The modern subjectivity and its questions: remarks related to Tibor Szabó's *Le sujet et sa morale: essais de philosophie morale et politique*, Szeged, 2016

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Abstract: *This paper is both an expanded review and an article insisting on some problems of the philosophical methods and the treatment of the human subjectivity. Thus, it starts from the book of Tibor Szabó,* Le sujet et sa morale: Essais de philosophie morale et politique*, Szeged, Centre Universitaire Francophone, 2016, and, first, highlights how the description of the human subject in the world may stay within the frame of the metaphysical suppositions or may divert from it. This position towards a metaphysical approach is that which differentiates the contents of the normative messages of philosophies. Secondly, the paper points out the adventures of the modern continental philosophy to both avoid the interdependence of the objective and subjective factors of the human subject and society and their unitary complex, and to reveal this interdependence and its concrete aspects.*

Keywords: *history of modern continental philosophy, human subjectivity, praxis, ethics, descriptive and normative in philosophy, fragmentariness, totality, Descartes, Bergson, Althusser, Antonio Banfi, Nicola Abagnano, Cornelio Fabro, Augusto Del Noce, Camus, Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, Lukács.*

Introduction

First, it's about *modern* thinkers. We always can use and interpret ancient thoughts as matching with the present and suggesting both similarities and lessons. (And certainly, we must study and even know all the thinkers, including he ancient ones, because they belong to the cultural treasure of our common humanity: knowing them we are happier and calmer once more experiencing the human continuity and the challenge to reason about discontinuity and new universes of problems). However, the analysis of the modern thinkers – directly answering to their modern era – is somehow more challenging: since they face new situations, they have to understand them, and since the permanent comparison with old eras and facts is not

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sufficient, they must innovate, create new concepts, a different reasoning and new arguments. And did Marx not explain that the understanding of the old times is more profound after they passed away and a new epoch has occurred emphasising the deeper significances of the concepts and facts?

Secondly, modernity is seen on a *broad* scale: though the problem of the human subject is discussed rather from the almost late modernity (end of the 19th century) to the well installed late modernity (whole 20th century) and beyond, in the so-called post-modernity, one does not forget to put Descartes as a stake. Clearer, the stake is a *rationalist* standpoint about the world[1]. Therefore, modern means also contemporary, and this scale includes even living philosophers.

Thirdly, though it's about a volume[2] written in the manner of history of philosophy and focusing on/gathering together different studies of ethics and politics, there is a tight logic showing the philosophical efforts and their historically inherently unilateral theses and conclusions concerning the contradictory *human entity* (as individual subjectivity and at the same time as social being, and as individual supply and game of ideas / or as theoretical practice, and at the same time as collective practice or palpable activity of transformation of both the individuals and society) and concerning the contradictory entity of what is called *history*: as both result of individual thoughts, behaviours and facts, and as collective, transpersonal and determining outside power over the poor transient and impotent humans. Indeed, this dialectical logic of things – including of man and history – was and is the most difficult to understand, and philosophy illustrates not only this difficulty, but also suggests that its own avatars (this last word as falling/aspect resulted from transformation, as in the ancient Indian mythology) must not only be described, but also critically analysed.

The book of my colleague from the University of Szeged, Hungary, fulfils just this task: focusing on *man* – more exactly, on the triad

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[1] And at the same time the stake is to not be "blind towards the experience of the subject", as Jean-Fraçois Petit, *Penser après les postmodernes*, Paris, Buchet/Chastel, 2005, p. 132, has formulated.

[2] Tibor Szabó, *Le sujet et sa morale : Essais de philosophie morale et politique*, Szeged, Centre Universitaire Francophone, 2016. [The references to this book, in the text of the article].

subjectivity, *praxis* and *history* – it critically analyses the routes of thinking of some important and representative philosophers: Descartes, Bergson, the Hungarian Halasy-Nagy, the Italians Antonio Banfi, Nicola Abagnano, Cornelio Fabro and Augusto Del Noce, again the French Camus, Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, and what is unusual (at least for the conformist thinking), the well-known Hungarian Lukács (as philosopher). Not all these names were/are the big stakes of the European modern philosophy. But the remembering of some good artisans in the field of philosophy is made just because they have contributed to the configuring of the spiritual atmosphere of their epoch.

And all of these names are deployed in a specific history of philosophy text where the ideas are exposed only in their logic and in their inner shortcomings: here, these ideas being circumscribed and interpreted only from the standpoint of the destiny of the above-mentioned concepts. And this exposition is true, indeed. However, as we know from Gödel, the "ultimate truth" is never in a system – here, the system of ideas of a certain philosophy – but outside it, in the system comprising it. Consequently, besides the exposing that is absolutely welcomed – the more so this book is of essays and may usefully be read by non-philosophers or by students just of philosophy – the radical critical conclusions are also suggested, though in a shy manner, even claiming the reader to think and arrive alone to these radical conclusions. Indeed, a respectable writer of history of philosophy cannot limit oneself to the letter of inner conclusions of the studied texts.

Actually, the reason of the book is its contribution to the dispersion of the present state of "uncertainty and instability" (p. 6) suffered by the human subject, just through the description of the theoretical views/solutions of some French, Italian and Hungarian modern philosophers. The presumption is that these views must be known not *in se* but as warnings for the present philosophy to not repeat some ideas and, at the same time, to go farther (let say, forward).

Methodological perspective

A very good presumption, giving birth to the first challenge put discretely: the stake from which starts the preamble is Sartre, the philosopher of the *self-critique* and of the construction of man as *totality* of the subject/individual, the praxis/social individual, and the history. Sartre has passed from the focus on the individual struggle within the world to the

focus on a *totality explained as collective struggle*. Only on this basis could he substantiate the idea of *possibility* of the human subjectivity to change and control the apparently impersonal and intangible social order.

