

NAE IONESCU AND THE ROMANIAN PHILOSOPHY SCHOOL

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Abstract: *This paper is meant to highlight the remarkable contribution of Nae Ionescu to the Romanian school of philosophy. He is considered to be an educational model, creator of a philosophy school as Nechifor Crainic was for the school of theology. He did not create a philosophical system, but he had exquisite disciples, axiological landmarks for Romanian contemporary and universal philosophy.*

He was the teacher of many well known personalities, among which Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, Mircea Vulcanescu etc.

No person reaches completeness and perfection without a model, without a spiritual mentor. For us, Nae Ionescu remains a prototype of the philosophy teacher.

Keywords: *spiritual mentor, philosophical education, disciple, metaphysics, history, God.*

I would have liked to have him as a teacher. I always thought that for glimpsing into the secrets of philosophy you need a real mentor, capable of lifting up, through the depth of his thought, through his living capacity, personal calling and method to the height of his philosophical discourse. Nae Ionescu used to say: „philosophical creation hangs on the inspiration that descends on us from above”. (Course on Metaphysics, p.17)

In the following article, we attempt to analyze Nae Ionescu’s contribution to the philosophical education, considering that a teacher proves his own value having valuable disciples. Socrates had Plato, Plato had Aristotle, Aristotle had Alexander the Great, the Macedon, etc.

Nae Ionescu (1890-1940) was the most influent philosophy teacher in the period between the two world wars. He got his PhD from the University of Munich, entitled *Die Logistik als Versuch einer neuen Begründung der Mathematik*. Starting 1920, he taught logic, metaphysics, and philosophy of religion (course considered to be on the phenomenology of the religious act) at the University of Bucharest. He was also the editor in chief (1926-1929) and manager (1929-1934 and 1938) of the newspaper “Cuvantul”, in which he published more than one thousand articles on religious, political and economic issues.

The academic publications of Nae Ionescu were only a few – some papers on logic, some forewords and a series of articles in the theological magazine “Predania” (1937). Nevertheless, his influence was enormous between 1922 and 1940. His lectures and papers revived the interest for metaphysics and philosophy of religion in Romania. Although he was chiefly a logician, he tried

to understand all forms of human activities. He maintained that the philosopher needs to ponder not only upon the theoretical expression of historical life – from religion to logic to sciences – but upon meaningful creations: the crafts, the arts, the biographies, political events, and all others. Approaching the history of logic, as well as that of metaphysics or religion, he researched thoroughly the human spirit. For him, such a typology is always a creation of history and eventually of life. From this inception point, a radical historical scale of spiritual creations seems to develop. But, for Nae Ionescu, God* is nevertheless present in history through embodiment. Even though Nae Ionescu did not conceive a philosophical system or a body of work similar to that of Blaga or Constantin Radulescu Motru, he has build enormously by what he has transferred to his disciples. His courses were real shows. His charm was fascinating, like he was living the ecstasy of the speech; his most seducing force – his oral speeches, turned in 50 years after his death, into the main handicap in reconstructing his ideas. All his courses raised serious problems to his editors; as a proof of this statement, *The History of Logic* (1941) was thoroughly verified by four “lectors”, all of them very familiar with the peculiar style of their magisterial model: Virgil Bogdan, Constantin Floru, Constantin Noica and Mircea Vulcănescu; vol.I of *Metaphysics* (1942) benefited from the editorial work of C.Floru, C.Noica, M.Vulcănescu, Octav Onicescu, Ștefan Teodorescu and Alice Botez; vol. II of *Metaphysics* (1944) was, in turn, checked by C.Floru, C.Noica, M.Vulcănescu, Octav Onicescu and Cella Dona. Only “*Roza Vânturilor*”, edited before, in 1937, by Mircea Eliade, is a fortunate exception, because benefits from two advantages: the presence of Nae Ionescu and that of the publisher who worked on the texts published by Nae Ionescu himself, not on notes taken in shorthand.

Despite all difficulties in transcribing and editing the notes by the ones who were his disciples, in respect to the clarity of the original text, we, the ones that were connected to Nae Ionescu only through the written texts, can understand and perceive that his relationship with philosophy takes place within a superior, metaphysical level. In his opinion, metaphysics’ scope is transcendence, divinity (Nae Ionescu, “*Treaty on Metaphysics*”).

