



Field: Philosophy

# **PhD THESIS**

## **- ABSTRACT -**

### **PHILOSOPHICAL CONSTANTS IN TRADITIONAL ROMANIAN SPIRITUALITY**

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## **Philosophical Constants in Traditional Romanian Spirituality**

The doctoral thesis *Philosophical Constants in Traditional Romanian Spirituality* is structured into the following main chapters:

- Chapter I. Traditional Spirituality. Referential Frameworks (pp. 6–69);
- Chapter II. Ontological Dimensions (pp. 70–126);
- Chapter III. The Universe of Morality: “Advice and Customs” (pp. 127–168);
- Chapter IV. Existential Finitude, or On Death and Immortality (pp. 169–187).

The work also comprises a brief Introduction (pp. 1–5), the Conclusions (pp. 188–190), and the Bibliography (pp. 121–205).

In the first chapter it is stated that traditional Romanian spirituality, like any form of spirituality understood as an expression of an integrative vision of the world, transcends the immediate dimension of existence and finds its roots in the human connection with the sacred, nature, and the cosmos. Although the concrete manifestations of spirituality vary from one era to another, certain fundamental principles remain constant: the search for the meaning of life, the desire for communion with the divine, and the need to relate to a universal order. In this context, it is essential to explore and understand the philosophical constants that structure this traditional spirituality. From ideas about destiny and free will to notions of time and eternity, from the conception of the cosmos to the place of man within it, these philosophical themes have persisted, providing continuity and meaning to Romanian spirituality in close relation with the great traditions of humanity.

The definition of being and the manner in which man perceives his own existence and the world around him constitute one of the foundations of spirituality. In any spiritual tradition, ontology—or the vision of existence—influences how the individual relates to divinity, nature, and his own human condition.

In traditional spirituality, the human being is seen as an integral part of a cosmic or divine whole, and this vision gives rise to rituals and behaviors that reflect respect for the cosmic balance and for natural laws. The search for truth is one of the fundamental philosophical constants in spirituality. In many spiritual traditions, the supreme truth is equivalent to divinity or the ultimate reality. Thus, all spiritual manifestations pursue a relationship that is as authentic and direct as possible with this truth, whether it is considered divine, cosmic, or transcendental.

In Christianity, truth is seen as essential in the relationship with God, and Christ is called “The Way, The Truth, and The Life.” This search for truth guides all aspects of spiritual life.

In the present thesis, these philosophical constants and the way in which they have been perpetuated and adapted over time within our traditional culture are analyzed. Their role in maintaining cultural and spiritual identity is highlighted, while at the same time their symbolic and metaphysical dimensions are explored. Finally, reflections are offered on the relevance of these philosophical constants in contemporary society, posing the question as to the extent to which traditional spirituality can continue to inspire us and provide answers to the great questions of life. Traditional Romanian spirituality, like other forms of traditional spirituality, displays distinct and unique features that differentiate it within the broader context of traditional spiritualities.

In our traditional spirituality, time is perceived as cyclical—that is, repetitive, governed by the rhythms of nature (the changing seasons, the agricultural cycle, the

regeneration of spring, etc.)—in contrast to linear time, which dominates modern thought.

According to the cyclical perception of time, nature, life, and death are part of a great cycle of regeneration. Holidays, rites of passage, and sacred festivals celebrate this cycle, bringing communities into a harmonious relationship with nature and divinity. In contrast, the idea of eternity is a characteristic of the sacred and represents that which is beyond time—that is, the divine world, the Kingdom of Heaven, immortal souls, or a final destiny that can be identified as paradise. In this way, cyclical time is seen as a means of preparing for the entry into eternity.

Traditional Romanian spirituality is characterized by a holistic vision of the universe, in which man, nature, and the cosmos are part of an interconnected whole. It is enough to think of the famous ballad *Miorița* to identify compelling evidence in this regard. This vision suggests that the human being is not separated from nature or the cosmos but is integrated into them. Every human action has cosmic implications and every change in nature is understood as a sign or manifestation of the divine, while rituals (for example, prayers for rain, fertility, or protection) reflect man's desire to maintain harmony with cosmic forces. This profound relationship between man and the cosmos underlies many traditions, both agricultural and in the field of popular medicine.

Traditional Romanian spirituality places a particular emphasis on the search for truth, the meaning of life, and wisdom. Throughout our spiritual history, the pursuit of wisdom has been equivalent to living in harmony with universal laws, with nature, or with the divine, the ultimate purpose of existence being, for the majority of Christians, communion with the divine and the understanding of essential truths that transcend the material world. In this quest, the wise or the elders of the community are seen as true role models, as it is believed that they have attained a profound knowledge of reality and the laws of the universe.

These philosophical constants are essential in traditional spirituality, shaping the holistic vision of the world and contributing to the structuring of the relationship between man, divinity, and the cosmos. They are not merely abstract themes, but constitute frameworks of reference for thought, behaviour, and the organization of social life.

Traditional Romanian spirituality has been influenced by a complex combination of religious, folkloric, and pre-Christian elements. Orthodox Christianity was integrated with pre-existing local traditions and customs, such as those related to Dacian mythology and the cult of the old gods. Christian holidays are often accompanied by popular customs and rituals that have deep roots in pre-Christian traditions, such as Christmas carols and New Year's traditions.

