PHENOMENOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WELFARE PRACTICE

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Abstract: *In the short post-communist welfare tradition, the welfare effort was directed towards the improvement of the material-financial conditions of the client. The situation is justified by the extended level of extreme poverty and social inequities generated by transition. Our intervention comes to emphasize the necessity of expanding the spectrum of welfare intervention, making useful the suggestions that come from phenomenology. The philosophy applied and the experiential philosophy talk about the restructuration of the meaning of existence and revaluing of the relational contacts, as decisive steps in improving the condition of the client. Thus it results that the social worker is not only a bureaucrat or a vigilante of the civil society, a defender of the vulnerable people, but also a counselor of the person who lost the fundamental marks, a mediator of the relation of the client with himself, with the other people, with the community, with the world itself.*

Key words: *phenomenology, existentialism, philosophy of donation, welfare counseling.*

1. Introduction. Social work – a (scientific) Practice searching for its own Fundaments

There are two meanings in which the term science is used. A traditional meaning, imposed ever since the antiquity, of expert knowledge and practice in a certain domain. In this regard there is the science of shoemaking, flute playing or science of navigation. Another meaning, more limited and rigorous, it is imposed starting with modernity, as modern sciences are created, after the model of physics.

Though with an own leeway, "a piece of the world" in which he develops his activity (Howe, 2001, p. 19), being "the man in need, the man in impasse existential, the man that has problems or that represents a problem himself" (Butrym, 1976), rigorously speaking, from the epistemological point of view the social work is a profession that does not have a distinct scientific statute. In other words, social work is not a science, in the modern meaning of the term, but a social practice theoretically founded on two related sciences, psychology and sociology. From here come the distinct welfare paradigms.

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From the *theoretical* point of view, the different welfare philosophies, identifiable in the paradigmatic fundament of practices, in the kuhnian meaning (Kuhn, 1962), may be reduced at two, based on the crucial value that feeds them and justifies them. One of them, which we could call *vigilante* (or *political*), is based on the value of the social justice. According to it, the social work is identified by the corrective effort brought to the principle of liberty, by conditioning the acceptance of the social inequalities (Rawls, 1971, in which, in a rightful society the inequalities are admitted if they exclusively relate to positions, status-roles, opened for everybody in the conditions of equality of chances, and from these inequalities the least socially categorized must win. Therefore, the role of the social worker is to accomplish the equality of chances by the support granted to underprivileged persons, groups and communities. This is the official paradigm that the welfare practices rely on, as sector of the public policies in the secularized occidental states.

The other paradigm, the first in the historical order, which we could call humanist (or *romantic*), founds the welfare practice on the idea of inter-human solidarity, charity and love, and has its historical origin in theology and religious practices. This is the non-official paradigm, which the non-governmental organization from the welfare domain rely on.

From the *methodological* point of view, the two paradigms have different perspectives. The political paradigm is oriented towards an objective approach of the social facts (Durkheim, 1988), determinative-functionalist, in which the condition of the "plastic man" (Hollis, 1977), or "object man" may be improved acting upon the variables of the unfavorable environment. The key concepts it operates with are disadvantage, marginalization, exclusion, vulnerability. In other words: we change the environment variables and the condition of the man shall be improved. The romantic paradigm is oriented towards a subjective, comprehensive approach, related to personality, for which there are not the objects and environment variables those which determine the human condition, but their significance for the person. The human being, free subject, is the one responsible of his condition. In other words, changing the human being, making him competent, he changes his own condition.

It is about abstractions, undoubtedly in the welfare practice, not being found the pure models, but a mixture, with predilections or accents from one part or from another. The limit must be found in the Aristotle's compromise, that narrow crest among what it is too much and what it is too little. The external determinations have their own role, as well as the internal determinations. Coming between both the variables, environment and the person, the social worker may contribute more efficiently at improving the human condition.

The first of the paradigms is based on the political philosophy and sociology. The second finds its reasonable grounds in the philosophical phenomenology and in the humanist psychology. We shall further focus on this paradigm, less theorized.

