

C. RĂDULESCU-MOTRU AND THE PURSUIT OF A NEW SCIENCE OF THE SOUL

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ABSTRACT: The following study presents a concise historical overview of natural philosophy, examining the interpretations of the human psyche and their development up until the contemporary era. The presentation focuses on some of the main theories regarding the nature and functions of the mind, aiming to contrast them with one of the unfulfilled intellectual projects of the Romanian polymath C. Rădulescu-Motru. Specifically, his project aimed to establish a philosophical system addressing the intricacies of the human soul in the context of the scientific advances considered modern at the time—a system he referred to as the new science of the soul. His objective was to provide a comprehensive perspective encompassing all areas of knowledge in order to mitigate their tendency towards determinism, mechanism and biologism, which were spreading from the direction of the natural science.

KEYWORDS: dualism; monism; Darwinism; psyche; energetic personalism.

FROM THE BIOLOGICAL TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IN THE OLD NATURAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE SOUL

Before the advent of modern psychology, which separated the definition of a special mental capacity from that of the animate soul, the two coexisted and were confounded with each other. Something that is quite present in the discourse of various thinkers, among whom the Romanian ones are no exception, is the failure to provide a clear demarcation between mind, soul, and all the faculties between them, even to this day. Additionally, the term ‘soul’ has been and is often used interchangeably with the term ‘spirit’. Hegel himself contributed to this terminological confusion when he associated the collective tendencies of a time period with the metaphor of the spirit in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. This gave rise to the idea that the mechanisms of social interaction are similar to an impulse within the biological processes of living organisms.

Ever since Aristotle, the defining property of being alive was that of being animate. In Aristotle’s view, the movement is made possible by the presence of a special substance which he called *psychē* – the psyche, or the soul. The Aristotelian soul is not separated from the body *per se*. They are not two distinct entities. The

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soul is that upon which every organism is built, i.e., its *essence*.¹ Furthermore, in his anatomy of the soul, he identified three stages of existence. The first, which he called the vegetative stage, characterizes plant life, enabling nourishment and reproduction.² The second, the animal stage, grants animals perception and independent movement.³ The third stage is the one we are most interested in because it is the form of life attributed to humans, endowing them with a special property that lacks in any other form of life – the intellect or *nous*.⁴ In short, this soul performs two functions. Firstly, it is an animating soul that allows the movement of beings and within the organisms of beings. We can call this the life force. This soul, Aristotle argued, dies when the body dies. At the same time, the body dies when the soul departs and complete cessation of movement occurs within.⁵ The second of these functions of the soul is the intellect. This provides the possibility of human reasoning, a place to store memory and the place where we form our personality and identity.⁶

This perspective prevailed until the 16th-century Reformation, when René Descartes, in his *Second Meditation*, made a specific distinction between a material and an immaterial dimension of life, creating a dualism between the biological body and the immaterial mind. With this perspective, Descartes identified two “things” or *res* that constitute life. First, we have the so-called *res extensa*, which regulates bodily functions, and then a *res cogitans* which doubts, believes, hopes and thinks.⁷ If, for Aristotle, the soul was a substance inhabiting the body, the *ousia* of matter and form, for Descartes, the mind and the body are two entirely distinct substances. Descartes’s dualism raised a new set of questions, including the challenge of explaining how an immaterial entity communicates with a material reality when their substances differ so much that they cannot interact with each other. Many followers of Descartes tried to defend his theory by using God as a direct intermediary between the mind and the body. Even Descartes himself tried to explain mind-body connection through a very obscure process that was supposed to take place in the pineal gland.

At the same time, Thomas Hobbes, in the first part of his *Elements of Law*, argued that life is nothing but matter in movement. According to him, everything can be explained by natural, biological causes without us having to rely on an incorporeal, immaterial soul or any faculty that is external to the human mind.⁸ This mechanistic perspective intertwined with empiricist views that sought to explain the mind solely through experience. According to John Locke, the human mind is empty at birth, as blank as a piece of paper on which nothing has been yet written – *a tabula rasa*.⁹ He additionally posited that not only are we born with a blank mind, but we are also born without any innate ideas. The only properties of this blank mind are the *predispositions* that enable it to acquire and store knowledge. Knowledge is acquired solely through the experiences of the senses that come into contact with the external world and through the inner reflection of the mind on these impressions.¹⁰ C. Rădulescu-Motru shared a somewhat similar view, assert-

ing that self-consciousness begins to take shape when the individual engages with its environment. It acquires self-consciousness not from inception, but after becoming aware of the life around it, and particularly after becoming aware of other similar souls. According to Motru, “man knew his fellow man, his alter, before he knew himself, his own ego”.¹¹

David Hume took Locke’s theory to an even greater extent. He argued that the mind is nothing more than the sum of all its experiences bundled together.¹² Specifically, he believed that an object is merely the sum of all its properties and relations, and nothing more. There is no substance in which these properties are inherent; they are only acquired. Hume compared the mind to a commonwealth, which retains its identity not by virtue of the existence of an enduring basic substance, but by being composed of many different, related, and yet constantly changing elements.¹³

