

GLORIA VICTIS IN 'THE TROUBLE WITH BEING BORN'

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Why do people who suffer don't get bored?

Emil Cioran

Abstract.

This approach relates closely to paradox as a central philosophical method in Emil Cioran. The main argument unfolds from an exegesis of the phrase 'the invincible victims', analysed from various perspectives using a selection of aphorisms from Emil Cioran's *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, published by Gallimard in 1973 and translated into English as *The Trouble with Being Born*, a highly appreciated translation. The study emphasizes the subtle irony and the turmoil beneath a phrase that seems to capture faithfully the pain and the crusade of Emil Cioran, 'the invincible victims', in relation to another phrase, 'No deeper worth beneath anything', a phrase that I have formulated to capture the gist and context of his philosophical discourse and which covers, in our view, a *Gloria victis* plea. In this study the core concept is 'existence'. Nevertheless, the investigation follows several major philosophical concepts such as 'truth', 'consciousness', 'time', 'existence', 'reality', in correlation with other concepts, such as 'meaninglessness', 'fear', 'religious belief', 'disappointment' and 'suffering'. One purpose is to emphasize in detail that lack of worth and the tragedy of existence are, in the light of *The Trouble with Being Born*, meaningful and, paradoxically, victorious. This seems only appropriate for a very impressive work, which would be great literature if it were not philosophy. Discovering the *Gloria victis!* plea, brings the reader closer to a deeper philosophical understanding of Emil Cioran, appreciating more a paradoxical and original metaphysical construction, in our view, 'house of horrors' dedicated to human existence, which sets in motion thought and emotion alike, describing philosophically and metaphorically the nature and scope of human victory.

Keywords:

existence; 'invincible victims'; Emil Cioran.

1. Introduction

Emil Cioran (1911-1995) is a Romanian-born French language philosopher, Bergsonian at first, then Nietzschean, considered also a great stylist of French language. He authored about two dozen intriguing books. His writings are philosophical, aphoristically and playful-unsystematic and fragmentary. He is famous for introducing himself as '*un homme de fragment*' and 'the patron of the defeated'. The fragment, the detail, the exceptional, the secondary or the local are the stars of his ontology. He did not produce a philosophical system. His first book, written in Romanian, under the title *Pe culmile disperării*, in 1934 was later translated in English, *On the Heights of Despair*, in 1992, by Richard Howard, who was the translator in English of most of his works. This book was published when Emil Cioran was only 23 years old and suffering from a terrible crisis of insomnia. The typesetter, a traditional person, a God-fearing man was shocked of the blasphemous contents and refused to touch it, so Cioran had to take it to be published elsewhere.

Folklore has it that in a conversation with the Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater, Cioran said at one point: 'If I didn't write, I could have become an assassin.' Writing is for this philosopher a matter of life and death. Human existence, at its core, is endless anguish and despair, and writing can make things a bit more bearable. 'A book,' said Cioran, 'is a suicide postponed.'²

¹ This is a revised version of a paper read at the June Zoom conference of the British Personalist Forum.

² Cf. Costica Bradatan, 'The Philosopher of Failure: Emil Cioran's Heights of Despair', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2016. Costica Bradatan authored recently *Dying for Ideas. The Dangerous Lives of Philosophers* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

Emil Cioran was not a philosopher interested in conceiving a philosophical system; he considered the system 'the worst form of despotism (...), in philosophy and in everything'³. However, there is a noticeable (strange) unity of his work, built around the idea that reality is downright 'lunacy' and that knowledge cannot elevate man from his petty and limited condition. This guiding idea is clearly present too in *The Trouble with Being Born*, his first work published in French, in 1987, under the title *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, by Gallimard. The quote displayed on the back cover of the French edition emphasizes the main idea of this perplexing philosophical endeavour:

Aucune volupté ne surpasse celle qu'on éprouve à l'idée qu'on aurait pu se maintenir dans un état de pure possibilité. Liberté, bonheur, espace: ces termes définissent la condition antérieure à la malchance de naître.,

which we can translate, as following:

No pleasure exceeds that which one feels at the idea that one could have maintained oneself in a state of pure possibility. Freedom, happiness, space-these terms define the condition prior to the bad luck of being born.

Our approach comprises the paradox, the subtle irony and the turmoil beneath a paradoxical phrase that seems to capture faithfully the pain and the crusade of Emil Cioran 'invincible victims'⁴, associated to another phrase that I consider expressive, capturing the context and the gist of his philosophical discourse, 'No deeper worth beneath anything', the two phrases opening, in our view, a paradoxical *Gloria victis* plea. This phrase about the ultimate lack of worth is not a quote though, it is not taken from any of his works, but it serves as virtual and all-encompassing dictum that might very well stay next to the intriguing title phrasing *The trouble with being born*, above the entrance into an 'Emil Cioran Library', if there has ever been one.

