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ON HORIZONTAL TRANSCENDENCE

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Abstract: Can the turn caused by the Protestant Reformation, which started 500 years ago, be understood in all its complexity without considering its hermeneutical aspects? Does the “actuality” of the Reformation, which addresses our present-day world, not manifest itself primarily as a hermeneutical actuality, or rather the actuality of hermeneutics? These are the questions motivating my investigation on the relationship between the hermeneutical turn of Martin Luther’s Reformation and the Schleiermacherian-Gadamerian turn of modern hermeneutics, respectively on the horizontal and the vertical orientation of transcendence, with special attention to the ontological status of the sacred Word and to modernity’s experience of finitude in establishing the horizontal transcendence, which will prevail again with the Reformation.

In the second part of my essay, I focus on the analysis of three modernization processes – methodological awareness, practical worldly rationality, and technological functionality –, in which the verticalization tendencies opposed to the prevalence of the horizontal transcendence, based on the mutual interconnectedness of finitude and completeness, keep on recurring and attempt to disrupt their togetherness, counteracting the hermeneutical attitude.

Key words: reformation, hermeneutics, turn, modernity, sacred Word, finitude, vertical transcendence, horizontal transcendence, method, ascesis, functionality, criticism

1. Luther's turn

Wilhelm Dilthey begins his study on Schleiermacher's hermeneutical system with the statement that "the science of hermeneutics actually begins with Protestantism" (Dilthey 1996, 33). Similarly, according to Gerhard Ebeling, the Reformation, "through concentrating on the Word of God, has attached a never before seen importance to hermeneutics – an importance even greater than it had enjoyed in the works of Origen and Saint Augustine. One could even say that it was an importance of a hitherto unprecedented scale" (Ebeling 1995, 11).

The hermeneutical problem emerged relatively early within the tradition of Biblical interpretation, due to the separation between *grammatical interpretation* and *allegorical interpretation*, respectively between the *sensus literalis* and the *sensus spiritualis*. It was considered that the literal meaning *obscures* the spiritual one, whose exploration is therefore in need of an interpretive effort which approaches the text from the outside, according to determined rules and procedures. In the Catholic tradition, the sole authentic interpretation is guaranteed by the *authority of the Church*.

However, in accordance with the basic critical idea of the Reformation, Church authority and the systematic interpretation it recommends has come to obscure the *original state* itself, from which the Catholic interpretive tradition itself has once grown out, i.e. to hide the fact that the Holy Scripture is the *Word of God* and not a *text* mediating the Word of God. This basic idea found its expression in the *turn* carried out by Martin Luther, who reinstated the authority of the Scripture instead of the Church's authority. In his texts published in the *Assertio omnium articulorum* (1520, cf. Luther 1883, 94–151), Luther explicitly states that *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres* – that is to say, the Scripture contains an illuminating force in itself (*claritas*) – and refuses all accidental and complementary interpretations.

The essence of Luther's turn does not lie in the reform of a hermeneutical thesis, or a hermeneutical tradition, but rather in turning (back) to the hermeneutical tradition originally permeating the entire Christian tradition. As pointed out by G. Ebeling, Luther does not add a new hermeneutical principle, substituting the traditional one, but expresses its own originally hermeneutical character: "when correctly interpreted, the *scriptural principle of the reformer* is in itself a *hermeneutical principle*" (Ebeling 1995, 12). Similarly, Jean Grondin considers that "the Reformation merely rediscovered the until then forgotten self-evidence of Scripture" (Grondin 1997, 40). Finally, in his dictionary entry on *Hermeneutics*, H.-G. Gadamer also emphasizes that the "obscured or distorted meaning of tradition" had to be "rediscovered and renewed",

since “an existing tradition blossoms again, or brings modified shoots, as a result of the uncovering of its roots” (Gadamer 1974, 1062). Gadamer suggests here that, as a result of the retrospective renewal looking back at that which is original and according to which the Holy Scripture addresses us as the Word of God, our relationship to tradition is also fundamentally changed. In the age of the Reformation, the believer no longer regards the tradition as a lifeless and closed corpus. Tradition becomes something living for him or her, it is constantly renewed and life-renewing, all this happening with his or her active participation.

