

RECENT PUBLICATIONS: THE AUTHOR PRESENTS**Mincho Georgiev, PhD****Professor,****„Medical Anthropology” Unit,****Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic
Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences****The Beginning of History
(Anthropological Notes)**

Abstract: *This is an introduction to the book „The Beginning of History”, written by its author. He presents a cultural-anthropological inquiry into the phenomenon of history as ‘history of the human reason’, by tracing its evolutionary-historical types – from pre-verbal, ritual-based to verbal. To demonstrate this, the book critically examines transitions between several types of reason: creative (syntactic); cognitive (semantic); axiological (value-oriented or pragmatic). The author explores the evolutionary and historical transitions between these types, their semi-otic foundations, and respective cultural-historical implications, while also changing the notion of ‘evental history’. The work argues that human history has a productive purpose, the content of which consists of the semophores of signification, meaning,*

concept, and value, and their material embodiments; the legislation of each type of reason presupposes its own type of long-term historical time, person, reality, and social paradigm; in particular, before the history of time, there is a history of place.

Keywords: *history of reason; types of human reason; evolutionary development; cultural anthropology.*

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„For the issue is not a trivial one, but the question
of how one ought to live”
– Plato

The new book *The Beginning of History*,¹ published by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Publishing House „Prof. Marin Drinov”, Sofia, 2025, is the final outcome of my inquiries in the field of cultural anthropology. The impetus for working on it came from my realisation that ritual is both „a precedent to any productive-economic, spiritual-religious, and social activity and the source from which they evolved” (according to V. N. Toporov), as well as a form of nonverbal, creatively-discursive attempt to produce meaning prior to the invention of speech. For example, the structure of the healing ritual consistently features a situation in which the healer, through her hands, produces nonverbal meaning, and through her speech apparatus – verbal meaning, each having the capacity to be translated into the other language-code. That the nonverbal (manual) repositioning of disease-dislocated bodily parts – organs of the patient – is analogous to their verbal repositioning into harmony with the syntactic order of reality under the rule of the proportional metaphor „just as... so too...” is evidenced by an incantation (baene) recorded by A. Popov in 1889: „Heart in place, hens on the roost, sheep on the pasture, grass in the field, and fish in the sea.” Thus, my assumption that I was witnessing a preverbal syntactic reason became undeniable and drove me to seek additional sources attesting to its historical reality. This also gave rise to a number of questions: does ritual as a nonverbal discourse exceed the cultural-anthropological horizon of its interpretation? If only words can designate concepts, and if verbalisation dates back no more than around 60,000 years, how could *Homo habilis*, the Neanderthal, and Cro-Magnon man have exercised any form of cognitive reason over the hundreds of thousands of years before that? Is ritual, as a nonverbal discourse, a relic of pre-cognitive

¹ Георгиев, М. (2025). *Началото на историята. Антропологични бележки*. София: „Марин Дринов“.

creative reason – an evolutionary precursor and condition of possibility for cognitive reason – or what Plato called ‘creative art’ in contrast to the ‘acquisitive’; Do the creative, followed by the cognitive and axiological (value-oriented) forms of reason constitute the content of three evolutionarily distinct long-term historical times within the field of a different (trans-being) history, understood as an evolutionary history of reason?; Does being-based reason originate from an evolutionary predecessor that is other than ‘nothing’, and hence reach its end in the transition to another – value-based – form?; Does the exit from cognitive to axiological reason coincide with the transition between metaphysics and anthropology? These and many other questions are what this book seeks to address.

The cultural fact that at a certain moment in the history of reason people began to use things and words in the same way raises the question of whether this fact is the bridge over the chasm between the two. If „meanings grow around words, rather than word-things acquiring meanings” (per M. Heidegger), if semiotic meanings have „a past of sensory meanings” (per G. W. F. Hegel), whose source lies in things and not in words, and if the creation of material artifacts precedes the creation of verbal ones by hundreds of thousands of years, and the making of artifacts – nests and other shelters – is also an ability of animals, then it is words that inherit their signifying function from things, not the other way around. It is entirely logical for this inheritance to occur at the lowest semiotic level – that of syntax, since only words can denote concepts. It follows, then, that as a semiotic system, reason-as-discourse originates from nonverbal syntax as the necessary and sufficient foundation of a primary, evolutionarily historical sign system.

