

# ABOUT ANOTHER KIND OF SOCIOLOGY. ERNEST BERNEA AND THE CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL DEPTHS OF THE ROMANIANS

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”A culture cannot be fulfilled unless it starts from a sincere aspiration and keeps perfect authenticity. The man of culture is a pragmatic deviser of a better world.”

(Ernest Bernea, *Philosophical Reflections*)

## Abstract

The text brings to the attention an iconic figure of the Romanian culture which is claimed not only by sociologists (as a representative of Gusti School), but also by ethnologists and philosophers. In essence, Ernest Bernea, through all his concerns, comes into light as a complex intellectual, who offers a refined humanist social research from his cultural and spiritual data. His sociological approach is based on ethnographic information and on a solid intellectual background. There is an obvious and visible influence of M. Heidegger, N. Ionescu, M. Mauss, and E. Durkheim. Issues of time, space and causality, that of law and order and the crisis of modern worlds represent the main directions of his concerns that we have analyzed taking into account the views of other Romanian authors with similar concerns. In this regard, E. Cioran, N. Noica, T. Maiorescu, L. Blaga, S. Afloroaei have been reading filters of Bernea's work. It remains a landmark in the sociological literature and a model in the sociological approach of reality.

**Keywords:** time, space, causality, social order, crisis, history terror

## Résumé

Texte met en lumière une grande figure de la culture roumaine qui est revendiquée par des sociologues (en tant que représentant de l'école Gusti), ethnologues et philosophes. Essentiellement, Ernest Bernea est recommandé comme un intellectuel complexe, raffiné, en fournissant des données de recherche sociale qui favorise la nature culturelle et spirituelle. Son approche est basée sur l'information sociologique et ethnographique et aussi sur une solide formation intellectuelle. Il porte de l'empreinte visible de M. Heidegger, N. Ionescu, M. Mauss, E. Durkheim. La question du temps, de l'espace et de la causalité, l'ordre et la crise du monde moderne sont les principales orientations de ses préoccupations. Elles sont examinées en tenant compte des vues des autres auteurs roumains avec les mêmes préoccupations. À cet égard, E. Cioran, N. Noica, T. Maiorescu, L. Blaga, S. Afloroaei représentés les filtres de lecture. Ernest Bernea reste un point de repère dans la documentation sociologique et aussi sa oeuvre un modèle d'approche sociologique de la réalité.

**Mots-clés:** temps, l'espace, la causalité, l'ordre social, la crise, la terreur de l'histoire

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**Rezumat**

Textul aduce în atenție o figură emblematică a culturii române care este revendicată deopotrivă de sociologi (ca reprezentant al școlii Gusti), etnologi și filosofi. În esență, Ernest Bernea, prin toate preocupările sale, se recomandă ca un intelectual complex, un umanist rafinat care propune cercetarea socialului plecând de la datele sale culturale și spirituale constitutive. Demersul său sociologic se bazează pe informații etnografice și pe o solidă formare intelectuală. Ea poartă vizibil amprenta lui M. Heidegger, N. Ionescu, M. Mauss, E. Durkheim. Problematika timpului, spațiului și cauzalității, cea a ordinii și cea a crizei lumi moderne reprezintă direcții principale ale preocupărilor sale pe care le-am analizat ținând seama de puclele de vedere a altor autori români cu preocupări similare. În acest sens, E. Cioran, N. Noica, T. Maiorescu, L. Blaga, Ș. Afloroaei au reprezentat filtre de lectură ale operei lui Bernea. Ea rămâne un punct de reper în literatura sociologică și un model abordarea sociologică a realității.

**Cuvinte cheie:** timp, spațiu, cauzalitate, ordine socială, criză, teroarea istoriei

Common sense as well as some trends of scientific approach associate Sociology rather with a quantitative approach. Nowadays, the news and the information briefly presented along with the requirements of the construction of a scientific text in specialised magazines show a statistical and mathematical approach of reality. Through figures and percentages are sketched typologies, characters, preferences, choices, cultural and spiritual dimensions of a research universe. We can easily find that, the sociological approach lacks the concern for the interpretative, symbolic aspect. More often, the limits of the visible, the immediate are not exceeded, the research rather showing a utilitarian dimension on short term and not one which concerns the deep explanations of a phenomenon. In this context, our main objective is to bring to attention a different type of Sociology.

Ernest Bernea is the promoter and the representative of another type of scientific approach of the social phenomenon. A well-known intellectual of the inter-war period, leading member of the famous Gusti Sociology School in Bucharest, Bernea reveals himself as a complex intellectual. He is a philosopher, a writer, a journalist, a sociologist and an ethnologist who who owes his background to some famous scholars such as Nae Ionescu, Martin Heidegger, Marcel Mauss. For this reason, his writing aims at a wide ranging from philosophy, literature, sociology, journalism, ethnology and pedagogy. Basically, Ernest Bernea can be placed among the personalities who promoted a cultural and spiritual perspective in different fields.