In Romanian spirituality, nature is often considered sacred and is associated with deities and cosmic forces. Natural elements, such as forests, rivers, and mountains, are frequently enveloped in symbolism and spiritual meanings. Traditional agricultural practices and customs related to the agricultural cycles are accompanied by rituals that reflect respect and veneration for nature (e.g., the sanctification of the "țarină").

Spirituality is, as most of the consulted materials indicate, a frequently used yet difficult-to-define concept due to its diverse scope. It refers to the psychic, affective, and intellectual life of a human community (people, nation), targeting the spiritual component of the culture and civilization of that community. It means the original way in which people view nature and society, acts upon them, and addresses the major problems of its life. Spirituality has a multifaceted, profoundly dialectical meaning, as a synthesis of

social, moral, political, ethical, aesthetic, religious, scientific, and philosophical elements of a people, as a unity in diversity. It possesses specific and enduring traits and evolves in accordance with the historical circumstances in which the people exist, being in a permanent process of intertwining continuity with renewal.

The issue of spirituality falls into the category of what are usually called eternal problems. It is a quality of human consciousness and activity that characterizes the individual's capacity to transcend the limitations of the present situation and immediate needs of existence, and to conceive of life in accordance with representations concerning the destiny, dignity, and perfection of man. It follows that when we speak of spirituality, we are by no means referring to a fleeting, momentary phenomenon, something that suddenly appears at a certain stage in the development of society. Spirituality is rather a state of any community—whether large or small—a unique way of thinking and acting, of perceiving the surrounding world in all its aspects, of understanding social phenomena, of relating to nature, and, in the case of individuals, of consciously positioning oneself with respect to all these, of understanding and assuming one's role, place, and purpose in the world.

It has been emphasized, in this context, that spirituality presupposes a high level of awareness of one's own existential journey; it is the result of an ingenious amalgamation of ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., the origins of which lie in a rich life experience and which manifest themselves in the enduring creations of the community—creations that ultimately pertain to spirit, thought, intellect, regardless of the specific field to which they belong.

Speaking of spirituality and morality, it has been shown, according to the reviewed bibliography, that these two concepts are usually analyzed in close connection with each other, sometimes even being conflated, with an equality sign placed between them. However, spirituality is a broader notion, while morality is one of its components, the moral qualities being considered as the foundation of spirituality.

It has been stressed that activities in which the act of sanctity, moral goodness, the discovery of truth, artistic creation, etc. are accomplished—activities that generate beauty as well as the noble sentiments associated with these experiences—fall within the complex domain of spirituality. Drawing a parallel between the laic-philosophical interpretation of the concept of spirituality and the strictly theological interpretation, it has been shown that, for religious consciousness, the spirit is a given, a suprarational beginning, realized intuitively; it is one of the names of God (God is Spirit and His Word), and Christianity treats the spirit as an hypostasis of the One in the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit/Spirit.

At the same time, the spirit is one of the components of human nature that distinguishes man from all other living beings. Along these lines, the ethnophilosopher and folklorist Ernest Bernea asserts that man should not be considered merely as a higher rung in the animal kingdom, but as a different nature that separates him from all other forms of life and gives him a specific, unique position.

The spirit is consciousness; it manifests itself in thought, in the intellect, in imagination and intuition, in the will, and in the creative capacity of man.

On a religious level, in religious philosophy, the human spirit represents the need for the sacred, for prayer, the awareness that we are neither alone nor arbitrary, that there exists a force beyond the capacity of the human mind to comprehend, which orders and governs everything, constantly overseeing, evaluating, and accounting for all our deeds.

From an anthropological point of view, the spirit is an essential quality of personality that determines man's belonging as a species to humanity, strengthens his capacity for knowledge and understanding of the world, and facilitates his ability to project himself as an agent in a life story, highlighting his place and role in the existential tumult of his time.

The spirit cannot be determined by the instruments of psychology; it is autonomous and cannot be confined to any particular space. Despite the successes related to physiological and psychic processes—psychology, in researching brain functions and the structure of consciousness, stops short before the mystery of the spirit, leaving this resolution to philosophers and theologians.

Just as the psychic structure of the person is the bearer of the individual spirit, we can speak of an objective spirit that exists at the level of the sociocultural community, whether it is a people, nation, social class, union (church), or corporation. This spirit manifests itself in the common spiritual heritage to which it belongs: language, production, technology, dominant customs and habits, law, basic values, morality, the traditional form of education and instruction, the dominant type of viewpoints and moods that set the tone, taste, fashion, and orientations of art and artistic reception, the place and situation of knowledge and science, the dominant conception of the world in any form (religion, myth, philosophy). In its purest form, the collective spirit manifests itself where its content is most evident: in the norms of thought, in notions and judgments, and is defined through the categories of faith, love, and good, in relations with the creations of nature and art, of science and philosophy, and manifests itself in the rhythms of history, in the specificity of national cultures, as a totality of ideas and aspirations, of hopes and values.

There also exists a spirit of history (according to Hegel—the absolute spirit), which is independent of any material bearer, being oriented toward self-knowledge and identical with the universe.

One also often speaks of the spirit of the times, the first proponent of which was Goethe, who understood it as that invisible force which guides the course of events and the minds of people, determining the character of an entire epoch. This invisible force materializes in the cultural realities belonging to society, and therefore the individual spirit's journey toward the objective (social) inevitably passes through the assimilation, through the appropriation of national value and the culture of all humanity.