As we have shown in a conference early this year the preoccupation with the paradoxical exclamation *Gloria victis!* is consonant with the interest for the centrality of the paradoxical meaning, relevant in human culture and for human life: '*Gloria victis!*' or, 'Glory to the victim!' is a very interesting puzzle, first and foremost due to the fact that, as far as we studied, this is among the very few Latin idioms⁵ without an associated context, without an explanatory narrative. For comparison, in the expression *ab ovo* we have both its meaning, from egg, that is, 'from the beginning', and the contextual explanatory narrative regarding the Roman feast starting with eggs and finishing with the fruits (apples).⁶ Therefore, in what concerns *Gloria victis!* it is as if this is a universal truth; as if man captured through this expression a fragment of truth, a crumble of reality. This study represents one of the first results of a complex research dedicated to *the centrality of meaning and paradox within the human ontological mode*. These two main characteristics are also the keys to the understanding the nature and the complexity of the singularity of the human ontological mode.⁷

We discuss the 'invincible victims' and the paradoxical dimension of Emil Cioran's philosophy considering the paradox a self-contradictory statement, with a more important role in literature and

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Emil Cioran (2011). *The Trouble with Being Born*. Transl. from French by Richard Howard (PEN Translation Prize), second edition. Seaver Books: New York, p. 117.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

⁶ Another Latin idiom without an associated explanatory narrative is *Omnia munda mundis*.

⁷ This even has a second explanatory narrative, with reference to the fact that Helen of Troy was born out of an egg (one of the two eggs laid by Leda, raped by Zeus), as Horace says in *Ars poetica*, too, about the ideal poet who should 'not begin the Trojan war from the double egg', *ec gemino bellum Troianum orditur ab ovo* (and, this way, bore the reader, when he should get into the action).

philosophy than simple wit, capturing the complexity of existence. The definitions of the paradox⁸ indicate as main characteristics, contradiction and self-contradiction, antinomy, a co-existence of contradictory logical elements in a statement. In culture, a central reference is found in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* where the witches describe the battle lost and won at the same time ('When the battle's lost and won', says the second witch in the first scene of the play, 1.1.4). In other words, the effects of a victory may be far too costly and, eventually, ruinous.⁹ In logic, the contradiction underlines the complexity of knowledge, the clash between knowing and believing, the limits of human knowledge etc. One may recall the famous paradox mentioned by G. E. Moore in a conference 'Outside is raining but I do not think it's raining'. Bertrand Russell's paradox relates to set-theoretical paradoxes: considering in its entirety the set of all sets that are not members of themselves it (that all-encompassing set) appears to be and not to be a member of itself: this is a paradoxical situation.¹⁰ In political philosophy, for instance in Derrida, the notion of 'unforgivable' is crucial in founding new forms of forgiveness.¹¹

However, the purpose of this interpretation is to emphasize that lack of worth and the tragedy of existence are, in the light of *The trouble with being born*¹², on the contrary, meaningful and, paradoxically, victorious. In this study, each of the fragments chosen and presented in the selected quotes bear witness to the fact that Emil Cioran confronts philosophical thought with a paradoxical ontology. This seems only appropriate for a very impressive work, which would be great literature if it were not philosophy: almost a philosophical system¹³ but only if seen as a house of horrors dedicated to human existence, which sets in motion everything else.

At the very beginning of the book titled *The trouble with being born* we find out that existence is bound to the realm of worthlessness, to futile things, while reality is downright 'lunacy' and that knowledge cannot elevate man from his petty and limited condition: 'There is a kind of knowledge that strips whatever you do of weight and scope: for such knowledge, everything is without basis except itself. Pure to the point of abhorring even the notion of an object, it translates that extreme science according to which doing or not doing something comes down to the same thing and is accompanied by an equally extreme satisfaction: that of being able to rehearse, each time, the discovery that any gesture performed is not worth defending, that nothing is enhanced by the merest vestige of substance, that 'reality' falls within the province of lunacy. Such knowledge deserves to be

⁸ Henrieta Serban, 'Victims' and *Gloria victis* in philosophy and culture,' paper delivered at the International Conference 'Cultural Heritage, Identities and the Public Space', organized by The Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Jassy, the National Institute of Research-Development ICI in Bucharest, Université Paul Valéry in Montpellier, Internet for Advanced Religious Studies and Internetworking Communication and the Journal for Communication Studies, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, the State University of Moldova Republic, the Academy of Romanian Scientists, UNESCO, UNITWIN-UNESCO Department for Interculturality, Good Governance and Sustainable Development of the University of Bucharest, Romania, ICSP, Timisoara, Romania, 18 March 2021.

