

1. “Der Philosoph behandelt eine Frage; wie eine Krankheit” (Wittgenstein)
“The philosopher’s treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness”

Introduction

In my essay I would ponder a few questions pertaining to the problems that arise when we try to investigate the Wittgensteinian phrase quoted above more closely. My work should be regarded as a mere preliminary draft of topics that were further advanced by some philosophers, such as Rorty, Derrida or Heidegger. I am aware that I am not able to comprehend all complex, yet important and vital matters that have recently become the object of interest of, to speak generally, postmodern philosophers. To put it bluntly, my concern is going to focus on the sentence taken from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein says clearly that he considers philosophy not as a body of doctrine, but as a kind of an elucidatory activity, the art of clarifying notions used in our ordinary as well as scientific language. He compares the vocation of a philosopher to that of a doctor. He ascribes the rise of philosophical problems and philosophical issues to a slip of the tongue of a group of wise men (and women also) that thought that they grasped reality, but, in fact, their eyes were catching mere “forms”, they were seeing the mere surface of things (as would Nietzsche say). Wittgenstein entirely transforms our conception of a “philosophical problem”. Philosophical problems are not perennial tasks posited by fleshless and shut-off universal mind (that is, of course, easily accessible to philosophers); on the contrary, they are *symptoms* of a disease hidden in the innermost parts of human beings. *The disease of philosophy* stems from language mistakes, misunderstanding other people and misinterpreting the world we live in. Philosopher, as Wittgenstein claims, should not solve philosophical problems, but replace them, put them in a proper context and understand them as symptoms of a latent illness. As the outcome of such philosophical movement almost nothing remains from the traditional view of what philosophical problems are. Wittgenstein expresses it distinctly: philosopher is to *treat* problems or to *manage, cope* with them, just as you manage to repair your hammer, do well your job or have good relationships with someone else. As we come closer and closer in revealing and deepening the sense of Wittgenstein’s phrase, three questions arise. Firstly, on what account may we say that philosophizing resembles the process of curing illness, namely the illness of philosophy itself? Then, what do we exactly mean by abandoning philosophical problems (or even the notion of a specific philosophical issue in general) or by re-shaping philosophy in a new way, that is, changing it so that it would not be a knowledge and theory-building any longer, but rather, using a Freudian phrase, a *talking cure*, or, according to Wittgenstein, a *treatment*? Finally, how re-thinking the very essence of philosophy may influence our further lives? Would they be the same? How could we describe the task of thinking in a post-philosophical age (are these names proper, or are they misnomers)?

Philosophy as a *talking cure*

What do we say when we claim that philosophy have to be regarded as an illness? I would strongly argue that re-articulating the task of philosophizing in our epoch does not necessarily mean the abandonment of philosophy or even its destruction. It is vital to emphasize the distinction between *destruction* and

deconstruction or, as I would like to call it, *replacement*. Destruction means devastation, abandonment and going away in a search for something else. Replacement, on the contrary, is not precisely abandonment, but rather a re-articulation. It designates not devastation, but a move towards something different. It also implies that something is replaced by something better, although not destroyed; by contrast, it could now be fully understood. Philosophy is, therefore, not a mistake, but, using a Kantian terminology, a “transcendental illusion”. Mind has inevitable tendency to posit some questions that it is not able to answer. Then it creates new beings (that exists only mentally) and claims that they are true. People think that they do comprehend external reality, but, in fact, they are deeply immersed in illusions and dream images. Philosophy, according to Wittgenstein is not a mistake (in an ordinary sense of this word), but rather a phenomenon that is essentially ascribed to the unrest human nature. It has its own place in the drama of human life, but its present situation is simply false. Human intellect deludes itself. The task of philosopher, as Wittgenstein claims, is to show the right place for the claims of philosophers to attain an absolute knowledge or, to speak more cruelly, philosopher have to show that they are not doing what they wanted to. It could be voiced more easily (I presume) in a Freudian vein. Wittgenstein project reveals some deep affinities with (specifically understood) Freudian psychoanalysis; there is a kind of a latent (unconscious, one may say) bond between those two thinkers. As it is widely known, Freud claimed that symptoms of neurotic patients, day- and night dreams, spelling mistakes, sexual activities are to be perceived as full of sense. Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of perception* states it clearly: Freud widened the sphere of sense, pointed at the fact that human life is full of sense. Thus scientific methods do not give a full justice to the very nature of human beings. They should be closely connected with methods of understanding, *interpreting*. Philosophy (as a symptom) is not condemned to fall in oblivion in few decades. The task of “philosophers” is to give a new sense to those activities, just as psychoanalyst cures his patients by leading them to discover a latent sense of their hardships. From this point of view, we can consider postmodern attempts to re-articulate the project of philosophy as a kind of *talking cure* that is building new stories about philosophy, its aims and its place in the human world.