2. Essential Characteristics of the Phenomenological Methodology

The phenomenology, as philosophical method, was initiated by Ed. Husserl and developed by M. Heidegger, M. M. Ponty, J.P. Sartre and others. The fundamental idea of

phenomenology, from which the others derive, is that of *intentionality*. There is no conscience itself, but only a "conscience of something" (Husserl, 1913). The intentionality of the conscience makes the human world not to be a physical, objective, neutral and external one, but an existential one, a projection resulted from this interlacing between the conscience and the world. All the actions of our conscience"are marked by an intentionality that comes from a content of life extracted from the world we move in (Liiceanu, 2003). The same idea shall be sustained by J.P. Sartre talking about the function "that creates the world" of the conscience (Sartre, 1997). Shortly, "the fact of existing in the world" is the same with "the fact of being together" with things, with people with us. From the reason that I cannot free myself from this "together" result the specific ontological, epistemological and psychological consequences.

The human being, *Dasein* in Heidegger's language (2003), is redefined as relation being, being reported to "the available existence", by "the ambient look" in the "tool related world", by "considerate look", when is reported to the others, "clement look" when reported to himself. As sole "existence that does not have a being", the man is an opening, project, freedom (Sartre, 2004), who defines and redefines himself with each choice. Being a "being together", by each of his individual choices the man chooses for the other, either. Thus it results the responsibility for him and for otherness. It happens for the man to forget his condition and to come into being non-authentic, under the dominance of the world, in daily automatisms, in the impersonal "one" (Heidegger, 2003), in the "bad faith" (Sartre, 2004), running from the authentic possibility of being.

What means this authentic possibility of being? And how can it be accessed? At this question, the phenomenologist reminds us that the man is a contingent being. He is time, finiteness, project, throwing, fall. He is "the possibility of not being any more", "the being into death". The fact that "we each bear in ourselves the spores of our own disappearance" (Yalom, 2012, p.14) arises the anxiety that paradoxically opens the possibilities of an authentic existence. The possibility of *not being any more* generates the possibility of *being* authentically. If my life is finite, what should I do with it? By this question I am forced to take myself at my word, as responsible project for myself and for the others. "Dasein is authentic only in the extent in which he builds his life in the anticipative horizon of death" (Liiceanu, 2003, p. 620). When the anxiety comes I am confronted with me and forced to choose, to make an opinion, to decide about me, about my life, with the others, with my world. From here it starts what philosophers call" authenticity of existence" and also from this anxiety starts the whole existentialism.

3. The significance of the Human Relation in the Phenomenological Ethics of Dialogue. A Philosophy of Donation

If at Heidegger it was discretely introduced the idea of "preoccupation" as "care for the other" (2003), and for Sartre the other was "the mediator between me and myself" (2004), but it still had an ambiguous statute, representing in the same time "the Hades" (1998, p. 134), for Buber and then for Lévinas, reporting to the other becomes the measurement of my existential authenticity.

Like Jaspers, who states that „I am only a being together with the other; I do not feel anything alone" (Jaspers, 1986, p. 13), Buber (1992) postulates the relation, „man among

men", as fundamental category of human reality. „At the beginning there is the relationship" states Buber (1992, p. 44), as a „category of the being", or a „soul matrix" of the human. The arguments invoked are phylogenetic and ontogenetic. Both at *the first man*, and for each of us – whose image we are, the beginning is the relationship lived with the creator, and the *primordial sin* consists in separation, in falling apart from the relationship, in the refusal of the communion. Adam was initially in a unity with the Creator, with Eva, with the world, as the child is initially in unity with his mother. This unity lived is called by Buber I-You, a relationship in which the ego is manifested as a person, as existential engagement, as embrace effectively lived of otherness into spirit. Adam, by disobedience, breaks off from divinity and from Eva, blaming her; Eva breaks off from nature, blaming the snake on her turn. Thus it is produced the individuation, fragmenting, separation from unity. This sin is similar in the same time with breaking off from himself, negating his own responsibility and falling into inauthenticity by bad faith. In case of men, the relationship lived, *I-You*, face to face, is gradually replaced with a new type of relationship, *I-That person*, relationship in which the other is no longer a subject, but only an object for "de experimentation and usage", the ego exploring only the surfaces, without getting engaged, without stepping out of the self, as it happens with experience, knowledge or rational possession.

