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SUPRATINGA VAIZDUOTĖ: NAUJOS HUMANITARINĖS PARADIGMOS LINK

Understanding Imagination: Towards a New Humanitarian Paradigm

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje iš plačios istorinės ir filosofinės perspektyvos nagrinėjama vaizduotės problema ir atskleidžiama, kad europinė metafizika ilgą laiką ignoravo vaizduotę ir pataikavo protui, todėl siūloma į vaizduotę pažvelgti naujai ir laikyti ją svarbiausia žmogaus kūrybine galia. Kaip galimas naujo humanitarinio diskurso šaltinis straipsnyje analizuojamos Henrio Cobrino ir Gilberto Durand'o idėjos.

SUMMARY

The article deals with the problem of imagination interpreted in a broad historical and philosophical perspective. It is shown that European metaphysics have for a long time neglected imagination in favour of reason. In contrast to this position, the necessity of considering imagination in a new way is postulated – as a leading creative force of the human being. In this connection, the ideas of Henri Corbin and Gilbert Durand are analysed as a possible source of new ways of humanitarian discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Does philosophy still claim to clarify the essence of things or even to find out the laws of the essential connections of all existing things? Since its own $\phi\acute{\nu}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (that lets it grow and reveal itself in its own irreducible quality) is

the activity of mind, then, perhaps, everything that can be called philosophizing is able to be reduced to the rational, despite even the well-known irrationalism of the postmodern thinking and the vehement criticism of logocentrism.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: vaizduotė, vaizdinys, juntamas pasaulis, antropologinis perkėlimas, įsivaizduojamas pasaulis. KEY WORDS: imagination, image, sensual world, anthropological traject, mundus imaginalis.

The shift of epistemological landmarks in the post-nonclassical epoch obviously implies the actualization of interest in other aspects of human interaction with the world, such as imagination, above all.

1. SENSUAL TRAINING FOR PSYCHE

Is not it true that humans are of three kinds, as the Gnostics used to believe: *hylics* (or *somatics*) whose existence is fleshly; *psychics*, facing one side the earth and the other side the sky; *pneumatics*, a higher kind, whom the first two will never be like.

This teaching is the core of Gnostic anthropology. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, expounding the views of the Valentinians, writes: "There being thus three kinds of substances, they declare of all that is material <...> that it must of necessity perish, inasmuch as it is incapable of receiving any afflatus of incorruption. As to every animal existence <...>, they hold that, inasmuch as it is a mean between the spiritual and the material, it passes to the side to which inclination draws it. Spiritual substance, again, they describe as having been sent forth for this end, that, being here united with that which is animal, it might assume shape, the two elements being simultaneously subjected to the same discipline. And this they declare to be 'the salt' and 'the light of the world'." (The Greek text is exactly about hylics, psychics and pneumatics.)

It would be superfluous to go into the details of Valentine's cosmogony here, as it is more important to pay attention to the characteristics of these kinds themselves. The involvement of mere materiality means the lower layer of existence, the complete suppression of human

forces by flesh, their captivity with ashes. Pneumatics, by nature, have special properties that protect them from all dirt and wickedness. Psychics occupy the middle place, and, as St. Irenaeus goes on to say, "for the animal substance had need of training by means of the outward senses" (ἔδει γὰο τῷ ψυχικῷ καὶ αἰσθητῶν παιδευμάτων), and the Savior, according to Valentine's soteriology, comes to the world in order to save the psychics first of all, for they are free in their movement upwards or downwards.

Psyche needs to be educated through sensuality, by "sensual training" ($\alpha i \sigma \theta \eta$ τῶν παιδευμάτων). But is it to go to the super-sensual world, completely disdaining and rejecting the flesh? Indeed so, as for the Gnostics the material world is completely recognized as a flawed creation of the ignorant Demiurge, that is, the evil. This aspect of the Gnostic doctrine evoked the condemnation of both Orthodox Christians and Neoplatonists. Plotinus writes that "to despise this Sphere [Cosmos – *Author*], and the Gods within it or anything else that is lovely, is not the way to goodness" (Enneads, II, 9, 16)³. In other words, the knowledge of the intelligible Cosmos cannot take place without admiration for the beauty and proportionality of the sensual Cosmos. "For who", Plotinus exclaims, "that truly perceives the harmony of the Intellectual Realm could fail, if he has any bent towards music, to answer to the harmony in sensible sounds? What geometrician or arithmetician could fail to take pleasure in the symmetries, correspondences and principles of order observed in visible things?"⁴ Gnostic neglect of the sensuous, according to Plotinus, is nothing but badly understood Plato with his pun on the body as the grave of the soul. In fact, the body is a necessary element of the world order, which bears a reflection of the highest harmony.

