

## THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY \*

UDC 101

**Lino Veljak**

Philosophy Department  
Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb

**Zusammenfassung.** *Auf zwei miteinander entgegengesetzten Weisen vereinigen die drei wesentlichsten Konzeptionen der Philosophie (d. h. die Philosophie als eine metaphysische Deutung der Welt, die Philosophie als Sozialkritik, die Philosophie als epistemologischer Rahmen und allgemeine Synthese der positiven Wissenschaften). Die erste Weise besteht in der These, nach der die Philosophie in den Zeiten totaler Verwissenschaftlichung menschlicher Welt heute zur ihren Vollendung, Veralterung und Überflüssigkeit gekommen worden ist. Die entgegengesetzte These nach ist die Philosophie (in irgendeinem von ihren Versionen) als versinnlichender Grund der Verteidigung menschlicher Welt vor bedrohenden Gefahr der Vernunftlosigkeit notwendig. Nur durch die Aufhebung der Einseitigkeiten, die drei genannten Konzeptionen charakterisieren, bekommt die Philosophie eine Gelegenheit, dem Schicksal eines überflüssigen Restes der Vergangenheit zu vermeiden. Damit bekommt auch die Welt eine Möglichkeit, der Versunkenheit in der Vernunftlosigkeit zu vermeiden.*

**Abstract.** *The most relevant conceptions of philosophy (philosophy as metaphysical interpretation of the world, philosophy as social critique and philosophy as epistemological framework and general synthesis of positive sciences) were unified by two different and opposite theses. The first thesis assumes that philosophy has reached in the times of total scientification of the human world its own end and that it is now something obsolete and meaningless. The opposite thesis assumes that philosophy is necessary today as a meaningful defense of the human world against the danger of irrationality. Only by overcoming the one-sidedness of these three conceptions can philosophy avoid its own obsolescence and the world can have a chance to avoid the threat of irrationality.*

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Among scientists, especially in the field of science and technical disciplines, and generally among people, the learned and less educated ones, the more and the less informed ones alike, there is a dominant belief that philosophy has definitely become a dispensable subject: it is an unnecessary and superfluous luxury, a remnant of some long-gone times, when it might have been fulfilling a useful task (we are led to this conclusion by the mere fact that the history – or, at least the prehistory – of practically all scientific disciplines begins with Aristotle, or, occasionally, with another philosopher); yet nowadays, its former rational (scientific, cognitive, proto-epistemological etc.) essence has been diffused in positive, exact and empirical / experimental sciences. What has philosophy been reduced to? A non-scientific or pre-scientific interpretation and explanation of the world, unappealing for anyone else but the odd lot of enthusiasts who consider themselves to be philosophers, even wizards, driven by self-gratification with the very products of their minds, that are definitely beyond all conceivable reasoning and sense.

Thus, philosophy is placed side by side with art and religion. However, unlike art, in which non-artists can find some aesthetic pleasure and which will provide a valuable possession, and therefore social prestige, to a person devoid of any sense of beauty and artistic appreciation; unlike religion, that has the capacity to inspire its followers with the sense and orientation in life, to lend them some support and give them hope, or at least a promise, philosophy has nothing to offer to non-philosophers. The consequence of such a definition is unequivocal: if philosophy does not provide anything to those who are not philosophers (i.e. to the overwhelming majority of a society and humanity), it means that philosophers, in turn, have nothing to give either to the society or to the scientific community, in brief – to anyone. Having nothing to offer, they are useless and unnecessary; philosophers represent a parasitic remnant of the past on the proliferating trunk of the contemporary and the future scientifically founded world. Plato used to claim that poets ought to be banished from all soundly conceived states. The present-day society is, on the whole, much more tolerant than old Plato used to be, so if beggars, professional 'social cases' and incurable psychiatric patients are to be put up with, if even murderers have their place under the sun (be it in the shadow of well secured institutions), we can also bear with the gradual extinction of the odd lot of philosophers. Despite the uselessness of its partakers, they are basically inoffensive.

