
Philosophy as a Guide to Action

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ABSTRACT

The article raises a number of topical problems of philosophy and offers an original explanation of their nature. This opens up new opportunities to rethinking such problems in the context of globalization through cultural and civilizational analyze of social life. In this context, special attention is paid to cultural and civilizational foundations of social systems. The author analyzes conditions, when differences in the cultural and civilizational development of various societies become detonators of social instability and “color revolutions”. military confrontation, and an opportunity to overcome problems peacefully.

Keywords: philosophy, method, civilization, development, education, knowledge, values.

Philosophy seems to be, apart from all values and achievements the humanity has acquired throughout the whole history of its existence, the most bright and unconditional heritage. Not everyone would agree with this statement, for even among professional philosophers one can find a viewpoint that philosophy has come to its end, is exhausted, and is over.¹ Nevertheless, one can positively speak about unquestionable value of philosophy and even more, about its growing role under modern circumstances².

Without diminishing the meaning of religion and science, not mentioning other values, in social life I would, nevertheless, position philosophy much higher taking into consideration its role in cultural and civilizational development of both separate peoples and world community as a whole.

There are several reasons for it. Let me refrain from special consideration of the most important functions of philosophy (world outlook, epistemology, methodology, integration, axiology, communication, etc.) and to start from the main point.

Philosophy better than any other sphere of human spiritual activity reflects our truly human essentiality, characterizing a human being as the one *critically thinking, having doubts* and, what is principally important – *questioning*.

Below we will dwell on the key role of questioning in philosophy. Now let us emphasize that principle differences between philosophy and the other forms of knowledge (religion and science, first of all) can be formulated in various ways. What is important is that *religion* mostly focuses on answers given ready-made and expected to be taken as they are. Here faith occupies the foreground; it is more important than knowledge. Doubts are not welcome at all; they are seen as more harmful than useful.

Science is different. It is based on knowledge and oriented towards final and verified answers, which science tries to find basing on some given knowledge, experience, or intuition. Another words, the task of science is to get and increase new knowledge. It is interested, first of all, in the correct answers and final results, which can be eventually (or, at least, theoretically) verified or falsified. *Knowledge*

¹ See Vattimo G. The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture, Translated by John R. Snyder, Polity Press, 1991 Translation of La fine della modernità, Garzanti, Milan, 1985; Swassjan K. Zur Geschichte der Zukunft. Drei Essays. Verlag für Anthroposophie, Dornach 2009.

² See Habermas J. Nachmetaphysisches Denken: philosophische Aufsätze. Fr./M., 1988; Hosle V. Die Krise der Gegenwart und die Verantwortung der Philosophie. Munchen, 1990; Richard Rorty's Pragmatism and the Russian Context. Moscow, “Tradition”, 1997, p. 110.

moves here to the foreground, while faith, being present within scientific knowledge, plays, nevertheless, no significant role. *Questions* are also important for science and *doubts* are welcome but, finally, they are factored out by theoretically proven and practically tested knowledge, i.e., by ready-made results. Another words, until we have questions and doubts, a scientific result is not final and a scientific research is not considered finished³.

Everything is different in philosophy. Here *question*, or problem occupies the central position. *Doubt* also plays the key role and his valued highly. As for *knowledge and faith* in philosophy, they play important but supplementary part. Knowledge and faith are only the basis, the fundament of any philosophizing, but they are not its result, which philosophers aspire to reach. Thus, knowledge and faith are only the starting point for philosophical analysis. Their representation is always incomplete, unfinished and they are dominated by questions and doubts.

