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XX A. KLAUSIMO „KAS YRA FILOSOFIJA“ ISTORINĖS IR FILOSOFINĖS DIMENSIJOS

“What is Philosophy” as the Issue of the 20th Century:
Historical and Philosophical Dimensions

SUMMARY

The paper focuses on the issues of what philosophy is intended for, its self-identification in the continental and analytical tradition of the 20th century, as well as actualization of its value potential. The study looks at the concept of metaphilosophy as the reflection on the historical experience of philosophy. Philosophy has been involving a human being in the culture of self-identification and practical rationality. Meanwhile, philosophy is still taken as thinking distanced from object which thus influences the status of philosophical disciplines. The situation makes us clear out the fundamental role of philosophy. The reference to the outstanding philosophers of the 20th century lets answer the question “What is philosophy?”, also allows to distinguish between the history of philosophy and metaphilosophy.

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje svarstomas filosofijos tikslo klausimas, analizuojama filosofijos savęs identifikavimo problema XX a. kontinentinėje ir analitinėje tradicijose, taip pat filosofijos vertybinio potencialo aktualizavimas. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama metafilosofijos kaip istorinės filosofijos patirties refleksijos samprata. Daug šimtmečių filosofija skatino žmonių savęs identifikavimo ir apsisprendimo kultūrą ir praktinį racionalumą. Tuo pačiu metu filosofija ir toliau suvokiama kaip nuo objekto nutolęs mąstymas, o tai turi įtakos filosofinių disciplinų suvokimui. Esama situacija verčia mus aiškintis, koks yra esminis filosofijos vaidmuo. Iškiliausių XX a. filosofų darbai leidžia atsakyti į klausimą „Kas yra filosofija?“, taip pat leidžia atskirti filosofijos istoriją nuo metafilosofijos.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: filosofijos istorija, metafilosofija, deskriptyvinė ir normatyvinė metafilosofija, savirefleksija.

KEY WORDS: history of philosophy, metaphilosophy, descriptive and normative metaphilosophy, self-reflection.

INTRODUCTION

Global processes, crisis of identities humanity is used to, digitalization, survival amidst Covid-19 pandemic bring a burning issue of the essence of philosophy, its role and place in the situation of seeking answers to the traditional needs of human life in the new context, to the fore of the philosophical reflection.

Whether through formalized systems, spiritual traditions, or written and oral heritage, philosophy is a way of viewing and considering the world, rather than merely a subject matter; it is very much alive and in action. This is why philosophy is so necessary and valuable in times of “rough weather”, to borrow a phrase from contemporary French philosopher Vincent Descombes. At times of great uncertainty, philosophy is more relevant than ever, because by questioning the world it enables us to resist all forms of reductionism, and to see a bigger picture. During this turning point in the history of humanity, philosophy is an exceptional tool for understanding technological, environmental and human transformations, both conceptual and practical” – stated the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on World Philosophy Day, November 19, 2020 (Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay).

Thus, the question of how philosophy understands itself becomes topical again; it is essential to realize “What is philosophy?”. History of philosophy has always seen the question of self-identification at turning points, the so-called “bifurcation points” of human culture.

The contemporary situation in philosophical community proves there has

been a growing interest in the subject matter of philosophy and its self-identification at a new level. On the one hand, at present there is still no agreement on what philosophy studies, what is its subject. The Aristotelian definition of philosophy is essentially a definition by Aristotle himself. But how are Aristotle’s (or any other philosopher’s) teachings an authentic expression of historically changeable subject matter and essence of philosophy? History of philosophy shows that almost all philosophers were confident their ideas manifested the invariable essence of philosophy. Each new philosophical system is convinced that it has managed to solve the tasks that seem to be beyond the power of its predecessors.

Today, these issues are central both in world and Ukrainian philosophy. In 2019, there was a panel discussion on the status of philosophy (Epistemology & Philosophy of Science 2019), its aims and goals. New concepts have appeared, such as “experimental philosophy” (Alexander 2012), “armchair philosophy” (Williamson 2019), bringing us back to the essence of philosophy itself. The Kyiv school of philosophy is known for exploring the essence of philosophy: V. Shynkaruk, M. Popovych, V. Horsky dealt with the issue. The Congress of Philosophers in Ukraine scheduled for the end of 2021 is to address the issue of the status of philosophy (first and foremost, Ukrainian), its subject matter, goals and objectives.