Few are the prejudices based on a rational tenet. This does not mean that they are to be considered true, or mainly true, accurate or endowed with a high degree of probability. Yet, presumptions that lead to prejudices have to be solid. A prejudice that refers to a poor and obviously discriminated or marginalized racial or ethnic minority group, that aspires to attain broad acceptance of the majority population, will not be based on the assumption that those wretched people are oppressing the majority and amassing wealth at the expense of the dominant group; as a starting point, that minority will be labeled as some kind of lazy population lacking basic hygienic habits, prone to petty crime and deceit. Therefore, it will be founded on features that statistically occur much more frequently in a marginalized population.

It must have become obvious by now that the above-mentioned view regarding the obsolescence and uselessness of philosophy has been labeled as a prejudice. However, it is also clear that this prejudice is based on some existing features of philosophy. Nevertheless, it is not philosophy as such that is at stake here, this argument is not about the entire concept of philosophy, but rather about some characteristics pertaining to one of the three dominant

directions of contemporary philosophy, that being the direction leading directly out of the classical philosophical tradition and pretending to the entire legacy of the history of philosophy. This direction can be defined as establishing the identity of philosophy by means of metaphysics, a process in which a metaphysical interpretation of the world is taken as the ultimate objective of philosophy; a pursuit for the core and the essence that eludes any positive cognition and any scientific approach to reality.

Such an approach to practicing philosophy is frequently dominated by a tendency to reduce philosophy to philology: contemporary philosophers interpret, often using very sophisticated philological tools, the thoughts of ancient philosophers, minor philosophers interpret the thoughts of their reputed contemporaries, and philosophers coming from countries where languages of inferior philosophical tradition are spoken, interpret the philosophic thoughts coming from the more dominant or reaffirmed linguistic environments, etc. Afterwards, the dominant Greco-Christian metaphysical tradition is combined with other, non-European traditional thinking, and everything becomes the subject of further interpretations and reinterpretations. Eventually, philosophy acquires the form of an auto-referential activity. Philosophy deals with itself, instead of dealing with its subject, the universal entity of being. This subject becomes elusive in an overstrained concentration on interpretations and reinterpretations. For example, the concept of justness, one of the central issues of ethics and of practical philosophy in general, is completely overshadowed in such approaches by issues of appropriate interpretations of Plato's or Aristotle's concept of justness in this or that philosophical school of thought. The issue of justness here merely serves as a foundation for interpretational disputes, and those disputes or arguments are in itself the real aim and true sense of such philosophical practices.

Instead of interpreting the world, modalities of interpretation are being provided. And, when within the framework of such an approach, a pretentious thinker ventures to turn to "the real thing", such attempts usually result in lifeless (basically arbitrary) constructs, unconnected and detached from their subject and from the cognitive, spiritual, existential or any other needs of the non-philosophical public, the scientific community, the social milieu and humanity as a whole. However, if an authentic turn should take place within the very subject, should some shrewd thinkers delve into their subject in an authentic and profound manner, the fruit of such thinking, if at all noticed, will be trapped, together with its creator, into the grindstone of self-aimed interpretation and reinterpretation. In a nutshell, they will remain unknown to the non-philosophic public.

Naturally, the sprouting of such a philosophical jungle nourishes prejudices of the scientific community and of the social community regarding philosophy. Philosophy is seen as uninteresting, unnecessary and obsolete, as the refuse of the academic workroom (where such philological and interpretational philosophical practices are particularly exuberant, especially in certain milieus). "Practicing philosophy" refers to "indulging in useless and groundless speculation". Those of us who deal with plausible, useful and vital activities, do not have understanding for this kind of wasting of intellectual energy, time and means (since this type of philosophy is hardly a leisure activity for anyone: perhaps some live for philosophy, but the truth is that that most make a living out of it). This is the typical way of thinking of any individual within the scientific or any other community who has experienced his /her first encounter with philosophy by means of the above-mentioned type of practicing philosophy.

The second type of philosophy is devoid of this naïve, metaphysical or auto-referential type of philosophical practice. However, this lack of artlessness is often labeled as a social threat or destructiveness. This refers to philosophy as social criticism.