The expression “spiritual culture” largely overlaps, from a semantic point of view, with the term spirituality. Spiritual culture is the result of the accumulations made over the course of existence by a community or an individual. It is built over time, is in a permanent state of evolution, enriched continuously, and varies from one era to another.

Spiritual culture is—whether one likes it or not—linked to and even determined by the socioeconomic development stage of the community, its aspirations, the intellectual performance of its leaders, etc. Therefore, the spiritual component is strongly involved in all human activities, in all domains and spheres that involve thought, intellect, sentiment, the relationship with nature and with other people.

We can speak of a spirituality of popular essence and one of cultivated provenance. The former is identified not only in folkloric creations—as one might be tempted to believe in a superficial analysis—but also in folk architecture, customs, traditional dress, and weaving, in ceramics and in the art of woodcarving, etc. The spirituality of cultivated provenance, which has its natural roots in the popular, is

represented by the great values of the nation that have excelled and continue to excel in a multitude of fields such as art, science, culture, etc.

National spirituality manifests itself in popular culture, in the individual's self-identity, in his character and his representations of the world, in his religious ideas, in the organization of the state, in morality, and in legal consciousness—all these segments playing a determining role in defining the spirituality of people and in understanding its specific forms of manifestation. For the affirmation and preservation of national identity, it is especially important to maintain the traditional spiritual core, the national mentality, the culture, and the national spirit, the national mentality being given by the deep structures of culture, which over time determine the ethnic and historical specificity of communities.

The great qualities of our artistic literature draw their essence from the richness of traditional popular creation, which, alongside faith, nourishes spirituality with elements of great value that function as landmarks around which the existence of the Romanian is woven.

Much is said and written about the miracle that Romania represents due to its geographical location but, above all, because of its ethnoconfessional makeup. Placed by history in a predominantly Slavic area and at a crossroads of some of the major cultures of the old European continent, the Romanian people have been subjected to numerous foreign influences, which have succeeded one another from one era to another with more or less beneficial effects. Perhaps the miracle consists precisely in the astonishing capacity of Romanians to select and appropriate from the culture of other peoples those components that best suit their own spirituality, so that, integrated into its ancestral structures, they do not hinder evolution but, on the contrary, stimulate it. It seems that in this prolonged process these components have been shaped and developed, being perpetually transmitted and refined.

Our spiritual evolution has been influenced both by the philosophy of the Occident and that of the Orient, yet we have also followed the "middle way," practicing a selective, working appropriation and achieving a beneficial balance between the two types of mentalities—a balance that has manifested itself distinctively in behaviour and permeated all areas of life, because if we observe closely, with all due attention, the customs, institutions, and manner of reaction of our people, we will come to the conclusion that their psychology is thus equidistant between the activist voluntarism of the Occident and the fatalistic passivity of the West.

Even though it is rather drastic concerning the spiritual profile of Romanians, in many of Cioran's formulations appears the desire to see his people reaching a high standard of civilization, emerging from his condemnable passivity and asserting their self-consciousness while overcoming the nihilistic attitude. He wishes for an active, transformed Romania, led by involved people with vision, capable of taking risks in order to achieve a noble goal, exalted to the point of madness.

"If eternity was born in the village, where every thought moves more slowly, where the heart beats more rarely—as if it did not beat in the chest, but deep in the earth somewhere—and if in the village the thirst for salvation is quenched, and its soul, that of the village, flutters around us like a shy scent of freshly cut grass, like a wisp of smoke falling from straw roofs, like a game of lambs on high graves, it seems only natural that this miraculous entity, which is the Romanian village, should actively intervene in shaping the mentality and philosophy of the people, generously providing a good portion of the ingredients that configure their spirituality."

One of the fundamental components of traditional Romanian spirituality is faith in general, and Orthodoxy in particular—an idea frequently encountered in the studies of our theologians, especially when discussing the transmission and dissemination of the elements regarding the implementation of Christian ideas and orientations in people's behavior. It is known that until the advent of writing—and for a long time afterward—Romanians transmitted orally the basic notions of their Christian faith, the Gospel itself being consistently reflected in folkloric creations which, in the vast majority of their initial phases, were characterized by a profoundly religious content. Faith in God is an essential constant of our traditional spirituality, alongside humaneness, hospitality, tender longing, irony, humor, creative intelligence, soulful harmony, balance, etc. Romanian culture in general, and popular culture in particular, have distinguished themselves over the centuries/millennia by a high spirituality, which, indubitably, brings them closer to the Orthodox tradition, binding them strongly to it.

The great virtues of our native Christian spirituality of Daco-Roman origin are fully present in popular culture in all its forms of manifestation. Some authors even speak of an interdependence—with strong implications in ethnogenesis—between popular Christian thought and folkloric creation, the latter generating an original spirituality, unique with strong Latin insertions.

The folkloric component is strongly imprinted in the structure of our spirituality and, implicitly, actively participated in the process of ethnogenesis, a phenomenon sustained, among other things, by the fact that Romanians were born Christians, not having undergone any conversion process as occurred with the surrounding peoples, who became Christians only in the second half of the 9th century.

