

A QUESTION ABOUT A NEW NARRATIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONCEPT OF AXIAL PERIODS. THE THOUGHT OF RAIMON PANIKKAR IN THE INTERPRETATION OF EWERTT COUSINS

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Abstract: The subject of this article is a question about a new narrative posed in the context of the concept of the second axial period of Ewert Cousins. Cousins links the emergence of a new narrative with the image of the Earth seen from space. This perspective poses a number of questions regarding the role of technology in the process of changing sensitivity, the role of interreligious dialogue in shaping future civilization and the role of spirituality in the context of combating the ecological crisis. The theoretical tools to explain these connections are: the tradition of media ecology and the concept of integral ecology.

Keywords: new narrative, second axial age, Raimon Panikkar, Ewert Cousins, Media Ecology, Integral Ecology.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, humanity faces unprecedented challenges. On the one hand, there is talk of helplessness in the face of the coming ecological disaster. The concept of apathy used in the context of the inability to take adequate action against ecological threats is becoming one of the key notions of the debate on Anthropocene. On the other hand, tensions between cultures and religions are growing, making necessary, global actions difficult to take. It should also be added that scientists – both representatives of exact sciences and humanists – more and more often indicate that the hope of resolving the ecological crisis only in science and technology is a wrong strategy. We are dealing not with one crisis (e.g. ecological), but with a whole network of interwoven and interacting crises. Different authors use different terms – Mike Humle uses the term 'wicked problems', Edgar Morin writes about 'polycrises', and the term 'metacrisis' is also used. (Hedlund et al., 2016, p. 5) The question that is increasingly being raised in this context is: How do we adapt our problem-solving strategies to a world permeated by metacrisis?

Some authors propose to include spiritual traditions in the area of pro-ecological strategies, assuming that an effective and responsible response to the phenomenon of metacrisis requires a series of actions that do not fit into the existing narratives. Authors such as Thomas Berry, Edgar Morin or Raimon Panikkar ask about the possibility of a new narrative emerging that would be able to reorganize the collective imagination, pointing to a new place of man in the world and explaining the sense of his actions.

In this context, Leonardo Boff – creator of the concept of integral ecology – notes that a new kind of sensitivity is developing, based on the feeling of the planet as a whole. This new sensitivity – resulting in new values, new dreams and new behavior patterns – emerged spontaneously from the image of the Earth that astronauts obtained in the 1960s. On the 25th anniversary of sending Sputnik into orbit, Isaac Asimov stated that the legacy of this quarter-century of cosmic activity is the image of Earth and humanity as unity (Boff, 1997, p. 11). Linking the emergence of a new narrative with the image of the Earth seen from space raises a number of questions regarding the role of technology in the process of changing sensitivity, the role of interreligious dialogue in shaping future civilization and the role of spirituality in the context of combating the ecological crisis. The theoretical tools to explain these connections are: the tradition of media ecology and the concept of integral ecology.

2. Media Ecology

Media Ecology is an intellectual tradition, which is based on the idea “that technology and techniques, modes of information and codes of communication play a leading role in human affairs”. Neil Postman who coined the term media ecology defined media ecology as “the study of media as environments”. In an anthology entitled *High School 1980: The Shape of the Future in American Secondary Education* Postman wrote:

“Media ecology intention is to study the interaction between people and their communication technology. More particularly, media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feelings, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival. The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people.

An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. It structures what can we see and say and, therefore, do. It assigns roles to us and insists on our playing them. It specifies what we are permitted to do and what we are not. Sometimes, as in the case of a courtroom or classroom, or business office, the explications are explicit and formal. In the case of media environments (e. g. books, radio, film, television, etc.), the specification are more often implicit and informal, half concealed by our assumption that what we are dealing is not an environment, but merely

machine. Media ecology tries to make these specifications explicit. It tries to find out what roles media force us to play, how media structure what we are seeing, why media make us feel and act as we do” (Postman, 1970, p. 161).

The main representatives of the media ecology tradition include Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, Walter J. Ong, Eric Havelock, Susan Langer, Lewis Mumford, Harold Innis, Jacques Ellul. In this article, we will try to deepen our understanding of Raimon Panikkar's philosophy by showing it in the light of media ecology. Many researchers from media ecology emphasize that the rapid development of mass media that took place in the twentieth century – and is still progressing – affects the structure of our consciousness, it changes how we perceive the world around us and how we understand ourselves. In this approach, the media are understood not so much as means of transmitting information, but as active metaphors that shape our way of capturing reality. Following the interpretation of Evert Cousins, we will try to show the modern era as a moment of deep change (mutational moment in human history) and Raimon Panikkar as a person, in who global transformation has become more specific and who has given it concrete expression in its reflection.

