MISERY OF THE CONTEMPORARY ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHY

By

Nikola S. Djurkovic

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Philosophy

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts degree in Philosophy

Supervisor: David S. Weberman

Budapest, Hungary

Year

2015

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the topic of misery of the contemporary academic philosophy. It establishes that both the contemporary academic philosophy and philosophers who are part of it are miserable. It does that by showing that academic philosophy involves a high level of stress, a lot of technical jargon and expertism, and that it is irrelevant for the societies that value freedom. Finally, it shows that philosophy cannot achieve results set by its own standards. Given the ordinary use of the word "misery", this is supposed to establish the conclusion that philosophy is miserable. In the end, other possibilities for the academic philosophy are explored.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will try to answer the question that I consider very important and that is often neglected within contemporary metaphilosophy: is doing philosophy in a professional manner in the way that it is predominant today[1] something that makes our[2] lives fulfilling? It seems to me that people start doing philosophy by engaging in an academic practice, rarely considering whether it will bring them personal gain and wisdom that it is supposed to bring. I will argue in chapter III that this is the consequence of the way that contemporary philosophy understands itself: as a project that is aimed at discovering *a priori* truth, modeled on the natural sciences, rather than as a quest for personal transformation or for wisdom. It is the finding of the objective representation of the world that is the primary task of philosophy, not solving some personal matter like finding happiness or fulfillment for the individuals doing it. This is not to say that wisdom does not matter in contemporary academic philosophy, it is only to claim that the primary focus is on finding objective truth about a given topic.

The other question which has an answer closely related to the answer on my first question that I will explore here is: "are there any results in philosophy?", in the sense that academic philosophy understands the notion of "result". If there are none, then the whole project of philosophy understood as a search for objective, community-independent truth is not something that we should use as an ideal model of philosophy. My answer to this question will be negative, and in the chapter IV I will offer arguments for this position. The

---

[1] What I mean by this will be made clearer later in this thesis. Three main characteristics of the way that most of the academic philosophy is practiced today that are expertism, technical jargon and the search for essences, and I take this as a paradigm of the philosophy today, and it is the target of my critique. I will deal with this in great detail in the last three chapters.

[2] I mean by this people who are involved in the academic practice described above.

fact that philosophy cannot achieve results by its own standards will be the most significant factor contributing to the misery of it. To this I will add other factors that make the whole of the academic practice of philosophy unsatisfactory for the persons doing it, like the high degree of specialization and technical jargon, high degree of stress and the possible irrelevance and harm for societies that value freedom.

My result will be based on the way I think the notion of "misery" works.[3] It functions in such a way that there are many factors that can make somebody or something miserable – it has many possible causes that can trigger the application of the concept. For example, a person named John can be miserable because he is sickly, does not have money, success in love, he is ugly and not very bright.[4] In some cases, such as with philosophy and its results, there is also a "necessary factor", something that is necessary, but not always sufficient, for that thing to be miserable. Not every notion works in that way – for example the notion of "being pregnant", for the best we know, has only one cause – only one thing that ultimately contributes to somebody being pregnant, while there may be other causes which led to that cause.[5] On the other hand, there are many possible causes for something being miserable, and I think that the way to convince a lot of people that something is miserable is to list sufficient amount of causes that contribute to the misery. Of course, nobody would always agree on what makes a given thing miserable, and even if all people would consent, as surely they would not, with my points about academic philosophy, not all of them would agree that those things make it miserable. Keeping this in mind I will proceed, and, in the end, I will be advancing the claim that is extremely controversial – that contemporary academic philosophy

---

[3] Here I analyze this notion with a Wittgensteinian understanding of how words of ordinary language word, which I will clarify in chapter IV.

[4] There are also degrees in which something can be miserable, but the word itself is very strong word, and it is applied when somebody suffers a lot, or if something fails in many significant aspects.

[5] Also, the notion of being pregnant does not have degrees. You are either pregnant or not. Compare with Dretske's distinction between absolute and non-absolute notions.

is a misguided project that is itself miserable, and that also makes the life of people involved in it miserable. Given the circumstances of the origin of this thesis, I will often have to use the very way of speaking and arguing that I am fighting against.

The main claims that I will be arguing for are: 1) The academic life is stressful, and lives of philosophers, since they are not significantly different from the rest of the academians, are also stressful 2) Expertism and technical jargon cause harm in academic philosophy, and there is nothing compensating for that harm 3) The search for metaphysical foundations of the academic philosophy makes it irrelevant and possibly harmful for the certain societies and 4) There are no results in contemporary academic philosophy in a sense required for academic philosophy to work as a project aimed at achieving truth. All of these statements are supposed to establish both the misery of the academic philosophy and the misery of the philosophers who are part of it. If project lacks the desired results, if it is stressful to participate in it, and if it is not perceived as relevant by the rest of society, it is not controversial to say that the project is miserable. If the people who are part of that project are under stress, cannot express themselves fully because of the expertims and the jargon, their work is not relevant for the rest of society and they fail to achieve the results that they aim for, it is not controversial to say that, as long as they are doing that, they are miserable.

My first claim, that there is a lot of stress involved in contemporary academic life, I will rely on empirical research "Higher Stress", conducted by Gail Kinman and Siobhan Wray. Since I take it that philosophers are not significantly different from the rest of the academics, I will argue that the results of the research also apply to them.

My second point will be based on Feyerabend's article "Experts in a Free Society" and his book *Against Method.* I will use them to demonstrate how two factors – expertism and technical jargon make, all things being equal, life in modern academic community worse.

In other words, we lose something if we become experts and use technical jargon, and that loss should be compensated at some other end.

My third point will rely on Rorty's work, and I will try to show how academic philosophy is irrelevant and possibly harmful for societies guided by the ideal of increasing freedom. He suggests that the philosophical urge to provide foundations for the whole culture which is independent of any culture is what alienate philosophy from liberal society, and that it can lessen the degree of freedom in that society (Rorty, 1982: 168). If we follow Rorty in understanding that every standard of justification is tied to some community, the research program aimed at finding permanent solutions for our problems will become obsolete. I think that he is right in claiming that the distance from the rest of society, caused by the search for metaphysical and eternal grounds in philosophy, makes philosophical life troublesome and makes few people besides philosophers see their results as relevant. In this part I will also present Rorty's interpretation of the epistemological paradigm – which is important in understanding the nature of the contemporary academic philosophy, and then discuss his philosophical alternative which he calls ironism. I will also show how pragmatically interpreted science can be relevant within liberal society, while current academic philosophy stays irrelevant.

With all these, I will show only that the life of modern academic philosophers involves a number of factors that contribute to misery. However, this will not be enough to show that the lives of academic philosophers are miserable in general, since the case with philosophy is such that the question whether philosophy provides us with any results carries great importance. It might be the case that the results reached by academic philosophical inquiry are so meaningful that the joy, satisfaction or even dignity gained by attaining them massively outweighs the suffering involved. I will call this the redeeming quality of

philosophy. In other words, although academic philosopher will spend a great deal of his time under stress, working on projects that are maybe not his first choice, reading papers written in highly specific and technical jargon, the results reached by that practice are admirable enough that they are worth the suffering, and when they are reached, they give philosophers significant gratification. One could argue that, although there may be forms of life that are more playful and less stressful, none is so pleasant that it can give us such deep and meaningful results.

I will exclude possible redeeming factor of philosophy in the last chapter of my thesis. I will show that there are no results, in the strict sense, in modern academic philosophy, and by "strict sense" I will mean true in the way that statements of science and ordinary life are true and that academic philosophers want their statements to be true.

This philosophical position is inspired by Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy, and it claims there are no meaningful philosophical problems that can be solved, nor that we can even start to move towards their solutions. I will demonstrate that, even though philosophical problems carry great importance for us, they originate from the natural tendency of humans to extend the use of their language beyond the limits of meaningful conversation and therefore should be abandoned. I will also show how academic philosophy tries to solve them by applying a more rigorous method that ultimately fails because of the wrong conception of how ordinary language functions.

