

Introduction: Touching Fictitious Reality in Philosophizing

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Witnessing each year's incoming graduate students in philosophy who will be taught in English at University of Sofia, I always wonder about the reasons, which have brought them to the program, and the goals, which the newly admitted students are trying to pursue. Only a few of them value the prospective degree as the ultimate achievement which they can expect, while some others are attracted by the scholarship. The predominant reason, guiding them to the University, seems to be a search for another dimension of life, different from the studies they have already gone through; some of them have already basic experience in philosophy and continuing in this direction seems appealing to them. Apparently philosophy and, perhaps, philosophizing is viewed as a special discipline unlike all of the positive subjects offered at the others Departments.

Thinking about my students' academic preferences and about the main points of this introduction, I noticed myself reflecting on the city of Sofia's name day, September 17, which is dedicated to Divine Wisdom, Sophia. According to another and predominant interpretation, the patron of the Bulgarian capital is a 2nd century Saint by the name of Sophia whose daughters, Faith, Hope, and Love were declared martyresses. Although the three daughters bear the names of the principal Christian virtues, it was my intuition that these virtues are not just a religious matter, but deserve philosophical attention too. This assumption found confirmation in Peter Costello's elaborate argumentation on the phenomenology of the divine. Not only by its etymology but due to its innermost intention, philosophy opens the horizon for transcendental love being the condition of any other love.¹ This could be also claimed about faith and hope, connecting the three virtues with Heidegger's

¹ Peter Costello, "Towards a Phenomenology of Religion Across the Limits of Reason Alone," *Sofia Philosophical Review*, 8.2:124.

temporal ekstases: faith being past, hope embodying future, and love coinciding with present.² Temporality is the indispensable characteristic of Dasein's Being as existence; as Andrey Patkul underlines, Being is ontologically different from any that-which-is.³ Neither Being nor temporality are entities; hope, faith and love escape the status of sheer entities as well. Ontologically, they are among Dasein's modes of Being as existentials, but ontically the three virtues do not have a place amid other entities and in this sense are fictitious. What is fictitious has been of prime concern to philosophers since the time of Socrates, when he pondered death, that is, what is not yet. And even Epicurus, with his ingenious plea not to be concerned about death since it never coincides with one's life, develops another type of fictitiousness in his moral utopia.

Philosophers' coping with death, nothingness and human finiteness is justifiably called "exiting from hell" as Paola-Ludoica Coriando suggests.⁴ Until Heidegger, this struggle with the threat, on the side of the fictitious, had been along the lines of overcoming finiteness (with the exception of Montaigne who, according to Thora Ilin Bayer, believed we can win over the fictitious side of life "by attaining the fullness of life while acknowledging the ever-presence of death"⁵); since Heidegger, this struggle has been transformed into appreciating finiteness and realizing that the only salvation is possible within its borders.⁶ Ontically, fictitious existentials offer the primordial support in fulfilling this new task. The impetus to this radical philosophical attitude is found in anxiety, an anxiety which has no real cause. Anxiety brings Dasein back to his existence as his mode of Being and enables him/her to develop an explicit ontology through philosophizing.⁷

Love and care, perceived as the leading existentials, seem to occupy the central place in early Heidegger. Matched with wonder and cultivation of prudence, they form, since the time of Aristotle, the

² Ibid., 120.

³ Andrey Patkul, "Philosophy as Science and Philosophy as Philosophizing in Heidegger," op. cit., 130.

⁴ Paola-Ludovica Coriando, "'Actually leaving hell'? About the status and the necessity of philosophy," op. cit., 32.

⁵ Thorallin Bayer, "Socrates' Profession," op. cit., 94.

⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁷ Andrey Patkul, op. cit., 134.

branches of theoretical and practical philosophy.⁸ Even earlier, human efforts and attention were attracted by another fictitious aspect of the social world to which high esteem has been attached; these are the precious metals and money. If it can be argued whether gold's preciousness is real or fictitious, it is clear that money, in particular, money not backed by gold, possesses ideal, and not real, value; the same is even truer about various financial instruments including now-famous derivatives. Ontically, money is hardly anything, deserving minimal respect; ontologically, it dares competing with Being as that which "determines entities as entities," that "in terms of which entities are already intelligible as entities"⁹ in all social interactions, especially in the modern world and nowadays.

Money, playing the role of pseudo-Being, easily transforms faith into fanaticism, love into fixation, and hope into illusion and delusion.¹⁰ Philosophy is summoned to elaborate an elegant and convincing "mask-discourse" and sophistry¹¹ (using Jean-Pierre Cléro's expression but not with exactly the meaning he gives it) aiming at promoting the pseudo-existenciales of fictitious financial reality. *Eudaimonia*, being the highest happiness or flourishing of life, can still be achieved on the road of Aristotle's intellectual virtues: prudence and wisdom together with practical virtues of justice, temperance, and courage, as is clearly shown in the essays of Donald Phillip Verene and Manuel Knoll;¹² to a certain extent, even financial speculation is not substituted for contemplation as long as disinterested theoretical contemplation is capable of serving the finan-

⁸ Manuel Knoll, "To Philosophize or Not to Philosophize?" op. cit., 99.

⁹ William Blattner, *Some Terminology in Being and Time*, <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/blattnw/heid/terms.htm>, last accessed on 20.09.2015.

¹⁰ Jean-Pierre Cléro, "What is Fiction?" *Sofia Philosophical Review*, 4.1:41. The author elucidates the possibilities of fiction to lead to mistakes and fallacies. A more detailed account on philosophical dimensions of fiction is provided in Jean-Pierre Cléro, "What is Fiction?" *Sofia Philosophical Review*, 4.1:34-64 and Jean-Pierre Cléro, *Essai sur les Fictions*, Hermann, Paris, 2014, 570 p., reviewed by Arab Kenouche in *Sofia Philosophical Review*, 8.1:89-127.

¹¹ Jean-Pierre Cléro, "The Play between Prometheus and Epimethious," *Sofia Philosophical Review*, 8.2:69 and 76.

¹² Donald Phillip Verene, "Prolegomena Philosophiae," op. cit., 15; Manuel Knoll, "To Philosophize or Not to Philosophize?" op. cit., 102.

cial markets. The trick here obviously is that this notion of happiness has very little to do with the Greek understanding of the same term.

There is also a sharp difference between philosophical speculation and financial speculation. For Hegel, speculative reasoning is the highest form of rationality, overcoming the limitations of intellectual formalism. It is thinking about the unconditional, based on concrete identity together with an element of difference, and does not accept the abstract identity of the understanding, or the gap separating truth from untruth. The kernel of speculative reasoning is the so-called speculative sentence. In a reflective sentence, the subject is attributed certain predicates and the role of the subject and predicate are clearly outlined. The subject in reflective reasoning is what is at the center of reflection and predicates are the various features which the subject possesses that are revealed by the predicate(s). In speculative reasoning, by contrast, subject and predicate are not fixed. In speculative reasoning, they are in an interaction, in which not only the predicate defines the subject, but vice versa too, i.e. they freely swap roles. Between them there is an unfolding tension as in a hermeneutical circle.

As an example of a statement fixed and strictly delineated within the limits of understanding, we could take the definition “money is a measure of the value of goods, it is a medium of exchange, the standard of value and a resource by which to maintain value.” In this case, the subject and its predicates are clearly and unambiguously identified. However, to reach the complete truth, it is necessary to move to speculative reasoning. To some extent, this can be demonstrated with the idea that the measure of value is also a medium of exchange. Obviously, the measure of value is a medium of exchange, i.e. subject and predicate easily and freely can swap their roles. The medium of exchange determines the measure of value by the amount of money and/or by the quality of the metal coins, while the measure of value can also determine the medium of exchange, for instance, via the basic interest rate declared by the central banks. Speculative reasoning can be illustrated more adequately with the statement “Money is power.” The characteristics of power clarify the nature of money, and the peculiarities of money contribute to understanding the nature of power. Money and power, of course, do not always interact like this and can be regarded as relatively independent.