3. Integral Ecology

The second perspective is the concept of integral ecology, which is a response to the so-called metacrisis, i.e. a network of interrelated problems – environmental, social, spiritual or existential. The concept of integral ecology was popularized by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. The starting point of integral ecology is the statement that since "everything in the world is closely related" (Francis, 2015, p. 14) and due to the wide scale of changes, "it is no longer possible to find the right answer for each problem separately. The search for integral solutions that take into account the interaction of natural systems with each other and with social systems is of fundamental importance. There are no two separate crises, one environmental and one social, but there is one complex socio-ecological crisis "(Francis, 2015, p. 91). Similarly, writes Mary E. Tucker, who involves the need to create an integral ecology with the so-called wicked problems. Because of this the notion of wicked problems illuminates the novel and dynamic qualities of complexity associated with many of our twenty-first-century challenges, such as climate change, an answer to these issues must be integral and pluralistic at the same time. Tucker:

“Many disciplines are working to solve these wicked problems, including the best of modern science, policy, law, economics, and technology. These are all necessary but not sufficient; we also need integrative frameworks that bring these environmental disciplines together with the humanistic disciplines of philosophy, religion, history, literature, art, and music” (Tucker, 2017, p. XII).

Using the interpretation of Panikkar's thought by Evertt Cousins, we will try to show how spiritual tradition can contribute to solving contemporary challenges characterized by resistance to simple solutions, because by their very nature these are problems consisting of complex interdependencies, open-systemic interdependencies of its multiple natural and social facets as they dynamically morph, reconfigure into emergent relational networks, and feedback on each other in complex, non-linear ways. So we can see that the concepts of metacrisis and wicked problems challenges the idea of an exclusively technological set of solutions to our global challenges. At the same time, however, we must emphasize that the pressure of emerging technology also affects the shape of spiritual tradition. This means that if spiritual tradition is to play a role in shaping modern civilization, it must be appropriately modified. The purpose of recalling the concept of media ecology is to show how deeply the development of technology modifies the cultural, social and spiritual sphere, while the concept of integral ecology helps to understand the role of spiritual tradition in shaping our attitude to the natural environment. As we will see in the Cousins interpretation of Raimon Panikkar philosophy, these two traditions are present.

3. The Basic Ideas of Raimon Panikkar's philosophy

The basic idea Panikkar is associated with is the postulate of interreligious dialogue. In the case of Raimon Panikkar, this idea is largely the fruit of his special biography. Panikkar, born in Spain, grew up in a Hindu-Catholic family, surrounded by two cultures and two religions. After traveling to India in the 1950s, Panikkar deepens his understanding of Buddhism and Hinduism, integrating these traditions with his Christian formation. As he will later say about himself, "I set out as a Christian, discovered myself as a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist, without ceasing to be a Christian." The second source of Panikkar's attitude – as noted by Dawid Rogacz – is the philosophy of dialogue formulated by Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig (Rogacz, 2016, p. 25).

In his understanding of the essence of interreligious dialogue, Panikkar is in favor of the hermeneutic concept of religion dialogue. Interreligious dialogue is therefore a meeting which results in the fusion of previously held beliefs with those learned later, according to their understanding and conscience. It should be noted, however, that Panikkar's thought is not limited to the concept of interreligious dialogue. Joseph Prabhu lists four basic issues around which Panikkar moves.

The first issue is related to the concept of cosmotheandricity, according to which the structure of being is threefold. Prabhu writes in this way: "There are no such things or beings as God or Man or World considered as completely independent entities. Not only are they dependent on one another, but this dependence is structural, that is, constitutive of their being"

(Prabhu, 2010, p. XVIII). The second issue is related to the specific pluralistic concept present in Panikkar's thought. As Prabhu notes: "Panikkar's pluralism lies between sheer plurality and multiplicity on the one hand and the monism of One on the other. Reality is neither one nor many, but rather non-dual. (...) What from one perspective looks plural is from another perspective a unity expressing the interdependence and interrelatedness of all things and co-arising of all processes" (Prabhu, 2010, p. XIX). Panikkar, who is leaning towards the Buddhist relationship and process ontology rather than substantiality, sees the One as both the basis of multiplicity and the emergence of one of multiplicity and through multiplicity. The third issue is The Open-Ended Character of Reality. Panikkar emphasizes – like Whitehead – that what we call being is always unfinished, still developing and new every time. The fourth issue present in Panikkar's thought is the rhythmic nature of reality. According to Panikkar, rhythm is what characterizes human existence, a universal condition that all human beings carry within themselves. Rhythm is also characteristic of the universe, and thanks to rhythm people can not only agree with the harmony of the cosmos, but also co-create it.