In exposing Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy I will rely especially on *Philosophical Investigations* §80-§130. He understands philosophy as "a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language" (Wittgenstein, 2009: §109). For him, the task of philosophy is not the search for the truth or search for the foundation of our knowledge, but avoiding confusion with the use of our language (Wittgenstein, 2009: §119).

5

That is why he understands philosophy as a therapy aimed at freeing traditional philosophers from their philosophical problems, which relied on use of examples, rather than as a systematical research project (Wittgenstein, 2009: §133). If Wittgenstein is right, then the whole practice of contemporary academic philosophy is misguided, as it is not the task of philosophy to aim at the kind of truth that is similar to scientific truth, but to avoid confusions. Philosophers do not do anything to add to the knowledge established by natural sciences and mathematics; rather, they **know how** to resolve misunderstandings that originated with misuse of our language. Besides relying on Wittgenstein's metaphilosphy, I will also use his understanding of meaning explained in terms of use, and his interpretation of definitions as something that could be given for most words only in a loose way, relying on family resemblances, to show how the traditional task of search for essences is misguided.

By establishing my last point, I think there will be enough material to convince most people that academic philosophy is a miserable affair and that the form in which it is practiced today should radically change. To sum up my final results in the most controversial manner: I will argue that academic philosophy is a stressful, technical, narrowly focused, irrelevant practice that does not give us any significant results at all, and therefore, it is nothing but a misery, and that philosopher that are part of it fare no better.

This chapter will offer a brief summary of the results of the empirical research "Higher Stress" conducted in 2013 by Gail Kinman and Siobhan Wray. It will not contain any original philosophical ideas, but it should not be considered less important because of this. I will summarize the results and analyze how they tell a very dark story about the level of stress and unhappiness in high level academia, and since philosophers are not significantly different from the rest of the academia, I think this stress will be an important contributing factor to the misery of philosophers.

This research was conducted among the members of University and College Union (UCU), which is the largest union of professional academics in UK, uniting both lecturers and researchers. It was a questionnaire made of 49 statements total, like: "I have to work very intensively", "I have unrealistic time pressures", "Relationships at work are strained", "I find my job stressful", etc, and the respondent had to rate her agreement on a scale from "very low" (or "strongly disagree", or "never") to "very high" (or "strongly agree" or "always"). Out of the 24 030 members who participated in filling the questionnaire, 14 667 were working in higher education (Kinman, Wray, 2013: 11). I take this as a relevant basis for taking the results of this research seriously. In order to object to this, one could argue on that there is something peculiar about academic practice in UK, and about those 14 677 people questioned, and that we should not make generalizations about all academians based on the sample from UK. I will not respond to this possible argument here, since it is not very relevant for the entire thesis, but I do not consider that it is based on plausible presumptions.

One of the most important results of the research is that work in high level academia is very stressful: "Nearly three-quarters of the sample agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I find my job stressful" (Kinman, Wray, 2013: 3)". Also, more than 50% of the people who participated said that the level of their stress was high or very high, and more than 33% often or always were under the levels of stress they deemed unacceptable (*Ibid.*). Since "stress" is the notion that works in a significant way like "misery", there are many contributing factors to it.[6] One of the important factors is that working hours are very high at high level academia, and the time for private life is low. As the summary of research says: "The majority of respondents from HE [higher education] appeared unable to set acceptable boundary between their work and home life. More than half indicated that they often neglected their personal needs because of the demands of their work (*Ibid.*)." The two others are high pressure in terms of unrealistic time tables and high demands (*Ibid.,* p. 14.). Academics are often expected to complete a lot of intellectually demanding work in a little time. The last significant factor that contributes to the stress is that it is often (but not always) easy to find strained personal relationships, or the lack of them, among the people working in academia. For example, 37.8% of people who participated said that they often felt "friction or anger between the colleagues", and only 4.3% said "never" (*Ibid.,* p. 22). The other problems that appear on a moderate scale are the lack of support and respect, and time to listen to the problems of other colleagues.

All of these factors contribute to stress, and the high level of stress significantly contributes to the misery of something. In other words, people will often say that a stressful occupation is a miserable one, if there is not something that compensates for it, like a great salary, a great practical contribution to the world or discovering important truths. However,

---

[6] But misery involves necessary failure, which stress does not. For example, the number one tennis player in the world or the president of the big country could be under the great deal of stress, but still not miserable, because he is very successful.

since I think philosophers do not achieve any of these, as I will show in chapters that will follow, stress should be taken as one of the things that make academic philosophy miserable.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will be devoted to analyzing how expertism and technical jargon in academic disciplines can make academic life worse in general, and why they contribute to misery in philosophy in particular. I will use arguments from Feyerabend's "Experts in a Free Society" and *Against Method*, which were directed against a certain methodological approach in science, and apply them to philosophy. The position that I will reach here will not be as radical as Feyerabend's – that expertism and technical jargon are always bad[7] – I will only claim that there is a significant loss if we model our discipline according to demands of these two, and that some gain at some other end should out-weigh that loss.

2.2. TECHNICAL JARGON AND EXPERTISM – DOUBLE TRADE OFF

The first thing that I would like to establish is that expertism and technical jargon are dominant throughout modern academia. It is not very controversial to claim that experts in contemporary academic disciplines, either natural or social, tend to achieve excellence in a narrow field at the expense of balanced development. This is the so called division of labor in science, where one scientist works within her research group on a very confined subject matter, in order to achieve the most accurate results possible, and then the combined results of the different research groups are supposed to give us the best science that we humans can build. This also means that some restrictions of writing style and vocabulary will have to be dictated by the academic community, so that the results of the different research groups could be combined in a uniform project.

---

[7]The difference between Feyerabend's position and mine is based on the fact that, in the case of any science, he does not believe that there is any method or epistemological rule which will always give us desired results (this position is known as methodological anarchism). Because of this, the jargon and the expertims are always bad and the progress of the science comes from the ability of creative people with wide range of interests to discover new methods, not from the strict following of the academic practices. On the other hand, I do not say that sticking to the academic method cannot lead us to the great results in some science; I only say that it makes things worse in some way, and that those results can possibly out-weight the badness of it in some cases.

The dominance of the jargon and the expertism Feyerabend describes in a more emphatic and controversial way (Feyerabend, 1999: 113), but I choose to state them here less controversially. According to him, expertism – which includes narrowness of a work field and the use of technical jargon - causes double damage, because both lives of the members of the academic community and their work become impoverished in important aspects. The work suffers because it lacks humanness – the ability to directly relate to what matters for us as human beings with wide general interests and a need to communicate personal views and express our feelings. As Feyerabend says about expertism: "Who takes care of the quality of the emotions? Who watches those parts of our language which are supposed to bring people together more closely – where one gives comfort, understanding and perhaps a little personal criticism (*Ibid.,* 113)?" This makes the lives of the experts worse because, once they master technical jargon and spend most of their time using it, it will be hard for them to express themselves by using normal, humane and emotional language: "/…/ they cannot speak straight any more, their linguistic talents and sensibilities have been distorted to such an extent that one asks oneself whether they will ever be able to write normal English again (*Ibid.,* 116)."

However, although these restrictions can be bad for style and general appeal of their work and for their livers, they do not need to be significant restrictions, as long as 1.) the advance of that subject matter is primary 2.) they do not exclude anything essential from a subject matter. It seems, broadly speaking, that there is a necessary tradeoff at a certain historical point in the development of science. Either science will be more narrow and technical, but achieve better results, or it will be more vivid and humane, i.e., more suited for the individuals creating it, but then all individual contribution to science will be too general and it will be hard to bring together all those efforts expressed in different vocabularies. One

11

could argue that there is no tradeoff, but that expertism and jargon are always bad science only when methodological pluralism is adopted – the idea that every important discovery requires a change in method – but I do not want to fully endorse that position when it is applied to science. The only place where I want to agree completely is that expertism and technical jargon are bad, and that there should be something compensating for their badness. To provide additional support for this, I will now go through Feyerabend's excellent examples from science, which illustrate in a good way his point about the jargon and then I will offer my own examples from philosophy for the same purpose.