However, despite this apology of the visible cosmos, Plotinus, like the Gnostics, is talking about overcoming the sensual, about becoming familiar with Beauty not inherent in separate things, but as it is. However, where is Psyche to find this Beauty as it is? What is to lead her, as she knows only the plural, but not the one? Will renunciation of the "moist" nature not turn into a true oblivion of Life, lost while trying to arise to the incorporeal ("fiery", "dry") "logosic" world? What is, finally, the Spirit if not the Mind, knowing plural as one? But how can Psyche learn the "noetic", if she is ignorant of Mind (Nοῦς)?

Even disagreeing with the Gnostic rejection of the sensory cosmos, it must nevertheless be recognized that the division of humans into three kinds is a very deep intuition of the unworldly principle in man. Hans Jonas gives a very significant indication of the consistent separation of the spiritual and the psychic not only in Gnosticism, but also in orthodox Christian thought: "In the New Testament, especially in St. Paul, this transcendent principle in the human soul is called the 'spirit' (pneuma) <...> It is remarkable that Paul, writing in Greek and

certainly not ignorant of Greek terminological traditions, never uses in this connection the term 'psyche,' which since the Orphics and Plato had denoted the divine principle in us."⁵

As we see, Psyche is something so rooted in the sensually-natural Cosmos that it is impossible to associate with her the possibility of going beyond this Cosmos. Psyche and Mind (as well as Pneuma, which should not be identified with Mind as a kind of Super-mind) are different beings, and they do not get along together. As for the distinction between Mind and Pneuma, we shall neglect it here.

And now, Psyche is the middle between the spiritual and the material, according to Irenaeus; in other words, it is completely pointless to consider the possibility of its ascent to the unworldly, for it is not in its power. A naive critic once wrote that Kant was mourning the unknowability of the thing in itself, and Vladimir Solovyov ironically asked him whether the Koenigsberg thinker was also sad that non-existence is devoid of existence. Similarly, it is ridiculous to lament the impossibility of removing Psyche from the flesh, for such is Psyche and not to be otherwise.

But then it must be acknowledged that the way Psyche can embrace and cognize the world is myth, while Mind (as διάνοια) gives birth to philosophy, and pneumatic cognition seems to be associated with religion. A. F. Losev in *The Dialectics of Myth* correctly notes: "By translating entire mythical images into the language of their abstract meaning, they consider integral mythical-psychological experiences as some ideal entities, not

paying attention to the infinite complexity and inconsistency of a real experience that <...> is always mythical. <...> Myth is not ideal being, but reality – vitally perceivable and vitally created, material and almost animal-like, fleshly one."⁶

This mythical way of grasping the world has a figurative character, and the main role here is played by imagination. Image unites the evident-sensual with the unobvious-ideal that shines through the vesture of the actual, material, fleshly. Actually, that is the case when something can be called an image in the true sense – being on the border of the sensual and supersensible, visible and invisible, and in its immediate manifestation these aspects are given as an indivisible whole.

The power that provides this conjunction is nothing but imagination. When we say "imagination" here, it is not so much about images of the world in the field of cognition or images in the field of artistic creativity, understood as certain mechanical reflections or prints, in the spirit of primitive materialism (or

even the "dialectical" one). Imagination is a powerful productive force that engenders the whole world different from nature. The entire collective life, both cultural and social, is imaginary in the sense that it is born of imagination. But imagination takes an intermediate place between the worlds of which one is completely ideal, intelligible, while the other is material, sensual, natural. Imagination is a fundamental "between," but it is also a special world itself, and not just a gap or a boundary with no independent being. And since the world for us is the conjunction of the subjective and the objective, the external and the internal, imagination appears as the primary reality, being ontologically initial because of its conjunctive function.

