GÂNDIRE ŞI COMUNICARE ÎN CIVILIZAŢIILE ORIENTALE
Thinking and Communication in Ancient Oriental Civilizations

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Abstract

As basic aspects of human action, thinking and communication are the very ontological condition of man in the universe, which has supported him not only in biological living, but also in going through moments and periods of deep transformations and complex metamorphoses in public life, along centuries. Congruence between thought and communication can readily be identified in ancient myths of Oriental peoples: *Enuma Elis, the Epic of Gilgamesh* – Sumerians, *Tep Zepi, King Shabaka's Inscription, Hymn to Isthar* – Egyptians, the *Bible* – Hebrews, the *Vedas* – ancient Indians, the *Book of Changes* – the Chinese etc. In the same way, the oldest writings (made on papyrus, animal skins etc.) contain the very first proverbs and philosophical meditations of mankind.

Keywords: **thinking, being, communication, evolution, intellect, myths, papyrus, proverbs**

Regardless of the angle from which we approach Man and the World, all opinions, beliefs and human ideas can be conveyed, transmitted or made public only by the subtle and various ways of communication, the more so as even "transmitting" itself requires the mobilization of thinking, Therefore we can say with certainty that philosophy is in full agreement with the phenomenon of communication, both "activities" being looked upon as fundamental aspects of anthropogenesis, their ambivalence in action and manifestation – in brief, *to think* and *to communicate* – is the very ontological condition of human individuals in the universe, which clearly distinguishes them from other "communicative" creatures from lower kingdoms, led only by primal instincts.

Structuring human knowledge in distinct compartments, according to *evolution* or, better said, *positioning*, not to damage the creationist version, we obtain, in a brief description, the following gradual *steps*, well defined from an ontological point of view: 1. The mineral kingdom exists and is positioned in space and time; 2. The vegetable kingdom exists, lives and is endowed with certain rudimentary instincts, communicates and is positioned in space and time; 3. The animal kingdom exists, lives, feels, communicates, is mobile and always occupies a certain place in space and time; 4. Human individuals are above the elements of all kingdoms: they exist, they live, they feel, they are mobile and always occupy a special place in space and time, they think and communicate both in their social area and beyond it, and the ideas they convey reveal at least *something* of their feelings and emotions and sometimes they even turn into "models" of the world's priceless spiritual heritage (of course, this happens quite rarely and if we want to be fully elucidated in this matter, we should enter into details pertaining to axiology, which is not our intention).

The question arises whether man, reaching or being placed (more or less comfortably) on top of the trophic chain, is able to influence and change the natural

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ontological course of the other creatures. In his study about *variations*, Charles Darwin made misleading statements concerning this issue: "Man has no possible way of altering the absolute conditions of life; he can neither change the climate of any country, nor add a new element to the ground; but he can move an animal or a plant from a climate or a ground to another and give them food to which they were not used in their natural condition. He that believes that man influences nature to cause variability is deeply wrong" (1) However, the British scientist could not possibly anticipate the major technical inventions of the 20th century, based on which scientists can rapidly change the standard habitat conditions of any creature in the world: let's think of irrigation and the transformation of large areas of the African Sahara into agricultural lands or the reckless deforestation (also caused by economic needs) of South American woods and the removal of the luxuriant vegetation from more and more extensive regions of Amazon, in order to transform these areas into arable land. See also the successes obtained in research laboratories in point of reproduction of various species of plants and even cloning animals – and we have the picture and the dimensions of this huge range of possibilities achievable nowadays, let alone the projected space stations on the Moon or Mars, the achievement of which would suddenly propel *earthlings* into *galactic beings*.

Of course, we cannot ignore the vital energy of individuals belonging to lower kingdoms, which accounts for the diversification of species and their adaptation to different climatic conditions (due to natural causes or artificial interventions). At this point, we cannot but totally agree with Darwin claiming that "variability wouldn't occur if organized beings didn't have an inherent tendency to variations…" (2) Mention should be made, however, that adaptations and mutations - hard to deny even by the most skeptical researchers of natural selection of species – persuade and validate the *concept of transformism*, perhaps the most glorious in the whole structure of Darwinist thinking. Subsequently, certain proponents of Darwin's biologist philosophy extended the influential area of transformism to interpersonal relationships, defining *social Darwinism* - a sociological trend stated in the second half of the 19th century, glorifying violence and war, maintaining that all social convulsions and the whole range of human conflicts occur "in accordance with nature" and human societies are also subject to the laws of natural selection.

