

THE LAST STAGE EXPLANATION WITHIN THE STUDY OF SOCIETY

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Abstract. I name as the last stage explanation within the study of society the tacit or explicit conjugated answers to the questions: “why is society as it is” and “where the further path/which is its further path?” We observe the philosophical character of these questions and answers constituting tacit or explicit suppositions of general as well as particular social researches. So it is about an element of the social theories, the referential supposition, I deal with.

Starting from a philosophical interpretation of Gödel’s theorems of incompleteness (1931) – not in the field of philosophy of mathematics, but in the common language translation –, the paper tends to show the correspondence between these theorems and some conclusions of the second half 19th century’s rebel dialectic philosophy. The paper enounces also some methodological aspects of the philosophy of social sciences linked to some non mathematical philosophical conclusions concerning Gödel’s theorems of incompleteness.

The aspects stated below are presented from a socio-philosophical perspective, and not from the perspective of the mathematics philosophy. “Maybe not by mere chance, mathematics has been and continues to remain in the imaginary of savants as well as in that of the wide public, as the pre-eminent mythical science, sometimes even overrated – precisely because, basically its subject of study does not have direct or exhibited connections with the empiric reality” (I. Isac, 2007).

Gödel’s incompleteness theorems (1931) had in view emphasizing the main limits of any type of formalisation: because his first theorem refers to the impossibility of demonstrating the completeness of a system (Peano’s logical theory of real numbers) and the second theorem – refers to the fact that the consistency of arithmetic cannot be demonstrated within the boundaries of the arithmetic system itself. My opinion is that these theorems can ultimately be applied to any *system of transposing reality into a code of signs and significations* – is the meaning that I still remember from the concise description of my first year at the Faculty of Philosophy, where I attended a course of Theoretical problems of mathematics. Therefore – the fact that *the last stage explanation of a system, whatever this may be, is outside the respective system*. The fact that only in every conceptual system – framed by its paradigms – demonstrable enunciations can be inferred, and their eliminating trial is actually outside the respective systems, i.e. that the self-referential is not sufficient.

The fact that a mathematical theorem – a field which I have always regarded with the shyness of the forever ignoramus – demonstrated what, on the one hand, a

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certain kind of common sense that I have assimilated since childhood, and on the other hand the history of knowledge (of philosophical knowledge) emphasized, strengthened my joy of having chosen the study of philosophy, and at the same time the image of the reciprocal completion of knowledge of different fields of study, the image of the inexistence of an absolute hierarchy, as well as my deepest interest for the understanding of social problems.

Indeed, if techniques and instruments of knowledge, including the language, as well as the fact that the knowledge mechanisms can be researched in themselves, in their internal logic which bears the seal of the universal – and if, of course, the truth in getting close to these is relative and dynamic (historical), then it would result that outside the system of the mind and of its products – instruments of the mind – there is a complex which makes up the conditioning of the system mentioned above: the society – interesting² at least through the multiplication of the human system. Of course, society as such is not “the last stage explanation”: it is in itself the superior complex of the individual-society relations, in their bustle, it has as understanding units the individual, as well as the ideal and material constructs of the inherently ineluctably social individual. At the same understanding, none of the elements on which various disciplines focus on can be regarded as the ultimate fundament. More, the notification of essences and ontological preoccupations – originally, precisely the study of the “prime” principles of existence/ of being/ of the world/ of the universe – have demonstrated through their multitude of answers, their historical character and the *vulnerability of the concept itself of last stage explanation*.

Gödel’s incompleteness theorems – deemed as being the most important acquisitions of logic, after Aristotle’s (J. Kennedy, 2007) – as well as other sophisticated contemporary theories that were the formalisation of old intuitions and have corresponded to the systemic pattern, developed in a “Gödelian manner” alt least in Marx’s study of society, all of these allow for a better understanding of knowledge and of course of the world.