In philosophy, we consider essential the relationship of the thinker with the absolute, with divinity. This is what defines his identity, the essence of his world and life concepts. After all, this is what philosophy is: “*the science about world and life*” (Hegel, *Lectures on Philosophy of Religion*, p.16). In this vein, Hegel supports the idea that “*the philosopher claims to have reached within the realm of truth, close to God, and reads the commandments straight in the original draft*”. Maybe this is why Nae Ionescu’s discourse is uncontestable. He was a teaching genius, and in the same time, a remarkable personality of his time. It is a gesture of kindred Romanian spirituality to unfold Nae Ionescu to our young generations: the way he thought, the way he taught, the way he lived the reality of his times, without distortions, wrath, prejudice or misconceptions, most of the times fruit of ignorance or unfavorable circumstances.

We will try to bring arguments in favor of our first statement: where was the fascination of the audience for the logics or metaphysics' lessons coming from?!

Part of it comes from the distance preserved from the existing "textbooks" and from the stance of the teacher as a creator of the domain: *"on the issues that are not litigable, I won't insist"; "I think that I'm not holding this class only for you, but for me too"; "I think that I'm not mistaking when I'm guessing that I succeeded in rooting, with your help, some of the fundamental issues in understanding this problematic of logic"*, etc. because it is an instrument of conveying knowledge, logics must be entertainingly presented. The professor succeeds in doing it solely through some formulations, such as: *"I can't say more than that; maybe in three, four years, when things would eventually settle in my head, I would be able to find a better wording"; "I have to start by confessing that I am dissatisfied with my yesterday's lecture [...], the impression of unclearness, of incompleteness still persists within me"; "you don't have to believe everything I am telling you"*, etc. above all these rhetorical tools of self-expression, the professor - orator knows how to catch the benevolence and good humor of his audience, through the tricks of interlocution: *"I promise you that..."; "it is more than you think"; "if you think about it"; "if you want to do this... you have to watch out"; "this is very important for you to remember"*, etc.

To complete the stylistic register of this course on logic, here are some more samples of his crafted speech: *"some say that we have among us a so called mystic, whose name is Nae Ionescu... the thing is that they are stupid"; "you have to add a little correction to your textbooks"; "with this last issue, I think that we solved all fundamental problems of logic; what is left untold ... is just some filler; I gave you the logical frame; what you are going to do with it, that's your problem"*.

Since we are discussing oral courses, there are footnotes only on three pages of the text edited following the stenographs of some members of his audience, and they belong to his first publisher, D.C.Amzăr. The index of proper names disseminated throughout the logic lessons of Nae Ionescu includes, in the order of occurrence, Aristotle, Kant, Descartes, Plato, Anaxagoras, Pascal, Leibniz, Plotin, Espinoza, Newton, Bergson, Copernicus, Burkhart, Schopenhauer, Lobacevcki, Riemann, Poincare, Russell, Einstein, Maiorescu, Heraclites, Euclid, Lullus, Ptolemy, Anselm, Cristofor Columb, J.S. Mill, Galilei, Lavoisier, Hegel, Bequerel, W.Wundt, Erdmann, Brunschvicg, Sigwart, Cuvier, Fichte, Spengler, G.e. Sthal.

Only one single Romanian logician is mentioned in the logic course of one of the most influential professors of logic and, relatively, few logicians that are also educators!

Starting 1922, most of the students in Bucharest lived under the spiritual spell of Professor Nae Ionescu. This influence, exerted now even beyond the walls of the Faculty of Letters, spread throughout the departments of Theology and Sciences, and later on through A.S.C.R and the papers published in the newspaper "Cuvantul" and, of course, through his course on logic. We are not addressing here the fame he reached or the oppositions he faced within the

public opinion of modern Romania. We are emphasizing and highlighting in the economy of these pages only the man, the professor who led for 15 years from behind the teaching pulpit the spiritual orientation of modern Romania.

