

THE END OF THE WEST? TOWARDS THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

(Lucian Boia, *Sfârșitul occidentului? Spre lumea de mâine* [The End of the West? Towards the World of Tomorrow], Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, ISBN: 978-973-50-4010-9, 124 pp)

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Especially during the times of deep economic, social and political crises, of historical and structural changes, people wondered about the becoming of the society they lived in, where did the changes come from and who made them happen, where the society was going to evolve? This historical background was the soil for the occurrence of great civilisations theoreticians, prominent philosophers of the history and of the culture such as those from the beginnings of the modernity (Morus, Campanella, Bacon, Hobbes etc.), those from the age of Enlightenment (Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, Hegel etc.) or those from the late modernity (Oswald Spengler, Arnold J. Toynbee, Nikolai Alexandrovici Berdiaev, Emil Cioran etc.) or even those from the contemporary times – probably in larger number than all the above. Their answers to such issues usually went into a paradigm that might reside in at least three ideas: ‘we cannot nu think and agree on an imminent end of the human world, of the human condition, but on a deep transformation of the existing culture and civilisation that is going to produce a deeply renewed society; the occurrence and consolidation of a new civilisation does not mean a total break related to the previous ones, which this is one comes from; the future civilisation is designed and outlined in a more or less prophetic style, putting into value a more or less deterministic methodology.

In such a theoretical framework, in his work “The Decline of the West”, published in 1918 and 1922, and written under Goethe’s, Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s influences, Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) replaced the linear paradigm of representation of the universal history with the cyclic one, denying the existence of a general meaning of the historical evolution of the cultures and civilisations. The eight great civilisations Spengler had identified had cyclic evolutions, likely to the evolution of a living body: birth, growing up, old age, and death. This historical cycle is also valid for the Western civilisation which might find itself in the decline stage, the old age one, following to fall likely to the falling of the antic Egypt. (Spengler, 1918; Spengler, 1922) The philosophical works of the history written by Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975) (Toynbee, 1997) and N. A. Berdiaev (1874-1948) (Berdiaev, 1995) follow the same type of approach. The latest claims that the human society goes to a new Middle Ages following the path of a revolution of the

spirit, of the human conscience, and of the creative activity. The Revolution does not look like a sunrise, more likely it appears to be a sunset, implying deep transformations, upheavals, and catastrophes; passing to the *New Age* cannot occur peacefully.

Professor Lucian Boia's¹ work enrolls into this thinking trend of reflections on the humankind history, especially related to the evolution of the Western society, being written as an essay and being accessible to a large reading audience.

Referring to the West, professor Boia appreciates that this one is at a crossroads, in the meaning that "one history ends and another is taking shape". It is not the end of the world but it is something likely to it: the end of *a world*. One world sunset and one can visualise through the mist the undefined shapes of a new world" (Boia, 2013, 5). It is not a novelty in the history: there had been cultures and civilisations at similar crossroads. However, on the globalisation background, two major phenomena characterise the "break" that the West is living nowadays: history speed-up and levelling the world, the communities, and the states. In such a framework, the West shows signs of fatigue as if it has accomplished its mission: inventing the technological society and unifying the planet. Its leader's position is fading away while other poles of power, other civilisations have a growing impact on the world's evolution. The cleavage between the West and the "others" will render nothing to be as it was before in the future society.

Born on the Christian religion grounds, the West almost entirely rural after the dismantling of the Roman Empire started to get strength during the 12th-13th centuries, taking some elements of culture and civilisation from others (the classic Antiquity, Chinese, Arabs, Indians, Jews products, etc.). What the West brings new is the scientific research, particularly the experimental science that led to the industrial revolution and the technological civilisation. The Science on man and mankind led to the acceptance of human rights and freedoms, of the diversity, of the democracy, and of the rule of law. Gradually, the West reaches a "scary ranking" (Boia, 2013, 27) related to the rest of the world; the other peoples are to be attached to it and live a process of acculturation. Consequently, the current planet civilisation is the Western one, within which "since the light bulb to the democracy everything came out from the Western laboratory" (Boia, 2013, 29). But as the author remarks, the West invented also bad, even terrible things: the

¹ Professor Lucian Boia is titular at the Faculty of History within the University of Bucharest. He published works in Romania and in France. Some of his works have been translated into English, German, and other foreign languages, and they were from areas such as: the history of ideas, the philosophy of history, the culturology, the imaginary role in the history, etc. Illustrative are titles such as: „Jocul cu trecutul. Istoria între adevăr și ficțiune” (*Playing with the Past: History between Truth and Fiction*) (1998, 2002, 2008, 2013), “Mitologia științifică a comunismului” (*Scientific Mythology of the Communism* 1999, 2005, 2011), “Sfârșitul lumii. O istorie fără de sfârșit” (*The end of the world. Never-ending story*) (1999, 2007) , “For a history of the imaginary” (2000, 2006) , “Mitul democrației” (*The Myth of Democracy*) (2003, 2013) , “Occidentul. O interpretare istorică” (*The West. A Historical Interpretation*) (2007).

slaves trade, the colonialism, the communism, and the fascism, the genocide, the two world wars, etc.