As it is already known, philosophy emerged precisely as a reflection on the world in its entirety, a reflection on its structuring (on its logic). Precisely the difference between the concrete limited historical level of the knowledge instruments and, on the other hand, the immensity and the complexity of the world has generated the idea of a last stage explanation/ main principle: the *water* of Thales (640–546 B.C.), “the first man whom the name of wise man was given” (D. Laertios, 1963) in the European culture, Anaximandros’ *apeiron*, Anaximenes’ *air*, Anaxagoras’ *nous*, but also at Plato and Aristotle, Plato’s *ideas*, Anaxagoras’ *homeomerics*, Democritus’

² See the discussion on the necessity of ontological assumptions at the basis of the laws of science, the lack of interest for these assumptions representing a limitation of the constructivist-instrumentalist approach to the laws of science, according to (Gerard Stan, 2006).

and Epicurus' *atoms*, Heraclitus' *fire*, Spinoza's *divine substance*, Hegel's *supreme idea*, the medieval nominalism and realism, Böhme's *nature*, the *vulgar materialism* of Cabanis, *the thing in itself* and Kant's logic and normative idealism, but also Aristotle's *matter and form*, Fichte's *absolute ego* and *non-ego*, Nikolai Hartman's *perfect archetypes*, or Empedocles'³ *air, fire, water and earth* (490–430 B.C.) illustrate different types of monist, dualist and pluralist perspectives. This is, in other words, a history of the coexistence of opposite elements and factors of *Dasein* – the persistence of values in a context where their opposites are the dominant ones – that is the complexity described in dualist paradigms (M. Florian, 1983).

But before this conclusion, we have to not forget that even the constitution of the concept as such in the natural languages – as general, as universal – was the demonstration that people grasped, as Aristotle observed, that because different concrete and singular things cannot be given in the place and time of discussions between the human beings, these singular things have to be substituted by abstract entities meaning just their *symbol*. For “the singular is in itself infinite, i.e. indefinite by itself and, as a consequence, no intelligible (*singulare autem infinitum et sub scientia non cadens*)”, the “last stage explanation” of the singular – which is substantial, concrete, contingent, no intelligible (ineffable), no predicable – is in the general which represents it as objectivity, ideality, necessity, intelligibility, predictability. Just these universal/general/abstract entities are the object of sciences: *scientia est universalis et per necessaria* (A. Joja, 1973).

However, the problem is more complicated. Besides the focus on a determination *at the last instance* but which does not always represents his subject of interest, philosophy leaned over certain issues, becoming specialised and fragmented. Thus there are monist, dualist, and pluralist paradigms in the theory of knowledge, ethics, aesthetics, social sciences, as well as regarding certain issues related to these ones. For example, within the domain I fell close to, the *methodological* dualism and monism regarding the specificity of knowledge in social sciences as opposed to natural sciences (M. Flonta, 1981; G. Ferréol, 2006), or regarding the causal explanation and the functionalist explanation in social sciences (C. Zamfir, 1981), or regarding positivism and hermeneutics in the understanding of society⁴, or regarding the intrinsic and extrinsic explanations and the types of approaches towards social issues (G. Nagâţ, 2006), or in relation with the detection and the interpretation of historical data (S. Vieru, 1981), or related to patterns of balance and conflicts within politics, or related to the endogenous and

³ At which he also added two principles of movement, *Philia* (love) – which unites the first – and *Neikos* (hate) – which separates them.

⁴ So as not to burden the bibliography, let us rather remember the question if the interpretation, the complex mechanism of impressions, could go beyond the narrow framework of demonstrable/tested social explanations? So, if the last stage explanation being problematic, could hermeneutics replace this, as a last means of reference?

the exogenous perspective on the political (A. Bazac, 1994), or related to the paradigmatic pluralism in sociology (*ibidem*) and political sciences (A. Bazac, 1997, 2006). As a matter of fact, there is no problem – that generates most of the times framed studies, therefore the emergence of sub-disciplines – which would be independent from the research and controversies related to concrete methodological assumptions. With this in mind, for example within the study of society took place the fight between the extreme tendency to reduce the social to the activity of the individual – to psychology, and this, as last resort, to chemistry and physics – and on the other hand, the sociological totalitarianism; but the integrated and contextualised perspectives made also room within the study of society; in other words: the fight between individualism and holism.