In the academic life, Professor Nae Ionescu is situated from the beginning as a direct follower of Nicolae Iorga and admits of being one of his purest "pupils", raised in the spirit of historic realism, a current and Romanian phenomenon brought into a dynamic mood by Nicolae Iorga. Chronologically, Nae Ionescu appears to be an "inheritor" of Vasile Parvan, because ever since 1926 he faced a crowd of students who grew up under the spell of Parvan, left behind with no spiritual guidance nor hope. A generation of students is not necessarily closer to the most erudite or skilled of their teachers. Students are not only in a quest for good, solid education, but also in search for a way of life, a way of thinking; they thrive for spiritual guidance. What they need is a role model, a man honest enough not to blink when he needs to explain the futility of all human sciences and with enough life and strength within him not to perish himself, overwhelmed by the awareness of this futility.

It is not just a fluke that all three professors which have lead generations of students since 1900 on - Nicolae Iorga, Vasile Pârvan, Nae Ionescu - confessed a tragic awareness of life. And even though they confessed it, they managed to give a heroic sense to this existence, which must be accepted and treasured, nevertheless. Therefore, the youngsters gathered around these three mentors, because each and single one of them confessed a certain aspect of this tragic awareness. Nicolae Iorga spoke about the curse of labor, about the unending pain of the man forced to work ceaselessly, to keep the world alive and fruitful. Vasile Parvan talked about the curse of solitude. Nae Ionescu never hid from his audience the paradoxes, the curses and the dramas of the human conscience. In spite all these, in the lectures and conferences of these great thinkers of our nation, generations of students quenched their spirits and found theoretical foundation of a true, genuine, authentic, creative life. (Mircea Eliade, *România in Eternity*, pg. 179) The tragic awareness of life is one of the features of Romanian modern culture (Eminescu, Haşdeu-Iorga-Pârvan-Nae Ionescu), awareness which does not deny itself out of despair or skepticism. All these creators of Romanian values accepted their human condition, worked and intervened in the history of our nation, bringing in their writings and speeches their great potentials. Nobody saw more gloriously than these "tragic thinkers" the faith of our nation.

Positioning Nae Ionescu as a pupil of Nicolae Iorga and spiritual inheritor of Vasile Parvan within the Bucharest academic life is not deprived of a certain historic significance. After Nicolae Iorga's prophetic and Dionysian momentum, or after the metaphysical and Apollonian one of Vasile Parvan, the Socratic function exerted by Professor Nae Ionescu gains a precise value in the evolution of Romanian culture. No doubt about it, Nae Ionescu himself admits to be of a Socratic type: against oratory, against prophetism, against external metaphysics.

He reduces metaphysics to its inceptive point: self-knowledge. Since his first lesson in metaphysics, the problematic of being remains the core of Professor Nae Ionescu's theoretical preoccupations. He introduces in the university the Socratic technique - warm, nurturing, dramatic lessons. He quickly patents a style, readily imitated by his students: direct way of addressing people, short phrases, and frivolous examples. Although a student of Iorga and inheritor of Parvan, Professor Nae Ionescu distinguishes himself decisively from his predecessor teachers. Ironic, instead of being prophetic, familiar instead of solemn, Nae Ionescu does not dominate the crowds like an oracle nor impresses like Pythia. His speech subdues and his thinking disconcerts.

The first stage of influence Professor Nae Ionescu exerted on the students, and the most fascinating one, was this technique of *disquietude*. Some saw in it a great "theoretical danger". Entire groups of students were thought not to place their trust nor believe in books, general theories or dogmas. On the contrary, paradox and adventure were encouraged; disappointment and exasperation were sympathized; sincerity and honesty were promoted everywhere. At the University, on the streets, in his office at "Cuvantul" newspaper - Professor Nae Ionescu always eyed the disquieted, despaired youngster approaching him. He only rejected two categories of people: the insincere and the wise. He always panicked or was being cautious around young people who already had their own philosophical system at the age of nineteen. He always used to say: "to hope to understand something in life, you need to realize seven years that you don't understand a thing."

The spiritual momentum which Nae Ionescu formulated, even though he did not create it, was asking for a breaking out of patterns, from books and from learned things. The spiritual status which alimments ceaselessly the articles of Professor Nae Ionescu pertains to yet another cycle.

First of all, it is instrumental to exhibit a total honesty towards self and others. No one knows more than one lives; no one bears fruit unless one discovers oneself. Any road is good, if it takes you to the core of your being, to the underground of great organic experiences, the risks, and the adventure. One sole thing is essential: to remain true to yourself, to be authentic, not to betray your spiritual being.