Although he has been referred to as a Christian thinker through excellence by many people, we believe that his scientific manifestation exceeds the limits of Christian spirituality, as a subtle appeal to humanism bearing the hallmark of spiritual belonging. After all, this is a formula of assuming the connection that any researcher has with his own belonging space in a creative and fecund way.

The sociology și ethnology of Ernest Bernea is, from the epistemic point of view, an example of objective assuming of an inherent subjectivity towards the

universe in which we were born. Thus, the spiritual and cultural data of the Romanian environment become values, not obstacles in understanding a particular phenomenon or the world. Objectivity is guaranteed by a thorough intellectual preparation which offers to the author a critical type of thinking and a wide perspective. Finally, the entire work of Ernest Bernea proposes a reading grid of the social issue which means an adequacy of it to the studied realities. Basically, in order to know and understand correctly the Romanian society, it is necessary to proceed from the inside, with conceptual tools appropriate for the culture of our society. Placing them in a more generous universal context, however may give the measure of a particular approach with universal vocation. This is a formula of valuing the Romanian culture and spirituality in the scientific knowledge that could also have effects at the social level. The perspective proposed by Ernest Bernea is that of an entire inter-war generation who had the courage to harness and value at the knowledge level the potential of the area so as to leave a smooth continuity between theory and practice.

Although the intellectual production of the well-known scholar has been manifested in different fields, it has coagulated around several basic directions that we are going to develop in separate chapters. They reveal the presence of a sociologist of the order but also of a subtle hermeneut with serious concerns of social epistemology.

### **1. Space time and causality – coordinates of the manifestation of spirit and social for the Romanian people**

Ernest Bernea's writings of sociology and ethnology whether relating to the agrarian and social habits, beliefs and superstitions, either traditions concerning death, art and village civilization, all these circumscribe frameworks specific to the Romanian culture, explored by Gusti's sociology. The most representative work in this respect is *Space, Time and Causality for the Romanian People* (Bernea 1997). It brings together three major studies published in 1996 (*Space Representation*), 1969 (*Time Representation*) and in 1972 (*Causality Representation*). The foreword to the 1997 edition of the trilogy emphasizes the fact that the work reveals "the elementary frames and shapes of thought". (Bernea 1997, p. 5) However, this "elementarity" should not be regarded as a vulgar, primitive and old-fashioned simplicity. In the tradition of the Durkheim French School of Sociology, "the elementary forms" are nothing but raw data base, which explains a number of social phenomena or social manifestations. Bernea has understood this well and that "ethnography prompted most often fecund revolutions in different branches of sociology". (Durkheim 1995, p. 19)

Without a doubt, his popular thinking frameworks trilogy exceeds the existence of an ethnographic study. The synthesis, comments and the references which Ernest Bernea make on the material collected from various areas (Northern Gorj,

Tara Barsei, Arges, Muscel, Sibiu area, Fagaras, Campulung Moldovenesc ) put the entire approach in the area of mentality sociology or of a social hermeneutics of great depth and modernity. Thus, the study of the practices and representations of the population which are based on traditional archaic thinking becomes a fertile source of discovery of some social patterns subsequently translated in behaviours, attitudes, lifestyle and ways of being. ‘Simple as they are, primitive civilizations thus, constitute privileged cases. This is why the observations of the ethnographers have represented true revelations which have renewed studies of human institutions. (...) Primitive religions do not allow only the revelation of the constitutive elements of religion, but have the great advantage that makes their explanation easier. The facts being simpler, the relation among them are clearer. The motivation of human actions has not been elaborated and distorted by the scientific thinking yet, but it remains more linked, more related to the causes which determined them.’ (Durkheim 1995, pp.19-20) The study of the three frames of the Romanian folk thinking, just like the research of culture or that of primitive religion, captures exactly that type of simplicity that gives account of the depths of the Romanian spirit.

The three coordinates according to which Ernest Bernea epitomizes the whole structure of the ethnographic material become milestones in the analysis of the mechanism of thinking of the traditional Romanian and Romanian communities. They can be also found in the writings of certain well-known sociologists, historians, philosophers or anthropologists and may constitute real research patterns of communities and societies. Basically, one cannot think and analyze the human and social life without taking into account the temporal, spatial and causality parts. The way in which the man and the societies he belongs to approach them represents the image of a new cultural pattern, a pattern of collective thinking and memory.

