



Some remarks on the philosopher's mission

Ireneusz ZIEMIŃSKI*

ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to defend philosophy as a valuable theoretical reflection on the ultimate questions about the meaning of existence (especially human existence). In accordance with Leszek Kołakowski's postulate, a philosopher could be modeled on a circus clown who observes the world from a distance and is capable of critiquing myths prevalent in the culture they grew up in. Although a clown does not provide final answers to ancient metaphysical questions, they make people reflect critically on their own beliefs. From this standpoint, philosophy is an integral element of every culture which does not wish to become ossified and stagnant due to its dogmatism.

KEYWORDS

philosophy; Leszek Kołakowski; clown; criticism; meaning of life

* Professor of philosophy Ph.D. (habil.), Department of Philosophy and Cognitive Science, University of Szczecin. E-mail: Ireneusz.Zieminski@usz.edu.pl.

DIAGNOSIS

Philosophy has been defined numerous times — some have seen it as a perfect product of the human spirit, love of wisdom, divine knowledge, or the understanding of being. Just as often it has been considered a medicine for the soul, the art of life, or an exercise in dying. Philosophy has been defined as the logic of science which assesses the legitimacy of research methods in various fields of study, or the synthesis of empirical data which provides a general overview of the world. Sometimes it has been seen as a fundamental science, vital to the existence of other sciences. Sometimes practical tasks, such as determining the norms of human behavior, social revolution, or creating a perfect state, have also been assigned to philosophy.

Just as often, philosophy has been subject to criticism. Among the charges that have been levied against philosophy is supplying abstract concepts which fail to describe the real world, instead of knowledge; it is therefore pointless sophistry and not a field of study. Another problem is that philosophers do not present their theories using the strict language of mathematics but rather through an artificial jargon only understood by them. It suggests that philosophy is more of an expression of personality than a system of objectively justified claims, and yet it is hardly considered art, since philosophers lack artistic talent. By using concepts with no empirical meaning, they make nonsensical (non-verifiable) statements. What follows is that since philosophy does not supply knowledge or produce any goods, it is redundant. Welders are needed more than philosophers.¹ Parents demand practical education which will guarantee their children's prosperity, not philosophical speculations (Nussbaum, 2016: IX) which are redundant and even dangerous. Philosophers' radical pursuits of ultimately explaining the world could ignite an insatiable need for cognition. Therefore, a philosopher is a parasite producing superfluous words (Kořakowski, 2006a: 173), disturbing people's peace of mind by questioning the traditional rules of social life, moral norms, and religious truths. They go even further in their criticism by undermining reason as a tool of critique, which ultimately leads to skepticism or even nihilism (according to which there is no truth or goals worth pursuing). As a result, philosophy leads to despair by undermining the idea that life (and any activity) has meaning.

Since antiquity, philosophers have been perceived as scandalists who proclaim provocative ideas they do not actually believe themselves, because they refute seemingly obvious truths. These claims were supposed to be supported

¹ "During his unsuccessful campaign for the Republican nomination for president, Marco Rubio claimed, with typical inelegance, "We need more welders and less philosophers'" (Nussbaum, 2016: XVI).

by the philosophers' disgraceful behavior, as exemplified by Diogenes the Cynic, who despised people and would satisfy his physiological needs in public (Laërtius, 2013: VI, 2, 69). In light of such attitudes, it would be difficult to look to philosophers for humanity's ideological and moral guides. While many have dreamed about creating a perfect social structure, attempts to build a utopia have resulted in totalitarianism rather than universal happiness.