Ever since its very beginning, philosophy has critically assessed the world. It is to be presumed that, in the mental process of differentiating good from evil, the justifiable from the unjustifiable, the truth from fallacy, the inevitable from the accidental (or possible) the acceptable from the unacceptable, the sphere of reality liable to human influence (or at least the one considered to be such) was exposed to a much greater degree, and that is the social sphere. It appears that society is much more prone to change than it is the case with nature. The natural course of events is obviously unbending. Therefore, a philosopher (inasmuch as any other human being) speculating about the criticism of an earthquake or a flood, a draught or frost, a grasshopper invasion or a plague epidemic would, inevitably, be seen as a grotesque figure. Such natural phenomena and their causes and antecedents can be cursed. However, cursing does not belong to the category of rational activities, and philosophy, according to its original definition, pretends to be rational. On the rational plan, it makes sense to build houses that are not going to collapse, and dams that will prevent floods, irrigation systems that will alleviate the effects of draughts on our agriculture, to manufacture clothes that will protect people from excessive cold, to take care to sow the fields before low temperatures set in, etc. – and it is inasmuch plausible to judge the justification, the efficiency and timeliness of all these measures undertaken as a protection from the elements. However, every instance of such judgment represents an instance of social critique, at least to the extent in which all the estimated measures are socially mediated (and it must be said that there is social mediation even on the level of manufacturing a sheepskin coat for protection against the cold in an isolated shepherds' family, let alone the construction of dams and irrigation systems).

The superiority of philosophical criticism of these and other social constructs and social contexts (and, in turn, of social relations structures, institutions, characteristic forms of social practice of individuals, groups and communities) over the so-called common criticism or daily critique, derives from the very nature of philosophy. It could be said that philosophy is criticism in its essence. In the first place, it comprises discriminating between justifiable and unjustifiable thoughts and ideas, separating the truth from illusion, which constitutes the crucial difference on the grounds of which philosophy does not belong to the group of spiritual activities, such as mythology or ideology. Nevertheless, some will remark that the above-mentioned differentiation is no specific feature of philosophy, but an ever-present process in any sound human mind; however, it must be noted that plausible reasoning is not immune to inherited or deep-rooted prejudices and deceptions: sound-minded people believed in witches until not so long ago, and many of those who still believe in racial superiority of their own ethnic group boast with their own intellect. The application of discipline of thought and logical consistence and consequentiality on social criticism (of isolated phenomena or of the whole) adds a new quality to this discriminating activity, a dimension of well-founded thought and verifiable results.

However, not even philosophically elaborated social criticism is immune from radical digressions. It can be empirically proved, at least for the past two centuries, that there has been no social catastrophe (in the broadest sense: ranging from irrational dictatorships to quasi-rationally established despotic realms down to wars and genocide) that has not been

given legitimacy by some respectable (or seemingly respectable) type of social criticism, had it not resulted in the first place from considerable instrumentation of social critique, supported by the apologetics of degenerated varieties of that form. There has been no social mythology or irrational prejudice that did not seek legitimacy in philosophy. And, although it is not particularly difficult to prove that, for example, the Nazis perverted the original intentions of Nietzsche's criticism of the modern society, driven by motives that were directly opposed to the character of that very criticism, the social and critical course of philosophy remains overcast by a somber shadow. Even if a figure like Popper exaggerates by labeling Plato and Hegel as the precursors of modern totalitarianism, it cannot be denied that the modern totalitarians were inspired by some motives – however much torn out of context they might have been – of the philosophical social criticism, or, in the least, they did take advantage of such motives to justify the projected or implemented forms of the totalitarian state. It is also true that critical tones against such instrumentations have all too often been suppressed by the dominance of divergent false alternatives in the field of social criticism itself (freedom and justice, the individual and the group, etc.)

A critical history of philosophy will undoubtedly, in the process of reconstruction of the history of philosophical social criticism, rehabilitate all those suppressed and strangled voices of authentic criticism, and separated the manipulated authors' social criticism from their instrumentations, from all misinterpretations and distortions they have been exposed to.