The intention to view history as a history of reason requires grounding its beginning in ‘nature’, understood as the pre- or proto-historical, understood as the asemantic (signless). In other words, the beginning of history as the history of reason is the beginning of signification as a living being’s ability to mark and differentiate its environment of habitation from the uninhabited, thus drawing a boundary within ‘being itself’ as the prehistorical asemantic and the semiotic as historical. Thus, nature receives its newly created double in the form of history, whose development unfolds as a history of reason in the evolutionary sequence of „semioforms” (in the sense of K. Pomian): signification, meaning, concept, and value, each owing itself to its predecessor and serving as the condition of possibility for its successor.

Before embarking on a critical reflection on the history of historians as a cognitive or interpretative reconstruction of human existence in historical reality after the end of biological and the beginning of cultural evolution, a caveat must be made regarding the possibility of two different histories: an ontological /evental/ history within the horizon of metaphysical thinking, which posits ‘people’ (in the sense of H. Arendt), i.e., human communities as ‘collective persons’ (in the sense of B. Uspensky) and historical subjects in a ‘worldly world’ measured by God (in the sense of Plato); and an anthropological evolutionary history as a history of reason, whose subject is the human being in his human life-world, measured by the historical human themselves (in the sense of Protagoras). In other words, the pathos of the book lies in my attempt to look at the slippage from one type of history to the other as a form of transition from metaphysics to anthropology.

Metaphysical history is evental because its subjects are human communities (peoples, nations, classes, parties, confessions, etc.) capable of producing ‘events’. Anthropological history, by contrast, has as its subject the historical human, capable of performing ‘discursive acts’ and producing ‘discursive results’ (in the sense of A. Greimas and J. Courtés). Evental history presents itself as a temporal chain of cause-and-effect events – from event-causes to event-effects, while historical knowledge retraces the reverse path back to the primeval event-cause. This is also how historical inquiry appears in B. Uspensky’s attempt to present historical knowledge as a semiotic system within the field of cognitive, causal-temporal reason. And this attempt would be indisputable if the semiotic system of reason operated solely in the semantic mode, lacking its syntactic and pragmatic forms. And it is well known that under the legislation of metaphysical (semantic) reason, ‘practice and morality are handmaidens to contemplation’ (per H. Arendt), i.e., that the empirical and axiological forms of reason are turned into distorted imitations of reflection. This makes it possible for the ‘synchronous’ (in the sense of Saussure) functioning of the three semiotic forms of reason to obscure and conceal their diachronic, evolutionary-historical sequence, in which each prior form is the condition of possibility for the subsequent one. And if the semiotic varieties of reason are diachronically stratified, then the ‘unifying principle of history’ (in the sense of K. Popper) is semiotic, in the evolutionary sequence of its creative, cognitive, and axiological forms.

By advancing knowledge of the ‘actors of history’ (peasants, merchants, intellectuals, clergy, etc.), the new ‘history of mentalities’ presents itself as a vivid form of the history of reason. But by remaining alien to the semiotic principle and to reason and its history, the concept of „mentality” turns the historical human into a „ghost” (in the sense of M. Bloch) within the field of social structures.

Global humanity is in need of a universal history in which every distinct culture has a preserved place. The foundation of universal history is ‘the faculty of speech’ (in the sense of Tz. Todorov), or more broadly – reason (logos, ratio, discourse, word). This history begins in the pre-verbal era, dominated by the macrosemiotics of the natural world – the longest period in the human past considered as the history of reason. Universal history is evolutionarily grounded in the three known types of reason: creative (syntactic), cognitive (semantic), and axiological (pragmatic). Among the many hypotheses about types of reason beyond the metaphysical, such as those in Kant, we randomly encounter Plato’s ‘creative art’, creation as an ‘unavoidable’ stage in the history of ancient Greek culture per J. Habermas, the ‘servitude’ of practice and morality to ‘contemplation’ in H. Arendt, Socrates’ and Protagoras’ thesis on the inaccessibility of values to knowledge, and others.

Evolutionary-historical types of reason result from the abstraction of a predecessor and serve as evolutionary conditions of possibility for a subsequent type. Each of them is a revolutionary discovery (‘innovation’ in the sense of K. Pomian), carried out by a specific historical human subject, rather than by a society or community, and its dissemination among the human population results in it becoming the foundation and ‘legislation’ (in the sense of Kant) of a corresponding ‘long-term’ (in the sense of F. Braudel) historical time-epoch.

A primary source for the history of reason is ‘folk culture’, or the culture of the subordinate classes, as the heir of times more ancient than being-time. At the foundation of this culture lies ritual, in keeping with the thesis that ritual is a ‘precedent’ of reason (in the sense of V. N. Toporov).

