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STRATEGIC IMAGINATION

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Abstract: *The usefulness of strategic imagination is one of the coveted competitive advantages today. I present some of the moments of its historical evolution and some of the social architectures that can generate it.*

Key words: *skill at imaginative identification, theory of complex phenomena, human intelligence*

1. Skill at Imaginative Identification

How does strategic imagination work? This is a question that invites us on an interesting journey. One of the possible starting points is the one offered by Richard Rorty through that "skill at imaginative identification" with another person, a social ability specific especially to an evolved society, such as, for example, "the ability to formulate differential equations". The way in which this capacity for imaginative identification increases knowledge is through recognizing and describing those "small things around which individuals and communities center their fantasy and their lives" (Rorty, 2012a). The more the experience of imaginative identifications increases, the more different sets of words, concepts and situations will be added. These constructions of differents sets do not seek to extract a universally valid explanation of the situations encountered, but only to understand each other, regardless of the language used. Richard Rorty believes that literature, ethnography and journalism make a special contribution to the ability imaginative identification. The immediate effect is not the establishment of an explanatory paradigm, but the awareness of a "common human nature" (Rorty, 2012a), starting from which we can become solidary. Richard Rorty observs three effects of practicing the imaginative identification ability. First, he considers that there is no "final vocabulary" as a set of explanatory theories. This perspective allows each person to accept the existence of another person's own vocabulary, even to accept to receive the understanding that his vocabulary may be different from that of others. Secondly, it is obvious that an argument formulated in a particular vocabulary may not work, may not even be understood in another vocabulary. And the last, the understanding of the fact that no vocabulary is stronger in explaining reality, that there is no competition between these vocabularies, the only differentiation being the moment of encounter/ of discovery on the time axis of these new vocabularies. Through this perspective Richard Rorty assures us that the absence of

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confrontation between different types of vocabulary allows us to produce a lot of redescriptions of a single situation, being able to make anything, anytime, to look good or bad. Richard Rorthy says that the mechanism of recontextualization sees the functioning of the human mind being the same as the functioning of a network of beliefs and desires. This permanent renewal has several consequences. Abandoning beliefs, reducing tensions by creating a new way of understanding in order to envelop the new belief as a central concept, or the denunciation of an old way of thinking, which has become contradictory to the new belief. By taking the understanding of beliefs from Pierce and seeing them as action skills, Richard Rorty considers the role of beliefs to be that of predicting, firstly, one's own behavior. But this perspective of Richard Rorty on "beliefs as action skills" allows him to be situated outside of self. Thus, Rorty sees recontextualization as "the process through which the number of beliefs that add or substract from the network increases" (Rorty, 2012b). Richard Rorty places himself on the line of pragmatism and he is not interested in favoring the "own context" of the researched object only because it is different from the researcher's context. The ultimate goal of this approach is to find out if we could have other beliefs. Rorty tries to bring us closer to John Dewey's idea of "intellectual progress" which occurs only through the "total abandonment of questions, as well as of the alternatives that come with it" which practically means the emergence of new interests. Dewey says that we do not solve the questions, we "get over them". The questions recommended by Richard Rorty is whether "are there other beliefs that we should hold" (Rorty, 2012b). And the answer, says Rorty, can only come by "enumeration and recommendation of other beliefs" (Rorty, 2012b). The way in which knowledge is defined in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, "not as an effort to render reality correctly, but rather as an approach to acquiring the habit of action in order to face reality" leads Richard Rorty to describe social institutions as "experiments in cooperation rather than as attemps to embody a universal a historical order" (Rorty, 2012b). Richard Rorty's evolution starts from understanding language as a tool, rather than as a mirror, "paintings rather than sentences, metaphors rather than assertions are what determine most of our philosophical beliefs" (Rorty, 2018). And he gets to the "contingency" of language in the sense of its organization in "transient, historical systems around guiding metaphors, which are forcibly interpreted as "representations"" (Rorty, 2012a). As Anton Dumitriu reminds us in *The Book of Admirable Encounters*, Protagoras understood cultural value as being attained by a person when he or she was particularly good at interpreting poetry. The interpretation of poets in the classical age, namely, "researching what they said", was being done because they were seen as "the fathers of wisdom and the guides of [humanity]" (Dumitriu, 1981). Finding this tradition, Richard Rorty considers that one of the meanings of history would be the "history of successive metaphors" which would reveal the poet as a "creator of new words, teacher of new languages, as the avant-garde of the species" (Rorty, 2012a). Hence the cultural articulation of self-awareness as "contingent, in the sense that it always depends on new contexts" (Rorty, 2012a). A complementary perspective is given by Professor Virgil Nemoianu who considers that sometimes literature functions as "an agent that moderates, deviates, delays. Imaginative frames counteract and disturb the "real ones", that is those ideas which