Be that as it may, the shadow will stay. It will nourish suspicions regarding philosophy as social criticism on the whole. On one hand, suspicion is legitimate and, in a sense, it is even justifiable; on the other hand, it is in itself a consequence of a certain degree of tampering. Suspicion is justifiable seen as a public reaction to the results of philosophical social criticism. In the name of surpassing the mediocrity and dullness of petit bourgeois existence, the manipulation of Nietzsche's heroic anti-thesis on leveling led to the implementation (which was, fortunately, aborted) of one of the most comprehensive leveling projects (*Gleichschaltung*) in the history of mankind. Such suspicion is plausible, and it can be justified by the option that it provides the opportunity to be transformed into criticism capable of separating a valid idea from its instrumentation. Even the other kind of suspicion can be understood: understood, but not justified. That is induced suspicion, where, on the grounds of an insight into the fatal consequences of social criticism, the very idea of subjecting society to criticism is being rejected: according to the proponents of this presumption, philosophy should not interfere with social life, because it is bound to lead to an evil outcome. Functionally oriented social sciences entirely cater for the need to rationally regulate the conditions of social processes. This is the reasoning of an exact social sciences exponent and, in turn, of the entire academic community; ultimately, it becomes the general public opinion. However, the forerunners of this stream of thought are to be found among those philosophers who are concerned with their own social and academic status. What remains to be offered to the academic community or to society in general after such self-imposed restrictions, is defined by the usefulness of those derivatives of social criticism that are free of any suspicion that they might result in any form of social evil: applied ethics and applied logic (for example, in the form of theory of rational inference) are typical products of a subdued and functional philosophy of social criticism. The application of thus obtained products is generally unquestionable, and this

quality, in turn, dismisses any assessment of philosophy as being unnecessary, redundant or obsolete.

The assessment concerning the redundancy and superfluity of philosophy is further dismissed by the governing trend of contemporary philosophy. It can be depicted as a predilection of philosophy to play the role of an epistemic framework or, at best, to represent an all-encompassing syntheses of positive (exact, empirical and experimental) sciences. In fact, modern science did spring up from philosophy. Francis Bacon, who, with his definition of knowledge as power abolished the Aristotelian paradigm of self-sufficient observational science (and thus created space for the practical application of mathematics and physics, while preserving their scientific dignity), and with Descartes, who laid the foundations of modern physics, marked the beginning of the process of separation of philosophy from exact sciences. It is also true that many of the Modern Age philosophers were, at the same time, leading scientists. Let us just remember Leibniz, the leading philosopher of his epoch, and also a versatile scientist, mathematician, founder of information technology, etc. Leibniz's philosophy is in perfect harmony with his scientific research. They are organically bound together.

However, the work of another outstanding Modern Age philosopher, and simultaneously, the leading physicist of the epoch, Blaise Pascal, incarnates the divergence between philosophy and science. While in his physical research he followed and successfully applied Descartes' geometrical method, as a philosopher, he advocated "the logic of the heart", completely divergent from the Cartesian "logic of reason".

Immanuel Kant, at his remote Baltic university, used to teach an entire range of exact sciences with great success. Even Hegel, in the course of his academic activities, addressed the universal scientific achievements of his time (although his lectures on the philosophy of nature, where he attempted a synthetic approach to matter, in an attempt to incorporate into his philosophical system, are among the weakest and least convincing aspects of his work; a critical analyses leads to the conclusion that his insight into the contemporary achievement of scientific research was poor, which can by no means be attributed to his negligence, inability to understand, etc., but, obviously, to objective obstacles).

Namely, in his time, science was expanding tremendously, regarding both the subjects and the methods. New areas of research were being defined and differentiation increased, with respect to the contents and disciplines as well as to the methods. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, such a comprehensive insight into universal scientific research will have become an unattainable task, even for the best-informed individual.

For a long time, physics ranked as the paradigmatic science. It was not accidental that one of the founders of social sciences, Auguste Comte, postulated the request that the new social science be formed as social physics. However, in the twentieth century, this positivism and the naïve realism that it implied were demeaned, primarily owing to scientists such as Heisenberg, as a unilateral and faulty approach.

