

REVIEW
THE BOOK ENTITLED „MODERNITY TENDING” OF PROFESSOR
CONSTANTIN SCHIFIRNEȚ AND PUBLISHED BY ‘TRITONIC’
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Abstract: *This is about modernity, a concept approached with the (intellectual) courage that is likely to be missing by number of authors, be they sociologists, as there is this case of book and author, or others. Moreover, this author does keep such a theme in a context of several (a real ‘chain’ of) writings around and certainly written along a pretty representative period that is finally his career and profession of fate. The last is equally for here daring an expression like ‘masterpiece’ that would rather be for fiction and arts.*

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Modernity appears defined in this book at page 19 as: „progress and linear unlimited evolving on a predetermined direction induced by a given social actor”. The author finds it arising in Spain and Italy, in the early ‘modern era’, then spreading into the whole Western Europe, then to the other European regions. And this is enough for any of my and the author’s ages living once in the communist Romania to quickly understand why even the earlier Ph.D. paper of Constantin Schifirneț had been stopped from publishing at its time. Things would be different whether the author had complied instead with the communist party’s thesis of, Western Europe being the ‘rotten contemporary capitalism’.

Nevertheless, problems remain even after 1989, be it for different circumstances and aspects. Let me mention that I am not a sociologist myself, but I know in person a few sociologists ever refusing debate on such a theme. I mean the sociologist that this book’s author is would equally be required with the philosopher. Or this debate might reclaim a kind of proximal gene as large as equally including terms like patriotism or even love. And let me ask who’s the one researching love, be it as a philosopher, a sociologist or a scientist? Is this really funny? Or, let us figure out debating about patriotism at the everyday tea and not quickly becoming pathetic, roast and/or ridiculous. As the result, the others’ reaction, the ones you share such a theme with, quite unwished as petty as it might be imagined, could be avoided rather only when avoiding just this theme as well from the very beginning.

Debating on modernity is proven here, in this book, in need of at least two preliminary qualities for the one who develops it. First, it is about that intact conscience, untouched by the poetic, dark mud of everyday routines, unmoved by the scales and thorns of the, concrete meanders’ as in an early 90s fashion be expression – and the author is aware of all these. That intact conscience belongs rather to the childhood; this is when the one’s look to the sky is still able to embrace huge clouds and to give them outlines and so a kind of ‘macro’-shapes certainly

according to the one's own psychological profile. It is the one's childhood as well that gets responsible for disconsidering human resource limits vis-à-vis great life goals approaching endeavour – e.g. modernity analysing and debating – and so risking at least a presumable stop halfway. Shortly, debating about modernity – as well as about patriotism or love, as above mentioned – isn't roast, ridiculous or wrong in any way, but the truth is that these 'great' things that belong to our collective conscience actually are as great as able to forbid or reject all inadequate facing.

And let me have a new example to strengthen the same idea: some say they could deny even God by pointing to misery of the world and pretending Him 'responsible for'; finally they ignore their own argument of 'God invented /i.e. 'made' by other ones'. In reality, even such a precarious circumstance might prove, instead of any 'argument against God's existence', Its staying off and untouched by any evil thoughts.

The other quality here required by modernity approaching doesn't belong to childhood, but, on the contrary, to the one ever able to guide all lost and perplexed reader (like me) on a slippery road like this above approaching. The example of love approaching example might be even better suggesting the 'slippery road' metaphor, plus this is for here figuring out then the ones that here organically slip, fall and wound. Professor is here much needed – and this is, of course, the same person with the above mentioned sociologist and philosopher – but once more, needed for keeping on the right way.

But then, on this road the author first encounters all ideas of 'inaccessibility' of this given theme by making known a whole list of authors and their papers previously on this theme and then scrupulously following them. Then, just finding out modernity-modernizing duality of notions, their unfinished shapping as 'de facto' and keeping instead what is here called tendence (tendential) – and let me here confess something I like enough, i.e. the *asymptote*. It is for the first time that I meet this spilling over from its mathematical and graphical basic definition – this is related in detail to the analytical geometry of the convex hyperbola and I wrote about the last myself, in my book-manual of economics. Tendence replaces achievement in the facts dimension, whilst achievement is, of course, more tempting for ordinary people, here the ones opposed to the author. On the contrary, for the last that is the phillosopher, sociologist and professor Schifirnet modernity is less accomplished and more and increasingly tendential. Back in facts, this is either never done, or previously never included in written projects – it is rather getting interesting how the phillosopher better deals with tendential as with ineffable (ineffable is the attribute that is likely to be enough agreed by phillosophers), than with things really done, and certainly much better than we do it, on our other side.