2.3. CASE STUDY FROM SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

Although Feyerabend uses illustrations from science, I think the equivalent occurs in philosophy, and I will demonstrate that with my own examples, after I finish with his. He compares reports about discoveries from the great scientists before science was professionalized, and work from contemporary academic science. The great scientists that he analyzes are Galileo and Kepler. Galileo talks about his development of the telescope and watching of the Moon as a charming personal story, full of concrete colorful terms:

> About 10 months ago a report reached my ears that a certain Dutchman had constructed a spyglass by means of which visible objects, though very distant from the eye of the observer, were distinctly seen as if nearby. Of this truly remarkable effect several experiences were related/…/ There is another thing which I must not omit, for I believe it not without certain wonder, this is that almost in the centre of the moon there is a cavity larger than all the rest, and perfectly round in shape (Galileo, 1957: 28-9)…

Kepler writes about Galileo's discoveries in a similar fashion:

12

I cannot help wondering about the meaning of that large circular cavity in what I usually call the left corner of the mouth. Is it a work of a nature, or of a trained hand? Suppose that there are living beings on the moon. It surely stands to reason that the inhabitants express the character of their dwelling place, which has much bigger mountains and valleys than our earth has. Consequently, being endowed with very massive bodies they also construct gigantic projects (Kepler, 1965: 28)…

Feyerabend rightly points out that these authors talk in a lively and exciting way about the dead and remote matter, like someone would talk to a friend, often letting their imagination wander freely (Feyerabend, 1999: 115). Then he gives examples from a book *Human Sexual Response* by the contemporary authors W. H. Masters and V. E. Johnson that they wrote within the contemporary academic community. Their subject matter is not something dead and distant but something humane and of general interest:

In view of the pervicacious gonadal urge in human beings, it is not a little curious that science develops its sole timidity about the pivotal point of psychology of sex/…/ Usually physical exhaustion alone terminates such an active masturbatory session/…/ The male will be infinitely more effective if he encourages vocalization on her part (Masters and Johnson, 1996: p. v – these words are themselves quotes from R. L. Dickinson and H.H. Pierson, "The Average Sex Life of American Women").

There are two problems with language like this, according to Feyerabend. First, this does not sound like normal English language anymore – "sole timidity", "encourage vocalization" – these are not words that anybody would use in a normal conversation. Second, the supposed justification for the technical jargon does not work, since it is not more accurate either – the male will not really be "infinitely more effective". To sum up, this is a depersonalized, dull and complicated way to say something that could be said in an easy and a clear way

(Feyerabend, 1999: 116). Given my experience with the works of authors from different fields it is not always the case that writers use such a terrible language with the greater inaccuracy than that of ordinary language. They can be technical and dry, but sometimes they are just using the jargon that they share with their colleagues, that seems lifeless to an outsider, but that is easy to understand and full of meaning for a professional. However, I still agree that the language of many papers and books written by professional academics lack that direct relation to our everyday lives, that is, the way they speak can hardly engage people on a personal level and make is think that there is something important going on.

That the same is true in philosophy could be shown if we consider the work of authors who wrote before the professionalization of philosophy and compare it to the works of contemporary authors. Let's take a look at this passage from Schopenhauer's[8] *World as a Will and Representation:*

> Here, on the lowest level, we see the will presenting itself as a blind impulse, a dark, dull driving, remote from any direct knowledge. This is the simplest and the weakest mode of its objectification. But it still appears in the whole of inorganic nature as this sort of blind impulse and striving in the absence of knowledge, in all the original forces that physics and chemistry are busy seeking out, and whose laws they are trying to learn. Each of these forces presents itself to us in millions of identical, lawlike appearances which do not register a single trace of individual character, but rather are simply multiplied in time and space, i.e. through the *principium individuationis*, as an image is multiplied in the facets of the glass (Schopenhauer, 2010: 174).

---

[8] Technically, Schopenhauer was a university professor and, in that sense, an academic philosopher, but he wrote before the high level of the professionalization of the academia, and the development of the strict standards of the contemporary academic publishing, so he is significantly different in his writings from the contemporary philosophers.

14

Make no mistake, this passage is about the heavyweight metaphysical theory. But still, half way through it, we cannot help imagining how that "blind impulse and dull driving" are at work in the basics of nature, and we cannot but form an image of a scientist trying to figure out the laws that bind those millions senseless appearances together. The theory presented here is interesting and relevant for our understanding of the whole universe – it explains it in terms of the will, and we want to hear how that story continues. Now, let us take a look at the piece from the contemporary academic literature:

> The distinction between a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge has come under attack in recent literature. Here are some examples/…/ The target of the attack is a particular concept – the concept of a priori knowledge – or, alternatively, a particular distinction – the distinction between the a priori and a posteriori knowledge. The attacks are related but different: two are directed at the coherence of their target; two at its significance.
>
> Evaluating the attacks requires answering two questions/…/ The attacks miss their target because they fail to correctly articulate the target distinction. (Cassulo, 2013: 249)

Note that this is from the beginning of the "Articulating the A priori – A Posteriori Distinction" by Albert Cassulo – a chapter in *The A Priori in Philosophy* that is a collection of the articles on that distinction. First, since this is the introduction to this text, we would expect some explanation why we should care. But we find only: "The distinction between a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge has come under attack in recent literature." So what! Is that literature interesting? Does it deal with questions of a great significance for us? We find nothing here. The only thing we find is a typical academic move of providing the definition of the target and explaining the kind of attacks, written in a very academic and dull

15

language. On the other hand, in Schopenhauer we find colorful phrases like "blind impulse", "trying to learn" and "as an image is multiplied in the facets of the glass" used to present theory that answers the most important question about the universe – what is its essence.

From a research of more examples it could be demonstrated that philosophers like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Plato, Hume and even Aristotle and Kant wrote often in a technical way, but they would frequently include colorful metaphors, vivid examples, or personal remarks about the meaning of the problems they examined, which were really important, and that this is excluded in contemporary academic philosophy as irrelevant to the subject matter and to the method. It also seems that it requires creativity and ingenuity, something that cannot be taught, and that that could explain why we do not see them so often.

With these examples I have shown how the technical jargon and the expertism work in the contemporary academic practice and what is the harm that they cause. However, the general point that I want to make is only that every technicality and every form of jargon makes things a lot worse all being equal, and that if we lose something at some point by using them, we must gain something at the other end. We often gain in precision and clarity in philosophy by using modern academic jargon but we lose in personal gain (wisdom) and we lose in artfulness, imaginativeness and the ability for personal expression. This shows that it is not easy to justify adopting jargon, although it could be justified if the results of that jargon are worthwhile. Given my position about the results in philosophy (there are none – see chapter IV), I think that we gain nothing but misery by adopting such jargon.

2.4. EXPERTS AND THE VIRTUOUS LIFE

To provide further support for my argument that expertism and technical jargon are bad all things being equal, I will follow Feyerabend and frame what I have said above in terms of Aristotle's virtue theory. Aristotle often stressed balance in life. According to him,

16

man[9] can live a fulfilled life only if he does not follow a single occupation to the point that it would create disbalance and hinder his practice of virtue:

> /…/any occupation, art, or science, which makes the body or soul or mind of the freeman less fit for the practice or exercise of virtue, is vulgar; wherefore we call those arts vulgar which tend to deform the body, and likewise all paid employments, for they absorb and degrade the mind. There are also some liberal arts quite proper for a freeman to acquire, but only in a certain degree, and if he attends to them too closely, in order to attain perfection in them, the same evil effects will follow (Politics, Book VIII, part 2).