Among the sources marking the beginning of history, drawn from the archaeological catalogue, of foremost importance are those that delineate the boundary between the reductive ‘division of nature’, characteristic of both animals and the divine (in the sense of Eriugena), and the constitutive form of creative reason, capable of producing an artifact from two bodies and a syntactic relation between them (axe, knife, file,

sickle, etc.), i.e. a tool analogous to the future verbal attributive syntagma as the smallest unit of meaning.

From the sources of the history of philosophy, those are selected which demonstrates an understanding of the distinction between both the constructive (syntactic, multiple, pre-existential meanings) and the hierarchical (semantic, unified, existential) sets, and between things as 'beings' and as 'objects of participation' (including the distinction between concept and value) in ancient Greek and early medieval philosophical thought (Protagoras, Zeno, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Proclus, Plotinus, St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, etc.). Particularly noteworthy is Plato's distinction between the arts based on the abstraction of sensory meanings into semiotic meanings (as Hegel also distinguishes them), such as cooking, cosmetics, rhetoric and sophistry on one hand, and those based on contemplation (reflection), such as medicine, gymnastics, justice, and legislation on the other. This distinction is an early intuition of the difference between creative and cognitive reason. The distinction between constructive (finite, syntactic) and hierarchical (infinite, semantic, conceptual) sets in the history of counting also points to the difference between creative and cognitive reason. This difference is qualitative, not quantitative, and the boundary between them is marked by the number.

In agreement with James Joyce's thesis that art is intended to reveal ideas to us, historical-literary sources are invaluable in showing the boundaries between types of historical humans as subjects of different types of reason throughout history: the boundary between epic and lyric marks the transition from the creative to the cognitive subject of reason; tragedy marks the possible transition from existential to value-based reason; and the European modern and postmodern novel – the decline of metaphysical thinking and the vacant space for a new value-based reason (Flaubert, Joyce, Kafka, Musil, Sartre, Borges, etc.).

The analytical historical presentation of the three types of reason in this book is uneven – weighted in favour of creative and value-based reason, which today remain insufficiently theorised. Metaphysical thought and the dialectical social necessity for domination and subordination it underpins are subjected to critical scrutiny, while the epoch of this reason, in the stage of its completion (totality), is seen as a catastrophe for the historical human. Its apologetics in the history of philosophy to date, however, has been more than ample.

Existing research on traditional and archaic cultures permits the hypothesis that a necessary and sufficient primordial semiotic-syntactic

type of (creative) reason existed historically among pre-human populations. Prompted by this assumption, the content of the book unfolds in four parts: the first three are dedicated respectively to creative, cognitive, and value-based reason, and the fourth – to history as a history of reason.

The first part is devoted to the creative historical epoch governed by the legislation of syntactic reason, which spans hundreds of thousands of years before the advent of verbalisation and number. It begins with the creation of the first artifacts (tools) through the dividing and combining of parts of natural bodies – wholes (wood, stone, bone) – an analogue to the „dividing and combining of significances” (in the Aristotelian sense) in developed speech activity. It is specifically noted that the creation of one’s own appropriated place – as a kind of ‘self-giving of place’, analogous to the ‘self-giving of time’ (in the sense of Martin Heidegger) through the signifying-dividing of nature – is the first great achievement of prehistoric man. This makes possible the historical creation of the self and of one’s world, forming the basis for domestication, productivity, and the reproduction of populations.

Under the legislation of creative (syntactic) reason, all encounters in reality are syntactic discursive constructs (emergent or created presences). The creative human is a syntactic unity of body and soul, with the body as an analogue of the Socratic body composed of different bodily members-parts in Plato; they are unique and unrepeatable – a semantically multiple syntactic unity, outside number and beyond the metaphysical field of the same; they have received their creative discursive capacity either as a gift from the gods or as an inheritance from a kindred predecessor. In the context of communal life under the gift system (vs. the system of exchange value in hierarchical society), human relations are dominated by reverence for elders and patronage over the younger within the community. Creative historical time is a result of its separation from natural time. It does not fully coincide with the movement of celestial bodies, but is structured in accordance with productive activities, beginning „after the first roosters crow” and ending with the return of the farmer home and the livestock from pasture. This time is a syntactic whole composed of parts, not units: day and night, old and new moon, the sequence of weekdays, an annual whole of season-parts, and so on.