Immanuel Kant, assessing John Locke’s epistemological system from his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, dismissed it in the Preface to his 1st Edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* as nothing more than an attempt at “the physiology of understanding”.¹⁴ He regarded Locke’s distinction¹⁵ between an external *idea of sensation* and an internal *idea of reflection* as the basis of human knowledge to be nothing more than a rudimentary description of a special faculty of the human mind attempted by an empiricist monist. Like his contemporaries Thomas Hobbes and George Berkeley, John Locke was a monist. He believed that the mind and body are made of the same material substance. He also held that all properties of the mind are physical instead of metaphysical and, therefore, can be examined through empirical means. Consequently, he viewed all experiences as physical experiences, acquired *intuitively* through the senses, directly and passively from stimuli in nature.¹⁶ Kant, in turn, challenged both materialism and Lockean monism. He further developed the Lockean theory of predispositions by introducing two new dimensions: the *a priori/a posteriori* distinctions of knowledge and the *analytic/synthetic* nature of judgements. The real-world objects he relegated to the *noumena* as objects who are independent of our perception and understanding. To enable the mind, as he understood it, to access the knowledge of the outside world, he introduced the *phaenomenon*¹⁷, the outward *appearance* of the objects that constitute our experience. As a conclusion to his inaugural dissertation *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*, we can determine that we humans could infer only as much as our senses allowed to, but not experience the actual object in itself.¹⁸ As such, we are limited in our understanding of the world by the appearance of things, and how our mind interprets these appearances. This very fracture between *appearances* and *things-in-themselves* he would later use as a basis for his *transcendental metaphysics*. This is considered the first discourse addressing the psychological implications of knowledge, marking an epistemological breakthrough in the study of the human psyche. Prior to Kant’s contributions, psychology remained largely unchanged since Aristotle and focused pri-

marily on spiritual matters as defined theologically. From this point on, a structured theory of the mind and self-consciousness could be established. Additionally, due to the need to better define personal and supra-personal identity, Kant was instrumental in introducing the first comprehensive theory of culture.

According to the arguments mentioned above, there is no inherent nature to individual identity. Identity, in and of itself, is not something, but merely the *possession* of certain *qualia* at certain times. Therefore, the definition of identity is not rooted in *being* something, but in *having* something. Hume argued that the characteristics of one's identity are not permanent; instead, they exchange and succeed one another. Given that one's identity does not remain consistent over time, the manifestation of its attributes would be merely coincidental and circumstantial, lacking essential or defining characteristics for the person. Hobbes considered that a person's identity is akin to the ship of Theseus. Every time a piece of the ship breaks, it is replaced by a new one. This process continues until, after a certain time, the entire ship is replaced. Despite this, the idea that it is still the same ship persists.¹⁹ However, Hobbes's example, although very relevant, omitted the fact that the idea of the ship does not exist in the ship itself but in the minds of its crew. Thus, every time a new part was broken off or added, the idea of the ship was updated with the new design, just as human identity is capable of updating its reference self-image at every moment of its existence.

First of all, we have to acknowledge that we have continuity of memory and the persistence of a unifying entity of the self. Yet, when we talk about the actual manifestation of this identity, we have a much more complex mechanism at play. Let's take Richard Dawkins's theory as an example. There are different levels of identity. Initially, we possess an individual, personal identity, and subsequently, we form a group identity. While identifying ourselves as individuals, we simultaneously define our identity by belonging to a group, whether it be a culture, an ethnic group, a creed, or a religion. This leads to the question of uniqueness and specifically, above all, the relationship between one's self and their surroundings. It is crucial to establish two very important environments here. At the biological level, we have the natural world with which we interact to exchange matter and energy, ensuring our continued growth and survival. At the psychological level, we encounter a vastly different medium – a socio-cultural environment, in which we exchange ideas and ideals. However, this exchange doesn't occur between that environment and us, but rather with other individuals like us within that environment. In this way a group consciousness is formed. Dawkins argued that genes exist only in the biological world but contended that they have an analogue in the psycho-cultural dimension, something he calls *memes*.²⁰ While the role of the genes is to carry genetic information into posterity, a meme is an idea, behavior, or style used for carrying cultural ideals, symbols, or practices that can be transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, or other imitable phenomena that can be replicated by others.²¹

Returning to the question of where one's identity is preserved, we can assume that one's identity lies both in one's self and in one's environment. We have an internal idea of our self that we manifest not only in our thoughts, but we also imprint it onto the objects and people we surround ourselves with. We are constantly comparing our memories of ourselves against the same memories stored either in our written artifacts or in the minds of others. We often give and receive parts of our identity that have a life of their own. When we embrace a culture, we don't forge that culture out of nothing to fit the needs of our identity; rather we adopt ready-made ideals and complex values. This inevitably raises a question as to how these ideas ultimately came into being. It is obvious that these ideas were once conceived by the minds of those who preceded us, and, in Locke's terms, we have taken them into ourselves almost unconsciously. We find that we have within our personal identity many properties that do not originate in us but in someone else at some point in the past.