⁹ R. M. Sainsbury (1995). *Paradoxes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Mackie, J.L. (1973). *Truth, Probability and Paradox*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹⁰ In other defining illustrations of the paradox Francis Bacon is often cited with the paradoxical idea that 'the most corrected copies are commonly the least correct'. In George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), the imperative written on the barn gets changed from 'All animals are equal' into 'All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others'.

¹¹ See also Gary Hayden and Michel Picard (2009). *This Book Does Not Exist: Adventures in the Paradoxical*. Brighton: Quid Publishing pp. 12-13 and 52-53.

¹² J. Derrida (2001). 'On forgiveness', In *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. M. Dooley and M. Hughes, with a preface by S. Critchley and R. Kearney. London: Routledge, p. 53.

¹³ Recently, a film with the same title was released (2020), premiered at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival, a science fiction disguise for the theme of existence, creature and creation, which was labeled as an 'antithesis to Pinocchio' and which Emil Cioran would have been most certainly very interested to see. What would have Emil Cioran said about the androids and the AI?

called posthumous: it functions as if the knower were alive and not alive, a being and the memory of a being. 'It's already in the past,' he says about all he achieves, even as he achieves it, thereby forever destitute of the present Unmaking, de-creating, is the only task man may take upon himself, if he aspires, as everything suggests, to distinguish himself from the Creator.'¹⁴

We should capture and emphasize this terrible, glorious arrogance of the human being: the whole philosophical discourse unfolds from this perspective of man vindicating to 'distinguish himself from the Creator', not in the sense that man does not want to be a Creator, but he aims to be original (to be more than a modest resemblance of a Creator) and fails, his works being rather acts of unmaking, while his creative, astute and conscious relation to everything else is both lucid and disappointing.

Everything is profoundly thought and everything is profoundly felt, to the point that thought meets poetry. After all, artful expressions signal *Holzwege* towards startling thought. It is for us unsurprising that Emil Cioran wrote with unrestrained admiration about a poet such as Saint -John Perse (Alexis Leger, Saint -Leger, 1887-1975) developing the 'film' of the whirlwind of the plenitude of which Cioran himself was no stranger, whenever he described the metaphysical downfalls of existence. In turn, the poet famously called him 'the greatest French writer to honour our language since the death of Paul Valéry.'¹⁵

2. Glory? What glory?

Existence is unbearable and one 'cannot live otherwise than dying'¹⁶. This is the representative image for Emil Cioran works. This is truly a thinker embraced by myriad shades of pain ...any attempt to delineate the keywords of his works sends us into the vicinity of *failure, disease, futility, agony, alienation, absurdity, illusion of change, decay* as a main law of the *tyranny* of history, *awareness* as curse and *cruelty of divinity, reason as plague* and even *boredom* as a symptom of the *meaninglessness* of life. The human beings are the 'invincible victims' who have to constantly face these dire straits of meaninglessness, absurdity, decomposition etc. and overcome them moment by moment in a crucially trying ontological becoming.

As we cannot approach here the entirety of his works, then, to describe in which ways is existence unbearable is to relate to the aphorisms gathered in *The Trouble with Being Born*. Which is this trouble? The cruelty of being cast into existence offers a quick and substantial answer. *The Trouble with Being Born* is the following: existing does not entail existence and existence is, in a few words, tragic, painful, futile, illusive, alienating, sickening, disappointing and meaningless. Obviously, these attributes only cover partially the perspective of Emil Cioran and we need to bring to the fore several various relevant aspects, selected 'illustrative moments' in the sickening, painfully excruciating human ontological becoming of these 'invincible victims', which are the human beings.

Emil Cioran emphasizes that everything is a game, which has its metaphysical relevance: 'Everything is a game—without such a revelation, the sensation we haul through our usual lives would not have that characteristic stamp our metaphysical experiences require to be distinguished from their imitations, our discomforts. For every discomfort is only an abortive metaphysical experience.'¹⁷ It is clear that for Emil Cioran all human beings are defeated beforehand at this

¹⁴ As we have previously mentioned, Emil Cioran considered the system in his book titled *The Trouble with Being Born* 'the worst form of despotism'.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ Is Emil Cioran French, is he Romanian? He surely is universal. Emil Cioran is also, probably, the only thinker thought to be an intellectual invention besides Anon. And although, in the educated image we rather represent Emil Cioran as a loner, the philosopher was not at all insulated and he had even certain preferred amicable relations with other intellectuals, philosophers, personalities, poets, such as, the Romanian poet Marin Sorescu (1936-1996), who visited him in Paris several times, made a few entries in Emil Cioran's diary and promoted the thinker in Romania, despite the restrictions imposed by the communist regime. On this topic, see details in Ada Stuparu (2019), 'Emil Cioran with Marin Sorescu', *Saeculum*, December, 48 (2): 39-53.

