Reason and Argumentation – Philosophy as discourse in Chaïm Perelman

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In order to determine the state of philosophical practices, we must take into consideration their objectivable dimensions, by retracing the operations that ensure their construction within the order of discourse. Grounding such discursive understanding of philosophical practices means first of all to explain the apories to which it submits. We can attempt at asking ourselves why such an endeavour that has completely renewed the reading of literary, religious or scientific books, seems so difficult to apply in the case of philosophy. The reason is anything but serendipitous, rather tied to the specificity of philosophy, which, by virtue of its calling, tends to reign over and explain the conditions of its own representation. It rejects therefore any attempt that, from an outside position, may claim the objectivization of its rules of instalment and functioning.

With Chaim Perelman, reason is restored within a pluralistic moral and axiological frame, as historical reason, revealed by philosophy, in a dialectic manner. Therefore, by virtue of the intrinsic and subtle relation between the two, the argumentative reason grounds the philosophy, and the latter formulates but also simultaneously modifies the historical reason.

Keywords: rhetoric, philosophy, philosophical discourse, argumentation, reality, historical reason, neo-rhetoric, argumentative reasoning.

The philosophical discourse in itself sets into motion, in a manifest or concealed manner, the intention to organize not facts, but significances that engage an experience. In essence, all of it is about the unique encompassing of a relative decision on reality, resulting from a perspective positioning of a fact inside an entirety that is provisional or eternal, elusive or authentic, or in any way, lived as such by the conscience. By contrast with the scientific construction that objectivizes the experience, philosophy is an interpretive and value-giving reflection of experience. Concepts have no reference in particular objects, but in global, totalizing experiences. The strict imperative that is acting upon the philosophical discourse is rationality.

The philosophic discourse builds an autonomous way of thinking – analogous to the original decision - inside which it can find answers on reality. Yet, its realization belongs to rationality that allows it to embody as philosophical discourse.

Through Chaïm Perelman we are assisting in a revival of the *logos*, that restores an own field of existence to the reason dissolved in subjectivism and invalidated by modern scepticism. With a reason that exceeds the limits of obsoleteness, finding in the *logos* a favourable form of manifestation, we find ourselves before a totalizing perspective upon philosophy that, as the author of the Treaty affirms, situates itself "against the adamant and irreducible philosophical

contradictions that represent absolutisms of all kinds: the dualism reason vs imagination, science vs opinion, unambiguous evidence vs fickle will, universally admitted objectivity vs uncommunicable subjectivity, individual values vs reality."(Perelman, 200, 676) M. Meyer delineates the difficulty of Perelman's approach to restore the reason in the context of a „logic too tight to still represent the unique model" or of the „abandonment of philosophy in the name of the demise of metaphysics", in order to make way to the politic, literature and poetry. (Meyer, 2000, Preface). Neorhetoric[1] becomes therefore *le discours de la method* of a „rationality that has to accept pluralism, both at the level of moral values as well as that of opinions. (...) The opening towards what is multiple and unbridled thus becomes word of order for rationality." (Meyer, 2000, Preface)

Perelman's problematic emerges from inside rhetorics; more precisely, it emerges starting from major questions arisen by rhetoric: logic or argumentation? Persuasion or reason? The main prerequisite of his theory is the nondissolution between rhetoric and philosophy. The rhetorical perspective on philosophy does nor presuppose an analysis projected from the outside over the field of philosophy and particularly does not presuppose the transformation of philosophy into a rhetorical product. The fact that philosophy reveals itself every time as installed, even when it studies its own (discursive) movement of its embodiment, does not mean that this motion should rather be transformed into an object of study of a non-philosophical science, as F. Cossuta[2] suggested.

The interpretation of Perelman's position leads us to affirm that it ought to be rather of interest to study the *already* present embodiment. We are in other words interested in revealing this particular form of self-construction by analyzing rhetoric and the philosophical discourse as a whole. Perelman emphasizes the necessity to not search for the connection between rhetoric and philosophy in a hypothetical origin, but to test the existence of this connection by observing its manifestations. As long as nothing justifies the relation of rhetoric with philosophy, while their connection being unperceivable, it must be assumed that every time this relation is intrinsically already operated. „The hypothesis of a constitutive relation between philosophy and rhetoric (...) signifies the fact that rhetoric has nothing to say about philosophy, that isn't already philosophy: in other words, the thematization of rhetoric for its own sake is pure redundancy in relation with philosophy."(Schmetz, 2000, 343)

To Perelman, the fundament of philosophy is the argumentative reason, that presupposes, as Meyer observes, „an argumentationthat convinces without constraining and that does not impose the relinquishing of Reason in favour of the irrational or the unsayable."(Meyer, 2000, Preface)

The notion of reason is approached in an original manner, as being founded upon the idea of discursive performance. Perelman points to an historical reason that, apart from the eternal demonstrative reason, manifests itself in argumentation. Argumentation is that dimension of philosophy that envisages universality; therefore, even if the thesis is particular, the utilized reasoning threads or arguments are pointing to universality.