Thus, we have arrived at the issues of inheritance and imitation as two possible models that an identity can use to perpetuate itself. Within the inheritance model, an individual transfers their personal values and ideas directly into another environment. This is the most common form of perpetuating *memes*. A teacher instructing his students, a master teaching his pupils, a writer writing a book – the goal is the same. In these scenarios, one consciously makes a selection of a set of values and information gathered from within oneself, then packages them in a compact container, making them readily available to be transferred directly onto another individual. This is how traditions are commonly established. Values are structured in such a way as to be disseminated directly to a targeted individual or group of individuals, primarily through educational means. We can store not only the information our mentors taught us, but also parts of their behaviors or beliefs. The second model is the imitation model, where the values of an individual or a group of individuals is disseminated into a "collective consciousness". They are not preserved as they are. Moreover, the values are not transmitted directly but are used to reinforce a common ideal within a particular culture. This phenomenon can be likened to Plato's concept of objects participating in their respective ideas. While particularly different, they all share the one common *eidéa* that they came to embody. We participate in the idea of our identity and yet we are the component parts that define it, like the cells of a multicellular organism. However, in this participation some individuals bring a much greater contribution than others. These are individuals who projected parts of themselves into the larger ideal of a group and who defined that group with the values they held to be of paramount importance. They achieved a state of timelessness by transcending the limits of their individual minds into the collective consciousness of their nation, and their ideals are forever inscribed in it. However, others whose contributions rise to a level that is universal can no longer be claimed by a certain group.

Summarizing the arguments so far, there are two distinct dimensions to life: one biological and one psychological. If we consider Dawkins's idea that only our genes are truly alive, not our bodies²², we can conclude that the same is true for the memes. In other words, that individuality lies not in the psychological person but in the construct of ideas. Therefore, we are merely collectives, communities of these ideas, which are atomic, immortal individualities. Ultimately, we are our ideas. Our individual identity is propagated in a continuous axiological metempsychosis. We foster and develop ideas within ourselves, and afterwards we release those ideas back into the collective consciousness.

This kind of preconception regarding the soul can be observed starting from the final years of the 19th century. In Romania as well as in Europe as a whole, there has been a considerable debate over the biological factor and its fundamental role in the development of societies. The cultural factor comes into play only as an afterthought, as a by-product of the biological factors. With this paradigmatic shift against the old science of the soul, an increasing number of thinkers began to view culture itself as an organism. Eugen Lovinescu, in *Istoria civilizației române moderne* [The history of modern Romanian civilization], described the phenomenon as follows: "The philosophical and scientific thought of the 19th century is, however, dominated by the idea of evolution. In philosophy, it took on a definitive configuration in Hegel's system; by assimilating social life to an organism, all forms of the present become the expression of gradual growth".²³

This line of reasoning parallels some of Spengler's ideas presented in the first part of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. Attempting to outgrow Hegel but without leaving him behind, Spengler stated that "Culture is Soul that has arrived at self-expression in sensible forms"²⁴; however, these forms are living and ever evolving. The greatest revolution of Spengler's thought, however, was the transition from the philosophy of history, as it had been established by Hegel, to the philosophy of culture when he stated that "[c]ultures are organisms, and world-history is their collective biography".²⁵ His model of historical development held that human cultures and civilizations are akin to biological entities, each with a limited, predictable and finite existence. For him, cultures are essentially related to plants, bound to the soil from which they sprang for the duration of their entire lifespans.²⁶ A biological heritage comes with a spiritual heritage.

This trend of greatly exaggerating the contribution of the biological factor and overusing it in other areas of social life has taken on the guise of Darwinism. However, it involves, both then and now, a false association between the theses enunciated by Charles Darwin and the interpretations given by his equally famous compatriot Herbert Spencer to them. It is worth noting that this confusion persists to this day. In his writings, Spencer comes across more as a syncretic thinker with Lamarckian views and was only circumstantially concerned with Darwin. For instance, the famous phrase "survival of the fittest" originated in Spencer's 1864 *Principles of Biology*.²⁷ Darwin later adopted this expression in the 1869 edition of

his works. We also have Spencer to thank for the eventual development of the concept of *social Darwinism* as a moral theory. As we shall see hereafter, Spencer also contributed to the concept of *cultural Darwinism*. Julian Huxley, grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley, a fierce advocate of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, in his 1942 *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis*, used the phrase "the eclipse of Darwinism" to describe the period from the death of Darwin to the modern synthesis.²⁸ Even though both Darwinism and Lamarckism have been superseded by the chromosomal theory of inheritance and modern genetics in the field of biology, the principles popularized by Spencer have been adopted by many of the social sciences and humanities. Today we have a *dual inheritance theory*, or gene-culture co-evolution, recognizing the importance of social and cultural factors in human evolution.