On the other hand, it is important to mention that our popular, traditional spirituality for a long time constituted a solid foundation and a generous and consistent source of inspiration for written culture, evidence of which is provided by the numerous literary works that have drawn inspiration, for instance, from the famous ballad *Miorița* or from the no less famous Legend of the Argeș Monastery. In popular mentality and in traditional spirituality, which are the result of the synergistic action of countless vectors—sociocultural, political, economic, etc.—the religious element is strongly imprinted and can be easily identified in the entire range of human activity, manifesting powerfully in rites of passage, in artistic creations—especially in carols, but also in laments, legends, or tales—and is well highlighted by the orientation of the agricultural calendar according to the major Christian holidays. Thus, starting with Saint George, also called the Head of Spring, spring activities begin—plowing, sowing, etc., the sheep are prepared for the fold, separating barren ones from those yielding milk, lambs are taken, shepherds are employed, etc. Immediately after Saint George, the sheep are shorn, the lambs are shorn between the feast of Saint Peter and that of Saint Elijah; between the two “Sântămării” the sheep are led down from the mountain (“At the Great Sântămăria / Sheep are brought down into the valley / At the Small Sântămăria / Nothing remains”), from Saint Demetrius the sheep are “selected” and financial settlements with the shepherds are made, etc.

Folkloric productions (tales, anecdotes, carols, etc.) follow the line of the Holy Book, emphasizing that “the poor takes care more readily of the joys of the soul and thinks of the life to come, while the rich occupies himself solely with earthly concerns and the pleasures of the present moment. The rich automatically becomes pragmatic and impoverished in spirit.”

There is no doubt that differences exist between the spiritual structure of the rural man and that of the urbanite, and these differences are sometimes defining. For him, holidays and Sundays have a profound significance. Thus, popular creation has long earned the important status of a perennial support element and a constant generator of the spirituality of the Romanian people, functioning as a veritable source of inspiration for the entirety of native culture. Religious sentiment is strongly imbued in popular culture, giving rise to a true symbiosis that constitutes the essence of Romanian spirituality. This spirituality has crystallized over time, admirably assimilating and amalgamating the two constitutive essences: that of the Thraco-Dacian element—with its memorable tenacity, ancestral dignity, and organic connection with nature—and that of the Latin type, which meant, among other things, a true civilizing infusion.

The spirituality of the Romanian peasant, his mentality, his unique philosophy of life are impeccably reflected in popular paremiology, where one can readily identify proverbs and sayings referring to the virtues and moral values he upholds, elevating them to the rank of major principles and insisting on their imprint in everyday behavior. At the same time, vices, bad habits, ugly behaviors, sins of all kinds are harshly condemned, ridiculed, and punished. In this regard, the folklorist, aesthete, and ethnologist Petru Ursac reserves several pages full of rural philosophical substance on the paremiological phenomenon of popular essence, demonstrating and arguing with numerous examples the profoundly Christian aspect of Romanian proverbs, which—directly or indirectly—advocate for the institution of behavior in which Christian values and virtues are present and from which evils and sins, vehemently repudiated and combated by Orthodox faith through the Ten Commandments, disappear.

An important component of our traditional spirituality is beauty, the aesthetic behaviour of the individual, about which Immanuel Kant stated that it is the symbol of moral goodness. In popular paremiology there exists a true philosophy of beauty. Often, beauty is associated with wisdom: “Beauty without wisdom is like a flower in a vase; the common man gives priority to wisdom, because beauty withers, but wisdom grows. Beauty is a given, but it must be carried with dignity, without pride or emphasis, and it is desirable that it be associated with a chosen character: It is not beautiful who merely dresses well, but it is beautiful who truly suits one.” Starting, probably, from the popular wisdom contained in proverbs of this category, Sorin Lavric, accepting and developing Constantin Noica’s point of view regarding the relationship between physical beauty, wisdom, and career (achievement in culture), asserts that to cultivate illusion and succeed in culture solely because nature has favored you—making you a successful specimen—means giving biology the right to dominate the spirit.

If one were to highlight the main component elements or categories of a people’s spirituality, it would be necessary to establish, among other things, to what extent the defining traits are present in the picture we shall create, such as the following: conscientiousness, generosity, sincerity, goodwill, honesty, a sense of justice, love and compassion, respect for parents, devotion to family, patriotism, national consciousness, observance of the laws, professionalism, knowledge of literature, art, history, etc., political and juridical culture, a luminous character, conscientiousness, respect for one’s parents, devotion to family, compassion, etc.

These qualities must be reflected in the various domains of human activity: the attitude toward one’s spiritual heritage, ideology, education, culture, art, customs and traditions, morality, law, science, philosophy, religion, etc., and if they find a conducive field of expression, they can lead to perfection.



In Chapter II I attempted a brief historical overview of the problem, namely a review of the main foreign philosophers who have been profoundly concerned with the issues of time and space, and among Romanians I dwelled somewhat more on the contributions of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, whose work *Time and Destiny* I found particularly interesting and accessible, as opposed to others, such as that of Virgil Ciomoș, which is rather difficult to follow.

Generally, time is defined in the specialized literature in close connection with space, both considered “philosophical categories that designate the basic forms of any existence,” with the category of time reflecting the duration of the existence of objects and phenomena, their simultaneity or succession.