However, in the official ideological messages, Sartre was seen at the best as an eccentric, if not criticised as a dangerous enemy. Why? He was seen in such a manner just because his *self-critique* and his *logic* with his *conclusions* were more cogent than all the forms of assumption of the existing social and philosophical *dominant*[1] order. Sartre has passed from the existentialist analysis of the individual alienation (having Heidegger as model) (*L'Être et le néant*, 1943) to a middle phase of "socialised existentialism" (*L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, 1946) and to the explicit and assumed Marxist philosophy (*Critique de la raison dialectique. I. Questions de méthode*, 1960)[2], and just this transition was unacceptable for the *mainstream*[3] philosophy. The modern existentialist tradition – of an anti-metaphysical philosophy that derives the essence/concepts from the real existence – has its origin not in Kierkegaard (even if this philosopher has influenced first Sartre), but in Marx. When Sartre has felt that the individual existentialism is not enough, he began to connect the individual alienation to society with its *concrete* social relations and to disclose the *dominant* patterns of thinking /the *dominant* meanings of concepts. And he arrived to the conclusion that this manner of thinking allows an active position of man towards the *dominant* clichés. For this reason Merleau-Ponty has grasped, opposed to Lukács, the consensus or common logic of Marx's philosophy and Sartre's[4]. This consensus and logic consist in *the interdependence of the individual conscience and the concrete social environment*, and in the optimistic significance of the *philosophical activism*, inherently followed by the possibility of *practical activism*.

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[1] I name "*dominant*" the characteristic to be the underlying conception of the *aligning to the domination-submission structural relations* and, consciously or not, *to their preservation*.

[2] See Ana Bazac, "Sartre and the responsibility of choice", *Revue roumaine de philosophie*, 1-2, 2008, pp. 173-185.

[3] The *mainstream* philosophy is just the *dominant* philosophy.

[4] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens* (1948), Paris, Nagel, 1966, p. 237, has noted: "This concrete thinking that Marx calls critical in order to distinguish it from the speculative philosophy, is what other ones propose under the name of existential philosophy" [my translation, AB].

And for this reason, as Szabó rapidly mentions, after Sartre, the *dominant* French philosophical schools have avoided to continue Sartre's issues[1] and thus have assumed the "impossibility, the impotence of man in the historical process", transforming this assumption into an "ontological fact" (p. 9). Though the pointing of French philosophical schools is too rapid, the idea of the *impotence to change as ontological datum* is very important, foremost for today. For example, there are enough voices deploring the present race of nuclear weapons or the genetic engineering over humans, but there are very few analyses of the *causes* of these phenomena: in other words, they only "critique" or describe or warn (as before, for example, the H.G. Wells' *Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896)), but in an at least theoretically impotent manner[2]. But this is not criticism. Nor the metaphysical presumptions which frame and direct the interpretation of facts – as if these facts would be only illustrations of the metaphysical presupposing – are: more exactly, there is no potent criticism issuing from a metaphysical tackling that only would show the exceptionality of the metaphysical deductions.

For this reason, the French structural Marxism (Althusser in the 70s) cannot be put together with structuralism and post-structuralism: not

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[1] The logic of an author is very important. But we must show why – and I do not refer here to psychological causes – did the author attach himself to some ideas rather than to other ones. The predominance of any types of spiritualism is related to the historical separation between the physical and intellectual labour, namely, to the belonging of philosophers to the bureaucratic strata of the intellectual labour, to their education as privileged persons because able to understand, to manipulate words and symbols and to speak in the name of humanity. For this reason, they have spent much effort to avoid the social aspects and causes, as well as the interdependences within a social totality. The present return to an old idealism is, however, not the simple reflex of the above separation of the physical and intellectual labour, but the answer of philosophers to new historical situations where not only that more consistent ideas from a theoretical standpoint became and are more attractive, but also because these ideas include practical consequences.

[2] An example is ICAN statement to the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, *Nuclear weapons: immoral, illegitimate, illegal*, October 10, 2017, http://www.icanw.org/campaign-news/nuclear-weapons-immoral-illegitimate-illegal/; therefore, the other weapons are moral and legitimate (for they are anyway legal, since laws reflect the relations of forces), are they?

because this Marxist view has criticised some aspects of structuralism, and nor because Althusser has evolved better explaining his conceptions (see only his *Eléments d'autocritique*, 1974), but because – and certainly, this complex theory cannot be evaluated in a half a page (p. 10) – his insistence on the objective structures as the *economic* ones, the *class struggle* and the *ideological state apparatuses* does not annul the subjective part of history, but warns about the necessity to not forget a *dialectics* where the subjective part cannot be understood without the objective one. In his theory of knowledge, Althusser was – as Marx was/as Althusser emphasised: Marx's concept of *knowledge as production* – a *constructivist*, not a naïve realist[1]: for this reason, history and man's "essence" (in Heidegger's understanding, as possibilities) are only the result of the above *dialectics*. This is something neglected by the post-war triumphal focus of an apparently victorious reformist social-democracy in the *État providence* only on the "finally acquired" freedom of the subject, and incessantly turning around this subject. And in any way Althusser did not arrive to a pessimistic conclusion, as the above-mentioned *dominant* schools did.

Actually, even *structuralism*[2], *post-structuralism*[3] and the *post-modern* philosophy should be approached in a finer way: it is true that, on the one hand, these schools have separated the practical conclusions from the theoretical focus on their problems/ rather have annulled the possibility of

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[1] See Sartre's beautiful explanation of the meaning of constructivism: "The indirect cognisance is the result of the reflection over existence. This cognisance is indirect in the sense that it is presupposed by all the concepts of anthropology… its most elementary concepts would be incomprehensible without the immediate comprehension of the project delimiting them, of the negativity as basis of the project, of the transcendence as existence outside-the self in relation with the Other-than-the-self and the Other-than-man, of the surpassing as mediation between the undergone given and the practical meaning, of the need as being-out-of-self-in-the-world of a practical organism", Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique (précédé de Questions de méthode), Tome I, Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p. 105.

[2] It is, just from the centre of interest of this book (the human subject), the theory of the "repetitive reproduction of the structure and of the formation of the 'eccentric' subject", Yoshiyuki Sato, *Pouvoir et résistance: Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Althusser*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007, p. 227.