Returning to issues of congruence, we must emphasize that both the process of thinking and of communication are complex operations of the intellect, highly involving the energy of the 14 billion of nervous cells in the human brain, in its various connections, networks and relationships. Experts have established that this "machine" of human thought possesses an operational capacity so vast that, if a computer were built to equate it in terms of effectiveness, its circuits would occupy an area of several hundred square meters. Our surprise today, more or less philosophical, is justified precisely by this huge "unity" of intelligence of human individuals, which has its origins and abode in "the potential of those billions of cells of the most perfect computer created by man – the human brain." (3) Yet, we should not forget that all these astonishing metamorphoses "are taking place because

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many of the nerve cells make it possible for humans to communicate with what is outside."(4)

Man's permanent strive for knowledge often overlapped and intertwined with his desire for action and social impetus or organizational initiatives within or outside the public space where he leads his daily life. These are spontaneous and perpetual tendencies to harmonize with nature. However, our formulation would not be complete and comprehensive unless we specify that all human events that we mentioned above are carried out solely under the large and generous umbrella of communication and social networking, which has the capacity to unify, like a mysterious bond, all these existential actions, inspiring them and, ultimately, placing them under the effigy of a final goal.

Although human communication is as old as humanity itself, we shouldn't forget that there are differences between past and present, both in point of forms of thought and ways of communication. Moreover, nowadays we witness the phenomenon of mind changing, which is fundamentally an act of "reconsidering and reorienting the vector of thought…" (5)

In terms of thinking, the very first human creations did not exceed naïve meditation, being rather pre-philosophies or proto-philosophies that give extremely vague and schematic explanations about the world, through myths and fancies; we speak of theogonies, cosmogonies and and anthropogenies characteristic of certain ancient oriental populations, transmitted and communicated through rituals of mages and druids that not only expressed but also imposed their views on issues about the origin of gods, the origins and the organization of the World, the position, the role and the mission of human individuals therein. On the other hand, in terms of communication modalities, in this early stage, this entire "mythosophy" was transmitted orally from one generation to another, because the Thought and the World were floating beneath a Heaven populated by divinities!

Among oriental peoples' contributions to the evolution of human spirituality we can't possibly ignore the famous *Law Code of Hammurabi* (enforced during his reign, between 1728 and 1686 BC), which is the first inscription of major legal provisions, some of which are still valid, the myth of *Ennuma Elish ("When Above")* or *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, both representing and communicating beautiful Sumerian stories that occurred in Mesopotamia's heavenly space, between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, at the dawn of history. In those settlements of the ancient Sumerian Neolithic civilizations, were also discovered clay tablets bearing the first proverbs of mankind. They have wider significance, as they represent not only the wisdom of those sedentary people (living three and a half millennia ago) that wished to eternize their oral traditions and their own reflections on the World, demonstrating a keen sense of eternity, but they are also significant for the whole of humanity that was starting – then and there, and perhaps, elsewhere too – on the hard and dangerous way to gradual spiritualization and humanization.

Although they are not proper philosophical concepts, these flashes of thought have a depth of their own and ask questions about various aspects of society in those times, as

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shown in superb interrogations about the causes and the effects of certain actions: "Can you make children without making love?"; "Can you put on weight without eating?"; they also approach ethical issues, speaking about lazy fellows or people with bad reputation: "Just put them in water and the water gets stinky; just take them in the garden and the fruit get rotten" (6) Some words of wisdom raise questions about the stability of the population, about peace and tranquility, openly criticizing armed conflicts; they express opposition to any kind of aggression and a clear preference for peace and its safeguarding: "The fortress whose guns are weak won't chase the enemy from its gates"; or "You go and conquer the country of the enemy; the enemy comes and conquers your country."(7) Despite their naivety and simplicity, these precepts, thanks to their substance, sometimes even touch… *the theory of communication*, revealing the professional status of the "writers" in various poses – whether or not they were educated, whether they had or not communicative competences: "He is a servant who really studied the Sumerian language"; or "What kind of a scribe is he who doesn't speak Sumerian?"; or "A scribe whose hand runs as the mouth dictates, here's a scribe worthy of the name!" (8)

Sumerian myths and reflexive skills are completed by the Egyptian *Tep Zepi* myth ("The First Time"), describing the golden age of mankind, "an age of absolute perfection that existed before anger, noise, fight and disorder had appeared, when there was neither disease nor death."(9) With ancient Egyptians, writing – as an advanced form of communication and "eternizing" knowledge acquired in the sacred temples – gains increasing importance so that the god Toth is recognized as "the inventor of writing and master of language, the very symbol of intellectual operations in general, and patron of the scribes."(10) Dating back to 712 BC, *The Inscription of King Shabaka* is an example of the huge generating forces ascribed to the word, mentioning that: "1.All human beings and all animals live under the faculty of Ahtum (the sun at zenith); 2. The word repeats the heart-thinking; 3. The tongue gives birth to the just and death to the unjust; it creates when it utters the word; 4. Language is Toth (the Sage) whose power is greater than that of the gods…" (11) Therefore, the word becomes power and he who possesses the word possesses the power. This is explicitly specified in another Egyptian writing, "*Hymn to Ishtar":* "The word masters you. The word is in your power. The secret word, the word that comes from heaven and was sacred…" (12) We can easily note the analogy with a text of the Bible, namely the one in The "Gospel of John": "1. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and God was the Word. 2. In the beginning the Word was with God. 3. All things were made through Him and without Him was made nothing that was made. 4. In Him was life and life was the light of humans."(13)

