

CHAPTER 02

BYZANTINISM AND THE LAWS OF IMITATION

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ABSTRACT

We can distinguish two sorts of Byzantinism. One is the political Byzantinism, the most widely known and discussed, signifying a constant inauthenticity in the political struggle and the constant plotting behind a verbiage conceived for this precise reason. There is also the literary Byzantinism, the other side of modernity, a contemporary of *fin-de-siecle* state of mind. The literary Byzantinism produces clearly an imagist literature, profoundly convinced that the language is capable to picture or imitate the world. There are two possible ways to assume the resemblance of the concept to the world, whatever meaning one may give to this last term (reality, state of affairs, everything that happens, etc.). These two ways are: the analogy and the imitation. The analogy is a structural part of the warrant epistemology of intellectualism. The behavior of the imitating individuals can be observed on the social level thanks to the social monadology.

Keywords: Byzantinism, analogy, imitation, monadology, space, having, being

INTRODUCTION

We can distinguish two sorts of Byzantinism :¹⁰⁴ one is the political Byzantinism, the most widely known and discussed, signifying a constant inauthenticity in the political struggle and the constant plotting behind a verbiage conceived for this precise reason. Political Byzantinism is a sign of decline, and it is not a surprise that it reoccurred in the vocabulary of the postmodernist phase that follows the great political narrations post-Enlightenment. There is also the literary Byzantinism, the other side of modernity, a contemporary of *fin-de-siecle* state of mind, what Mario Paz named the Aesthetics of *Vittoriale* and Julien Benda diagnosed in the works of Paul Valery or Andre Gide.¹⁰⁵ The literary Byzantinism is characterized by its ambiguous position in regard to ideas: it is idealist as much as it longs for abstraction and not so idealist as long as it gives not away its aestheticism. The literary Byzantinism produces clearly an imagist literature, profoundly convinced that the language is capable to picture or imitate the world, not through sentences, as the first Wittgenstein believed, but through the power of the words alone, the *mots justes*.

There are two possible ways to assume the resemblance of the concept to the world, whatever meaning one may give to this last term (reality, state of affairs, everything that happens, etc.). These two ways are: the *analogy* and the *imitation*.

ANALOGY AND IMITATION

The analogy is a structural part of the warrant epistemology of intellectualism and its origins are Platonic. One central promotion of the idea is made in the theorem of the analogy of being, widely used by Thomas Aquinas. The analogy of being warrants the relation of the intellect to

104 G. Arabatzis, Byzantinisme et rationalité : Julien Benda et Constantin Tsatsos, *Peitho. Examina Antiqua*, 1/8, 2017, 423-445. See also, G. Arabatzis, *Αισθητικός Βυζαντινισμός*, Athens, Kardamitsa, 2018.

105 *Αισθητικός Βυζαντινισμός*, *ibid*.

the things through the relation of God to the world and vice versa. On the level of the social reality, *anomy* is such an example of analogy, a kind of structural homology between the social normativity and the signifying transgression. The notion of analogy faces the same theoretical difficulties as the Platonic relation of ideas to their participating exemplifications. The Platonic descending dialectics assumes a linear synthetic structuration that cannot be repeated with precision in the ascending dialectics. Besides participation, Plato used the idea of reflection to explain the relation of ideas to things. The analogical reflection remains a warranted epistemology, a relation of model to copy that is ascertained by a specialist's intellect destined to this task. The specialist's mind has a more or less obscure relation to the general intellect of the world.

The idea of imitation is found again in Plato where it concerns primarily the relation to the divine. Here, the whole world becomes an image. The imitation is a desire for identity, yet it becomes nothing more than a process of identification and thus, a state of constant difference. In this case, the problem is that of the individuation without which no imitation would be possible. The Hegelian dialectic of the desire for the desire of the Other is such an example of the individuation process; it is a dialectic that clarifies primarily the relation of the Master to the Servant and can be seen crystalized in the false ends of history that occur before the final, complete, and absolute totalization.¹⁰⁶ Jealousy or snobbism are emotions that characterize this false end of history and they can be seen in the long end of history¹⁰⁷ during the millennial timespan of the decline of Byzantium, which is the historical birthplace of Byzantinism.