4. Axial Periods

Ewert Cousins – American theologian, pioneer of interreligious dialogue, places the thought of Raimon Panikkar in the context of the so-called axial periods. The interpretation of Cousins allows to see Panikkar's philosophy from the perspective of rapidly developing forms of communication and ecological threats. According to Edward Cousins, the beginning of the 21st century is the dawn of the second axial period, a time of spiritual mutation caused by interreligious convergence. Cousins emphasizes that the direct causes of this interreligious convergence are factors that can be described as material – the increase in the global population and the development of communication caused by technological progress. However – importantly – the development of technology alone is not enough for humanity to make a leap of consciousness. According to Cousins, to make the transition to the global level of consciousness of the second axial period, various spiritual traditions must be used as a catalyst. As a model for combining spiritual traditions, Cousins points to the philosophy of Raimon Panikkar, a visionary in whom the transformation of consciousness of the second axial period has already taken place and which gave it a concrete expression in his theoretical reflection.

4.1. First Axial Period

The concept of axial periods comes from the work of Karl Jaspers "On the Source and Purpose of History". Jaspers notes that in the spiritual process taking place between 800 and 200 years one can find the deepest caesura of history. "In this age," writes Jaspers, "the basic categories in which we think today have been coined, and the world religions in which humanity

lives today have been created". The spiritual processes that took place almost simultaneously in China, India, the Middle East and the West consisted in the fact that man was aware of being in general, his own status and his own limitations. Jaspers lists the following people whose intellectual achievements determine the characteristics of axial time: Confucius, Lao-tsy and other Chinese philosophers, Buddha and authors of the Upanishads in India, Zoroaster in Iran, prophets operating in Palestine – from Elijah to Isaiah and Jeremiah to Deutero-Isaiah, in Greece, Homer and philosophers – Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, but also great tragedies, historians – Thucydides and nature researchers – e.g. Archimedes. The change brought about by the axial period was radical enough to change culture at almost every level. Ewert H. Cousins writes that there was a change of consciousness during this period – the earlier form of consciousness was cosmic, collective, tribal, mythical and ritual, while the axial period consciousness created personal identity as separate from nature and tribe. "The consciousness of the tribal cultures was embedded in the cosmos and in the fertility cycles of nature. Thus there was established a rich and creative harmony between primal peoples and the world of nature, a harmony which was explored, expressed, and celebrated in myth and ritual. Just as they felt themselves part of the nature, so they experienced themselves as part of the tribe. They had no sense of independent identity apart from the tribe. It was precisely the web of interrelationships within the tribe that sustained them psychologically, energizing all aspects of their lives. To be separated from the tribe threatened them with death, not only physical but psychological as well. (...) Yet within their tribe they felt organically related to their group as whole, to the life cycles of birth and death and to nature and to cosmos" (Cousins, 1998, p. 5). Meanwhile, the characteristic of the axial period was the discovery of individual identity. The call at the entrance to the Appolin Temple: "Know yourself" can be a kind of condensed description of the breakthrough that came when consciousness became self-reflective and analytical. A whole range of social and cultural phenomena was a consequence of the application of self-reflective and analytical awareness to subsequent areas of reality – applied to nature it gave scientific theories, social criticism to society, philosophy to knowledge, and religion as an individual path of spiritual knowledge. At the same time, the appearance of self-reflective and analytical awareness, apart from benefits, also brought losses, with far-reaching consequences of negative aspects of scientific and technical development. First of all, harmony with nature and the tribe was broken. "Axial persons were in possession of their own identity, it is true, but they had lost their organic relation to nature and community. They now ran the risk of being alienated from the matrix of being and life. With their new powers, they could criticize the social structure and by analysis discover the abstract laws of science and metaphysics, but they might find themselves mere spectators of drama of which in reality they were an integral part" (Cousins, 1998, p. 6). So we have to deal with contradictions that are in the very heart of the concept of the axial period. Individual awareness is once a positive factor when it offers a critical reflection of ourselves, our place in the community, the knowledge we create, etc., then becomes a negative factor responsible for alienation from

social structures and from the world of nature. The solution of these contradictions is associated with the concept of the Second Axial Age, whose appearance according to Cousins depends on the creation of a new narrative.