2. The hermeneutical turn

What is the meaning of “reformation”? In the hermeneutical horizon, it is the *re-shaping/re-modelling* of something in the literal sense of these words. That is to say, “to reform” does not mean to endow the previous content with new forms, but the *formal* renewal and formation (*Bildung*) of the already existing content. It is a process through which the new *form* imposes itself as the essential development of the content that is shaped/formed. This is manifested by the content going through the shaping/formation as its *trans-formation*. Hence, the Reformation does not only mean renewal/remodelling, but also the emergence of that which is *new*, as an addition in being and meaning.

If one regards the Reformation as an event which started a series of reforms, then the opening act of this series is certainly a *reform of interpretation and understanding*. Luther’s conception is built upon the rejection of the Holy Scripture’s allegorical interpretation and on his renewed turning toward the *sensus literalis* – or, in other words, on his insight that the literal sense, if understood correctly, contains a spiritual meaning. He thus lays down the foundations for the overcoming of *misunderstanding*, which has become established as a tradition, and for the restoration of the Holy Scripture’s original *unity of meaning*. Moreover, Luther’s reform does not stop at this point. It brings into the foreground, under the existential conditions of the emerging modernity, an original experience of *understanding*, based upon the *reversal* of the Catholic tradition. Here, understanding is no more naturally given, and its various distortions are not meant to be corrected by the Church’s authority. Rather, the possibility of misunderstanding and understanding differently is primarily given, and the believer has to carry out with each renewed act of understanding all the necessary efforts needed for bringing the meaning forward. No matter how clear the revealed meaning of the Scripture might look in itself, the interpreter always has to take account of the particular conditions and difficulties of its human reception.

One can already discover a *practical antitype* of Schleiermacher’s universal hermeneutics in Luther’s turn – the anticipation of the basic idea

stated three hundred years later, in critical opposition to premodern hermeneutical tradition (as a more relaxed practice of hermeneutics): “misunderstanding results as a matter of course and that understanding must be desired and sought at every point” (Schleiermacher 1998, 22). Understanding takes place as an endless process, in the modality of “understanding better” (*Besser verstehen*), or rather “always understanding differently” (*Immer-anders-Verstehen*), which involves an “infinite task” (Grondin 1997, 71.) for (modern) man.

Understanding conceived as a task is the crucial point from whose perspective the hermeneutical essence of the Reformation can best be apprehended. It is from this point of view that the unilateralism of the “*sola scriptura*” hermeneutical principle becomes apparent as the abstract and general representation of the divine side, purely on the conceptual level. For the Scripture’s meaning to actually reach and address man, the other side, which is associated with the divine, is also needed: the principle of the “*sola fides*”. “Faith alone justifies” – says Luther in his *Preface to the Acts of the Apostles* (Luther 1932, 446). The essence of the hermeneutical turn of the Reformation is that neither the Word of God, nor faith as a human orientation toward it is fully given in advance. These are realized only in their mutual togetherness. Divine revelation reaches its fulfilment in man as a *carrying out* of faith in man, since humans can also find their fulfilment in faith as a *carrying out* of the divine revelation. These two jointly effect the formation of the Christian believer within the horizon of a universal and free human existence, which opens itself up as modernity. Hegel captures the essence of this development when, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, he states that, with the Reformation, “we enter a stage of the spirit in which it recognizes itself as free, inasmuch as its will is directed at the true, the eternal, and the general in itself” (Hegel 1989, 491).

The hermeneutical key of the interrelation between revelation and faith within man lies in the relationship posited in H.-G. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as the unity of *interpretation and application*. Understanding, conceived of as the realization interpretation, is essentially nothing else than a response relationship which takes place as a shaping or formation of the matter’s mode of being, and as such it is always already *application*. In this respect, the Lutheran implementation of the “*Scriptura Sacra sui interpres*” principle does not merely represent a reformation of the (textual) interpretive tradition, as Schleiermacher’s positing of the universality of “misunderstanding” does also not only involve the reform of understanding which is limited by misunderstandings. In both cases, the change brought about by the turn has a deeper meaning as the fundamental change of our outlook upon and relationship with the world of experience. The essential common characteristic of Luther’s reform and the turn of Schleiermacher’s

hermeneutics lies in the *change of human outlook and attitude* expressed within and through them.