Philosophy is inextricably linked to the process of reflection on something. When saying “to philosophize”, we mean to go through the process of reflection on something we are thinking about. However, does it mean that philosophy all by itself or in itself is only a

reflection tool, a method of the “right” way to reflect? Or is philosophy an exclusive efficient cause that “brings something about”, or can it become the objective of reflection? And if yes, will there be the result, the product of reflection on reflection?

CONTROVERSIA OF METAPHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

As the issue of philosophy identity is brought to the fore, the question “What is philosophy?” becomes important. The development of this direction of research calls for identification. “Metaphilosophy” has become the most suitable term for most scholars, although researchers from Cambridge express a preference for “the philosophy of philosophy” (Overgaard & oth. 2013: 10), acknowledging it is within the latter that the essence of the issue was formulated.

The reflection on the subject matter of the discipline, the philosophy of philosophy is not new. The concept was introduced by the popularizer of the Kantian philosophy K. L. Reinhold. In 1890 in Warsaw, H. Struve published his work *Introduction to Philosophy*, in which he substantiated the necessity of forming a new discipline within philosophy – philosophy of philosophy. Self-knowledge of philosophy was to become its main objective. According to H. Struve, metaphilosophy was to become the starting point for any philosophizing, any solution of specific philosophical tasks.

The main problem within the definition of metaphilosophy is understanding

it as a segment of philosophical knowledge, which is the result of the reflection on the way of evolving philosophical knowledge in an attempt to generalize everything rational in history of philosophy. Metaphilosophy pays close attention to the analysis of fundamental grounds of philosophical knowledge.

The subject matter of both history of philosophy and metaphilosophy is philosophy. Although one may object that the disciplines discuss the subject matter differently: history of philosophy shows what philosophy used to be like, while metaphilosophy clarifies what it is like now and what it should be like. Moreover, a philosophy historian is preoccupied rather by specific personalities, not by philosophy in itself, not by the idea of philosophy, unlike the metaphilosopher. The latter, however, will never do without empirical material, even if she/he reflects on philosophy in a normative way. It is history of philosophy that provides the material which allows seeing significant features behind the details of philosophical theories; thus a metaphilosopher has grounds to reflect on what philosophy should be like.

HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY ON ITS WAY TO METAPHILOSOPHY (20TH CENTURY)

Within the framework of metaphilosophy, there are two main approaches: continental and analytical.

The representatives of continental direction of metaphilosophy broke to a certain extent with the classical philosophical tradition, tried new ways, were looking for a new identity. M. Heidegger is an apologist for a non-classical, or continental, philosophizing in the philosophical tradition of the 20th century. While reflecting on the nature of philosophy and philosophizing, just as other continental philosophers, he did not share the view on philosophy as a science, considering it a matter of poetics that can show us into the real world of being. M. Heidegger looks at "What is philosophy?" in the context of foreseeing the tragic fate of the humanity. It is not "a historical question that aims to clarify how what is called "philosophy" appeared and developed. This is a historical question as it is a fatal (geschickliche) question" (Heidegger 1956: 10).

Let us consider M. Heidegger's views in more detail. In his landmark work *What Is Philosophy?* the thinker emphasizes, "Our question is on the essence of philosophy. If it arises out of need, it should not remain an imaginary question just to direct the conversation; then, it a question of philosophy as philosophy" (ibid, p. 11).

We may conclude that M. Heidegger admits that philosophy has essence, root, fundamental basis which is the cause of being or aim justification. Philosophy as

philosophy, philosophy of philosophy, an instrument that works on itself. Again, we are back to the idea of "reflection on reflection" and although we do not fulfill the task, but start from the point we set off at.

Let us be back to M. Heidegger. In his search of philosophy, he turns to the source of the term – Greek culture, the cradle of European philosophy. He finds out that Aristotle clearly and quite fully answered the question of the essence, tasks, and subject matter of philosophy: "Philosophy is a kind of aptness which makes it possible to see being in respect to what it is in so far as it is being" (ibid, p. 16). Meanwhile, he at once refutes an opportunity to define the term "philosophy".