The free and fulfilled man has to enjoy many different things such as politics, philosophy, poetry, love, drama, geometry etc. It is concrete experience, that comes from the interaction with various subject matters, that gives meaning to our lives. It should vary as much as possible so that a person will experience balanced development and become virtuous. Any science or discipline which makes us not apt for virtue is vulgar. From this theory, Feyerabend draws a conclusion that expertism is not fit for virtue and vulgar because experts become too devoted to a narrow field and the one way of talking. This conclusion might seem plausible but we must keep in mind the context, that of the 5th Century B.C. Athens, in which Aristotle's theory was developed. If we do so it will be hard to demand that, given the drastic changes of society from to the modern times, standards of virtue should be completely the same. That is, given the way in which contemporary society works, it will be archaic at least, to demand the same level of versatility from every person. Nonetheless, it seems that Aristotle's point about the practice of an expert still applies when we talk about personal gain from doing theoretical work, and that modern experts, especially in philosophy, could be

---

[9] Of course, Aristotle thought that this kind of fulfillment is not achievable by woman, or a slave.

more versatile. Concerning those deep and personal questions such as those about what is right or wrong, what is the essence of the universe, what is beauty, a contemporary philosopher will not get as many answers as ancients or moderns did. This is because those questions have either been made more narrow and divided in many sub-questions, or they were replaced by some other questions that emerged as important in contemporary academic philosophy. Also, the demands of the search for the permanent answers, together with the academic practice of today, made getting interesting answers much harder in contemporary philosophy. Concerning this, we can make a small thought experiment and ask: whether you would be naturally curious about the issues debated in contemporary philosophy, if the whole academic community was removed? There are no people who take these problems as important, there is none of your involvement in the project, no academic prestige, no salary etc. I think that many philosophers would find in that situation many questions of the contemporary academic philosophy unnecessary, and many answers not satisfying enough[10]. However, this is not yet to say that these problems are not really important. This just shows how we judge them on the personal level. But further arguments should be provided why we care so much about our personal judgments.

To counter the point that I made above, it could be said that it is not a person but the whole project that matters most. That is by making philosophy more technical and by dividing the labor we can all make highly sophisticated contributions to the whole, and although no person will be able to know all of philosophy today, philosophy would still be very serious and complex set of true and well justified statements about philosophical

---

[10] Consider for example, the very intricate debate whether Locke was a materialist, or the debate about the right definition of the "knowledge", that started with Gettier problem. The questions about Locke's materialism and the definition of the knowledge were interesting and significant in the first place, but I would say that they became too technical today, and their solution seems too far away, for a curious intellectual to become excited.

matters. It could be argued that this is greatly preferable to an imprecise and too general method that brings greater personal gain.

2.5. NO TRADE OFF IN PHILOSOPHY

Feyerabend would not think that arguments like the one stated above would work, because he is a methodological anarchist. He believes that in science and philosophy following certain technical methodological approach and its jargon can work only as far as circumstances permit, which is not very often - "/.../given any rule, however "fundamental" or "rational", there are always circumstances when it is advisable not only to ignore the rule, but to adopt the opposite (Feyerabend, 1993: 14) ". He thinks that every new and important discovery required the development of the new methodology and the new technical way of speaking. Thus, according to him, there is no possible gain in jargon and expertims in any discipline. I believe only that there is no gain in philosophy in particular, because of the arguments that will be presented in chapter IV, and I think that line of thought developed above is not a good answer in choosing how to do philosophy.

In chapter IV I will use Wittgenstein's arguments to demonstrate that there are no results in philosophy, in sense that would justify the use of technical jargon and expertism. That is, in the sense according to which many philosophers today understand both science and philosophy as research projects aimed at giving a true representation of the certain aspects of the world (for science – empirical aspect and for philosophy – conceptual aspect). The jargon and the expertism are justified according to this picture, because they yield better results in representing these parts of the reality. But, if that picture is wrong for philosophy some other kind of justification is needed for the jargon and expertism. I intend later to show that this picture is wrong, and that there could be no other justification. And that was the goal of this chapter – to show how much is at stake in adopting technical academic jargon and

expertism (relevance, creativity, imagination, humanness). If I am correct in my later arguments about the lack of results in philosophy, there is hardly anything gained by using that jargon, and it will be a significant contributing factor to the misery of academic philosophy.

CHAPTER III - RORTY AND THE IRRELEVANCE OF THE ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHY[11]

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will use Rorty's metaphilosophy to show how academic philosophy has become irrelevant and possibly harmful for the societies with ideologies that can change easily, and that are thus able to encompass more freedom. I will also try to make the very notion of the academic philosophy much clearer, because I will explain its tendency to search for eternal metaphysical grounds of our way of life. That is, I will take the philosophy which is based on the epistemological paradigm to be the exemplary case of the academic philosophy. The conclusion I draw in the end is that being irrelevant and possibly harmful is one very significant source of the misery for the project of academic philosophy and its participants.

3.2. FREEDOM, IRRELEVANCE AND THE POSSIBLE HARM

First, I must explain what it means that philosophy is irrelevant for society and why that irrelevance should concern academic philosophers. Maybe a lot of current societies got its standards wrong and could use a lot of help from the professional academic philosophy. If that is the case, the irrelevance of philosophers should not be something that they should be blamed for, and their state would rather be that of a tragic hero than that of a miserable person. It is also unclear what "society" stands for. There are many societies in the modern world, and we should be suspicious about the idea that something interesting could be said about all of them. Surely, Chinese society is different from American and American is different from the society of Papua New Guinea. And even within a given society, say, American, there are many different groups, like Christian fundamentalists and bourgeois intellectuals. It would be hard to argue that academic philosophy is irrelevant for all of these

---

[11] Some parts of this chapter are inspired by my paper called "Rorty and the Division of Philosophy".

societies and all groups because there is no common core that is shared by all these societies and groups. However, none of these is my goal here.

The societies that I will talk about here are those which are guided by the ideal of freedom.[12] And the irrelevance and the possible harm will consist in the fact that academic philosophy cannot contribute to those societies, by increasing the degree of freedom, and it can even block its progress. In the history of the development of Western societies we have seen the growth in acceptance of atheism, nominalsim and historicism, and the decline of religious fundamentalism, Platonism and the belief in the eternal. I believe that these changes lead to the breakdown of the absolute world view and provided a historical background for greater freedom and the greater acceptance of the other worldviews. We give more freedom of speech and expression to others because we are, just as they, the products of our historical surroundings, and that there is nothing ultimate which makes us right and makes them wrong. In weakening the rigid ideologies in recent history, philosophy was relevant. But for the future increase of freedom, and loosening of the ideologies, philosophy has become irrelevant because it searches for standards which lie beyond any culture, and which ground every possible culture. Its metaphysical tendency to ground our moral and our way of speaking in something eternal could present an obstacle for further expansion of freedom, and could even be harmful for the ability of free expression in a given society. If we fix our standards once and for all, it is possible that we might exclude people that do not share those standards from the free society. One objection, which could even come from the people who accept freedom as the highest value, is that it was exactly the discovery of common metaphysical core – the

---

[12] Concerning the possible question: "why is freedom primary", I would agree with Mill that "the burden of proof is supposed to be with those who are against liberty; who contend for any restriction or prohibition…. The *a priori* assumption is in favor of freedom…" (1963, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* vol. 21: 262). The other possible candidates like justice and happiness, are, in my opinion, only fully realizable in a free society. That is, one cannot be really happy or really just, if he does not respect freedom of the others, and if his freedom is not respected.

essence of human beings – that lead to spread of liberalism and human rights. For example, it was the discovery that whites and blacks are essentially the same that led to significant decrease of racism. However, I find this theory highly implausible. If we would take a closer look at the history, we would see that it was not any metaphysical essence that led to decrease in racism, but slowly paying more attention to the fact that blacks suffer in the same way as we do, and listening to their expression of their troubles. It was their ability to express their pain in language that we can understand, in a way that is close to our hearts that made us equal, not the eternal metaphysical rights that exist independent of every human. But, surely before the freedom was the most important in the society, for example, in Medieval Europe, academic philosophy was relevant, and certainly not harmful. In the remaining of this chapter, I will sketch how philosophy failed to follow the developments of the rest of the society. In order to understand how this has happened, we need to understand what the dominant paradigm of the academic philosophy is, which I will call the "epistemological paradigm".

3.3. MIND AND THE MIRROR OF NATURE

In this section I will list the three major characteristics of the epistemological paradigm, which represent the summary of Rorty's analysis in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity,* and *Consequences of Pragmatism*. Of those three characteristics, the third is the most important, and the other two will depend on it. Along the way, I will also offer Rorty's critique of epistemological paradigm. These characteristics will show in what way philosophy based on the epistemological paradigm is irrelevant and how it can be harmful for the societies which value freedom.