The Socratism of Professor Nae Ionescu integrates itself within the spiritual momentum of the period between 1922 and 1930. Everything the "young generation" had under debate at the time - "the experience", "the adventure", "the orthodoxy", "authenticity", "the living" - stems in Professor Nae Ionescu's ideas. The Romanian soul could not find itself without dramas, without failures, without "the experiences". The man cannot meet himself through books, through methods, through someone else's ideas. Self-awareness presupposes authentic living. In this dramatic and necessary fight for authenticity - without which nothing can be created, Professor Nae Ionescu played a major role. While other

writers and craftsmen rushed to “systemize”, he continued his conversations, his lessons, his fragments.

Professor Nae Ionescu was interested in only one thing: to be genuine. The problem of the Romanian soul is ontological before being historical. This is why within the framework of the lectures he held before the students, Professor Nae Ionescu insisted for 12 years upon the issue of *the being*, so he can pass on, towards the end, to the issue of *the Romanian being*. The road towards reality was the aim of all his classes. And because this aim of his was attacked as being prophetic and mystic by Iorga and Parvan, Professor Nae Ionescu chose another method, a personal one, a Socratic method.

If his influence was so fertile, if instead of “pupils” he made friends and co-workers of all ages, was because of this Socratic method of his. The miracle followed this technique, which does not influence automatically, from the outside world, through the written word, but through this method of maieutics. This is why all his ex-“students” of his are so special, so different and diverse. They still have some common traits, though: they are realistic, anti-oratorical, and anti-democratic. But how huge the difference between Mircea Vulcănescu, and Emil Cioran; between G.Racoveanu and Mihail Sebastian; between Mircea Eliade and Constantin Noica!...

Maybe the best portrait of Professor Nae Ionescu was drawn by his greatest disciple, his assistant to be, after participating to a course entitled “Faust and the Issue of Salvation”. I am talking about Mircea Eliade, who, in his Memoirs, mentions his mentor in terms like these: “...Nae Ionescu didn't speak like a teacher, he did not lecture, nor held a conference. He was starting a conversation and was addressing us directly, speaking to each and single one of us, as if he was telling a story, presenting a series of facts, proposing an interpretation and waiting for our comments. We were under the impression that the entire lesson was part of a dialogue, where we were invited to take part and to share our opinions at the end of the class. We felt that what Nae Ionescu had to say one couldn't find in any book. It was something new, freshly thought and organized in front of our eyes, at his desk side. This thought was original, genuine and if you were interested in this type of thought, you knew you couldn't find it elsewhere; you had to come and receive it straight from its source. The man behind the teaching pulpit addressed you directly, opened up the issues in front of your eyes and showed you how to solve them, forced you to think. (Mircea Eliade, *Memoirs*, pg.107)

In the history of Romanian modern culture, one single other personality had a similar effect on its younger contemporaries: Mihai Eminescu. But while Mihai Eminescu created a current of feeling and thought through his written work, Professor Nae Ionescu exercised a Socratic man to man, soul to soul influence. His Socratic destiny dominates and justifies all gestures; he came to teach young people to find their way through themselves, to teach them love for the inner living - he couldn't contradict himself “publishing” philosophy books, dead texts for his students to read and understand.

One could reduce all life and thought efforts of Professor Nae Ionescu to two

major callings: *sympathy and soteria*; “sympathy”: closeness, merging with people, and “absolution”, distancing from people, searching for God, merging with the Divine Being. In the years in which the problematic of being was dominant, Nae Ionescu was debating with his students the drama of absolution. Ontology – soteria – dominion of the spiritual – it was a moment of the search for the being, the realm of reality, of genuine spiritual life, done against all odds.

The issue of salvation, meaning the autonomy and wholeness of the human being, had to follow necessarily the ontological problematic. To reach the being, Nae Ionescu was teaching all to go back to the great, organic sincerity, to accept adventure, not to run away from despair and anxiety, all and all culminating with the problem of salvation. Here one can definitely see the profound Christianity of Professor Nae Ionescu’s thinking.

To talk about Christianity and Christian philosophy at the University, in the 1920s, was a real revolution. To talk about “salvation”, “sainthood”, “orthodoxy”, “heresy” – in classes of metaphysics and logic meant to go astray from a tradition really well rooted in idealism and positivism. The problems of metaphysics and religious philosophy were for a long time excluded from the academic life. Professor Nae Ionescu was the first to place these issues in the center of his lectures, with great originality and competence. Religion, supposedly “*a false or imperfect philosophy*”, was present before in the department of philosophy, but displayed as an outdated stage in the development of human knowledge.