C. Rădulescu-Motru, however, tried to offset this drift towards materialist determinism. For him, culture is not an abstract characteristic of a living biological community, but is itself a living organism. Motru's addendum to the Darwinian theory is the introduction of a social environment as a mediator between the biological environment and the human individual. Naturally, human beings come into immediate contact with the physical elements of their environment, but they always do so through the interface of a socially acquired understanding of their actions.²⁹ This idea is also found in Darwin. In his most famous works, *On the Origin of Species*³⁰ and *The Descent of Man*³¹, the latter discussed at length the concept of "inherited habits". The concept of inheritance is not unique to, and does not originate in Darwin's body of work. It appeared earlier, in the works of French zoologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, to which Darwin made frequent references. Lamarckian inheritance professes the idea that an organism can pass on to its offspring the physical characteristics that the parent organism acquired through use or non-use during its lifetime. Unlike inherited physical characteristics, the inherited habits *are passed on to an individual after birth*, signifying that they are not dependent on the biological constitution of an organism or its genes. Habits require a psychological environment in which they can propagate. They depend on a mental ecosystem primarily anchored in the virtualization capabilities of the mind. Darwin distinguished between instinct and habit. According to him, an instinct is "[a]n action, which we ourselves require experience to enable us to perform, when performed by an animal, more especially by a very young one, without experience, and when performed by many individuals in the same way, without their knowing for what purpose it is performed, is usually said to be instinctive".³² According to him, an instinct lacks any prior experience. One example he gave was that of the newborn baby who instinctively knows how to suckle at its mother's breast.³³

He also attempted an explanation of the emergence of language and material culture in primitive tribes through habits that are socially taught within the community, whether of animals or primitive humans, through imitation.³⁴ He provided a basis for a culture rooted in necessity and survival, in which technological ad-

vantage, however primitive, made the difference between proliferation and extinction. The material culture of a tribe afterwards developed and spread through imitation.³⁵ Darwin contended that “if some one man in a tribe, more sagacious than the others, invented a new snare or weapon, or other means of attack or defense, the plainest self-interest, without the assistance of much reasoning power, would prompt the other members to imitate him; and all would thus profit”.³⁶

The same holds true for art; the regular practice of every new art must have also, to some extent, strengthened the intellect.³⁷ In this context, culture must be understood as “socially learned behavior” and “social learning”, defined as copying behaviors observed in others or acquiring them by way of learning from others. Language has its origin in this process of imitation, upon which modifications, additions and improvements have been made.³⁸ Unfortunately, as Motru concluded in his excursion into Darwinian evolutionary theory, society as a whole has its own selfishness, since it always prefers the product to the individual who produces it, as “the fate of the innovation is not linked to the fate of the innovator’s person. The qualities that constitute the value of the innovation are social, not individual, and that is the reason why the innovation continues to live on through itself, abandoning the person of the innovator who gave birth to it”.³⁹

Yet, while there are many similarities between his approach and Darwin’s, he warns that Darwinism and other forms of biologism in natural philosophy run the risk of reducing the human person to a sum of determinants and biological functions, neglecting altogether the inner disposition of his soul.

A NEW SCIENCE OF THE SOUL

Amid the new emerging sciences that marked the advent of the new century, C. Rădulescu-Motru contended that philosophy must also undergo a scientific revolution, relinquishing its Kantian underpinnings and embracing new modes of inquiry. He was referring to psychology and sociology, sciences which, at that time, were not recognized as legitimate fields of knowledge in themselves, but only as experimental fields of study in philosophy. However, the methodological shift towards treating these disciplines more like natural sciences, through positivism, left philosophy with a vacuum. In response to this, and indeed to the entirety of positivist empirical philosophy, German philosophy formally established anti-positivism, proposing that the emphasis of investigations should focus on human cultural norms, values, symbols and social processes. Most importantly, these investigations must be carried out from a subjective perspective. This firmly delineated a social world distinct from the natural world. Thus philosophy, as Motru saw it, must create a new science to address the human soul in a more fitting manner.

Previously, David Hume, in his essay *Of National Characters*, noted how social character was far more influential than national character.⁴⁰ However, in the

latter half of the 18th century, there was a notable move towards characterizing collective entities, blending moral philosophy with socio-cultural mappings that explored the connection between human typologies and their natural environment. Positive thinkers such as Spencer adopted the concept of national character to describe the correlating interactions between the environment, race, and internal psychological factors. The most important scientific paradigm in this regard in late 19th century Europe that attempted to define national character, was *Völkerpsychologie*, of which Wilhelm Wundt was a pioneer. Nonetheless, this methodical approach has been shown to have several weaknesses. Initially, it attempted to counter nationalist arguments by highlighting changes in community attitudes. Despite this, it opened up opportunities for the development of structures that foreshadowed the radicalization of nationalist thought in Germany, particularly after the trauma of the Great War.⁴¹ Motru implicitly rejected this ethno-nationalist prejudice, as he noted that “[d]ifferent peoples with different civilizations have settled on the same soil, and it is not the soil that determines their culture, but rather their culture determines how they use the different properties of the soil”.⁴²

Similar to Hume, Motru gave more weight to personal character than to heredity.⁴³ What he proposed instead was to abandon the biological factors which had served as the main obstacle to the formation of such a new science, and to concentrate on the role of the human person in directing this succession of phenomena.⁴⁴ Later on, in *Personalismul energetic* [Energetic personalism] he made an extensive critique of the methods lent by the natural sciences to psychology:

The science of the human soul, especially with regard to the human personality, has been held back by applying the wrong method of research. More than the naturalist of old, who studied the plant separate from the environment, the psychologist, until recently, saw in the human soul a kind of monad, in the sense given by Leibniz to monads. No window of free communication with the environment was given to this soul. The psychologist spoke, it is true, of external impressions, but these were artificially constructed; they were the same for all souls. And these artificial, typical impressions also gave rise to reflex acts, which were themselves similarly artificial and typical constructions. Nothing remained of the soul, in the psychologist's notion, that could recall its concrete reality. The environment in which man lives was eliminated. Man's descent, eliminated. The cultural atmosphere of the time, eliminated. Even from the intimate constitution of the soul everything that did not appear clearly in the consciousness of the mature man was eliminated. The human soul was studied *in abstracto*, and then artificially rendered to the eye, like a plant, dried, labeled in an herbarium.⁴⁵