Why? Because philosophy, being basically rational thinking, deals with problems having no unquestionable solutions and not being represented as laws or formulae, which can not be unequivocally proven or finally disproven by practice. They are often called “eternal philosophical problems”, meaning that each philosopher and each time provides their own solution for them. Philosophical solutions mostly depend on a philosopher’s outlook, things he\she is concerned about, questions she\he asks. Horizons of philosophical problematique have no precise boundaries, and the nature of tasks set is defined by many factors. That is why ability to formulate and to ask questions is them central function of philosophy, its essence, source and driving force of philosophical knowledge. Philosopher always asks his\her questions to him\herself and, basing on her\his reason, knowledge, experience, intuition, beliefs, convictions, tries to resolve problems of the highest significance for her\himself or for the society with their help.

It follows from the content of the term “philosophy” that it refers a limitlessly broad spectrum of problems and, in fact, transcends the boundaries of available knowledge. We deal here with intellectual games and imagination of specific philosophers and, finally, with their subjective evaluations, positions and statements. This explains why the path of philosophy is paved by precedents and can never be over; while all talks about death, or end of philosophy are only bravado and epate having nothing to do with reality. At best, one can talk, with some share of conventionality, about the end of this or that philosophical teaching, school, or current because many philosophical ideas, directions, concepts are really over, have no ground in public consciousness, no development or continuation. It is also true that nowadays many of them are in a difficult position or in a deep crisis. But it is not yet philosophy as a wholly. Its initial meaning is “love for wisdom” and as a form of public consciousness, a way of knowledge, as a state of mind, and, finally, as a special type of world outlook, rotates endlessly around uncountable number of problems. Having emerged once, philosophy will accompany homo sapience until humans remain humans.

Value and uniqueness of philosophy grows because it is self-sufficient and recognizes, unlike religion and even science, no absolute authorities. For instance, in case of religion a human being always has some higher authority and criterion of truth (be it God or a sacred text), which he/she inevitably applies to. Science also recognized unconditional authority of those who has already paved the way of knowledge by their discoveries while practice is a test for the truth of this knowledge. Discovered laws, proven theorems, formulae, theories are indisputable here.

Philosophy has no (an can not have) such unequivocal authorities and criteria for true philosophical ideas and statements. Philosophy is always in search, it questions everything, rethinking every time what seemed to be already resolved. In search of philosophical truth a human being, finally, has to count on him\herself only and, as a result, he/she becomes his/her main authority and the basic criterion of truth.

If we define truth as correspondence of our knowledge to reality or as adequate reflection of the objective reality by a subject, only science may deal with such a truth.

Philosophy deals not with the truth but with truths of this or that philosopher, i.e. with his subjective certainty that his\her vision of the essence of things is adequate to what goes on in reality. But this does not mean that reality is what this philosopher observes. That is why asking whether he\she is right in her\his judgments and evaluations, one can only answer “may be” and nothing more. This is the principle difference between philosophy and the other forms of knowledge. Any philosophical

³ See Stiopin V.S. *Sciens // Global Studies Encyclopedia*. Ed. by. Alexander N. Chumakov, William C. Gay, Ivan I. Mazour. Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 2003. P.441-443.

statement, position or theoretical system, be it maximally substantial and elaborated, can not pretend for absolute truth and unconditional verification of its prepositions. Another, including directly oppositional, philosophical judgments and concepts still have the right to exist.

This situation is characteristic for philosophy and only for it, making it unique and specially valued social phenomenon. Here rationally oriented human creative activity is able to flourish mostly and in the best way. Besides, philosophy expands horizons of our vision of a problem, having such theoretical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetical and other opportunities, which, taken together, make it a universal means to achieve our goals in such spheres as morality, law, ethics, aesthetics, international relations, etc.

We would like to stress that philosophical ideas and theories always reflect some objective or subjective reality. So, they are the more valuable, the more they lean upon achievements of modern science and on verified knowledge. This point is made also by a Korean philosopher Samuel Lee, who, discussing the role of philosophy in the peace studies and movements, states that “Although peace studies should be an interdisciplinary area, it is often claimed to be the task of social science. And many important theories of peace today have been produced by social scientists, since the analysis of peaceless social international structures and relationship and their interpretation must be investigated scientifically. Philosophers, unless they are trained or equipped to analyze social phenomena scientifically, must hesitate to deal with the problem of war and peace and social or international conflicts”⁴.