[3] It is a "theory of the alteration of the predetermined modality of the structure and of the subject", *ibidem*.

the subject to change the structures. But on the other hand, they have showed – in a direct challenge of the dominant spiritualist seal – that there are *historically* forged *structures* of ideas, relations, mentalities, institutions, without which we cannot understand the so-called individual free-will and its historical agency; and that (as in the post-modern philosophy) the *great narratives*, which before had the function of stake and unification of practices, lose this function: they are no longer infallible – as the old metaphysics seemed to declare itself – and the stakes and centres of action become relative. That this relativity led to pessimism and at the same time joined with the pessimism generated by the conceiving of structures as seeming to overwhelm the humans, not letting them any possibility to decide, it's one thing. But that the post-modern approach has contributed to the destruction of ideological fetishes, is a different one and is true.

What all of these schools show is not only that it is difficult for people to understand the *dialectical* existence of things – in our case, that society and history are the results of *both* the objective and subjective facts and factors, and that these facts and factors are *contradictory* and still *coexist* and *intertwine* – but also that the thinkers who, inherently, are depending on the *dominant* ideological frame, were determined to *both* understand the dialectical complexity and surpass all the kinds of metaphysical reductionism, and to avoid this understanding and the reference to the modern origin of this understanding and surpassing: the Marxist *paradigm* working around praxis as *mediation* of ideas and of social interests, and around its multi strata *social*, and not only historical, roots and consequences. If I wanted to be malicious, I would say that one of the goals of the *dominant* 20th century philosophy was just this avoiding. By this behaviour, the mainstream philosophers have contributed to the *waste of the time* the human society has to solve its problems. By contributing to the consolidation of the dominant worldview characterised by *separation* and *fragmentariness* in the tackling of problems, the dominant philosophical schools of the 20th century have opposed to the necessary *holistic and dialectical* approach, their preference for one aspect or another of the dialectical existence, as well as their *relativism* that was not only the *winner over metaphysics* but that was and is used by the *dominant* ideology as the "argument" of the normalcy of a society with *mobile forms but covering the immobility of the structural pattern of social relations*.

Methodologically – and this is a valuable link made by Szabó between the main or deep *content* of philosophies and, on the other hand, their

methods to approach society – since the problems (concretely, the human alienation within an alienated society) can no longer be ignored, the solution/method is to *describe* them. Indeed, what may confuse us when we read the 20th century valuable *dominant* philosophy is that it emphasises very important aspects in a non-metaphysical approach, apparently starting from the real facts and not from a frame of theoretical principles. But this manner must not make us to not see the clear, or not so clear, ideological presumptions behind it. The more so the *methods emphasise themselves just and only through the contents* analysed in the philosophical texts.

From this standpoint – in fact, assumed by Szabó – I think that only according to a *formal* methodology can one oppose 1) the *descriptive* approach and 2) the *normative*, as Szabó does (p. 12). But the first has an indirect normative conclusion, since the more the description is accurate and consistent, the more it implies a critical approach and drives to alternative – that is, normative – representations about the problems had in view. At the same time, if the description is anti-metaphysical – i.e. starting from the social *ontos* generating concepts and inferences/an ontological tableau, and not starting from the unquestioned concepts and tacit presuppositions – it is *sine qua non* for the understanding of things and the imagining of alternative states of facts. Actually, the normative writings have no influence without a powerful critical description: because criticism stands not only in alternative propositions but, first of all, in consistent disclosures.

But since Szabó has explained the (descriptive and normative) methods to approach the social problems according to the stake of normative description of the "totality of faculties of the disintegrated individuals" (p. 13), it results that the methods depend not so much on a pattern of thinking remaining in present or imagining a future, but on a specific imagination of the future based on a holistic view about the human being: as both material being and ideal universe, realising what later on Althusser called *over-determination*. The role of the subjective factor is *mediated* by a complex influence of the ideal universe and the real material conditions of living. And since the ideal universe – not at all homogenous, but reflecting the socially determined contradictory ideas – is very powerful, it is logical that to creating the subjective factor that can control its environment and history means to understand and act upon both the material and spiritual conditioning of this subjective factor. But since the author discusses only

the ethical and political aspects of this conditioning, he reminds only the necessity of new forms of the civil society and new democratic institutions (p. 14) as a frame of the development of the creative role of man in and upon society.

Therefore, in my opinion, since *formally* the methods do not depend on the content, *normative* means the explained, or not, conclusions of a good description. But if, *concretely*, the methods cannot be understood without the contents they promote, it means that the methods related to the analysis of man etc. are 1) the *fragmented*, *separated* and *isolated* approach – that: a) does not link the ideas to the interests and the economic structures, and b) does not link the ideas so as to arrive to conclusions beyond the fragmented view –; his approach is opposed to 2) the *holistic and dialectical* tackling. And if so, the *normative* (opposed to the descriptive, according to Szabó) is not "only a theory, a *Sollen* instead of *Sein*" (p. 13) or an imagination, but another, *alternative way of description*. For: one can arrive from every kind of descriptive social theory to a normative *conclusion*. The problem is how does that theory conceive of its object/society. As well as each descriptive social theory is based on a pattern of thinking/methodological *presumptions*; the problem is the type of these presumptions (either fragmentariness and isolation, or dialectical interdependence and holism).

Before going forward, I have to note that today it's already obsolete to discuss ethics and politics without relate them to their economic and social bases; as it is obsolete to discuss about economics without the consequences on the human beings and their environment. This separate discussion is a *dominant* methodological approach, implying the above-mentioned fragmentariness. But the idea that Lukács's "normative" method promoting the totality of the human and sketching (only) a *Sollen*, rather than describing the *Sein*, would belong to the fragmentariness/separation between the description and the normative is only a proof of the timidity of any issuer of this idea.

The descriptive philosophers

But the concrete analysis surpasses this timidity. And it is very useful just for our dialectical understanding of the philosophical theories focusing on the mentioned problems. And in fact, the author's differentiation between the "descriptive" method's promoters and those of "man as totality" helps us and gives the book the logic that can be retained easily. The logic of the

supply of philosophers is itself significant for the ideas intended to be transmitted by Szabó.

