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### APPRECIATIVE PHILOSOPHY. TOWARDS A CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH OF PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

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**Abstract:** The constructionist approach of philosophy includes an epistemic dimension and a pragmatic emphasis on the interdependence between knowledge and action in the social areas. Appreciative approach to philosophy is based on the work of David Cooperrider on “Appreciative Inquiry”, which is a form of pragmatic discourse that substitutes the focus on the problem with the focus on successful elements of previous experience of individuals, groups, organizations or communities. This experience can be integrated in the philosophical discourse starting from Plato's dialogues and maieutic method promoted by Socrates. Hermeneutic of the real seen as a philosophical reflection on the daily positive experiences falls into tradition of philosophical search of the ultimate meaning of reality. The appreciative speech starts from a postmodern view by a constructivist and constructionist approach, through which reality itself is a social construction generated by successive negotiations on accepted interpretations.

Appreciative philosophy is centered on a semiotics grid that seeks positive qualities of existence and its strengths. Appreciative theology reveals a collaborative process between humanity and divine that catalyzes transformations in human being giving them life including eternal life. The communion human-Divinity is seen as a divine-human co-creation.

**Key Words:** appreciative inquiry, appreciative teaching, constructionism, appreciative philosophy, appreciative theology

## Introduction

Appreciative philosophy is centered on a semiotics grid that seeks positive qualities of existence and its strengths. Vicki Hammel<sup>1</sup> in his thesis *Appreciative Philosophy: the Emerging Context and the Transformative Power of Co-creation* believes that appreciative philosophy is a collaborative creative process completed by a social construction based on the significant results of the dialogue between stakeholders.

Appreciative approach to philosophy is based on the work of David Cooperrider on "Appreciative Inquiry", which is a form of pragmatic discourse that substitutes the focus on the problem with the focus on successful elements of previous experience of individuals, groups, organizations or communities. This experience can be integrated in the philosophical discourse starting from Plato's dialogues and maieutic method promoted by Socrates.

In the context of postmodern constructionism, themes of philosophizing are pretexts of discursive construction or deconstruction of structures of thought foreshadowed by questioning the meanings of their approaches in the contemporary world. Philosophy is in its ultimate essence a problematical speech. The deconstruction of problematization, in our view, do not annihilate the philosophical concerns, but put them in relation with the individual experience which are interrogatively returned of the individual's very own experience, of sources and meanings of them.

The destiny of applied philosophy is to put in the hands of those who are interested in, very different ways of understanding and interpretative instruments regarding the continuous negotiation of interpretations processes and principles underlying them, and how to decrypt the hidden meanings in the very process of interpretation<sup>2</sup>.

## Constructionism and postmodernism

Constructionism is seen as part of the postmodern paradigm because of models relativization and reporting reality to negotiation of interpretations. Constructionist epistemology is through its structure close to postmodernism, to Lyotard's vision, according to which our picture of reality is a narration, a consensus of speech - considers Hacking<sup>3</sup>. The scientific discourse is a particular form of speech and can be analyzed in a constructionist manner as textual analysis.

Constructionism can be methodological used based on the importance of the epistemic subject in the social construction of truth<sup>4</sup>. The concept of truth has therefore significance in relation to a socially accepted fact or experience. Social constructionism can be applied to a series of theories that have as a starting point Gergen's work. Constructionism<sup>5</sup> is concerned mainly with explaining the processes by

which people come to describe, explain and take note of the world they live in and it includes them. Campbell, Coldicott and Kinsella<sup>6</sup> believe that the constructionist view proposes a model through which reality is created in the process of communication and with language tools, each individual influencing and shaping the responses of others. Constructionist emphasis is on the network of interactions between individuals in the communication process. As a postmodern orientation, constructionism deconstructs the ontic in terms of independent existence, moving reality at the level of language experience. Significance and meaning of words are not given on a correspondence theory of truth but especially of a theory of social negotiation of the meaning and indirect of substitution concept of truth with the concept of adequacy and verisimilitude. Continuing the Campbell's idea, we can consider that the illusion of ontological rupture between subject and object should be eliminated and replaced by a construct of inter-subjective reality<sup>7</sup>. Analyzing Van Nistel Roof's opinion, Van der Haar considers the fundamental concern on constructionism as a sensification process - meaning creation- by which individuals give a meaning to the subjective experience on reality. There is a co-creating process of meaning through negotiations of interpretational attitude. Individuals are thus capable to produce different and parallels realities<sup>8</sup>.

Van der Haar commenting the philosophical significance of constructionism indicates the adherence of this trend to an alternative epistemology because knowledge and reality analysis can only be the contingent of human relations being the result of continuous practice of reification, sedimentation and habitualization. The constructionist perspective can not admit knowledge itself, free of any axiological foundation nor can conceptualize a disjunctively between subjective and objective which involves a clear distinction between knowledge and reality.

The central premises of constructionism proposed by Van der Haar, from contributions of Burr, Gergen and Bouwen, are:

- Social constructionism assumes that the world cannot be known as it is but rather as a series of multiple socially constructed realities;
- Social constructionism sees language, communication and speech as having the central role of the interactive process by which we understand the world and ourselves;
- Social constructionism sees language and communication as a process of coordination of actors;
- Social constructionism deals with relational process through which social actors construct social realities;
- Social constructionism requires an exclusive distinction between subject and object; it is not a happy or necessary construction and therefore proposes the overcome of the

restrictive dualism that sees the two as existing independently of each other;

- Social constructionism adepts consider important the reflection on the social, cultural and historical fund of our assumptions and constructs and maintain of our openness to other possible realities constructed<sup>9</sup>.

Constructionist Semiotics falls usually in the general trend of postmodernism promoting interdisciplinary knowledge. We prefer to place constructionism at the level of an area of intersection between postmodernism and transmodernism precisely because of the aspects of network analysis made possible by constructionism. Affirmative orientation specific to transmodernism can be exemplified in a particular area of constructionism: appreciative model.

