

History and Hermeneutics

PhD Decebal COPILET
dcopilet@yahoo.com

Abstract

The classic science was founded, been known, on accuracy and rigour. The demonstration was the only modus probandi, for formal sciences, by which a fact was admitted as being scientific. History, leaving the narrative seduction, partially gave up what used to define it in discrete, its essence becoming the own duration of a continuous present. This continuity discovered in traditions, mentalities, symbols, rituals, myths, wants to show us that the historical distortion is no longer possible, because the same historical present reaches, by profound and constant seems the future generations as well. Only a discrete history can be counterfeited, because the discontinuity can favour certain historical data, by making convenient contexts, as well as by taking the historical even from a continuous context. The new history tries, through hermeneutics, to found something that cannot be proved in a classical way and this because the interpretation increases the truth, because it brings new meanings but it does not render the truth. It relates but it does not counterfeit, meaning through hermeneutics, we build a truth, we do not produce it.

Keywords: *history, hermeneutics, understanding.*

The will and tendencies for renewal or renovation of any field of knowledge are very old, in some this struggle being active and positive. Therefore, the school of insight (the new novel-1957), the new critics-1960, the new philosophy-1970, the new lirism-1987 etc. are tendencies to refuse the past in its made-up form and then surprised by time and to open a field of knowledge to other areas unrevealed (Virmaux & Virmaux, 1970, pp. 135-149). We can seize pretty easily that “the new critics”, “the new philosophy”, but especially “the new history” are attempts to reconsider the position of man related to the mentality, to the world of traditions, of rituals, of miracles or symbols which structures a new universe of imaginary and prefigures new styles of history, of thinking or critics. There is a profound, continuous history, not in the positive or Procust way, but in a hermeneutic, interpretative and constructive way. Any science is entitled to consider, since the time of Einstein, a space-time continuum, so in history only events are interrupted, its deep shiver is continuous, meaning “The outspoken

proclaimed breaks are delusional... and... spectacular” (Irina Mavrodin), and the historical fact can no longer be absolute, because it provokes “study” and this because it comes out of eternity and fades over time. “...the impossibility of re-signification equating the exit from the truth” (Gh. Vlăduțescu).

The surface history of voivodes, of battles, of wars, of fights or sieges – events which seem to stop for a moment the historical time – is “abandoned”. It is now trying to free itself from the burden of historicism, of the narrative seduction, as well as of the fault of ideologic subordination committed with other subjects. The new orientation in history has also an educational reasoning, we think, because depicting only wars, fights, battles, confrontations, massacres, murders (infanticides, homicides, patricides, matricides, regicides etc.), the history risks to educate the aggressivity, violence, hate or vendetta. The danger can easily come from other part as well, tells us a well-respected historian “...since mankind seems to admire more the ones who destroy it than its benefactors, the thirst for military glory represents the defect of the most noble characters”.

The discrete history is changed for a continuous one, which no longer cultivates the exclusivism, because in the new history we no longer speak about the truth, but about its interpretation, meaning truths. The classical narration (narro, -are, -avi, -atum) is replaced by the art of interpretation which retrieves the rituals and rhythms of life, renouncing the traditional chronology and anticipation of a duration plurality. This chronological sequence can have different significances, based on aspirations, ideas, cultural horizon, all making up certain mentalities of the temporal understood as natural time, plural time, senior time, religious time, the time evasion, the time fall etc. (Le Goff, 1970) Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and others initiated a movement in France in the 30’s, called the School of Annals (L’ École des Annales), by which history used to open to the other social-humanistic sciences: sociology, psychology, ethnology, linguistic etc., which guides again its researches and the discourse, without affecting its prestige. The orientation of “the new history” are shortly the following: 1. Opening the history to social sciences. 2. Renouncing to ideologic hypotheses in history research. 3. Critical analysis of all history fields. 4. Opening history to mentality (Virmaux & Virmaux, 1970, pp. 14-15).

The phenomenon of opening becomes relevant and promising, since in 1945 Karl Popper wrote the book called *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, and then in 1962 Umberto Eco publishes the work *Opera Aperta*, and in 2000 George Soros publishes the volume *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism*. Young people identify themselves in such an approach, because the new orientation no longer means reciting the old lessons of history but signifies a reconstruction

(*deconstruction* from Jacques Derrida), by which each generation discovers its own values and participates to the cultural act by a creative effort, not mimetic. In history there is no longer one and only truth but truths..., because in history we no longer demonstrate – as in the old positive history – but we interpret, meaning “The history is written ain for every new present” (Hans-Georg Gadamer). The new history gives up to a certain extent the fatigue of traditional sciences, auxiliary to history (epigraphy, palaeography), in order to approach the freshness of modern sciences (psychology, sociology, ethnology, anthropology), which show us how to discover the other one in history. In fact, it’s no longer about the history of wars, first of all, but “the recovery of mankind by the historical research” (Karpov, 1986, p. 22), aspect neglected by the traditional history.

Jacques Le Golf is another representative of the new orientation in history who “dreams” about a new middle age, in fact about another history of the middle age, but not an illustrious one, not a famous or festive one but one of celebrities, a profound, deep and peaceful, continuous, infinite one, and then about another history of humanity.

