

**REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE HARMONY OF THE SOUL
IN PLATO AND KANT: STARTING FROM
RODICA CROITORU'S *THE HARMONY OF THE SOUL. FROM
PLATO'S ONTOGENESIS TO KANT'S COGNITIVE
MULTIFUNCTIONALITY***

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Abstract: This article was prepared, first, as a review of Rodica Croitoru's book *The Harmony of the Soul. From Plato's Ontogenesis to Kant's Cognitive Multifunctionality* (in Romanian). But the problem is so interesting that the analysis became too long for a review. Anyway, it is an opportunity to remember some cardinal problems related to the specific of the soul as it constitutes in its relations with the human individual as such (thus with its body) and the environment. The problems are here only as they were referred to in Plato and Kant. Both thinkers are essentialist, but at both essentialism as such is limited by the human constructivism (through reason and action). Therefore, the harmony of the soul is both pre-figured and a result of the human endeavour: a valuable idea against the dogmatisation of any conclusion about the existence of entities.

Keywords: Plato, Kant, soul, harmony, holism

Harmony is equilibrium, balance of constitutive different parts of an entity or of the entity and its environment. And when it is about the harmony of the soul – we certainly think to its necessity in our times full of imbalances difficult to cope with – once more this problem of harmony appears as a cardinal one. Because: neither the soul nor the body, and nor the entire organism/human being is a mechanism whose equilibrium is pre-determined and realised through some mechanical changes.

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Harmony seems to be the opposite of contradictions, sending at the same time to the holism of things and the holistic approach, opposite again to the discrete character of the world and the discriminative focus on it – since every thing has its autonomy as a subsystem inside biggest and more comprising ones.

Then, the questions concerning the harmony of the soul appear as natural; since we all experience the disharmony of the existence, manifested in the disharmony of the soul, we should to ask: why is this disharmony of the soul so strong and important? Would rather the harmony of the soul be more beneficial to the humans? Why? What would harmony mean so as to be the good alternative? And what could people do in order to avoid disharmony and realise the so desirable harmony of their souls? Would this activity not lead also to the harmony of the world the human souls being intertwined within? But what does this harmony of the world mean since the harmony of the individual souls is their *internal equilibrium according to the values* which they assume so as their fellow human beings to be *creative, transformative and happy in the dynamics of their actions* involving also the critique of society, the refuse to bear it unconditionally and to adapt calmly to it in order to not derange ‘the others’? Would the importance of the harmony of the individual souls consist only in the ‘functionality’ of the individual humans for the harmony of society? Does this image not conduct to the erasing of the importance of the individuals – from which society is formed – and thus to the inherent conclusion of the necessity to substitute them with more functional entities?

It is always good to remember that these questions – put in different forms and starting from different aspects – constitute a historically constructed building conglomerate of philosophy, and that they were (and still are by some ones) considered as unsolvable because of two *epistemological* causes, besides the *historical* one: the first is the discriminative and essentialist standpoint traditionally promoted by the thinkers, for their aim was the exercise of reason and this exercise required both the separation of things, the focus on the discontinuous, and thus the effort to highlight the main characteristic of entities – the fact that they exist as such – and from this the “palpability”/tangibility of entities, their delimitation from the surrounding continuous, their essence; the other is the inherent backwardness of science and separation between it and philosophy. These three causes have generated a permanent repetition of questions and a permanent

impression of their insolvability and of the need to find “finally” the mono-coloured and Big Unique Answer. The present epistemologically transitional epoch of knowledge shows that many aspects put before in separated philosophical hypotheses are solved by science in progress, while the necessity to unite them in a philosophical meta-theory is more and more imperious, but that obviously there is not about a mono-coloured and Big Unique Answer. Therefore, the ongoing science does not exclude the necessity of epistemological meta-theory about it, while the remembering of old astonishments and steps in thinking is surprisingly useful.

Anyway, the book¹ of the distinguished translator into Romanian of most of Kant’s works, Rodica Croitoru, suggests many answers to the above-mentioned questions, at the same time letting them open: not only as the good philosophy proceeds, but also because it is about two historical moments in the process of questioning and answering. The book is a specialised professional one, concerned with the *logic of Plato’s and Kant’s theories of the soul and their similarity and difference, in front of the problem of the harmony of the soul*.

The first significance of both philosophers’ focus on the harmony of the individual soul is not simply that they allusively considered the excesses of the soul as mirroring the excesses of society, but that the human existence – and soul – is/are so complicated that the individual needs to be in harmony both with itself and society. How?