Thus, if the issue of space is studied by Emile Durkheim in *Les formes elementaire de la vie religieuse* (Durkheim 1912) and Levi-Bruhl in *Les fonctions dans les societates inferieures* (Levy-Bruhl 1910) among primitive societies, it is restarted and brought up to date by the well-known historian of religions Mircea Eliade in *Le sacre et le profane* (Eliade 1965) based on a vast and diverse ethnographic material. No doubt, between space and mental patterns there is a subtle connection, determination. *The Trilogy of Culture* (Blaga 1944) in fact represents applying some older theories (with reference to Frobenius, Spengler) on the Romanian culture. This is spatially determined in space by that *infinite wave* which also influenced the specific Romanian vision over space. Ernest Bernea captures precisely this specificity.

The place, the road, the borders, the world, the direction, the location in space, the type of space and quality become spatial categories according to which the ways of “being” in the world appear. They include an actual vision, both physical and metaphysical, regarding the world. What seems utterly interesting is that

between these two approaches there isn't any divorce, any demarcation line, they go together and are mutually complementary. For instance, the places that are marked by some negative stories change people's attitudes and behaviour towards them. At the same time, people know that any action or behaviour could influence the quality of the space in which they are present.

"The good place is the holy place; it's getting beautiful and strong and the fruit is sweet, the evil place is the weak one and the man is close to sin if he likes it; The bad place comes out of the spirit." (Bernea 1997, p. 23)

Furthermore, according to the Romanian traditional approach, space carries with itself the mark of a permanent complicity between visible and invisible. Fairies ward off evil spirits, lost spirits or simply ancestors inhabit the real and imaginary spaces and share them with us. Their presence is not at all coincidental. They announce cosmogonies, orders and disorders of this world.

"It is said that the strong bad fairies dance on evil land. Bad things may happen to you, you may lose your mind if it happens to step on their space, that is where they used to dance; and if it happens to see them, it's a bad omen." (Bernea 1997, p. 29)

This game between the visible and the invisible, between the natural and supernatural makes reference to the famous distinction made by Mircea Eliade (1992) between *sacred* and *profane* and it announces a spatial inhomogeneous experience, characteristic for the religious man. It consists of symbols and significances and it makes the human existence cosmic.

Any other type of human relationship of this kind reiterates a cosmology, a copy. "But other times, this origin is explained by a notion which is not too clear in the minds of those who use it, but that comes, however, as a form of explanation, other than the biblical Genesis myth. It is about the so-called evil spirits. (...) These evil spirits are something primitive, something mysterious, an origin of all things in the world, yet without a precise definition." (Bernea 1997, p. 66) Their presence in the popular mentality makes us think of those original elements present in ancient cultures and civilizations such as water, fire, earth and air at the ancient Greeks. This fact finally indicates the presence of an archetypal common background which aims at explaining the presence of *homo religiosus*.

Moreover, maintaining a certain comical order requires the *ritualic creation of the space*, as Mircea Eliade used to call it. The creation rituals in case of the Romanian people, those referring at the limits and including the threshold, border demarcation, locations and those which are related to the original space called *vatra* etc. the sacredness of space and separate the familiar by non-familiar the known areas by unknown ones, the private zone by the public one, the centre by the periphery.

"The house has its own place, as any other thing. In the weft of the house everything seems to go better. The space in which the house is built is a good one, it is protected; anything one may cultivate gives fruit, anything one may do is beautiful. This comes like that out of the ancestors 'spirit'." (Bernea 1997, p. 34)

Such testimonials undoubtedly indicate that each individual builds his own centre of existence. It becomes a spatial landmark with powerful spiritual and symbolic meanings. The village, the home, the original space are for the Romanian peasant centres depending on which it regulates its own existence. They are a sort of *Axis Mundi* which mediates a vertical connection, with the unseen.

”Such a cosmic column may not be situated but in the centre of the Universe, because the totality of the living world is around it. So, we deal with a mixture of religious outlooks and cosmologic images which are united and articulate in a *system* which can be called *The World System* of traditional societies”. (Eliade 1992, p. 36)

The spatial experience of the Romanian peasant, as it was surprised by Ernest Bernea in his writings is a highly symbolical and religious one and it reveals a deep popular philosophy with universal vocation. Here, simplicity, harmony, balance become the coordinates of a traditional vision in which *the sacred* and *the profane* are both found.

The same symbolic meanings are also present in the relation of the Romanian peasant with the element of time. This is perceived as an essential coordinate of human existence. We cannot live outside time. It is perceived in dual categories and lived as such. The ethnographic material synthesized and presented by Ernest Bernea in different studies show that, in case of the traditional man, time may be good or evil, favourable or fatal, belonging to the genesis and to the finite, sacred and profane, continuous and discontinuous.

“Our world is fleeting, it’s like this here, on Earth: it resists as it can and then, it is replaced by something different. Look at the trees and the beasts and the man: all are fleeting; even the reigns are like this, even they seem to be everlasting.