Beyond metaphysics

In XXth century’s thought we could find a lot of attempts to redefine the task of thinking. I would argue that a real self-reliant thinker simply could not use language which he (or she) was born into. Thus, in my opinion, philosophy has a structure of revolution or as would Harold Bloom say a shape of *agon* between *strong* thinkers. But, however, there is something specific in contemporary attempts to revive or abandon philosophical tradition. Philosophers (not all, of course) ceased to believe in the power of philosophy and started to doubt the sense of philosophizing and the place of philosophy. Despite the fact of doing so, they do not leave the field of philosophy itself. They are still philosophers (in a wide sense of this notion), that is, they are still the lovers of wisdom, although any of these words should not be understood traditionally, neither “lover”, nor “wisdom”. It is said that Heidegger dropped traditional philosophical controversies and began to think differently or, more concisely, more widely, more deeply and further. Even though he himself claimed *the end of philosophy*, as well as *the end of humanism*, he did not abandoned philosophy for something else. As every revolutionary thinker he was deeply convinced (at least before his “turn”) that he revealed the underlying premises of

Western philosophy and he was not a traditional philosopher, but, to say so, a philosopher in a deeper sense; he was *more* philosopher than all his predecessors. He did not leave the field of philosophy. Philosophy is, according to Dewey, the criticism of criticisms; I think it would apply to Heidegger's early works. His criticism embraced not only the philosophical problems, but also the way of posing questions and the notion of philosophy itself. Referring to his attempts to overcome metaphysics, we are able to perceive properly work of such philosophers as Derrida, Wittgenstein or Rorty. Re-articulating the notion of philosophy does not imply the abandonment of philosophy in general. Philosophy necessitates to be incessantly questioned by subsequent generations of philosophers. It is already assumed when we talk about philosophy as not so much critical, but as a *radical* thought. According to the etymology, "radical" means reaching to the roots of things, deepening and going further and further in the light shed by the main affect of philosophizing that makes all its "problems" possible, namely the love of wisdom.

Philosophy and the life-world

If philosophy were a truly radical activity, some would raise claims that there is something that is not considered in philosophy. Moreover, it could not be perceived properly, because it enables the whole project of philosophy. Again, as Derrida would express it, the condition of possibility of something is the cause of impossibility the same thing. Philosophy aims at clarifying everything outside its borders, but is intrinsically and inevitably unable to manage with its problematic status. To express it in a Hegelian vein, philosophy is to be *systematic* (for Hegel it meant rational), but it is not able to explain this relentless demand. In general, philosophy aims at attaining Truth (by this we assume that the desired Truth will be Absolute, the Only One, Universal etc.), but one no-philosopher may ask, using a philosophical language of Plato, whether are philosophers trying to establish a connection between the sublunary world of change and happenstance and *hyperuranium topos*, that is, the celestial sphere of immutable ideas. In other words: why the truth at all? According to Nietzsche, we should put the will to truth in question, but, as he claims, only *versuchsweise*; we are *only* making attempt to re-evaluate the basis of philosophy. It implies what I mentioned in the previous paragraph: philosophy itself necessitates its *replacement*, that is, forceful and ruthless criticism.