The response is the result of the analysis of the soul in both ontological and epistemological keys. The first one reflects the human need to last after the normal death: the body is transient, *it* dies, but “does something not remain after”? Just this something – the soul – that remains/must remain is which gives worth to the human existence: because this one “must be something different from the transient visible”. Yes, the human being is very contradictory – it knows and is rational, but at the same time it senses as the animals do, and it aspires beyond its needs and has abstract and universal values. But if so, the soul that commands the body is complicated too, and it is divided in its parts responsible with the above contradictory functions.

But what is important – ontologically – is the *criterion* towards which the complex soul itself exists and is organised. This criterion is a

¹ Rodica Croitoru (2016). *Armonia sufletului. De la ontogeneza lui Platon la multifuncționalitatea cognitivă a lui Kant* [The Harmony of the Soul. From Plato’s Ontogenesis to Kant’s Cognitive Multifunctionality]. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.

principle – an *archē* that, as Heidegger showed in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, is an original saltation – according to which all the functions (in a hierarchy where the inferior ones are subordinated to the superior ones) practice their influence and guide over the human being. In both Plato and Kant, this principle is *the good*, based on the human predisposition toward the good and the constraining nature of the principle as such.

In both, the structuring of the soul and its logic are developing not in cold deductions, but in models describing the human *actions*, and the problems from which one can follow that harmony are not only thought but always arise in actions, sending to the emphasis of the goal of the book as the author assume it: the highest values, common to both philosophers – the good, the beauty, the truth – are overlapping each other, and the *self-censorship* according to the good produces the beauty of knowledge and the truth of the beautiful. In both, knowledge must be ‘beautiful’, i.e. to follow the good, and only in this manner we have the harmony of our soul faculties; thus, this philosophy is *opposed* to the modern tendency of *separation* between these faculties, between the corresponding actions, between the “aesthetic”, the intellectual and the moral values: briefly, this philosophy is opposed to the modern tendency that dissolves, in the name of the *hic et nunc* efficiency, the principle of the good, as well as the disinterested, so beautiful, strive for the knowledge of the good.

And though Kant put the beautiful in a secondary position towards the good, linking the good directly to the moral forces of the soul – the knowledge of the good and the will to decide according to it – in fact, the Kantian integrative, synthetic view without which (the problem of) the harmony is only affirmed but not demonstrated, has promoted the human being as a *legislator*, i.e. according to the spontaneity of the human moral thinking in its clash with the world: where man as a complex *thinking self* is surpassing the unilateral reduction of the soul to its rational part (as Plato did) – because the moral capacity is higher valued: morality is regarded as unconditionally superior to the rational ability because it is the end/reason of this ability – and where the beautiful is the symbol of the moral good.

Therefore, both thinkers started from the need to having soul as the means of man’s exceptional importance in the order of being.

Plato has realised this need by separating the soul from the body, and by giving to the soul “an independent metaphysical existence”² that explains the *continuity of what is human* beyond the function of vital principle of the body: this continuity is the immortality of the souls. This metaphysical function of the concrete souls puts them – though they are made by the Demiurge, as the whole world is – in a similarity with Him: because as the Demiurge is external to the world but gives it both its soul making the world as such alive³ and the concrete human souls, as the human soul – that certainly gives to the body its life, but that after the death of the body becomes autonomous and starts its journey toward perfection and at the same time according to its former moral performance – is external in its function concerning man. As the Demiurge who governs the world, the soul governs the body: or more precisely, the temporary unity between it and the body where it is embodied.

In his turn, Kant has put a new and biggest burden on the soul: this one is no longer simply external to the body/concrete man, but on the contrary governs him from inside, through his *self awareness*. And the *cognitive* faculties of the soul – reason and the will – make man to be aware of the *moral* principle/moral law, then their infringements generating profound worries which are a bigger punishment than any ulterior damnation. Obviously, self-awareness is strongly conditioned by education and the state of lack of understanding or “minority” man being imposed to lie within: but since man has the above-mentioned faculties, it is only a question of will and courage to exercise them⁴.

But the book emphasises two types of problems: one is the intertwining of capital values (within the soul) and the explanation of the human behaviour according to this intertwining and especially to *the good*.

The other is the place of *thinking/reason* in the logic of a so contradictory human life: it *must* be the *essence* of man, directing him

² *Ibidem*, p.43.