He laid the groundwork for a new philosophical framework to replace such an impersonal psychology as early as his 1908 *Puterea sufletească* [The Power of the soul]. However, as a forerunner in the development of experimental psychology himself, Motru relied heavily on it. Nevertheless, he clearly recognized that a science of the soul is not just psychology, but something much broader than it. It

should encompass the faculties of the soul hitherto established by the study of the human psyche, including judgment, imagination and memory, and outline how these potentialities should be used in the social environment in culture, science, morality, art, and justice.⁴⁶ The aim of such a science should be to enable man to master not only the material world, which he is already beginning to tame, but also his inner world, which he is only now beginning to comprehend.⁴⁷ Individual consciousness, he asserted, becomes part of this spiritual environment. The determinations of the soul, to which the progress of culture is ascribed, together with the possibility of mastering the external environment, belong to it. Therefore, only in and through it is it possible for the individual consciousness to further assert itself. The affirmation of the individual consciousness towards the external environment consists in mastering it through culture. Meanwhile, the affirmation of that same consciousness in relation to the soul's environment consists in a more perfect organization of it within said environment.⁴⁸

In this novel system, defining forces or physical energy does not require venturing outside the laws that interconnect natural phenomena. The definition of energy itself resides within the understanding of this chain of laws. When considering the powers or energy of the soul, the answer should be no different. Just as natural sciences have shifted their focus from seeking the intimate nature of matter to understanding the laws that govern the order of events, so too must psychologists abandon speculation about the substance of the soul and focus on discerning the causal laws through which the soul manifests itself. Most psychologists of the time challenged not only the existence of a soul substance, but also its utility, even as a mere hypothesis. Traditional psychology proposed two hypotheses regarding the substance of the soul. One suggested the soul was immaterial, while the other conflated it to matter. The former derived from spiritualist metaphysics, while the latter from materialist metaphysics. Nevertheless, both concerned themselves solely with the nature of this substance, disregarding its existence, which served as the underlying assumption of both. The new psychology questioned precisely what was precluded by both the old spiritualist and materialist psychologies. It called into question the very existence of a soul substance. It is worthy to note that Motru credited Wundt for his contribution towards resolving this issue.⁴⁹

The relationship between the various forms of energy in the Universe is unchanging. It remains continuously identical with itself. Consequently, if it is constant and identical with itself, it must also constitute a unity. Since energy remains consistent with itself, it is inherently unified. As Motru appropriately asserted, the three concepts are intricately linked: "Reality underlies identity, and both together, unity".⁵⁰ The same holds true for the connection between the different acts of consciousness. Therefore, the reality of consciousness forms the basis for the identity of the soul, and when merged, they result in unity. Consciousness is self-consciousness, which makes it a unified consciousness.⁵¹ From these conclusions, Motru suggested that the same principles cause the unity of consciousness and the

Universe. Either of these two unities affirms the same thing, namely “that within consciousness, as within the Universe, there is a mutual conditioning of acts and phenomena that are based on a relationship that remains identical with itself”.⁵² He presented the materialist argument according to which these certain irreducible properties constitute matter. Matter alone is the real substance, and the soul is a byproduct of matter, as without it, the soul could not exist. Consequently, the entire world is an outward manifestation of matter.⁵³ He also presented the opposing argument that matter cannot constitute reality, because it is manifestly a product of our senses.⁵⁴ Consequently, the soul must be assumed as the first reality from which we form the appearance of the external world.⁵⁵ Both the materialistic and spiritualistic arguments that formed the basis of the major directions around which old thinkers and leaders rallied, he said, suffer from a fallacy.⁵⁶ We can understand the causal laws which govern the occurrence and repetition of every kind of phenomena. However, regarding the nature of soul and matter, our opinions are constantly changing. Therefore, the only true reality, unconditioned by our temporal dispositions, which our intelligence can successfully grasp and retain, is that of the causal chaining of phenomena. This is the law which unifies all the appearances of the internal and external world. This unifying principle, he claimed, is the law of energy.⁵⁷

C. Rădulescu-Motru revisited this issue in his 1912 *Elemente de metafizică* [Elements of metaphysics], republished in 1928, on which occasion he appended to the title: “on the basis of Kantian philosophy”. He argued against dualism, and also against a “monism which tends to explain the unity of phenomena by the existence of something outside the known Universe”. He considered that the best form of monism is the one that “attempts this explanation by means of causes which are to be found within the phenomena known to the human mind”.⁵⁸ He strived to construct a philosophical theory of consciousness that preserved both Kant’s apriorism and experimental psychology’s concept of consciousness, in a context where physical and psychological phenomena are forms of one and the same reality, which is neither physical nor psychological. This position had previously been taken, in turn, by the rationalist Baruch Spinoza and the empiricist David Hume, who argued that ultimate reality is of a singular nature because it allows only for a single substance. Moreover, it is neutral, describing the single substance as both body and mind. It is not oriented towards any of the dimensions it subsumes, unlike its physicalist and idealistic counterparts, as it does not favor one over the other.