Beyond this world, there is the alleviated world which, they say, it’s no longer changing; in the world beyond there’s no past or future, as this world belongs to God. Everything is the same and this is how it stays.” (Bernea 1997, p. 149)

The answers from peasants capture in subtle observations the difference between duration and eternity. They correspond to a Euclidian vision in which the time flow is increasing the flow and the changing of everything. The infinite flow of time, the past, the present and the future lapse into eternity. It is specific to the divinity and it describes a place in which the perception categories no longer. ”Beyond this world there is no life or death in our way” (*Ibidem*)

Apophatic formulas of expressing the transcendent divine, even though they seem borrowed from the biblical, theological discourse (“neither sorrow nor sadness, nor sighing”, for example) however reflect a certain sensitivity of the Romanian peasant of assuming a certain type of speech and understanding. Although at discursive level nothing of our world’s plan has any equivalent in the transcendent, the funeral practices and rites investigated by Ernest Bernea in the area of the Northern Gorj and also the research carried out by Simion Florea Marian (Florea Marian 1995), Tudor Pamfile, or more recent research (Gavriliuță

2013) are a living proof for serious preparations for the *Great Passage*, the journey into the beyond.

”When a man is being prepared for the great journey, when the man who is about to die, one tries to give everything to him. Maybe it’s a long way and it is not known what he needs; it’s better to have all with him.

When a man dies, this doesn’t mean that everything is over with him: it is an ending and a beginning at the same time; that’s why it is good to take care of him.” (Bernea 1998, p. 41)

All the customs and ritual practices related to the funeral deal with a transfer from here to another existential plan. ”The dead person’s house”, an old custom, present even today in different parts of Moldova, perfectly shows this fact. Yet, beyond some symbolic gestures there is the impossibility of giving an abstract representation of eternity. Elements of the present world become instruments of perceiving something that transcends this world.

Thus, in the traditional world time is not perceived as a mere physical reality, ”it is not a postulate, something abstract, but a concrete reality; it is not something which cannot be measured quantitatively, it is a living thing. And, as everything is concrete, with their own life characteristics, time has continuously new meanings and power, towards which the thought and the deed are always trapped. (...)” (Bernea 1997, p. 208)

This makes Ernest Bernea to be more reserved in his research with Eliade’s vision regarding a sacred reversible time. The fact would be valid only in the case of archaic societies influenced by a mythical thinking. The rite practices would produce temporal tears and the reliving of a mythical time, sacred par excellence<sup>1</sup>. In Ernest Bernea’s view the Romanian traditional society seems to be permanently marked by a Judeo-Christian tradition which asserts the existence of a historical *sacralised time*, as it is referred at by Mircea Eliade.

Such things are only partially known, known being the fact that the Romanian Christianity (folk version) keeps until today a multitude of practices and pre-Christian elements camouflaged by the ancestral customs. They (still) exert a tremendous social pressure and they really need to be done. The customs present at birth, wedding and funeral, those which are related to the domestic universe together with the calendaristic ones, the magic practices and many others<sup>2</sup> remind us of serious pre-Christian traces in the Romanian attitude.

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<sup>1</sup> ”The calendar periodically regenerates Time, to make it correspondent to the original time, referred as *the powerful and pure Time*. The religious experience of the feast, namely the participation in the sacred, allows people to live periodically in the presence of gods.” (Eliade 1992, p. 99)

<sup>2</sup> Numerous examples of these practices and customs are approached by Ernest Bernea in *The Romanian Village Civilization*: “(...) religion and magic in the ancient Romanian village, having a stunning organic unity can be investigated only together; it is a need of the spiritual life of the village reality itself.” (Bernea 2006, p. 66)

More precisely, the Romanian peasant, as it results from ethnographic testimonies, experiences the time in Christian and pre-Christian version as well. It is *reversible* when it comes to all kinds of practices inherited from the ancestors on the occasion of celebrating The New Year, for example. However, when it is about taking part in the liturgical and religious rituals, the duration and the history become sacred, the time becomes *irreversible*. This dual formula of experiencing the time is betrayed by the explanations that the peasant give to some pre-Christian and practices and rites. Tradition and custom become well-known formulas of explaining various rituals, practices and symbolic actions. Their original meanings are often forgotten and are given religious explanations. It is a privileged situation which allows us to study the survival of some archaic elements not only at the level of collective mental state, but also regarding the practical, real collective mental state. It is a fact that such a situation deserves a more detailed interest regarding the issue of time for the Romanian people. In the famous work, *The Trilogy of Culture*, Lucian Blaga forays into the essence of the Romanian spirit starting from a subtle spatial-temporal geography. Temporal horizons metaphorically described as river, waterfall or fountain reveal a peculiar manner of assuming the existence.

In essence, the significance given to the time and space, that the Romanian peasant shares, influences his entire philosophy of life. Nothing seems to be influenced by hazard, by chance. There is a material causality and a spiritual one of everything that happens in the world and in the Universe.