Therefore, if the primordial sin consists in the refusal of the relationship, *I-You* being transformed into *I-That person*, than our salvage, "redemption", can only consists in reestablishing the authentic relationship, by relearning how to say *You* to *That person*, therefore to exceed the neutral-cognitive and pragmatic-interested report, "tool related" as Heidegger would say, by a relationship lived with the world, with the neighbor, and through him with God. In *You* condition it can be included everything that on the existence scale is presented towards a *I*, from stone to the tree, animal, man or God. Learning how to make from *That person* a *I* ultimately means to learn how to give.

The acting of these concepts shall be found also at Dumitru Stăniloae (1996), who, replaces the dyad with the triad, placing *I* as witness or „horizon" of the relationship *I-You*. From these „fundamental words" Emmanuel Lévinas shall start, who shall introduce in the relation *I-You*, symmetric relation at Buber, a primordial unbalance, *You* being placed above *I*. this asymmetry in the I-You relation is the place in which the ethics is created. The other, Lévinas shall state, "is not a You, but a Your" (Lévinas, 1999a, p. 81). In this asymmetry, in perceiving that I am not the *peer* of the other, consists the „fundamental intuition of morality", in which I „am *obliged* towards the other" therefore, I „am infinitely more exigent towards myself than towards the others"(Lévinas, 1999b, p. 44). The disproportion between The other and Myself is the moral conscience itself. This asymmetry is the key of lévinasian philosophy: „always the other comes first, Lévinas states [...]. Not a line from what I wrote advocates whether this assertion is not accepted"(Lévinas, 2001, p. 146). Due to this asymmetry, materialized in the primacy of the otherness in relation with the ego, in the world there may exist pity, compassion, forgiveness and proximity, and even the simple „after You, Sir" (Lévinas, 2006, p. 245). This is the distinctive sign of the appearance of human in the economy of the being: *in-the self* of the being, *persisting into being*, is exceeded in its gratuity *beyond the self for the other*, until sacrifice or in the possibility of sacrifice, from the perspective of sanctity.

Dostoievski's formula from *Karamazov Brothers*: „Each of us is to blame in front of everyone and for everything, and I am more to blame than the others" is assumed as slogan by Lévinas (2001, p. 113 and 2006, p. 299). If the fundamental feature of the being is the preoccupation of each particular being for his own being, then the human gender is that of a „ontological absurdity", by the fact that the care for the other tips the balance onto the care for the self. Our humanity consists in this „absurdity", in the power to recognize the priority of the other.

The life humanly lived appears as *giving in to the other*, as a preoccupation for another until sacrifice, until the possibility of dying for him. In the human existence, the vocation of an existence for the other appears as being stronger than the threat of death. The possibility to assign, in sacrifice, a meaning to the other and to the world that without me, counts for me (Lévinas, 2000, p. 233), creates a reference to a future that will ever be my present but that gives essence to this present.

Born in the relation I-You, the ethical relation is permanently enriched, including the third that *concerns us* (Lévinas, 2000, p. 109), under both connotations of the term; even in the appearance of the other, Lévinas states, the third concerns me (Lévinas, 2001, pp. 133-134). Nobody may confiscate for himself the title of neighbor. Related to the other, I am always in relation with the third. He is the „ source of justice" (Lévinas, 2001, p. 135). This makes the relation between the responsibility towards the other and justice be extremely closed. And the third, other than my neighbor, is also my neighbor and my neighbor's neighbor. Thus it is reached a Reason able to compare the incomparable, at the idea of justice that founds the state (Lévinas, 2000).

The ethical relation, which involves the social justice and the acknowledgment of the other's priority based on the ego, does not deplete the possibilities of being of the human existence. Ethics means a lot, but it does not mean everything. To be compared from the moral point of view, is *as* loving the other. But it is just apparent love (Sponville, 1998). The essence of the human is love, Marion argues (2004).

Marion also starts from anxiety, namely from the question "What's the point?" Who can assure us against the cattish assault of futility? The only assurance that makes us resist the futility and the suspicion of inutility is, in Marion's opinion, the possibility of love. Therefore, the essential interrogation which our existence must handle is „Does anyone love me?" This question definitively exiles me out of myself, marking me as a lack for me. Thus love becomes the distinctive mark of human, as „in this world, Marion argues, only man loves, as the animal and even computers may think, they even do it as well, or even better than him; but we cannot state that they love. Man, yes – man is an animal that loves" (Marion, 2004, p. 32). By my way of being, I need someone to love me. The futility is vanished when somebody else matters for me, counts, interests me.