The social development, being essentially an integrative process<sup>10</sup>, is prone to transdisciplinarity, and that's why I chose this dimension of social practice to illustrate the interpretative drift of some social techniques caused by changes in a paradigm<sup>11</sup> offered by the shift from transmoderne epistemology centered on interconnection.

Constructionism, as an epistemic method, is drafted by Burr through the following fundamental assertions:

- The anti-essentialist nature of constructionism and critical understanding of access to knowledge<sup>12</sup>. This view precludes understanding the nature of knowledge as equivalent to the existence. According to this view what exists is what we can grasp, in one form or another, in a way that we can understand its very own existence. Our knowledge is rather dependent on the construction we rely on, in interpreting the real, the construction being developed in daily interactions between individuals.

- Antirealism. The version of reality in which we live is socially and culturally constructed through interaction, and it can not be an objective fact but rather an assumption of a significant model<sup>13</sup>.

- Historical and cultural relativism of knowledge and of the concept of truth<sup>14</sup>. All forms of knowledge, both scientific and common, have intrinsic historical and cultural specificity. Truth itself varies historically and culturally, as a concept based on social interaction processes by which people are related. Thus transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity is possible because globalization is a construct of contemporary culture.

The constructionism itself has an anti-naturalist vision starting from the following perspectives: the theories do not describe reality itself but a rebuilt in consciousness, going to the point where it introduces in the theory entities whose existence there are no experimental evidence or observation, but make theory coherent, consistent and with measurable results. We can consider the measurement of results a consequence of the theory and the way of choosing the type of experience or observation to be made and an inherent pre-quantification of results that is expected to

be obtained. Thereby, the scientific theories, especially the contemporary ones, are themselves social constructs in a special form of social interaction called scientific research, and in a given social, cultural and historical context called contemporary science and the scientific community. Gergen moves the interpretive focus from reality to reality context and social network which generates for the individual the experience of reality. Gergen makes a remark towards the Cartesian vision, paraphrasing Descartes: "I am connected therefore I exist"<sup>15</sup>. By the paradigm change proposed by Gergen, epistemology becomes dependent to semiology, as "reality" itself is a sign constructed in a social convention.

### **Religious background of affirmative (appreciative) paradigm**

The historical model of appreciative paradigm consists in Beatitudes Theology<sup>16</sup>. Appreciative theology reveals a collaborative process between humanity and divine that catalyzes transformations in human being giving them life including eternal life. The communion human-Divinity is seen as a divine-human co-creation. In this respect Tudor Ghiddeanu<sup>17</sup> spoke about a theandric sense of love. The author states that, in the vision of Orthodox Theology, Creation is a movement generating love of God towards man. In the context of Christian spirituality "appreciation" is no longer a social construct that generates a positive semantic but a movement within God through which God becomes human and within the human He transfigures Himself in glorification. The term "theandric" in Tudor Ghiddeanu's vision is composed by juxtaposing of the Greek words: Theos-God and Andros- Man. The term means a bi-univocal passage between God and man. This passage is the very process of glorification. The co-creative process generates in Orthodox Christianity salvation and glorification.

Christian process of salvation is a deliberate choice of positive inspired by the supreme power generating life which in the Orthodox vision is the Holy Spirit. Draining the passions (Kenosis) as a deliberate process of generating a positive sense make Christians approach each other and be together.

New Testament theology is in essence a positive appreciation. The equivalent to the 10 Commandments in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ is the Beatitudes (Happy is the one who...). The Christian vision chooses to replace the retributive ethics with the affirmative one.

Ethical approach as a logical construction is based on an axiological focus. A congruent philosophical system, from an axiological point of view, may, in principle, generate an ethical system. Christian ethics has, or should have, as a fundamental value love, value which seems to be the center of the axiological doctrine of Jesus Christ. "Love your neighbor as yourself" generates an ethical construction based on altruism and oriented towards alterity as a mean of ethical expression. A Christian

pragmatic could be seen as serving ones neighbor. The dimensions of Christian love aims at a first level for forgiveness, acceptance and commitment.

### Dimensions of affirmative ethics

The ethical- axiological vetero- Testamentary system as we perceive it today has as a fundamental value reciprocity or retribution. The system appears to be expressed by the phrase “eye for eye, tooth for tooth”. The moral principles: Do not steal, do not lie, do not commit adultery, are applicable since there is a retribution-punishment for their violation. The logic of retribution has as an onto-axiological substrate the principle of autocracy. God does not allow competition and thus His will acts retributive. “I am your God, you shall not have other gods besides me”. Affirming the uniqueness of God is opposed to prohibition of alterity “you shall not have other gods besides me”.

The prohibition of alterity, in fact the ban of accepting alterity or reporting to alterity is seen as a denial of the multiple possible. The phrase “I am your God, you shall not have other gods besides me” does not absolutely deny the existence of other gods but one is prohibited to report to them. A jealous and possessive God prohibits idolatry by law as a form of spiritual adultery. Ethical postulates are negative, being based on a categorical “shall not”. Operating in a limiting sense, they generate a pragmatic as: “what if”, an exacerbation of temptation, as a form of ownership of a non-negative freedom. Adam’s prohibition was violated because of an attitudinal assumption of freedom. It is interesting that the evil retort serpent was that in fact there is no retribution, that there are no consequences to actions. And yet according to the biblical myth there was a fall. In the logic of prohibition, any assumption of freedom proposes fall as an alternative.

Are the two systems vetero and New Testament compatible from an axiological and ethical point of view? Christian Ethics proposes a positive pragmatic type: “Love and do what you want”. Love is the guarantee of positivism. Love transcends the prohibition, because is no longer negative as a punishment but positive as salvation. Salvation is not a retribution of good deeds as you might believe in the logic of a prohibition, but the affirmation of God's will as a saving intention. Salvation comes in the redemption of sins, which God himself through the sacrifice of his own Son unites logic of retribution with logic of freedom. Retribution continues to exist, but is absorbed by the grace of God. Fall is canceled by descent. Adam man fell from heaven, and Christ, the new Adam, went down first on earth then in hell. God assumes retribution thus generating redemption. Such an ethics is possible only in a theological affirmative system. God is love and does not require anything other than to show such love for Him thus He can be the one that works through you. Love is not

therefore an onto-axiological utopia to generate an impossible pragmatic but is seen as an affirmation of God in the world. The two ethical and axiological systems are thus disjoint from an ontic perception point of view but are praxiological complementary. It is interesting to note that the proposed ethical discourse of Jesus Christ was founded in the form of Beatitudes, opposed to the prohibitions of the Old Testament. Affirmative Ethics proposed by Jesus in the form of the Beatitudes, is neither restrictive nor mandatory but pragmatic as by applying these principles one can obtain a happiness state.