Perelman sees a double motion of philosophy in relation with the historical reason, in that philosophy reveals the historical reason by formulating, it, and it also modifies it. Therefore, argumentation is the justification of a thesis as a dialectical operation– of modification and bringing it close – performed over a cluster of viewpoints. So the conclusion of a philosophical thesis ought not to be different from the arguments, or other said, to develop arguments means to enunciate conclusions that appear as similar to the points of departure. The term conclusions can very well be replaced with vision on the world, produced *inside* the argumentation.

Perelman spots the dialectic between the spirit of a system or the inner coherence of philosophy – which is of the nature of the reasoning and its unfolding into arguments – which is of the nature of the reasonable. The philosophical discourse's objectivity is connected to the criteria of reasonable choice, and these criteria cannot be associated, according to Perelman, with the idea of verification, but with that of justification. „ (...) if philosophy has a meaning, and if it is not connected to criteria of verification, it is still linked to the criteria of reasonable choice. These are not associated withthe idea of verification, but with that of justification."(Perelman, 1974, 199)the means that can function within the approval or justification of a philosophical discourse's assertion is not the Cartesian evidence, but the argumentation as „an imperatively necessary completion of demonstration based on formal reasoning."(Florescu, 1973, 187)The ideal of argumentation resides in the very dialectic union of the reasonable with the rational. This dialectic union delineates the global aspect of philosophy lying beyond the system, and which is the perspective on the world that it provides. This means that the elements of the philosophic discourse that we can isolate must only be understood in the light of this global whole and not the other way round. More precisely, it is not our task to determine how they constitute the perspective on the world, but how this perspective on the world in discussion is unfolding *in* them. The affirmation of the idea of rationality, Perelman considers, „presents philosophy as a vision of the world or as a system of beliefs", that must be rationally legitimized, which legitimacy is „conform to the structure of the

system." The notion of rationality will be adopted as an „adjustment to the very system," adjustable reason meaning „a communication, assertion, affirmation, a universalizable decision."(Perelman, 1974, 193-194)

The articulation between argumentation and philosophy suggests before all the idea of an ontological equality between the two. Schmetz insists on the „active" and even „interventionistic" character (Schmetz, 2000, 322) of the way in which Perelman constructs the relation between philosophy and argumentation, a relation that Schmetz associates with the metaphor of play. Play presupposes the idea of equality between the two fields, which signifies the refusal to consider one superior to the other and implicitly the impossibility for one to be dominated by the other. One field is the condition of the possibility for the other to appear, without us making it an objectivable fact. From this perspective, Perelman's purpose is to search for this „instauration" of philosophy into rhetoric, highlighting the non-superiority of philosophy in relation to rhetoric. As a condition of possibility for the philosophy, rhetoric is permanently present in the philosophy, but, if we submit this thing to study, we find their relation already constructed.

The perspective on philosophy as discourse, proposed by Perelman through the lens of the theory of argumentation represents in essence a probing into the concrete and contextualized reason, that yet does not exclude the undetermined, for „a theory of argumentation must neither research a method that is conform to the nature of things, nor present discourse as a creation having its structure within itself."(Perelman, 2000, 672).Such a distinction would lead to a separation between form and content, within which, so Perelman, resides both "the dehumanizing of the notion of method" as well as the „stressing the irrational aspect of rhetoric."(Perelman, 2000, 673)

The analysis of Perelman's perspective therefore imposes a set of conclusions that unite the main aspects in discussion:

Philosophy, as discursive vision, assumes the understanding of the dimension of discursive action that is inherent to it, or the capacity of each discursive act to facilitate a vision on the world.

The problem of universality of philosophy must be formulated with less poise. Philosophy is particular and contingent; it resides and functions in each philosophical discourse of which it cannot escape.

The argumentation represents the dynamic mechanism of producing philosophical theses, and, more than a means of eloquence, it constitutes a projection of a thinking mechanism.

Philosophy and rhetoric are both in an intrinsic and not external relation; between the two there is no relation of subordination, and neither of identity, but of *repeatedly performed association.*

By uniting the speculative schemes, the expressive schemes and the context constraints, the philosophical practice constructs its own *re-presentation*, simultaneously viewing a search for legitimacy, the obtaining of recognition in the historical and social field and the achievement of full adherence between the conceptual and the argumentative-demonstrative structures. By inscribing it in a form of presentation, philosophy integrates and modulates rhetorical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions, displaying a continuous dialogue between demands that are hardly compatible with each other.

Note:

1. Neorethoric individualizes two directions that are ascribed to two different tradition lines – the direction described by C. Perelman, that develops in the Aristoelean line of discourse as persuasive argumentation and the direction described by R. Jakobson, G. Genette and the *µ* Group within contemporary poetics, concentrating upon semiotic mechanisms of literary works, reflected at thelevel of figures. The generalized New Rhetoric implies the reconstruction of language as action, and its utilization to the purpose of modification of the epistemical universe.
2. „If philosophy cannot be summed up otherwise than through metaphysical limitation, if it cannot be annulled otherwise than through an instauratory gesture, then its transformation into object becomes legitimate. This signifies the fact that philosophy can never bring its self-constitutive motion to an end. (...) But it means that its project to explain is own way of discursive constructional ways leaves behind a blurred remainder, that leads exactly to this same question."(Cossuta, 1995, 14)

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