The first assurance against the assault of futility, Marion states, consists in the fact of you loving first, loving in advance, in order to create love. The true lover is the one who loves without being loved, as a lover that loves first, without reciprocity, without enough reasoning, without reason and without sufficiency. If we want to receive first what we think we are entitled to (the gift of love), with the thought that then we will pay the price and love in return, we enter under the captivity of the reciprocity of the commercial exchange, falling from the specific location of love to that of gift. The one who loves "appears when one of the actors of the exchange does not make prior conditions, loves

without asking to be loved, therefore abolishes the economy in the image of the gift"(p. 119). The fact of falling in love and loving does not depend on the other, the beneficiary or the *grantee*, but only on myself, on the *grantor*, condition in which I place myself by the gift of love.

Following Marion's reasoning, I noticed that I discover myself as worth being loved due to the other, though loving in advance, I being the first. In reality, when we love, another always precedes love. I am the one who loves but in fact I am first loved by another: "When I advanced crazily in my own advance, blind lover, not knowing who to love, nor how, other lovers, older than me, followed me undoubtedly with their look, guided upon my steps and already loved me, without my knowledge, despite me"(p. 284). Nobody may claim, without lying himself, that nobody has ever loved him. Simply because I exist, somebody must have loved me first. In the last resort (in fact always as a first resort), if there is a lover called with the same name as love, then he loves us before we love him, loves us infinitely better than we love and we love Him, outranking us with the title of "the best lover"(p. 292).

Therefore, starting from the original question, "Does anyone love me?", I find myself loving and giving first, discovering that I am neither the first nor the last from the act of love and gift. Therefore I include myself in an existence with meaning, able to justify life through itself, but which is ultimately able to be included in a universal circuit of Love.

Thus, the sacrifice for the other, the idea of social justice, of authentic existence and love reciprocally interposed and they complete one another, as values that put the basis of the reason to live together.

4. Conclusions for the Welfare Practice

From the perspective of phenomenological ethics it would result that fact that the improving welfare intervention, that follows the client's "well-being", meaning his benefit, under all the aspects, physical and psychical, material and spiritual, should aim more inter-correlated objectives.

One of the objectives, not always the first in the order of urgency, but always the first in the order of its determinant importance, is represented by the inner world. "The primordial matter that the psychotherapy deals with, Yalom states (2012, p. 13) is always the existential pain". The inner difficulties, the feeling of isolation and loneliness, the burden of freedom in vain, the meaningless of existence and the fear of death hang heavily on the shoulders of the self, being most of times at the origin of the outer difficulties. As bleak as these given realities may seem to us, they "contain though the seed of wisdom and redemption" (Yalom, 2012, p. 13). Which is why the careful examination of this inner horizon and finding some existential anchors, a support, by replacing the own position in the world may be a good starting point. In other words, the identification of a meaning of life, not general and abstract, but the particular vocation of each of us, our mission, sense and responsibility (Frankl, 2012). And this meaning must be rather placed in the world, as man forgets himself, going heart and soul into a cause that he serves or into a person that he loves, the more human he is and more he updates himself (Frankl, 2012).

According to those mentioned above another objective of welfare intervention results, that of improving the relations with the others. The relational deficit, the dissatisfaction generated by the relations with the peers is the source of big existential difficulties. Apart from all the reasons for which people cannot ask for a psychologist's help, at their basis there is an incapacity to establish satisfactory and long relations with other people (Yalom, & Elkin, 2012). That is why the correction of the distorted relations and acquiring the power to adequately bond with others become an essential problem of personal well-being. "The inter-human relation is the one that heals, the relationship is the one that heals" – this is my professional catechism!", Yalom confessed (2012, p. 126). The satisfaction offered by the relation with the other confers the self-esteem, perspective, responsibility and meaning.

Accomplishing the objectives derived from the phenomenological perspective may be the support for the explicit interventions with the purpose to improve the material-financial conditions of the client, who aims the person in the same time, family, neighborhood, community, the legislative system and the entire society. From the phenomenological perspective, social work is not only a profession among others, being a way to be fulfilled and authentic.

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