With the help of the Aristotelean characterization of philosophy, one can, to be sure, conceive and interpret both the thinking before Aristotle and Plat, as well as philosophy after the time of Aristotle. However, it will be pointed out with ease that philosophy itself and the way in which it conceives its own nature have changed frequently in the subsequent two thousand years (ibid, p. 17).

The definition of philosophy is not stable as it is dependent. The definition of philosophy depends on the cultural layer, which just as Plato's ideas come from the world of ideas to the world of a human being, originating from human beings. The definition of philosophy is the unity of epoch and human being defining it.

From this we deduce the second point: we must realize the earlier and later definitions of philosophy. And then? Then, through a comparative abstraction, we shall reduce them to the common denominator of all the definitions. And then? Then we shall arrive at an empty formula which fits every kind of philosophy. And then? Then we shall be as far removed as possible from an answer (ibid, p. 18–19).

History is another important category of our research. In this paper, we understand the concept of history ambiguously and will use Paul Ricoeur's term "history of historians" to refer to purely historical knowledge. On the other hand, we will talk about the history of science, referring, for example, to the history of physics. But the most important one, of course, is the history of philosophy.

Is the history of philosophy identical with the essence of philosophy? Obviously not. What happens if we try to answer the question about the essence of philosophy with the help of its history? Heidegger puts it like this:

But in this way we will never get to the true, i.e. authentic answer to the question "what is philosophy?" The answer can only be a philosophical answer, an answer which as a response, as a response word is philosophical in itself (ibid, p. 19).

The history of philosophy is the tradition itself. The very desire to draw from the bottomless well of tradition pushes Heidegger to search for the essence of philosophy in ancient Greek, in Aristotle's and Plato's understanding of philosophy. Yet tradition is not dead ground that has given all its strength to the sprout of philosophical knowledge. The

perception of philosophy has changed, but has its essence changed? K. Jaspers observes that

...unlike science, philosophical thinking is not characterized by progress. We have certainly progressed considerably compared to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates. However, we can hardly say that we have advanced beyond Plato. It is only in the material of scientific knowledge he used that we are further ahead. In philosophy itself we have probably hardly reached it yet (Jaspers 1971: 9).

Nevertheless, the wonder is – how can there be a history of philosophy, which should be the receptacle of the whole philosophical tradition – if progress is not possible in philosophy itself? Jaspers also answers this question:

For the history of philosophy the idea of development is also only an immaterial point of view, because every great philosophy exists quite in itself, it lives embodiedly, without reference to comprehensive historical truth. Science unfolds in such a way that each new step along the way surpasses the previous one. The formation of philosophy, according to its content, must be carried out entirely in the individual. Therefore it would be a contradiction to line up philosophers, to build between them ties of subordination or presidency, to see them as stages of the same path, as previous steps (ibid, p. 108).

So we are faced with a dilemma of the following kind: on the one hand, the history of philosophy is not history in the classical sense, but is a living tradition, or, as we shall call it, a "living memory" – situated retrospectively in relation to our time, however, which does not belong exclusively and entirely

to the past, but lives precisely in the present. Philosophical tradition is like Plato's ideas or truths in Ortega y Gasset's understanding:

This gives truths a double, very curious quality. In themselves, they are always there, without the slightest distortion or change. However, the fact that they are possessed by a real subject influenced by time gives them the appearance of historicity: they arise one day and will probably disappear the next one. It is clear that this temporality does not refer to them, but to their presence in the human mind (José Ortega y Gasset 2004: 10).

So once again we find ourselves in a double position. On the one hand, we extol the history of philosophy, call it a tradition, speak of its vitality, and refuse to recognise only a chronological parade of thinkers.

On the other hand, we refuse to acknowledge the history of philosophy as philosophy, although, for example, Paul Ricoeur argues that "philosophy exists and continues to exist only as a history produced by philosophers..." (Ricoeur 1991: 42). At the same time, according to I. Vdovina, the thinker "... preferred the creative aspect of philosophical reflection: the history of philosophy should be a reactualisation of its own problems in the present and a reappropriation of tradition" (Vdovina 2019: 31).

