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# ON POSSIBLE FORMS OF EXPOUNDING PHILOSOPHY

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*Abstract.* This paper deals with the analysis of various ways of expounding philosophical content. We start by distinguishing between oral and written methods of presenting philosophical knowledge and then proceed to categorize philosophical texts based on the criterion of exposition. In the central part of the paper, we analyze the fundamental philosophical-scientific forms of expounding philosophical content: prolegomena, treatises, essays, meditations, aphorisms, autobiographies, letters, etc. The goal of this paper is to emphasize the connection between scientific forms and specific philosophical content, as well as the close correlation between the form of exposition and the purpose of a particular text. In the concluding chapter, we address the question: What allows philosophical content to be expounded in various ways? In answering this question, we highlight an important characteristic of philosophy that makes it more akin to art than to science.

### *On the Form of Articulating Philosophical Content*

Throughout its history, philosophy has developed and established a significant array of its own methods by which it engages with the exploration of a wide range of topics and issues. The methodical diversity of philosophy often clouds the fact that, on the level of expounding philosophical content, one encounters a multitude of forms as well. The manner of expounding philosophical content is not something incidental or unimportant, rather, an unambiguous philosophical stance is implicit and expressed in the choice of form of expounding philosophemes. Philosophy, indeed, contemplates everything, including the most suitable way to present specific philosophical content. Thus, this paper focuses on the various forms of expounding philosophemes.

When comparing science with philosophy, it becomes evident that sciences have devised a distinctive form for presenting their content—the scientific treatise or article, with its more comprehensive manifestation being the scientific monograph. Philosophy, often intertwined with conceptual discursive thinking and rigorously logical inference of statements and conclusions, emphasizes providing proofs and deriving statements methodically in well-argued discussions. However, the ways of presenting philosophical content can be profoundly diverse. Philosophy does not solely manifest its content in the form of a thematic treatise, although certain philosophical orientations advocate for precisely that form. There exist philosophical texts and works where the manner of exposition is less conceptual, featuring dominantly metaphors, allegories, and poetic expressions.

Philosophy is communicated in various ways, and the chosen format of presentation depends on the author's evaluation of which form best suits the stated content and objectives at hand. Intrinsicly linked to the selected mode of exposition is the determination of the nature and purpose of philosophy itself. To facilitate the division and classification of forms of expounding philosophy, the original assumption is the idea of its unity. Simultaneously, this implicit assumption underpins the encompassment of all forms of expounding philosophy within the same encompassing whole.

In this paper, our aim is to systematize distinct methods of expounding philosophical content, including the criteria employed for classifications and significant categories falling within them. Classifying philosophical teachings can be guided by diverse principles. To enumerate a few potential principles for categorizing philosophical content: recordedness of teachings, scientific versus literary character, the fragmentariness of starting propositions or the composition of more extensive philosophical works, introductory character as a foundation of a specific subject field, a critical departure from prior traditions, or an apologetic approach, epistolary form, confessional tone, and so forth.

### *Oral and Written Forms of Conveying Philosophy*

First of all, we can observe that in the history of philosophy, both written and oral forms of conveying philosophical teachings are supported, with the written form being the crucial one, as without it, the philosophical tradition could hardly have been established.

The Greeks believed that wisdom is acquired through contemplation and also through the skill of listening and direct learning from a teacher, or alternatively, through live conversations with other philosophers. The art of orally transmitting philosophical knowledge was practiced as early as the first centuries of philosophy's emergence, during the time when the first philosophical schools were formed. Some philosophical schools in the classical period, such as the Pythagoreans, insisted on respecting the secrecy of knowledge as a condition for gaining access to the study of the highest truths. This unique method of philosophical education encouraged the privileged practice of listening to valuable teachings. Hence, the processes of oral transmission, listening, preserving, and imparting knowledge were important segments of the initiation procedure within the Pythagorean brotherhood.