As for another example, we (the reader), on our side, we rather like to see European integration (i.e. European Union, pp.90, 97, 100, 138) done on a predictable time horizon, despite the unclear literature's viewpoints on this issue. Besides, the European integration-Union actually is a project, unlike modernity, plus a more palpable and obvious reality, previously than academic debate. Moreover, the completion of European integration is expected for ever ending the integration's chronical contradictory dynamics.

Concomitantly, not to be ommitted that projects are claimed apparently for long(extended) terms, as well – e.g. it is by the the EU project that member States agree to expose their own sovereignty. Vis-à-vis, modernity is appropriate for long terms, but more pecisely for very *long terms* – *that make it, on the contrary, rather inappropriate to projects*

and/or corresponding programmes. But equally not to be omitted the historical example that has been as real as the today EU, plus really achieved, but missing all kind of projects: this was the famous ‚Silk Road’ and belongs to some thousands of years before the today globalizing as well as to times before Jesus Christ. I here introduce this example in order to avoid presumably wrong association of human action achieved with project existing and/or with lowering working terms – neither the author argues as such, except for emphasising the modernity example that proved rather incompatible with any project idea.

Back to the paper and especially to its author, his asymptote-tending concept tandem reminds me of the Romanian example of Ion Barbu, the poet and mathematician (his mathematician’s name was Dan Barbilian) of my grand-parents’ generation and publishing his writings in the inter-war period. Everybody learned about this writer in the Romanian Secondary School and the mathematics-metaphor – the last for its belonging to poetry – relationship was so left to each one. Besides, two more things are equally true: that the human maturity wisdom is so different from that hurry of learning for school written tests in our youth and that metaphor belongs not only to poetry.

Moreover learning from this book (and not exactly here following its text relating order) that modernity’s implementing compulsorily deals with national (pp.15, 123) level, whereas this last looks decisive for all that occurs in corresponding epoch. Let me here have the counter-example that succeeds to make the same aspect even clearer: the ancient world had been different than the modern one by staying far from national environment. George Modelski (2000 &2004), another sociologist that also cites author names like Karl Jaspers (1953) and Jaques Glassner (2000), finds the ancient corresponding development centered on urbanization not only out of national landmark, but even so interesting as world-wide and pretty homogenous. This is an interesting urbanizing example without modernity and modernizing and it even cannot be any challenge to the Schifirnet’s theses since the Modelski’s approaches are earlier in time. The Modelski’s facts related’s interest reminds of that process of millions years ago, when the human species, contrary to all the other living creatures, were spreading across all climatic areas.

Back to our book relating about modernity and following the above tinting on, it then unexpectedly stops customizations, concepts detailing and conceptual ‚dissection’ to a minimal concretization on geographic regions and some individual countries. Naturally, the region here claimed as the Western world area (pp.1, but also 39, 42, 47, 65 and 128 for Westernization) is here special issue – as already shown above. Plus, the author prefers to openly declare his deliberate staying off all international comparisons on modernity criterium. Or, let me here keep a contrary opinion, that interestingly comes in favour of the author and of his text’s quality (never against them). I so believe that the author is rather convincing on concretizations, as equally on his bibliography scrupulous reading for concepts shaping.

Plus, I can then continue to be faithful in the author’s capacity of concretization and of making himself enough credible for a larger public – all these even against the author’s previously here declared paradigm. In such circumstances, for the moment Mr. Schifirnet prefers an integrative discourse and this is the philosopher, once more.

And now let me have two more remarks that I have on the same admirable side of my contribution developed so far. The one is that I see Mr. Schifirnet not developing just one of his ‚n’ subjects of diverse preoccupations; this is, on the contrary, something related to a profession of faith, to most of his writings, to a presumptive continuity of preoccupations, no less to the

scholar's 'masterpiece' -- as much as every scholar and author might claim his/her own masterpiece, much previously to having universal masterpieces. Profession of faith and masterpiece belong to the individual's whole life or at least to the maturity part of this whole life. I here try to believe these aren't any big talk, but bibliography around sounds certainly common with or at least continuing the one of the author's previous writings, e.g. his 'Forms without Foundation'. Another personal reflection of mine might become here appropriate (nobody suggested it to me): it is pretty certain to have got such ease of expression helping others to understand (only) when one knows so profoundly the subject related. In other words, deeply knowing the related subject equals capability of best relating it in one phrase and/or on some hundreds of pages. And this is for our author and his writing that we here focus on.

The other remark in this order is for categorizing this paper as an essay. This last does enter debate on a topic, get active within with its standpoints, but finally leaves it whereas I, the reader, could access its contribution to assess its exact contribution as such. The last would be the difference within the same full debate between now and previously, without this essay.