Therefore: the first illustration of the descriptive method is Bergson's moral theory, as it is developed in his *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 1932. Especially at that time one could no longer ignore the determination of society over the individual. This social determination has led, Bergson pointed, to the submission of the individual to the duty until the *abandonment* to this one and thus, to the quasi *automatically* fulfilled tasks without which neither the individual nor the whole society could survive, maintain and develop in a "cohesive society". In fact, the main task is just the conservation of the individual in this cohesive society. (Well, is this not a normative stance?)

As Heidegger who did not write about moral, Bergson too has separated the historical from the social or the domination-submission structures: the "pressure of society" would have the same power on all the members of a "closed society" ruled by *habits* and *duties*, and what was more important for Bergson was to avoid the social character of duties by insisting on the "average persons" which have inside them the "social self" generating the obedience to habits and duties (the analogy with Heidegger's *Das Man* /the They Self is obvious). But there is another moral, an "absolute" one, based on *love* and promoted by exceptional persons like the saints who know to speak to every conscience about this love structuring an open and human society.

Bergson's theory is written in a usual metaphysical, spiritualist and a-social manner. "In a human society, the individual is able to love". To love whom, why, on what basis? The vague model (another normative position) of a human society without any connection with the social mechanisms and forces is in this inter-war period and after the humans have experienced the horrors of the Big War is too weak and unconvincing. This is the reason Bergson's moral had no theoretical relevance and influence. It is true that he has illustrated the "descriptive method" but without any analytical – i.e. critical – attitude towards reality. and the consequence was that of a weak normativity: I doubt that Szabó's conclusion that Bergson "wanted to change the moral of his society" (p. 23) is valid, letting aside the presumed good-will and *élan* of Bergson and every other belonging to this type of philosophy; Bergson did not want this, his goal was to justify the moral conscience of those who considered that the solution to a "mechanical" (p. 34) but inevitable social moral would be the call to love.

After a chapter dedicated to the Hungarian historian of philosophy József Halasy-Nagy (1885-1976) who was a Francophone (rare in Hungary) and a spiritualist declaring his appurtenance to the French school of *personnalisme* in a critical manner – in a kindred, thus, with the Romanian Constantin Rădulescu-Motru (1868-1957), if I may suggest a comparative approach – a more interesting chapter about the Cartesian heritage in some schools of the modern Italian philosophy follows.

The problem of the Cartesian heritage may be understood according to the interpretation of Descartes made by the next (here, modern) generations of philosophers. As it is known and almost automatically mentioned in the philosophy handbooks, Descartes was a rationalist ("father of the modern rationalism"). But what does this mean? And especially, what does this mean without mixing the historical conjuncture that asked and at the same time offered simple idealistic flesh to his breakthrough in the philosophical paradigms?

First, Descartes was the initiator of *constructivism*, i. e. of the epistemological paradigm that reality is according to our mental working over of the external world. This one certainly exists, but its *meanings* are according to how we do elaborate it. No one doubts that I am/the world is. But we all have doubts that the world as we speak about is really as it is. The manner "to have proofs" for our sayings about the world is the *strict exercise of our reason* on both our sayings and the reality they describe. And obviously, if we exercise our reason in the strict observance of logic, we arrive to certainty.

As I said, I am interested here about the the philosophical paradigms – the only elements really deserving to be considered a bequest – not about the historical colours and limits they were draped. *Certainty* is not absolute, of course, but if I have no doubts about a state of things – doubts annulled after my accurate rational analysis – it means that *my knowledge* about that state of things is certain. Therefore, the exercise of reason is the exercise of logic and argumentation ("the method"), and since these ones always concerns some concrete things, the exercise of reason takes into account the human experience. However, not the experience as such – involving senses and feelings, intuitions and natural dispositions[1] – gives a certain cognisance, but its *rational elaboration*. And from this point of view,

[1] René Descartes, *Œuvres,* éd. Adam et Tannery, VII, Paris, Léopold Cerf, 1904, p. 70.

Descartes has promoted indeed the model of rigorous *scientific* approach of reality. Because: the core place of the *doubt* in Descartes' demonstration of the necessity to exercise our reason in order to know something certain means that it's imperious to *critically* examine all our data and all our types of cognisance.

Consequently and secondly, Descartes was the promoter of *dualism*, showing that there are two natures of the things existing in reality: the "material" nature and the spiritual/cognitive nature. They are interdependent: not only in the sense that our mind has as a location/origin/generator the brain (we remember his insistence on the pineal gland), but also in the sense that the palpable, "extended" things are known (in other words, are corresponding with reality) according to their elaboration in our mind – therefore, including the elaboration of our sensations etc. about things –. So, with this entire interdependence, the two natures cannot be reduced one to the other. And this does not mean idealism, because constructivism (from Descartes, Kant to von Glasersfeld) is not idealism.

From this methodological dualism, Descartes has advanced a model – and the models are always limited, both from a historical and constitutive standpoint – where *res extensa* was the world of *causal* chains, possible to be known. The causality of nature was quasi "mechanical": but this did not mean mechanistic[1], and in any way in the first half of the 17th century one could advance the most consistent ideas about the natural *necessity* only by using the mechanical motifs. In the same model, the pendant of the former *res* was *res cogitans*, the world of the subjective *clinamen* or freedom, which, however, was not outside the possibility of rational knowledge (See his *Les passions de l'âme*, 1649).

Consequently and thirdly, Descartes was *anti metaphysics*: just because his method claims that all the ideas must be critically examined. In fact, just this *methodological* opposition to metaphysics made Descartes the founding father of the modern philosophy.

Obviously, this methodological anti-metaphysical stance was assumed only according to the contents/ideological assumptions philosophers have promoted. For example – and though Szabó stated that Marxism has no connection to Cartesianism (p. 37) – Marx could be but *constructivist*: reflecting terrestrial objects or imagined worlds, the ideas are formulated

[1] See Ana Bazac, "The Machine Motif in Descartes", *Noesis*, XXXV, 2010, pp. 71-87.

and judged in our mind. But the *criticism* of ideas – and especially of the ideas about and related to society – is a different problem. This criticism, if it wants to be scientifically consistent, must start from the correspondence of ideas with the real facts, not from their prestige or metaphysical statements. The *metaphysical structures have always generated the closed philosophy of the "that's it"*/the philosophy of the given data. Descartes' philosophy has showed the way to an open philosophy, and the philosophy of Marx meant to go beyond the "that's it".