It is on these grounds that the philosophy of science developed on one hand, while on the other (though not in an antithetic contradiction) epistemology. In the first aspect, science becomes the subject of philosophical interest, whereas in the other it serves science, attempting to solve those methodological, theoretical and scientific problems for which the devices used in scientific research are not sufficient. The spreading of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, indispensable in the process of adequate confrontation with an ever more complex world (which is increasingly being shaped

precisely on the grounds of an enormous development of science and its application, turning the human environment into a scientific, artificial, technical and technological milieu), merely emphasizes the role of philosophy as a servant (but also, in a way, a coordinator, if not a unifying factor) of science. The modalities of concrete, empirical and experimental researchers' activities in all conceivable areas of science crucially depend on the solution of logical, methodological and epistemological problems (therefore, on an imminently philosophical task, which is philosophical in its essence, regardless of the original profession of its proponents: anyhow, Spinoza was an optician by profession, yet we still enlist him in the history of philosophy and do not speak of him as an optician, except on the biographical factual level.

Certain traditionally oriented philosophers consider this type of approach to scientific reality unworthy of genuine philosophy, which should be in constant pursuit of the essence of being (although in practice it is all too often reduced to thrashing out the justification of the interpretation of this or that text). On the other hand, certain philosophers belonging to the methodological / epistemological trend, presumably induced by the above-mentioned supercilious contempt, do not see themselves as members of the philosophical profession; rather, they envision themselves exclusively as members of the scientific community and they see their own activities as a kind of subcategory of science. The strengthening of this tendency would lead to the submerging of philosophy into science. Such a concoction will not put at stake the future functioning of philosophy as epistemology in the process of establishing and assessing the methodological framework of scientific research. Even an unassuming philosophy, inclined to self-oblivion will successfully perform its task at the service of scientific development.

The difficulty, however, lies in the danger that in the course of this process of self-oblivion (and the same is true for the potential self-oblivion of functional derivatives of social / critical philosophy, such as applied ethics or the theory of rational behavior) it might lose that peculiar philosophical dimension which enables both philosophers and non-philosophers sharing the space for thought created by philosophy, to formulate valid questions regarding the essence and justification of what is and what is to be. Amid a global prevalence of a scientific approach, there have been long-hauled fears of the possible consequences of remaining on well trodden paths (paved on science and built on its results) that could lead to disaster, be it defined in ecological, social or existential terms, or merely as the collapse of humanity and defeat of humanness.

Epistemology alone cannot provide a counterbalance for the obliviousness of meaning and loss of orientation. Nor can applied ethics be sufficient, especially if it is restricted to functionally resolving certain dilemmas in an isolated area of a scientific / technical / existential reality broken down into disciplines. A self-absorbed and auto-referential philosophy would by all means represent the worst counterpoise to oblivion and loss.

It is only by resisting disciplinary fragmentation (and this resistance is not contradictory to the requirement of upholding the highest standards of professional competence in specific areas, nor does it tolerate any kind of superficiality), only by maintaining the vision of philosophy as a whole and only by merging with interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary forms of scientific research that it will be possible to guarantee a sensible survival of philosophy and the fulfillment of its integrative function of being the critical mind of the dawning epoch.

**BUDUĆNOST FILOZOFIJE****Lino Veljak**

*Tri najznačajnije koncepcije filozofije (filozofija kao metafizičko tumačenje svijeta, filozofija kao socijalna kritika i filozofija kao epistemologijski okvir i opća sinteza pozitivnih znanosti) objedinjuju se na dva međusobno suprotstavljena načina: u tezi o dovršenosti, zastarjelosti i suvišnosti filozofije u vremenima totalne scijentifikacije ljudskog svijeta, kao i u tezi o nužnosti filozofije (u bilo kojoj njezinoj verziji) kao osmišljavajućeg temelja obrane ljudskog svijeta od prijeteće pogibelji bezumlja. Samo nadmašivanjem jednostranosti spomenutih triju koncepcija filozofija ima šanse da izbjegne usudu suvišnog ostatka prošlosti a ljudski svijet mogućnost da izbjegne potonuću u bezumlje.*