3. The sacred Word's mode of being

The essence of the *hermeneutical change of outlook and attitude* can best be illuminated from the perspective of the sacred Word's mode of being, as God's Word represents the inseparable unity of *sensus literalis* and *sensus spiritualis*, based upon the *hermeneutical structure of belonging*.

Saint Augustine already protests from the same perspective, in the third book of his *De doctrina christiana*, against the *objectification* of the word as *sign* and against its separation into sign and meaning, or into the letter and the spiritual content of the Scripture, which, in the case of the literal understanding of figurative expressions, is as if someone would only regard the body, while omitting the pervading spirit: "It is, then, a miserable kind of spiritual slavery to interpret signs as things, and to be incapable of raising the mind's eye above the physical creation so as to absorb the eternal light" (Augustine 1995, 141). His position is based upon an idea borrowed from Paul's *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*: "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (Augustine 1995, 141); and idea through which the apostle himself exposes the hermeneutical meaning of the Christian turn, as we should become "ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter, but of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:6). The essence of the "new covenant" is made up by the unity of the divine and the human, or of the spiritual and the bodily, grounded upon the togetherness of divine revelation and human receptivity through faith. The inseparable interrelation between the spiritual and the bodily and its experiential representation is apprehended by Augustine as the spiritual unity of the word. In his conception, the word itself is always already *spirit*, and the spirit is not the transcendent "*beyond*" of the word, but the *word itself*, taking place as the practical *carrying out* of the believer under empirical and experiential conditions. The sacred Word is the infinite over flowing potentiality of the divine *grace*, which find its *concrete* and finite realization under the special individual and collective conditions of the *believer*, within the understanding reception carried out as practising, viz. *application*. On the level of the interpretation, which is separated from application and rendered autonomous against it, the Word merely remains "dead letter" (or sign).

Similarly to the Augustinian conception, Luther's *sui ipsius interpretes* thesis also states that, as God's self-offering, the divine Word is realized through the carrying out of explanation and understanding by the believer. All that the Scripture intends to reveal is fulfilled within the comprehensive turning-towards and practise engaged in and partaken of by the believer (cf. Grondin 1997, 41). In today's terms – to borrow an

expression from G. Ebeling –, the authentic mode of being of the sacred is the *word-event* (Ebeling 1995, 18), which happens to the Christian as a faith experience. As Ebeling puts it: “In the Biblical tradition, the Word of God has to be understood as a word-event which does not become obsolete, but constantly renews itself, does not seclude itself parochially, but opens up the world, and does not result in uniformization, but is language-creating (...), liberating us to our own present. The Word of God naturally becomes obsolete and limiting – i.e. its own antithesis –, depriving us of our freedom, if responsible participation in the word-event is lacking” (Ebeling 1995, 65).

It is the special mode of existence of the word as a hermeneutical formation, its human *immediateness*, which is highlighted here, as against, among other aspects, the alienating self-distancing of writing (Holy *Scripture*). Entrusting something to the word, or bringing into language, is never an instrumental relationship, although it may become one in the case of writing. Thus, that which is written (including the Holy *Scripture*) can best be understood by entrusting it to the word and bringing it into language. For understanding is not an event taking place *through* the word or language, but the *word's mode of being*. Thus, the word itself appears as a comprehensive and comprehended reality or as an actual hermeneutical event.

Three Gadamerian theses also support this recognition of the word's essence:

1) The unity of the word is a unity based upon the interconnectedness of being and appearing (coming into language). “To come into language does not mean that a second being is acquired. Rather, what something presents itself as belongs to its own being” – says Gadamer (Gadamer 2004, 470). That which comes into language steps forward from within the word itself; coming into language is the word's own mode of being.