Some philosophers publicly demonstrated the art of philosophical living and inquiry through spoken discourses at the agora, as well as through their way of life and conduct. The most well-known example of this approach is the activity of Socrates. He is credited with establishing the foundations of ethics as a philosophical discipline, despite not presenting his teachings in written form. He did not compose treatises on virtue; instead, he imparted his teachings through his actions, choices, and dialogues. Therefore, the aim of teaching ethics determined his form of expressing philosophical content—oral inquiry and transmission of knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Having a significant influence on their fellow citizens, later on, a few ethical schools in Athens referred to Socrates as their role model and a teacher. Aristotle believes that Socrates' method of inquiry and expounding philosophy led to two important achievements,

Some authors, like Plato, even argue for the necessity of exclusively oral transmission of esoteric philosophical insights. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, if a written record remained, it could result in misunderstanding the teaching, which cannot defend itself in the shape of a dead letter. Thus, in *The Second Letter*, Plato addresses the ruler of Syracuse, Dionysius, and states that certain philosophical content must be conveyed to him “...in enigmas, in order that if anything should happen to these tablets ‘in the recesses of the sea or land’, whoever reads them may not understand our meaning” (Plato, 1997, p. 1638, para. 312d). To prevent those unworthy of its content from obtaining the teaching, Plato believes that: “The best precaution is not to write them down, but to commit them to memory; for it is impossible that things written should not become known to others” (Plato, 1997, p. 1639, para. 314 b–d).

Secondly, we are discussing knowledge that cannot be directly transmitted and learned. Instead, it can only be induced in the soul of another person after their extensive engagement with a particular subject and through a live conversation with the teacher. This process allows them to attain the same valuable insights that the teacher had already obtained.<sup>3</sup> If this teaching could be effectively written down or communicated to people, the teacher would not hesitate to reveal it. However, as Plato explains, “...no sensible man will venture to express his deepest thoughts in words, especially in a form which is unchangeable, as is true of written outlines” (Plato, 1997, p. 1660, para. 343a).

The form of conveying philosophical content solely through speech was the reason some teachings have not been preserved; specifically, only through subsequent reconstruction based on secondary sources can one fathom the essence of that particular philosophy. Such is the case with Plato’s so-called unwritten doctrine, which was intended solely for the innermost circle of philosophically educated disciples. As this aspect of his philosophy was not documented in its original form, attempts are made to reconstruct it through subsequent analysis, relying on notes and indications from other philosophers, primarily Aristotle.

When evaluating the impact of oral transmissions within philosophy, it is important to point out that the recordedness of teaching, either by the author or their disciples, is a prerequisite for studying the philosophical tradition. Therefore, we can hardly speak of philosophy among those peoples who did

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the invention of definition (Aristotle, 1956, p. 987b, lines 1–4) and formulating proof by induction (Aristotle, 1956, p. 1078b, lines 27–29).

<sup>3</sup> In the Seventh Letter, Plato addresses Dion and asserts that concerning what is most worthy of study and teaching in philosophy, “There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one” (Plato, 1997, p. 1659, 341c), because the content of that teaching, similar to other sciences, cannot be “put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself” (Plato, 1997, p. 1659, 341c–d).

not have any writing system, and therefore transmitted the creations of spiritual nature only by word of mouth.

### *Scientific and Literary Forms of Communicating Philosophy*

Within the next type of division, we can, in principle, distinguish between philosophical-scientific and philosophical-literary (literary) forms of expressing philosophical content. In scientific-philosophical works, conceptual work is dominant, technical terminology is used, argumentation is strictly logical, and analyses are performed with precision. On the other hand, within a more literary exposition of philosophical content, various poetic, prose, and dramatic forms are used. Poetical forms include philosophical poems and shorter verses, philosophical novels belong to prose works, and dialogues fall under dramatic forms.

In the continuation of the paper, we will be considering certain written philosophical-scientific forms of expressing philosophical content.<sup>4</sup> Here, the focus lies on the analysis of scientific forms of presenting philosophical ideas, with the aim of addressing the question: What corresponds to specific scientific forms of articulating philosophical content?

Most often, philosophical works take the shape of technical disquisitions (presented as books, studies, essays, treatises, and critiques), but they are also expressed through the format of letters, fragments, and aphorisms.

### Philosophical Treatises, Systems, Aphorisms, and Fragments

The classification of philosophical works can also be based on the criterion of the extent to which specific philosophical teaching aspires. Thus, in practice, one may come across aphorisms and fragments that express a single thought or remark. Then there are disquisitions or treatises, wherein analyses delve into a host of topics and issues within the same (common) subject field. Lastly, there are works that encompass individual disciplines or entire philosophical systems.

Apart from more comprehensive disquisitions and treatises that elaborate a specific problem area from different interpretative angles and positions, less extensive papers, such as philosophical essays<sup>5</sup>, are also written.