Just as Gödel's theorems were the result of his research of what was called/and within was called *principia mathematica*, the same way philosophy was the ardent debate on the issues of knowledge related to the complexity of existence. The result was always *the invalidation of the completeness theories and of the last stage explanations representations*. Rather the image come into view is the one of *architecture*, seen as a method of establishing the requirements of a system made up of the ensemble of its functions, that is “the structure of the external functions...the structure of the functions in relation to another system or to an observer at a given point, at a given level or a given interface of the system”. See the architectonic model of the human psyche which consists of three components: “I-for-myself”, “I-for-the-other”, and “other-for-me”, in (M. Bakhtin, 1986; A. Joja, 1971; M. Drăgănescu, 1981; A. Botez, 2006).

Obviously, the premise of the gradual intelligibility of the world⁵ – and in a certain space-time framework it is obvious that the intelligibility is not absolute, meaning that is not predictable in the Laplacean sense – is constitutive to that perspective. The idea of incompleteness, thusly, must be accepted positively, “even though the attraction of certainty still prevails” (I. Isac, 2007). In this way, theories developed getting thoroughly into the ancient points of view of dialectics: antagonism as generator and the dynamic logic of the contradictory⁶, as well as the necessity to surpass the legitimating of philosophical doctrines (A. Bazac¹, 2007).

This perspective is more and more fruitful: particularly, see the image of the problems of the integration of identities (cultures) in a single universal civilisation (M. Malița, 2001).

Before going to the subject of this article, it is necessary to remember a precursor of the idea of relative completeness and only within the systems of systems: Gianbattista Vico.⁷

⁵ Today this happens already with the tendency of an integrative perspective of science, through the revelation of a common methodology, according to (M. Kafatos, M. Drăgănescu, 2003). Also see (I. Prigogine, I. Stengers, 1984).

⁶ See the emphasis laid on the effectiveness of this approach at (Y. Durand, 1998).

⁷ (G. Vico, 1744): “what you love most is yourselves, your own ideas”.

Building an integrated⁸ view of the research of history – on institutions, traditions, relations – of language (on discourses – in a real post-modern⁹ vision) and of the understanding of the society, by clearing up the relations between the answers of the individuals (practical answers) to history and, on the other hand, the characteristics and general motivations of the historical creation, Vico emphasises the unity of wisdom (*sapienza*) accomplished in the practical action¹⁰: the certainty comes from man's voluntary action, “the certainty is the practical objectivity of the right” and wisdom becomes justice (F. Botturi, 1991).

In what follows below and discussing exclusively within the framework of social philosophy, I shall describe three types of answer to the conjugates questions – that underlie of any *Weltanschauung* of social research: “Why is society as it is?” and “What is its further path?”

If it is true that these questions have been explicit or have been accompanied in a low tone all the texts of philosophy focused on society issues (or on universal history, as we have already seen), at the same time their historical determination emerges.

In this sense, the first type of answer, chronologically speaking – but it structures the *mainstream* even today – is the *creationist* one: in fact, the origin of everything that happens within society, the social relations, the joys and suffering of people being in different social positions, is divinity. And this means that the social dynamics has the form of a circular pattern, the *éternel retour* type of pattern: there is no advance or fall in history, because movement takes place in the pre-established manner, regardless of the fact that man knows (Oedipus, Cassandra) or revolts (Antigona). The system of explanation is in this way closed. But it is not at all reassuring. See the agglomeration of the falsifying evidences and of course, the crisis generated by these ones.

Within this kind of answer, the last stage explanation has in view what was called *causa finalis* and lies emphasis on the concept of social freedom. Not accidentally Protestantism and, obviously, the counter-Reform have insisted that human freedom would be possible within the frame of creationist explanation.

This explanation, if present everywhere in the common reason – even if people tacitly presuppose that things are complex, most of them believe that all the social turmoil has its final cause in an extra-mundane force – is even more striking

⁸ (J. Michelet, 1835): “our historic tendency...is to study humanity as a whole...Vico merged for the first time all knowledge having man as subject, in a vast system that draw together the history of facts and the history of languages”.

⁹ This perspective consists in the union of philosophy – because universal history was narrated in a philosophical manner, as search for structure, motivations and rules – with philology, according also to (B. Croce, 1953).

