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Philosophy As a Productive Orientation

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Philosophy and Human Thinking

Philosophy in its very nature is a humanistic and democratic discipline. It is turned to humans and is intelligible to all since each of us is endowed with reason. As Ludwig Feuerbach (1972:63) wrote, „to bestow understanding does not lie in the power of philosophy, for understanding is presupposed by it...” In other words, philosophy presupposes reason as a common principle in all people. However, Feuerbach has not been accurate in his further discourses: „...Philosophy only shapes my understanding.” In his opinion, the creation of concepts on the basis of a particular kind of philosophy is not a real but only a formal creation; it is not creation out of nothing, but only the development of a spiritual matter lying within me.

I believe metaphysics is of greater importance: philosophy not only shapes and discloses the contents of the human spirit but also participates in the creation of these.

From this point of view, one of the main purposes of philosophical education is to affirm and develop the original thought of humans, i.e., to promote their spiritual self-creating. Philosophy invites to reflection. Philosophy should awaken thought but „not make us the captives of its oral or written word... which always has a mentally deadening effect” (Feuerbach 1972: 67). It means in particular that no one dares without my permission to come into my head

and thrust alien ideas upon me.

Reflection is realized in dialogue where truth like a spark strikes from the clash of different opinions. Dialogue is the optimal way of doing philosophy, the classical form of its being. It can be said that philosophy is dialogue. A self-enamoured monologue is insulting to it.

According to Erich Fromm (1976:35), the way one reads a philosophy book is formed by contemporary education. The school aims to give each student a certain amount of „cultural property,” and at the end of their schooling certifies the students as *having* at least the minimum amount. Students are often taught to read a book so that they can repeat the author’s main thoughts. This is how the students „know” Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Heidegger, Sartre. „The so-called excellent students are the ones who can most accurately repeat what each of the various philosophers had to say. They are like a well-informed guide at a museum” (Fromm 1976:36). In Fromm’s view, they do not learn to question the philosophers, to talk to them.

Our thought is presented through our reflection, and the presentation of philosophy must itself be philosophical. The professor can tell about philosophy only by means of his thinking. Otherwise it is simply impossible to show how human reason functions. Thus, „a mystery of resurrection” of various philosophical doctrines comes into being in our lectures and semi-



nars. The lecturer, the philosophy professor, is the wonder-worker who revives and resuscitates the past of philosophy.

A philosophy teacher does not instill thoughts into a person like drops of medicine. The main thing – the understanding of the thing involved – he does not give students. As Feuerbach (1972:66) noted, „...otherwise the philosopher could really produce philosophers, something which so far no one has succeeded in achieving.”

The truth is not transmitted. Only words or some information about it are transmitted. Above all, the truth comprehension is a personal process connected with the spiritual self-development of a personality. There is a moment of truth, a time for its revelation, but this time will never come if one does not strive for it. Really, how can we pass on to someone, for instance, Plato’s wisdom? No exhaustive story about his philosophy would help us. Plato is meaningless and non-existent for someone who lacks understanding; he is a blank sheet to one who cannot link ideas that correspond with his words. Therefore, students themselves have to gain experience in Plato’s metaphysics in order to understand him. Obviously, the autonomous creative work of their own mind is required for that cognition.

In the final analysis, human ability for realizing of the other’s ideas and feelings is conditioned by a personal mental state, experience. Only by developing our own reason and other powers can we rise to even higher stages of human mind. That is why in the first place, the teaching of philosophy presupposes the student’s awakening soul, and not a mechanical learning of some philosophical postulates. We must think in order to see, feel, and understand philosophy. Philosophy is not esoteric knowledge; it can be clear for everyone who looks clearly at it.

Meanwhile, one should not attempt to reduce philosophy to standards of common sense. The ascent to philosophy demands serious mental effort. By this, the teacher of philosophy occupies Socrates’ position, i.e., he is in the role of a midwife helping give birth in another to ideas and truth. In other words, the professor should use the art of *maieutics*.

The problem of genuine, productive thinking is very important today since pseudo-thinking is such a widespread phenomenon. E. Fromm (1941:190-191) demonstrates this as follows. Let us suppose we are on an island where there are fisherman and summer guests from the city. We want to know what kind of weather we are to expect and ask a fisherman and two of the city people, who we know have all listened to the weather forecast on the radio. The fisherman, with his long experience and concern with this problem of weather, will start thinking. Knowing what the direction of the wind, temperature, humidity, and so on mean as a basis for weather forecast, he will weigh the different factors according to their respective significance and come to a more or less definite judgment. He will probably remember the radio forecast and quote it as supporting or contradicting his own opinion. Fromm (1941:191) emphasizes: „...This is the essential point, it is *his* opinion, the result of *his* thinking, which he tells us.”