Human consciousness, Motru stated, “is not a passive mirror, nor a transcendental consciousness”.⁵⁹ It does not take the form of an epiphenomenon, which is superimposed “like a light from another world, on the background of a material world”, but is the synthetic result of the evolution through which the whole universal energy has passed.⁶⁰ He further asserted that of all the correlations that are possible for evolution, “[r]eality, in so far as it is conceived as an evolving energy, confounds its evolution with the process leading to the formation of personality, in

which all organic correlations are summed up”.⁶¹ Finally, he came to the conclusion that “reality is an energetic personalism”.⁶²

Motru did not consider the idea of a transcendent ultimate reality unless it could be grounded on a scientific basis. As he expressed, “[t]he unity we seek can only come from the inner constitution of the Universe. The God of whom we spoke above, if he exists, must exist in the Universe, and not outside the Universe”.⁶³ Energy is the real substratum of the world.⁶⁴ In other words, reality can be rationally explained through the laws of energy. We are dealing with a universal energy subject to determinism and evolution. Human consciousness, or personality as Motru prefers to call it, is the necessary result of this evolution. “Physical energy and consciousness are two different aspects of the same reality”⁶⁵, he claimed, a reality that was initially neither physical, nor psychic. At the level of the primordial unchanging reality, the physical and the psychic were indistinguishable.⁶⁶ Motru referred to Julius Robert von Mayer’s 1841 postulate of the law of conservation of energy: energy can neither be created nor destroyed. This axiom permeates Motru’s energetism.⁶⁷

According to an explanation provided by Gh. Al. Cazan: “At the genesis of energetic personalism lies, therefore, not so much the apriorism, but the idea of the dependence of the object on the subject and, at the same time, the idea that psychic phenomena are not mere epiphenomena, but realities which, by their nature and origin, have an active role in the production of science”.⁶⁸ Following all this we can see that energetic personalism can be defined in its premises and ideas as a *naturalist monism*, that is a *realist monism* with nature as its reality, and at the same time as *evolutionary realism*. As a result, the former dualistic view, wherein the soul and matter were deemed incompatible materials, is superseded by the new monistic approach. Motru anticipated that, on the basis of the theory of energy, the philosophy of the future will necessarily construct a monistic system which will provide a satisfactory resolution to the ongoing issues over materialism and spiritualism.⁶⁹ This new philosophy, in its monistic direction, will help to harmonize the inner tendencies of human nature, its tensions and, once this harmony is achieved, will facilitate the accomplishment of social solidarity.⁷⁰

Eventually, he amended his theory of personalism in *Morala personalismului energetic* [The moral of energetic personalism], which constitutes a predominantly moral explanatory supplement to his metaphysics of the human person.⁷¹ He wrote this in response to the accusations made by the communist Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu that his philosophy of late had been dominated by mysticism and a pronounced theological spirit.⁷² By philosophical morality, in this case, Motru understand the laws that arise from a consensus, a social contract between man and the society he belongs to, not for the immediate good of the individual, but for the good of that society. What is invoked here is the principle of a form of altruism that we can think of as duty, which suppresses the selfish and animal desires of a still disorganized self. At the same time, he observes that societies vary over time, geography, and culture.

What was considered good for ancient societies may lose value for contemporary ones. Similarly, the concept of good varies between Western and Oriental societies, as well as between religious and secular perspectives. Instead, he suggests that society plays a central role in shaping the moral conception of individuals within it. For, as mentioned above, all the actions of individuals must be directed towards the good of their society. Human actions, if they are to be understood, must always be related to the personality that generated them.⁷³

First of all, Motru's philosophy, due to its secular nature, is totally devoid of transcendence. In other words, we cannot invoke an abstract idea or the figure of an auctor god as the origin of the good at work here. Goodness must be rational and practical and done by the individual for the benefit of his community. It does not exist as an intrinsic property of things, nor as a universal idea in the human mind, but as a constant evaluation of the relationship between action and consequence. Subsequently, this philosophy constitutes an applied ethics centered on the relationship between man and labor. A mediating element, society, is involved here. Yet, as is evident, a society is a pluralistic collective entity and therefore extremely vulnerable to factionalism. Two individuals within the same society do not entirely share the same worldviews and do not hold the same value systems in the same way.

In order to prevent the danger of social entropy, however, Motru introduced an agent of society – the man of vocation. In his views, a man of vocation is an individual expression of human exceptionalism. Such an individual enters the world with a “calling” and is endowed by nature with extraordinary capacities to fulfill its calling. He claimed that the evolution of mankind is moving towards the personality type of the person of vocation:

Between the consciousness of the human person and nature, there is a unity of structure and evolution. Human personality is the ultimate form of energy towards which the whole energy of nature evolves; as such, in the consciousness of this personality the truths of necessity and universality are not, as Kant maintains, the products of the union of a priori forms with the experience caused by the energy of nature, but are the immanent laws of evolution between man and nature.⁷⁴

However, this individual does not emerge through spontaneous generation, but through a mutation of the soul.⁷⁵ It's not a singular archetype but an ideal gradually constructed. In other words, the man of vocation doesn't represent a singular individual. Instead, he signifies an inherent quality in individuals, which not only can be but must be the ultimate goal of development through education, including moral education, of man in society.