¹⁷ Emil Cioran (1991). *Singur tate i destin, 1931-1944* [Solitude and destiny. 1931-1944]. Foreword by Emil Cioran, editor Marin Diaconu, Bucharest: Humanitas, p. 243.

deceitful game of existence. There no 'winning hands' ... This is one reason why he writes: "Ever since I was born"—that since has a resonance so dreadful to my ears it becomes unendurable.¹⁸ Birth is an indictment, one so terrible that whoever understands it will not catch much sleep. However, at a closer investigation we discover that a sort of *Gloria victis!* vibe lays beneath all tragedy and existence, luring man back in, despite lucidity, reason, thought, with despised emotion and hope.

The Trouble with Being Born stays in the fact that existence is a tragic and beautiful (the same way death is so beautiful for the Romantic thinker) pirouette into the paradox. It relays on a deeper understanding of the self-conflictual impression left by lucidity into human life. Human existence unfolds between the various, inconsequential, human developments landing either in meaningless vanity or in failure. As in a deep meaningless and serene sleep and, at the other extreme of existence, as in the perfect existential nightmare, human life has the co-ordinates of a self-deceiving highly mediated meaning and lucid tragedy, that is, we move between tragedy and more tragedy.

Only that tragedy, along with the accompanying suffering, is always interesting and glorious. In this interpretational perspective, we identify and emphasize here probably the clearest set of thoughts describing what the mysterious Latin phrase *Gloria victis* means, understood in a philosophical perspective. Emil Cioran explains it. 'Since we remember clearly only our ordeals, it is ultimately the sick, the persecuted, the victims in every realm who will have lived to the best advantage. The others—the lucky ones—have a life, of course, but not the memory of a life.'¹⁹ Even more, the philosopher talks about 'invincible victims' a very surprising phrase not because it is oxymoronic and paradoxical, which it is, but because it is not consistent with the bleak tone of his aphorisms in *The Trouble with Being Born* (and in his work, as a whole, since *The Trouble with Being Born* could be considered as a metonymy for Emil Cioran's work).

At the same time, one may notice that it offers a *solution* to the whole trouble of existence, which is even more surprising: 'The only way of enduring one disaster after the next is to love the very idea of disaster: if we succeed, there are no further surprises, we are superior to whatever occurs, we are invincible victims.'²⁰ Thinkers! Such opportunists of 'collapses' and 'miracles': 'A poor wretch who feels time, who is its victim, its martyr, who experiences nothing else, who is time at each moment, knows what a metaphysician or a poet divines only by grace of a collapse or a miracle.'²¹ There is glory in living; against the ripples of disasters, suffering, sickness, decomposition, absurdity or meaninglessness.

3. Everything exists; nothing exists

One of the aphorisms included by Emil Cioran in *The Trouble with Being Born* underlines the reversibility of meaning in relation to existence. The human beings have to overcome the illusory dimension of their existence: '*Everything exists; nothing exists.*' Either formula affords alike serenity. The man of anxiety, to his misfortune, remains between them, trembling and perplexed, forever at the mercy of a nuance, incapable of gaining a foothold in the security of being or in the absence of being.'²²

The philosophical discourse is criss-crossed by time related despair; here is a troubled relationship with time, a present but despised anxiety for security, the past always taking hold of the present and the future conspiring to make everything as futile as it is uncertain.

As following, we may delineate the main dimensions of existence, according to Emil Cioran and thus we identify more illustrative moments for the facets of meaningful -meaninglessness of being and its associated 'Gloria victis' perspective.

Man is an arrogantly inquiring being and when he is lucid, he is bound to suffer. From these

¹⁸ Emil Cioran (2011). *The Trouble with Being Born*. Transl. from French by Richard Howard, second edition. New York: Seaver Books, p. 11.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 214.

aspects unfold all the other characteristics of human existence. We identify a recurrent preoccupation with truth, a rather destructive ingredient, though: 'We can endure any truth however destructive, provided it replaces everything, provided it affords as much vitality as the hope for which it substitutes.'²³ The status of knowledge and science are obviously related to this vision of truth:

Nescience is the basis of everything, it creates everything by an action repeated every moment, it produces this and any world, since it continually takes for real what in fact is not. Nescience is the tremendous mistake that serves as the basis of all our truths; it is older and more powerful than all the gods combined.²⁴