So, value of philosophy, from some viewpoint, seems evident. Nevertheless, we have already mentioned that academic community partly doubts value and usefulness of philosophy. The following questions are asked: Do we need philosophy now, in the age of high speed and technology? Is not it backward? Is not it replaced with specific knowledge under circumstances of endless informational flow and constant time shortage? Such questions are fully adequate but they are answered by life itself, making modern people encounter numerous philosophical problems, of which some are principally new and never existing before. Here one can probably list prevention of nuclear suicide and keeping peace on the planet, moral and ethical problems of cloning and, what seems even more important – contemporary globalization problems.

World community faces the third millennium having acquired new quality. It has become, according to the main parameters of social life, a single holistic system. At the same time, world community pays more and more attention of the problems of its unity thinking about its responsibility for the biospheric conditions and continuation of life on Earth. This engenders questions of sustainable socio-economic development and harmonious relations between society and nature, establishing humane, good neighbor relations between separate people and peoples. Such questions, along with eternal philosophical themes, inevitably move to the foreground of modern philosophical studies⁵.

Stoics have mentioned that people try to get rid of philosophy when everything is fine and turn to it when everything goes wrong. This is the time. But is humankind able to recognize it? Will it be able to solve the emerging tasks and to use properly all the available knowledge as well as everything philosophy can give?

We are seriously concerned by condition and level of development of planetary education, for insufficient education and absence of due breeding, as well as violation of human rights seems to be the cause of the majority of modern problems. Protecting human rights becomes task number one because if it is left unresolved, the other tasks become insignificant. The largest specialist in the sphere of human rights Ioanna Kucuradi thinks, that “those who are responsible for the implementation and education of human rights have sufficient philosophical knowledge of the conditions that human rights demand and have become able to put in connection this knowledge with the cases they will face”⁶.

⁴ Samuel Lee. The Role of Philosophy in the Peace Studies and Movements // Papers of the 2007 World Philosophy Day / Edited by Ioanna Kucuradi. Philosophical Society of Turkey, Ankara, 2009, p. 42-43.

⁵ Mikhail Epstein, After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

⁶ Kucuradi I. Human rights, from the philosophical point of view // Global Studies Encyclopedia. Ed. by Alexander N. Chumakov, William C. Gay, Ivan I. Mazour. – Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 2003, p. 249.

Even what was mentioned above makes philosophy an unalienable part of human life but, at the same time, an enchanting, mystifying and not acknowledgeable phenomenon. This position is confirmed by the whole history of philosophy demonstrating that none of the peoples, regimes or ideologies could ignore philosophy, regardless of their attitude to it. And now not only separate peoples, but world community as a whole ultimately needs philosophy and philosophical vision of itself, its place and mission in life. It is also confirmed by annual worldwide UNESCO Days of Philosophy, and by World Congresses of Philosophy regularly held for already two centuries but now and then returning to the only question of the essence and mission of philosophy.

The 20th World Congress of Philosophy (Boston, 1998) was especially revealing in this regard⁷. Discussion about its main topic – “Paideia. Philosophy in Human Education” – the world philosophical thought has once again returned to the sources of philosophy and its role in the contemporary global world. Questions, which seemed to be resolved long ago, were actively discussed: *What is philosophy? Who needs it and why? What is its mission and how can it help to confront the global challenges of modernity?*

Ten years later we once again ask the same questions. And, once again, we have no single vision of the subject of philosophy, or whether it can purposefully influence social development, and if so, in which way. There are several causes of such variety of positions. The main of them is predetermined by specifics of philosophy itself, which can only exist together with pluralism of opinions, dissent and comparison of various viewpoints.