2) Alternatively, it is also true that “what comes into language is something different from the spoken word itself”; “the word is a word only because of what comes into language in it” (Gadamer 2004, 470). The physical being of the word can only put across what is said through its own self-abolishment. Coming into language or the physical being of the word “exists only in order to disappear into what is said” (Gadamer 2004, 470). What is physically represented through coming into language does not disappear, but is spiritualized. The word's mode of being itself is *transformation*: the *transcending* of the physical into the spiritual. Speaking and saying are just as spiritual as they are physical acts. The word as an open process of meaning formation is enlivened by the internal tension and unity of immanence and transcendence. From the perspective of the word's unity, transcendence does not open itself up as external to the word itself, but as something belonging to the word's own mode of being,

and the meaning-creating openness of the word brings the *horizontal* orientation of the transcending movement into the focus of attention.

3) According to Gadamer, “all human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid open” (Gadamer 2004, 454). The finitude of human existence itself, in its relationship to the entirety of being, is projected within the word’s finitude. In this sense, Hegel’s statement on finiteness from his *Science of Logic* is worth remembering: in its being-in-itself, the finite simultaneously contains, on the one hand, its own limitation and transience, as it is always defined from the perspective of the end (i.e. its own end), and on the other hand, the *ought* (*Sollen*) as the negativity of its own limit, since negation permanently belongs to its determination – it is *not* what it *ought* to be –, as a result of which it always “*transcend it in itself*” and to strive for the permanent transcending of its limits (cf. Hegel 2010, 101–105; 104). Thus, according to the Hegelian dialectic, *transgression* necessarily belongs to finiteness. But, what is more, the dialectic of the word also reveals the direction of this excedence. The word’s open horizon of meaning hints at the potential meaning-fullness and necessary inexhaustibility of what is said. It is the finitude of human existence in its relationship to the completeness of being that is projected within the finiteness of the word. As pointed out by Gadamer, under the specific, finite conditions of speech, each and every word utters and “expresses a relationship to being” (Gadamer 2004, 465) as a whole. Each utterance creates a finite *situation*, which is also open to further movement and fulfilment, in whose *hermeneutical circle* the word can be apprehended as the mutual interconnectedness of finiteness and completeness, or of part and whole, inexhaustible meaning potential and concrete realization.

The word’s mode of being, as outlined by Gadamer, appears most clearly within the sacred Word. The sacred Word is divine, but addressed to man and thus exposed to the finiteness of human listening, attention, and receptivity. The possibilities of the divine Word as directed to humans are also finite, but the Word also always leads beyond the borders of human finitude due to its inexhaustible fulness. The infinite internal potentiality of the sacred Word, over flowing through the divine *grace*, attains its *concrete and finite* realization within comprehensive human receptivity, under the specific individual and collective existential conditions of the *believer*. It is from this perspective that Gadamer’s observation deserves consideration: “[f]or it is with respect to an end that a beginning is defined” (Gadamer 2004, 467). The “finite possibilities” of the word contain the possibility of permanent contact with the beginning. As utterance, each word represents a new *beginning*: repetition, restatement, an always renewed testimony of one’s faith and partaking of the divine grace. Consequently, each utterance and reception of the sacred Word brings the infinite fulness of the divine potential to always different, *finite and simultaneous* realization. These specific word-events, irrespective

of the historical period of their appearance, are repetitions of the creative divine revelation, thus becoming each other's eternal "contemporaries". Hence, the Reformation restores and liberates the original creative power of the divine Word.

However, we also have to note that the event-like realization of the word only represents one aspect of its mode of being: the specificity of its inherent meaning potential under the finite conditions of speech and utterance. Yet, at the same time, the word's mode of existence also implies the fact that the utterance is live speech, in whose chronological order each word-event expands and associates with others as an occurrence. The word-events that realize the divine revelation simultaneously structure themselves into the *successive* order of the ever-advancing and self-evolving movement of speech.

Thus, every specific act of the carrying out and reception through faith of the divine revelation is realized via the sacred word as the unity of simultaneity and successivity. The permanent openness to transcendence and the horizontally directed movement of live speech belong together organically within the word's essential inherent formedness.