The first characteristic is **representationalism**. It can be summed up as: "the essential feature of the X is its capacity to represent reality". "X" had varied interpretations through the

history of philosophy. In modern philosophy it was mind or ideas, and in early analytic philosophy "X" was language. But it is important that the theory contains a dualism between reality and something which represents that reality (Rorty, 1991: 151). This dualism is significant for establishing genuine research field for academic philosophy. The inquiry into the workings of the human mind or language is supposed to tell us when our ideas or propositions represent reality correctly, and when it fails to do so. It is also supposed to tell us which claims that are supposed to be true are really true, by tracing them back to pure sense or intellectual data, or logical atoms, and explain how we constructed them. This project was followed in modern philosophy by a conjecture of so-called privileged access: it claims that each person has the greatest clarity in accessing her own mind, and that she can reach perfectly justified beliefs that way. In analytic philosophy it was the apriority of logic that gives certainty to the results of this task.

The second characteristic is **foundationalism**. Foundationalism is a position which states that there are certain statements that are the basis of our system of a beliefs, that they are non-inferentially justified, and that the rest of our beliefs are justified if they can be inferentially related to them. This idea was important in the epistemological paradigm because its members thought that **only** a philosopher using an *a priori* method can discover those absolutely certain basic beliefs which constitute the foundations of our entire culture. Philosophy was conceived as a foundational discipline. Philosophical investigation into the nature of the mind or language determines the starting point of every other human inquiry. As Rorty says in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature:*

Philosophy as a discipline thus sees itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art or religion. It purports to do this

24

on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of the knowledge and of mind. Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of the culture because culture is the assemble of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims/.../ Philosophy's central concern is to be a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (Rorty, 1979: 3).

This is the picture according to which philosophy is the tribunal of rationality that judges the value of all human creations. It is important to highlight that the only value in the epistemological paradigm is knowledge, and that entire culture − present, past and future − should be shaped in a way to increase the amount of knowledge we have. It is the goal of other sciences to gather the knowledge about different subject-matters, but only philosophy can say if that is real knowledge, by discovering something permanent and eternal which corresponds to it. Rorty, in the need for philosophy to provide eternal metaphysical foundations, sees the need that originated with the scientific revolution to show that the results of new age science are legitimate claims about the world while statements from the Bible should not be taken literally. Although providing philosophical foundations for science by Kant, Hume, Descartes and Locke was an excellent tool to convince society of its value, Rorty thinks that, once the victory of science is secured, there is no need for philosophical foundations. Philosophy stayed bewitched by an old understanding of its role. It is interesting to see Rorty's comparison of the outdated need for foundations and the contemporary need for holistic linking in a modern, liberal and democratic society:

25

What people do believe is that it would be good to hook up or views about democracy, mathematics, physics, God, and everything else into a coherent story about how everything hangs together/.../ this holistic process of readjustment is just muddling through on a large scale. It has nothing to do with Platonic-Kantian notion of grounding. That notion involves finding constraints, demonstrating necessities, finding immutable principles to which to subordinate oneself. When it turns out that suggested constraints, necessities, and principles are plentiful as blackberries, nothing changes except the attitude of the rest of the culture towards philosophers. Since the time of Kant, it has become more and more apparent to nonphilosophers that a really professional philosopher can supply a philosophical foundation for just about anything (Rorty, 1982: 168).[13]

Academic philosophy, according to Rorty, lost its connection with modern liberal society because it still searches for explanations of our ordinary beliefs (about things like mind and morality) and scientific beliefs that would resemble the results of an *a priori* science, and be grounded in external objective reality and set once and for all.

The third characteristic is of the epistemological paradigm is **an objective conception of the truth**. The idea of an objective truth presupposes that our propositions should represent the states of affairs exactly as they are, independent of the any subjective elements of the representation. This idea was developed in philosophy by Plato and proved to be useful

---

[13] Note that this passage presumes something that will be explained later in this paper. If we try to "hook up or views about democracy, mathematics, physics, God, and everything else into a coherent story about how everything hangs together" we might need to make some of those views foundational, because such is the nature of these views that they ought to be structured in that way. In the next section I will explain why Rorty thinks that that is not the case, by using arguments from Quine and Sellars.

during the enlightenment as it was crucial in the secularisation of the society. Belief in the words of Revelation was replaced by a belief in the equations of science, because philosophers argued that what science says really resembles objective reality. However, according to Rorty, it is now a significant obstacle in the further secularisation of the society. That is because there is still an authority which is above us humans, and that is permanent, observer-independent objective reality. It is easy to see how representationalism and foundationalism are dependent on the idea of the objective truth. It is the objective state of affairs that our ideas or statements represent, and that grounds the truth of every other proposition.

Rorty thinks the conception of the objective truth should be replaced with the pragmatic conception of the truth, which he borrows from James and Dewey, and that society would, through further secularisation, focus more on our fellow humans, and less on representing some external, cold, hard state of affairs (Rorty, 1999: 27). In Rorty's pragmatic understanding of the truth there is no privileged, completely correct, description of the world, which is forced upon us by the world itself. What matters is how what we call true could be used to make our future better. And better could be explained only within a context of a certain society and its way of talking (Rorty, 1999: 28). Also, the truth in a Rortian sense can be defined only in relation to a certain community, and it is the consensus of that community in accordance with its practice of justification. The rationality of these practices can be grounded only circularly or not be grounded at all. But what is crucial is that they **work** for a given community – they match its goals. This could be highlighted by a Darwinian point made by James and Dewey: that the state of doubt is a state of discomfort, and that finding truth is the end of that discomfort and beginning of an action. However, it is important to note that just mere consensus of a community wouldn't be enough – because this would lead

Rorty towards relativism. This was pointed out by Gary Gutting, in his example of the millennium year. Almost an entire community, save for one person, might wrongly think that the third millennium started in the year 2000, while that one person thinks that it started in 2001. That person would still be right, because her justification is in accordance with the rules of counting years and millennia and therefore with the practice of the justification of that community (Gutting, 2003: 51). However, what is important here is that the external component of the truth is completely defined in terms of the practice of a given community. There is nothing besides that for Rorty which decides what is true and what is false.

And to think that there is presents a source of the irrelevance and the possible harm of the philosophy based on the epistemological paradigm. Since societies based on freedom act, or rather, should act, in a way that does not take any description of the world as final, philosophy which searches for final answers is irrelevant, and if those final answers are taken too seriously, it could be even harmful. In society based on freedom, no scientist needs a philosopher to ground his theories in objective reality; no freedom activist needs a philosopher to provide foundations for human rights in objective moral facts; no art critic needs a philosopher to ground his critique in one and only true theory of art. That is because most people in those societies do not search for a complex system of philosophical foundations developed in highly technical language, but for something that could improve that society immediately and their work immediately.

At this point there is still something to be demonstrated, and that is, why it is futile to practise philosophy within a framework of the epistemological paradigm. So far I have only established that academic philosophy is irrelevant for the societies that rely on freedom. But, one could argue, that this could be used as a good argument against that kind of liberal

society, since academic philosophy represents things right. That is, the ideal society should be one where academic philosophy is relevant.

Arguments against the epistemological paradigm that Rorty uses are based on Sellars' and Quine's work. I will not analyze them in detail here, but just present them quickly. I will also offer Wittgenstein's arguments why epistemological paradigm is wrong in the last chapter, which I think are the strongest of them all. The result of both Quine's and Sellar's arguments is the philosophical position which Rorty calls "linguistic holism". It could be summed up in following statements:

1.) Knowledge can be expressed only within a certain language;

2.) Language works in such way that a justification of its statements is holistic, and we learn to justify through practice.

This is a summary of Sellars' attack on the myth of the given (in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind),* and Quine's attacks on the analytic/synthetic distinction and reductionism (in "Two Dogmas of empiricism"). The most important point of it is that there are no statements in science, logic or ordinary language that are immune from revision. And the idea of objective knowledge presented above, the most significant part of the epistemological paradigm, is incompatible or at least completely redundant in linguistic holism, since there are no statements that are true once and for all, and that will be self-evident for every rational being at any time, nor is there any need to talk about metaphysical reality that makes these statements true. If we adopt this form of holism, Rorty's pragmatic theory of the truth seems to be a natural consequence. As Sellars said: "For a proposition to be true is for it to be assertable, correctly assertable, that is, in accordance with the relevant

semantic rules and the basis of such additional thought unspecified". (Sellars, 1967: 101). I will not develop this argument any further here.