Motru's moral man is the working man who defines and identifies himself through and in the product of his labor. The principle that labor redeems here brings him slightly closer to theology, especially to Protestant ethics, which is where the concept of vocation originates. However, not all labor is also good labor,

and not every product of labor is beneficial. Motru rejected labor done solely for material gain, or performed without passion or interest. To be considered beneficial, labor must be done with much consideration and reflection, and not as an empty and meaningless action. Also, labor must be done primarily with the welfare of society in mind. The man who sacrifices the welfare of society for his own welfare and exploits society to enhance his personal gain is an individual who is considered amoral to the point of monstrosity and must be removed, directly or indirectly, from society.

In order to sustain the idea of progress and, consequently, real progress in society, it takes not only the collective work of the many but also, from time to time, the extraordinary work of a man of vocation. This person, as outlined by C. Rădulescu-Motru, is the sole creator of values. What distinguishes the person of vocation from other laborers is the desire for continuous, disinterested self-improvement, motivated solely by the desire to seek and achieve self-fulfillment.⁷⁶ However, the challenge with such an individual lies in authenticity. Because of his exceptional character, an inauthentic man of vocation who does not reflect the needs of the society to which he belongs can have a cataclysmic effect. Thus, the ultimate evil in Motru's philosophy is inauthenticity, while the ultimate good is the harmony between man's vocation, his work, and the natural and social framework into which he is born and lives – understood here as true authenticity. The origin, structure, and function of identity can be analyzed on both an individual and collective scale – through the concepts of personality and culture respectively. To fully explore this axiological ecosystem, it is essential to comprehend the circular relationship between the individual creator of values and their culture, which serves as a repository for these values. More importantly, it is crucial to track the impact of one's own contamination by the values of a foreign culture and, with the introduction of these foreign values into their indigenous culture, the forms that this cultural "parasitism" takes. While not all forms of cultural exchanges are inherently negative, and some axiological transfers are even desirable when they contribute to the improvement of the society in which they take root, there are ideas and values that can only fulfill their purpose within the mental structures that originate them. Otherwise, they can be detrimental to other cultures or, worse, covertly cannibalize their host cultures by serving the interests of the mother culture. The concept of cultures imagined as biological entities interacting and implicitly dismantling each other is neither new nor exclusive to C. Rădulescu-Motru. This idea has been articulated and reiterated from Plato and Aristotle, through Herbert Spencer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Max Weber, to Samuel Huntington and Richard Dawkins. It has taken on various names such as socio-cultural evolutionism, cultural Darwinism, cultural and civilizational conflict, and memetics or modern mimetics.

In *Vocația, factor hotărâtor în cultura popoarelor* [Vocation, a decisive factor in the culture of nations], Motru investigated culture as a product of personality which allows the consciousness of the ego to identify with its surroundings. This

analysis was further developed during the war years in *Etnicul românesc. Comunitate de origine, limbă și destin* [The Romanian ethnos: A community of origin, language and destiny]. Here, he elaborated his most refined system of political philosophy, which he harmonized with a philosophy of history of his own, outlined in his earlier works. His entire examination culminates in the concept of “kinship through destiny”⁷⁷ within a so-called community of destiny. In *Timp și destin* [Time and destiny] he initiated his analysis of destiny starting from mechanical causality, which he defined as rational time, while understanding the finality of life as “the old intuition of destiny”.⁷⁸ Consequently, this abstract rational concept of time serves as the foundation for the rigid laws of nature, considered to be “the highest expression of reality”, with the “method of finality” grounded in lived, experienced time.⁷⁹ The time that Motru considers real, or experienced time, is a distinct form of time. It is irreversible and intertwined with the life of the organism, varying for each individual. He distinguished between a biological, a historical, and a psychological time. Only these can be organized into ages and only in their case can we speak of a past, present, or future. The other form of time, that of physical objects, is beyond ages; it is simply a marker for periodic movements—movements without origin and without end.⁸⁰

Every person is inclined to perceive their own time as a period in the life of the world soul everywhere. The individual destiny of this “anybody” is suddenly elevated in their mind as the destiny of the entire world.⁸¹ Numerous revolutionary movements and wars have their origin in the appropriation of a nation’s destiny by the perceived destinies of ordinary individuals. What C. Rădulescu-Motru aimed to convey through destiny is the shaping of one’s fate, termed by him as “an organization of the soul’s potentialities”. This process, comprehensible through the instruments at our disposal, is envisioned to guide the unfolding possibilities of the soul towards purposeful accomplishments in life.⁸² Mastery over one’s destiny requires, first of all, understanding it. This necessitates not only deep self-awareness but also an exceptional force of will. We cannot organize the future of a soul without first directly considering that soul’s own intuition. In this context, psychology plays a crucial role for Motru, as human subjectivity is intricately connected to destiny. The approach we take to shape this destiny must consider the potential for strengthening our subjectivity.