Time is involved in all spheres of human existence; precisely for this reason, a certain interpretation of it is found in various domains of spiritual culture: in the grammar of natural languages, in mythology, philosophy, theology, art, literature, science, in everyday common consciousness, etc. Man’s existence, the world itself, unfolds in time and in space.

I have underlined the antinomic character of time, its paradox, in the sense that it is both a cradle and a tomb, the giver of gods and yet the ruthless Cronos who devours his own progeny. It is an all-powerful torrent, bringing everything to the grave, yet at the same time it is a miraculous medic that heals every ailment. It is the friend of truth, dispelling the fog of error, but it is also the accomplice of the lie that it entrenches through the force of habit. It is the avenger of the world, the cornerstone of love, affection, and friendship. It is the judge and the humbler of the proud. It is the comforter of the oppressed. Generally, it is an all-powerful authority. For rational beings, time is at times an enemy, at times a friend.

Time is a change in two different directions: in the direction of the affirmation of life and in that of death. In its future aspect, time is fear and hope, horror and joy, worry and liberation. Time is a paradox and can only be understood in its dual character.

I have made several references to the biblical, mythological perception of time, showing that beyond its dependence on cultural-historical or national distinctions, the mythological core of this perception can be characterized by the triad of creation—the fall into sin—salvation. Time is born at one moment as a result of the creative act accomplished by God in eternity and remains as a reality. Here I opened, in a way, a parenthesis highlighting Emil Cioran’s position on time, exposed in *The Fall into Time*, for which I relied on the study by Professor Ion Dur—*Between the Fall into Time and the Fall into the Temporal*, from Volume IX in the series *Studies in the History of Romanian Philosophy*.

By virtue of his own interpretation of biblical texts, Emil Cioran considers that the first fall—Adam’s fall—marked the beginning of history, this being, in philosopher Ion Dur’s opinion, the second blow dealt to God’s order, after Lucifer, the first protester who attacked the original unconsciousness, disrupted the unity of the beginning of the world. This fall of the progenitor of man, as theologians customarily call Adam, generated, according to Cioran, the exit of the human being from what is called primordial innocence and thereafter its entry into time.

Regarding eternity, I have shown that it is perceived by man as an infinite duration of time that he cannot represent. I strove to capture in the consulted bibliography the difference between time and eternity, showing that the essence of time lies in its passing and that eternity is not expressed in notions or words, since our notions

and words are adapted to an existence that flows in time, and as such, they are always marked by temporality.

Eternity is that absolute supratemporality that can be proper only to a supraliminal existence, to God. In other words, eternity is one of the basic attributes of the Absolute, of Godhead itself. God is a Being who transcends the world; He lives, is situated not in time but in eternity—a state placed absolutely outside of time.

Eternity is foreign to any living being, only God—Who is a Being that transcends the world, lives, is situated not in time but in eternity, as a state placed absolutely outside of time. If access to eternity is possible in a certain sense through death, then the Kingdom of God itself does not mean death but rather victory over death, it means eternal life.

Time itself is the result of the fall from eternity, a consequence of the deterioration of eternity. Time and eternity are correlative; they exist in a reciprocal relationship, and it is not possible to analyze one without the other. However, time has a beginning and an end, whereas eternity is endless.

The exit from the authority of time will be achieved, according to the Russian philosopher N. Berdeaev, on what is called the “eighth day of creation.” This eighth day of creation is a metaphysical and ontological creation that is realized through the synergistic efforts of two free beings: God and man. This act is, according to Berdeaev, the exit from time and the return to the eon, that is, to the eternity of divine existence. (The eon means divine power, divine intelligence.)

Man, by his nature, is a supratemporal being and, at least in one aspect, lives in eternity. And if in another aspect he is subject to the condition of time, this is explained by the fact that the human body is immersed in the temporal.

I am aware that I have not captured all the problems raised by time and eternity and that there is much more to study, especially regarding the approaches of Sartre, Heidegger, Noica, Cioran, Eliade, or Blaga. Also, Marian Nencescu’s studies concerning Bergson or the way time is perceived in popular mentality are interesting.

The penultimate chapter has a generous theme, but at the same time is very comprehensive and ambitious in the sense that, speaking of the universe of morality, it would be necessary to include here not only its traditional components but also its implications in daily life, in regulating interpersonal relationships. Therefore, alongside defining the notions of moral norm, moral value, moral virtue, moral principle, etc., I strove to select from the reviewed bibliography some significant elements that indicate how morality, through the levers at its disposal, governs, on the one hand, the relationships between the members of any community and, on the other hand, their relations with society as a whole.

The phenomena that fall within the universe of morality are extremely diverse. Included here are deeds and behaviours of both individuals and collectives; moral relationships among people, the relationship of man with the surrounding environment; the psychic attributes of individuals and their character; moral motives that determine activities, actions, initiatives, etc.; the will; values; virtues; rules and requirements regarding community behavior (norms); conscience, judgment, manifestation, the notions of honesty, dignity, duty, responsibility, etc., etc. All these constitute a system of values, norms, principles, ideas, beliefs, etc., through which a society defines itself and which regulates the behavior of its members as a whole. This system evolves over time, acquiring characteristics that differ from one type of social organization to another, being

influenced both by the level of culture of the society and by the socioeconomic changes that occur in its evolution.