Back to Plato, the problem of analogy and imitation is crystalized in the following passage from *Phaedrus* where Socrates states his credo:

If I disbelieved, as the wise men do, I should not be extraordinary; then I might give a rational explanation, that a blast of Boreas, the north wind, pushed her off the neighboring rocks as she was playing with Pharmacea, and that when she had died in this manner she was said to have been carried off by Boreas.¹ But I, Phaedrus, think such explanations are very pretty in general, but are the inventions of a very clever and laborious and not altogether enviable man, for no other reason than because after this he must explain the forms of the Centaurs, and then that of the Chimaera, and there presses in upon him a whole crowd of such creatures, Gorgons and Pegas, and multitudes of strange, inconceivable, portentous natures. If anyone disbelieves in these, and with a rustic sort of wisdom, undertakes to explain each in accordance with probability, he will need a great deal of leisure. But I have no leisure for them at all; and the reason, my friend, is this: I am not yet able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know myself; so it seems to me ridiculous, when I do not yet know that, to investigate irrelevant things. And so I dismiss these matters and accepting the customary belief about them, as I was saying just now, I investigate not these things, but myself, to know whether I am a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature.
(229c - 230a, translated by Harold N. Fowler)

The “wise men” mentioned above is an ironic reference that marks the introduction of a modernist science of interpretation in Athens, based on analogy (the mythical sign – the *mytheme* – is analogical to its reason of being). Socrates advances rather the “know thyself” principle which demands for a somnambulist imitation since the monadic sufficiency is based on Phaedrus’ conforming presence and, on the difference with Typhon who, born by Hera alone, without the insemination by a male, points to a discourse without a father. To this last

106 A contesting view about the final totalization is made by Catherine Malabou, *L'Avenir de Hegel: Plasticité, Temporalité, Dialectique*, Paris, Vrin, 1996.

107 The false end of history is an idea of Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1947.

Socrates would never concur, he who constantly looks for the father of logos. What is more imitating than a son to a father? This may be the ground for the metaphysical construction as to its monadic moments.¹⁰⁸

MONADOLOGY AND SPACE

The behavior of the imitating individuals can be observed on the social level thanks to the social monadology. Within the unified image of the whole, the monads are populating every level of reality and thus, also the social reality. No laws of imitation and out-imitation can be conceived of without the theory of monadology or abstract individualism. The perception of the monads is real since no separate unconscious sensation can be thought of. Thus, the intellect, as the language for Wittgenstein, is objective to the highest degree. The objective reality of the intellect is individualized in opinions or beliefs, or else powers to will. The imitation process makes images out of our convictions. As it is already noted, Hegel gives a very good idea of the process of imitation of convictions or objective data of consciousness, through evolutions and ruptures up to the final, totalizing point. This cannot be a simple phenomenalism but a discourse on the objective spirit or phenomenology. Beliefs are monads that cannot be further analyzed and the monism of desire is thus shown to be real. The universal monadological texture assumes the ancient “all things are full of gods” principle of Thales.¹⁰⁹ There is however no teleology in a monadological universe, no metaphysics of the telos, no polytheism either since each monad is a totality, a cosmos. There is no space-time, only an interpenetration of spaces. Monadology cannot accept the idea of world-vision since each monad is a place; some monads are imitated, others are imitating, producing and abstracting space.¹¹⁰ Thus, the continuity of the phenomenal world is ascertained and the continuity from monad to monad is assumed without any differentiating principle. The symmetry of the monadological extension outdoes the sublime of hierarchical differentiation.

Without the monadological principle, one must posit a collective intellect that creates consensus in the place of the *klinamen* that monads produce by clashing between them through the force of knowledge/power. One cannot conceive of final determinative conditions since the result is always more complex than its initial circumstances of appearance. If the space was not monadological then it would have been totally contemplative long ago. Only through the action of monads, space can persist. At the end we see more and new individualities to imitate and be imitated. The process is more important than any state of affairs. The principle of imitation means that for one to be identified one must differ since identity is not possible without a minimum of difference, which as we said before makes the imitation the constant process of individuation. Thus, the structural character of the monads since the difference is their distinct quality. Difference is the reason for the resulting multiplicity and the imitation cannot be other than an intermediary state from one difference to its replica, producing objective, cultural space. The society is an example of this process and the association of monadic differences makes common projects or factions. Unity and stability are the product of difference, simplicity and complexity follow one another and at their heart is the difference while the normativity can only be contextual.

108 What follows is a series of disseminations on Gabriel Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation*, préface Jean-Philippe Antoine, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en ronde/Le Seuil, 2001 (1890/1895) et *Monadologie et sociologie*, préface Eric Alliez, postface Maurizio Lazzarato, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond/Institut Synthélabo, 1999 (1893).

109 DK 11 A22(b) Arist. de Anima I. 5, 411 a 7: «Certain thinkers say that soul is intermingled in the whole universe, and it is perhaps for that reason that Thales came to the opinion that all things are full of gods».