### **Affirmative- appreciative ethic values. Success and grace**

In *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Max Weber makes an analysis on the types of society, generated by specific religious ethical vision. A society in which salvation is the privilege of the chosen ones and the sign is personal success generates in Max Weber's vision an individualistic society that represents the capitalism pragmatic roots of nowadays. "Work and individual success are forms of love to others because as fulfilling your mission you help the achievement of God's will"<sup>18</sup>. Salvation is seen by Protestants as grace that is working. Signs of grace are the individual successes and individual work. Work is itself asceticism made possible by manifestation of grace. Originality, authenticity is the triumph of individualism, nature and personal guarantee of success. Success is an axiological value generating ethics systems. The Christian phrase "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" derives in American neo-protestantism vision an ethic vision which proposes valuing the individual. The overturning of the Christian phrase is understood as well as: if you do not love yourself you can not therefore love your neighbor. Love of neighbor is a bi-univocal connection with alterity. Moving focus from love to neighbor, the logical Ethics of Weber focuses on selfishness. The phrase "as you love yourself" means a measure, *as much* but *as well as how*. Lack of love, of self esteem, implies lack of love towards neighbor, placing us in a logic of *as much*. As little as you love yourself you can love your neighbor as well. At the same time there is the logical *as that* can be expressed by the Romanian saying "What you do not like for you do not do it to another". Opposite to logic of love that is essentially a logic of complementarity, completeness and reflection in the other, individualism, is the other side of ego alterity relationship. Not accidentally contemporary psychology emphasizes personal development techniques, and focusing on success. Weber considers that the individualistic paradigm has its origins in the religious sense of the presence of Grace. Grace, God's grace acting essentially free, even indifferent to human actions, transposes the chosen ones into a special status of ontological aristocracy, as God's chosen, as privileged of God's will. God's will is free, and the grace which flows from the sacrifice of Jesus

is given by God to His chosen ones. The sign of the chosen ones must be a form of restoring heaven on earth. This restoration of heaven is the very success. Success becomes thus a “metaphysical” category, a participation of the chosen ones to ontological extreme situations caused by the presence of God. In popular language we could say that “those loved by God” are helped by God. Work ethic is a combination between the idea of success as a guarantee of Grace and the idea of the resemblance with God. God works through people and for people, so work is a way of accessing the divine through its presence in its own work. “I can see God as He works through me”. Weber’s explanation leaves open the discussion on how ontological individualism becomes praxiological individualism. Personal success as a special ontological status of the one becomes personal success as the socially privileged of fate.

### **Affirmative- appreciative ethics and vocational theology**

Spiritualist religious foundation of Western postmodern and transmoderne society is evident in the way its values are implemented. Export of democracy achieved by the USA for example is made on behalf of God's will. U.S. and its allies bear always a decisive battle with evil either communist, terrorist, etc. George Bush presented America as having a divine mission to export democracy and the American model in the world<sup>19</sup>. Theology of vocation is the model of ethics success transposed from the success of an individual chosen by God to the success of the chosen people. Ideology of the chosen people is not new, although being at the origin of Old Testament writings, but also the medieval Crusades, the rise of the Third Reich and the anti-terrorist war fought by the U.S.

Success as a guarantee of choice by God is both at the individual and community level. A nation considers itself chosen either because an ancestor made a pact with the Divine, or because they simply believe in a God who prefers and chooses it under this preference. The axiological foundation of this model is ownership. Ontological privilege is derived from membership of a chosen people, a chosen community, etc.

Logics of membership ethics is today the foundation of identity construction. Constructed identity as belonging to a community, gives force to the individual by guilt diffusion feeling on one hand and by consistency of power on the other hand. Membership ethics is in an axiomatic system of *God is on our side* type. The will of God is identified with the will of the group or leader. The existence of a *primus inter paraes* generates praxiological autarkic systems, because the most untitled is the one chosen by God, who knows, transmits and applies God's will. The elimination of *primus inter paraes* creates ethical democracy by introducing additional equality value. Equality can find its spiritualist foundation according to which people are actually children of God, even if not by birth, but by adoption (as sons of Abraham in Judaism, as brothers



of Christ by baptism into Christianity). Establishment of identity is made in the communion of the chosen ones. The chosen ones are self-set as a church, people, nation, etc. Ethics membership is also an ethics of difference.

Membership is not an ethical axiological principle, but tends to become an ontological establishing. Membership is becoming as well a pseudo-epistemic principle. Guarantee of truth is the membership of the chosen, the wise, the lighting, etc. community. As an ethics of difference, it experiences conflict drama of otherness. The existence of other legitimates the opportunity of ontological privilege on one hand and on the other hand it offers the temptation of isolation. Identity isolation proposed the solution of otherness as a punishment. Dealing with otherness is anguish: *You're either with us or against us*. The Supreme Otherness is God who is seen in vocational theology systems as a God who prefers. Contradiction at a logic level is that God, Absolute and Immutable Transcendence makes an act, that of preferring. God gets out of the state which is *The one that exists*, into the state of Abraham's, Isaac's and Jacob's God that is the one who chooses. The choice requires freedom issues related to evil issues. Evil is a logical guarantee of freedom. Thus the construction of identity opens in front of the other. Whether the other is evil or just different he is "to be known". Community Ethos proposes several solutions for the treatment of otherness. The first such solution is universalism. Community takes everything into possession and becomes the institution that gives meaning, and becomes meaning itself. Thus God can return to Transcendence as community, church are founded.