³ R. Mohr (1982). “The world-soul in the Platonic cosmology”. *Illinois Classical Studies*, 07 (1): 41-48.

⁴ I. Kant (1996). “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784/1798). In *Immanuel Kant. Practical Philosophy*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, General Introduction by Allen Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.11-22.

from the soul but – because this direction is not fully efficient (though the reason is, according to the Ancients, what is of divine nature in the human), i.e. man acting in many irrational ways generated by bad predispositions and bad social influences (let us remember the real city as a deviation generating excesses, *The Republic*, 373b-c, 373d, 373e, 425e, 426a; *Gorgias*, 518c-d) – at the same time persistent beyond its unity with the body. The *logical thinking*, the weight of *reasoning* are what remains, they are what shows that the knowledge of the world continues, even if this knowledge is not continuously shared since men are mortals: it is the *criterion* of the human judgement/things man confronts. And for the logical thinking and its result as bulk of reasoning cannot exist in itself, the ancient philosophers incorporated them within the soul.

The harmony of the soul is disturbed by the above-mentioned causes, and since this state of disturbance leads to the disharmony (the excesses) of the body, the only logical solution is the imminent destruction of this temporary unity of body and soul, and the search for another, happier unity. In fact, only the externalisation of the soul – as the only permanently *identical* entity (and the identical is the best, since it has no contraries which make it disharmonic) – gives harmony. Therefore, the essence/the soul could but inhabit an eternal world outside the human temporary and contradictory existence. In Plato's ontology, reason as the essence of man had a separated trajectory from this one.

Kant has continued the *essentialist* standpoint, the soul being the essence of man, but the essence of the soul is no longer the reason, but its *entirety* (this holistic approach being a step toward the future modern existentialism). The entirety of the soul subordinates the intellect – as a means (as logic is) (thus, opposed to Plato) – to the *rationality* (the specific and superior characteristic of man's mind as a synthetic model of far-reaching dialectical and critical treatment of the concepts of intellect in their relation to the world; or as deductive ability from principles) and the *moral* reason: and the *moral reasoning* realised through this subordination form the *moral consciousness* and give the harmony of the self-awareness. But we know that this harmony is difficult to be realised. The “tools” counteracting the many influences of the sensible world on the human feelings are not only the will and the moral reason, but also the *a priori* moral principle/moral law (that is formal, and act through maxims). Actually, the moral law

“must be the *only* determinant reason of the pure will; only in this way the highest good may become the object the law proposes to realise”⁵.

The *highest good* is an ideal (a moral ideal, of course), but people can conceive of it, because it is the *end* of their striving for happiness through virtue/making one’s moral duty: if there is no end for an action, and if this end is not ideated as *possible*, the action as such lacks its reason. Therefore, by devising the highest good, the human consciousness “calls for perfection similar to *holiness*”⁶. Man is certainly not able of holiness, but by conceiving the highest good, man enters its *moral progress*, and knows that there is a continuity of his concrete moral purpose and the transcendent character of morals. The harmony appears just in this continuity.

The book highlights Kant’s three postulates of the pure practical reason – the *immortality of the human soul*, *freedom*, and the *existence of God* – in order to suggest that Kant’s metaphysical construction was the means to better explain the dialectic/the contradictory process of continuity and discontinuity between the everyday moral behaviour and the *universal*, the *modelling* and the *formal* without which this behaviour has no meaning.

The last two substantial chapters are, however, devoted to The harmony of the sub-intellectual faculties of the soul in Kant’s anthropological project, and The soul as thinking self in the critique of the rational psychology: in order to emphasise not only that Kant has showed that between the intellectual and sub-intellectual faculties of the soul there is – and is necessary – a harmony leading to the harmonious construction of man as such, but also that the intellectual faculties, guiding the sub-intellectual ones – transpose the *self* into all the representations of man⁷ and impose, through morality, the *telos* of man not only in every individual but also in the historical and integrated development of culture.

The consequence of this teleology is the harmony of the soul, despite the limitations given to it by sensitivity and the obscure representations; actually, the excesses of sensitivity and obscure representations interfering in the *order* generated through the exercise of intellect – these excesses are maladies of the soul – are only deviations from the quiddity of the human soul. This quiddity is the

⁵ Rodica Croitoru, *op. cit.*, p.143.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.161.

goodness of the soul, “the pure form where all the ends unite”⁸ and that, normally, supports/produces the human reason in its constructive effort towards the world and the human morals/moral ends. For this reason, the maladies of the soul are not stimuli of creation – as later on some modern thinkers have considered – but brakes in the way of the conscious moral manifestation (of the *goodness of the soul*).