In the first part of the chapter I defined the concept of morality as it appears in the specialized literature, highlighted the differences between morality and ethics, showing that, in the current perception, ethics is a philosophical discipline whose object of study is morality—one of the most important facets of human life and society. I reserved a relatively large space for the emergence of morality, showing that regarding its appearance and development the specialized literature recognizes several approaches, the most important of which are three: the religious, the naturalistic, and the sociological. The religious orientation relates the idea of morality to divinity, to the absolute, considering it the source of both the right and the fact of morality. In this vision, in order to restrain one's passions and moderate one's desires, man must address God; this faith helps him to observe all rules of conduct. The naturalistic orientation considers nature, the natural laws—especially regarding biological evolution—as the foundations of morality, whereas the social orientation sees morality as a sociocultural mechanism that ensures the stability of society. In the religious interpretation, which is also the oldest, morality as a law was given to man by divinity. Thus, in the Jewish, Christian, or Islamic tradition, morality is perceived as something given by a divinity who embodies absolute perfection and is the source of all qualities that in earthly life are considered to be of the highest morality. Adherents of all religious cults and orientations see in morality a kind of deification of man, a manifestation of God in man. Man becomes moral through union with God via faith: the closer he comes to God, the more he is governed by the desire to do good and, conversely—the further he strays from God, this idea of good abandons him, being replaced by the idea of evil whose source is the Devil. The result of distancing oneself from God, in theological conception, is the commission of sin.

From a religious point of view, moral norms were transmitted by God to humanity through His chosen ones—the prophets. Let us recall that Muhammad, the founder of the Islamic faith, is considered a messenger of God, who, through revelation, disclosed the Great Truth to him, and this revelation later formed the basis of the Quran, the holy book of Muslims. To Moses, God also revealed the laws of a dignified, moral life. According to the Christian faith, in order to save people from sin and guide them on the right path that would ensure eternal life in paradise, God Himself sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to Earth, who promulgated the laws of the new life in the Sermon on the Mount, on that occasion—reinterpreting the old Testament commandments—calling not only for love of one's neighbor but even for a general forgiveness, extending even to love for one's enemy.

The concept of morality is not immutable; thus, ancient morality promoted the wise as a model of individual morality; in the structure of Christian morality, the saint takes the place of the wise, while modern morality has opened wide the field for the assertion of human rights, in short, that of the citizen.

Regarding the functions of morality in society, specialized studies highlight several, the most important of which appear to be the following: the regulatory function, the cognitive function, the evaluative-imperative function, the orienting function, the communicative function, the predictive function, the educational function, etc. I have addressed a few essential issues regarding moral norms and principles.

Moral norms are social norms that regulate people's behavior in society, the attitude of some toward others, their relations with society and with themselves. They appeared with the birth of human society and developed along with it, reflecting its moral

values. The simplest form of moral assertions is the norm ("Do not kill! Do not steal! Do not hide the truth!" etc.). Moral norms are determined by the categories of good, truth, justice, duty, etc.

Philosophy distinguishes several categories: general norms, which pertain to any type of community and human activity and are characterized by a stability sustained by the very regulations they impose, which in "their positive expression would be: Be honest! Be truthful! Be dignified! Be brave! Be generous! Be grateful! Be loyal! Be good! Be just, etc."; particular norms, which pertain to groups and collectives constituted on professional or marital criteria and whose duration is determined by various factors (this includes marriage, family life, the ethics specific to different fields of activity, etc.); special norms, such as those specific to medieval chivalry, royal courts, various protocols, etc.

Moral norms can be expressed both in a negative, prohibitive form—as for example, the Ten Commandments of Moses' Law formulated in the Bible—and in a positive, stimulating form, as an exhortation to action ("Be honest! Help your neighbor! Respect the elderly!").

Moral principles express the fundamental requirements regarding the moral essence of man, the character of interpersonal relationships, determine the general direction of human action, and underlie all concrete, particular rules of conduct, serving as criteria of morality.

If the moral norm indicates which specific deeds man must perform, how he should behave in specific situations, the moral principle offers man the general orientation for his activity. It contains a set of moral rules that operate both in the case of the individual and the entire society and that are usually assimilated from childhood, functioning as requirements to be taken into account in all circumstances of life.

The process of constituting moral principles is strongly influenced by education, religion, culture, the social environment, etc. Their content changes along with the development of society, which allows them to contribute decisively to its normal, harmonious functioning. Thus, what seemed unacceptable and condemnable a short while ago may, over time, become the norm and be encouraged. And vice versa: deeds and social acts considered natural may become absolutely unacceptable.

Among the moral principles are included the following: humanism, as a recognition of man as the supreme value; altruism, as selfless service for the benefit of one's neighbor; compassion, as an active and understanding love that materializes in the willingness to help those in need; collectivism, as a conscious tendency to act for the common good; the renunciation of individualism—which sets the individual against society—and of selfishness, which presupposes the assertion of one's own interests to the detriment of others, etc.