Thus, we should also emphasize 'corruption': 'Every phenomenon is a corrupt version of another, larger phenomenon: time, a disease of eternity; history, a disease of time; life, again, a disease of matter. Then what is normal, what is healthy? Eternity? Which itself is only an infirmity of God.'²⁵

The consequence is disappointment, provided that truth itself has this gift. 'As a general rule, men expect disappointment: they know they must not be impatient, that it will come sooner or later, that it will hold off long enough for them to proceed with their undertakings of the moment. The disabused man is different: for him, disappointment occurs at the same time as the deed; he has no need to await it, it is present. By freeing himself from succession, he has devoured the possible and rendered the future superfluous. (...) Illumination, that lightning disappointment, affords a certitude which transforms disillusion into deliverance.'²⁶ And also: 'My faculty for disappointment surpasses understanding'.²⁷

Besides, 'occurrence', as modest as it seems conceptually in comparison to 'truth' reveals a limitation, illustrates determination, partiality and, thus, on the one hand a theft, in terms of freedom, and a deceit, in terms of the illusive idea that existence implies manifestation linked somehow to worth. Occurrence is merely a stopping point, a sort of marsh, a purposeless prison. Existence harvests its tragic quality from the disconnection from origins and purposefulness alike; so that existence leaves man *suspended, alone* with oneself. Since being born is to occur amidst world man is destined to the whole symphony of the already mentioned litany of attributes and derivatives of tragedy: anxiety, disappointment, failure, 'ne -science', discontent, suffering, alienation etc.

Then there is torment.

Existence = Torment. The equation seems obvious to me, but not to one of my friends. How to convince him? I cannot lend him my sensations; yet only they would have the power to persuade him, to give him that additional dose of ill -being he has so insistently asked for all this time.²⁸

Finally, there are conscience and a consciousness, troubled, alive, recreated and renewed, which are truly sizing existence: 'Fear creates consciousness -not natural fear but morbid fear. Otherwise, animals would have achieved a level of consciousness higher than ours.'²⁹ and 'We are not afraid to accept the notion of an uninterrupted sleep; on the other hand, an eternal awakening (immortality, if it were conceivable, would be just that) plunges us into dread. Unconsciousness is a country, a fatherland; consciousness, an exile.'³⁰ As a consequence: 'We dread the future only when we are not

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 116.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

sure we can kill ourselves when we want to.³¹

4. A few unexpected aspects of confluence

We came across a few interesting, yet unexpected confluences of the ideas present in the aphorisms from *The Trouble with Being Born* with certain aphorisms in Lucian Blaga³², the first of those, regarding logic:

Logic suffers from a great vice of logic: it believes reality itself to be logical. If it comes up against something that cannot be understood logically, it will maintain that such something does not exist, that it is mere appearance.³³

In our view, even the tone, not only the meaning and sense of the phrase are very similar to what Emil Cioran has to say about logic. For instance, when Emil Cioran says 'Getting up in the middle of the night, I walked around my room with the certainty of being chosen and criminal, a double privilege natural to the sleepless, revolting or incomprehensible for the captives of daytime logic',³⁴ he captures this volatile quality of logic, about which Lucian Blaga is meditating as well, in other terms. The same goes for the following aphorism:

Destruction and explosion of syntax, *victory of ambiguity and approximation* [our emphasis]. All very well. But just try to draw up a will, and you'll see if the defunct rigor was so contemptible. An aphorism? Fire without flames. Understandable that no one tries to warm himself at it.³⁵

Indeed, we have here a contradiction: the victory of approximation is nearing the idea about the necessity of rigor and the self-irony about the futility of aphorisms. All these have the quality to sum up indicating the relativity of reason, knowledge and logic itself, while precisely this relativity, irony and self-irony trigger a fertility of thought.

However, in another aphorism, when Emil Cioran talks about the meaninglessness of the term *being*, he talks more or less along the same significant lines, for the relativity of logic represents the

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 77. See also Angela Botez, R.T. Allen, Henrieta Anisoara Serban, eds. (2018). *Lucian Blaga. Selected Philosophical Extracts*.