In this respect, most of the Italian philosophical schools were Cartesian. Antonio Banfi (1986-1957) has declared himself a critical rationalist, continuing Descartes but also Kant's criticism and being interested in Marxism, too. And though the critical rationalism was inserted in the work of Nicola Abbagnano (1901-1990), it was the method he used in order to degage the *possibilities* of man, neither diminishing nor exaggerating them.

Well, those who opposed the Cartesian method were the Italian neo-Thomism and neo-Scholasticism. Cornelio Fabro (1911-1995) and Augusto Del Noce (1910-1989) have correctly related atheism from Descartes' rationalism. And though this line of reasoning (rationalism-atheism) is not the result of the mechanistic approach of *res extensa*[1], but just of the constructivism that shows the human subjectivity as the origin of ideas, this line of reasoning is correct (and not at all exaggerated, as Szabó considers, p. 41). At the same time, I doubt that in Descartes there would be an internal insuperable conflict between his "humanism" – i.e. role of the human subjectivity – and his "anti-humanism", namely, the rationalist method, as Del Noce considers[2]. But the Italian philosopher's conclusion that the religious tradition must refuse the rationalist, constructivist method[3] is logical within the neo-Scholastic view.

Therefore, the topic analysed in the entire book is the problem of philosophical anthropology – the human subjectivity, its power and limits. After the discussion about rationalism as a precise power of man, the next chapter is dedicated to Camus as indignant man. Szabó presents the

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[1] Cornelio Fabro, *God in Exile: Modern Atheism: A Study of the Internal Dynamics of Modern Atheism, From its Roots in the Cartesian* cogito *to the Present* (1964), Westminster MD, Newman Press, 1968.

[2] *Il problema dell'ateismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1964.

[3] Ibid., quoted by Szabó, p. 41.

French philosopher's core concepts – the *absurd* and the *revolt*[1] – and arrives to the conclusion that just because Camus did not relate the revolt to revolution, he was a humanist (p. 50). Or, it is true that a feeling of revolt may lead not only to revolution but also to contra-revolution, and thus to a simple self-silencing because of disappointment and despair, but if *humanism means the conception that considers the importance of the human being and focuses on the means and manners to develop the possibilities/the human forces*, why would the revolution aiming theoretically at transforming the structural relations in the modern society just in order to assure the dignified conditions for all a non-humanist movement? And why would a simple attitude of revolt be more humanist?

In his short 1948 article cited by Szabó – *The century of the fear*[2] – Albert Camus says that in that time people were scared and did no longer speak about the abject politics that transformed all of them (minus the believers) into beings without future, because they faced "the spectacle" of blind and deaf forces which seemed to be impenetrable. The general terror people lived within consisted just in this dissolving of the possibility to speak, rationally argument and beg. However, pointed Camus, the *fear* must be considered as the first element of the situation that requires a change. The other one is his older second element, the *revolt*. But the implied third element was the *change* as such.

Consequently, I think that it is more plausible to show the *kinship between revolt and revolution*. Two more remarks may clarify this problem. The first is that the transition from the first to the latter is not mechanical. The second is that both the revolt and the revolution are not only *forms* of the manifestation of the human subjectivity, but have *contents* according to which they may support and develop the human subjectivity, or may move it in a state of impotence, waste and depletion. Theoretically and practically, we cannot ignore the contents of concepts.

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[1] See Ana Bazac, "La révolte et la lutte : Albert Camus et Jean-Paul Sartre en dedans et en dehors de l'existentialisme", *Revue roumaine de philosophie*, 2, 2010, pp. 239-266.

[2] Albert Camus, "Le siècle de la peur", *Combat*, 1948, Centres étrangers - Séries générales - Juin 1999, http://lettres.ac-rouen.fr/archives_bac/annales/a96.html.

For this reason, though the revolt may well be equated with indignation – as Jean-François Mattéi has showed[1] – it is not only an origin, a basis of the moral life, but *it claims its follow up*. Szabó mentions Stéphane Hessel (1917-2013) with his *Indignez-vous!*[2] But this author has continued: his 71 pages interview in 2011 is published under the title *Engagez-vous!*[3], while his book written with Edgar Morin is called *The road of hope*[4]. These books note that people must be aware of the enumerated big problems of humankind today and that the solution is a large, world movement of different civic organisations, including international NGOs, and local initiatives. It's true that it's too weak (almost as general as the call for indignation), *but nothing stops us theoretically to put new contents in the follow up of indignation*.

The last chapters of this first part of the book dedicated to The subject and its moral are devoted to two famous recent post-modern and post-structuralist philosophers: Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Obviously, they are discussed only under the aspect of the moral of the human subject. Accordingly, Szabó has chosen a problem put by Derrida at the beginning of his *Spectres of Marx* (1993): how to live?. In the chosen short text (Exordium) that deconstructs the meanings of the words (how to live, to learn how to live, savoir-vivre/good manners/wisdom of living, why to learn how to live, learning to live from the other side, the death) – seeming to put us in a "fog of self-reference"[5], but in fact being an introductory signalling of the "spirits" without which one cannot understand the good life: the *emancipator promise* and the *analytic/critical/deconstructive* outlook, which are interdependent[6] – one arrives to some answers which Derrida does not give/does not give

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[1] Jean-François Mattéi, *De l'indignation. Aux origines de la vie morale*, Paris, Editions de La Table Ronde, 2005.

[2] Paris, Indigène éditions, 2010.

[3] Stéphane Hessel, *Engagez-vous!*, entretiens avec Gilles Vanderpooten, Paris, Éditions de l'Aube, 2011.

[4] Stéphane Hessel, Edgar Morin, *Le chemin de l'espérance*, Paris, Fayard, 2011.

[5] Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, *Genes, Mind, And Culture: The Coevolutionary Process* (1981): 25th Anniversary Edition, New Jersey, London, Singapore, World Publishing Co, 2005, p. XX.