I have allocated a relatively extensive space to moral virtues, considering them to be among the most important components of the universe of morality, which have been the subject of attention over time by numerous philosophers, theologians, anthropologists, psychologists, etc. I attempted to differentiate between moral value and moral virtue, showing that moral values are perceived as standards governing human behavior at the level of a culture or society, defining what is right, correct, and acceptable from a moral point of view, whereas virtues should be understood as a practical transposition, a behavioral reflection of values, as a reflection of the manner in which the individual and society as a whole understand how to conform to these standards, to take them as the basic rules of social behavior. I briefly discussed the intellectual virtues (dianoetic virtues), the theological virtues, and pointed out that the content of virtues is

not identical for all types of societies and cultures; on the contrary, it differs and evolves over time. Thus, Greek ethics emphasizes the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice, while Christian morality considers as fundamental virtues faith in God, hope for the salvation of the soul, and love for God and one's neighbor, whereas the Renaissance and the Enlightenment promote secular virtues related to the affirmation of the individual.

Virtue, therefore, is not an inherited quality or something that can be obtained as a ready-made object; it is a disposition voluntarily acquired, defined through reason; it is not something that is simply gained, but something that is developed; it falls into the great category of habits and is obtained through practice. Aristotle himself emphasized in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that it is not enough to know virtue theoretically; one must try to possess it and make use of it—or any other means available—to become a virtuous person. The same philosopher, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, repeatedly underlines that virtue is a mean between two extremes: one positive and the other negative. For instance, courage is the mean, the balanced space between recklessness and cowardice.

Insisting on virtue as a median point, as the rational balance between two mutually exclusive extremes, Aristotle appreciates that an excess of virtue is wrong, and an insufficiency in this domain is to be blamed—whereas the proper measure is praised and signifies rectitude; both these traits are proper to virtue. Thus, virtue is a kind of moderation, its target being the just measure between two extremes. In accordance with this principle, Aristotle discusses virtues in close connection with the opposing vices, which, by identifying them, he strives to define with precision. Thus, to courage is opposed fear, to magnanimity is opposed—by excess—vanity, and by deficiency—pettiness; to gentleness is opposed irascibility, and an excess of gentleness leads to apathy.

Within the framework of virtues, Aristotle treats generosity and magnanimity, truth and moderation, ambition and gentleness, justice and wisdom (in which he distinguishes between practical wisdom and speculative wisdom), self-control and strength of character, friendship and goodwill, concord and contemplation—with the latter considered the highest level of happiness.

As mentioned earlier, the description, analysis, and highlighting of the content of virtues have been favored subjects for many philosophers belonging to different epochs and currents. In this chapter I dwelt somewhat more on the work of the French philosopher André Comte-Sponville, whose treatise on great virtues is noteworthy, for besides the impressive bibliography he brings to bear, he possesses an original way not only of selecting virtues but also of interpreting them. Revisiting Aristotle's idea that virtue is the acquired disposition to do good, André Comte-Sponville specifies that virtue is goodness itself, in both spirit and fact, and that virtues are our moral values incarnate, lived, and enacted.

André Comte-Sponville does not treat virtues separately, as if isolated from one another; rather, he sees them in an indestructible relationship, conditioning, sustaining, and challenging each other. This is a very old idea, and this phenomenon of the symbiosis of virtues is very well captured in a series of works belonging to the Church Fathers or some contemporary theologians. André Comte-Sponville's list contains eighteen virtues: politeness, fidelity, prudence, moderation, courage, justice, generosity, compassion, mercy, gratitude, humility, simplicity, tolerance, purity, gentleness, good faith, humor, and love. I have also highlighted the approach to virtues by Professor Teodor Vidam, who, relying especially on Petru Creția's work *Moral Essays*, structures the virtues into five

pairs, each pair consisting of a positive triad and a negative triad. For example: honesty, propriety, dignity versus villainy, stupidity, mediocrity, etc.

Towards the end of the chapter I dealt with the relationship between morality and law and highlighted the similarities and differences between the moral norm and custom—this social practice that has become established as a result of near-unanimous acceptance at the societal level and its transmission from generation to generation. I showed that the main difference between custom—which, essentially, has much in common with the moral norm—and law is that in the case of law we are dealing with a bundle of rules imposed by specialized bodies under the authority of the state and having a binding character for the entire community, whereas customs have evolved from social habits, being the result of traditions and cultural practices transmitted from generation to generation and accepted as such by the entire community. While the observance of laws is enforced by institutions created by the state for this purpose, customs are not subject to official juridical controls but rather fall under the influence of public opinion, having a relatively significant impact on individual behavior and interpersonal relationships.

Life and death, fundamental notions of human existence, are the subjects discussed in the final chapter of the work.

Death takes life from man, and we fear it, yet we do not fear not having been born at all.

Finitude refers to the limited nature of the human being, the recognition that man's life has a beginning and an end, that our existence on this earth is temporary, and that we are inevitably subject to death. Finitude highlights the fragility and transient character of the individual's condition in relation to eternity and infinity. Analyzed from an existential point of view, finitude is a constitutive element of the human condition, whose awareness calls for meditation on the meaning of life, on the value of the actions undertaken by man, on the need to live authentically within the temporal dimension assigned to us by destiny. At the same time, the awareness of finitude is a challenge in the sense of truly appreciating the value of every moment of life, identifying its meaning and affirming its authenticity, but it can also be the source of anxiety or fear of death.

Between finitude and death there is a close connection in that finitude implies the awareness of the individual's end, and death is the absolute end of human existence.

Death and finitude, in the traditional conception of the Romanian peasant, are perceived as constitutive elements of existence, as essential and inevitable components thereof. Although a sad experience, death is usually seen as a passage to another stage of life, and this vision is expressed through various funeral rites and burial customs that have their roots in popular and religious traditions.