But one should not think that imagination is the arbitrariness of a man who produces the whole world out of himself. Imagination rather gives him the opportunity to create himself and to see the hidden faces of things, along with building an external cultural and social world.

2. ONTOLOGICAL INDEPENDENCE OF IMAGINATION

Michel Maffesoli, referring to Gilbert Durand, writes that there is an ancient and fundamental distrust of the image within the Judeo-Christian (and especially Semitic) tradition. With all the exceptions, one can emphasize the fact that for them the world has always been thought as separated from God. There is a qualitative difference between perfection (God) and imperfection (world). Later we come across the opposition of reason (the throne of perfection in imperfect human nature) and imagination, associated with

insanity, animality and demonism, which should be kept away from.⁷

To what extent is Maffesoli right in this assertion? On the one hand, this distrust of image and imagination indeed can be traced quite distinctly in the tradition of European metaphysics: from the Platonic rejection of art through the Baconian concept of idols to the positivist denial of imagination by Auguste Comte. On the other hand, in historical analysis, we will constantly come across an emphasis on the importance of $\tau \acute{o}$ $\alpha \ \'{t} \sigma \theta \eta \mu \alpha$,

the sensual-imaginative in the life of Psyche, albeit with certain reservations.

If we do not reduce the role of imagination only to representation, then it is quite possible to think of it as an independent principle, which is the basis not only for the sensual (τό αἴσθημα), but also for the activity of mind as such. Imagination is a connecting of the sensual and extrasensory for Psyche. Actually, we are guided here by the leading researchers in the sphere of imaginary, who have made a shift in understanding its essence and functions - that is, first, Henri Corbin, as well as his follower Gilbert Durand and those scholars who can be considered developers of Durand's ideas.

However, a certain terminological reflection is needed here, in order to clearly distinguish between separate and sometimes completely incompatible meanings embedded in the concept of "imagination."

First of all, the very concept of "image" can be interpreted in two ways. There are two Greek words associated with image, εἰκών (hence the "icon") and εἴδωλον (hence the "idol"). In the word "eidolon" the "duplicative" meaning is more expressed: secondary, phantom, illusory, unreal. This, as Deleuze would say, is a "bad copy", while "icon" is a good copy, properly referring to the original.

Henri Corbin expressed the main point of the difference between these two concepts: "The image is an idol <...>, when it stops the vision of the beholder on itself. The idol is impenetrable, opaque, it remains at the level of what it originated from. As an icon, <...> the image appears when its transparency al-

lows the beholder to see something behind it and with its help – to see what is beyond it and can not be perceived except through it."8

When we talk about the image as a product of imagination, we always mean its actual-sensual character, its sensual certainty and fullness. In our opinion, the metaphysics' suspicious attitude to the image is not abolished by pointing to the key concept of Platonism – εἶδος. The initial semantics of the eidos as "shape", "external look", "visible appearance" does not at all cancel out the fact that in its final speculative sense the Platonic eidos does not imply anything sensual and belongs entirely to the world of mind (in spite of all the saturation of Platonism with the intuition of sight). Being a structural principle of a thing's organization, the eidos is completely and exclusively intellectual, hence the activity of mind (thinking) is something that takes us beyond the visible only by bodily eyes and enters into those areas where the perceived "by the intelligent eyes" turns out to be, in fact, unimaginable in bodily form, i.e. not-visible. The idea of the Beautiful as such can be contemplated, but it is impossible to imagine, that is to present in an image.

This enmity for sensual imagery clearly appears in the Platonic attitude to art, because art only reflects something that is itself the result of reflection, and therefore more and more leads a person into the realm of not-being, with the arbitrariness of "fantasy", infinitely far from the true nature of things. That is why the artist, according to Plato, is akin to the sophist, if we recall the well-known fragment from the dialogue

"Sophist" (236c), where the Eleatic Stranger conversing with Theaetetus says: "Thus, I named the following two types of fine art: the art of creating images and the art of creating illusory likenesses" (τούτω τοίνυν τὼ δύο ἔλεγον εἴδη τῆς εἰδωλοποιικῆς, εἰκαστικὴν καὶ φανταστικήν). Those two kinds of art eikastic and fantastic - are, respectively, the reproduction of similarity and the creation of the phantom-imaginary, uncorresponding. (Actually, the first kind of art is also unproductive, for it only reflects likeness of sensory things, secondary in themselves). In the final part of the dialogue (Soph. 266-268), the sophist is defined as the one who creates "phantoms", "eidolons" (εἰδωλοποιικῆς), i.e. distorted images that have their source in a sensual "fantasy."