Further, Fromm explains, the first of the two city summer guests is a man who does not understand much about the weather. When we ask him his opinion, he will merely repeat the radio forecast. The other man whom we ask is of a different type. He believes that he knows a great deal about the weather, although actually he knows little about it. He is the kind of person who feels that he must be able to answer every question. He thinks for a minute and then tells us „his” opinion, which in fact is identical with the radio forecast.

This latter man’s behaviour as seen from the outside is the same as the fisherman’s. Yet, if we analyze it more closely, it becomes evident that he has heard the radio forecast and has accepted it. He has the illusion of having arrived at an opinion of his own, but in reality he has merely adopted an authority’s opinion without being aware of this process (Fromm 1941:191-192).

Fromm believes the same phenomenon can be observed if we study people’s opinions about certain subjects, for instance, politics and art. Thus, many people do not think, but rather employ *rationalizations*. In Fromm’s (1941:195) view, thought that is the result of active thinking is always new and original; original in the sense that the person who thinks, has used thinking as



a tool to discover something new in the world outside or inside of himself. Rationalizations essentially lack this quality of discovering and uncovering; they only confirm the emotional prejudice existing in oneself. Rationalizing is not a tool for penetrating reality but a post-factum attempt to harmonize one's own wishes with what already exists.

If such a situation is typical for the vast masses of people, this is a cause for concern. Pseudo-intellectuals become easily subject to manipulation by the powers that be. Besides they are not able to engage in genuine human development. Only actually thinking and feeling personalities are able to do real creative work; pseudo-thought does not rise above pseudo-creation. Human beings are becoming human only thanks to their creative activities. That is why in particular the question of the development of autonomous thought by means of philosophy is something more than, say, a fashion trend in contemporary pedagogy. It is a major condition for humanistic progress.

Philosophy As a Therapy of Human Mind

There's much evidence that throughout its history philosophy has often included a therapeutic component. For example, Epicurus wanted, by means of his thought, to liberate humans from three kinds of fear: the fear of gods, of necessity, and of death. His argument that „death has nothing to do with us: when we are alive, there is no death; when death comes, we are no longer here,” still impresses us and indeed pacifies, to some degree.

When life fills with terror, humans often find the last shelter in the depth of their soul. Like a snail, human being hides in there. Yet still, in this case philosophy can play the role of a healer of human soul. When skepticism calls us to refrain from judgments, this is legitimate first and foremost under the conditions of a social and metaphysical land shake, when the being and everyday values recede underground. It is as if skeptic philosophy was saying: „Do not rash with your definitions. Things are too shaky and unclear.” It offers humans to use caution in the epistemological fog. In my view, such philoso-

phy is much wiser than those self-confident ideologies that hastily provide a comprehensive assessment to the crumbling being.

Philosophy is deeply rooted in human nature. It is not surprising when *homo sapiens* is a philosopher; it is surprising when he is not, that is, when he does not ponder on the nature of things. Unfortunately, many people lose this capacity. Wrapped into the standards of the modern socium, people are deprived of the joy of live thinking. Yet if a human being wants to stay a human, he'd rather think. Philosophy is a condition for the salvation of human being.

If philosophical knowledge about being provides humans with what Hegel called „windows into the absolute” (that is, into eternity), then we can assume that it is due to this connection that an individual can acquire a new emotional-intellectual state. Perhaps, the real connection of the individual with the endless essence of being liberates her/him from the absolute loneliness, allows to see other meanings of being and reveals truth about the actuality of personal immortality. In other words, if you want to sense eternity, touch it (eternity) in your thoughts.

On the one hand, thinking of an infinite essence of the universe may actualize an infinite essence of humans themselves and, thus, root them in infinity. On the other hand, to think of infinity is to acquire the power of infinity, i.e., an infinite power. In short, thinking of infinity fills us with infinity. Philosophy allows individuals to overstep the limits of the lived experience, transcends them beyond daily occurrence. Obviously, just this human transcendence into metaphysical reality, into the world of essential relationships ensures the therapeutic effect of philosophy.

From this point of view, philosophy can indicate where various forms of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy reach their limits, by pointing, for example, at a confined character of their methodological postulates. Besides philosophy is capable of assimilating the results of, for instance, psychoanalytical observations in order to create a better theory of the human spiritual life. Finally, we may say about the possibility of philosophical therapy, or a therapy of human mind by means of philosophy.



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