### **From an atonement ethics to a welfare society**

Max Weber believes that the Catholic ethic is an ethic of intention and atonement<sup>20</sup>. This vision of finitude combined with the ethics grace which is mediated by the church determines the creation of a social welfare society of totalitarian model, as opposed to liberal individualism. Mediation access to transcendence is fundamental. Without the contribution of the church salvation is not possible. There is no salvation through individual effort. The Original Sin cancels the access of human to salvation through personal effort. The Church as the Body of Christ is grace storage. It is no accident that art has flourished particularly in areas where the Catholic Church has imposed it as an external manifestation of the absolute greatness of the church that represents Christ on earth.

The rise of environmental, feminist and ethnic movements have brought to the foreground the fundamental issues faced by man and society in the 20th century. Gilles Lipovetsky claims that the phrase "age of minimalism" is better suited to the postmodern society than "the society of generalised permissiveness". Lipovetsky<sup>21</sup> believes that the postmodern society is a post-moralist one, at the twilight of duty.

Transmodern (“hypermodern” in Lipovetsky’s reading) ethics establishes moral norms based on liberal, pluralist and pragmatic principles. All forms of negation morals are abandoned: not only had that anchored in ontology – such as the paradigm of the God who picks favourites or of the jealous God – even the contractualist perspectives, applied in the modern period, are no longer significant. The preferred focus is on the value of positivism, of cooperation as a source of efficiency, of personal enrichment – be it cultural, spiritual or moral – derived from the access to alterity. Tolerance as an ethical value is legitimised by a utilitarian humanism. The social contract is rather a need for togetherness going beyond spiritual space in the space of social cohabitation. Another value generating coherent systems in transmodern ethics is happiness. Crass hedonism and consumerism result in moral sterility an ethics that defines itself as being beyond morals: neither moral, nor immoral, but instead amoral<sup>22</sup>. We are dealing with a secularization of morals from the perspective of the ontological “emptying” of reality<sup>23</sup> and its transformation, in a constant identification of the meta-narratives established in interpretative conventions<sup>24</sup>. The lack of an anchor in ontology and the placement of absolute freedom and happiness at the top of the axiological priority list generate an ethics of admitted difference and, at the same time, of minimising ethical negation. We can put transmodernism in relation to the network society into the hive society, as a continuation of postmodernism, presenting itself as a society of generalised spectacle, established on the basis of the theory of games and on the exacerbation of seduction strategies – more precisely on simulation and seduction strategies<sup>25</sup>. The categorical imperative is displaced by that of unlimited action, however implying the existence of consequences; the latter are limited to the pragmatic. However, not doing evil within the limits where evil is punished does not mean doing good. Constructionist voluntarism anchors action in personal and social fulfilment as a formula for maintaining happiness.

### **Freedom as an affirmative experience**

Horrific scenes of violence in places such as Guantanamo Bay and Abughraib require redefining freedom in the contemporary context. Violence experience constitutes a problem itself. Reformulating the problem of freedom in the contemporary world from a specific kaleidoscopic world that maybe fractal developed by denying the major structural approaches through the convergence of completely disparate sequences. The method of this research is addressing the phenomenological structuralism, through deconstruction of reality understood as the negotiation of interpretations. The historic event in itself is reconstructed as meaning through a process of “negotiating interpretations”. In this process the reformulation of significance matters

more as the same event under a different language agreement is completely phenomenological altered.

Fractal reconstruction integrates kaleidoscopic aspects of various interpretations starting from the identification of discursive and interpretative constants existing after cultural contamination. Kaleidoscopic aspect is programmatic to respect “the ideal of linguistic structures deconstruction” and conventions of language. Based on the indicated methodology we will analyze the existential meanings of historical and social phenomena in terms of understanding social and historical reality as a construct that was generated through a “reframing” of interpretation. The issue of freedom becomes “a pretext” for the hermeneutic process of initiation of significant construction act. The concept of freedom itself is one such construct which is operated through the significant process to the extent that it can draw around it an interpretive agreement. In our view obtaining an interpretive consent can be based on assumptions already accepted by interlocutor and the cognitive resonances that each of the interlocutors manifest.

Contemporary philosophical discourse is no longer limited to argumentative strategies, contemporary rhetoric being a significant part of the speech as a seductive strategy for an interpretative “empowerment”. More specifically the speech does not explain and persuade but rather persuades seeking “raising the interlocutor” to the level of “abstraction” necessary for interpretive convergence.

Philosophy as any act of communication is achieved by “manipulating fantasy”<sup>26</sup>. Philosophical text is not meant to solve problems but raise other forms of human knowledge interrogations. Philosophy does not teach you to “boil a cabbage” but the specific spirit of questioning opens to science the possibility of a relationship between cabbage and pot. The joke of boiling cabbage is a memorial to the futility of what philosophy does most important and that is specific query about the relationship between universals. Having freedom as our pretext of speech, we will try to find a kaleidoscopic space to show it and pursue an interpretative derive of its meaning in the contemporary world.

## **Freedom as an experience for transcendence access**

The contemporary world is faced with complex socio-political phenomena, which involve upgrading of the issues of freedom, thus it can meet the interpretative requirements specific to postmodernism. The issue of freedom will be combined with the determination issue and through extension with the limitation issue. Absolute freedom defined as the ability to “make” any wish, at any moment of time and space, is an attribute of Deity. In the sphere of humanity, freedom comes up against limits. Shaping individual identity, and with it his freedom, is made subjectively through limiting and difference experience.

Freedom itself knows its own borders either spiritual or cultural, personal, political, etc. Limiting the transcendence of freedom generates in philosophy the problematic of metaphysics. The question: "What is what?" to receive a different response than a negative one like "existence is not" or tautological one such as "existence is what is" it must refer to the category of freedom. This makes the being to self-determine in relation to the void, says Heidegger<sup>27</sup>. While the Absolute has as an attribute the absolute freedom, the existence determined by objects and phenomena, contains inherent freedom in a quantitative way.