The problem of history continuity is in fact, for the historian, the problem of owning the past and not a belief in evolutionism (Le Goff, 1970, p. 42). The past is no longer kept as a data volume, inevitably discrete, because history is no longer accountancy – which records the discontinuities, meaning the events proposed – but a science that understands this time the past in its continuity. We discover in this way, the long duration (*la longue durée*) in history, which is more prolific than the event time, because it means understanding and not recording. Such a history must replace the surface history of the middle age, which can catch only the phenomenological agitation of events and when these are not raging, we have the false “impression” that the historical time stopped. That is why Jacques Le Golf wants another middle age, a *total* one, a *long middle age* or a *profound middle age* the paradigm of which is discovered – with the help of ethnologic means – in people’s beliefs, behaviours and mentalities (Le Goff, 1970, p. 41).

The new conception about the historical document or about chronology – these, the document and the chronology used to unify in order to make the historic fact positive – they regulate the interpretation of historical facts, based on rigueur and imagination (Jacques Le Golf). In fact, what does the historian aim to prove? He tries to found something which cannot be demonstrated in a classical way. Of course, the hermeneutics does not refer to factuality, because it is not an experimental science, but an interpretative one and therefore it is a science of the spirit, which makes the historical fact comprehensible. It connects, in fact history to the way people talk and, in this way, the historical document becomes a literary

text and can be interpreted with the linguistics and semiotics methods (the syntax, the semantics, the pragmatics). Words rise together with the age and slowly they reach the image of the age and express it. “Abandoning” the historical document and discovering the literary text in the same text, the historian gets closer to the language and implicitly to the mentality it expresses. Hermeneutics helps us dissociate wisely between the *natural sciences*, where the *scientific explanation* is dominated and the sciences of spirit, within which understanding is fundamental. The vicious and fallacious circle in the field of sciences is replaced by the hermeneutical circle – which means a concentric development of meanings – which shows that

in the field of understanding, there is by no means a successive derivation claimed, so that the logical argumentation error of circularity is not a fault of demarch here, but it represents the appropriate derivation of the structure of understanding. (Gadamer, 2001, pp. 596-597)

The interpretation increases the truth because it brings new meanings but it does not render the truth. It relates, but not counterfeits it, meaning that by hermeneutics we build a truth, we do not produce it.

Hermeneutics does not absolutize, because it is not chronology and its inevitable subjectivity does not make it non-scientific and it does not compromise it either, because only through “subjectivity” hermeneutics promises. This way, we can hardly understand the ones who no longer live, the ones from yesterday or the ones who are to be, meaning the ones of tomorrow.

Hermeneutics starts from text, but the meaning is reached from context with the help of intuition, which, “although it has a non-cognitive character, because it expresses the emotion of truth and not the truth itself”, generates nevertheless an authentic understanding and knowledge.

In hermeneutics we interpret the mankind not as a universal man, but as a man of a certain age, because there being not only the ability to comment, hermeneutics requires not an intelligent comment, but an appropriate comment. But an intelligent comment must be also appropriate. It requires a distance from the text and recovering the meaning from context, because the truth in the sciences of spirit, according to Wilhelm Dilthey, means interpretation.

Although hermeneutics was once an auxiliary subject of theology, philosophy and jurisprudence (Hufnagel, 1981, p. 7), and today it became an auxiliary subject of history, however it continues to offer the methodologic instrument of confrontation of subjectivity to the intersubjectivity (Hufnagel, 1981, p. 7), meaning of the individual not with another individual, but with the relationship between other individuals.

We will not find the essence of history in discrete, but “in what proves to be a proper duration of a continuous present” (Gadamer, 2001, p. 394). We find this continuation in traditions, mentalities, symbols, rituals, myths and wants to mean that if present is continuous, then the historical denaturation is no longer possible, because the same historical present reaches, by profound and constant seams, the future generations. Only a discrete history can be false, because the discontinuity can bias certain historical data, by making convenient contexts, as well as by taking the historical event from a continuous context.

The last in the order of debate, the myths, “*are not masks of historical reality, which the mind could snatch from things in order to consummate as a historical reasoning. They reveal more a real force of history*” (Gadamer, 2001, p. 394). We could have the impression about them that they counterfeit history, when in fact they highlight its continuity, because the reasoning enlightened by finite would be nothing but, according to Gadamer, *the horizon of our own historical conscience, the empty desert of myths, the never-ending enlightened consciousness. This state of enlightenment is more conditioned and limited historically, it is a stage in the realization of our destiny* (Gadamer, 2001, p. 394).

History is a science that has a meaning and man is a human being that has a purpose and man can be understood only with his destiny. The connotation of the above-mentioned word “stage” is here, we think, “moment” in destiny, purpose in meaning but only the meaning decodes the purpose, which is nothing but an infinite freedom without meaning, in the absence of destiny.

That is why freedom is not made up in history, because there is no freedom without destiny or according to Gadamer’s more profound words:

It (the enlightened conscience n.n.) can understand itself in a wrongful way when it considers itself as being the freedom that lacks destiny of the historical conscience. But this fact means: history is what we were and always are. It is the compulsory fact of our destiny. (Gadamer, 2001, p. 394)

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