Discredited as scholars and as political reformers, philosophers keep trying to redefine their mission by way of various metaphilosophies, which determine the research methods, goals, and the subject of the study for philosophy. However, the focus is on debating the status of philosophy rather than on creating original theories, which may ultimately result in undermining its own merit. After all, no one is debating whether there is a need for doctors or plumbers (Kořakowski, 2006a: 73), or questions the validity of mathematics, physics, or sociology as a field of study. Yet, the main topic of debate among philosophers is their own profession.² This problem might be rooted in the nature of philosophy itself, whose aim according to Pythagoras, is not to govern or produce goods, but to observe the world without bias. However, the problem is the multitude of theories, none of which has gained universal approval, not even the thesis about the existence of the world. While some predict that it will soon be possible to settle the issue of whether God exists using philosophical argumentation (Dummett, 2010: 151), one should be skeptical about this claim. Thus, it is not surprising that philosophers are haunted by the question as to whether they are even needed (Kořakowski, 2006a: 173–174).

The necessity to justify one's own indispensability brings frustration and complexes, as observed particularly in academia, where being a philosopher is a source of shame, not pride. When asked about their parents' professions at school, children are afraid to admit that they are philosophers, expecting to be mocked (Kořakowski, 2004: 19). While children might also mock a peer who says that their father is a garbage collector or a circus clown, they would be mistaken. After all, being a clown is a useful profession, while being a garbage collector — an absolutely essential one (Kořakowski, 2004). Besides, the work performed by philosophers is similar to some extent, after all it consists of sorting human thoughts and critiquing myths which pose a danger to culture, especially when they take the form of exclusionary ideas such as racism, nationalism or rules of behavior elevated to the position of absolute and immutable norms. Philosophy is also akin to the work of a clown (Kořakowski, 2004) who points out the absurdities of the world we usually fail to notice. Contrary to

² Kořakowski provides a broader perspective on this issue — he believes that the favorite topic of discussion for intellectuals (not just philosophers) is the question of why intellectuals exist (Kořakowski, 2006a).

appearances, a clown does not provide cheap entertainment, but rather reveals the futility of human pursuits.³ Although most people value their daily affairs, from the cosmic view they are completely unimportant.⁴

A clown is ridiculous due to being different, by not conforming to any universal norms of behavior. Philosophers are just as funny, staring at the stars while tripping and falling into a ditch — a source of amusement for regular people (Laërtius, 2013: I, 1, 34) whose superiority comes from giving up on discovering the mysteries of existence to keep their feet firmly on the ground. In this context, a philosopher seems mad and thus should not expect to be taken seriously (Kłoczowski, 2014: 119), as illustrated by the satirical portrayal of Socrates in Aristophanes' play *The clouds* (Aristophanes, 2001). However, in reality, Socrates is seen as ridiculous because of his inquisitiveness, his refusal to accept circulating slogans and his disregard for praise. By rejecting naïve answers to difficult questions and awakening critical thinking in citizens, he became a danger to the authorities. A philosopher by nature undermines traditional norms by revealing alternative lifestyles. Thus, they are a revolutionary, particularly when situated outside society like ancient cynics. However, while Socrates' intellectual attitude was dangerous to the authorities, Diogenes' gestures were just folklore. Although he had the courage to ask Alexander the Great, who was willing to make any of his wishes come true, to not block him sun (Laërtius, 2013: VI, 38) he could only dream about having as significant an influence on politics as Alexander's teacher, Aristotle, had had. However, the fates of Aristotle, Socrates, or Boethius are also a testament to how dangerous politics may be for a philosopher. It might cost them their life, or as in the case of Plato, their freedom. Yet, regardless of political failure, a philosopher's personal attitude seems important.

The multitude of attitudes taken by philosophers can be boiled down to two figures (following Kołakowski's thinking): a priest and a jester (Kołakowski, 1989).⁵ A jester is impertinent, questions axioms and looks for rationality in absurdity. However, their attitude is not rooted in defiance, but rather in a distrust towards a stable world (Kołakowski, 1989), where there are no mysteries. Meanwhile, a priest believes in an idea, they consider it to be a truth that offers salvation. Therefore, they want to force it on everybody, regardless of whether it is a religious, scientific, or political truth. By taking on the role of being

³ This function of a clown was portrayed by Heinrich Böll in *The clown* (Böll, 2010).

⁴ According to Thomas Nagel this is the absurdity of human existence (Nagel, 1972).