110 See the genealogy of cultural space in Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, in Levine, Donald (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1971, 324-339.

HAVING AND BEING

At the core of the monadological ontology is a comprehension of the ontology of having that is situated prior to the ontology of being. To be is to identify or else to say, such or such has these qualities. The belief is an image of having since we are *having* beliefs. The philosophy of being comprises of the non-being and this is a fatal error as to monads. The quality of “more or less” is far proximal to the ontology of having and pictures better the mediation from monad to monad. The opposite of being is not the no-being but the “non-having”. Science is focusing on the having or the properties and to have is a better form of explication than analogy. An encounter (like the ones Socrates was having in Athens) is also a form of possession (“I have or I had a meeting”). The intimate conversation or interior monologue is the reciprocal condition par excellence as Wittgenstein thinks also and any other possession is ulterior to this conversation. Culture and life are born out of it and this may be called the solipsism of language. Without the ontology of having, the whole is not understandable at all. This concludes on the intermediate character of monads instead of some quintessence of them. The ontology of having is also the reason for universal intentionality that can be noticed in every child as the will to will. The leading monads permit to overcome the frustration of not having and the steps to acquiring are replaced by piety and devotion. The ideas are the passage from belief-power to properties and, then, intentionality becomes the application of belief-power to ideas. Persuasion is the ultimate communication of monads and piety makes the transformations of intentionality. The Empire is an example of the possibility to apply massive force either over one point or over many points at once. This is a clear example of the passage from acquiring to persuasion that characterizes the Empire. At the end, the Apostolic path is more effective than the military one. The real Empire is uneven yet consistent. The murderous frenzy never reaches the heart of the pious soldier¹¹¹, it only happens in the case of Barbarism. Faith and love are the real factors of making and consciousness is the imperial gestalt delimited only by the fall of the Empire. The dispersion of divinity is the beginning of new independences.

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The above summary presentation permits to understand the predominant individualism of Byzantinism. Social history based on the history of ideas and social conflict may only point to the anomy as the sign of an underlying consensus, a structural homology, or some distinctive analogy. Monadology or imitation explains better the intellectual fractionism, the converging beliefs, the general piety and the imperial hold on opinion. Even more, at some crucial points, on certain belief-junctions, one may perceive the auto-affirmation of individualism, beyond the antiquarianism, the cult of citation, the dominant opinions, the transcendentalist or the esoteric style. Monadology in this case defeats the idea of representationism as form of all-pervading intellect or intellectualism of the object or rational phenomenalism. In philosophy, the debate about mental representation concerns on one part the propositional attitudes (beliefs, desires, etc.) and the phenomenal properties that are related to the contents of thought and data-experience. Byzantinism as the limit of the rationalist credo in *fin-de-siecle* sensitivity coincides with the monadological view of the universe. Their contemporaneity must be underscored and further explained.

WORLDVIEW

One must mention the opposition of monadology to the idea of worldview. The concept of worldview comes mainly from the hermeneutical philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey¹¹². In sum, a worldview is the mode on the basis of which a precise cultural space-time represents the

111 G. Arabatzis, Crainte et eusébeia dans la pensée byzantine, *La peur chez les Grecs : Usages et représentations de l'Antiquité à l'ère chrétienne*, eds. M. Patera, S. Perentides, J. Wallesten, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2023, 77-86.

112 See Tom Rockmore, Dilthey and Historical Reason, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 226, 2003/4, 477-494.

world that surrounds it, meaning the human relations, feelings, the artistic productions but also the world of action. Action is thus always within a worldview. In that way, Dilthey introduced a cultural relativism that was subject only to understanding and not to causal explanation. Hegel though had himself produced a historicist account never concluded on a relativist point of view since in him the different worldviews are articulated inside an evolutionary picture that culminates in Absolute Spirit.

Dilthey's relativism had certain consequences that remind us strongly of the postmodern moment in philosophy. Thus, since worldviews exist, no one is ever in direct contact with reality, but only in contact with the worldviewed reality. Reality can never be understood without the mediation of a network of concepts. In fact, anyone that partakes to a worldview lacks the words to describe what is evident for another worldview. A second consequence is that the question of power becomes clearly prominent. The first and original power is that of translation that brings forth the question of the compatibility of worldviews. Is the relativism of worldviews a radical one or can it be surpassed? The incompatibility of worldviews shows that a translation always misses or, as the Italians say, "*traduttore traditore*". Yet, the description itself of the variety of worldviews demonstrates that the relativism here is not a radical one or, in other terms, the description of a variety manifests the limit of absolute relativism. So, from questions of ontology, one passes to questions of common action: do we share the same worldview? Do we see the same worldview? These are questions that become crucial with globalization, migration or even, simple tourism and here appears the need for new epistemic fields of cultural observation. There is still a major problem: the communication can obscure or cover the difference of worldviews. The new media are the manifestation of the coexistence of relativism and communication, despite their informational noise and the ensuing bad faith.