4. The reversal of transcendence

The word's finitude essentially represents the finiteness of human existence. Everywhere the finitude of the word got dissolved in the series of interpretations adapted to external rules, the finiteness of human existence could not become an actual experience for the believer. In the Christian experience of the historical epochs preceding the Reformation, the human relationship to transcendence was not defined by endeavours to fulfil the potential of the human existence's finitude, but rather by ambitions to rid oneself of one's existential finiteness, conceived of as an original evil, through the ascension to the level of transcendence. Thus, the human existence's relationship to transcendence was characteristically shaped in the field of *verticality*.

For Europeans, modernity begins with the recognition of the human existence's finitude. Paradoxically, however, humans cannot actually experience and conceive of their own finiteness in any other way than through its permanent transcending or overcoming. Without the horizon opening itself up to this overcoming, man's own finitude would not become actually recognizable and intellectually comprehensible for him. At the same time, the overcoming of finiteness does not mean that the borders of finitude are effectively transcended. Modern man experiences the overcoming as well under the conditions of finitude, while remaining within an open horizon. In other words, the permanent overcoming of finiteness is itself also a *finite event* – but always continuing and moving ever beyond itself. Therefore, although history, as a process woven from

self-transcending events, proceeds as a continuously advancing movement, it is not merely linear, but also integrates within itself the circularity of the movement. Due to its openness to transcendence, it always begins anew as well. Thus, within the *open horizon* intertwined with historical movement and moving along with it, transcendence also expands horizontally and opens up to finite human existence, unfolding and realizes itself historically, which is even more valid for the believer who experiences and recognizes his own finitude *historically*.

For the modern believer, through the transcendence which opens up horizontally, the Reformation is able to provide a positive answer to the question how human existence, limited in its finite and concrete (individual) realizations, can permanently maintain its relationship with transcendence, or how the believer is able to draw strength and renewal for his or her self-completion from the original potential of the divine revelation, which opens up for him or her.

The historical movement of the *finite* outlined here also establishes an analogy between the *dialectical movement* in the Hegelian sense and the *hermeneutical circle* conceived as the interaction between the whole and its parts. According to the Hegelian conception, *dialectics* itself is nothing else than the movement of the *finite*. Hegel repeatedly refutes the “prejudice (...) that dialectic has *only a negative result*” (Hegel 2010, 743); “the negativity (...) constitutes the *turning point*” in the movement of being (Hegel 2010, 745). The process of reality is a transition from the general to the particular, followed by a comeback or a progress to a form of the general which is completed under the conditions of the particular. In this process, mediation “winds the end back into the beginning”, as the end becomes a “new beginning”, which differs from its antecedent precisely due to this determination; “[f]or the result contains its beginning and its course has enriched it with a new determinateness” (Hegel 2010, 750). Or, as Hegel puts it, we have a *circle* that is a “*circle of circles*” (Hegel 2010, 751). That which initially appears as different and as something always departing from the undefined beginning, is, at the same time, “also a getting back closer” to the beginning, and, within this pendular movement, “the retrogressive grounding of the beginning and the progressive further determination of it” coincide (Hegel 2010, 750). The essence of the dialectical movement is forward movement, i.e. further determination, “which is not to be taken as a flowing from other to other” (Hegel 2010, 750), but an enrichment with a new determinateness and more concreteness; and, one should add, it is also an improvement process of that which is relatively bad. At each new level of determination, “the greater the extension, just as dense is the intensity. The richest is therefore the most concrete and the most subjective, and that which retreats to the simplest depth is the mightiest and the most all-encompassing” (Hegel 2010, 750).

The Hegelian conception excellently highlights the way in which the horizontal movement is interwoven with the transcendently directed verticality of dialectical transformation. In the horizon of the horizontal forward movement, which opens itself up to transcendence, the increasing expansion of finiteness involves the dynamization of its associated potential, and its inherent human creative energies are also released.

The *reversal* of transcendence is intrinsically linked to Christianity's essence and involves the transformation of the previous sacred tradition *in its entirety*. The fixation of Christianity into a tradition, its institutionalization, and the consolidation of Church authority brought in their train the *verticalization* of the transcendence which originally opened itself up *horizontally* within the Christian experience. However, vertical transcendence asserts rather the *nothingness* than the *finitude* of man before God. Conversely, the perspective of human finitude presupposes the determinateness of human existence, its "being something", and self-groundedness within a horizon opening up to the self-realization of universal and free human existence, realized in the efforts of modern humans toward the conscious and rational leading of their life. Thus, with respect to the human existential processes in Europe, the most important contribution of the Reformation lies in the repeated vindication of the *horizontal transcendence*.