claim to subordinate the particular to the general. Literature proves to be a creator of "pleasant" discordances, evoking the autonomy of details and restoring imperfection" (Nemoianu, 1989). Somewhat close to Rorty, Michel Foucault in his inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France* in 1970 describing an author, was considering that "in writing is not about the manifestation or exaltation of the gesture of writing, it is not about enveloping a subject in a language, but about opening a space in which the writing subject does not stop disappearing" (Young, 1981). This Foucaultian dissolution of the old subject into a new one is similar to Emil Cioran's approach to returning to "the absolute childhoods of the spirit, chanting a prayer and taking refuge in it" (Cioran, 2017).

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty recalls the historical path of the last 200 years of the imagination, as the "main tool of cultural change", which led by "changing languages and other social practices" to the emergence of a type of "human beings that never existed before" (Rorty, 2012a). This change occurs when we follow the method of describing "in new ways, to the point where a new pattern of linguistic behavior has been created that the emerging generation will be tempted to adopt, leading it to look for new appropriate forms of non-linguistic behavior, such as the adoption of new scientific equipment, or new social institutions" (Rorty, 2012a). New ways bring with them new questions, which are much more interesting, but also the option to do something new, to become someone else. And the absence of arguments from the new vocabulary, compared to the existing arguments from the old vocabularies is, in itself, an urge to a new description of reality. Just like the late Professor Valentin Mureșan in his 2007 undergraduate ethics course at the University of Bucharest left open to Richard Rorty the option of "internalist" epistemology that focuses on the concept of truth-coherence: "Looking through the lenses of the literary philosopher [as Rorty] we are surrounded by various descriptions of the world (stories) that are not objectively true because our experiences of the outside world are always mediated by other narratives that depend on the culture in which we were born and on the historical moment in time. A certain description, with its principle, is not true, but effective or ineffective and relative" (Mureșan, 2007).

2. Towards a Theory of Complex Phenomena

From Hayek's perspective, the complexity of the phenomena of human life, mind and society should make us decrease the degree of falsifiability. This is also a fact that we should see as an advance of knowledge. Hayek believes that because of our ability to spontaneously identify a pattern in nature, we have come to belive that by observing a sufficient number of cases, we will eventually find a pattern. But there are also situations, in the science of living nature for example, where the pattern should first be invented, before it can be discovered in nature or before one can test its applicability. The consequence would be that our predictions will depend on the amount of data observed. But falsifiability, in Hayek's opinion, does not make a "distinction between a prediction of the appearance of a pattern of a certain class and a prediction of the appearance of a particular instance of this class" (Hayek, 1967). Because, says Hayek, "this larger structure as a whole will possess certain general or abstract features which

will recur independently of the particular values of the individual data, so long as the general structure is preserved" (Hayek, 1967). According to Hayek, the case of predicting the pattern with incomplete data is solvable in Pysics, but not in the fileds of some "more highly organized phenomena". If we can not elaborate "a theory of sufficient simplicity to enable us to derive from it predictions of particular events", Hayek directs us to the reappearance of abstract models as such, but not to a particular manifestation of them. This minimum advance of knowledge will occur on the basis of "hypothetical predictions", as Professor Michael Scriven called them in his 1959 article from the journal *Science*. But these "predictions dependent on yet unknown future events" (Hayek, 1967), will lead us in the direction of low falsiability. And Hayek's observation is that, at least when it comes to the complex structures of life, we should be in "the possession of an appropriate theory". As an example, Hayek gives us the Darwinian theory of evolution through natural selection as an instance of a pattern of prediction. Hayek reminds us of the correct meaning of this paradigm: "the theory of evolution by natural selection describes a kind of process (or mechanism) which is independent of the particular circumstances in which it has taken place on earth, which might result in the production of an entirely different set of organisms" (Hayek; 1967). The power of the Darwinian paradigm lies in the fact that it senses the appearance of "a mechanism of reduplication with transmittable variations and competitive selection of those which prove to have a better chance of survival will in the course of time produce a great variety of structures adapted to continuous adjustment to the environment and to each other" (Hayek; 1967). We have, therefore, the case in which the falsifiability of the empirical content of Darwinian Theory consists in what prevents its occurrence. Through the series of possibilities described, this theory "excludes other conceivable courses of events and thus can be falsified" (Hayek, 1967). Once we understand the opening made by the Darwinian paradigm, Hayek is left to lead us to new ways of generating theories about social structures. Due to the complexity of it, Hayek believes that the goal of such theories is not to predict certain specific phenomena, but only to produce "describing kinds of patterns which appear if certain general conditions are satisfied" (Hayek, 1967). The value of these types of patterns, including the types of predictions generated, consists of specifying the general conditions under which patterns are formed. The generation of these general conditions will lead to the emergence of patterns, although perhaps we will continue to remain "ignorant of many of the particular circumstances which will determine the pattern that will appear" (Hayek, 1967). Hayek warns us about the pretence to view knowledge as universal determinism, but also about the existence of full knowledge that would lead to obtaining specific conclusions. The general description of certain event complexes or classes of structures of such events can be used, Hayek believes, but we will never be able to reach "an exhaustive enumeration of all the […] circumstances which constitute a necesary and sufficient condition of the […] phenomena in question" (Hayek, 1967). Awareness of these limits of knowledge transforms us: "the more we learn about the world, and the deeper our learning, the more conscious, specific, and articulate will be our knowledge of what we do not know, our knowledge of our ignorance" (Hayek, 1967). Hayek's urge is to understand and formulate explanations of the appearance of certain patterns, not of individual events. If