Jean-Jacques Wunenberger writes that art is considered by Plato as an accomplice in the production of appearances (simulacra), "whose negative value is not due to the fact that they represent non-existent forms, but because they deceive us, making us believe in morphological similarity in the optical illusions. The fantasmatic image loses its ontological value, because its imitation makes us believe that it is a faithful representation of generating being."

In fact, Plato demonstrates both tendencies of understanding the image, sometimes superimposing them: according to the first, creativity is a figurative manifestation of what is hidden in the spiritual plane, and hence the image can be regarded as a limited expression and representation of the true Being; the second tendency comes from the ontological approach to the degree of being,

which aims to justify a theory of pure knowledge free of sensual images that lead a person into the realm of error.¹⁰

Nevertheless, it seems that the main trend for Plato is the first one, as soon as he asserts the absolute externality of ideas to our senses: "And the one class of things we say can be seen but not thought, while the ideas can be thought but not seen" (Rep. 507c), and the experience "by the power of dialectic" is due to the identification of those who are able to disregard the eyes and other senses and go on to being itself in company with truth (537d).¹¹

If we reduce the consideration to thinking primarily, then its independence from imagination is disputable, although in our minds we are able to grasp objects, which are exactly unimaginable, but only conceivable, and this encourages us to recognise thinking as selflawful and self-sufficient. But is it so? For the European metaphysical tradition, perhaps, it is just like this, as well as for a number of our colleagues, with whom we had to conduct philosophical discussions. In this paradigm imagination is interpreted as a phantasmal deviation from the right path of cognition. This point of Western philosophy Henry Corbin called an "agnostic reflex", which is responsible for the divorce between thinking and being.¹² This reflex stems from the negation of the ontological value of imagination, recognized only as a source of delusions or phantasms.

Imagination and imaginary are to be comprehended in a quite different way, namely: as an independent reality mediating the interaction of the sensual world and the intelligible world. Corbin notes the need to develop a new terminology on imagination, which would correctly reflect its essence. In particular, he writes: "This world is hidden behind the very act of sense perception and has to be sought underneath its apparent objective certainty. For this reason, we definitely cannot qualify it as being imaginary in the current sense of the word, i.e., as unreal, or non-existent".¹³

In this case, we are primarily interested in an indication of the fundamental reality and ontological independence of the world for which Corbin has found a special term – *mundus imaginalis*. He develops his understanding of imagination on the basis of the Islamic philosophy of Suhrawardi, with its idea of 'alam al-mithal (the translation of this expression is the used above Latin word combination), but we can also notice the structurally close understanding of the reality of imaginary in other mystical traditions, including the Christian one.

In the framework of the latter, the problem of the image is particularly evident in the confrontation of iconoclasts and icon-worshippers. The arguments of the iconoclasts were connected, among other things, with the fact that the worship of God cannot include a sensory-visual element and must be wholly related to the sphere of νοῦς. St. John Damascene, objecting to the iconoclasts, wrote about the need to combine the sensual and "intelligent" (νοερῶς) elements in the worship and knowledge of God. In particular, he points out that a person is not able to rise to contemplation of spiritual objects without any mediation, and something similar to human nature is needed here. If Holy Scripture,

taking into account our ability to perceive, gives images even of that which does not have a sensual embodiment, then why not transmit in images what owns the image? The incarnation of God the Son allows us to reflect the visible side of God, although worship is not done to matter, but to God who created it. St. John Damascene refers here to St. Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzus) "who is so eloquent about God, says that the mind, which is set upon getting beyond corporeal things, is incapable of doing it. For the invisible things of God since the creation of the world are made visible through images (Rom. 1.20)." Further he writes: "Do not despise matter, for it is not despicable. Nothing is that which God has made. This is the Manichean heresy. That alone is despicable which does not come from God, but is our own invention, the spontaneous choice of will to disregard the natural law, - that is to say, sin."14

Psyche associated with the corporeal, only through the corporeal can receive an impulse to ascend to the incorporeal and supersensible. Notable is the fact that mind, according to St. Gregory, is powerless to grasp into its network of definitions what is indefinable and unlimited by its essence. Therefore, imagination is regarded here as a special world between the worlds, having *its own ontological significance* and providing a link between the sensory nature of humans and the invisible and super-sensible world.