¹⁰ The conclusion of the philosophy of *praxis* is crossing our mind: practice is the criterion of testing the *social* truth.

in philosophy, in the savant judgment. Today there is an obvious pressure for strengthening the creationist assumptions in social representations.¹¹

The second type of answer is the *mechanistic causal* one. Appeared especially at the same time with modernity, the causal pattern is already naturalist and partially open: the social phenomena are already generated within society. But due to its limited and fragmented nature of causal inferences – a cause is, in its turn, the effect of another cause (the pattern being the one synthesised by Blaise Pascal in *Pensées* (posthumous, 1670, VI, 18) – “If Cleopatra’s nose had been shorter, the entire face of the world would now be different”) – therefore in causal lines separated from each other, the causal pattern arrives also at the ultimate cause, the divinity. The social movement here has two forms, both linear: one – optimistic (“society progresses”), the other – pessimistic (“we are witnessing a social regression”). Of course both forms reflect interests and positions, morphologies and different social trajectories: of the winning social forces (the optimistic pattern), of the defeated ones or of those who transfigure the historical crisis (the pessimistic pattern).

The third type of answer constituted at the half of the 19th century, is the *determinist pattern on complexity*. The causal pattern is no longer linear and fragmented, but integrated, systemic¹², like a tree’s wreath, and allow history to remain *open*¹³, it does not pre-establish history, annulling any last stage explanation (K. Marx, 1932).

This pattern does not omit the indeterminist principle, but it does not consider this one as turning into an absolute explanation. The knowledge of society is open corresponding to the open system of society. The historical movement is not linear, and includes ups and downs within an open and self-made system through people’s freedom and responsibility. The pattern, thusly, represents a critique to the presupposition dividing these ones into actors and pawns. *This is the pattern that annuls the principle of the last stage explanation of society.*

(Opposing this pattern, a fake one was constructed, which includes the complexity but in the frame of the assumption of the eternity of social patterns. But actually these patterns are historical).

¹¹ See only Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy*, Georgetown University Press, 1996; Nicholas Wolterstorff, Robert Audi, *Religion in the Public Square*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996; Paul J. Weithman (editor), *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1997; Nancy L. Rosenblum (editor), *Obligations of Citizenship and Demands of Faith*, Princeton University Press, 2000; Brendan Sweetman, *Why Politics Needs Religion: The Place of Religious Arguments in the Public Square*, InterVarsity Press, 2006.

¹² Including and deriving from the dialectics of the *basis* and the *superstructure*, also see (A. Bazac², 2007).

¹³ This happens including through the translation of society into a virtual world – the extension of the world of knowledge – and in the outer space in Cosmos.

One first observation here is connected to Marx's social philosophy. This consisted in the overturning of the creationist and mechanistic paradigms regarding society. Because the arguments – or the stories, in their post-modern formulation – have in view the society represented as a system (a system made up of other systems) in its complexity, these arguments (theories, doctrines) are tested by being confronted with other arguments belonging to different and opposed philosophical schools of thought, by being confronted with practice and thus through their self-criticism. From such a perspective, the presuppositions of the ultimate causes become inconsistent. Gramsci noticed that Benedetto Croce, in his criticism against “Marxist” dogmatism, showed the difference between Marx's philosophy and this dogmatism: “Croce added then that the founding father of the philosophy of *praxis* had never set out to search for this *ultimate cause* of economic life: « He had not ‘flirted’ in vain with Hegel's dialectics, for later pursue the search of the *ultimate causes*. »” (A. Gramsci, 1959).

But the principle that practice is the testing criterion of truth must not be caricatured: *only as a last resort* do the relations and the social positions verify the social theories that have indirect and multiple mediated connections with the social. Rather the history of these theories allows, *inter alia*, the emphasis of their connections – which, once again, are mediated – with the social. The principle only refers to the *social* truth, that is to the falsifying of the theories directly related to this one (the sociological and political sciences) *through* and *sine qua non through* confrontation with the social reality.

Finally here, Marx's social philosophy includes the requirement of openly assuming the *ideological assumptions*, i.e. of those describing the social positions and interests of different actors and historical players, precisely so as the connection between the social representations and, on the other hand, the social positions and interests reflected by these representations to appear very clear.

Marx's social philosophy is not reducible to ideological assumptions: on the contrary, these are always subjected to falsifications – *they are not axioms* (and only where axioms do exist can the limits of formalisation be demonstrated) – and allow for criticism of theories within a social integrated image (hence also *from outside* different theories). If Gödel's demonstrations have shown that the axiomatic method does not represent the guarantee for complete certainty, Marx's social philosophy excludes, as presented above, this method completely, but at the same time in the framework of open knowledge – full of *relativity*, *indecisiveness*, which is actually *indeterminacy*¹⁴ – there are still certainties, always counter posed to concrete social historicity. In other words, Marx's social philosophy is not a hermeneutics that would substitute the indeterminism generated by the contemplation of the social puzzle.