Under the legislation of cognitive (semantic) reason, reality takes the form of the semantic relation between signified and signifier as ‘being’ in its ‘beingness’; the cognitive historical human is a hierarchical

semantic unity of their body and soul (I), and after a second semantic elevation from I to the Second I (Self), they assume the figure of the autonomously existing historical human, whose ability 'to be' is the result of 'being able to be oneself' (in the sense of S. Kierkegaard); metaphysical time-being-representation is the duration of the act of contemplating-measuring-knowing-representing-acquiring the creation of meaning and of meaning itself. „Historical time-being is acquired time and owes its existence to 'having the word' and 'having language' as tools of representation, which are not available to all like the sun and air are to all living beings, but are the possession and property of the man of the ruling classes. The interpersonal (social) relation is thus an analogue to the semantic relation between 'being' and its 'beingness', in the form of domination and subordination (rulers/ruled). In fact, the intrapersonal structure of the being-historical person is the same, insofar as the I is the being as 'possession and property' of the Self (personal beingness in the Aristotelian sense). In turn, the ontological (evental) history unfolds as the work of categorical fictions embodied in hierarchical communities (peoples, nations, classes, states, etc.), and the person is thereby depersonalised and deprived of the role of historical subject.

It is important to note that so-called 'social revolutions' during the epoch of 'beingness' are mere storms in a teacup compared to the fundamental transitions between semiotic-historical types of reason. As for the long-term time of metaphysical reason, its medium-term transitions are realised through the necessary sequence of revolution and counterrevolution. None of its revolutions is 'real' without its counterrevolution, whose driving forces failed to bid a final farewell to an exhausted historical reality: Julian the Apostate, the Counter-Reformation, the ancien régime, national-territorial capitalism... There are grounds for the intellectual-political climate of United Europe – founded on the values of the global order and the rules against changing state borders by force, against violence against civilians, and against threats of nuclear weapons – to be seen as the beginning of a transition to a future epoch of equality in a value-based fellowship of humans and cultures.

Under the legislation of pragmatic (value-oriented) reason, the historical human acquires a personal structure in the form of a freed from personal beingness befriended unity of I, Self, and body under the banner of intrapersonal understanding among them; this intrapersonal

understanding is a precondition for the possibility of interpersonal understanding within communal living; value reality is a fellowship of all (material and ideal) values: a material value is anything (object, being, phenomenon) that is free from categorical determinacy and is available for human participation and co-participation, and an ideal value is any idea that partakes in the boundless fellowship of values, or at least in one other idea from that fellowship. Outside of it, any idea is merely a concept within the composition of conceptual infinity. Value-based historical time is free time – free from being-as-acquisition-time, it is time available to the person, free to live in order to work, and not working in order to live; it is the time of our future. The transition from semantic to pragmatic reason is indicated as the moment of passage from the capacity for knowing-acquiring-destroying to that of creating-valuing-preserving and participating in the human life-world, and as the moment of the transition from metaphysics to anthropology, as discursive anthropology.

The concluding fourth part contains a reasoned critique of evental (cognitive) perverse history with its claim to universality at the stage of its completion. As a possible way out, it proposes an understanding of global history whose subject is not only human communities but also the human being themselves, and whose active organising principle is semiotic: it is the process of alternating discursive capacities as an evolutionary sequence of semiotic forms of reason under whose legislation respective long-term historical times unfold – each with its own type of historical human, historical reality, and social paradigm.

The thematic structure of the book, thus presented, also contains a number of debatable theses with heuristic potential: for example, if creation is „reason before reason,” then the apriority of beingness as ‘nothing’ is illusory, and cognitive reason has no dealings with the transcendent; if the cognitive type of reason is only one among others, then its singularity and its historical finality, together with history itself, are products of misunderstanding; beingness is not in and of itself, but a product of semantic reason; besides beingness, the being also has its own internal ontological structure: autonomous are only those who are capable of being themselves; authorised are the recipients of public time-beingness (slaves, vassals, and proletarians); and those who are being involuntarily are all ‘things with names’. The evolutionary history of reason is visible from the so-called ‘Archimedean’ point of history outside historical time; the aporias of Zeno of Elea serve as illustrations for understanding creative, cognitive, and dialectical types of

reason; created as a result of artifact production, human history has a productive purpose, the content of which consists of the semeophores of signification, meaning, concept, and value, and their material embodiments; the legislation of each type of reason presupposes its own type of long-term historical time, person, reality, and social paradigm; in particular, before the history of time, there is a history of place, which allows things to be accessed and arranged.

In short, history is seen as everything that the human makes of themselves and of the world through the instruments of their reason. And the book seeks an answer to the question posed by Paul Ricoeur, „What is real?": the real is the analogue of the type of reason dominant in any historical epoch. Thus, evolutionary anthropological history places the human before both the alternative of their boundlessness and the „Last Judgment" of their own reason.

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