

REPORTS AND BOOK REVIEWS

DISCOURSE – INTELLECTUALS – SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

The issue of intellectuals, their social position and their role, their potentials and opportunities, their troubles and challenges in the contemporary world is highly relevant and up-to-date and in combination with such topics as discourse and social communication it could provide a very attractive opportunity for inspection from various standpoints: philosophical, psychological, sociological or whatever. Actually, these are three independent topics, which are, however, linked together this way or another.

The issue of intellectuals raises a whole range of questions, such as: do intellectuals have a business of their own? If so, what is this business like? How do contemporary changes and even crises affect the position and the role of intellectuals? What are the reasons to change or to sustain the traditional concept of the intellectual stemming from the Enlightenment or even from the Greeks? What expectations does society have towards intellectuals and which of them can be fulfilled? Should intellectuals rule and lead or rather serve and give advice? Should they enter the world of politics and if so, should they do it on the global or on the local level? How do intellectuals communicate among themselves and with all others? What are the basic prerequisites for the work of intellectuals and what should the institutions they desire to work for be like?

These and other questions were the focus of attention of the Conference DISCOURSE — INTELLECTUALS — SOCIAL COMMUNICATION (with English as the conference language) which took place on July 9–11, 1996 in Bratislava, Slovakia under the auspices of the *President of the Slovak republic, Michal Kováč*, with the participation of the *Chairman of the Slovak Academy of Sciences Štefan Luby* and other leading representatives of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and increased attention from the mass media. The Conference was organized by the Department of Social and Biological Communication of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAV) in cooperation with the Slovak Philosophical Association and the Slovak Psychological Society. Almost 50 contributions were presented, more than a half of them by participants from abroad (USA, Great Britain, Australia, India, Malaysia, Poland, Czechia).

The prominent guest was **Richard Rorty** (USA), one of the world-famous contemporary philosophers. In his contribution he gave a concise picture of the contemporary American leftist intellectual scene together with an outline of the socio-economic problems of the poor in the USA. According to Rorty, the Platonic dilemma whether philosophers should return to the cave, whether they should take part in public life, or whether they should commit themselves to contemplation or to practical activities, is today obsolete since the Platonic understanding of knowledge as an attempt to get in touch with something eternal is obsolete. Nowadays it is replaced by Bacon and Dewey's understanding of knowledge as part of the solving of the problems of the day. Therefore, there is nothing general and philosophical to say about the relations between intellectuals and politics and only the situation of particular intellectuals in particular historical situations should be dealt with. Rorty defines a leftist intellectual as anybody who reads quite a lot of books and who thinks that there is a lot of unnecessary human suffering which can be relieved through political means. Some academic disciplines (law, history, economics) can be relevant to political practice whereas there is not much relevance in other disciplines (e.g. microbiology, chemistry or philosophy). Rorty sees the problem of the poor or the fact that the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer as the principal socio-political problem of the contemporary USA. He says that nobody, not even the leftist intellectuals has offered any solution. Invited lectures were delivered by **Robert C. Solomon** (USA) who spoke about the university and the future of philosophy and **Antony Flew** (Great Britain) who focused on academic freedoms, objectives, and duties. Philosophy is, according to Solomon, the core of education which should convey wisdom and shape the students' feelings, not only transform information or knowledge. Both university and philosophy should teach not only how to think but also how to live – they will soon have to work towards this mission again, if they want to have any future. This is because the market mentality is very aggressive and attacks even the university milieu: ideas, teachers, and students are for sale and efforts to

change the former “ivory towers” into “money machines” predominate. The author criticizes social risks following from it, especially the fact that a university is neither a corporation nor a trade school. He resolutely encourages a return to the original mission of the university, namely education, life-long not just for short-term purposes of the profession. The conflict between the long-term and short-term education, between (seemingly meaningless) education for life on the one hand and the (meaningful) education for job on the other is, however, a manifestation of a more serious disturbance of values and concepts, philosophy itself, which is the cornerstone of culture. The primary idea of A. Flew’s contribution was that if there is anything special about academic freedom, it should be based on the distinctiveness of academic activities, and if there are any moral claims to this freedom, it has to correspond to academic duties. The aim of the academic is, in his opinion, knowledge (truth) and each freedom of investigation, thought or expression has to be based on critical (and self-critical) rationality, on the proofs and competence of the academic. The academic, who does not follow this, who asserts only his/her opinion, or disparages the opinion of the other, disqualifies his/her moral rights to academic freedom.