Asking himself *how and how it expresses itself the current fall of the West?*, Lucian Boia identifies and analyses few historical trends, expressing themselves in the West, even having a role of preventing, stagnation or even to take backwards the socio-economical life. Among them the most obvious are: the demographic collapse; the economic crisis and stagnation, while other poles of power develop strongly; the crash of the technologies monopole – “the others” continue to take over the new ready-made technologies; the economic-financial crisis started in 2007 is just a first episode in a wide series, marking obviously the hyphenated decline of the Western world; the balance of power is moving in favour of other worldwide poles (China, India, Brazil); “the others” are no longer dominated, they are partners, though the Christianity remains the origin pattern of the European civilisation, an increasingly larger part of the Western population started to be embarrassed of its Christian dimension, many people becoming atheists or indifferent from Christian point of view; the earthy values, the welfare in this world won the battle with the “afterlife”, the Christian belief that shaped the Western civilisation faded away, not playing any longer the role it had before; the globalisation is about to dissolve the nations into a planetary amalgam by cancelling the borders, by the mixture of ethnicities, ideologies and religions; Western democracies seem to be tired as if they have fulfilled their mission; the capitalism itself presents signs of fatigue, producing more and more failures; the social inequities are not concordant to the proclaimed rights, to the legalised equity; the globalisation generates economic, social, political, and military “undemocratic” trends which do not take into consideration the crowds’ will, not the citizens’ votes; the West records a deficit of utopia, of ideal after the past superabundance; the Western world became a multicultural area assaulted by the emigrants’ waves, cultures, religions and ethnicities – which is not bad, but poverty, marginalisation, quarrelling risks are foreseen; more and more obvious is the look of the West likely to a “fortress under siege” where we could imagine all kind of confrontations and conflicts; the Western culture traditional model tends to be dominated by a “Brownian movement” particularly because of the ascension of the internet and of the “show-time” cultures.

The author considers that, related to each of these historical trends expressed in the Western society, factor of counteraction intervene so their efficiency might be stopped and it might result a new synthesis of civilisation, in time. It might a more democratic world just as it might be a less democratic one, because the future of democracy is not entirely sure not even in the West. The author claims that “the long-term solution should be an improbable but so necessary reconciliation in the absence of which the disaster is lurking at the horizon” (Boia, 2013, 119).

There is no doubt that the historical trends characteristic for the nowadays West, which the author presents, are not real, visible, and true processes. Considering this state of the Western society, questions arise: What direction is the

West going to? How would the architecture of the new planetary civilization look like in 2050-2060? What position will hold the Western world in the new world order?

The author avoids answering to such questions reasoning that the only undeniable truth “is the rupture” (Boia, 2013, 121). We do not know about the future or we “know” so little thing and so antagonist that is like we do not know anything. We cannot anticipate how much would the Western world detach from its own past, how much other cultures would alter or cover it. There are infinite projections and scenarios on the future of the West, but we cannot know which are going to be its direction and way of evolution; we know absolutely nothing on the true future. In this regard, plenty reasoning is made out of which it results that all prophecies have been refuted by the real course of events. Consequently, crucial events, major crises, wars, etc. came suddenly into the history, they could not be predicted. Who could predict the great oil shock of 1973, the communist system crash, the terrorist attack of 2001, the financial crisis of 2007 or the Arabic “spring”? The great prophecies launched by the Club of Rome around 1970 or those from Francis Fukuyama’s book, published in 1991 (Fukuyama, 1994), did not come out true. Therefore, the future cannot be anticipated. (Fukuyama, 1994, 11)

It results from the presented aspects that Lucian Boia is an adept of the social-historical un-determinism and that he tries to fight against the “anticipators” position, of the futurologists’ standing. Therefore, despite admitting that there are causality and objective laws in the history, that certain regularities in events occurrence can be noticed, the author considers that the actions of the huge number of small and massive causes, curdling into an amalgam, is very hard to know and weigh. We cannot know in advance the result of such complex interactions between the causes and the causing lines.

Obviously, this author’s position is debatable. On the occasion of the launching of the book, a famous Romanian thinker – Gabriel Liiceanu - highlighted aspects of author’s subjectivity and limits of his standing on the possibility to predict certain trends of the future evolution of the West. Beyond these observations, it is hard to accept the “undetermination state” allowed for the society development and, starting from here, the impossibility to make certain predictions or approximations on the future evolutions. If social interactions would develop at hazard, if social movement and development would of Brownian type, then, indeed we could not anticipate for the future. Nevertheless, are not really there objective laws, a systemic organisation of the society regulating its evolution? Do not the socio-economic and political processes submit themselves to some regularities, to some relatively constant trends during long times in history? If the human society historical becoming is ruled by causes, objective laws, regularities – combined with masses of accidental social phenomena, can we not really accept the functioning of a statistical – probabilistic determinism? In such a case, could it not be possible the relative and limited prediction of the great events and historical trends? (somehow how the meteorologists forecast the weather)? The

“anticipators” place themselves in such postures of thinking, persons whom Professor L. Boia is criticising.

As adept of the indetermination state in the history track, the author cannot avoid the entry into opposition with his own vision on the future of the society. Consequently, the impossibility to predict the future of the society, the idea according to which “when talking about the future, the word *surely should be forbidden*” (Fukuyama, 1994, 91) , enters in opposition with the postulate that the author has stated, and according to which “the world of tomorrow provides at least two certain issues. China will dominate it (which I have already marked down) and it will be warmer” (Fukuyama, 1994, 100) and to another certainty – that nothing would be like it was before. (Fukuyama, 1994, 9)

Appreciated as a whole, Professor Boia’s work presents a unitary and original conception, dese in ideas covering the contemporary world, especially in Western ones. The style, the language is characterised by precision, concision and clarity – which induces the reader maximal motivation and opening for reading and reflection. The author’s attitude is expressed in prudency, balance in performing the analyses, in drawing the conclusions, and now and then is optimistic. We illustrate these assesments with the end wording of the work: “the man is the most adapting being; so, do not worry, one will fit perfectly to any of the possible histories and will have no reason to regret what once was”. (Fukuyama, 1994, 22)

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