”Things go like this, together, they have their own rule, you see, they are linked. The sun moves, but together with it the moon and the others; they are all connected. Nothing works at random. What would that mean?” (Bernea 1997, p. 237)

The whole evidence synthesized by Ernest Bernea, whether of biblical influence or not, includes the space and the entire human existence within a cosmic order. It is expressed in the Romanian “order” which is present spontaneously in everything including the entire world. This exemplarity at the macro and micro-cosmic level directs human behaviours. They must follow and adhere to a certain tradition, to intervene and restore balance when disturbance appears. The customs and the magic-religious practices presented by Ernest Bernea in *Sociology and Romanian Ethnology* examples of restabilising a primordial order (for example: “Beautiful bindweed / Go in peace! / Healthy you found us, / Healthy you left us!” (Bernea 2009, p. 87) “The magic of the Romanian village, apart from rare exceptions appears as a complementary activity related to the religious one with weakened and evolved forms, with increasingly high recreating objectives, even if they concern the material order of things.” (Bernea 2006, p. 74)

The research brought to attention by Ernest Bernea shows a dual causality: *material* and *spiritual*. Whereas the first concerns the existence of some connections and subtle laws among things, the second one, as the famous Renaissance scholars such as Macilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno show, warn

about the role that the idea, the thought, the power of words, the gesture and the human spirit have upon reality.

”There are things that can change, but one just has to believe. But why is not the man able to bring rain?”

”Things sometimes change according to the man’s will, but only in human terms.” (Bernea 2007, p. 248)

Moreover, these forms of perceiving the reality are also confirmed by the contemporary research which increasingly highlights the importance of the inner resources in changing and influencing some situations, the reality. The sociological approaches use theories of creative prediction or phenomenological perspectives embodied in constructivist theories to explain roughly similar social facts. In the traditional version, this double causality induces the idea of a nuanced determinism in which the free will can lead to visible changes in society. The human spirit thus is an active presence in the functioning of this world. Yet, it subsumes to a divine order which transcends this world.

## 2. About the world order and spirit

Everything that has been presented so far evokes Ernest Bernea as a *sociologist of order*. However, the order that the famous scholar presents us, is not an exclusively philosophical one. It is analyzed based on concrete realities (acts, gestures, ritual practices, celebrations) by taking into account the causality dimension of social phenomena of existence, as shown by the ethnographic material. Therefore, we are dealing with a *social world order* that the traditional Romanian integrates in a *cosmic order*.

Thus, in traditional terms, this order is explained by a dual causality and it is expressed by *tradition* and *custom*. The nuances that the author uses, based on field research, put in a new light two terms that normally are synonyms. Usually there are social-related distinctions between custom and tradition which involve a certain direction and gives a meaning to human actions. Moreover, they would translate into spoken language the two types of causality, that related to things and that related to spirit.

Thus, the *tradition*, called *datina* refers to something external, an immutable – ”gift”. ”The tradition is, according to the social order something stable and permanent, it is something *durable* referred to in Romanian as *așezat*, hence the Romanian synonym term *așzăminte*.” (Bernea 2006, p. 35) It would not represent anything else but a ”social form”, a ”collective being”. Therefore, the tradition is the guarantee of an order which is justified by appeal to the past, to the ancestors and to the divinity. In traditional communities it shouldn’t be argued, explained or questioned in any way. It simply exists. The peasant is obliged to respect it. This is the only way of explaining some verbal formulations whose presence is one present even today: ”That’s the tradition from our ancestors”, ”That’s the will of God”, ”That’s how it is since mankind and the earth” .

The feasts, the initiations of the traditional environment, the triptych dimension of life (the birth, the death and the funeral) as defining moments of existence, they are all based on a tradition located in times long gone. Although Ernest Bernea is not very specific regarding tradition, we believe that it makes use of some pre-Christian data which represent the background of the folkloric beliefs. Regardless of the inevitable acculturation experienced over time, these traditions preserve the sense of belonging to an ancient archetypal which Christianity couldn't remove permanently. Somehow, the tradition confirms, in a simple folkloric manner that “the sacred is consubstantial to the human being”, as Mircea Eliade explains in his writings.

This relative stability and unity which Bernea relates to tradition is somehow in opposition to the custom's characteristics. It is perceived as an expression of dynamism, of action, of movement. “The custom takes us straight into the action. It starts and refers to the same phenomena related to the social order, but in other way, that of social activity. The custom directs the social activities in different situations required by the social organism, it leads according to types of actions and reactions with traditional character.” (Bernea 2006, p. 35) It comes with the experience, the exercise, without neglecting the symbolic data. The ritual practices, customs related to sowing, the traditions related to birth and funeral etc, all translate into a practical manner traditions and beliefs. Thus, they come to life and become an ordering principle of existence.