⁵ Despite referencing metaphors which were introduced into discourse on the nature of philosophy by Leszek Kołakowski, the article is not of a historical nature thus it is not an attempt to reconstruct Kołakowski's views on philosophy or intellectuals' social responsibilities. Rather, I employ the symbols of a priest, jester, and clown because I consider them to be the most accurate metaphors for the role of philosophy in culture. In my article I expand somewhat on their symbolic descriptions as depicted in Kołakowski's work.

a guardian of tradition, however, a priest is not an opportunist who wants to please authority, but a defender of an absolute.

A jester is more dangerous to authority because authority does not need original thinkers or critics, it needs believers who preach the official ideology (Kořakowski, 2006a: 176–177, 181–182). However, even a priest who is loyal to the doctrine they preach must keep searching for new justifications, which forces them to go beyond the narrow frames of orthodoxy. After all, those who want to better justify their faith usually question it (Kořakowski, 2006a: 178). Paradoxically, one who wants to perfect a doctrine is more dangerous than one who attacks it from the outside. It blurs the line between a believer and a heretic, and a priest can become a jester (Kořakowski, 2006a: 178). The reverse is also possible, since a philosopher often questions other people's axioms in order to create their own (Kořakowski, 1989: 169), thus turning from a jester into a priest or even a prophet who harbingers paradise.⁶

The figures of priest and jester have claimed a permanent place in Polish philosophy; formulated during a time of ideological tensions during the period of state socialism, they not only showcase Kořakowski's ideological evolution, but also the ambiguity of the role of philosophers in culture. After all, a world inhabited only by jesters would be just as unbearable as one inhabited exclusively by priests. Although there are some philosophers who are pure jesters or priests, most of them are somewhere in-between the two extremes. A philosopher should be expected to not only question old truths, but also discover new ones and be able to critique their own ideas as well as see the value of competing positions. Therefore, a philosopher's mission is to balance between being a jester and a priest, which allows for creative thinking; this mission can be broken down into a few postulates.

POSTULATES

The proposed list of postulates is not supposed to be complete, it is limited to the most obvious postulates, which by directing philosophers in the past, are a guide for the future. Their fulfillment may confirm the usefulness of philosophy to culture.

The first postulate, as paradoxical as it may seem, is to limit metaphysical reflections. Although metasciences are considered a sign of maturity for a given field of study, it is also an expression of doubt in its competences. This skepticism is clearly visible in the case of philosophy, which has been trying to define its subject, methods, and goals for centuries. Constant preoccupation with one's own status is not conducive to fulfilling philosophy's

⁶ „It is common for intellectuals to want to be both prophets and advocates of reason, which obviously cannot be reconciled” (Kořakowski, 2006a: 180) [trans. from the Polish by A.Z.].

objectives — understanding the world and human fate. The postulate to renounce metaphilosophy is not rooted in doubt, but rather in the faith that philosophy can still creatively take on the eternal problems of being, cognition, and values. One of the sources of distrust in philosophy is the preoccupation with metaphilosophical issues, as exemplified by the development of metaethical problems. Philosophers of morality are more focused on the structure of concepts and ethical reasoning than on defining human obligations. While metaethical issues are important to moral discourse, they are merely a tool for the discovery of what is good and righteous. Thus, metaethical discourse should not replace ethics. Just as a clown's role is not to reflect on the meaningfulness of their profession, a philosopher's role is not to focus on the structure and usefulness of their discourse. A clown on stage pondering the goals and methods of making people laugh would not be understood. A jester, who instead of cheering up the king, gives him advice or predicts disasters, risks being removed from the court.⁷ A philosopher who avoids the subject matter and instead engages in metaphilosophical deliberations is no longer a philosopher. While they might achieve methodological perfection, it is doubtful that they will say anything meaningful about the world. Instead, a philosopher's objective is to discover new ideas which have significance not only to other philosophers, but also to the broader public (Kofakowski, 2004: 19–20).