³³ *Ibidem.*, p. 143, from *Stones of My Temple*, 1919. Lucian Blaga was a Romanian philosopher (1895-1961), prominent in Romanian culture as a philosopher of culture, knowledge, history and anthropology with a 'metaphysical vision of the totality of existence' (*The Sketch of a Philosophical Self-Presentation*, 1938). He was a translator of Goethe and Lessing (first volume of G.E. Lessing's works in Romanian were published in 1958), but also an essayist, a poet, a playwright and a memorialist. He was a professor of philosophy and a diplomat at Bern, Vienna, Lisbon and Prague. He was proposed for Nobel Prize by Bazil Munteanu (France) and Rosa del Conte (Italy) in 1954, but the Stalinist Communist government sent agents to Sweden to prevent this. Nevertheless, the publication of his work was resumed in 1962, even under the communists, due to its great value. He created an original philosophical system appreciated by Mircea Eliade, Antonio Banfi and others, interpreted as relevant in correlation with several universal philosophers such as Nietzsche, Spengler, Emerson, Bergson, Freud, Nietzsche, Cassirer, Kuhn, and others, but he was also a poet (translated in French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, English, German, Russian, Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish, Greek, Serbian, Polish, and Bulgarian). The main concepts of his philosophical system are culture, mystery ('man lives in the horizon of mystery'), style and the stylistic matrix, considered defining for a culture, the metaphysical and creative being, the Great Anonymous, the unconscious and the abyssal categories. See also:

³⁴ Emil Cioran (2011). *The Trouble with Being Born*, p. 211.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 198

foundation for the relativity of meaning, or, lack of meaning all together: 'Whether it is spoken by a grocer or a philosopher, the word *being*, apparently so rich, so tempting, so charged with significance, in fact means nothing at all; incredible that a man in his right mind can use it on any occasion whatever.'³⁶

Another fascinating similarity appears in an aphorism dedicated to truth: 'That truth may also have disastrous influence upon us does not disprove its ideal value, it only proves our weakness: we are like the sick one who cannot stand the fresh, brisk air of the mountains.'³⁷

Emil Cioran proved a persistent preoccupation with authenticity of existence, and involvement with one's own existence, too, at occasions explicit, other times, implicit, to be found in Lucian Blaga's aphorisms, too. For illustration, we mention the following:

Truth abides in the individual drama. If I suffer authentically, I suffer much more than an individual, I transcend the sphere of my selfhood, I rejoin the essence of others. The only way to proceed toward the universal is to concern ourselves exclusively with what concerns ourselves.³⁸

Lucian Blaga expressed his similar view in the following aphorism:

Those who in order to live need a theory of living, those who in order to be enthused need a theory of enthusiasm, those who in order to become passionate need a theory of passion, those who in order to exist need a theory of existence—ought to leave living, enthusiasm, passion, existence in the hands of the others.³⁹

In our interpretation, if Lucian Blaga was ever to comment on the topic of the human being and existence at Emil Cioran (or, specifically on the troubled relation with existence entertained by the philosopher), would have said: 'So many trees, which ruthless winds cannot break, do break under the load of their own fruit.'⁴⁰ And, if Cioran were to relate to Blaga he might have mentioned: 'Once we step into a cemetery, a feeling of utter mockery does away with any metaphysical concern. Those who look for 'mystery' everywhere do not necessarily get to the bottom of things. Most often 'mystery,' like 'the absolute,' corresponds only to a mannerism of the mind. It is a word we should use only when we cannot do otherwise, in really desperate cases.'⁴¹

Returning to *The Trouble with Being Born*, we may consider the following aphorism as an indication for what Emil Cioran himself, found in a self-reflective mood, might have said of his work:

We get a better hold of ourselves and of being when we have reacted against negating, dissolving books—against their noxious power. Fortifying books, actually, since they provoke the very energy which denies them. The more poison they contain, the more salutary their effect, provided we read them against the grain, as we should read any book, starting with the catechism.'⁴²

5. God Is Nowhere; God Is Everywhere.

Gloria victis is turned more obvious in the struggle of the philosopher with faith, religion and God, within an impossibly difficult relation with Divinity, in the discontent full of resentment with the

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 210.

³⁸ Emil Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, p.133.

³⁹ op.cit. p. 147. From *The Élan of the Island*, 1946.

⁴⁰ Emil Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, p. 113.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² op.cit.. p. 120.

destructive sense and the lack of meaning assigned for creation. The 'invincible victim' is vocal and strong, not at all perplexed or really defeated by the existential puzzle. The victim rises to fight meaninglessness times and again, often attacking God, 'the unbearable paradise', the fellow believer ('What right have you to pray for me?'), albeit hopeless and quasi -disarmed by the limits of reason, human illusions, human appetite for deceit, 'nescience', futility, meaninglessness etc.