In Bernea's view, the difference between *tradition* and *custom* lies in the way in which we perceive them, as one and the same phenomenon can be both. For example, baptism is a tradition if we regard it as a religious initiation in the social order but it also may be referred to as custom if we focus on the actors, on the ritualistic and symbolic acts or on the actions they encompass. The custom rather refers to that area which is at hand, which undertakes changes and interventions without altering the world order in its foundations. The magical interventions, the protective practices, the rituals which are circumscribed to traditional medicine, for example, are present in the centre of the events aiming at changing them and at restoring balance. A spiritual type of causality which offers a certain freedom and responsibility to the individual is present. The hints introduced in these distinctions come to clarify a series of issues which refer to a world order, on one hand and to one of spirit, on the other hand.

Thus, the traditional man manifests the belief in a relative and nuanced determinism. Everything is related to cause. He does not question the order of the world or the cosmic one (“Whether I want it or not, what it was meant to happen it will happen for sure.”) (Bernea 1997, p. 242) It is one that transcends it, something already given. The traditions, the practices, the actions and everything the man does, represents the expression of his freedom and responsibility of joining that cosmic order. The subtle links among thoughts, facts and reality may become ordering principles of life here, on earth. They are crucial when it comes to finding

some practical solutions, some social patterns and moral attitudes in daily living. Of course, some rituals may imitate exemplary gestures, spent somewhere in the past, in *illo tempore*, but others, may be the result of some lasting observations and experiences in which nature becomes the main source of inspiration. For instance, a series of agrarian habits take into account the cosmic rhythms (solstices, for example) and those of nature.

It is obvious that chance, hazard don't really belong to the traditional world. The Romanian individual swings between *existence* and possibility, as shown by Constantin Noica, leaving only the false impression of arbitrariness.

The same as the ethnographical material used by Bernea which includes very deep philosophical answers, Noica's philosophical research carried out in the subtleties of the Romanian language reveal a Romanian specificity which are ontologically connected to *the order of the human being* and the *order of becoming*. The various manifestations of "to be" ("it was not meant to be", "it was about to be", "it would have been", "it would be", "it was meant to be") refer to different ways of existing, an active principle, a way of becoming which is excluded from a rigid determinism<sup>3</sup>. The way in which existence is approached by using different reference to the fact of being which is present "inside", ultimately represents the essence of the whole traditional philosophy."Because *inside* gave us the suggestion of becoming into being, the Romanian approach at the level of thinking related to the human being must have a special dimension. Indeed, other type of feeling related to being has been revealed in any Romanian perspective. The state of being has a good and positive freedom. The world is not beyond the state of being, it is not in the being, but it is inside it. So, the world is free to remain in the process of becoming-which means searching and finding, and sometimes even in error-with or without the memory of being. (Noica 1996, p. 173) Traditional meanings related to order, as presented by Ernest Bernea, converge with the philosophical ones, expressed by Noica.

In the traditional language this order is translated by *rânduială-ordinance* and involves the idea of law and cause at the same time. "The world, the life, the things as they are and we can see them have their own features which make them just be. Things have their own condition and follow their nature. Whether they belong to the physical or human nature, they follow their ordinance that makes them fulfil their purpose." (Bernea 1997, p. 236) In fact, the traditional ordinance undresses the law, the current legal law and it rather assigns it a metaphysical meaning. The

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<sup>3</sup> Unlike Noica, Ștefan Afloroaei, the philosopher from Iasi relates the idea of possibility with arbitrary, random, fate, "equal chance of good and evil". (Afloroaei 1993, p. 48) This arbitrariness of fate brings with it instability, resignation, "a type of metaphysics which cannot belong to the active reason, but to living the event". (*Ibidem*, p. 49). It doesn't change in a fertile and creative freedom, as Noica points out, but in immobility, resignation, in carnival events of failure or even the sense of experiencing an Adamic curse.

process of becoming follows a certain ordinance and focuses on accomplishing a goal, which makes everything meaningful.

### 3. The tragism of history, the morden world crisis and the role of science

The traditional man is made out of spatial, temporal and causal representations which leave enough space for manifesting freedom, without disturbing in any way the cosmic order. Although the Romanian religious and traditional manifestations and sensibilities have very old pre-Christian roots, Ernest Bernea captures the importance of Christianity in their existence. In the Christian anthropological drafts the contradictory and somehow paradoxical existence of the human being is emphasized, which is present in the complexity of his living. "Being the product of a natural order, it exists and mainly manifests something which comes beyond nature, something that could be perceived as a super-nature and which, from where it is caught with safe and simple data of life, suddenly throws it in a new critical area full of dramatic trials. Being at the boundary between the cosmic substance and spirit, between material things and ideas, between real and possible, between sin and salvation, man will permanently remain an open issue of debate, a question with many answers, a grieving existence but not one deprived of beauty." (Bernea 1996, p. 21) Because of this, the image of Christ becomes one basic model in traditional human perfection. The mystery of incarnation spiritualizes the man. It exalts him and it helps him in overcoming his tragic existence resulting from the endless game of opposites: good and evil, beauty and ugliness, truth and lie, visible and invisible, reality and possibility, substance and spirit, etc.