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<sup>4</sup> In this connection, the author will devote a special article to philosophizing in literary form, that is, in specific literary genres. The author refers to her forthcoming paper entitled "Philosophy in Literary Forms".

<sup>5</sup> However, some essays exceed the standard scope of the genre, as is the case with a very extensive work by John Locke, entitled *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In response to the views stated in this work, G.W. Leibniz wrote an extensive work as well, *New Essays on Human Understanding*.

## PHILOSOPHICAL TREATISES AND DISCUSSIONS

In philosophy, we frequently encounter thematic discussions and treatises, which aim either to support a thesis with arguments and prove its validity, or to establish its falseness. Unlike a philosophical essay, where one's own position is presented through a blend of scientific procedure and literary form, in philosophical discussions, one attempts to approach the problem area under analysis with a more rigorously conceptual approach. This philosophical form places emphasis on a gradual and systematic derivation of conclusions and the presentation of arguments to support them. The structure of a treatise follows the course and the dynamics of the analysis of the examined problem. The topic under discussion is clearly defined and delineated, and the questions are formulated unambiguously. Discussions, as a rule, bring something new into the problem area under consideration, whether those are new arguments in the demonstration procedure or a different approach to the subject. More often than not, a new way of solving the examined question emerges. The most well-known treatises and discussions were written by: René Descartes, Baruch de Spinoza, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others.

## PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS

Some philosophers, like Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Baruch de Spinoza, G. W. F. Hegel, and Nicolai Hartmann, set themselves the task of examining all relevant problems within the field of a single entire discipline and thus laying its foundations or providing a fresh basis and reorganizing it. While forming a comprehensive worldview that explains all its segments, the author tries to develop a complete philosophical system that encompasses different philosophical disciplines. At the core of the concept of philosophy as a system lies the perspective of a necessity to partition this unity into fundamental philosophical disciplines, among which close relations and a hierarchy are established.

In an epoch in which the world is perceived as unitary, and philosophical teaching as a system, extensive systematic discussions are written, characterized by a unitary methodological approach. In a time when the world is perceived as fragmentary, philosophy is not understood as a system either. The interest in the problems of totality is lost, and philosophical texts are often written in the form of fragments and aphorisms.

In periods when philosophy was understood as a system and when philosophers developed comprehensive philosophical systems, metaphysics was dominant. The systematic period of the development of Greek philosophy is dominated by the metaphysical teachings of Plato and Aristotle, and there is a distinct division of the whole philosophical knowledge into fundamental philosophical disciplines. Furthermore, this kind of tendency can be found among

philosophers of German classical idealism.<sup>6</sup> In earlier centuries, philosophers sought to develop their philosophy and ground it as a system of knowledge. However, there are almost no such aspirations to universality today. In the time of criticism of metaphysics, in a way, the system as a form is becoming outdated. Fragments and aphorisms are coming into fashion as short and pithy forms of expressing thoughts and ideas.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL APHORISMS AND MAXIMS

Philosophical ideas are sometimes expressed in short sentences of condensed thought – aphorisms. Several such aphorisms, collected in one work, do not have to be thematically connected, although a whole work can be composed of meaningfully integrated aphorisms pertaining to a common topic. This form of expression allows brief and concise formulations, which, although condensed and laconic, are rich in meaning and layers of significance.

Expressing thoughts in a concise form has been present throughout the history of philosophy. Many philosophers expressed their thoughts in the form of aphorisms: Heraclitus, Erasmus Roterdamus, Francis Bacon, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and so on. However, among the Presocratics, only scanty and skimpy data on original works survive. It seems that most of the thinkers wrote complete discussions, of which only parts—i.e., fragments—have survived. Nevertheless, it appears that some of them precisely formulated their thoughts in gnomic form, through aphorisms, as Heraclitus did. His aphorisms are concise, cryptic, and are usually stated briefly in one sentence. On the other hand, there are philosophers like Bacon who include larger segments of text (several pages) addressing a particular subject within a single aphorism.

Frequent use of this form can be observed during transitions between epochs and at the dawn of a new era. Often, inklings and indications about the times to come, forthcoming tendencies and goals, as well as guidelines for the development of a new epoch, are communicated through this succinct form. Moreover, moral advice, wise thoughts, separate observations, condensed remarks, and critical comments are formulated in the form of aphorisms and pithy maxims.