In universal philosophical tradition three fundamental modes of representing the afterlife have been identified. The first mode represents death as a continuation of earthly life, in which man remains occupied with his daily activities. This representation is reflected in the character of the burial and in the objects placed in the grave with the deceased. The second symbolic representation of existence after death supposes that the life to come unfolds in another, distinct world, which is arranged either underground or above ground (in heaven) and has nothing in common with this life. Depending on how one has spent one's life on earth, the sleepers experience happiness if they led a righteous life, or are condemned to eternal torments for their misdeeds. According to this representation, the life beyond the grave is divided into heaven and hell. The third representation is the transfer of the deceased's soul into another living being. In this case, the idea of posthumous punishment is present, but in a modified form. If the deceased led

a righteous, honest life, his soul is installed in the body of a noble and wealthy person, whereas if he led an unrighteous life, his soul will be installed in a beggar or even in an animal.

In human consciousness, death is represented as a terrifying phenomenon not only because it signifies the end of life, but also because, most often, it lies under the shadow of the unknown. This fear of the unknown, the total lack of information regarding what may happen beyond, generates, especially in individuals who have distanced themselves from God, a series of contradictory feelings, among which fear, worry, and anxiety are the most notable. This phenomenon is also perpetuated by the fact that in contemporary society a didactic–scientific approach toward the theme of death predominated for a long time, as evidenced in the research of many biologists, psychologists, physicians, etc.

The Christian Church has developed a series of rituals, sacraments, and practices aimed at convincing and helping the faithful to await with calm the earthly end which will undoubtedly open the gate to the life to come. Among these one could include the Holy Communion—which symbolizes communion with the body and blood of Jesus Christ—the prayers for the deceased, their periodic commemoration, etc.

In traditional philosophical systems, death is presented as a realm of incomprehensibility, as a mystery impenetrable by human efforts, and its cause is to be sought in the fall into sin of the original man and in the punishment that followed this fall. According to naturalistic ideas, death is completely transparent and accessible to human reason, indeed it can even be understood and overcome by man precisely through the intelligence and reason he received from the Creator Himself.

Every man is aware of the finitude of his own life, yet at the same time he is tempted to substitute, rather than this idea, thoughts about the finitude not only of the things that surround him, but also about the finitude of other human beings. Yet even in understanding that he is a finite being, man strives, as much as he is able, not to take this fact in a grave, acute manner.

Among the beneficial consequences of this process we may mention that, by understanding that his existence is limited, the individual should enjoy every moment spent here on earth more intensely, live the present more fully, and develop and nurture feelings of appreciation for simple things, highly valuing relationships with fellow human beings and especially the bonds with those close and dear to him. At the same time, he must stabilize his own scale of values, reprioritizing according to the real needs of existence—needs specific to each stage of development.

Mortal beings should understand that death is part of the natural cycle of life and that it is inevitable.

The essential role of the philosophical constants in the constitution, definition, and functioning of spirituality can be understood from the fact that they provide the conceptual and principled framework that guides and shapes the way an individual or a community organizes its vision of existence, as well as how it conceives its relationship with divinity, with the natural environment, and with society as a whole. The philosophical constants function as universal reference points, giving coherence and meaning to spiritual experiences and forms of religious and cultural expression, serving as the foundation upon which spirituality is built and guiding its evolution.

Philosophical constants offer a solid theoretical framework for the development of spirituality. They provide coherence to beliefs, rituals, and spiritual practices, ensuring a conceptual and axiological foundation that supports a profound reflection on existence,

divinity, and the relationship between man and the world. Their role is not only to guide the formation of spirituality but also to structure the relationship between the individual and the spiritual reality, offering him a deep and essential meaning in relation to the purpose of life, truth, freedom, and transcendence.

They play a crucial role in the cohesion of communities and in affirming their national identity by providing common reference points, fundamental values, and life principles that unite community members in a unique vision of existence. These constants become elements of stability, continuity, and cultural identity, helping to form a cohesive community and consolidate a collective identity.

In spirituality, time is often seen as a limited reality that contrasts with eternity. The philosophical constants that deal with the nature of time help in understanding the fact that human life is limited, yet rooted in an eternal or transcendent dimension. In Christianity, earthly time is perceived as a transitional phase toward eternal life. Rituals and religious celebrations are means by which man is reminded of this connection between time and eternity.

The problem of freedom is central to spirituality. Depending on the philosophical and religious tradition, spirituality may encourage either a deterministic vision or one of individual freedom. In Christianity, freedom is seen as an essential virtue, yet at the same time, man is encouraged to exercise his free will in accordance with the divine will.

Moral values and virtues constitute another essential philosophical constant in the formation of spirituality. An authentic spirituality is guided by a set of moral values that establish how the individual relates to himself, to others, and to the divine. These values function as the backbone of spiritual behavior. Thus, in traditional Romanian spirituality, moral values such as compassion, honesty, humility, and altruism play a central role in the way of life of both the individual and the community.

In conclusion, the philosophical constants hold great importance within traditional spirituality and have a considerable impact on spiritual and cultural life, while also playing an essential role in maintaining and promoting the spiritual identity of traditional communities. Therefore, the study of this subject can offer interesting data for a deeper understanding of cultural and religious diversity, contributing to a more striking emphasis on intercultural and interreligious dialogue.