But, "history means life, human life", Ernest Bernea states, which means that the tragic of human existence also influences history (Bernea 2011, p. 17) Visibly influenced by the ideas of his mentor, Nae Ionescu and those of the well known writer and philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, as Daniel Mazilu notices, Bernea identifies a strong connection between man's crises and the crises of history (*Ibidem*, p. 10)

After all, the tragedy of human history and existence is neither negative nor positive in its essence. It expresses the pursuit of experiencing human liberty and free will through time and history. It is the perpetual struggle of making the right choices and of dealing with the eternal challenges facing the dual registers of the world on a daily basis. It may be that the "fall into time" Cioran was referring to (Cioran 1994) is nothing else than this tragic experience, a harsh and necessary pursuit of freedom, a perpetual human effort to remember our primordial condition. This is why Christian morality becomes a guide, a book of reference to human conduct and social life. "Christian views and morality restore the natural order of things in our world, expressing through them the most pure and superior form of existence, an existence within the boundaries of the absolute." (Bernea 1996, p. 102) The ethnographic material shows that this morality gets much wider connotations

inside the traditional world. It translates into gestures, practices, beliefs and rituals which subscribe to a natural and harmonious universal order. Romanian Christianity is thus a cosmic one, in the words of Mircea Eliade. This is why failure and crises do not belong to time or history, but to the human being. They represent our incapacity to imitate the paradigm of the Christ, our insufficient knowledge and practice of Christian morality, our failure to achieve harmony and balance, and our deviation from the path of an existence aspiring to the cosmic status.

While in the traditional world it is possible to achieve harmony and balance by adhering to the natural order of things and to common sense, in the modern world this seems less possible. The ways of the world are different, or at least we perceive and understand them in a different manner. All kinds of crises and incapacities emerge, of an economical, social, political, moral, metaphysical or spiritual nature. Among these, the metaphysical and spiritual ones are the most important. They prove that the drama of the fall into time can get really dramatic tones through the fall into history. "After spoiling the archetypal eternity, man fell into time, where he succeeded, if not to thrive, at least to survive: it is at least certain that he has adapted to his new condition. The unfolding of this fall and adjustment is called History. But behold, another fall is upon him, whose amplitude is still difficult to determine. This time he will be no longer falling from eternity, but from time; and falling from time means falling from History. Whether or not imminent, this fall is possible, maybe even inevitable. When it will happen, man will no longer be a historical being. And then, when he will have lost even the memory of the archetypal eternity, of the primordial happiness, he will turn to look upon the temporal universe, upon this second paradise from which he will have been banished." (Cioran 1994) The skepticism that Cioran displays in this grey scenario is one which eliminates the absolute, the transcendent. He refers to an exclusively historical and temporal condition in which "the nostalgia of the origins" (Eliade 1994) will be long forgotten. He reduces man to his historical condition and cancels any connection with divinity.

The moral and spiritual crises of the modern world foreshadow a character who is torn apart from his spiritual roots and who goes into deep, endless historical crises. These crises could be expressed by reference to a narrow universe, to circumstantial sequences, without considering the purposes which transcend historical reality. Above all, oblivion (forgetting one's roots, spiritual profile, forgetting the essential aspects of life) seems to be the main reason for all the transgressions of the contemporary man. It is not definitive however, just as evil cannot have an absolute nature. Mircea Eliade's version is more nuanced, more optimistic and much more comfortable for the modern times man, who fully experiences "the terror of history" (Eliade 1992, p. 115) Our connections to the absolute cannot vanish. They will survive in various forms: some of them will be concealed in the most profane gestures and actions, others will stay with us within the space of literary and artistic work, while others will dwell latent inside the

individual and collective unconscious mind, only to burst out at the most unexpected moments of life. Thus, the ethnographic materials that Ernest Bernea studies become arguments which support Eliade's point of view. Just as records of the traditional world subjects keep the connections alive with the universe of archaic, pre-Christian beliefs, just as they are part of a wider equation of a cosmic, universal order, in the same way modern man can retrieve a part of the paradise lost.