Overall, after all of the above, facing what this paper is, lets us see the contrary, what the same paper isn't and could not be. I think that a philosophical and sociological approach couldn't be expected to be a perfect work. Only pragmatic approach, and this one when circumscribed to a purpose and this latter well circumscribed itself could be that. To be an approach circumscribed to some hypotheses-restrictions that are both exact and self-imposed, e.g. mathematical modeling. An aphorism identifies the masterpiece's perfection to the one of literary sketch. *Vis-à-vis*, philosophical approach misses by definition all self-imposed limitations – limits of the philosophical approach will come up instead by themselves, together with the others' criticism. Philosophical work seems vulnerable by definition. But this book seems to make itself particular by just its topic's imperfection found.

And this above could already be the appropriate introduction for a piece of criticism that we could have. Let me have just three points to explain. The one might also be pretty unexpected, as related to... Marxian theory. It won't be here about this theory directly, about literature either, but I here prefer an episode made by a Romanian journalist, former Romanian National Television's employee. His name is Theodor Brates and he was actively present at the episode of 22 December 1989 in that memorable Revolutionary studio. Let me be very precized that I never met him in person; something else made him known to me. Nearly all the people present in that studio at that time then enjoyed almost fulminant ascents; not him. I was going to see him after long years in a modest position, in a modest newspaper editorial that was 'The Economist', in Bucharest. At that time, in 1989, Theodor Brates responded to Nicu Ceausescu, the dictator's son, caught by revolutionaries, when this one was asking for his presumptive right to reply, by: 'No! Dictators have spoken enough.'

Or, my critical remark will express similarly to this episode. This is for somebody (i.e. Karl Marx and his followers) who has 'spoken enough' making me sick whenever I still read here and there about 'capitalism', 'bourgeoisie', history made by 'social classes' and 'social arrangements', or even 'dialectical denial'. And let me explain myself by that K. Marx isn't missing from my own writings, the update ones, not the ones of before 1989. I believe this is too much for our present doing more for Marx than classifying him and rendering his writings to their appropriate historical context and contest. And let me explain once more – *vis-à-vis* the time when we were forbidden to learn or listen to anything else than Marxism – by not bringing

into scientific writing any resentment, like in the above Theodor Brates' case. All I am feeling is a kind of 'scientific anxiety' (weather I could say that). I feel anxious facing the 'miracle' that only Marx seems to have for his performance of shaping a 'philosophical system' of himself. In other words, when not throwing overboard this system's stuff renewing its same appropriate conclusions seems inevitable.

But let me here have the example of my first ever article published – that was in 1991, at 'The Economic Tribune', but, of course, it passed fully unnoticed ever since. Actually, I was then starting my writing career in our new post-communist era with debating on the notion of 'capitalism' as properly as intended. My current argument is the same one that I had in 1991. The term 'capitalism' has two valences. Firstly, it is an 'ism' that means an ideology all over (e.g. liberalism, islamism, structuralism, socialism,...) up to people grouping and ghetto making – i.e. communism was even proud of openly recognising itself as an ideology.

Then the same term turns into a real conceptual and 'linguistic diversion'. It is obvious that Marx did not invent or issue the 'capitalism' term, but did take it over (from press and literature of his time) due to that it was wonderfully serving his target. This 'capitalism' was a newly fabricated word – no one yet sees how inappropriate 'capital' to 'ism' is. The purpose that excused the means is that all audience was aimed to perceive automatically or as quite a reflex that 'capitalism ever was a social arrangement made by a social class' (i.e. the one that was exploiting the the other classes) in its own interest as such. It was in this order that 'capital-ism' was naturally and logically going to be overturned by another 'social arrangement' created and supported by another 'social class' – and that 'social arrangement' was going to be called 'social-ism' and to belong to another 'social class' that would ever be 'pure' and especially 'not-exploiting' other social classes.

Marxism had the ability to hide the simple historical truth that the society of his time, here nicknamed as 'capitalism', de facto results from the free development. I just fear wherever 'capitalism' written up that authors might think that it really followed the ancient slavery and the medieval feudalism to be then overturned by socialism and... 'communism, the mankind's future forever' (?). I still do not believe that our author thinks like this, but what I fear at least is any syllogism here involving 'social classes' as presumable modernity actors – the way K. Marx was seeing things. Let me have bourgeoisie (pp. 30, 144-5, 151-2) that could here be the one of Marx or ... the one of Molière earlier. More exactly, how does professor Schifirnet see the today 'bourgeoisie' ? And besides such a reservation there comes up the other one that there could be 'social classes' – i.e. just some of them – actively playing on society and its politics and modernity; the society and its politics would correspondingly let themselves played by social classes at their large scale in a continuously adversative and certainly dynamic context.

And this could also include the elites phenomenology (pp. 16, 71, 82, 92, 110, 113-126) – and here the second critical remark. It isn't the elite's position or role that require some clarifying, but their genesis, functioning and modus operandi – I personally keep so found of sociologists ever explaining how today and/or previous elites were ever shaped in Romania (?) and not only.