It seems a shortage that philosophy does not fit the Procrustean bed of exact and complete knowledge, that it is not a holistic teaching having no single language, common laws and methodology. But it is, at the same time, its greatest advantage. One can see it clearly dealing with complicated systems and having to resolve complex interdisciplinary problems.

Rethinking such problems from the viewpoint of philosophy has special value⁸. Unlike scientific approaches, philosophical vision of a problem is characterized by more freedom in interpreting facts, by less strict requirements to verification of propositions, by the right to speculative formulae, subjective evaluations, etc. And while, at the first glance, such explorations may seem not so valuable, they actually are.

First, a philosophical study is done in those spheres of rational knowledge where science, restricted by the field of precise knowledge, turns out to be ineffective or even useless. Let us remind that humankind has no other means of rational knowledge but science and philosophy.

Second, philosophical reflection widens the horizon of our vision of a problem; it initiates new, unusual approaches to its exploration, including scientific ones. At the same time, science, based on precise formulations and strict proofs can not afford freedom of evaluation and judgment typical for original philosophical thought.

But how can one domesticate philosophy, use its results in everyday life, how to teach it if it has no precise knowledge and does not even aim at it? And if pluralism and even completely different answers for a single question is a philosophical norm, when how one can reach monism in his\her head, meaning ordered, holistic and relatively coherent world outlook?

I would like to mention that for some modern Russian philosophers this problem remains the most complicated one. Marxist philosophy of the Soviet period wanted to be scientific and possessing exact, proven knowledge. It was also taught as such. Those studying philosophy had to learn it as a specific discipline, or as a collection of correct findings. Now, from the position of pluralism in philosophy, recognizing equal value of various philosophical ideas and concepts, such teaching approach becomes a dead end. Question arises: What to teach as philosophy and how? Which ideas and positions should be preferred in the absence of strict criteria of their truth?

This problem is extremely interesting from many international philosophers, as it was demonstrated by the World Congress in Boston. For example, basing of the experience of Socrates, Seneca and the

⁷ See: <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/PaidArch.html>

⁸ See: Global Studies Encyclopedic Dictionary. Edited by Alexander N. Chumakov, Ivan I. Mazour and William C. Gay. With a Foreword by Mikhail Gorbachev. Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam/New York, NY 2014. XI, 531 pp.

other thinkers of the past, an American philosopher Martha Nussbaum defended in her plenary report a seemingly evident suggestion, which is, nevertheless, not always taken into consideration even now. She said, that philosophy should not teach memorizing facts but to develop an ability to reflect and to put questions. The aim of philosophical classes is to teach people to think independently, to follow their own reason and not to turn to authorities in each case. From here the task of philosophy is teaching communication, dialogue, achieving not self-assertion, but search for truth. This means, according to Nussbaum, that all people deserve to be listened to⁹.

These correct and precise words once again confirm that philosophy can not be learned like discipline. It can not be digested as a sum of knowledge, ready made rules and formulae. We need a principally new approach. Teaching people we should choose the way of Paideia. This means teaching not “what should be seen”, but “where and how to look”.

Another plenary speaker of the Congress, a French philosopher Pierre Aubenque, also spoke about the educational function of philosophy. He asked: Is it possible to proceed from the barbarian human nature to the civilized one? The philosopher thinks, that human nature is dubious and only education (Paideia) makes people human in the full sense, or, as Plato used to say, Paideia opens our eyes¹⁰.

But opening eyes is not the purpose of education. Its goal is to provide the correct viewpoint. Referring to Plato, Democritus and the other prominent thinkers, Pierre Aubenque suggests, that through education one can make human nature different, having directed education against violence and cultivating human reason. The notion of Paideia draws our attention to the educational process, when children become adults. The mechanism of this process can be better understood on the basis of the Antique philosophy stating that divine human nature should be cultivated like good grape. Specifically, Protagoras, Socrates, Plato in their philosophical teaching focused on teaching not so much the art of convincing, but the art of correct judgment. We can find many interesting findings about it at the Aristotle’s, who thought that Paideia should enforce human self-development¹¹.