Compared to some things or events, an individual can be free in the sense that he can make or not make them and to others that freedom is lacking. The limit of freedom is called constraint. Several such constraints outlined in the metaphysical level are called categories. For example space is a limiting category in the "*omnipotence of spreading*". An individual can exist in a single point in a certain moment in time, while the divine omnipotence is simultaneously acting in the whole space.

Temporality can be understood as limitation for the "*omnipotence of efficiency*" creative, whereas from metaphysical point of view time introduces the causal determination. An event called *effect* necessarily follows another event called *cause*. The two concepts are related as that the happening of the second (effect) is a sign of the previous existence of the first (cause). Conversely the presence of the cause provides further effect. Of course the causes are multiple and can be categorized according to various criteria among which the most important is the certainty of causal relationship, in other words, the certainty with which the presence of the effect can be inferred from the existence of the cause and reverse the existence of cause in the presence of effect. Another type of limitation may be viewed as limiting the knowledge. Divine omniscience is limited in the specific human knowledge as a relative knowledge based on the distinction between subject and object. The human specifically knowledge, says Kant<sup>28</sup>, has a categorical character referring to the "phenomenon" that is how the "thing itself" interact with our own conscience. The issue of freedom for the human being can be linked with the need.

The dialectic of freedom - need is solved under the dialectic form of free will - preset. Free will generally means the ability to orient you towards values and to make choices in full consciousness. Determining in this context is to prevent any form of free choice of the individual. With free will comes the issue of liability. The ability to choose invests you with responsibility for the choices made. If God is omnipotent and omniscient, we ask ourselves why He allows the existence of evil and transgression (sin). Fatalism, on the other hand is facing a similar problem of justification, since the lack of freedom, responsibility for human actions belongs to divinity, but their remuneration shall accrue to the individual. The dilemma is resolved in different ways depending on the specifics of

various philosophical current: for Stoics for example, freedom is equal with the understood need. Man can not preclude the need, but understanding it can reach peace of mind.

Christian philosophy through St. Augustine affirms the existence of free will as part of human nature. Elections are free and the individual is liable even if God has a prescience of these elections. Martin Luther, on the other hand, will affirm the determination and lack of free will. Lutheran doctrine has as a social effect the diluting of the moral through lack of responsibility. From the perspective of social philosophy we are interested in transforming mentalities generated by a religious faith. Grace theology founded by Luther is also a theology of freedom. In his conflict with Erasmus from Rotterdam Luther criticizes him as being partisan theorist of free will according to which man is free to choose between doing good deeds that will lead to salvation, or bad things that will lead him to eternal damnation.

By contrast, Luther emphasizes free will as a fiction as there is not inside the man the power to perform good or bad deeds<sup>29</sup>. All the works of man, as well as everything that happens in the world is the result of a pure necessity and strict determinations. This opinion is shared by Martin Luther, denying the existence of free will because it is contrary to God's absolute will. Nothing can happen, considers Luther, if God does not want it to happen. This view is challenged by Erasmus and other scholars because in the absence of free will there is no liability on the facts and no justification for punishment. Although Luther denies the existence of free will, gives rise to a theology of grace which suppresses, at least at the level of premises, the liability.

Man can not do anything to attract grace or reject it as God's will is sovereign. The subtext is the idea that if any action is done out of necessity and there is no real responsibility for it, then at least the social freedom is total and partly anarchic. The result of this anarchic freedom was the very first peasant wars that Luther criticizes.

However, Luther introduced in social philosophy the distinction between spiritual freedom absolutely inexistent for Luther and the social political freedom which became complete for his followers. Post-modernity has as foundation the imperative of freedom. Freedom is seen as both creative attitude and the rejection of shape, or any structural frames. Post modernity requires waiver to subordinating to form as expression of over-sensitivity and proliferation of possible worlds to the detriment of the real world.

Having as foundation the ontical expression "God is dead" the metaphysical center of post modernity migrates from absolute to human: from a metaphysics query and an artistic search of "What is" postmodern shifts from ontical view to "what is for us" or "What does for us mean what is for us". Contextual, "what is" becomes negligible in front of "what is represented" that is what we can configure.

Freedom is no longer an understood necessity. Freedom is the foundation of difference. The right to be different certifies our level of reality. In other words, the more I exist, the more I manifest myself as different. Tyranny expressed by harmonics and order obsession is replaced by an obsession with promotion, as a person, as a group: social, political, cultural, etc. promotion.

## Appreciative teaching of philosophy

Social constructionist philosophy states that the learning is primarily an active and ongoing process of “construction” of new knowledge, from social interaction in peer groups, or a sustained interaction with the social environment<sup>30</sup>. We can not emphasize the close relationship between philosophical research and teaching philosophy<sup>31</sup>. The constructionist-appreciative pedagogy model has two fundamental dimensions:

- the social – constructionist dimension of education
- education focused on appreciation and success.

Social constructionist pedagogy states that the learning activity<sup>32</sup> is primarily an active and ongoing process of “construction” of new knowledge from social interaction in peer groups, or a sustained interaction with the social environment. Learning is effective when knowledge and skills acquired by trainees are systematically used in social situations different than those in which they were taught. Student's mind should not be treated like a database that stores information read or exposed in a course. Educational partnership between the educator and the educated replaces the social construct called learning, on a self-discovery dimension, which catalyzes the motivational and cognitive abilities of the student to maximum update their potential, both for the educated and the teacher.

Education focused on appreciation and success has the following elements proposed by O'Connor and Yballem<sup>33</sup>:

- Focusing on the personal experience of the educated and trainers, especially the positive element of the experience,
- Focusing on the successes and winning strategies,
- Educational partnership relationship.

The teacher's role is changing from the transmitter of information to facilitator of their own curriculum design for consumers of education services.

Appreciative teaching uses a methodology based on collaborative-discovery learning process<sup>34</sup>. The learner is seen as a partner of the teacher in this process. Educational partnership<sup>35</sup> aims not the system of transmission of information (content knowledge), but the formation of communication skills and attitudes<sup>36</sup> both to the student and teacher.