All themes considered in the paragraphs above are neatly put together and somehow summed up in the philosophical papers of an American neo-pragmatist, Richard Rorty. In his famous *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* he refers to Heidegger and Derrida as well as to Dewey, Wittgenstein and contemporary analytic philosophy. He perceives Western philosophical tradition as a specific cultural activity, the aim of which was to adjudicate any disputes amid other cultural discourses. Philosophers, according to Rorty, regarded themselves as impartial judges that have to hold control over the manifold of human activities. This ideal was embodied in the *critical* philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The thinker from Konigsberg described his philosophical enterprise as a court trial with universal Reason as a main judge, advocate, defense counsel and defendant. Critical philosophy was aimed at establishing transcendental conditions of knowing the objects of all possible experience. "Transcendental" means there: universally and apriori determining the variety of human cognition. Transcendental conditions do not refer to particular objects or experiences, but to world in general. Transcendental philosophy was divided into several disciplines to search for apriori conditions in such spheres of

human cognition as scientific reasoning, ethics or aesthetical experience. Rorty calls this type of philosophy the *foundational* discourse. In his view, philosophy (from Plato to Heidegger) was at pains to attain absolute knowledge. Moreover, Cartesian quest for certainty (characteristic of modernity) created a new paradigm of articulating the task of philosophizing, that is, this task was to judge everything else, adjudicate claims to knowledge made by other cultural activities (such as ethics, aesthetics, politics), establish borders between those and give them proper names and proper values. Rorty rejects this vision of philosophy and in his multifarious papers he attempts to give a new image of philosophy, which would not be a body of doctrine or an absolute knowledge, but an activity; a creative cultural activity, engaged in the realm of everyday life, creating new vocabularies for our self-descriptions and trying to better our lives in liberal democracies (although not by pointing at the loftiest strivings of men and describing future utopias, but through leaving some space for slow development; using the title of one of the Rorty's papers: not movements, but campaigns). Rorty emphasizes the contingency of our beings and shows the role of irony in our public lives. If we call the philosophy of Descartes *the philosophy of borders*, we should name Rorty's discourse *the philosophy without borders*.

How re-thinking the very essence of philosophy may affect our lives? Would it be important at all? How to lessen the danger of being entangled in the problems and traditions we have apparently detached from? Is not our attempt to re-evaluate philosophy another great illusion? I would argue that re-thinking the place of philosophy is essential in our times. Theodor W. Adorno said that the truth of psychoanalysis lies in its *excess*, in its *exaggeration*. Why there are philosophers in *the hollow age* (to paraphrase Holderlin)? Philosophy is something more that is normally needed. So why should we, saying metaphorically, abstain our philosophical appetites, rather than indulge them through creating brave, all-embracing systems, new interpretations and breath-taking visions? Do philosophical thought have to abandon its attempts to reach the Absolute? I am convinced that philosophy needs a *treatment*, not necessarily that offered by a great doctor of human souls, Wittgenstein, but perhaps that of re-thinking the history of Being (Heidegger), or that of putting everything in the context of *experience* (James), or, maybe, that of analyzing disciplinary regimes (Foucault) or metaphysical discourses (Derrida). Especially when we look at the previous century, the age of catastrophes, we are more likely to agree with those thinkers who offer us a more reasonable, moderate and *silent* way of philosophizing. I am convinced that all those senseless but somewhat necessary illnesses that affected humanity in the previous century are deeply rooted in the ground on which our culture (that is, European, but, for me, the legacy of Europe is a universal one) was built; and philosophy, although it is not the only one to be blamed, is not entirely innocent. I think that *the will to truth*, Cartesian quest for certainty, and, finally, technology that stems from the project of philosophy (see Heidegger's papers on technology) are not out of suspicion, they have to be all re-thought and somehow *cured*. Thus, I would side with Wittgenstein, Rorty and Heidegger (to mention only a few). The task of thinking (as Heidegger calls it) is not something *neutral* that could be *objectively* solved as *philosophical problems* are usually solved. Philosophy should be cured, not as a mistake of human race, but as a cultural activity that may cause effects that were not properly considered or planned. I named it, therefore, *the replacement* or *a talking cure*. I think this interpretation of Wittgenstein's phrase is justified, or, even more, it is necessary if we want to continue the vivid tradition of philosophy, if we want to address an Adorno's question: is the philosophy possible after Auschwitz? And, perhaps more important, *which* philosophy is possible? Would

it be a result of overcoming or repairing previous mistakes or something completely different? I think that predictions pertaining to the questions about the very essence of philosophy are self-fulfilling, so it would be futile to refer to some universal criteria that will be accepted by all of us. Nevertheless, I hope that re-thinking the task of philosophy is the requirement of our times. And it is still the task ahead of us.