Back to Byzantinism, the concept of worldview can be conceived of only as a form of monadological belief. In this sense, the worldview relativism is limited by the action of imitation and counter-imitation. Worldview is not an explaining principle but a monad like the other ones, just a monad with a greater attraction to imitative forces. Byzantinism itself can't be a worldview, only a worldview that is not in actuality, a second degree of belief, a monad that imitates and counter-imitates within the interpenetrated spaces of modernity.

PASSION

Byzantinism contains the idea of the singularization of passion. Instead of the classical philosophical war against the passions, Byzantinism proposes an analytic of passion which monadologizes. The units of passion are placed in silence, cannot lead to clear and distinct ideas, and constitute a form of internalization of having. The units of passion require a new hermeneutic understanding of phenomenality. Silence is, at the same time, a cognitive impossibility and also an attitude of piety, in the face of what one might call the war of passions. The passions that are being opposed to are envy, jealousy, ambition, sensuality, bad faith. The sum of them is none other than what Plato would call a disharmonious state corresponding to psychological disharmony. The generalized hypocrisy requires a beautiful language, a benign language which constitutes the hieroglyphics of hypocrisy, while authoritarianism is well rooted in general behavior. Communication channels function not as a transfer and diffusion of information but as intuitions of the Other's mood. This latter categorizes the passions as signs. Thus, an ulterior ethics emerges which is still a cognitive ethics, seeking precision, subtleties, nuances, gradation, and constant comparison.

This minor ethics is foundationalist and is based on self-observation which provides the primary measure of comparison. The basic facts to be compared are envy and sensuality. Ethics parallels what we would call, in modern terms, a novel of apprenticeship (*Bildungsroman*). The general attitude is the moral equivalent of a progress towards the light but without any

lyricism or romanticism. Its tools are abstraction and logic, both of which are to be found in bad faith. Expression is identified with the moral defense of the Ego, the condemnation of the Other, the recognition of this last's intelligence and non-moral reciprocity; thus, any form of confession according to St. Augustine is avoided and is rather sought the balance of conduct. Moral truth, too, is ultimately monadic and oscillates between passions and disorder (referring often to popular Stoicism).

Although the passions are ultimate entities like monads, which do not admit of further analysis, the psychology of passions constitutes an object of knowledge. The process parallels any other cognitive efforts: observation - hypothesis - identification of the causes. However, the end of the knowledge of the passions is not a new science but a withdrawal into the beyond of passion, i.e. Hellenistic serenity (*ataraxia*). A prominent idea is the constant war against the collective illusions of a benevolent sociability. The understanding of passions is the taking of a decisive distance from them as the final criterion of the individual acquisition of the relevant knowledge. From Christian ethics we pass to moral individuality as the only possible movement of the will. The generalized passions that are the object of imitation (ontology of having) lead to an ethics of isolation (monadology). This is, perhaps, a particular distinction performed in Byzantinist terms within monadology.

IN CONCLUSION

There is a difference between ethical experience and ethical communication that leads to the problem of moralism. The latter can be associated with hypocrisy, bad faith, pharisaism or Machiavellianism. Can one be moral by betraying her/his own principles? Is not moral knowledge love, as it was considered at the foundation of the Second Rome? If we accept the hypothesis of the Renaissance imagination as a potential idea-in-progress since the classical Byzantine period (i.e., after the end of iconoclasm) what remains as to the autonomy of the divine mind? Is imagination nothing else than the projection of the mind into external, diviner spheres? Is the mind characterized by a continuous referentiality in which itself becomes continuous (excluding the presence of mental faculties) and is life the supreme good? Moralism posits a schism within the monad between the Being and the Ought-Being of our moral behavior. What is the description of that behavior and whether it should be changed are questions that point also to the distinction between categorical imperative and moral imperative. Nothing precludes moral behavior from being an illusion concealing the truth of the monad. In this case, ethics is a moral impressionism and the object of games and role-playing. A Stoic theatre may be, but this does not preclude its realism. Thus, moralism is completely separated from moral determinations and moral facts in a monadological universe.

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