

VASILE CĂTĂLIN BOBB

THEMES OF EXISTENCE

Vasile Cătălin Bobb

Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, The North University Centre of Baia Mare,
Department of Socio-Human Sciences, Theology, Arts, Faculty of Letters, Romania.

Email: vasile.catalin.bobb@cunbm.utcluj.ro

Review of Istvan Kiraly V., *Existence(s). Short Deep Forage Chapters*. Balti: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017.

Key words: existence, nothing, religious education, the sacred, myth, ciphers, hermeneutics, euthanasia, Istvan Kiraly V.

How to approach such an intricate concept as existence? Perhaps, if Badiou is right to assert that the entire field of contemporary philosophy can be isolated only in hermeneutics, analytical philosophy and postmodernism (Badiou 2008), Istvan Kiraly will find himself in a privileged position. The entire structure of the book is marked by hermeneutics, or, better said, by hermeneutical phenomenology. His hermeneutical endeavor has at its basis the author's previous interests, unfolded in his philosophical work: from applied philosophy, to philosophy of religion, to existential metaphysics, to transcendental philosophy or to analysis in the field of secular ethics, bioethics and biopolitics.

But, is there enough to assert that the concept of *existence* is covered (or developed) in Istvan Kiraly's book under the sign of hermeneutics? Perhaps other types of discourse, such as religious or metaphysical, will do justice in the case of *existence*. Istvan Kiraly resorts to philosophical hermeneutics as an authentic source of thinking in relation with the religious hermeneutics and the theological practices from which he explicitly dissociates in this book, but also in other works.

To be precise, it seems to me that Istvan Kiraly is not far from a metaphysical discourse (see Chapter I, *The names of the nothing* and Chapter V, *The meaning of life – and the possibility of human illness*) blended into a rigorous hermeneutical approach, always attentive to the poetic dimension of words (see Chapter III, *The Sacred or the Bright Sounds of Silence*) and, perhaps, in the proximity of a sort of sacred *weltanschauung* (see chapter IV, *Ciphers, Existence and the Musicality of Making Philosophy*).

Therefore, even if Istvan Kiraly names his chapters *Short ... Chapters* we, as readers, should understand the adjective *short* as grasping previous elaborated analyses (Kiraly 2001; Kiraly 2003; Kiraly 2011). Furthermore, in this book, Istvan Kiraly employs, beside a rigorous philosophical framework, a sort of poetic attention. The author is always attentive to the voice of the poet, be that the voice of Attila Joseph, Friedrich Holderlin or Rainer Maria Rilke. Therefore, it seems to me that when Istvan Kiraly writes about *nothing*, *liberty*, *truth*, *the sacred*, *ciphers* and so on, he writes always at two hands – a philosophical one and a poetic one. Let us give here an example: when commenting a poem by Attila Joseph, Istvan Kiraly asserts: „The path is about freeing oneself for deceptive hopes and renouncing them. The result is first of all the clear, un-deceptive mind. Which nods wisely and cleverly, being freed of, or rejecting hope” (Kiraly 2017, 27). Before describing the structure and the ideas of the present book, one final remark is required. One should understand that Istvan Kiraly is situated in what we can name, after Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, hermeneutic phenomenology i.e., an analysis that follows rules and procedures (understanding foremost that the human being is a

historical being) beyond epistemology, logical formalism or theory of science.

Thus, Istvan Kiraly manages to isolate some marks in order to develop a type of Heideggerian analysis that pinpoints new ideas in the realm of philosophical discourse regarding the existence. For instance, in the first chapter, *The names of nothing*, Istvan Kiraly displays an intricate and interesting demonstration on a concept such as „nothing” that shows that, at least in its Hungarian version (SEMMI), nothing „never negates the searching itself, only places and fixes it in its deficient modes. (...) This way, the SEM charges, emphasizes and outlines the NOT, but, it also stimulates the search until *the exhaustion of its final emptiness*” (Kiraly 2017, 21). Bluntly, Istvan Kiraly always finds, whatever the topic is, a new path to explore.