Evoking here several aphorisms is enough to capture the principal traits of Emil Cioran's religious turmoil. First, we need to highlight the vicinity of the religious turmoil (integrant part of the existential turmoil) with suffering, since suffering is an exceptional promoter of *understanding*:

Suffering opens our eyes, helps us to see what we would not have seen otherwise. Hence it is useful only to knowledge and, except for that, serves only to poison existence. Which, one may add in passing, favours knowledge further. 'He has suffered -hence he has understood.' This is all we can say of a victim of disease, injustice, or of any kind of misfortune. Suffering improves no one (except those who were already good), it is forgotten as all things are forgotten, it does not enter into 'humanity's patrimony' nor preserve itself in any way at all -it wastes itself as everything is wasted. Once again, it serves only to open our eyes. After *certain experiences* [our emphasis], we should change names, since we ourselves are no longer the same.⁴³

Suffering is a wide path to 'certain experiences' which trigger philosophical thought. Thus, 'In classical India, the sage and the saint were combined in one and the same person. To have any notion of such a success, we must imagine, if we can, a fusion between resignation and ecstasy, between a cold stoic and a dishevelled mystic.'⁴⁴ And when he talks about 'certain experiences' the only considerable ones are personal; he stands alone in his quest for God and a prefiguration or clarification of faith and he is unimpressed by the example of others:

Even if I were to lose my reason, I could never bring myself to that 'uninterrupted prayer' advocated by the Hesychasts. All I understand about piety is its excesses, its suspect outrages, and asceticism would not interest me a moment if one did not encounter there all those things which are the lot of the bad monk: indolence, gluttony, the thirst for desolation, greed, and aversion for the world, vacillation between tragedy and the equivocal, hope of an inner collapse...⁴⁵

Emil Cioran rejects convenience in religious matters: 'Appealing, that Hindu notion of entrusting our salvation to someone else, to a chosen 'saint,' and permitting him to pray in our place, to do anything in order to save us. Selling our soul to God...'⁴⁶

The paradox is central to this lane of religious existential investigation, as well; in the following aphorism Cioran indicates the impure path toward purity: 'He who is inclined to lust is merciful and tender -hearted; those who are inclined to purity are not so' (Saint John Climacus). It took a saint, neither more nor less, to denounce so distinctly and so vigorously not the lies but the very essence of Christian morality, and indeed of all morality.'⁴⁷

Emil Cioran's anti-dogmatism entertains an endless quarrel with God. As we have previously mentioned, in another paragraph 'eternity is an infirmity of God', he thinks that 'the jealousy of the gods survives their disappearance', that '[w]e long since ceased to believe in the gods, and we no longer offer them sacrifices. Yet the world is still here'⁴⁸ and stands up to God and 'well-behaved'

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

faith in all occasions, he does not approve of anything, not even the kindness of Jesus Christ, mostly in thoughts such as,

The ancient gods ridiculed men, envied them, hunted them down on occasion, harried them. The God of the Gospels was less mocking and less jealous, and mortal men did not even enjoy, in their miseries, the consolation of being able to accuse Him. Which accounts for the absence or the impossibility of a Christian Aeschylus. A good God has killed tragedy.⁴⁹

In an important investigation of Emil Cioran's 'anti-theology' Marius Dobre⁵⁰ provided a comprehensive interpretation of textual resources found in Cioran's work and of the influences received by Emil Cioran, for instance, from the sceptic philosopher Pyrrhon, in terms of anti-dogmatism, criticism, negativistic attitude and discontent with most facets of religious certitude. Another important influence is considered his professor at the University of Bucharest, Nae Ionescu, although he understood the religious act was a generally human one. The influence of Gnostics (most of all Marcion, emphasized Marius Dobre) is also mentioned and it appears explicitly in the aphorisms in *The Trouble with Being Born*. Their solution to the problem of evil is especially appealing to Cioran: there is 'a primordial Demiurge who failed the act of creation, alongside the idea of a supreme God, entirely good, willing to repair as much as possible the work of his predecessor.'⁵¹ The researcher discusses the similarities and differences between Cioran's anti-theology and Nietzsche's anti-theology, mentioning that Cioran himself had reservation for this comparison. Indeed, we also consider that in Cioran's case the relation to Christianity is much more complex and not simply a 'religion of the weak, of slaves, with a moral built in the detriment of real people, of supermen'⁵². At the same time, we want to emphasize along with Marius Dobre that,

The two must be placed next to each other at least for the fact that they present their ideas in the same essayistic-literary manner. But, the Nietzschean vision of the religious phenomenon, at least that from the Antichrist, constitutes, from my point of view, another case of anti-theology.⁵³

This brings us to the next interesting observation concerning the complexities of the relation entertained by Emil Cioran with (Christian) religion and faith. Having emphasized the 'anti-theology' present in Emil Cioran's work, any interpreter is going to be puzzled by the prayer that he wrote and included in 1936 in his *Book of Delusions*. It is important to render it in its entirety:

Prayer in the wind: Protect me, Lord, from the great hatred, of the hatred from which worlds (might) spring. Appease the aggressive trembling of my body and free me from the grip of my own jaws. Let vanish that black dot that lights up in me and spreads in each and every one of my limbs, giving birth to a deadly flame in the endless black burning of hatred. Save me from the worlds born of hatred, set me free of the endless blackness beneath which my heavens die. Open a ray within this darkened night and let rise the stars (once) lost in the thick fog of my soul. Show me the way back to myself, open my path in my thick grove. Come down within me along with the sun and let my world begin.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

⁵¹ Marius Dobre (2011). 'How to Build an 'Anti-Theology'. The Case of Emil Cioran', *European Journal of Science and Theology*, September, Vol.7, No.3, 47-58 (57).