[6] See the review of the book by Radu Florian, "Le philosophe français J. Derrida sur l'héritage actuel de Marx", *La revue roumaine de théorie sociale*, année 1, No. 2, juillet-décembre 1994, pp. 187-194.

expressly, but which may well be deduced. One is that the value of life is according to the finitude of the individual human. The other is that life means always a coexistence with the spectres of the past/the past experiences; we learn from these experiences how to behave in a responsible and dignified[1] manner, and "more justly".

And, because Derrida does not give us the contents of the savoir-vivre, Szabó is who proposes them to us, but in an eristic manner. Since the material wealth is only a pre-condition of a human life – as long ago Aristotle has stated – would the learning of the tranquillity of the soul (as the Stoics and Epicureans have considered), or of the self-mastery and self-reliance be the contents? Or: the success, the recognition by others, or perseverance, the ability to invent, and to rapidly take decisions? Well, somehow according to Derrida, briefly the content of the wisdom of living is to have "a long life full of experiences" (p. 57).

In the same line, Foucault – who has constructed an "empirical anthropology" focused on practices, as Paul Veyne has observed – has assumed the principles considered by the ancient philosophers as cardinal for a good life: self-cultivation, rationality (and time for contemplation and everyday examination of the facts made by the subject), happiness of soul and health[2], perseverance, cultivation of friendship, self-control. The joy of life – an important value – is thus within the limits given by rationality.

However, is there no difference between Bergson, who put the problem of joy of life as sign of the victory of the vital impulse (*élan vital*)[3], and Foucault's framed joy? Of course, it is: because otherwise the idea of the limits given by reason is ancient and thus, absolutely banal. *Reason is from within the human subject*, but in Foucault not the reason is that which disciplines man so as it enjoys only according to the requirements of what is rational, but the *power relations as external forces towards the subject*. Consequently, neither the subject – if it is analysed in its empirical relations and experiences *within the frame of the multiple institutions of the power*

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[1] See Ana Bazac, "The Societal Crisis and the Human Dignity: Epistemological View", *Wisdom*, 2 (5), 2015, pp. 47-60.

[2] One must not forget (as this is in Foucault): *health* – and the health care/*cura sui* – *is*, together with other values as truth, *a moral value*.

[3] Henri Bergson: *L'évolution créatrice* (1907), septième édition, Paris, F. Alcan, 1911; and "L'énergie spirituelle" (1911), in *Essais et conférences*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1919, p. 24.

relations (as Foucault did) – is unitary, but *multiple*. Structurally, it shelters two types of reason or thinking: the *internal, moral* one – reflecting only the human logic and moral, as Descartes and Kant have cut out them – and the *external* one, generated by the suitability to the external frame of power relations. And – something which we copiously experience nowadays as self-censorship – the *external reason arrives to control the internal, genuine moral one*: because the power mechanisms function in such a perfect manner that the subject can no more resist them. In fact, there is only an *empirical resistance* – manifested in the concrete everyday *tactics* to survive within the *strategies* of the power[1] – and Foucault, through his historical critique, has analysed just this *empirical resistance*, and has arrived to an ethics that is "a style of life, a manner to think and live"[2]. But this is only a "transformation of the subjected manner of the subject"[3].

Therefore, and with the two important aspects emphasised by Foucault (and by the "descriptive" philosophies) that 1) it is a constitutive feature of the individual to be also altruistic and 2) the contents of life are cardinal for the definition of man, this type of philosophy is individualistic; not as egotism, not at all, but as more or less conscious *methodological individualism*. The above altruism and the interest for friendship as a source of happiness start from the individual and the techniques of the art of living are individual. But this apparently inherent/normal starting point and centre – because, indeed, from an *epistemological* standpoint, the understanding of the world (of both Me and the Other) starts from the *first-person* point of view, from which all the cognisance and values emanate and are emitted[4] – is concomitant with the *incapacity to understand man as species, or as social being*. Or: concomitant with the definition of society as individual plus individual plus individual. For this reason, we are the witnesses of this concomitance of the normative description of the

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[1] As Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du Quotidien*. Vol. 1, *Arts de Faire*, Paris, Union générale d'éditions 10-18, 1980, said also.

[2] Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits. 1954-1988*, *III. 1976-1979*, Édition établie sous la direction de Daniel Defert et François Ewald, avec la collaboration de Jacques Lagrange, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 135 (The Preface, 1977, to the translation into English in New York of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*), quoted by Yoshiyuki Sato, *op. cit*., p. 72.

[3] Yoshiyuki Sato, *op. cit*., p. 223.

[4] See Ana Bazac, "Person – for Me, and Object – for the Other? How Does Humanism Occur?", *Dialogue and Universalism*, Vol. XXV, No. 2/2015, pp. 104-115.

individual "thrown into the world" and the implicit or assumed "death of man".

The normative philosophers

It's radically different with the normative philosophers, towards which Szabó's empathy is not hidden. They are Sartre and Lukács, and the analysis of the book emphasises what does normative mean linked to these philosophers. It is not about deontological prescriptions, but about a *continuation* and *surpassing* of the "descriptive" method – if we have in view a didactical scheme showing the continuity and discontinuity between philosophers – through the emphasising of the *social* character of the human subjectivity, and its *dialectically contradictory* "essence" as both individual/unique and social.

Obviously, the book shows the constitution of the conceptions of both philosophers. Let first focus – as the book does – on Sartre (1905-1980). In the first half of the 20th century, in Europe the positivism in its different variants, the pragmatism and the vulgar materialism were dominant, together with the renaissance of idealism and the birth of phenomenology[1]. These currents have constituted the framework within which Sartre has formed as a philosopher. And he treated all of these in a critical manner. This criticism and at the same time the difficulty to make it are obvious in