In a passage reminiscent of Karl Marx’s *11th Thesis on Feuerbach*, Motru identified political action as the ultimate goal of philosophy. From his perspective, the thinkers of his day were fundamentally different from those of antiquity. In antiquity, philosophers maintained an absolutely passive attitude towards destiny, whereas the thinkers of his day sought to master destiny with every fiber of their being.⁸³ The contemporary thinker’s ideal is no longer contemplative isolation. On the contrary, according to him, they must find their mission in active participation in public life to shape the destiny of future generations.⁸⁴ The destiny of the individual is intertwined “like a link in a chain with the destiny of the whole nation to

which he belongs. And this is not a destiny imposed top-down by fate, but a deliberate conquest of the future through an act of will”.⁸⁵

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize the complex line of thought explored above, Motru rejected both Descartes’ mind-body dualism and Kant’s sense-intellect dualism. Opting for a monistic approach, he argued that the physical and mental can be treated as two aspects of the same reality. This reality equates to energy, serving as the foundation for all phenomena in the world, whether physical or psychological. This energy is in constant motion, a phenomenon we term evolution. The culmination of this evolution is human individuality, referred to as personality by Motru. Within specific individuals, this personality is imbued with a vocation, distinguishing those who produce meaningful and valuable work from those who merely toil. The pinnacle of vocational work is the creation of axiological values. These values, in turn, feed the cultural tapestry of the space and place from which the individual emerged. This cultural tapestry extends through its enrichment, beyond particular values, toward universal human values. This constitutes the framework of Motru’s metaphysics and philosophy of culture in which energetic personalism, vocation, Kantian apriorism and psychological aspects have all been integrated. In light of this cohesive whole, human subjectivity should be seen as inextricably linked to its destiny. Therefore, any potential science of the human soul should focus on understanding and conquering this destiny.

NOTES

¹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book II, 1–3.

² *Ibidem*, Book II, 4.

³ *Ibidem*, Book II, 5–6.

⁴ *Ibidem*, Book III, 4–7.

⁵ *Ibidem*, Book III, 12–13.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 17–24.

⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, pp. 5–9.

⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 54ff.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ C. Rădulescu-Motru, “Conștiința etnicului și conștiința națională”, p. 158.

¹² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 251ff.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, “Preface to the First Edition”, in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 100.

¹⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 105–119; 129–132.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 530–532.

- ¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 338–352; 354–365.
- ¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, “On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World”, pp. 373ff.
- ¹⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy*, pp. 132–138.
- ²⁰ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, pp. 189–201.
- ²¹ *Ibidem*.
- ²² *Ibidem*, pp. 199f.
- ²³ Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria civilizației române moderne*, I: *Forțele revoluționare*, p. 122.
- ²⁴ Oswald Spengler, “Perspectives of World History”, in *The Decline of the West*, II, p. 331.
- ²⁵ Oswald Spengler, “Form and Actuality”, in *The Decline of the West*, I, p. 104.
- ²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 145.
- ²⁷ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology*, p. 444.
- ²⁸ Julian Huxley, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis*, pp. 22ff.
- ²⁹ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Puterea sufletească*, p. 360.
- ³⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, pp. 16; 74; 187; 190; 210–211; 212; 213; 214; 215; 216; 219.
- ³¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, pp. 47; 50; 72–73; 80; 83; 91–92; 134; 144; 162; 163; 164; 181 182; 215; 252; 275; 337; 360–365; 394; 401.
- ³² Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 205.
- ³³ *Ibidem*, p. 190.
- ³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 44.
- ³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 161.
- ³⁶ *Ibidem*.
- ³⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 56.
- ³⁹ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Puterea sufletească*, p. 361.
- ⁴⁰ David Hume, “Of National Characters”, pp. 162ff.
- ⁴¹ Balazs Trencsenyi, “Conceptualizarea caracterului național în tradiția intelectuală românească”, p. 340.
- ⁴² C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Puterea sufletească*, p. 265.
- ⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 374f.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 375.
- ⁴⁵ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Personalismul energetic*, p. 536.
- ⁴⁶ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Puterea sufletească*, p. 259.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 260.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 262.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 338.
- ⁵⁰ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Elemente de metafizică pe baza filosofiei kantiene*, p. 478.
- ⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 478.
- ⁵² *Ibidem*.
- ⁵³ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Știință și energie*, p. 51.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 52.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 54.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 61.
- ⁵⁸ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Elemente de metafizică pe baza filosofiei kantiene*, p. 505.

⁵⁹ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Personalismul energetic*, p. 506.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Elemente de metafizică pe baza filosofiei kantiene*, p. 509.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 505.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 509.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 497.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 498.

⁶⁷ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Puterea sufletească*, p. 361.

⁶⁸ Gh. Al. Cazan, “Problema «adevăratei filosofii» și schița interpretărilor operei lui

C. Rădulescu-Motru”, p. XX.

⁶⁹ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Știință și energie*, p. 62.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

⁷¹ C. Rădulescu-Motru, “Morala personalismului energetic”, pp. 1ff.

⁷² C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Revizuirii și adăugiri*, IV, 1946, pp. 204.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁷⁷ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Etnicul românesc: Comunitate de origine, limbă și destin*, p. 133.

⁷⁸ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Timp și destin*, p. 8.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 8f.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 241.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 226.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 220.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 236.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

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