The second postulate is even more obvious: it is vital to have a plurality of research methods, not limited to one trend, school of thought, or culture. If philosophy aspires to a general understanding of the world, it cannot exclude any point of view. A philosopher should not engage in methodological purity (a trait of phenomenology, neo-scholastics, or analytical philosophy) but rather take advantage of all the methods available to settle the questions they take on. By remaining in the confines of a certain school of thought one's goal becomes loyalty to a master rather than the pursuit of truth, which makes one a guardian of orthodoxy, not an independent thinker. Meanwhile, philosophers should look at the world from various perspectives and without biases (Nussbaum, 2016: IX); one cannot come closer to truth without combining many perspectives. Even if it does not lead to an accurate image of the world, it will be less erroneous than theories built within the framework of one trend.

The postulate of pluralism is not limited to schools of philosophy, but also to other areas of culture, such as science, religion, and identity-related experiences, particularly to those of groups who for centuries were denied a voice. While we are used to accepting Socrates' point of view, the inclusion of Xantippe's perspective is also crucial. A woman in despair, worried about the fate of her children,

⁷ The legendary jester of King Sigismund I the Old, named Stańczyk, was an exception — he was considered a wise thinker and was respected by the king.

was banished from her husband's prison cell so that he could speculate about the immortality of the soul and a dignified death without interruptions (Plato, 1966: 60a–60b). Socrates' brutal behavior invalidates an important existential experience, the experience of women. Xantippe's fate is a testament to the fact that philosophers had no desire to listen to the voices of half of humanity which must have resulted in proclaiming a limited vision of the world. The experiences of minorities are just as important, as one could hardly imagine anthropology or ethics without including the perspective of the LGBTQIA community. Defending the biblical idea that God created men and women (Gen 1, 27) not only reinforces an archaic, wrong, and harmful (binary) gender distinction, it also makes understanding the richness of human nature more difficult. Similarly, it is crucial to take into account ideas which originate in other cultures. We are used to a philosophy established by Greek colonizers and forget that the invaded peoples had their own visions of the world, from which one could learn a lot. Even the very definition of philosophy as an original form of scholarship suggests that there were no similar undertakings on continents other than Europe. Meanwhile, the pre-Christian ideas formed by tribes in Africa and the Americas are a testament to the existence of other philosophies, which colonizers made an effort to destroy (Maffie, 2015; Hallen, 2009: 7–22; Obenga, 2006: 31–49; Diagne, 2006: 66–77). Philosophy is global by nature, however it is not about the domination of one school of thought (e.g. modern scholastics transplanted to universities established in Latin America since the 16th century) but including various cultural traditions and modes of thinking which significantly broaden our particular view of the world.⁸

⁸ Those who are attached to their own school of thought rooted in their own culture or philosophical tradition may find this approach to be too liberal, or even inconsistent. After all, there is no doubt that the concepts of freedom or truth function differently in Latin American decolonial philosophy, which considers the Cartesian model of philosophy (scholarship) to be the root of European conquests on other continents, and in Europe, where the same model is commonly considered to be the philosophical foundation of modern physics. Even when European thinkers notice the danger of dehumanization in mechanical philosophy, they do not see it in the ideas of colonial conquest or the slave trade. Looking at one's own philosophical tradition from the perspective of other cultures seems crucial not only because every point of view is inevitably particular, but also because it allows one to see one's own superstitions. The postulate of pluralism (especially in the area of culture) may also seem implausible; as Kołakowski argued, accepting all cultures as equal leads to an extreme relativism of truth. For this reason, even a postulate of tolerance for cultural difference seems problematic — after all it is difficult to tolerate a position of intolerance towards one's own ideas. As a result, a consistent position of tolerance may turn out to be suicidal (Kołakowski, 2006a). However, regardless of the possible inconsistency in the postulates of pluralism or tolerance, considering one's own culture to be the most legitimate or universal is just as problematic. Historically, forcing one's own cultural models upon other peoples is usually done through violence. Meanwhile, philosophers should refrain from any violence and instead attempt to inquire about the reasons behind other cultures proclaiming particular beliefs.