This fundamental book of mankind, *The Bible* (from the Greek b*yblos – book*) also known as *The Holy Scripture,* has two main parts: *The Old Testament*, containing 45 books dealing with concepts of life, the wisdom and morality of the Jewish people – a legendary people settled on the Mediterranean coasts, under the authority of Persian Empire, for a while – and *The New Testament* , containing 27 books, and being a huge monument of human spirituality. The original books of the *Old Testament* were written in Hebrew and

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some parts of them (Maccabees) in Aramaic, while the books of the *New Testament* were handwritten in Greek. According to specialists, the Bible was compiled over a period of 1600 years, the oldest part of it (*the Book of Job*) being written about 1500 years BC, while the last book (*The Revelation of John*) was added only in 96 after Christ. Despite the large number of texts and the long period of time in which it was compiled and the numerous additions, though its pages were written by about 40 authors, differing in point of social position (kings and emperors, shepherds and fishermen) of which the most prominent author of the *Old Testament* was Moses, who wrote the first 5 books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) and the author of the New Testament was Apostle Paul who wrote 14 episodes of the Bible (from the *Epistle to Romans* to the *Epistle to the Hebrews*), other prominent writers of the *Old Testament* being king David (who confronted the giant Goliath), the author of the *Psalms*, and emperor *Solomon* (who wrote the *Song of Songs*, perhaps, to pay homage to the Queen of Sheba, and also the *Proverbs* and *the Ecclesiastes)* – the biblical text is amazingly cursive and comprehensive! We shouldn't forget that a large part of the *Holy Scripture* was written under heavy persecution, and we have in view especially the books of the *New Testament.* Initially, the biblical text was handwritten on papyrus, with implements made of reed, which scribes would soak in some kind of ink that was prepared from resin and soot. Later on, certain fibers extracted from plants were used; calligraphers would write on parchment, with feather writing quills, using oil lamps or candle lighting. Unfortunately, no manuscript of the time was preserved. However, about 500 years after Christ, a group of Hebrew scholars, the *masoreti,* assumed the moral obligation to produce copies of the Bible, as close as possible to the original, for generations to come. For this purpose they set some very strict rules that had to be observed by all copyists: scribes were not allowed to write even a single word from memory and had to always look at the original text, noting each spelling rule before transcribing the word itself. Even more than that, they counted the words on each page and, for any slightest mistake, the page was destroyed and the guilty scribe had to start working out again. Therefore, when those old manuscripts written on animal skins were discovered in a cave of Qumran, near the Dead Sea in 1947, upon close examination, experts proved and demonstrated the great accuracy of the Hebrew copyists. Thus, the heritage of mankind enriched with a book that *continues to communicate* (thoughts, precepts, parables and other elements of wisdom) without exhausting its spiritual load for over two thousand years.

Elements of recognition and assumption of the power of words can also be identified in the four books of the Indian *Vedas* (*Rig-Veda* = The book of stanzas or hymns, *Sama-Veda* = The book of songs of praise, *Yajur-Veda* = The book of sacrificial formulas, *Atharva-Veda*= The book of spells) and in the ancient Chinese *Book about dao transformations and power* – which clearly demonstrates that people of those times were moving about and communicating and their ideas were also moving along with them, covering huge distances (considering the means of transportation they used), crossing and interfering continuously and eventuating in cultural exchanges and borrowings that still amaze us today. Let's note, for the moment, that it's the epoch of "books" in scrolls as a means of written

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communication, with a rich conceptual content, using various support materials, such as papyrus, animal skins, paper etc.

Having researched the same cultural-philosophical space, an ancient commentator maintains that "the Magi are more ancient then the Egyptians; they believe in two principles: a good demon and an evil demon, the first one called Zeus or Oromasdes (Ohrmazd), the latter one called Hades or Areimanios (Ahriman) …" (14) It is, without a doubt, a reference to the dualist conception of Iranian Zoroastrianism, dating from the 7th - 6th centuries B.C. The same Greek chronicler writes about the gained primacy in the invention of philosophy by Thracian Orpheus, through discovering the intuitive power of music, with its talent of structuring and relaxing people, through deep reflection on the past (looking back, to Eurydice), by proclaiming the soul-body dualism and considering the body as the prison of the soul – all being innovative ideas in times of yore, when human thinking was left to drift under the veil of mists…

Translated by Ileana Sandu

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