The native invited lecturer **Štefan Markuš** delivered the lecture entitled “Contemporary values versus scientific research”. He pointed to the contemporary tension between the values of the politicians and the values of the scientists in our country. He sees the way out of all the risks and threats in the return to traditional values, whose foundations were laid by Saints Cyril and Methodius. In the interest of this, Slovak intellectuals will have to fight another spiritual battle.

Discussions held in parallel sections were crucial for the success of the Conference. Ten to fifteen valuable contributions were heard in each of them. Participants of the first section (*Discourse: Thinking and theory*) concentrated on contemporary currents of thought in the intellectual area, the second one (*Intellectuals: Academy and Education*) focused on internal institutional problems and processes of the conveyance of intellectual heritage and the third (*Social Communication: Culture and Society*) on the ways of communication between intellectuals and the wider community and their share in culture creation. **Ján Horecký** (Slovak Republic) spoke about the effectiveness of discourse, **Miroslav Popper** (SR) about universality and particularity in discourse, **Simon Locke** (Great Britain) about the character of scientific and common discourse, **Jarmila Chovancová** (SR) about linguistic games in postmodern philosophy, and **Antonia Soulez** (France) about the relations of language, philosophy and society. The concept of transdisciplinarity was the topic of the contributions by **Malcolm Quinn** and **Steven D. Brown** (both Great Britain). **Wendy Staiton Rogers** and **Rex Staiton Rogers** (Great Britain) together with **Gabriel Bianchi** (SR) dealt with diagnosis of the contemporary diseases of academies and the dynamics of their transformations. The key role of the academic, the tasks of social philosophers and the search for new jobs in the contemporary rapidly changing world were mainly discussed by the Australian participants: **Ian Lowe**, **Greg Heath** and **Michael (Booth) Eveline**. **Jozef Piaček** (SR) focused on the role of intellectuals in creating cultural dialogue. Several contributions were devoted to paradigmatic changes in contemporary psychological theory and practice (**David J. Nightingale** and **Garth Rennie** from Great Britain, **Mária Bratská** from the SR, and **Lubomír Kostroň** from the Czech Republic) and to experiences from communication in the process of education (**Kamaruddin bin Yaakub**, Malaysia). Some contributions analysed various aspects of particular social situation of intellectuals or tried to reflect it theoretically (**Tatiana Sedová**, **Juraj Podoba**, **Jana Plichtová**, **Elena Brozmanová** from the SR and **Albert Bopegamage** from India). **Marina Čarnogurská** (SR) spoke about the need for the global synthesis of the intellectual heritage of different civilizations and the possibility of a synergistic effect. She says that while all the substantial mysteries of nature have already been uncovered by man, in the spiritual and social domains of human life, humans are still paralysed by various ideologies which endanger their survival and their future and, while in the domain of the knowledge of nature people (scientists) are able to agree, in their personal lives they are able to act in contradiction with their scientific conviction. There are still various dogmas, traditions and religious intolerance in the opinions of the arrangement of human life – those who are not fit for the “Procrustean bed” established by one ideology or another, are pursued. The final consequence might be the extermination of all life, whose fascinating creation was at the beginning of human existence. The topic concerned with intellectuals and social communication is therefore, according to the authoress, very significant today.