Same brakes are the *appearances* which are not maladies but are the result either of too much imagination influencing the intellect or the principles of thinking, or of the ignorance of logical rules. Nor are the appearances phenomena, since they are not cognition units/true results of cognition, but even obstruct this process, because they are the result of unreasonable suppositions. In any case, the appearances, as well as the errors, are not ontological – as in Plato – but subjective, epistemological. The discovery and critique of appearances as they are made in the *Critique of Pure Reason* emphasises the revolutionary *constructivist* perspective Kant offered: the arrival to *transcendental ideas* – which are the concepts of the pure reason operating over the concepts of intellect about the empirical world, and giving the unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions of thinking – are the result of the *subject*, of how it knows, how it links the internal perception of its self (and this internal perception is the *consciousness*, with the mediated external transcendental apperception of the data gathered in the intuitions of intellect) and at the same time how it discriminates the subjective and the objective in the judgements of this one.

The final result of this discrimination is Kant’s representation of the soul as a simple, identical, related to possible objects in space *substance*. Being the result of the internal sense of the human, the soul is *immaterial*, being simple, its substance is *incorruptible*, being identical it has a *personality*, and all of these give its equivalence as *spirituality* related to the external bodies. Hence the soul as thinking substance, thus principle of life, is *immortal*. But since the main problem is the explanation of the nature of soul (its separated existence from the body), all the analytical inspections of the cardinal supposition/the proposition “I think” do not give the answer.

However, all these reasoning and conclusions are difficult because they contrast different aspects given by the concepts (of intellect) and the logic of the relation between these aspects, while all of these must

⁸ *Ibidem*, p.169.

be both intuitively and logically congruent. Thus, the harmony of the soul appears only after the critical observation of all the possible paralogsms in the above-mentioned logic of *relation* and, of course, in the rational psychology. (Some shortcomings of the rational psychology highlighted in its examination by Kant are especially important for our problem: that the rational psychology cannot prove that the awareness of the self is possible without the objects outside it, and that the logical description of the thinking cannot give a metaphysical characterisation of the object). But this harmony is rather a desire of Kant, and also a *possible* tendency: because the above statements about the soul, as results of the efforts of reason, have to fit not only to the world of reason, but at the same time to the world of man as such. And in order this suitability to realise, (Kant's) modern philosophy has advanced two, but of different order, solutions: the first is the *transcendental idealism* – since, according to him, neither materialism nor idealism explains the nature of the soul – demonstrating however only its epistemological necessity, i.e. the fact that “I do not know myself in that I am aware of me as being thinking, but I know myself because I am aware of the *intuition* about me as being determined according to the function of thinking”⁹.

Because the empirical representations are fundamental for the relation between the self and its awareness about the thinking, the transcendental idealism is open, developing rather the critique of simplistic and unilateral explanations of the possibility of the human knowledge of the object and the subject, and tending to avoid the traditional metaphysical declarations. In this framework, the transcendental idealism offers only the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of human experience (knowledge), i. e. “some *a priori* laws of the pure use of reason upon our existence”¹⁰. The analogy between the practical and the theoretical use of reason emphasises the *spontaneity* of reason and, thus, of the human existence where the humans appear to be, as an effect of their free will, *legislators* of their world.

The second solution is related to the first: the all the way dissection of thinking and the dialectical tackling of both the thinking and its results as the mutual milieus mediating between the world and the subject, the *transcendental principles* which however do not annul the

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp.199-200.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 207.

necessity to focus on the concrete practical experiences (but on the contrary, call these ones), all of these have not only led to the ulterior philosophical evolution of both phenomenology and existentialism ardently interested about the reverberation of the external world within the consciousness of man, but also to the second solution of Kant, the famous *moral teleology*, itself followed by both detractors and votaries.

The manner Kant has worked this moral teleology is the substantiation of what is visible in morals, the *values*. So why would the moral values give the direction of moral behaviours? Because they reflect the moral *principles* which “come from the practical use of reason” and correspond to the *telos* of man that is just his *reason* able *to conceive of a world of ends*, where the development of the human reason is the crowning of the *teloi* of every living structure, and *to be*, in the ontological order, is the crowning of beings and the proof of the logic of Creation¹¹.