The idea of appreciative seminars starts from a new vision on education that we see as a partnership centered on equality between

students and teachers, in which each one reveals its creative potential bringing his contribution to social development of its own and of others. Peer equality transforms “the social distance” between partners of the educational act by moving the focus from the difference in volume of knowledge, to equality of the creative potential ability to produce efficiencies in the area of expertise of each one. The use of appreciative seminars methodology is not limited at teaching philosophy in academic environment, as it was shaped to be a form of applied philosophy.

Appreciative seminars are generally form of appreciative summit which begins to identify the positive and the mutually transforming resources both of the learners and trainers by stimulation of the collaborative creativity. There is not just a simple “act of discovery” that the student makes, guided by a trainer. It can be seen as a research (inquiry) and at the same time a “festival of discovery” (research as celebration). The stimulation of the student’s questioning potential can be done starting from the principle that a system evolves in the direction in which the questions are raised. The construction of appreciative seminars starts from the identification of the student’s creative and co-transforming potential and less the relevant knowledge they possess. The identification of the positive in knowledge takes form as success experiences appreciation, in collaborative learning, the moments in which students were successful in learning and strategies that led this success. In this case, the educational act is to us an “empowerment” process of all those involved. This process aims to transfer successful strategies that learners and trainers have identified in different learning situations to the new formative context.

The stimulation of student’s participation is achieved by transforming “the learning task centered group” into a learning team. The removal of specific formal and classical education process and the focus on the playful learning techniques including role play, or other methods of stimulating learning in a group with mainly playful nature, transforms the act of learning into a “festival of discovery” and learning context into “the best framework” of the creative potential auto-update. The development of the skills is seen in the appreciative pedagogy as a successively passed process through stages of identifying successful strategies and positive experience, how to use the skills through a co-transforming and playful act and the application of these skills in the suited field where “they work best for us.”

In introducing the appreciative methods in education, a model can be “collaborative centering on a task”, that means the identification of a motivating task for students which will be achieved in teams, appreciative peer review, stage in which colleagues will highlight the positive successful elements of the team, originality, innovative, etc. of each colleague and not least, the transforming of learning into research by selecting a task which involves discovering and producing new.

Another specific element of appreciative seminars is the different position from the known elements (their reframing), the difference in understanding of symbolic elements and overcome the interpretative conventions that limit knowledge in one direction. The opening pretext of collaborative research can be the appreciative and systematic analysis of an event (this can mean everything: from a religious, social or political event, to analyzing a movie, developing an essay, a research). Another appreciative reframing element used by us, is the free discussions session focusing on positive affirmation. Students are encouraged to explore any new element which they consider significant in terms of their past experiences. The pretext of discussion can be any element of everyday experience, their own successful stories, a new approach of a topic or of a social context, etc. The pretext of opening appreciative collaborative research is “the playful frame” which we call “learning context”. This can be outlined as a goal of the seminar, reserving some time for appreciative dialogue, or may constitute the general framework of the seminar, when the approached themes are built gradually through dialogue between students and teachers. The main appreciative dialogues theme is chosen from the proposals of the students. The dialogue is oriented so that students can “discover” the innovative elements and appreciate them as their own, encouraging them to pursuing with the interpretative approach, oriented on the discovery of new and creative elements in the studied domain.

#### 4D model in appreciative teaching

The origins of this technique may be identified in an approach called “appreciative inquiry”, proposed by Cooperrider in the area of organizational development<sup>37</sup>, later taken over by areas such as psychology<sup>38</sup>, theology<sup>39</sup>, social work<sup>40</sup>, political sciences<sup>41</sup>, adult training<sup>42</sup>, organizational development<sup>43</sup>, programme evaluation<sup>44</sup>, coaching<sup>45</sup>, planning<sup>46</sup>, analysis of minorities<sup>47</sup>, supervision<sup>48</sup> etc. The appreciative inquiry has a quadriphasic structure, called “4-D cycle” in literature. Narratological character of appreciative inquiry allows theoretical construction of educational meta-models. We will present in the following lines a form of the 4D model applications (Discovery, Dream, Destiny, Design), in terms of philosophical content exposure. This approach can be used in teaching different topics like philosophy of religion, ethics, social philosophy, legal studies, but also metaphysics, epistemology<sup>49</sup> or systematic philosophy.

We propose a model to build a series of “appreciative seminars” starting from the philosophical theme of “freedom in the contemporary religious and laical ethics” as a hermeneutical pretext<sup>50</sup> using the 4D model previously presented.



***Discovery (Discovery the freedom)***

Phase I (DISCOVERY): the stage of discovering positive “stories” and disseminating them. The starting point of the inquiry is the selection of affirmative/positive topics; starting from the assumption that the individual evolves in the direction where questions are asked. The choice of appreciative seminars topics is significant and strategic; the topics are formulated in affirmative terms and must be connected to the area in which the individual wishes to evolve, hence in the areas where they can be empowered. The appreciative teaching that we proposed, takes the model of positive stories as a focus on the student’s best experience, on his very own significance for the proposed topic of freedom in our example that it is already in his consciousness. The starting point of discussion is the selection of positive / affirmative topics, assimilating that knowledge, including the students’ way of understanding freedom from his personal previous experiences. It is explored the correlation between ethical and religious vision of the student and his behavior. The themes are set in positive terms and must be related to the field in which the knowledge of students is desired to be amplified. Van der Haar<sup>51</sup> believes that at this stage we realize the appreciation upon what gives life and energy to individuals, students in our case, related with the discussed topic. It is a stage of positive stories analysis reported on their experience<sup>52</sup>, prior to the proposed topic. This positive experience represents the core positive change. At this level the analysis does not concern only positive experiences, but also fundamental matters regarding the individuals as spiritual beings. In the following lines there are extracted the positive elements from their own experience of forgive or be forgiven, by focusing the educational appreciative interview to them. The presentation of problems by a subject is not locked in a directive way but rather analyzed in terms of methodological challenges and questioning the successful stories in similar situations, that can be transferred.