II.

The implementation of horizontal transcendence through the Reformation did by far not lead to the dissolution of the contradictions characteristic for the emerging European modernity. The *verticalization* tendencies directed at dissolving the mutual interconnectedness of finitude and completeness, upon which horizontal transcendence is based, recurrently *haunt* the various stages of European modernity. Their implications repeatedly lead to the refusal of the hermeneutical change of perspective and attitude, losing its ground in the present. I will outline here three such tendencies, not necessarily connected to each other, but which nevertheless point in the same direction.

5. The ongoing misunderstanding

Taking its beginning with the *reform* of interpretation and comprehension, the Reformation does not at all clarify, once and for all, the "misunderstanding" concerning hermeneutics, but on the contrary, through its own consolidation as a tradition, reproduces it in a new form. I do not mean here the answer of recatholisation, given by the Council of Trent (1546), to the hermeneutical turn of the Reformation, according to

which the Revelation attested in the Holy Scripture cannot be understood without Church tradition. What I rather have in view is that – as also pointed out by Ebeling –, even within the Reformation, the meaning of “*sola scriptura*” has not always been clearly recognized, especially not in its actual consequences (cf. Ebeling 1995, 12).

Nevertheless, the *misunderstanding* of hermeneutics, now recurring under the conditions of modernity, is not without productivity either, as the Lutheran-Schleiermacherian turn of understanding does not mean the elimination of misunderstanding, but rather its positive enforcement. The “reformation” of interpretation and comprehension decidedly changes the character and orientation of misunderstanding. The possibility of misunderstanding the Holy Scripture remains, but the conditions and ways of misunderstanding will not be identical with those from before the Reformation, since they now bare the essential transformations brought about by the hermeneutical turn of understanding, with the hermeneutical re-thinking of the *methodological ideal* as perhaps the most significant among them.

In his dictionary entry on *Hermeneutics*, discussing the rejection of the allegorical method by the representatives of the Reformation, H.-G. Gadamer calls attention to the fact that it has led to the unfolding of a *new methodological consciousness*, which “aimed to be objective, related to the matter, and free of any subjective arbitrariness” (Gadamer 1974, 1062). This process was also influenced by a “formal motivation” at the dawn of the modern age, because the methodological consciousness of the emerging modern science urged for “the construction of a general theory of interpretation” (Gadamer 1974, 1062). This was the project of Melancthon and Dannhauer, and those representatives of protestant hermeneutics whose texts Gadamer and Gottfried Boehm have included in their seminary reference book for hermeneutics: Flacius, Spinoza, Rambach, Chladenius, Moritz, Baumgarten, Herder, Ast, and especially Schleiermacher (see Gadamer and Boehm 1976).

From a hermeneutical point of view, the most conspicuous characteristic of the misunderstanding of hermeneutics within the modern methodological consciousness consists in the *renewed separation of interpretation and application*. The traditional contradiction between the theory and practice of hermeneutics deepens into a contradiction within the hermeneutical attitude, as it is methodologically confronted with itself, which defines its double and mutually irreducible methodological and existential orientation.

Insofar as, seen from the perspective of horizontal transcendence, the essence of hermeneutics reveals itself as the implementation of understanding, the hermeneutical turn of the Reformation is carried out within human existence itself, in the view of life and in the practical orientation of the individuals and communities who enter the path of

modernization. Understanding does not anymore appear for them as a “methodological” requirement, but rather as an existential task.