The Congress and its aftermath have demonstrated that the principle of Paideia, where philosophy plays the most important part, had not lost its significance in the modern times and even became more topical. Only a moral human being, physically and spiritually mature, can confront the global challenges of modernity.

Not economy or technology are dangerous for humans today but the essence of humans themselves. Having started, under objective circumstances, discussing environment, sustainable development, rational usage of nature, they are not yet guided by common concerns and interests of the world community. The world remain divided into “national compartments” where sovereign states continue to guard their independence fiercely, while humankind as a whole gradually becomes, under the influence of globalization, a single social system. Such as system needs adequate – global – governance, still not existing. The main cause of such state of affairs is that people have not yet started to think responsibly at the planetary scale, in the categories of the whole humankind. Value systems that emerged in the era of national dissociation do not correspond the modern situation any more and should be changed significantly in the short run.

This task can hardly be resolved without philosophy. First of all, because we need common and complex vision of the situation as a whole, which can only be provided by philosophy. Philosophy allows to observe social life systemically, at large and, at the same time, historically.

It should be emphasized that humanity in its progressive movement reveals two main -but opposite - vectors of development.

The first one originates from the formation of primordial people and is defined as the vector of cultural development. The second vector emerges much later and with regard to proceeding to the settled way of life, state-building and, finally, civil society formation. It is the vector of civilizational development. They have a lot in common because civilizations emerged as a result of cultural

⁹ <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/speakers.html>; See also: Itogi XX Vsemirnogo filsofskogo congressa // Voprosy Filosofii. 1999. – № 5. – P. 43.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

development of societies. Moreover, philosophy itself as a form of social consciousness, as a certain type of world outlook and way of knowledge, as the sphere of spirituality and way of life emerges as a result of world cultural and civilizational development. From the period defined by Karl Jaspers as “axial time”, philosophy has become an important part of human spiritual life and an unquestionable value.

But there is a principal difference between culture and civilization¹². In the system of social relations culture always reveals something specific, private, peculiar about this or that people being rather a distinguishing factor. Being a unifying basis for separate human communities, culture, nevertheless, divides these communities from each other on the basis of language, traditions, beliefs, way of life, folklore, everyday customs, etc. Thus, different peoples become principally divided culturally. Cultural disintegration is objective. It proceeds from cultural diversity fully analogical to the biological one. It seems evident that cultural diversity is a necessary condition for the existence of social life and can be seen as a natural law. This, mostly, causes differences between people and peoples. All of them are unique because of cultural diversity.

At the same time, we can see that these peoples reveal common forms of organization of social life. State, with its moral and legal regulators of social relations, is the most bright and elaborated of these forms. These forms characterize civilizational way of development of any society. Thus, civilization emerges as the means of smoothing cultural diversity and uniting people. Civilizational principles of organization of social life are the unifying factor for different countries and peoples.

It is important to mention, that having once entered the way of civilizational development this or that social system thus enters the path towards universal global civilization. Different peoples complete this transition differently and with different speed, but the essence of the global civilization does not change: it grows from local and regional civilizational seats. The basic contours of the global civilization have been formed by the end of the 20th century and, together with universal and mass culture, engendered by globalization, they let us speak about the emergence of a single all-human cultural-cum-civilizational system. Two opposite forces act and will always act in this complicated conglomerate of the world community: centrifugal, born by culture, and centripetal, conditioned by civilization. It is not possible to acknowledge this new reality and to build adequate global world outlook without philosophy. This makes philosophy not just a value, but an absolute value. Losing it would mean the loss of human essentiality and the prospect for human worthy future.

That is why, among other values, philosophy should be listed together with such unconditional value as freedom, because it is, in fact, spiritual freedom. At the same time, it is more than freedom, which is an absolutely necessary and needful condition for existence of any philosophy, independent on its teachings, systems, or schools.

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