These border zones between the visible and the invisible are examined in detail in *Iconostasis* by Father Pavel Florensky. Having night dreams, creating artistic images and undergoing mystical

experience are considered by him as obvious examples of such a contact between the visible and the invisible. Those are the situations when a person gains the experience of the borderland, of course, with certain differences in each of these cases, but Florensky nonetheless postulates that "the general law is the same in all cases: the soul is taken from the visible, having lost sight of it, to the sphere of the invisible - it is the Dionysian dissolution of the bonds of the visible. And, having risen up on high into the invisible, it descends again to the visible, and then it has symbolic reflections of the invisible world - the images of things, the ideas: that is the Apollonian vision of the spiritual world."15

The structure of this interaction with the invisible world is twofold: it includes ascent and descent, which are one way. On the path of ascent, as Florensky writes, there is a temptation for Psyche "to mistake spiritual images and ideas for those dreams that surround, embarrass and deceive the soul when there opens the way to the upper world."16 In other words, the frontier of imagination is fraught with the danger of mixing truly spiritual images with the ones that are to some extent still involved in the world on this side, having a sensuous nature, although they may look like the epiphany of the invisible world. This danger, within the framework of Christian terminology, can be called "seduction".

Imagination as a special cognitive function of a person can be compared to a magnet producing a field, the polesprojections of which are, on the one hand, images born at the junction with sensual representations, and on the other hand, extremely remote from sensuality, archetypal patterns possessing an independent being and not created by people, but rather awakened and actualized by them under certain circumstances. This is the *mundus imaginalis*, this is the border of the visible and the invisible, the passage through which means the acquisition of the transpersonal experience, the entrance into the truly spiritual realm.

It is impossible not to notice the resemblance of Florensky's and Corbin's reflections on the spiritual frontier, although they speak of various mystical traditions. Like Florensky, Corbin strongly emphasizes that mundus imaginalis is independent of physical corporeality and sensuality, but we believe that its manifestation does become possible at the second pole, which is turned to sensuality: thus epiphany takes on symbolic flesh. The manifested is not a phenomenon itself, but it can not appear otherwise. Psyche, comprehending the world by means of myth, grasps it in a unitary revelation of the corporeal and super-corporeal.

A living revelation of myth cannot be reduced either to the activity of reason (dianoia) or to mere sensory impressions, but it is present in the oneness. Those are the imagination's sensual lessons for acquiring the fullness of knowledge that there are worlds that extend beyond the limits of human sensuality – or rather, the same world unfolds at different levels of the hierarchy. The most important thing here is the experience of the reality of the Divine presence, a living experience, and not just abstract reasoning.

3. IMAGINATION AS AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TRAJECT

The French sociologist Gilbert Durand, a former student of Henri Corbin, gave the name of "l'imaginaire" to the special world of images. Durand characterized l'imaginaire as an anthropological traject – "thrown between" (cf. sub-ject, ob-ject).

An anthropological traject, as Durand writes, is "a constant exchange that exists at the level of the imaginary (l'imaginaire) between subjective and assimilative impulses (on the one hand) and objective demands arising from the cosmic and social environment (on the other hand). <...> There is a reciprocal genesis, which oscillates [like a pendulum – *Author*] from instinctual impulses to the material and social environment, and back ... In essence, the imaginary (l'imaginaire) is nothing other than this path in which the representation of an object allows itself to be assimilated and modelled by the instinctive imperatives of the subject, and, as Piaget has virtuously showed, subjective representations are explicated by accommodating the available for the subject schema of the objective environment ... the symbol is always the product of bio-psychic imperatives, carried out in accordance with the requirements of the environment."17