[1] It is interesting to know – and perhaps future researches will do this – in which proportion were strong the above philosophical schools. In Romania, the proportion was clearly favourable to the idealist thinking. This is the reason of the bending of an "idealistic", thus respectable conservative philosophy toward extreme-right tendencies, while the criticism of metaphysics and the interest for positivism/materialism/constructivism were not in fashion; and this explains the dominant spiritualist interpretation of the humorous epistemological criticism of metaphysics by Blaga (see Ana Bazac; "Lucian Blaga and Thomas Kuhn: The Dogmatic Aeon and the Essential Tension", *Noesis*, XXXVII, 2012, pp. 23-36; "The approach of space and an inter-war anthropological model", *Analele Universității din Craiova, Seria Filosofie*, nr. 33, (2/2014), pp. 127-161; "Daimon, creativity and science (transdisciplinary flight)", *Noema*, XIV, 2015, pp. 203-256). It is also interesting to discuss the relation between the proportion of philosophical schools and the ideological influences in the general spiritual atmosphere of a historical period. Perhaps in France the power of spiritualism in philosophy was not so strong as the power of non-metaphysical thinking; but I doubt that the dominant ideological seal of the ideological messages was not spiritualist.

his works related to the human subjectivity. Szabó analyses the transition from the individual existentialism of *Being and Nothingness* (of the human *being-for-itself*, conscious, responsible – in its choices and decisions – thus free, but this freedom and responsibility suppose a structural anguish and engagement) to the intermediary phase (*L'existentialisme est un humanisme*) and the rapprochement to Marxism in *Critique de la raison dialectique. Questions de méthode*. Here he shows the relationships between existentialism and Marxism from both the point of view of methods (the problem of mediations, the progressive-regressive method, the critical dialectic (including that of the critical experience) and of the meanings – actually, of the concrete contents – of the subject. This one is its *total* praxis, and one can treat it only as totalising praxis, with all its mediations realised by the inter-human relationships, its history[1], its original reification and alienation, which configure a "practical-inert" existence.

Because Szabó has mentioned only the *Questions de méthode*, preceding the *Critique de la raison dialectique*, let circumscribe us in this frame and mention that the problem of the human subject was the origin of Sartre's meticulous analysis of the genuine Marxist method and its "Stalinist"/dogmatic face rather dominant in the 60s. Sartre has not only showed the origin of this dogmatism – the "bureaucratic conservatism"[2] of

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[1] This history is marked by the ontological original place of rarity. The frame of rarity means that humans and the human events "are in a society still incapable to freed from its needs, so from nature, and thus which is defined according to its technologies and tools; the tearing of a collectivity crushed by its needs and dominated by a mode of production generates contradictions between the individuals which compose it", Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique (précédé de Questions de méthode), Tome I, Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, p.85.

See Ana Bazac: „În jurul problemei cauzelor structurante: ontologia gramsciană a forțelor de producție şi teoria rarității la Sartre", în *Gramsci şi Sartre. Mari gânditori ai secolului XX*, Bucureşti, Editura Institutului de ştiințe politice şi relații internaționale, 2007, pp. 97-113 ["Around he problem of structuring causes: Gramsci's ontology of the productive forces and Sartre's theory of scarcity", in *Gramsci and Sartre: big thinkers of the 20th century*]; „Sartre şi aventura conceptului de raritate", în Adriana Neacşu (coordonator), *Sartre în gândirea contemporană*, Craiova, Editura Universitaria, 2008, pp. 105-162 ["Sartre and the adventure of the concept of scarcity", in *Sartre in the contemporary thinking*].

[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique (précédé de Questions de méthode), Tome I, Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, p. 29.

the ruling communist parties – but also/more importantly, that the dogmatism consisted in both *deterministic and voluntarist idealism*, i.e. a contradictory theoretical offering that could not explain the contradictory status of the human subject. And certainly, the reaction of this dogmatic Marxism – that, in fact, was not Marxism[1] – was its fear from the significances[2] from the standpoint of logic/determinism/necessity, significances which the concrete analysis of the human features in concrete situations would have revealed. "We reproach to the contemporary Marxism that it has thrown in the part of hazard all the concrete determinations of the human life and it did keep nothing from the historical totalisation, but only its abstract skeleton of universality…(What we want is) the reduction of the indeterminism and non-knowledge; not to hurl Marxism in the name of a third way or of an idealist humanism, but to re-conquer man in the interior of Marxism"[3].

The lack of the dogmatic Marxism is that it treats the concrete events only as symbols which may be used insofar they illustrate the already known dogmatic conclusions. This type of Marxism is thus no longer-critical. (From this standpoint, a "synthesis" of Marxism and the existentialism focused on events would be necessary)[4].

But the dialectic totalisation is historical, it puts both the facts, events, passions and the concepts into the historical ensemble and define them according to the tendencies it arrives to grasp. While the dogmatic Marxism is "truant", it substitutes the dialectical analysis with an a priori knowledge and "can discover nothing with this method of pure *exposition*"[5]. And thus,

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[1] Marxism „is unsurpassable because the circumstances which generated it are not yet overcome", *ibidem*.

[2] "real effort of totalizing", *idem*, p. 59.

[3] *Ibidem*, pp. 58-59.

[4] *Idem*, p. 82. Because: "the object of existentialism is the singular man in the social field, in its class in the middle of collective objects and other singular individuals, the alienated, reified, mystified individual, as it was made by the division of labour and exploitation, but struggling against alienation with falsified instruments and despite this, partially acquiring space", p. 86.

[5] *Ibidem*. The discovering of new aspects was meant by Durkheim too, as the description of „social facts" and by the filling of the picture with relevant facts and correlations. One does not deploy a scientific research that does not bring anything new and only confirms cognisance which are already banal. Instead, one does grant a research *challenging* this knowledge: concretely, a research showing the

it reduces the praxis, the individual creation. "On the contrary, the dialectical method refuses to reduce; it reverses the way: it surpass by conserving"[1].

Briefly, what would the human subject be in this understanding? It is a *conditioned freedom*, a subject that only *is to be*[2] by its practical and theoretical experience and struggle.

Well, what Szabó describes based on *Questions de méthode* and the conference in Rome, 1961, in front of the Italian Marxists, *Marxisme et subjectivité*, is just the underlining of this dialectical grasping of the human subject, and its opposition to "an idealist dialectics which ignores the subject"[3]. The representative of this idealist dialectics is, for Sartre, the Hungarian Marxist György Lukács (1885-1971). This one would have taken the economic determinism of productive forces and relations in a manner dissolving the subjective "interiorisation of the exterior"[4].