Aphorisms are presented on their own, without additional argumentation that would explicate and justify them. Furthermore, this form of expression allows freedom in formulating thoughts without an obligation to further develop

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<sup>6</sup> In *The Phenomenology of Spirit (Phänomenologie des Geistes)*, G. W. F. Hegel raises the question of a way in which one should present philosophical truth. It was his conviction that the true form in which it exists can only be its scientific system. Hence, philosophy needs to abandon its aspiration to be the love of knowledge and ground itself as real knowledge (cf. *Preface* in Hegel, 1967).



the subject. Sometimes, due to their concise phrasing, aphorisms may appear obscure and enigmatic. Therefore, there is a necessity to further elucidate the intended meaning of the written text. Often, ambiguity and equivocation are intentionally cultivated in the aphoristic form, to allow for additional layers of meaning. Some authors make the mistake of equating aphorisms with fragments, which represent a distinct philosophical genre of writing and contribute to shaping thoughts.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS AND THOUGHTS

The phrase *philosophical fragments* is used to designate a special philosophical genre, but this term also denotes unfinished thoughts out of context and surviving remnants of a larger work. Generally, we can divide philosophical fragments into four groups. Fragments can be written in preparation for a larger work. Furthermore, they can emerge as remnants of a greater whole that could not be preserved. They can also be created as separate segments of a finished complete work or as an intentionally devised form (a style of narration and writing) in which a fragmentary manner of expression is cultivated.

Certain fragments came to be as a preparation for a larger and more integral work the author did not manage to finish. In such cases, only the main theses of the envisaged whole are sketched, and ideas take shape as single, isolated, and mutually unconnected sentences. Pascal's work *Pensées* emerged in this way. It is a collection of fragments based on which the author planned to write a larger disquisition, a complete work on faith and religion.<sup>7</sup>

Some fragments are just remaining passages from a work that has not been preserved in its entirety. This is the case with the teachings of the Pre-Socratics. Namely, all Pre-Socratic fragments are randomly remaining segments of once-complete writings. Significant parts, or even the complete writings, of classical philosophers are lost.<sup>8</sup> Owing to the quotations by later doxographers, we possess data on this extensive, but unfortunately non-surviving, production.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Namely, in the text *Pensées (Thoughts)* Blaise Pascal states his standpoints on man's life, faith, God, human suffering, sickness, etc. Since, due to his untimely and sudden death, he was prevented from carrying out this project to its completion, fragmentarily written thoughts from his legacy were collected, compiled and published under the title *Pensées*. Thus, these are preliminary sections of an intended future whole and, owing to the circumstances, preserved and recorded in this shape. In addition to being classified as a philosophical work, *Pensées* belong to literary prose, as well. Because of his extraordinary talent as a writer, Pascal is considered to be one of the greatest virtuosos of French prose (Pascal, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Nothing of Thales' writings survived. The first recorded philosophical standpoint is Anaximander's and it is assumed that this preserved fragment is the beginning of a whole discussion entitled *On Nature*, which is lost.

<sup>9</sup> If what later doxographers, such as Diogenes Laertius, write on the topic is any indication, Democritus had an elaborate philosophical system of which only scant portions

Sometimes philosophers publish selected thoughts from a larger and more complex work as a separate whole. Singled out and separately published fragments represent key thoughts and concisely stated syntheses taken from the more comprehensive text. A newly created work, formed based on parts of a larger whole, is composed of fragments.<sup>10</sup>

Some philosophers choose to write fragments on various topics and to create and publish a complete work in that form. Then, we are talking about a fragmentary style of narration and expression. In the form of isolated sentences, one notes thoughts on particular subjects, which do not have to be logically coherent and correlated in terms of contents. Fragments are written as individual opinions, remarks, comments, and conclusions. Most often, fragments do not have aspirations to take up greater space, although they can be more extensive. This form of expression sometimes reminds of aphorisms. In the modern age, an inclination toward this succinct form was shown by Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Moreover, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer composed their coauthored book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, subtitled *Philosophical Fragments (Dialektik der Aufklärung, Philosophische Fragmente)* out of fragments (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). In Serbian philosophical tradition, that kind of style was cultivated by Božidar Knežević and Ksenija Atanasijević (her principal work is titled *Filozofski fragmenti/Philosophical Fragments*, I-II, 1929–1930). Branko Pavlović, after Pascal, fashioned his *Misli (Thoughts)* in the form of fragments, with no intention of translating this work into a larger whole at some later point.