The third postulate concerns the autonomy of reason and freedom of thought, after all, according to Nietzsche, philosophy is only possible if created by a free spirit (Wotling, 2008: 11). Thus, the Horatian prescription of *sapere aude* which Kant considered to be the motto of the Enlightenment (Horace, 2004; Kant, no date), should be the norm guiding all philosophers. Freedom of thought means the ability to oppose irrational impulses, tribal emotions, and social prejudices. Philosophy should not be reduced to the role of a tool justifying established cultural myths. Although human reason is finite and one can hardly expect it to solve all mysteries, it remains the best guide to solving the mysteries of the world. Philosophers must defend themselves against the absolutization of their own ideas, as criticism and suspicion of others and oneself is a sign of a free spirit.

The fourth postulate is an elaboration on the third, and it is the necessity of defending the autonomy of philosophy against other fields. The relationship between philosophy and other academic disciplines is particularly complex and delicate. It is a result of both attempts to completely eliminate philosophy and replace it with empirical sciences (especially physics and biology) as well as the desire to turn it into a fundamental science which provides methodological justifications for other fields. Contrary to these opinions, philosophy is neither superfluous nor the most important academic field. Thus, a philosopher should be neither insecure nor proud in the face of representatives from other fields of study; the knowledge they provide is neither better nor worse, it simply concerns a different set of problems. Philosophers should not replicate the methods of other disciplines in the hopes that they will be accepted as fully-fledged scholars by physicists or mathematicians; at the same time they should not make claims about the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of research procedures in other disciplines, for they are not qualified to do so. Just as representatives of formal sciences or empirical sciences can wreak havoc in philosophy by trying to adapt it to their own methods, a philosopher may create a crisis in other disciplines by trying to impose their own research procedures on them. Philosophy will probably never be a hard science like mathematics, it will never be an experimental science like physics or chemistry, it will remain a conceptual field of study even when it draws on data from other disciplines. Although a philosopher who researches the problem of time should know what physicists, astronomers, biologists, or historians have to say about it, this data is not the final stage in constructing a concept of time. At the same time a philosopher should not turn their own ideas into a model for other fields of study. Just as a circus acrobat has no business being a clown, a clown should not do the job of an acrobat. A philosopher should not advise doctors on how to deal with patients (as bioethicists have a tendency to do); they should not school neurophysiologists

and psychologists on cognition processes (as philosophers of the mind tend to do). Philosophers of religion should not be apologists for any denomination or tell the clergy how they should preach their faith, they should focus on the nature and rationality of religion.

This leads directly to the fifth postulate which is criticism. A philosopher should be more of a jester than a priest, which puts them on the side of masters of suspicion. Philosophers must be particularly sensitive to the superstitions that exist in culture. One can look to those masters from antiquity who courageously stood up against contemporaneous myths and paid the price of banishment or death, to be one's guides in this matter. Following the example of Anaxagoras, Protagoras, or Socrates, a philosopher should be suspicious of any rules that are considered immutable, eternal, and absolute, especially when it comes to customs, morality, religion, or politics — it is the only defense against the tyranny of self-proclaimed authorities or traditions (Nussbaum, 2016: IX). It is hardly shocking that throughout history philosophers have been accused of corrupting youth, impiety, and blasphemy — after all they woke people up from their dogmatic nap. This attitude deserves praise because paradoxically divinity is present in blasphemy more often than in pious kitsch. However, the destruction of myths is not the goal of their critique, but rather pointing out their historicity, mutability, and contingency. Philosophers are aware that people cannot live without myths (Kořakowski, 2003), so abandoning ones hitherto in existence without establishing new ones would lead to cultural chaos. Still, one should keep in mind that every myth binds and limits, making people blind to anything outside of its framework.