In Chapter II, *Liberty and truth – Fragments about the „cave-myth”*, Istvan Kiraly stipulates that, when grasping the meaning of either liberty or truth, one can never separate them. After Heidegger, says Istvan Kiraly V, we should always understand truth as „expressed” and „definite” in liberty. Or, plainly said, the question on truth requires liberty and vice versa. But Istvan Kiraly goes even further and proposes that, perhaps, „they (truth and liberty n.m.) rather are – in a more profound sense – the existence-like divisions of belonging to one another, respectively of belonging to (the) existence” (Kiraly 2017, 31). The entire endeavor on liberty and truth has, in fact, a precise scope: to show, in a rigorous and precise manner, that in existence (mine, yours, theirs), or here and now, the problem of liberty and truth functions as tasks and, above all, as challenges were truth has meaning only in liberty, or, were truth does not lose its existential character.

Therefore, Istvan Kiraly, in the second part of the chapter, engages in a – possibly – lost battle with the status of philosophy in Bologna educational system. Philosophy, as a teaching subject, is marginalized and Istvan Kiraly believes that sometimes the results of philosophical education are diminished by the major role played by the religious education in public schools: „I am thinking about the fact that doctrinal religious education is compulsory in Romania, to the best of my knowledge singularly in Europe, from elementary school to the end of secondary school (age 18). In addition to violating human rights – since children ideologically indoctrinated ever since age 6 or 7 should have the rights to decide freely and openly for themselves in such matters – this of course also tailors, a priori and determinately, the possible horizons of inquiry, directions and inclinations of questions and answers for people who have grown up this way. So one of the most serious problems that I face as a professor of philosophy is that students seem to lose, year by year, the open inclination for questioning, or that most of the students’ “own” questions are formulated in a yet hardly movable religious and theological determination and framework” (Kiraly 2017, 68).

We do not go further into the debate about the role of religious education and the place of philosophical education in Romania, since the topic is already investigated. (Frunză, Frunză, Herteliu 2009, 129-149; Moise 2004, 77-100; Frunză, Frunză, Grad, Grad, Bobb 2011, 151-161). Nevertheless, it is important to underline that Istvan Kiraly identifies the commodification of philosophy as such, or the reification of an act (that of philosophizing) that transforms philosophy in an object where in fact, as Istvan Kiraly says, a „philosophical science” could not have any other purpose than what philosophy itself drives from: the problematic, historical and factually accepted ontology of human freedom!” (Kiraly 2017, 61). Let us repeat here the finale sequences of the fragment quoted above – “ontology of human freedom!” – in order to better understand the position assumed by the Romanian professor. Not without a shadow of naiveté (charged with irony), we can grasp such a strong position. But, in fact, Istvan Kiraly stipulates something very simple: the task of genuine philosophical reflection refutes any ideological incorporation, be that of Bologna system where philosophy becomes (like everything else) a commodity. In fewer words, Istvan Kiraly assumes and desires, I think, a sort of Humboldtian educational system where the products of school are humans not goods. Thus, following the logic of commodification of philosophy, Istvan Kiraly speaks about philosophy without philosophers or „philosophy without thinker” as a common fact of contemporaneity. Although his view is a bit bitter and perhaps a bit excessive, Istvan Kiraly proposes a clear radiography of the status of philosophy and of the philosopher in present-day societies.

A fundamental question marks the entire third chapter, *The Sacred, or the bright sounds of Silence*, i.e., „what is the relation of the sacred ... to the transgression of metaphysics?” (Kiraly 2017, 85). And the answer is, at least for Istvan Kiraly, mediated by or, better said, found through poetry. The depth of the analysis of the philosophy of religion brought by the hermeneutical discourse proposed by Istvan Kiraly can be perceived from the following poetical revelation of the horizon of the sacred: „The growth of the shining light is the most silent of all events. When the poet names this, he does not add something to nature externally, but expresses and grows (exclaims!) it. Nature grows the poet, the poet grows nature. Nature and its advent in the poetic word, which names and grows its light by its own constraint: that is the sacred. Not simply emerging, because mourning, darkness, calmness is also being-on-the-way, that is, actually emerging” (Kiraly 2017, 87). Poetry tackles, for example, the fact of existence in a manner attentive to the „silence” of words. It is not Istvan Kiraly’s intention to question, in a critical manner, the role of poetry but only to show the bounds between poetry and „essential thinking”. For Kiraly, if Heidegger „utters existence”, Holderlin „names the sacred” (Kiraly 2017, 99) and the very act (be that philosophical or poetic) suffice.

In Chapter IV, *Ciphers, Existence and the Musicality of Making Philosophy*, Istvan Kiraly attempts a (de)cipher of Jaspers' philosophy. Of course, the author's purpose is to situate inside the thematic of existence a philosopher of existence. With Jasper, Istvan Kiraly finds an ally in his endeavor. The religious dimension of Jaspers's thought is converted, through the hermeneutic effort practiced by Istvan Kiraly, in an act of philosophical reflection and of metaphysical construction, where the entering the sphere of transcendence is realized amid the integration of man in the flux of significations of life marked by the philosophical resources of meaning.