The strife between modern and postmodern was a subtext of several contributions (**John Kaye**, Australia). According to **Rachel Russell** (Scotland), new current conditions do not allow intellectuals to play their roles without expressing their ethical attitude; postmodern intellectuals have to not only tolerate and respect but also support and strengthen the otherness of people. According to **Richard M. Clewett** (USA) an increasing tension has occurred in the consciousness of contemporary intellectuals (at least in the USA) between the concept of the academic professional and the concept of the intellec-

tual; this means pointing out that the academic professional actually ceases to be an intellectual, i.e. a moral authority expressing his/her opinion on "broad questions", and is merely interested in his/her narrow professionalism. **Václav Černík** and **Jozef Viceník** (SR) agree with Lyotard's opinion that there is no necessity of telling grand emancipatory stories "which should be implemented", but they disagree with the idea that the cause of the global crisis is metaphysics; they say that it is rather the socio-economic character of contemporary society, which leads to the "irrational use of reason" and thus also to the ideas of meta-narratives; according to them, tendencies towards the future can be understood through analysis and the authors identify some of them. The crucial philosophical prerequisite is, however, the defeat of the traditional understanding of the relation between identity and difference, unity and diversity. According to **František Novosád** and **Emma Nežinská** (SR) modern culture is the regimentation of the spontaneous based on rationalization, discipline, regulation, gradation of the consciousness of reflexivity; modern reason observes the principle "Divide et impera"; the culture of principles is the culture of homogenization, standardization and unification; but in the world, where particularity reached legitimacy, it will be skills that will play a leading role – skills as capabilities to apply situational, contextual, local (sometimes even primitive) knowledge and experiences or the knowledge inseparable from the particular situation of the particular agent of action.

Finally, part of the contributions reflected the situation of an intellectual-philosopher today. **Egon Gál** (SR) spoke about the problem of the relations between the identity and otherness as applied to the politics of democracy and **Lubomír Zaorálek** (CR) about the issue of the consciousness of the intellectual. **Marek Kwiek** (Poland) concentrated on the issue of freedom and accountability of the philosopher in postmodern era; according to him, the traditional Platonic philosopher wanted to show the way to others, to give them advice on what to do, since philosophy itself secured him (as it was believed) the deepest knowledge and wisdom – he was an authority because philosophy itself was authority; he had, in a sense, a privileged place in culture. Such a type of philosopher-intellectual will probably disappear together with modernity. But the question what type of intellectual is being shaped instead, or what type is the "postmodern intellectual" has by far not been elucidated, one can even ask whether the term "postmodern intellectual" is not an inner contradiction. There is, however, a special problem concerning the role of intellectuals in contemporary Central Europe during its massive transformation; there is even a possibility that the situation in Central Europe is so different from that in the West and in the USA that the accountability of intellectuals/philosophers might still be very significant and valuable for managing social transformation precisely here. The contribution of **Emil Višňovský** dealt with the search for the identity, place, and authentic role of intellectuals in the contemporary world; according to him, one of the traditional expectations towards intellectuals (not only) here and now is that they will provide and communicate a (more or less) clear understanding of their era. The author defined intellectuals as persons with strong inner intellectual needs (passions) who cannot live without devoting themselves to certain intellectual activities like reading, writing, researching and "discouraging". Intellectuals are feeling and thinking creatures able to reflect their experiences, activities, states (positions); and in that sense each of us is an intellectual to some extent. What has always been changing, however, is the social context of the intellectual work: and a question concerning its social value started to be posed at least during modernity. The author differentiates between the professional (academic, cultural) and social (civic, political) roles and responsibilities of the intellectual.

The Conference DISCOURSE — INTELLECTUALS — SOCIAL COMMUNICATION raised a number of pressing, in our country so far little discussed questions, bringing many new stimuli and inspirations to the given topics, rich and open inter-cultural exchange of experiences. The participants agreed that it was a useful event and agreed on the necessity of similar events in the near future, as well as on the fact that it was not only a social event but also an intellectual asset. One of the possible conclusions can be: the primary role of intellectuals in society is the cultural, educational and ethical role (which does not eliminate the economic and political role); therefore, a society whose concern is the development of its culture, education and morals, should naturally also be concerned with the possibilities of the development of its intellectual potential. A society (and politics) that does not care about all this, does not care about its intellectuals either. Although, paradoxically enough, it is again the role of intellectuals to look for their audience, their routes towards society and ways of becoming aware of this and especially how to find effective steps towards their support.

Conference materials and conclusions will be published in the Proceedings by the Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences VEDA.

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