In the rest of this chapter, I will show how Rorty's alternative to the epistemological paradigm – ironism – presents a way of doing philosophy and can influence society in a positive way. I will also explain how science can still be relevant for the ideal liberal society, if we adopt Rortian alternative.

3.4. IRONY AND THE LIBERAL SOCIETY

In order to see how Rorty's pragmatism and ironism can contribute to the liberal society, we need first to provide more precise definition of ironism. But, to do so, we first need to see Rorty's definition of the final vocabulary. It is a:

/…/a set of words which all humans employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives/…/ to formulate praise of their friends and contempt for their enemies/…/ [This vocabulary] is "final" in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse (Rorty, 1989: 73).

In short, final vocabulary is the one possible practice of talking, which is complete in sense that there is no way to justify that vocabulary outside of it. Concerning the notion of the final vocabulary, the ironist is someone who fulfils following three conditions:

1.) **Condition of tolerance** – she has equal appreciation for her own and other possible final vocabularies.

2.) **Condition of apprehending finitude of her own final vocabulary** – she understands that her own vocabulary cannot justify itself.

30

3.) **Condition of not believing in matching objective reality** - she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to the objective reality than any other.

As with the epistemological paradigm, the third condition here is the crucial one. Because, if her vocabulary was matching the objective reality, there would be little to appreciate in other vocabularies – possibly their poetic value – and the problem of the justification of her own vocabulary would be solved by that reality. With these three characteristics, we can explain what is the *irony* of ironism. It is attitude taken towards the final vocabularies, both ours and of other people. If we follow three conditions stated above, we will not take vocabularies we respect too seriously, and with a healthy dose of irony, because we realise that they can always be redescribed to look bad in terms of some other final vocabulary. However, as I will argue bellow, I think that Rorty places too much importance on the possibility of redescription, and that the dose of irony in real situations should rather be mild.

Ironism again depends on accepting arguments that support linguistic holism and pragmatic theory of the truth. Turning to the link between freedom and ironism, it is clear that the society where ironism is dominant will be freer in terms of letting other people adopt whichever final vocabularies they like, and allowing them to express themselves in terms of these vocabularies. If we apply this to practical situations, different worldviews – like scientific and Christian – and different political positions – like conservativism and communism – would all be interpreted as rational and present possible candidates in the development of the liberal society. However, that is not to say that they are all equally good in a given liberal society, because the scientific worldview may serve that society far better and agree with the practice of justification of that society in a significantly greater degree. Still, there are two problems with ironism interpreted as a possible ideology of a society:

1.) How can ideology of society be based on ironism?

2.) How can ironist condemn unusually cruel societies, like Nazi Germany or ancient Spartan society?

Concerning the first question, Rorty notes that: "In the ideal society, the intellectuals would still be ironists, although the non-intellectuals would not. The latter would, however be commonsensically nominalist and historicist (Rorty, 1989: 86-87)". Thus, in a certain sense, ideology cannot be based on ironism – because in ironism "anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed… (*Ibid.,* 73)". According to this, the ability of the ironist to question everything, even the most precious part of any ideology makes him unable to sincerely employ that ideology. However, Rorty places too much importance on the redescription of a final vocabulary, given that it is not something that often happens in practical situations. What should be primary is **the possibility** of the redescription. That is, an ironist should be able to recognize that her final vocabulary could be redescribed, but still, in any given situation, there should be reasons why that vocabulary should be redescribed. The mere fact that there are other vocabularies which work for other people does not mean that I should doubt my own, as long as it works for me and my community, and I cannot see why other vocabulary would work better. If we recall the pragmatic notion of truth and justification, it will be clear why it is so. Thus, if we consider the public debate in terms of the possibility of reinterpretation, an ironist will not say that the human rights are grounded in a moral law, but she will ask: what are good reasons for adopting a vocabulary that does not include the human rights?

Concerning the second question, the ironist will have to bite the bullet in a certain sense and say there is nothing beyond the words of the final vocabulary that we adopt that makes Nazism bad and liberal society good. However, the ironist can argue that there is a lot of historical evidence that believing in a metaphysical grounds of the vocabulary we use, the

32

one that academic philosophy provides, proved to be only an obstacle in increasing freedom. Religious discrimination was motivated by a belief in the absolutely correct and metaphysically grounded worldview and Greek institution of slavery and discrimination towards woman was metaphysically grounded by Plato and Aristotle. Thus, nothing is lost in terms of liberty by saying that Nazis are bad only according to what we as a contingent and historical society think. If we remind ourselves of an answer to the previous objection, we will see that a suggestion "let's adopt the vocabulary in which the actions of a Nazi society are morally fine" as one that needs a lot of arguments, given our current final vocabulary. Therefore, the metaphysical grounding, although it can provide direct answers to the questions about unusually cruel societies, is a possible obstacle for an expansion of liberty in future, because it limits the possibilities of final vocabularies that can be accepted. And ironism, we saw, doesn't have that flaw and it can provide an answer to the questions about unusually cruel societies, and it can serve as an ideology of a liberal society. Therefore, I see it as a better option for doing philosophy than the one that provides the metaphysical grounding, and since the latter is the approach of academic philosophy, it presents the source of its irrelevance.

3.5. THE RELEVANCE OF SCIENCE

In what remains, I will explain how Rorty's pragmatism can preserve the relevance of science for ideal liberal society, without providing metaphysical grounding for it. This will, unsurprisingly, rely on Rorty's interpretation of Kuhn's philosophy of science. What Rorty takes from Kuhn is his famous theory of paradigm shifts from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and then he relates it to his pragmatic theory of truth. Thus, according to Rorty, Kuhn's greatest contribution was "/.../ to help us see that the natural scientists do not have a special access to reality or to truth (Rorty, 1999: 176)."

Kuhn interprets the history of science in terms of the change of different paradigms. A scientific paradigm represents the starting set of propositions and methods for problem-solving used by certain group of scientists (Kuhn, 1994: 135). Within a framework of a certain paradigm there are clear standards of what constitutes a rational and sound solution of a given problem. Relying on the notion of scientific paradigm, Kuhn calls the period of normal science the period in which there is a *status quo*, that is, in which basics of a paradigm are not in any kind of doubt. On the other hand, a period in which basics of a given paradigm become unstable and new alternatives emerge Kuhn calls the period of revolutionary science. What is primary for pragmatic interpretation of science is that during the period in which some paradigm is under suspicion, there are no scientific or rational methods that are outside of all paradigms that will lead us to the decision what to do. The change of paradigm Kuhn compares with a revolution in politics (Kuhn, 1994: 93). There are no objective criteria independent of any community that will lead science towards rationality and reality. What counts as rational and scientific will depend on the paradigm we use, and the choice of paradigm is itself unscientific. This interpretation of science explains how science can function without its most important characteristic according to the epistemological paradigm, it being the rational enterprise which links us directly with the objective reality. Now I will explain how it still remains relevant for the ideal liberal society.

In other words, I will find the characteristics of science independent of the epistemological paradigm that will explain its relevance. We can sum up three from Rorty's work. The first is that natural science provides results that are in agreement with a current social need for manipulating and reshaping the world – the need which, after renaissance, suppressed the one that was fulfilled by religion – to explain closer the link between man and God. The second is that in the natural sciences the state of normal science, where there is an

34

agreement about problems and methods for their solution, is predominant. That is why science is a very reliable field for asking questions and getting answers that a lot of people would agree about. But, as Rorty points out, the same sort of agreement could be reached concerning questions related to moral, theology or literary critique, and it was achieved when those fields were normal (Rorty, 1979: 341). During the period of romanticism there was a general agreement on what constitutes a successful work in a degree in which there is agreement today on what represents a good solution in physics. The third source of relevance and respect for science is that it is much easier to tell a story – at least in Western tradition – about changeable moral law in context of unchangeable physical law, than the other way around. But if we adopt linguistic holism and Rorty's pragmatism, this does not mean that there is something objective and independent of any final vocabulary that makes this kind of story true. This explains how science can be relevant for society without the epistemological paradigm, although not many scientists and laymen have this view of science.