The Sartre-Lukács debate – to which Szabó devotes many pages – is interesting not only from the standpoint of the history of philosophy[5], but

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repeatability of correlations and situations and thus *separating the exceptional/the knot of conjuncture* from the repeatable. But this purpose of the empirical research only supports a finer one: that of explaining the *causes/reasons* of the repeatable. And if to the same cause a same effect corresponds, it results that the repeatable is only the consequence of functions of facts/ of the functioning of the social aggregate. See Émile Durkheim, *Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique* (1894), Paris, Les Presses Universitaires de France, 16e édition, 1967, pp. 82-83

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique (précédé de Questions de méthode), Tome I, Théorie des ensembles pratiques*, p. 95.

[2] See Michel Kail & Richard Sobel, "La méthode en question: Sartre en marxisme", in (sous la dir. De Eustache Kouvélakis et Vincent Charbonnier) *Sartre, Lukács, Althusser : des marxistes en philosophie*, Paris, PUF, 2005, pp. 39, 36.

[3] Sartre quoted by Szabó, p. 82.

[4] Sartre quoted by Szabó, p.83.

[5] It is worth to note that though Sartre and Lukács's theories were not radically opposed – even though their authors have considered they were – the two pictures (of the opposite theory) may be compared with the contraposition of the mechanical materialism of Feuerbach and the German idealism, made by Marx in his first thesis on Feuerbach: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side

also/rather from the one of the methods and concepts/their meanings of the Marxist philosophy. Lukács has criticised Sartre's existentialism (in *Being and Nothingness*) as idealism already in 1949[1]. It was about the explanation of the subject and /in its social milieu. Actually, they supplied two explanations which are opposing to each other only if they are taken in an absolute manner, as "the last explanation": the human reality as totality of experiences, decisions, choices, projects, thus society is explained "either" through the individual subjectivity (Sartre), "or" "the objective reality of objective relations determining man in its actions" (Lukács)[2].

Today this "either or" seems us fun: we already know that *reality* is dialectical, and this feature means that the subject is *both* determined and free: theoretically, it depends from which standpoint we do analyse it. But because the aspects and their knowledge (from concrete to abstract and back) are complex and difficult, the philosophers have saw/rather have arrived to one aspect or another. For this reason, the learning of the history of philosophy is so interesting and necessary: we can grasp the "phylogeny" that may explain our ontogenetic repetition of unilateral standpoints. Concretely, both Sartre and Lukács in their mature works (*Critique de la raison dialectique (précédé de Questions de méthode)* and *Ontology of social being*, 1971) have *surpassed* their previous eventual unilateral accents which were only historical reactions and levels of understanding the complexity. And thus their theories have become closer to each other. The similarities of the two great thinkers are clarified by Szabó: they have impelled – somehow just through their debate – the research of the human subject; then, they were modern (and not post-modern negating man); and they remain modern/up-to-date in the present era where the post-modern complexity and problems seem to neglect both the human subjectivity and its terrestrial determination (pp. 134-135).

Political essays

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was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such", Karl Marx, *Theses On Feuerbach*, 1845, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm.

[1] Georg Lukács, *Existentialism*, 1949, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1949/existentialism.htm.

[2] Tibor Szabó, *Le sujet et sa morale: Essais de philosophie morale et politique*, p. 84.

The second part of the book is that of essays of political philosophy dedicated to some *contemporary* thinkers who brought about ideas which may substantiate in a new way the present "instability era" (pp. 147-148). Ervin László and his "necessity of a planetary conscience", Jacques Attali and his three waves (relative with the Toffler's) of hyper-empire – generating a polycentric world after many disorders – so, hyper-conflicts and hyper-democracy, Edgar Morin's uncertainty of thinking and the future chaos, Serge Latouche's de-growth /ecological democracy: let say excepting Latouche, all of them are – this is my remark – "descriptive" and the norms they praise are only *reforms within the present untouchable system*, but which is in *final crisis*[1]. However, the local improvements and ecological policies do not solve this crisis[2]. For this reason, Szabó mentions the radical forerunners of the de-growth theory: Ivan Illich (1926-2002), Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) and André Gorz (1923-2007) (p. 163). Anyway, from a methodological standpoint, we must not neglect that the above reformist thinkers coexist with those who do not discuss at all the critical aspects, and all configure together an atmosphere of "nevertheless, the best of all possible worlds"[3].

What is disquieting is that the human subjectivity as uniqueness seems to be erased even from the supplies of the reformist thinkers. In this regard, Szabó's analysis of the lack of civil society in Central European countries tries to compensate the above feature, especially when he focuses on the mass political habits which are constructed and used by the ruling stratum in order to fix the structures of domination (pp. 170-171, 174-176).

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[1] Ultimately, the system crisis is generated by the capitalist private property that forces economy to be organised according to the principle of maximisation of the private profit, and thus implies capitalist competition and exploitation of the labour force, both internally and on world level (between the Centre and Periphery of the capitalist world system). Consequently, capitalism develops but at the same time must destroy – and this destruction is not anymore constructive – a part of its productive forces, in order to gain again "vital space" for private profit.

[2] See James Lovelock, *'We can't save the planet'*, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8594000/8594561.stm.

[3] See Ana Bazac, "Le passage sous silence et l'avenir du développement humain", *Revue de L'Enseignement et de la Recherche Philosophiques*, ISB 1840-5665, Numéro spécial, 2011, Actes du Colloque international le Cinquantenaire des Indépendances Africaines, Bénin, pp. 7-20.

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The book has as annex a recall of the author's four months university stage in France in 1968-69. The recall begins with a testimony: "I consider myself a "son of the 1968 year"/a "*soixante-huitard*" (p. 191). So, the reserved tone of the recall – picturing a serious young man from a socialist country arriving in a different political atmosphere, wondering about and at the same time enjoying of the free critical speech, and a revolutionary one – cannot hide the deep humanist hope of Szabó, although disciplined by the requirements of his social responsibilities.

The book is pleasant to be read, and useful. It contains many data concerning the history of modern and contemporary thinking and spiritual milieu. And which is more important, it fuels the remarks and further thinking of the readers: something specific only to a good book.

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