There is no shortage of contemporary myths which generate undesirable activities, for example nationalism which tells people to revere their own nation, language, and culture more than the legacy of other tribes. This myth can sometimes be the source of wars and have catastrophic consequences for the climate crisis, which requires a common understanding and cooperation in order to save the planet and prevent the destruction of our only (shared) home. Another harmful myth is the idea of binary gender (Ziemińska, 2022) which excludes a lot of people from social life or worse, stigmatizes them as supposedly being sick or somehow disabled. One of the consequences of this myth is defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman which denies homosexual people basic rights in many countries. Unmasking such prejudice, especially when it leads to discrimination and harm, is a philosopher's duty. Even if one should not take away all of people's myths, they should be constantly critiqued and reviewed in order to limit (at least somewhat) the violence they generate. Abandoning harmful myths is not only an opportunity for a culture to develop, but also for a more responsible and mature experiencing of individual fate on a path to freedom.

A philosopher should be suspicious and critical of not only external myths, but also of their own ones. A jester who undermines traditional axioms should not become a priest who preaches their own truths. Their epistemic position is not better than that of other people and the myths they believe in are not always better or less harmful than the ones they have rejected. Thus, the postulate of criticism is also a postulate of self-criticism, that is a constant reflection on one's own prejudice.

This is directly related to the sixth postulate, which is not so much a norm, but rather a description of the historical nature of philosophy as a child of its time. Regardless of the ambitions of particular thinkers trying to discover eternal truths, their views are marked by the culture in which they originated. That does not mean that there are reasons for Hegelian optimism according to which partial and relative truths are historical stages of the whole and absolute truth. After all, history is not a creation of a cosmic spirit, but of specific individuals in specific existential situations. Unlike mathematics or physics, philosophical truth (like artistic truth) is marked by the personality of its discoverer. It does not mean that it is a subjective truth, but rather that the philosopher's individual experience has epistemic significance. When it comes to issues such as the meaning of life, love, suffering, or death, personal experiences, which play the role of a kind of "laboratory", are just as significant as objective data; without them philosophers would be unable to create their theories.

While the fifth postulate points to a subjective aspect of philosophical truths, the sixth requires limiting philosophers' ambitions; it is a postulate of epistemological minimalism which means giving up on the pursuit of absolute truth which provides final explanations. A philosophical truth is not going to be a pyramid or cathedral with an unshakeable construction and lasting foundations; it also is not going to be a well-rooted tree capable of surviving centuries. It is rather a leaking raft on a rough sea which needs to be repaired away from the port, otherwise it is going to sink. Philosophers should remain vigilant and make claims about absolute truth. In practical terms, it means that it is necessary for philosophy to abandon the cult of itself as the primary science (not to mention the only one, capable of satisfying humans' hunger for understanding). One should also limit the cult of reason, as faith in its unlimited power blunts the blade of criticism. This kind of minimalism does not have to lead to pessimism; after all every theory is in danger of being abandoned as false but that does not mean that it does not include some universal and timeless truths, meaningful for future generations. However, when it is created it is impossible to predict its future; only the far future may verify or falsify the claims of a specific philosopher.

The seventh postulate is related to the existential value of philosophy as a reflection on the meaning of life or even a life project worth

completing. Although a philosopher in this situation comes closer to the role of a priest, the theories they construct cannot replace religious doctrine, particularly in the soteriological dimension related to faith in a better world after death. A philosopher should also give up easy consolations and unmask human illusions rather than strengthen them. Contrary to Richard Rorty's opinion (he expected philosophers to create uplifting ideas), the pursuit of truth should be prioritized (Kořakowski, 2004: 20), even if it is not an optimistic one. A philosopher's objective is to understand the human condition, not give false hope. Similarly, a clown's jokes should not create the illusion that the circus is actual reality. Even though the circus lets people temporarily forget about the agony of life, even suggests that the world does not deserve to be treated with absolute seriousness since it contains comical elements, it does emphasize the tragic nature of the human condition. Thus, paradoxically, the clown is the one who reminds us about the world outside the circus' stage where people suffer from existential wounds that never heal. So, if a philosopher keeps opening these wounds, they must reckon with the fact that they might be ridiculed and banished to the margins of society because people find it hard to stand the truth about the hopelessness of their own existence. Thus, the social banishment of a philosopher is not a result of the scandalous nature of their ideas, but of their hardly uplifting nature. As Albert Camus argued, there is only one authentic philosophical problem — whether there is any point in continuing to live? Although the French existentialist had no doubts that suicide would be a failure and therefore argued in favor of heroically continuing to live, one could also justify continued existence using irony. According to Ernest Renan's argumentation neither life nor death are justified and so they should not be overvalued. Quite the contrary, all issues should be approached with a healthy distance, ironically laughing even at the tragic or the absurd.