we fail to give due importance to understanding these mechanisms that produce models of a certain type, we will be able to free ourselves from our "naïve" perception that we can, through direct observation, discover simple regularities between all phenomena. In *Individualism and economic order*, Hayek considers that „neither biological nor cultural evolution knows anything like „the laws of evolution" or „the inevitable laws of historical development" within the meaning of laws governing the necessary stages and phases, mandatory completed by the products of evolution and that can predict future events. Cultural evolution is determined neither genetically nor in any other way, and its results are materialized in diversity not in uniformity" (Hayek, 2012). Hayek analyses the human mind not from the perspective of accumulating verifiable knowledge, or the power of interpreting the environment, but from that "capacity to restrict the insticts, a capacity which cannot be verified by individual reason, since its effects are manifested on the group" (Hayek, 2012). Hayek also believes that the transformation of man into an intelligent being is due to the fact that he had the opportunity to learn from tradition, which "told the man what he must or must not do under certain conditions, and not what to expect to happen" (Hayek, 2012). All these arguments urged me to approach the perspective of Mircea Eliade who, studying the oriental traditions, noticed "the exaltation of the embodied existence as the only way to be in the world, the way in which absolute freedom can be conquered" (Eliade, 1992). These transmitted traditions brought "not only the desire for liberation, the thirst for freedom, but also the possibility of a beatific and autonomous existence, here on earth and in Time" (Eliade, 1992).

3. Conclusions

John Dewey asks the question under which we can say that our mind conceives an idea as being true. He gives the example of the idea according to which following a path we reach a community. But if we get lost in the woods, we will understand the falsity of the idea and look for new ones. And this search process will change our behavior. Therefore, "intelligence should not be conceived as a feature of a man independent of his relationship with the environment. Man must be conceived in the indissoluble unity of his person. And the person interacts continuously with the environment, it poses problems to which he responds by developing ideas, which are behavioral strategies. Human intelligence is an operational skill, a set of orderly and effective behaviors that allows solving the problems posed by the environment. Intelligence, therefore, operates through trial and error. Given a problem, man develops strategy – based on ideas, which are nothing else than operational predictions about what will happen as a result of the action – confronts it with the reality through action and modifies it according to the results obtained. In conclusion, the approach of the human conscience never attests to the existence of any absolute truth, but it is a process of continuous adaptation" (Chiriță, 2006). And, like Hayek, John Dewey believes that scientific theories are just "operational formulations which allow the description of the behavior of nature and thus make the prediction of what will happen in the field to which they refer" (Chiriță, 2006).

One of the difficulties noted by Keynes was the abandonment of "old paradigms that no longer correspond to the present" (Keynes, 2018). Moreover, Nassim Taleb in his

famous book *The Black Swan*, recommends focusing on "anti-knowledge, that is on what we do not know […]. The strategy of discoverers and entrepreneurs is to rely less on top-down planning and to focus on remedying things and recognizing opportunities when they arise […] The reason the free market works is that it allows people to be lucky through aggressive trials and errors, not through rewards or "incentives" for skill. In this case, the strategy is to focus more on corrections and try to gather as many opportunities as possible offered by the black swan phenomenon" (Taleb, 2017).

Sir Karl Popper has pleaded countless times for the pre-Socratics to return to "the simple rationality", to their courage to invent Western science, which did not start with the inventory of observations about oranges, but with bold theories about the world" (Popper, 2018). What generated the problem of knowledge more than two and a half millennia ago was how the ancient Greeks marveled at the phenomenon of change: "any change means the change of something: change involves something that changes. And it also assumes that this something remains the same during the change. […] It is essential for the idea of change that the thing that changes retains its identity during the change. However, it becomes something else" (Popper, 2018).

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