MEMORY AS A CHALLENGE TO HUMAN EXISTENCE – ASPECTS OF TEMPORALITY AND THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN REFERENCE TO GUITTON’S CONCEPT OF TIME

ABSTRACT

The article describes the attitude of Jean Guitton towards the category of time, concentrating on two essential notions: dissociation and contamination. The author presents the phenomenon of memory in different philosophical, cultural and psychological backgrounds. Memory is presented in its connection with cultural symbols, language and individual aspects of man, as well as psychological explorations of the way it is developed from early stages of child’s experience. Going further these examples are analyzed according to Guitton’s proposition of perceiving the role of memory, with two different solutions of its function: either moving it away from the present condition of man or, on the contrary, making it an essential factor of man’s present choices. Answering the question of the importance of memory for phenomenological analysis, the categories of dissociation and contamination are used as a tool to determine not only the individual approach towards memory of the individual, but also in a broader sense, taking into consideration the cultural and linguistic aspects of man.

Let us consider the first metaphor of time taught on history lessons – that of a line. The present is just a point, a short, specified element of infinity. In this geometrical interpretation, is a consequence of the past. The future is a prolongation of the line towards infinity symbolized with an arrowhead, allowing only one course of events to take place.

This interpretation of time, analyzed as early as in classical Greek philosophy had a very important aspect – the relation of time to infinity or eternity, attributed to being or Absolute. Philosophy throughout the ages made multiple attempts to understand the relation between the ideal, atemporal and unalterable being and the experienced world of constant change. On existential level this research is related to the problem of life’s finitude – the search for eternity and the ideal is a way of answering the question about the meaning of limited life. On social level, the concept of time helps the man to understand...
change, development, the civilizational motion. The human thought traveled in many directions in search for the satisfying structure of time, answering both, existential and social needs of humanity, concentrating especially on two developed forms of its symbolic representation – the mentioned line and the circle. To understand time would thereby mean, to connect its structure with an ideal model, explaining the direction of change in relation to the notion of the end, as in the linear model, or an infinite cycle of events, with periods of development, followed by periods of collapse. Every cultural concept of time emphasizes one specific aspect of temporality, as crucial for development of the whole system, thus influencing individual consciousness in attitude towards existential and social aspects of life. The individual and general memory, related to the interpretation of the past, are very often considered crucial, if not fundamental for the development of the consciousness of time.

Before concluding to the main course of my analysis of the role of memory in Guitton’s thought, I would like to point several aspects of anthropological attitude towards the problem of human temporality. Cultural analysis of concepts of time shows several layers of the problem, crucial for the proper understanding of the mechanisms responsible for our attitude towards memory. A very important, yet obvious supplement to philosophical understanding of time is that its consciousness is performed not only on psychological or perceptive basis, but is also linked with the cultural background of the individual. As in the mentioned example of a symbolic representation of time, we are determined to see temporality through the prism of culture, religion, social and historical events.

As stated by Leach, Flis, a person living in a homogeneous society does not pay much attention to close past and future. He oscillates between the ever-repeating present and the past, taking responsibility of re-living events from the myths. Leach describes this attitude as the pendulum concept of time. In this structure, events taking place in time would mean nothing, without the possibility of reaching out towards the myth, allowing the man to participate shortly in divine events. In this concept, memory about the eternalized myth, existing outside the human world is crucial for supporting the reality as it is. History of the generations, future and development would mean nothing without remembering the original stem, from which they derived. As Leach states, the past has no depth in this mode – all events that had happened are almost in opposition to the present experience, disallowing a continuum to appear, neglecting the possibility of development. Similar negative attitude towards future is exemplified in homeostatic cultures, often linked with the circular concept of time. The difference though is that, due to visible social development, these cultures are more interested in relation between the past and the present. A well known concept of this structure of time is the Golden Age theory, developed both