¹⁴ There are in this sense, postmodernist patterns in Marx's social philosophy.

(It is not about the mere amending of the myth of the integral intelligibility: social intelligibility is not only historical, it is the open result, therefore insecure, of the confrontations between society and its environment, and of those within society itself. The problem is however, that even though in one historical moment or another there are social aspects which are unknown/ are not knowable/ “they evade”, virtually they are not in this manner in principle: the confrontations above-mentioned are those which annul the unknown character of the social phenomena. The *tendency* towards optimism in knowing the society is not the result of a positivism belonging to the natural sciences, but a result of the demonstration of the historical characteristic of the knowledge of society. Precisely this historical characteristic outlines the “ideal-type” of Marxian social philosophy.)

At the same time, Marx’s materialism does not annul the determinant role of theories and beliefs: these ones reflect, of course, in one way or another, the historical social conditions, but they also constitute real, objective factors of social phenomena: they are given/existing circumstances for the existence of people in all the historical moments. (To say it differently, materialism accepts Platonism, i.e. also the genesis of ideas from ideas, the anamnesis, and the ideal constructs as given realities together with others in society and which cannot be disregarded). In this sense: *a.* without the transformation of these factors no transformation of material, institutional and cultural aspects, takes place; and *b.* an essential aim of social theories, including the Marxist ones, is exactly the control of these factors.

But the theories and beliefs are relative because they reflect the concrete social places from where/ on whose basis they came into being (and not only because of different historical moments). From this point of view, changing the social place of people entails new social conceptions as well. In the same perspective, people can have social convictions which are objectively speaking, opposed to their concrete social positions: but these convictions obviously correspond to other people’s (groups’) social positions. That is why, for example, the certainty and the uncertainty stated from a given social position are not “ultimate”: they must be counter posed to the results of the knowledge of society from other social positions. Finally, not only a permanent *feedback* between the social knowledge of various types (issued from different social positions/ in their name) allows for a certain degree of certainty in knowing society: to the debates and the certifications within the scientific communities – including between different schools of thought – the falsification should be added, in fact it is added, through the confrontations with social *praxis*.

A question should come into focus: if the truth of a system lies outside it isn’t the assumption of divinity justifiable? Social theories and social philosophies are of course divided when facing this question. But if we take into consideration the explanations for concrete society and its history, divinity is difficult to be demonstrated as the last

cause of social progresses. Only religious faith, of course, together with its force and its institutions, can play a part in determining social phenomena.¹⁵

Social theories are not games, and they can/ or cannot be demonstrated starting from the assumption of the system characteristic, meaning that they are falsified (Marx and Popper: through practice and logical arguments). As a result, the falsification implies the critique of the internal logic of theories and their confrontation with different theories as well as with the social practice. In this sense, theories are more or less consistent. Their social predominance is not dependent only on passing the falsification test, but it depends on their social functions, at the last instance on the division of the real power relations which they reflect.

Social theories are obviously, incomplete, because they refer to certain aspects through the nature of things, partially. Thus, social theories reciprocally complete and criticise themselves. Social philosophies underlying these theories – belonging to precise social disciplines – are organised around different epistemological assumptions and ideologies and have the same social function as the particular social theories. Their critical function and the repudiation of the fact that the assumptions are not axioms are what generated the tendency of closing the dialogue within each philosophical school. As a conclusion, let us notice the two meanings of the concept of *tacit supposition* which are openly included by/in philosophies which do not explicitly assume their assumptions: *one*, the meaning of unexplained knowledge, but which would represent tested premises as a result of specialisation and of acquired competencies; and the *other*, that of passing them over in silence (the spiral of silence).

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¹⁵ But let us not forget that the notion of idea, *eidos*, derives from *idein*, exterior aspect, and visible form. Even the deep convictions were understood by people as reflections. (Although we obviously aware that we should not turn the principle of reflection into an absolute one. There also exists the principle of construction – outlining of concepts and ideas from the logical course of the knowledge.)

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