Moreover, Bernea cannot imagine a truly creative act, long-lasting on a historical scale, outside of religion and metaphysics. “One cannot make history in a creative way, without metaphysics and religion, just as one cannot sustain a process of order and creation, without transcending from the temporal to the spiritual, where one can no longer find the foundation of a new settlement, with ulterior forms and lasting nature (not permanent, because through the ages nothing is permanent). A durable settlement of history does not have to do with political success and engaging the masses in a certain direction, but involves experiencing through social settlement and order, the deep human background and its historical aspirations.” (Bernea 2011, p. 26) Therefore, the real challenge here on earth is to develop social institutions and mechanisms that come in agreement with our deep background, with our cultural and spiritual profile. The functionality and durability of a society is provided precisely by this adaptation of form to content.

It is possible that these philosophical and sociological ideas are responsible for Ernest Bernea's affinity with the *legionary movement*. Also, his intellectual beliefs seem to have been the cause for his hard years of prison and marginalization during the communist regime<sup>4</sup>. However, regardless of their effects over his personal, as well as social and political life, they endorse a most honest point of view, claimed also by Titu Maiorescu in his time. First of all, it concerns a proper knowledge of the background, or the constituent data of the Romanian people, and this is not possible without an ethnological, sociological and historical knowledge, as well as an articulated philosophical outlook. Bernea's writings are a step in this direction. They outline the traditional Romanian spirit and highlight the positive elements which can constitute the foundation for future structures. We must admit that after all, the traditional rural world provides examples of social existence that were perfectly valid for those times, according to the cultural and spiritual profiles. It is a world in which the forms are adapted to the content. And it works. The issue is to what extent can we learn today from the lesson provided by the traditional communities? The data has changed. So have the world and its rules.

The current degree of knowledge and level of aspirations go through extraordinary changes as well. The modern sciences always provide solutions that lack the cultural and spiritual dimension of the communities to which they address.

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<sup>4</sup> Data regarding Ernest Bernea's biography was captured by Ioana Diaconescu (2008, pp. 18-19).

The layman of our times seems to grow weaker and weaker against the historical and existential crises. Beyond the psychological, economical or other possible explanations, Bernea locates the profound causes in the area of knowledge and science. A close reading of the pages dedicated to science and the modern world reveals a disagreement with *the aberrations of science*, with its *meaning* and not with science itself. (Bernea 2007) The main transgression would lie in the positivistic approach, which “claimed for itself the whole responsibility for the human life and destiny.” (Bernea 2011, p. 69) Positivism is comfortable, is verifiable and brings along *popularity*, as Bernea claims. Along with it, however, the perception on man and society changes as well. “Modern man has eliminated the spirit and has made culture superficial. His rationalism meant fabrication and his objectivism meant inner misery. (...) The collectivities, seen from a formal point of view, are treated as structures of systems of relations which function beyond the human being, subjecting him to purposes that do not concern him.” (*Ibidem*, p. 59)<sup>5</sup> The excessive mathematization of sciences such as psychology and sociology led to their simplification and pauperization, while complex issues remain unsolved. Alongside these changes in knowledge and science, we experience a decline of theological and religious knowledge in our society. Quite often, the relationship between science and religion is perceived as being on antagonistic terms, the advantage being held, of course, by modern science. It is officially accepted, it enforces its language, its methods and its means of control. Everything that escapes its realm is considered to be speculative, lacking consistency and invalid. Within this depressing scenario, Ernest Bernea manages to find a positive aspect: the improvement of life conditions. “Science is a way of knowledge at man’s service, a beneficial tool, if it is well targeted.” (*Ibidem*, p. 72)

Overall, modern man’s relationship with science and technology can be permanently vicious. Man has the chance not to be dominated by his own creations and can avoid the modern reiteration of the Golem myth, as predicted by the famous specialist in Jewish mysticism, Gershom Sholem, when the first computer was inaugurated.

The solution that Bernea suggests is one that can reconcile human nature and modern science. It consists in conveying superior meaning to knowledge and science. Their purpose is not only to create a rational society, objects and technology. Indeed, this meaning can only be ensured through religion and metaphysics. Alongside an appropriate education of values, they can shape the meaning of life and can establish a balance between reason and feeling, between matter and spirit.

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<sup>5</sup> Bernea’s ideas on the modern age are not unique. They are to be found in the works of authors such as: Romano Guardini (2004), Max Picard (1999), Edmund Husserl (2003), Gilles Lipovetsky (2007).

Being a sociologist of the Romanian spirit, a moralist but also a fine observer of society, Ernest Bernea outlines a well-established society, dominated by balance and order. The core of such a structure is represented by the cultural and religious dimension<sup>6</sup>. It is a daring project that, throughout history, was confiscated by ideology and successfully failed.

Nowadays, in a global world, that seems too small to fit us all and too large to allow us to find ourselves, the ideas and research of the Romanian philosopher can provide subjects of meditation, models of scientific approach or just a way of *returning to the origins*.

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<sup>6</sup> The ethnographic research concerning the spring holidays, the social and magical traditions reveals the existence of a spiritual order that foreshadows the existence of a social order. (See Bernea 2009)

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