### The Division into Works of Theoretical and Practical Philosophy

Some philosophical teachings belong to theoretical, and some to practical philosophy. That is to say, certain works are oriented towards the theoretical grounding of knowledge on phenomena and processes in the world, while others have a practical function of giving meaning and direction to man's life journey. The form of teaching set down in writing conforms to this difference. In view of the fact that they do not pertain to the realm of actual phenomena and processes, but to the sphere of the future and the possible, recommended practical principles of moral life are usually presented only in hints and through generalized principles.<sup>11</sup> If the rules of moral judgment lay claim to universality

remained. Similarly, Epicurus had an extensive output. It amounted to around three hundred scrolls of which only shorter segments have been passed on to us.

<sup>10</sup> In this way, in Serbian philosophical tradition, Božidar Knežević, taking the most important sentences from his work *Principi istorije (The Principles of History)*, published the text titled *Misli/Thoughts* (Knežević, 1902).

<sup>11</sup> In his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that speaking in hints is appropriate for works belonging to practical philosophy, because it indeed is a sphere where we cannot

so they could apply to a wider range of practical actions, they have to be sufficiently general. Only in such a form can they apply to all those particular and unrepeatable cases which, in their peculiarity, could not be foreseen and described in detail beforehand. On the other hand, theoretical discussions often analyze the given problem area from various interpretive positions, studying it down to the smallest detail and finer points. Stances put forward in discussions must be adequately proven and supported with arguments. Regarding the language in the domain of theoretical discussions, it is insisted on judicious discourse, statements, logically valid reasoning, and demonstration, while the sphere of ought-to is presented either in a strict and imperative form, or in the shape of advice and suggestions.

### Prolegomena and Introductions

Philosophical works are mostly written as monologue discussions in which the given problem area is considered from a specific theoretical-interpretive position. The question under discussion is clearly indicated, as well as the methodical procedures used in treating the presented issue. If a new subject field is opened up in philosophy, a discipline is founded, or new foundations are laid to already existing philosophical branches, authors have recourse to writing an introduction to the given problem area, a prolegomenon to the subsequent direction of development, an outline of the prominent discipline, thus indicating and delineating future directions for the development of the examined field. When the basic guidelines for a new teaching are established or a movement manifesto is prepared, then the basic theses of the presented conception are pointed out in a short and concise form.<sup>12</sup> Such works are not extensive and basic postulates and ideas of the teaching are often specified in a list in a condensed form. Originators of a new philosophical trend, position or a movement, in an effort to provide a basis for their teaching, formulate new and different methods, techniques and aspects of treatment of the specific philosophical content, often in the shape of logical or methodic rules and procedures which should be followed in research or in the thinking process of grounding certain contentions.<sup>13</sup>

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ask for more accuracy and precision than the matter in question itself allows (Aristotle, 1996, 1094b, lines 14–15).

<sup>12</sup> For example, Karl Marx wrote *Theses on Feuerbach* (*Thesen über Feuerbach*) in 1845 (Marx, 1998). In 1929, Hans Hahn, Rudolf Carnap, and Otto Neurath wrote the manifesto for their logical-positivistic teaching, *The Scientific World-Conception – The Vienna Circle* (*Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung – Der Wiener Kreis*) (Hahn, Carnap, Neurath, 1929).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, René Descartes, in his work *Discourse on the Method* (*Discours de la Méthode*), states four methodic rules which all researchers should follow during scientific research (Descartes, 1984a).

## Philosophical Meditations, Diaries and Letters

Philosophical works can also be divided according to whether the author focuses on objects and phenomena around themselves or on their own train of thoughts; that is, whether they tackle the object itself or the problems of cognizing the object. In a confessional tone, a philosopher can direct their attention to the process of developing their thoughts and the processes of acquiring certain cognitive insights, but also to their own life and past events.

### PHILOSOPHICAL MEDITATIONS

Works that thematize doubt about previously rooted knowledge are mostly written in the form of an inner soliloquy or meditations of the reflecting subject. René Descartes, in his work *Meditations on First Philosophy (Meditationes de Prima Philosophia)*, established the genre of philosophical meditation.<sup>14</sup> In this text, observing and following the train of his thoughts and his state of mind, he reconsiders the certainty of all that appears in his experience (Descartes, 1984b). The gradualness of stating thoughts and transparency of cognitive actions engages the readers in the very process. Descartes' intention is to engage the readers through the continual presentation of the train of his thoughts and to win them over to reflect together. In contemporary philosophy, this kind of introduction to philosophizing, through philosophical introspection, will be followed by Edmund Husserl. Following the example of Descartes and his method of laying the foundations of the noetic sphere, Husserl wrote the work *Cartesian Meditations (Méditations cartésiennes)*. His text represents a commentary (that is meditations) on Descartes' meditations.