In our example regarding the “forgiveness and freedom” topic we can tackle the following themes of appreciative discovery:

It seeks to highlight the very own experience of freedom in religious and the phenomenological way.

It may concern the inner experience of freedom connected with a religious or laical experience of forgiveness, of responsibility, faith and limitations, free will etc.

The speech is focused on the positive value of freedom as a human experience the ultimate instance of freedom for themselves.

***Dream (Dream - freedom as possibility)***

Phase II (DREAM). Van der Haar emphasizes the importance of alternative thinking, that overcomes the limits, by creating appreciative vision of the future based on experience<sup>53</sup>, historical ones and new understanding of present, process previously called by us as the

hermeneutic of real. Bernie Carter<sup>54</sup> argues that the dream stage or building the dream adopts a series of creative and positive image of the future based on the thinking type “outside the boundaries”. Educational interview contains elements of symbolic challenge with the role of anticipation of knowledge and to enable the transformative effort.

The dream phase can correlate freedom with opportunity:

It aims to build a series of strategies that evaluate the possible, and build the future starting from there. It examines the impact of decisions on possible lines of future.

### ***Design (Construction of freedom)***

Phase III (Design) is using the collected data in the first two stages, once students have a coherent image about philosophical developments of the proposed theme. Co-transformative research, upon the topic and also upon the thinking itself, needs a new social architecture. At this stage students will realize the projects that become an infrastructure of learning and knowledge management, necessary to support the vision system. This is a process of reinvention<sup>55</sup> of the theme. Van der Haar<sup>56</sup> believes that the role of this stage is to create a procedural and relational design necessary to update the “dream” of previous stage. The method is a constructive and collaborative one<sup>57</sup> of creating a series of actions from the creative perspectives from the theme of study.

Regarding our example about the freedom:

We will analyze the possible theoretical constructs of freedom starting from those made by the students themselves.

By collaborative research we will identify the best ways that students can reach their own vision of freedom.

### ***Destiny (Destiny freedom)***

Stage IV (Destiny) is the phase of implementing the plans of support, maintenance, adjustment and development of what was projected<sup>58</sup>. This later stage is also named as Delivery. It is a phase of creating networks, facilitating structure and building links designed to develop the co-creator potential of students<sup>59</sup>. Destiny phase follows to implement the built vision of freedom in their own lives, and in their social relations, including assuming responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

## **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Vicki Hammel, “Appreciative Philosophy: the Emerging Context and the Transformative Power of Co-creation” (Ph.D. diss., Tilburg University, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Sandu, *Perspective semiologice asupra transmodernitatii*, (Iasi: Editura Performantica, 2010). See also Antonio Sandu, “Abordarea apreciativă a filosofiei. Către o nouă abordare a discursului filosofic în spațiul educațional”, în Sandu

Frunză, Mihaela Frunză (ed.), *Criza instituțională a filosofiei* (Cluj: Limes, 2010), 55-78.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 196.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Cojocaru, "Appreciative supervision in social work. New opportunities for changing the social work practice", *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie sociala* 29 (2010): 72.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *Social construction in context*, (London: Sage Publication, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> David Campbell, Tim Coldicott and Keith Kinsella, *Systemic Work with Organizations. A New model for managers and Change Agents*, (London: Karnak Books, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Van Der Haar Dorieke, "A Positive Change. A Social Constructionist Inquiry into the Possibilities to Evaluate appreciative Inquiry", (Master Thesis, Tilburg University, 2002), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Van Der Haar, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Van Der Haar, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Gry Espedal, "Creating growth and development in a coaching relation using appreciative inquiry and solution focused approach", *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala* 20 (2008): 16.

<sup>11</sup> Suzanne Grant and Maria Humphries, "Critical Evaluation Of Appreciative Inquiry" *Action Research* 4 (2006): 401.

<sup>12</sup> Vivienne Burr, *An Introduction To Social Constructionism* (London: Editura Routledge, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Vivienne Burr.

<sup>14</sup> Vivienne Burr.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *Social construction in context*, (London: Sage Publication, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Florin Nicai, "Paradigma pozitiva a Fericirilor in contextual social de astazi", *Seminarii Apreciative*, ed. Antonio Sandu (Iasi: Editura Lumen, 2009), 125-135.

<sup>17</sup> Tudor Ghiddeanu, *Sensul teandric al iubirii*, (Iasi: Editura Lumen, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Max Weber, *Etica protestanta si spiritual capitalismului*, (Bucuresti: Editura Humanitas, 1993), 118-119.

<sup>19</sup> Virginia M. Antonescu, "Identitatea europeana intre Turnul Babel si spiritualitatea crestin ortodoxa", *Despre Europa*, ed. Virginia M. Antonescu et al. (Iasi: Editura Lumen, 2006), 8.

<sup>20</sup> Max Weber, *Etica protestanta si spiritual capitalismului*, 226.

<sup>21</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky and Sebastien Charles, *Hypermodern Times*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky and Sebastien Charles.

<sup>23</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky and Sebastien Charles.

<sup>24</sup> Antonio Sandu, Stefan Cojocaru and Simona Ponea, "Appreciative evaluation of training programs. Case study: Lumen Consulting and Training Center", *Social Research Reports* 8 (2010), 1-77.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Strategiile fatale*, (Iasi: Editura Polirom, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Culianu, Eliade, *Dictionar al religiilor*, (Bucuresti: Humanitas, 1996). See also Sandu Frunză, „Elie Wiesel and Nostalgia for a Lost Paradise”, *Transylvanian Review*, vol. XVIII, No. 2, (Summer 2009): 101-105.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Fiinta si timp*, (Bucuresti: Editura Humanitas, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Bazele metafizicii moravurilor*, (Bucuresti: Editura Antet, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*. trans. by Willard, R. Trask. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Vol. 2, 1984), 225.

<sup>30</sup> Simona Ponea and Antonio Sandu, "Appreciative Group Socialization. Model Presentation", *Postmodern Openings*, Special Issue, (2010): 33.