Moreover, as it is precisely noted in this saying: "Along with the activity of a historian studying 'in truth' the events of the past, Ricoeur was interested in revealing the specificity of philosophical enquiry and the history of philosophy, which he believed was inconceivable

without 'making a philosophical history of philosophy'" (ibid, p. 32). This assertion is critical for us.

A new perspective on the issue "What is philosophy?" is presented in the work of the same name by J. Deleuze and F. Guattari, which vividly illustrates the search for a new identity of philosophy. Asking this question, the authors point out: "we always had the same answer: philosophy is the art of shaping, inventing, making concepts" (Deleuze, Guattari 1991: 21).

Modern analytical philosophy is moving away from a framework of antagonism relative to continental philosophy which discusses fundamental worldview problems, from the nature of human consciousness to the existence of the divine. It is precisely in this tendency that their metaphilosophical enquiry into the nature of philosophy comes to the fore. In the analytic tradition, "metaphilosophical status" is given to logico-semantic studies of the meanings of terms appearing in philosophical discourses. Among examples are A. Tarski's "semantic theory of truth", "relevance" logics explicating the notion of logical consequence, and the application of game theory to the analysis of moral categories and problems (Verbeek 2002; Kuhn 2004).

"Metaphilosophical" reflection can be divided into two "types". The first is represented by a descriptive type of analysis of how philosophers of different historical epochs and ideological orientations understand the particularities of their activity, its goals and ways of achieving it. N. Rescher called this ap-

proach “descriptive metaphilosophy”. The second type is “normative metaphilosophy” as a general theory defining criteria for the quality and content of philosophical work (Rescher 2014). This theory defines the principles necessary for “the objectives of philosophical enquiry to be achieved in an efficient and effective way” (Rescher 2006: 11). Just as

in science there are principles and laws to establish the “scientificity” of theories and hypotheses, so in philosophy a criterion of the “philosophicality” of concepts is required. Only in this way can we obtain what Rescher calls good philosophy. Thus, “normative metaphilosophy” is a kind of “charter” adopted by like-minded philosophers.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be ascertained that philosophers of the 20th century, as we can see from their own judgments, are not the first to pay attention to the subject, essence, aim, fullness of philosophy. Moreover, albeit with edits, the same Heidegger fully acknowledges the ultimate importance of philosophy in the sense of a method of knowing “the essence of Being”.

So why are they revisiting this passed question again?

This is precisely because in the 20th century the failure of previous definitions is becoming apparent. The history of philosophy has accumulated many definitions subordinated to cultural epochs – from cosmocentric and theocentric to the positivist “circumcision” of philosophy, later called by Ortega y Gasset “the imperialism of physics”.

They all remind us of Kant because they answer the question “how do I engage with the philosophical tradition?” rather than “what is philosophy in itself”?

The only way, in our view, to answer the second question rather than the first, is a “philosophical history of philosophy” or metaphilosophy.

“The way to answer our question is not to break with history, not to deny history, but to assimilate and transform what tradition transmits” (Heidegger 1956: 34).

The aim of philosophy is to know the world. To reflect the world. The goal of metaphilosophy is to cognize philosophy. To reflect the instrument of knowing the world. Metaphilosophy is not identical with the history of philosophy.

The fact is that the history of philosophy, being a “living memory” of the philosophy of history, a way of unfolding the philosophical tradition – is nevertheless history rather than philosophy.

But even as history, it differs from the “history of historians” – historical science, as Ricoeur called it, because the latter turns its entire research activity to the study of cause and effect in a historiographical context. However, also the history of philosophy is not identical with the history of science, since the latter is a chronological chain of “man’s knowledge of an idea”, as José Ortega y Gasset said in his critique of physics. The history of science is always retrospective in relation to science itself and can nev-

er be the subject of its study – even when a physicist talks about Newton’s laws, it is the content of these laws, not the person who gives the laws their name, that matters to him.

The history of philosophy, on the other hand, as mentioned above, is not

philosophy itself. However, in our opinion, the history of philosophy can be the subject of philosophy. And when the history of philosophy becomes the subject of philosophy, the aim of philosophizing is reflexion over reflexion. Thus, metaphilosophy is born.

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