The final, eighth postulate is about the social impact of philosophy, particularly its relationship with politics. While philosophers rarely held the highest offices (Emperor Marcus Aurelius being one of the few exceptions), they were advisors to rulers (Aristotle, Seneca, Boethius, Cassiodorus, Thomas Moore, Francis Bacon), constructed ambitious political projects (Plato, Niccoló Machiavelli, Karl Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre), or supported the political and military undertakings of their governments (Rudolf Eucken, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger). Despite these examples, philosophy should not be identified with politics, if only because a fight for power which includes lies and violence has nothing to do with attempts to understand the world. Philosophers' place is in the arena of ideas, not politics, where reason is often just a tool. This does not mean that politics is irrelevant to philosophy, quite the contrary, the development of philosophy is largely dependent on the form of government — democracy is more conducive to free debate than a totalitarian regime. Likewise, the freedom to hold philosophical discussions fosters critical and creative thinking

which are crucial to democracy (Nussbaum, 2016: IX, XVII),⁹ therefore philosophers are most feared by authoritarian regimes.

The social and political importance of philosophy is not limited to the tools of critical thinking used by philosophers, it is extended to the ideas they proclaim, particularly those related to human nature. Thus, philosophers cannot escape politics, not because everything is political, but rather because philosophical ideas influence (at least indirectly) political actions. The idea of a human as a fallen and sinful being who requires protection generates a different vision of the state than the idea of a human as a free and mature being capable of shaping their own fate. This does not mean that a philosopher should build their theories based on the needs of government or that they should seek power for themselves — a philosophical mind operates using categories that are too general to use in political action. When confronted with power, reason turns out to be powerless and so, as Hegel stressed, a wise thinker's role is not to engage in historical events but to attempt to understand them. The marketplace of words is a more appropriate place for philosophers than a royal court (Kořakowski, 2006a: 184). As exemplified by Marcus Aurelius, a philosopher on a throne can be a tyrant.

One should not expect heroism or martyrdom from philosophers confronted with power, however one can expect that they refrain from becoming ideologists who justify terror. Even in a totalitarian state a philosopher can take the position of passive opposition; if they are incapable of openly unmasking the government's lawlessness, they at least should not justify it. One example to follow could be Bertrand Russell who remained faithful to his pacifist views and went to prison rather than conform to the nationalist amok in 1914. He was preceded by Henry David Thoreau who went to prison almost a century earlier for refusal to pay taxes when the US government invaded Mexico. According to Thoreau, a citizen should refuse to obey imperialist power and not allow their taxes to be used for invading another country (Thoreau, 1993). A philosopher also should not conform to public opinion, following the example of Hannah Arendt who courageously told her own nation uncomfortable truths, risking repressions. These examples are not only about the nobleness of a few people, they are about presenting a philosopher's mission within a culture, which is taking the position of opposing established myths. The role of philosophers is to remind people about the most painful and sensitive truths. From this standpoint, eliminating philosophy from social life would be a triumph of violence over reason, madness over rationality.