6. The inconsistency of the secular reform

In contrast with the ideas aimed at separating the physical and the psychological aspect of man, the reprisal of the thesis on the unity of the word is stated as the foundation and expression of man’s (spiritual) unity. Contemporary philosophies urging the emancipation of the sensual and the bodily often misunderstand this “critically”. In fact, however, the spiritual unity of the word – from Paul through Augustine and Luther up to Gadamer – is not aimed at excluding, negating, or invalidating the bodily and the sensual in any of its aspects. The thesis of the word’s unity opens up a wider, more encompassing horizon of understanding, in which the bodily, the sensual, and the natural becomes a reality, according to its authentic meaning, for the Christian, within the medium of the spiritual and in its mutual interconnectedness with the psychological, subjective human experience. This spiritual unity is based on a double transcendence, extending in both directions: it presupposes just as surely the ongoing transcending of the bodily and the sensual into the spiritual as it also assumes the permanent manifestation and expression of the spiritual through the bodily and the sensual that it permeates, which is specifically not the negation of the bodily and the sensual, but its realization according to its meaning gained within the horizon of the completeness of human existence.

This fundamental idea is also reflected within the Hegelian idea of the “worldly reform”, which explores the relationship of the new Church to *worldliness*. The secular is related to the spiritual precisely from the direction of its bodily and sensual nature. This realizes a “fought-out reconciliation” of the spiritual and the worldly, which “confers the consciousness that the worldly is capable of including the truth in itself, although before it was considered as purely evil and incapable of achieving the good, which remained something beyond the worldly” (Hegel 1989, 502). As a result of this process, the actually practical domains of sensuality and of the bodily, i.e. productive activity, the industry, and the various trades, “have now become moral”; moreover, even usury is not considered sinful anymore (Hegel 1989, 503).

Max Weber expounds the ethical principles of modern rationality, which opens up from the horizontal transcendence and the rationalization of worldly life associated with it – along with its irrational foundation in its relationship to transcendence –, as well as their directions of realization, as the practical representation of the Hegelian dialectic logic of the Spirit. One’s calling, asceticism, active life, regular work, rational time management, and the elimination of enjoyment without holiness can

be considered as inherent to the Reformation and also elements which, although, “must appear to the truly religious consciousness as incidental and even superficial” (Weber 2001, 48–49), nevertheless – due to the rationalization of modern life – express most effectively the true practical contribution of the Reformation: the turn-like change in human behaviour, outlook, and attitude, which can be apprehended as a development of the new Protestant ethics that establishes the rational way of life. According to Max Weber, the Reformation “meant the repudiation of a control which was very lax, at that time scarcely perceptible in practice, and hardly more than formal, in favour of a regulation of the whole of conduct which, penetrating to all departments of private and public life, was infinitely burdensome and earnestly enforced” (Weber 2001, 4). Weber’s basic idea is that the thought and practice of “living in a way that pleases God” is built around the concept of “calling”, which expresses the central dogma of all Protestant orientations, as “the only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfilment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world” (Weber 2001, 40).

However, paradoxically, “the appearance of virtue” is also sufficient for this purpose, and the ever-wider spread of this recognition leads to the predominance of the religious *indifference* that can be attributed to the spirit of capitalism. Through this, the Weberian principle of asceticism turns into the *reversed antitype* of that into which the bodily turns into as a result of its emptying out of the spiritual, its breaking away from transcendence, and its self-transcending into functionality. Under the conditions of contemporary capitalism, it is hard not to recognize that these processes lead to a turn at whose essential level the increasingly intense and provocative imposition of corporeality and sensuality is realized as a kind of *negativity*, i.e. as the withdrawal and revocation of what the bodily and the sensual could become through its mutual inter-connectedness with the spiritual.

7. The mystery of functionality

The most complete “embodiment” of corporeality and sensuality, as they are emptied out of and broken away from the spiritual, can be apprehended within the contemporary technical and technological formations, relatively to whom natural human corporality and sensuality are degraded to the level of mere accessory. They manifest the fact that contemporary processes lead to a kind of reversed/twisted *verticalization* of horizontal transcendence, identified already in the last decades of the 20th century – in many respects, quite far-sightedly – by J. Baudrillard, as the repeated dissolution of finitude within infinity. Baudrillard constructs

his theory around the concept of “functional transcendence” (cf. Baudrillard 1968, 155). The automatic machine takes over and operates an increasing number of human functions. The *meta-functionality* built on the primary functions of an increasingly improved technology implies the integration of human and mechanical abilities and functions into a comprehensive unity (cf. Baudrillard 1968, 167). The functional openness of the machine, automatization, and robotization enable the involvement and modelling of human abilities within an expanding functional system – a kind of artificial synthesis between mechanical functionality and anthropomorphism – in relation to which man increasingly becomes a subordinate component part (cf. Baudrillard 1968, 168, 169). The personalization of the machines goes together with the depersonalization of the human organism, as it becomes increasingly integrated into the operation of the machinery. The (metaphysical) boundary between man and machine is gradually blurred.