This chapter has established how the philosophy that is based on the epistemological paradigm is irrelevant and could be harmful for the societies which value freedom and have loose ideologies. Since I think that many people would prefer those societies, this contributes to the misery of academic philosophy and academic philosophers. In the last chapter I will analyze the final argument for the misery of the academic philosophy, and that is that it fails to achieve results by its own standards.

4.1. PHILOSOPHY AS A QUEST FOR ESSENCES

This chapter will offer the ultimate argument for why academic philosophy should be considered miserable, and that is because it cannot achieve any significant results by its own standards. This will also contribute to the misery of the philosophers who practice this kind of philosophy, since it is not controversial to claim that the failure of an important project you are part of makes you miserable. Academic philosophy is the kind of philosophy is based on the search for permanent answers, the discovery of the essences, as illustrated above with the epistemological paradigm, and the idea of objective truth according to Rorty. The typical philosophical question is:

What is the essence of X?

where X is usually taken to be something that is general, very significant for us, and mysterious in a certain aspect, such as the good, beauty, the soul, knowledge etc. Wittgenstein also has this type of philosophy in his mind when he says:

"The essence is something hidden from us": this is the form our problem now assumes. We ask: "What is language?", "What is a proposition?" And the answer to these questions is to be given once and for all, and independent of any future experience (Wittgenstein, 2009: §92).

Academic philosophical inquiry is centred on the search for necessary and sufficient conditions for something being X which will once and for all determine what counts as X and what doesn't. In other words, academic philosophy, according to this picture, is the search for definitions. Sure, these definitions will determine extensions of the notions in question, but

philosophers also presume that they will be interesting definitions in the sense that they tell us about the meaning of the X, by showing what it necessary is. Philosophical practice is centred on the search for essences, and a lot of questions that are not formulated in this way could be rephrased to fit this pattern. For example, the question of the relation between the body and the mind could be answered once we understand the essences of both mind and body. This search is the main thread that links contemporary academic philosophy with the philosophy of the past. Plato, Descartes, Russell and David Lewis all searched for essences of different Xs.

Another form of a typical question in academic philosophy is "How is X possible?" (Horwitz, 2012: 5). This question highlights the mysterious aspect of things that we ask about. We ask how are numbers possible, given that they should be real for mathematics to work, but they are not real like physical objects; how is mind possible, given that it seems that it is substance and causally active as matter, but not touchable nor spatial etc. Philosophical questions are usually about the things that have a mysterious aspect to them, and usually there is a philosophical position that denies the very existence of a thing in question, like Hume's theory of morality, nominalism, and scepticism about our knowledge, materialism, Darwinian theory of beauty, Zeno's theory of motion, McTagart's theory of time and many others.

All these questions never get satisfactionary answers according to Wittgenstein, and philosophy should not search for their answers. Rather, it should eliminate the confusions that originated by asking those philosophical questions:

> The results of philosophy are the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense and the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language. They – these bumps – make us see the value of discovery (Wittgenstein, 2009: §119).

38

Philosophy is there to make clear for us how the grammar[14] of our language works, by pointing at overstretched rules of the use of certain words, and non-existent analogies between certain concepts like between mind and body or physical objects and numbers (Wittgenstein, 2009: §123). Thus, the work of philosophy is therapeutic according to Wittgenstein. It is there to eliminate confusions rather than to solve any problems. There is no general theory to be built according to him. Rather, good philosopher should move from case to case of philosophical problems, dissolving them one by one, until none are left bothering him. I will illustrate why Wittgenstein thinks this with some typical problems of academic philosophy, showing how they are confusions originating from the misuse of language. Then, I will explain why we should be pessimistic about solving any philosophical problems that could appear.

4.2. THE TYPICAL PROBLEMS

According to Wittgenstein, typical philosophical problem originates when we illegitimately apply a rule taken from a paradigmatic case to some other case where it should not be applied (Wittgenstein, 1965: 27). That is, we see the "analogies between the forms of expression" where there are none. For example, often we look at the subject of a sentence as something that should be an object in some way similar to a paradigmatic physical object (Horwitz, 2012: 11). Let's take a look at the following sentences:

This chair is red.

Number two is a prime number.

Time constantly passes.

The French revolution was an important step for the enlightenment.

---

[14] In Wittgenstein sense, grammar is made of the rules about the use of words, the rules of different language games that we can play.

In all these examples in the place of subject occurs a phrase that should refer to some object. Paradigmatical objects are spatio-temporal individuals like chairs, mountains and airplanes, but we think that there is something analogous between spatio-temporal objects and other possible objects. That is, we think that there is a definition of an object, a common core that links all different things that we call objects. And that is how a lot of philosophical problems come about: numbers, for example, seem to be objects, because they function in a significant degree like the paradigmatical objects, but they are neither spatial nor temporal, nor can they causally interact with other spatio-temporal objects (Horwitz, 2012: 52). Thus, philosophers set to discover, using an *a priori* method, the underlying essence of all objects, or they acknowledge that that is impossible and become sceptics. But this has failed so far. No philosopher has discovered any interesting set of necessary and sufficient conditions which are the common thread in the different meanings of X that were accepted with the significant agreement. And this happens according to Wittgenstein in many cases because philosophers make a category mistake[15] – they think that properties belonging to a certain set of objects should also somehow belong to other similar objects – that is, they overextend the rule of the use of the word:

> Here [in philosophy] the fundamental fact is that we lay down rules, a technique, for playing a game, and that then, when we follow the rules, things don't turn out as we assumed. So that we are, as it were, entangled in our own rules (Wittgenstein, 2009: §125).

The task of philosophy according to Wittgenstein is to survey those entanglements. It is to make clear ground for science before we start with it, to erase the possibility of confusions. But, no theory should be offered by a philosopher – he "neither explains nor

---

[15] Ryle famously talked about the category mistakes in his analysis of the mind, claiming that the notion of mind is a category mistake (See: *Concept of Mind*, especially p.7).

deduces anything (Wittgenstein, 2009: §126)". Philosophy in Wittgenstein's sense is there only as a reaction to theories built by systematic academic philosophers. A proper philosopher should only eliminate their confusions and survey how the language works and then he is done with it.

So far, I have explained what Wittgenstein thinks about the general structure of philosophical problems, and about the task of the philosophy. In the rest of this chapter, I will give his reasons why nothing can be gained by asking philosophical questions about essences. That is, it might me the case that, when we ask "how are numbers objects" we really have the right intuition and that there is something really deep and hidden, which explains the objecthood of both numbers and physical objects. Wittgenstein theory of how language and the meaning of its words work tell us that usually that is not the case.

4.3. MEANING AS USE AND FAMILY RESEMBLANCES

Two ideas of his are crucial. The first is the understanding of the meaning of the words in terms of their use. As he says: "For a large class of cases of the employment of the word meaning – though not for all – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of the word is its use in language. (Wittgenstein, 2009: §43)". That is to find the meaning of the word, we only need to consider the way in which it could be used in language. This account of meaning goes against the account of meaning as an abstract mental entity, some idea that is always associated in the mind of the speaker when he utters a certain word. Also, it goes against the idea that meaning is something fixed, since the way that words are used in language changes over time and within different speaking communities. It also relates the meaning to a certain practice of a certain community, because it is hard to believe that one person alone will be the master of the use of a given word. Additionally, this is not the traditional account of the meaning in sense that meaning is not encapsulated in a certain set of

41

uses, or it isn't something that lies in the background of all uses, and ties them together. Rather, it is a skill possessed by different members of a community who speak the same language, and some of them are more skilful, while some of them are less. There is nothing more, metaphysical, eternal or fixed to be added to this.

The other idea related to Wittgenstein's argument that there could be no answers to traditional philosophical questions about essences is the idea of family resemblances. It occurs in the §67, after his analysis of the different usages of the word "game". He points out that the word "game" could be used to refer to many different things like games played by teams, for example football, or games played by one self, like passiance, games when you win and someone loses, or games where that is not the case and so on. His conclusion is that there is no common core to different types of game, but some of them have similarities with others, and those others with some others and so on... He calls these similarities family resemblances:

> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family – build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: "games" form a family.