⁹ Some also believe that a philosophical education (or more broadly, an education in the humanities) is useful in the world of finance and business which require brave, critical, and creative thinkers. Thus, it is hardly surprising that many people on Wall Street are graduates of humanities degree programs. See Nussbaum, 2016: XVII–XVIII.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

The role of philosophy cannot be codified in the form of a selection of universal norms just as it is impossible to formulate a universal concept of philosophy, acceptable to everyone. At the same time, philosophy cannot be removed from human life, since the source of philosophy is unsatiable curiosity as well as Jasperian borderline situations such as the feeling of foreignness (even hostility) of the world, being overwhelmed by the burden of guilt, unbearable suffering, inevitable death or losing loved ones. Thus, there is no doubt that philosophy will prevail as long as the human race does. While it may be removed from social life or from universities, it shall prevail in art or people's reflection on the meaning of their own lives. As such, there is no need to foreshadow the coming end of philosophy or to repeat the questions about its nature or current role since they always remain the same — to understand our fate in a world into which we have been thrown against our will.

Translated by Agnieszka Ziemińska

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aristophanes. (2001). *The clouds*. (W.J. Hickie, Trans.). Retrieved from: <https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/2562> (15.06.2023).
- Böll, H. (2010). *The clown*. (L. Vennewitz, Trans.). Brooklyn: Melville House.
- Diagne S.B. (2006). Precolonial African philosophy in Arabic (pp. 66–77). In: K. Wiredu (Ed.). *A companion to African philosophy*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Dummett, M. (2010). *The nature and future of philosophy*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Hallen, B. (2009). *A short history of African philosophy*. Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Horace. (2004.) *The first book of The epistles of Horace*. (C. Smart, Trans.). Retrieved from: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14020/14020-h/14020-h.htm#THE_FIRST_BOOK_OF_THE_EPISTLES_OF_HORACE (15.06.2023).
- Kant, I. (no date). *What is Enlightenment?*. (M.C. Smith, Trans.). Retrieved from: <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html> (15.06.2023).
- Kłoczowski, J.A. (2014). Kołakowski o Jezusie (pp. 117–135). In: L. Kołakowski. *Jezus ósmieszony. Esej apologetyczny i sceptyczny*. (D. Zańko, Trans.). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.
- Kołakowski, L. (1989). Kapłan i błazen. (Rozważania o teologicznym dziedzictwie współczesnego myślenia) (vol. 2; pp. 161–180). In: L. Kołakowski. *Pochwała niekonsekwencji. Pisma rozproszone z lat 1955–1968*. (Z. Mentzel, Ed.). Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza.
- Kołakowski, L. (2003). *Obecność mitu*. Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka.
- Kołakowski, L. (2004). O zawodzie filozofa (pp. 19–20). In: R. Ziemińska & I. Ziemiński (Eds.). *Byt i sens. Księga pamiątkowa VII Polskiego Zjazdu Filozoficznego w Szczecinie 14–18 września 2004 roku*. Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego.
- Kołakowski, L. (2006a). Intelktualiści (pp. 171–185). In: L. Kołakowski. *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazania*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.

- Kołakowski, L. (2006b). Szukanie barbarzyńcy. Złudzenia uniwersalizmu kulturowego (pp. 11–31). In: L. Kołakowski. *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.
- Laërtius, D. (2013). *Lives of eminent philosophers*. (T. Dorandi, Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maffie, J. (2015). *Aztec philosophy. Understanding a world in motion*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Nagel, T. (1972). The absurd. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68, 716–727.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2016). *Not for profit. Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Plato. (1966). *Phaedo*. (H.N. Fowler, Trans.). Retrieved from: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=plat.+phaedo+57a&redirect=true> (15.06.2023).
- Obenga, T. (2006). Egypt: Ancient history of African philosophy (pp. 31–49). In: K. Wiredu (Ed.). *A companion to African philosophy*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Thoreau, H.D. (1993). *On the duty of civil disobedience*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/71/71-h/71-h.htm> (14.06.2023).
- Wotling, P. (2008). *La philosophie de l'esprit libre. Introduction à Nietzsche*. Paris: Éditions Flammarion.
- Ziemińska, R. (2022). Toward a nonbinary model of gender/sex traits. *Hypatia*, 37, 402–421.