The financial meaning of speculation is usually confined to the understanding of a very risky investment. This is undoubtedly true, but

such belief omits something very significant, which is of particular importance for our discussion. Derivatives, for example, are increasingly cut off from the life-bearing source—surplus labor—and increasingly possess an independent and self-sufficient being in an unconditional way. Derivatives define themselves in absorbing and unfolding the entire substance of the stock exchange. They are not obliged to refer to a reality outside themselves and de facto they do not. They produce their own reality and are similar in that to the code of Baudrillard's simulacra. It can reasonably be argued that financial speculation produces a hyper-reality, where real and virtual are inseparable.

Hegel applies the term speculation to the most developed philosophical thinking. It is well known that philosophy, in his system, is the apogee of society, culture, and science; it is the real science approaching its subject with concepts purified of any sensible matter and being the realm of genuine and concrete thinking, which leaves abstraction to common sense.¹³ Nevertheless, this elitarian or even aristocratic position does not express the whole truth about the place of philosophizing in Hegel. His *Phenomenology of Spirit* lucidly shows that the entire journey of spirit is due to spontaneous philosophizing. Beginning with the sense of certainty and proceeding to absolute knowing, through the various stages of unfolding of spirit; each step of passing from delusion to a clearer vision and to yet another disappointment is marked by philosophizing. Consciousness, self-consciousness, and spirit are expressions of the ultimate reality for Hegel. However, for sense-certainty they are nothing; here emerges the same issue of the ontical fictitiousness of certain aspects of reality, which have been approached by means of philosophy throughout the centuries.

Dealing with what is beyond the ontical borders of the world, philosophers have always occupied an ambivalent position:¹⁴ on the one hand, they spend their time on nothing palpable or useful and in this sense are harmless; on the other, philosophers somehow succeed in transforming fictitious issues into most urgent questions in the common use; this makes the powerful of the day aware of philosophers' skills to master the potential of nothingness, turning it into an instrument for practical life.

¹³ Donald Phillip Verene, "Prolegomena Philosophiae," op. cit., 21.

¹⁴ Thorallin Bayer, "Socrates' Profession," op. cit., 88.

In the 21st century, philosophers have got some very well-versed competitors—the financial speculators. Both philosophers and speculators are immersed in a fictitious domain of reality; nevertheless, they differ significantly. Philosophers, following the steps of Socrates, are mostly interested in the human condition, while speculators are dedicated to sophistry¹⁵ on a global scale, substituting the non-existence of financial capital for ontological existentials.

Recalling Plato's parable about the Olympic Games, it is our inclination to admit that the Games are impossible without spectators.¹⁶ Today's Olympics, however, differ crucially from the ancient ones in the transformation of roles played by all participants: merchants have become stock and securities traders; athletes play not according to the sport's rules, but follow the capricious will of the financial markets; and among the spectators are not only philosophers but huge crowds of outcasts who have nothing better to do than watch. Hopefully, the advantage of speculative philosophers over the outcasts is that philosophers might be able to see the ontological level of reality behind the ontical sense-certainty of the show. Philosophers are called to look beyond the instilled illusion of the Games at the seemingly fictitious domain that determines the entire circus cum carnival. This philosophical exercise could be the route to full-blooded individual life and, perhaps, happiness,¹⁷ but this is barely possible without seeing the face of the Other and responding to his/her call no matter what will be our attitude to the scene on show.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁶ Donald Phillip Verene, "Prolegomena Philosophiae," *op. cit.*, 25.

¹⁷ Manuel Knoll, "To Philosophize or Not to Philosophize?" *op. cit.*, 104.