And this is for then including the third and our last critical remark that I have for this paper of phillosophical and sociological debate. This will be through debate on elites to widen scale of observing, but here also recall modernising and modernity moving through the national benchmark and then through West and first through the Western Europe. Right! Let us also recall

that the pre-modern world had stayed appropriate to a different kind of development that other authors have previously focused on. Neither Mesopotamia, nor the ancient Egypt, nor the ancient China, nor the ancient Rome, all the less the medieval Otoman Empire have ever imposed or supported phenomena-processes similar to modernity each at its historical time.

But on this point I will quickly leave all above analytical viewpoint for the one rather growing ,defensive'. Actually, what I am stepping into here is an old question mark that I keep since my ,intellectual puberty' opposable to all I have learned ever-since. Let me be precise equally for refusing all prejudice of the kind of rasism, protochronism or of others that presume ,natural inequalities' and/or promote discrimination within the human kind. This is why I say I couldn't undestant for the modern era how Europeans (never others) were always the (first) ones: the ancient Romans with their echo in the later modernity, the ones making geographic breakthroughs – never nations or peoples of other continents have landed in Europe, except for the ,Great Landing' at the last World War end --; by consequence Europeans were the colonists of the modern age; the top economic development nations up to the America's colonisation also by Europeans and then to the new continent's development throughout the current economic superpower and world hegemony; the first ever industrial revolution was earlier in Europe (England); unfortunately, Europe was equally the unique source of World Wars of the 20th century – and their world-wide consequences proved at least comparable impact with the ones of other non-violent European influences world-wide; the freedom idea and spirit came up and spreaded into world from Europe as well (Netherlands); later on, democracy looks equally European origin, despite that the same continent didn't also miss ferocious dictatorships, as equally as the other continents. The modern America, as a kind of ,first Europe's child moving out' wasn't (unfortunately, this time) the lonely experience as such,i.e. South Africa was pretty similar to, up to its ,apparthoid' against local people, together with independence regained from the European metropolis. The most widely spoken language worl-wide (English) comes from Europe, as similarly; Chinese and Russian are also top spoken languages, but rather due to their native countries' high populations than to international spreading.

Only religions (all of them, it's true) meet world specific impacts without coming from the ,old continent', whilst the ancient non-European great empires stayed just cultural vestiges for present. No any ,balance' between non-European cultural vestiges and all that this ,world elite' that Europe might qualify for sees having done so far. Is anyone afraid of recognizing all these against... who knows... ? Or aren't these aspects observed really against common sense or good faith ?!

Such a profound and complex question that I ask is equally seen since here appreciating a contemporary phillosopher and sociologist that I personally have the chance to live nearby. On the other hand, the same question makes a good pair with another one of the same age and challenging the whole instruction that I ever received: has life appeared (when it really has) just uphazardly, or in a very evolving way of nature ?

But since this is the question, let us not omit answers (the so few ones and partial) here and there attempted.For instance, (so-called) historians claim the West Europe as the ,happy spoiled child' of the Middle Ages since defended by Romanian countries (principalities) at that time against possible huge Otoman invasions from south-east. These Eastern countries were so sacrificed destiny; the West had all he needed for developing and thoroughly founding his future modernity. See the example of strange contemporaneity of Christopher Columbus – the great

adventurer, navigator, explorer, road opener for a whole world and for a long historical future; the one who's Italian origin ever remained a petty detail -- with the Great Stephen of Moldova -- a swordsman, commander of hosts, winner in more battles against the Ottomans in their full glory, defender of the countries of Moldova and Wallachia. About a century later, Michael the Brave took the lead in the southern neighbouring Wallachia, continued fight with Ottomans and searched for impossible coalitions around in such a way -- and these when England had a Parliament already, William Shakespeare was performing his 'Richard III' and other plays, Francis Bacon issued his first Essays and 'Gresham College' was founded in the City of London. 'This is the West-East difference in Europe, the specific historic circumstances making the West the winner', historians argue.

As for later on times the communist ideology pretended that 'capitalism had finally entered its imperialist phase' -- 'what else to be expected from this barbarian society?' they said --, in which new territories were invaded and then 'capitalist order' was here brutally imposed. Actually, the colonies were accordingly supposed to have had 'their own previous specific development', probably or certainly different than in Europe (...?!). In other words, who knows what marvelous societies and future might have met and shared territories like South Asia, Africa, Australia, Near East, Oceania and all Americas whether Europeans had leaved them in peace from the very beginning? What miracles this world might have met instead?

Last, but not least, it will be great enough when a full and genuine explanation will come to face such a question asked on the modern world and on modernity, once more.

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