It is true that only Professor Nae Ionescu could afford the freedom to talk about religion, Christianity, mysticism and dogmatism from the height of the metaphysics pulpit. He was, in the same time, a feared logician, was teaching classes on science philosophy, and had a PhD in Mathematics. His solid education nobody could contest. He couldn’t be accused of mysticism or dilettantism. Therefore, his courses in the philosophy of religions were viewed in the same time with doubt and timidity.

Professor Nae Ionescu, viewed within the University as a revolutionary, never betrayed his mission, the obligation he had toward his students of presenting the naked truth, reality as it is, of not avoiding difficulties. Professor Nae Ionescu was and remained a revolutionary, through his own overwhelming sincerity. Rarely a teacher confesses in front of his students the limits and limitations of his knowledge and understanding. When it is so easy to improvise or to cheat, Professor Nae Ionescu sadly confessed everything he didn’t understand *yet*. The boundary of this *not understanding yet* obsessed and charmed students: he thought gaining shape in front of their eyes, the man that struggled to find the truth – invited more to thinking than an ocean of philosophy. Although permanently dissatisfied with his performance, Professor Nae Ionescu succeeded in building the first Romanian philosophy. Not a philosophical system – but a philosophy; Professor Nae Ionescu considered the

philosophical system the grave stone of a philosopher. For him, philosophy or philosophizing was an act of life, an act of living; or a method of knowing reality and a technique of formulating this knowledge. But this isn't about a generally universal method, because philosophy is too personal of a thing. Each philosopher had his own method. Subjectivism in philosophy is absolute. In Professor Nae Ionescu's case, it is a living one.

Preoccupied for ten years mostly by *soteria*, Professor Nae Ionescu feels again the direction towards which history is heading, and in the last years places a major importance on sympathy of man in the world. Actually, he never forgot this calling of his soul towards communion, towards "*the merging into the other*". In his lectures, he often talked about love as a knowledge tool. What is love other than the perfect form of sympathy?

In the last years, Professor Nae Ionescu was preoccupied by the destiny of the Romanian people. When he raises this issue, he knows that this people do not survive through treaties and rules, but through its honesty towards its own destiny and through its capacity of bearing fruit. One cannot stop a people from the natural path of its history; one could only stunt its growing and there is always a price to be paid for this delay. The "policy" of Professor Nae Ionescu is just a practical exercise of the eternal ontological problem: to see what it is, to foresee the destiny of birthing historical forms, to formulate reality laws in terms easily accessible to others, to lend a helping hand to the ones that don't see. ***Man does not create anything in history*** - this is the desperate and heroic law ceaselessly repeated by Professor Nae Ionescu. Man is not a creator beyond the limits of its being. A man cannot make history, because history is making itself under the sign of God or destiny, but it is shaped nearby others.

The road towards *the being* starts from a self searching, but ends beyond self, in God (*soteria*) or in history (sympathy). Authenticity, without which nothing is valid, asks of you to be yourself, but realizing this, you recognize yourself beyond you (love, mysticism, history).

Having such a vision on existence, fine connoisseur of the Romanian being in its essence, Nae Ionescu wasn't a regular philosophy teacher. He was aware of this fact and therefore his involvement in the realities of his time was from the perspective of a paideic mission. He fought for the Romanian culture and its autonomy. His fight was spiritual. Here we have, in this vein, Nae Ionescu's confession: "...*The signal of our time doesn't push us to politics, to incentivized deed, to the deed provoked by others. The signal of the time is pushing some of us towards culture, some others towards proper deed - genuine proper deed, not mimic deed.*" (Romanian Prophetism)

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* For Nae Ionescu, *God* has several different meanings, based on the problem that we confront with. So, in ontology, *God* is the *absoluteness*; we cannot keep anything about him, except for the facts written in the Old Testament: "*I am the one that I am*". In anthropology, *God* means himself *the meaning of life*; neither the salvation nor our reconciliation is possible without returning to *God*. In an epistemology, *God* is the one *on whose position we are willing to be*; knowledge means the fact that the human being starts to become a *God*.