4.2. Second Axial Age

Describing the second axial period, Cousins draws a picture of a new transformation of consciousness that is to be as deep and far-reaching as that which determined the characteristics of the first axial period. However, in contrast to the transformation of consciousness of the first axial period, which crystallized into the form of individual consciousness, the transformation of consciousness of the second axial period is to be global. According to Cousins, the global nature of consciousness will be related to two dimensions. The first refers to the process of increasing cultural and religious complexity, the source of which is the development of new media – the interpenetration and collision of different cultural and religious currents can create positive feedback loops, the effect of which is to deepen understanding of ourselves and the world. This is clearly a Teilhardian inspiration in which one can recognize the basic terms of the author of the Phenomenon of Man - the law of complexity consisting in the propensity of matter to create more and more complex forms of ordering comes to the stage of the so-called planetization, as a result of which divergence forces are replaced by convergence forces. The very process of connecting humanity through the development of communication technologies is a challenge for our understanding of the world - the first step should be to rethink the pretensions of individual religious traditions for exclusivity, their belief in the exclusive possession of knowledge about the final destiny of man and the cosmos. Cousins points to Panikkar as the creator of the systematic theology of the future, which can become the intellectual basis for the transition to the level of the second axial period.

The second dimension of global consciousness is related to regaining its roots in the world of nature. Cousins says:

At the very moment when the various cultures and religions are meeting each other and creating new global community, our life on the planet is being threatened. The very tools which we have used to bring about this convergence – industrialization and technology – are undercutting the biological support system that sustains life on our planet, is shrouded in a cloud of uncertainty by the pollution of our environment, the depletion of natural resources, the unjust distribution of wealth, the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. (...) The human race as a whole – all the diverse cultures and religions – must face these problems squarely. In this Second Axial Period we must rediscover the dimensions of consciousness of the spirituality of the primal peoples of the pre-Axial Period. As we saw, this consciousness was collective and cosmic, rooted in the earth and the life cycles. We must rapidly appropriate that form of consciousness or perish from the earth. However, I am not suggesting a romantic attempt to live in the past rather than the evolution of consciousness proceeds by way of recapitulation. Having developed self-reflective, analytic, critical consciousness in the First

Axial Period, we must now, while retaining these values, reappropriate and integrate into that consciousness the collective and cosmic dimensions of the pre-Axial consciousness. We must recapture the unity of tribal consciousness by seeing humanity as a single tribe. And we must see this single tribe related organically to the total cosmos (Cousins, 1998, p. 10).

5. Summary

It is worth of mentioning that this ecological awareness orientation, which Cousins writes about, does not question the basic assumptions of Western civilization, it is neither anti-scientific nor technophobic. This clearly distinguishes it from the currents of humanistic ecological thought, such as deep ecology. The key postulate is integration, i.e. combining two separate forms of consciousness. For this reason, Cousins's proposal can be tried to be placed in a broader stream of considerations, which take as a starting point the complex interdependence of nature, culture and knowledge – the concept of integral ecology seems particularly appropriate. Especially since Cousins – like Leonardo Boff, who coined the term integral ecology in 1995 - devotes much attention to the need to adapt spiritual traditions to the challenges of the modern world such as: ecological crisis, social stratification, etc. Cousins draws attention to the precedents of this specific combination of spirituality with social and ecological activity: theology of liberation in South America, the Ramakrishna movement in India, the activity of Mahatma Gandhi, political and social thought of Sri Aurobindo. Thus, the Cousins proposal can be understood as the third way. On the one hand, Cousins points to the exhaustion of the Scientist paradigm, which was due to, among others the very development of science in the twentieth century, on the other hand, the proposition of postmodern philosophy that is not directed at the spiritual depths, but only interested in endless text exploration is also inadequate. Cousins proposes another way – regaining spiritual depth would not be an end in itself, but would be a kind of catalyst that would allow transformation of consciousness to the level of the second axial period. After Panikkar, Cousins points out that such a transformation is possible only if we can formulate a new myth, a new story that will give meaning to our lives and indicate the direction of action.

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