It is as if Jasper proves what Istvan Kiraly thinks: the ciphers of existence situate human beings in a reality where the surplus of meaning cannot be exhausted. Or, to put it in the author's words: „just like in music, Jaspers' themes also have energetic surpluses exceeding inner necessities which abstracting and condensing the temporality of the whole, ensure the stresses of its transformation” (Kiraly 2017, 109).

With chapters V, *The meaning of life and the possibility of human illness - prolegomena*, and VI, *Euthanasia or Death Assisted to its dignity*, we can understand the authors' methodological stand point, a methodology, in fact, allured through the entire chapters of the book. For Istvan Kiraly, the „ontological”, „existential” and „historical” side of any thematization is, to put it bluntly, the only possible thematization. Hence, existence, to reclaim here the main topic of Istvan Kiraly's book, can be thematized only if history, existential and ontology are present. In a way, any other attempt is doomed to fail as long as existence is at stake. And, through detailed analyses of illness and euthanasia, Istvan Kiraly shows that „existence” cannot support any other methodology. Thus, the chapters develop a sort of analytic investigation of illness and euthanasia as central possibilities of humans. They are not margins of existence, but the inner „possibilities of meaning” (Kiraly 2017, 184). In a way, Istvan Kiraly assumes that with illness and euthanasia we are in the center of existence.

The book ends with an interesting appendix, *Library secrets founds and the competition of societies*, where Istvan Kiraly applies philosophical analysis on the concept of secret, resorting to a well structured historic example.

Before concluding, I want to emphasize an idea that goes beyond the topics of the book *per se*. It seems to me that Istvan Kiraly has a distinct way of doing philosophy, that I named hermeneutic phenomenology, but only for methodological reasons. It is clear that Istvan Kiraly follows Heidegger and the entire tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, but only to articulate his own thoughts. Thus, for instance, to remain in the proximity of the topics addressed by the book, with illness, euthanasia and ciphers Istvan Kiraly advances a renewed methodology, a methodology that assumes the act of existence as the pivotal act. In a way, Istvan Kiraly assumes a sort of existentialism, different from the French or Russian versions, embodied in hermeneutics.

There is a peculiar way of doing philosophy that, in my opinion, marks Kiraly's discourse: a reclaim of a sort of genuine philosophical reflection. It seems to me that with *Existence(s)*... Istvan Kiraly assumes and declares the urgency of philosophy. I am not sure if Istvan Kiraly's lament is entitled; perhaps it is, but what we, as readers, can see is an authentic concern of a thinker in front of (our) existence.

References:

Badiou, Alain. 2008. *Manifest pentru filosofie*. Cluj-Napoca: Idea.

Frunză, Mihaela, Sandu Frunză, Iulia Grad, Ovidiu-Nicolae Grad, Cătălin Vasile Bobb. 2011. "Formare filosofică și expertiză etică: implicație sau incompatibilitate?" (Philosophical Training and Ethical Expertise: Implication or Incompatibility?). In Tomiță Ciulei, Cristian Sandache, Antonio Sandu (coord.). *Logos - Universalitate - Mentalitate - Educație - Noutate*. Iași: Lumen, 151-161.

Frunză, Sandu, Mihaela Frunză, Claudiu Herteliu. 2009. „Philosophy, ideology, religion. An attempt to understand what is going on with philosophy in the Romanian educational system”. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 8, issue 22: 129-149.

Kiraly, Istvan V. 2017. *Existence(s). Short Deep Forage Chapters*. Balti: Lap Lambert.

Kiraly, Istvan V. 2001. *Fenomenologia existențială a secretului - Încercare de filosofie aplicată*. Pitești: Paralela '45.

Kiraly, Istvan V. 2003. *A halál és a meghalás tapasztalata*. Budapest: Közdok Könyvkiadó.

Kiraly, Istvan V. 2011. *A betegség - az élő létlehetősége - Prolegoména az emberi betegség filozófiájához*. Bratislava: Kalligram.

Moise, Emil. 2004. „Relația Stat-Biserică în privința educației religioase în școlile publice din România/ Church-State Relation in the Religious Education in Romanian Public Schools”. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 3 issue 7: 77-100.