Actually, the problem of the harmony of the soul is dear rather to the author of book, and not so much to Plato and Kant. They have presumed that the world is contradictory and within it neither the human soul may exist in a serene detachment; and they were interested only in the understanding of the condition of a smooth life of the individual in a troubled environment. They both started from and have arrived at the most important feature of humanness, the *discursive reason generating ends and criteria which are the most important mediators between man and its existence*. Because man is more than an animal adapting to its milieu, and he considers even his adaptation through the lens of the specific ends and criteria arising from his unique attribute. Then both Plato and Kant have focused on *reason* as the fundamental element constructing the human consciousness and trajectory; and although Kant has showed that consciousness cannot be explained only on the basis of reason and the characteristic of the soul is not its rationality, he was the most interested in understanding the manifestation of this rationality¹². This is the reason Kant has elaborated the structure and logic of experience, and has developed the *epistemological* mediation of the *ontos* started by Plato (in the trail of Socrates).

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp.205-206.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp.208-209.

The specific of the soul – as the entity governing the speech and the thinking, the superior emotions and the vegetative functions and feelings, the relationship of the human being with itself (its thoughts, emotions and grasping of the inner states) and with the others – was the first fact (as this appeared to humans and philosophers) that broke the undifferentiated balanced whole as the first premise of their existence. The soul – so the *thinking* with its result, the *decision-making*, of course, but also something more, the different kinds of *affects* – appeared like the *governor* of the body, and of the “I” of every individual, just because of the *awareness* it brings in and over the existence: an already *constitutive* hierarchy instead of the holism of the human person.

In fact, the difference between the individual and society was obviously the first grasped by humans: but not a difference as such makes the destruction of a harmony. The humans have inherited from their ancestors the conscience of the necessity of the group, and thus the harmony individual-group as constitutive for the human existence, irrespective of the taboos developed just for the preservation of the group. The attack against this harmony arose only with the social stratifications, or rather from the subordination of *cooperative relationships*¹³ between the members of the group to the *social* hierarchy relations of asymmetric authority. Anyhow, people were convinced that they all had “shared intentions”¹⁴ which does not contradict the individual ones at least in “modest sociality”/cooperative actions starting of individual planning agency¹⁵.

However, people – as Hesiod – have sighed over the above subordination of cooperative relationships, and the philosophers had to explain all of these processes.

Both Plato and Kant have started from the individual’s capacity of reasonableness, since the human individual was the representative of the human species, since society appeared as a unity of individuals, and since the form of society was so varied and haphazard. This was the phenomenon, but philosophy goes beyond appearances. By taking as a model of the soul the *polis*, certainly idealised – but just this

¹³ K. Sterelny (2014). “Cooperation, Culture, and Conflict”. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 67 (1): 31-58.

¹⁴ M. E. Bratman (2014). *Shared Agency: A Planning Theory of Acting Together*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ Michael E. Bratman (2016). “The Intentions of a Group”. In Eric Orts and Craig Smith (eds.), *The Moral Responsibility of Firms*. Oxford University Press.

idealisation showed the class values assumed by Plato – the ancient thinker has made two movements: in one, the problem of the evitable human suffering (resulted from the social relations) was either avoided or considered as provoked by the deviation from the sane ancient idealised *polis*, and certainly from the moral virtues; in the second, the soul/reason, with its moral burden, was moved from the human reality to an extra human one. But, after more than 2000 years after Plato, Kant has brought the soul back, and only thus was he able: 1) to emphasise the specific universality the individual man carries and to demonstrate that this singularity is *universalizable*, and 2) this process is showed only through the development of a *commonwealth* based on the internalised moral principles – as virtuous behaviour – which reflect the above mentioned human *telos*, as this appeared in his 1793's *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*.

The book of Rodica Croitoru, though technical, suggests all these ideas – and obviously, more than those mentioned here – and sends to a glowing image of philosophy: because if philosophy is honest, it knows that the universals it creates and glosses “do nothing explain, they themselves need to be explained”¹⁶, and since the universal concepts are constructed, they *must be confronted with the real life*: actually, philosophy and the understanding of the world take place only by this confrontation whose one of the instruments are the universal concepts. The harmony of the human soul was (and is, is it?) an ideal whose function is all the more related to the intertwining of the logic of reason and spirituality with the world. And both this logic and the intertwining are open.

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