This integration process carries many consequences for the human existential condition. According to Baudrillard, the mechanization and automatization processes – the transfer, or delegation, of human capabilities and functions to the machines – carry out the *self-transcending* of the human into the machine-like. The mechanic transcendence of human functions leads to the human personality’s formal transcendence. The characteristics of the autonomous personality – independent gestures, creative energies and power, control over itself and its environment, the personal character of its individuality – are taken over and adopted by the automatic machine (cf. Baudrillard 1968, 157, 158). The French philosopher identifies within this tendency the unconscious desire of modern man to overcome his structural finitude. The striving of functionality toward normative universality is associated with the mystery of functionality, as it is embodied in a series of total world-shaping operations beyond its practical functions (cf. Baudrillard 1968, 163). This implies the production of an imaginary/virtual sphere, as opposed to the real human world and to its authentic universality, whose extension toward universality creates the illusion of transcending human finiteness into infinity.

The critical horizon in which Baudrillard traces out these processes also enables him to shed light upon their internal inconsistency or even on their inherently paradoxical nature, i.e. how the seemingly endless expansion of functionality actually manifests the pseudo-functional and the endowment of automatic machines with human capacities reveals the hidden loss of human essence. The paradoxical nature of this process is foremost demonstrable through the increasing dominance of mass production, based on transcending the model, which embodies human creativity and on which the production series is based, within the system (i.e. the series). Due to these circumstances, through illusory changes brought about through minor innovations, the production series becomes

able to survive for a long period of time without structural changes (the creation of new models) taking place. This tendency reveals the human *inability* to innovation which actually creates and completes being, hidden behind the illusion of the ever-increasing, accelerated, and intensified technical, technological, and economic development (cf. Baudrillard 1968, 216).

Similarly to other critical theories, reinvigorated during the final decades of the 20th century, Baudrillard's criticism forcefully points out the de-realization and loss of essence characteristic to the human contents of our existential condition, as it is transcended into mechanic functionality. At the same time, these critical analyses also reveal how, through the secularization of horizontal transcendence and through its (negativistic) verticalization toward the mechanic functionality that falsely promises limitless efficiency, the paradoxes of transcendence take control over and entrap the modern human subject, increasingly reducing it, in its relationship to itself and to its world, to the ontological level of a *sub-ject*, in the original sense of the word.

This critical horizon calls into question the extent to which the practical/historical tendencies oriented at moving beyond the horizontal transcendence toward the vertical, as well as the theoretical/critical polemics carried out against horizontal transcendence in the name of the vertical, which identifies post-modernization and post-secularization tendencies in the verticalization of transcendence and lacks consideration for the hermeneutical perspective, can be reconciled with the Christian tradition and with the historical movement it has shaped, along with our needs to understand these.

One thing, however, is also certain within this critical horizon: the turns of transcendence take place within Man itself; both the recovery of the unity between finitude and completeness, which actually belong together, and the disruption of this unity. Although the movement of transcendence is horizontal, history, unfolding as a result of its development, cannot be merely linear: it proves to be humanly viable only if it restarts itself in each of its phases, unfolding the potentialities inherent in its original sources. The loss of connection with these sources involves the risk of exhaustion and cessation for any authentic aspiration. The *disruption* of the togetherness at the essence of horizontal transcendence projects in front of us, on the one side, the unstoppable process of linearity and successivity, running toward infinity in its lack of transcendence and horizons, and on the other side, the self-enclosing completeness resulting in fanaticism or, as its mirror image, in the chaotic state of complete secular disorder.

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