<sup>31</sup> Antonio Sandu, "Recurring Themes in the History of Social and Political Philosophy", *Postmodern Openings* 1 (2010b).

<sup>32</sup> Maria Fernando and Cristina Socoro, "Appreciative inquiry: a positive approach to organizational planning and learning", *Social Research Reports* 10 (2010): 3.

<sup>33</sup> Leodones Yballem and Dennis O'Connor, "Appreciative pedagogy", *Journal of Management Education* 24 (4), (2000): 474.

<sup>34</sup> John Heron, *Cooperative Inquiry: Research into the human condition* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Antonio Sandu and Simona Ponea, "Applied Protocol for Appreciative Group Socialization", *Postmodern Openings*, Special Issues, (2010): 19.

<sup>36</sup> Pinyo Rattanaphan, "Impact of organization development interventions on human capital: a case study of Thailand Appreciative Inquiry network", *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala* 29 (2010): 25.

<sup>37</sup> David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivatsva "Appreciative Inquiry in Organization Life" *Research in Organizational Change and Development* 1 (2005); David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook. The First in a Series of AI Workbooks for Leaders of Change*, (Ohio: Crown Custom Publishing Inc., 2005); Gervase Bushe, "A comparative case study of appreciative inquiries in one organization: implications for practice", *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie sociala* 29 (2010): 7.

<sup>38</sup> Tojo Thatchenkery and Carol Metzker, *Appreciative intelligence. Seeing the mighty oak in the acorn*, (San Francisco: Barrett-Hoehler Publisher, Inc., 2006); Leslie E. Sekerka and R. McCraty, "Understanding the psychophysiology of appreciation in the workplace" *Constructive discourse and human organization: Advances in appreciative inquiry*, ed. David Cooperrider and M. Avital, (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2004); F. Barrett, David Cooperrider and R. Fry, "Bringing every mind into the game to realize the positive revolution in strategy", in *Practicing Organizational Development. A Guide for Consultants*, ed. William J. Rothwell and Roland L. Sullivan, (San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2005), 510- 539.

<sup>39</sup> Florin Nicai, "Paradigma pozitiva a Fericirilor in contextual social de astazi", *Seminarii Apreciative*, ed. Antonio Sandu (Iasi: Editura Lumen, 2009), 125-135.

<sup>40</sup> Stefan Cojocaru, *Metode apreciative in Asistenta Sociala. Ancheta, Supervizarea si Managementul de Caz*, (Iasi: Editura Polirom, 2005); Stefan Cojocaru, "Appreciative supervision in social work. New opportunities for changing the social work practice", *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie sociala* 29 (2010)

<sup>41</sup> Erik S. Schooley, *Appreciative Democracy*, (Ph.D. diss, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Antonio Sandu, Stefan Cojocaru and Simona Ponea, "Appreciative evaluation of training programs. Case study: Lumen Consulting and Training Center", *Social Research Reports* 8 (2010): 1-77.

<sup>43</sup> Chandi P. Chapagain and Gana Ojha, "Appreciative inquiry for enhancing individual and organization capacity", *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala* 20 (2008): 7-18.

<sup>44</sup> Hallie S. Preskill and Tessie T. Catsambas, *Reframing evaluation through appreciative inquiry*, (London: Sage Publication, 2006); Stefan Cojocaru, "Claryfing

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<sup>45</sup> Gervase Bushe and A. Khamisa, “When is appreciative inquiry transformational? A meta-case analysis”, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 41 (2) (2005): 161.

<sup>46</sup> Maria Fernando and Cristina Socoro, “Appreciative inquiry: a positive approach to organizational planning and learning”, *Social Research Reports*, 10 (2010).

<sup>47</sup> Stefan Cojocaru, *Metode apreciative in Asistenta Sociala. Ancheta, Supervizarea si Managementul de Caz*, (Iasi: Editura Polirom, 2005); Antonio Sandu, *Perspective semilogice asupra transmodernitatii*, (Iasi: Editura Performantica, 2010)

<sup>48</sup> Stefan Cojocaru, “Appreciative supervision in social work. New opportunities for changing the social work practice”, *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie sociala* 29 (2010).

<sup>49</sup> Oana Bradu and Antonio Sandu, “Perspective epistemice si axiologice in supervizarea apreciativa”, *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie sociala*, 24 (2009): 95.

<sup>50</sup> Antonio Sandu, “Freedom as a hermeneutical pretext”, *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 3 (2) (2010c).

<sup>51</sup> Van Der Haar Dorieke, “Evaluating Appreciative Inquiry: A Relational Constructionist Perspective”, *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 57 (2004): 10.

<sup>52</sup> Van Der Haar Dorieke, “A Positive Change. A Social Constructionist Inquiry into the Possibilities to Evaluate appreciative Inquiry”, (Master Thesis, Tilburg University, 2002): 55.

<sup>53</sup> Van Der Haar Dorieke, “A Positive Change. A Social Constructionist Inquiry into the Possibilities to Evaluate appreciative Inquiry”, (Master Thesis, Tilburg University, 2002): 54.

<sup>54</sup> Bernie Carter, “One Expertise Among Many Working Appreciatively To Make Miracles Instead Of Finding Problems”, *Journal Of Research in Nursing*, 11, (2007): 48.

<sup>55</sup> Stefan Cojocaru, *Metode apreciative in Asistenta Sociala. Ancheta, Supervizarea si Managementul de Caz*, (Iasi: Editura Polirom, 2005): 53.

<sup>56</sup> Van Der Haar Dorieke, “A Positive Change. A Social Constructionist Inquiry into the Possibilities to Evaluate appreciative Inquiry”, (Master Thesis, Tilburg University, 2002): 54.

<sup>57</sup> Antonio Sandu, *Tehnici afirmativ – apreciative. O socio-pedagogie a succesului*, (Iasi: Editura Lumen, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook. The First in a Series of AI Workbooks for Leaders of Change*, (Ohio: Crown Custom Publishing Inc., 2005).

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