In other words, Durand considers imagination as the instance, which connects, conjugates the sensual, physical and the out-of-body, conceivable. Any thought and any meaning eventually arise at the subconscious affective dynamic level. The interesting fact in Durand's approach is that he seeks to implement a synthesis of humanities knowledge and natural science facts and builds his interpretation of the imagina-

tion, basing on the theory of reflexes developed by Vladimir Bekhterev and Alexei Ukhtomsky (and some other well-known Russian physiologists). From Durand's point of view, activity of imagination is determined by the operation of three systems of dominant corporeal reflexes which a newborn baby has: 1) a postural reflex (reflex of "standing" which expresses a striving for upright posture); 2) digestive reflex (reflex of feed intake); 3) copulative reflex (connected with rhythmic movements, repetition, dance, etc.).¹⁸

According to J.-J. Wunenburger, *l'imaginaire* is fixed in sensory-motor schemes programming an "anthropological traject", which comes from neurobiological to spiritual and defines 3 types of representation constructions, described as 3 verbs: to distinguish, to confuse, to connect (French: *distinguer*, *confondre*, *relier*).¹⁹

The task is precisely to identify the basic structures of imagination and to interpret the products they generate. Moreover, these products should not be thought of as "eidolons", idols, false phantoms that do not have their own being ("we refuse to see the image as an ordinary sign of psychological reality or external reality reflected in the mind," writes Durand²⁰), on the contrary: *l'imaginaire* and its products are the realiae of a special world, eventually helping us to build something on the level of the material and social world.

What exactly does *l'imaginaire* conjunct? Collective unconscious and collective supra-individual consciousness (in the form of collective representations) –

that is the interpretation of Alexander Dugin, in particular. That is why the concept of *l'imaginaire* and the "sociology of imagination" are needed – in order to penetrate into the deep mechanisms of the interconnection of these two levels. And this means working with symbols, images and, ultimately, with archetypes. Social and cultural phenomena can and should be analysed basing not on the one-dimensional logos strategy, but on the two-dimensional *logos/mythos* topic, where it is the mythos (in fact, *l'imaginaire*) that is the generator of all sociocultural elements.

Ultimately, any thought and any meaning originate on the subconscious affective-dynamic level: thus, crying and "babbling" precede articulated speech. Postulating this basic level of consciousness and communication necessarily leads us to the conclusion that the very thought and language expressions are based on the activity of imagination. The universality of symbolic representations, on the one hand, can be interpreted as a distinctive feature of the human species, but, at the same time, the imaginative function, or "the transcendental fantastical" (fantastique transcendantale, the expression of Durand, which he borrowed from Novalis) is an a priori component of any understanding. Durand assumes that rational operations of mind and definitions of truth generated by them are unable to grasp the full depth and

complexity of the "absolute reality".

In this perspective, imagination turns out to be the primary element (a sort of $\alpha o \chi \dot{\eta}$) that produces "reality". The independence of imagination in relation to the subject and the object is expressed by Durand in the already mentioned concept of "anthropological traject", i.e. an independent being between the "objective" world and the world of "subjectivity," between nature and culture. The traject is imaginary in its dynamic and generative sense. Alexander Dugin writes about this: "L'imaginaire, considered in the rational tradition as an intermediate and not self-sufficient phenomenon located between external reality and the cognizing subject, in this model takes the reference point and is considered as the base instance constituting both the external world and the cognizing subject in the course of the various trajectories of its deployment."21

"L'imaginaire" deals with the level of archetypes, and here Durand's concept is based on the ideas of C. G. Jung. As noted by M. M. Joy, "both Durand and Jung understand the archetype not as an original image (as in original sin), but as a type of patterning of fundamental experience, rooted in instinctual and affective forces, whose meaning finds expressions in iconic rather than verbal form. The archetypal symbol functions as the 'substantification' of these tendencies, giving them a particular form and image."²²

CONCLUSION

Collective representations, expressing the identity of certain communities, can be linked to the activities of the collective unconscious, which symbolic structures predetermine both the ways and the content of identifications. In the words of A. Dugin, the Logos is verified and interpreted by Mythos, and not vice versa, which, in fact, means going beyond the Modern rationality in an attempt to outline other ways of constructing the discourse of the social and humanitarian sciences.

Those elements of human experience that have been consistently eliminated in

the new European thought are again at the centre of attention thanks to C. G. Jung, M. Eliade, H. Corbin, G. Durand and many others. This way of understanding imagination has not yet been fully mastered, but one can foresee that it is here that great discoveries are to become possible, although this style of thinking is very far from the positivistic ideals.

Endnotes

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