> And likewise the kinds of number, for example, form a family. Why do we call something a "number"? Well, perhaps because it has a – direct – affinity with several things that have hitherto been called "numbers" and this can be said to give it an indirect affinity with the other things that we call "numbers" (Wittgenstein, 2009: §67).

42

Theory of the family resemblances is important in the argument against academic philosophy, since it is plausible to think that many words which essences academic philosophy tries to find function by family resemblances. Words like: good, object, real, beautiful, knowledge are presumably used in a way such that there is no common core to all usages.

That is, to sum up the argument, the meaning of these words is expressed in various ways in which they can be used, and the ways that they are actually used are such that there is no essence common to all different usages. If this is true, philosophical question like: "What is the essence of beautiful?" makes little sense given that the word "beautiful" is used in various ways, without anything common to all of the usages and our bewilderment by the question "How can numbers be objects?" is gone once we realize how many different uses of the "object" are there in our language.

However, this argument does not establish that the philosophical talk is meaningless when it tries to answers the questions about essences. Again, academic philosophy itself consists of a number of different language games, which constitute the philosophical jargon and philosophical technique discussed in the chapter III. There might be something in playing the language game as if there is an essence to the word. But this is obviously not what academic philosophy is looking for. Still, if someone would advocate the approach of academic philosophy in spite of Wittgenstein's arguments, the justification for it would have to be of the other kind. That is, he should tell us why it is interesting or useful to offer philosophical theories. Again, in my interpretation neither science finds any essences, but it is still interesting to ask scientific questions. I gave reasons for this in the chapter III. The others are that science can offer generality and depth in explaining phenomena, it can organize, unify and explain common sense phenomena and correct some of the common sense

43

attitudes. But I think that it is not easy to argue that philosophy works like science in this way.

To sum up my final argument why there are no results in academic philosophy: I started by defining it as centred on a search for essences, then I sketched how philosophical confusions originate in those searches, by overextending the application of a rule for the use of a given word from a paradigmatical case. After that, I showed how Wittgenstein's theory of meaning tell us that there is nothing to be gained from that overextension, and that it just originates confusions.

However, not all kinds of philosophy are targets of this kind of critique. There are many approaches in philosophy which are not based on the search for essences, like Nietzsche's, later Heidegger's, Foucault's, Sellars', Quine's and many others. On the other hand, applied philosophy usually does not search for essences, but tries to clarify notion so that they can be applied better. Still, I think that the most dominant paradigm in the academic philosophy is the one I have been criticizing.

In Chapter I, I have shown that there is a great deal of stress involved in academic practice, which comes from various sources such as the high workload and the bad balance between the academic occupation and private life. I have claimed that this stress makes both philosophy and philosophers miserable unless there is something compensating for it.

In Chapter II, I have shown how expertism and technical jargon make philosophy less interesting and humane, and how people who participate in it suffer from it. I claimed that the expertism and technical jargon could possibly bring some advantages that could out-weight the loss at the personal level if the results of using them are significant enough. But if there are no significant results, they bring nothing but misery.

In Chapter III, I have demonstrated how philosophy based on the epistemological paradigm is irrelevant and possibly harmful for the societies that value freedom highly. That is the kind of philosophy that searches for permanent answers and tries to ground our final vocabulary in the metaphysical reality. I have also shown how Rortian alternative – ironism – can play the role that academic philosophy is supposed to play in a society, and how it can explain the relevance of the science. I take that irrelevance and the possibility to cause harm is the very significant source of the misery for the academic philosophy and philosophers.

In Chapter IV, I have shown, using Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy, that academic philosophy fails to reach results by its own standards. Academic philosophy is centred on the search for essences, and given the way that the words of ordinary language work that are significant for philosophy, we cannot find the essences. This argument also has consequences for the arguments from chapter I and chapter II, since it show that there are no results that

will make it worth going through all that stress and that would make expertism and technical jargon seem as a good trade-off.

Thus, to sum up, I have shown that the academic philosophy is a stressful occupation, which involves a lot of technical jargon and expertism, that it is irrelevant and possibly harmful for the societies based on freedom, and that it does not achieve results by its own standards. I take this as enough to establish the misery of both academic philosophy, and the people involved in it.

However, not all kinds of philosophy are miserable according to this argument. Nietzsche's philosophy, for example, is written in a highly vivid and interesting way, and it does not try to find the correct representation of the metaphysical reality, but to lead us towards personal transformation. In his writings, he often analyzes and criticizes European morality and expresses his alternative of superman. He asks in *Daybreak*: "Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into *sand*? Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand! Is that your ideal, you heralds of the sympathetic affections? (Daybreak, 174)" He provokes the reader to think whether the traditional morality which favors sympathy is something that should be desired, since it will take individuality from humans and make them insignificant and unable to make greater impact. But he does not offer any eternal metaphysical grounds for the new aristocratic morality that he proposes. This kind of philosophy could still have value according to the arguments from this thesis.

In the end, although I think that the contemporary academic philosophy should change, I do not wish to offer any guidelines how the new philosophy should be practiced besides that it should abandon the search for essences and eternal solutions. I think that once we realize that every solution in philosophy is not something written for eternity, something

which has to answer to the objective truth, but something written for us and other human beings that matter for us, our philosophy will become more personal and more humane. And it will be less stressful and less technical if we practice it in this way, and many people could relate to it. And, if future academic philosophy becomes like this, it will no longer be miserable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Aristotle, (2000) *Politics*, Dover Publishing, New York

Dummett, M. (2010), *The Nature and Future of Philosophy*, Columbia University Press.

Cassulo A, "Articulating the A priori – A posteriori distinction" in: Cassulo, A. and Thurow, J. (2013) *The A Priori in Philosophy*, pp. (249-274), Oxford University Press.

Feyerabend, P. (1993), *Against Method*, New Left Books.

Feyerabend, P. (1999), *Knowledge, Science and Relativism*, Cambridge University Press.

Galileo, G. (1957), *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, Doubleday Anchor, New York.

Gutting, G. (2003) „Rorty's Critique of Epistemology", in: Guignon, C. & David, R. H. (2003), pp. 41–61.

Horwitz, P. (2012), *Wittgenstein's Metaphilosophy*, Oxford University Press.

Hume, D. (1993), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hackett Publishing.

Hutto, D, (2003), *Wittgenstein and the End of Philosophy*, Palgrave McMillan.

Kepler, J. (1965), *Kepler's Conversation with Galileo's Sidereal Messenger*, Hafner, New York.

Kuhn, T. (1996), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press.

Masters, W. H. and Johnson, V. E. (1966), *Human Sexual Response*, Little Brown and Co., Boston.

Nietzsche, F. (1997), *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, Cambridge University Press.

Overgaard, S., Gilbert, P. and Burwood, S. (2013), *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy*, Cambridge University Press.

Quine, W. W. O. (1960), *Word and Object*, MIT Press.

Peterman, J. (1992), *Philosophy as Therapy*, State University of New York Press.

Rorty, R. (1979), *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature,* Princeton University Press

Rorty, R.   (1982), *Consequences of Pragmatism*, University of Minnesota Press.

Rorty, R. (1989), *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press.

Rorty, R. (1991), *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge University Press.

Rorty, R. (1999), *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, London.

Schopenhauer, A. (2010) *The World as a Will and Representation*, Cambridge University Press.

Sellars, W. (1967), *Science and Metaphysics*, Ridgeview Publishing, Atascadero.

Sellars, W. (1997) *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.

Wallgren, T. (2006), *Transformative Philosophy*, Lexington Books.

Williamson, T. (2007), *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishing.

Williamson, T. (Forthcoming), "How did we get from here to there", Belgrade Philosophical Annual.

Wittgenstein, L. (1965), *The Blue and Brown Books*, Harper Publishing.

Wittgenstein, L. (1969), *On Certainty*, Blackwell Publishing.

Wittgenstein, L. (2001), *Tractatus logico-philosophicus,* Routledge.

Wittgenstein, L. (2009), *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell Publishing.