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

In the light of this prayer, the relationship with God is direct open and warm, characterized by complete trust. God is the deliverer, the saviour, from the 'grip of my jaws', which is a metaphor for sins and He is the hope and the light. He *can* end any darkness and provided that the prayer is fervently requiring for delivery from hatred and darkness, we also easily deduce that God is love and light, that is, salvation ('Come down within me along with the sun'), spreading 'the thick fog of my soul' and 'my thick grove' (again, the sins and the disbelief). At the same time, He appears as the only guarantor for '(my) heavens', my salvation, rendered as well through the metonymy of a shining soul.⁵⁵

The major significance of the fact that an author like Emil Cioran wrote a prayer is paramount and the contents of this prayer perfectly capture the image of the religious (Christian) attitude and being. The article published next year, 'Emil Cioran -between Prometheus and Sisyphus'⁵⁶, capitalizing this paper, the accent was placed on the discovery of the hypostases of the philosopher as believer: either a Promethean image of the daring believer rising against God in search of the authentic meaning of God, believer, religion and, at an extreme, the Sisyphus image of believer, happy fulfilling his omen, while carrying up the hill his boulder of faith, as heavy, rough, futile and temporary as it might be.

6. *Gloria victis!*

The interpretations underlined so far and the selected quotations prove from various perspectives the fact that Emil Cioran brought paradox (and inconsistency) at the higher rank of method. The paradoxes with their included contradictions and antinomies explain how existence is the ultimate trial and the meaningful ontological effort necessary for the human being to keep on living. Living is creation of meaning and struggle with powerful meaninglessness at the same time. Cioran was not someone to think that philosophy transforms 'chaos into cosmos/order and meaning', or that ontology was cosmology's highest aim and dream. However, he is facing in his works the puzzling manifestations of truths in the forms of existentially accessible meanings, brought up in dialogue with his own accusations of meaninglessness against existence and everything else. Space is not the final frontier, so to speak; the final frontier for man is meaning, which is, paradoxically, man's dazzling and victorious contribution to a meaningless and brief existence.

Existing does not necessarily entail existence. Nevertheless, being born casts one into existence and for those cursed with the metaphysical core, it is something always bigger than life, cruel and glorious. It is doomed to failure, yet, in glorious symphonic harmonies. Whenever Logos is exhausted, or overcame, or failed, it gets transformed in Melos.⁵⁷

The 'patron of the defeated', as Cioran referred to himself in one occasion, was as much provoked by meaning as well as by meaninglessness; and this bleak vision of human life described mostly by lack of meaning proved to be eventually absolutely necessary for the renewal of the endless quest for meaning, found beneath his own metaphysical lament about meaninglessness of the being and of the human universe. From this perspective, metaphysical turmoil is the entire hope for a meaningful existence, since there (in the midst of metaphysical turmoil) all meaning is present in nascent form. As a consequence, meaninglessness is still meaningful. Thus, meaning is inescapable and it is the genuine source of suffering, salvation and victory. Quite probable, this represents the paradoxical affirmation of the philosophical

⁵⁵ Emil Cioran (1991). *Cartea am girilor*, Bucharest: Humanitas, p. 104, our translation. See also Camelia Elias (2010). 'E. M. Cioran, The Book of Delusions', selective translation, *Hyperion*, V (1): 53-82.

⁵⁶ In the paper entitled 'Prayer in the wind' delivered at the conference organized by the Academy of Romanian Scientists in September 2011 at Dorna Arini, Romania, we presented this above cited *prayer written by Emil Cioran*, an intriguing starting point for interpreting the surprisingly profound preoccupation with the religious feeling, its deep understanding, based on the centrality of love as the great connector to divinity, in opposition with hate, which represents the definite disconnecter from God and sacredness alike.

⁵⁷ Henrieta Serban (2012). 'Emil Cioran-între Prometeu si Sisif', *Revista de Filosofie*, No. 1: 71-78.

privilege, if there ever was one, and this is, truly, 'Gloria victis'.

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