### CONFESSIONS, DIARIES, AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF PHILOSOPHERS

It is not seldom that in philosophy, in the form of a diary and an autobiography, confessions are given, one's own intellectual evolution is considered or connections between philosophical convictions and personal experiences are stated. In that case, the author wishes to reveal to the readers the reasons for adopting a certain philosophical position, to point out deeper personal motives for specific convictions and teachings, but also to emphasize the changes and turns in their conceptions and thoughts.

In his peculiar autobiography entitled *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography*, Karl R. Popper states important facts about his life and work.

<sup>14</sup> Descartes took the meditation form from the religious sphere and applied it to epistemological questions. In religious tradition, meditations were a part of spiritual practice and had enlightenment as their goal, while, in epistemological tradition, one seeks cognitive certainty through meditations (Žunjić, 2022).

In this work, in addition to purely biographical data, he also explains the motives for his philosophical stances, clarifies theoretical and conceptual turning points, and positions his conception with regard to the present competitive philosophical teachings and the dominant trends in terms of ideas of that time (Popper, 2002). Autobiographical books were also published by many other foreign philosophers (Hans-Georg Gadamer,<sup>15</sup> Bertrand Russell,<sup>16</sup> Karl Löwith,<sup>17</sup> etc.), as well as some Serbian philosophers, e.g., Branislav Petronijević (1998) and Mihailo Marković (2008–2009).

In his work *Confessions* (*Confessiones*), Aurelius Augustinus recounts events, mistakes, and wanderings of his youth when, as a heathen, he experiences various life situations and challenges. This work gives the possibility for deeper insights into the motives that led the thinker to conceive and expound his standpoints in a particular way. In *Confessions*, he also states his mature convictions and feelings aroused by his Christian faith (Augustine, 2006). *Confessions* (*Les Confessions*) were also written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2000).

#### PHILOSOPHICAL LETTERS

The form of letters or epistles is usually used in philosophy when it is required to express religious themes in the form of advice and instruction. Insofar as epistolary philosophy treats the topics of other fields, not just moral questions, then it is used as an appropriate means to suggest the secrecy or importance of some teaching. Philosophical letters and epistles were written by Epicurus, Paul the Apostle, François M. A. Voltaire, Pyotr Chadaayev, and so forth. In addition to philosophical letters as a genre and a form of expression in philosophy, the correspondence of philosophers can also be of significance. Personal correspondence of a philosopher is often an important source of information for understanding his teaching and life, but is also a source of data on his contemporaries, the teachings of other thinkers, historical events and the *Zeitgeist*. The most extensive epistolary legacies belong to Heidegger and Leibniz, but the oldest surviving and philosophically most important is certainly the one of Plato.

#### Critiques and Critical Disquisitions

A separate classification of philosophical works can be performed based on the tone in philosophy. Some works are written with the intention to publish them or to criticize philosophical teachings, hence the critical tone dominates. Other

<sup>15</sup> Gadamer called his autobiography *Philosophische Lehrjahre* (Gadamer, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Certainly, the most extensive one is the *Autobiography* by Bertrand Russell (Russell, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> Löwith wrote *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933* (Löwith, 2007).

works are written in more of an apologetic manner, and consequently they are used to defend particular phenomena and philosophical teachings.

Philosophical works can also be differentiated according to whether they take as the subject of their study certain segments of reality and phenomena within them, or an elaboration and a technical analysis of other authors' works are conducted. Within philosophical literature, philosophical criticism stands out as a genre which includes critical accounts, analyses, reviews, critical appraisals and comments. Philosophical polemics constitute a special genre, where standpoints of other philosophers on particular issues are considered in a trenchant, belligerent, antagonistic way.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from criticism as a genre, which evaluates the works of other philosophers, there is criticism as a type of thinking characteristic of philosophy, which rationally judges its object: knowledge, mind, reason, experience, religion, etc.<sup>19</sup> A considerable number of philosophical works have been written in the form of criticism of a particular teaching, standpoint, method, orientation, man's beliefs or cognitive powers.<sup>20</sup> Philosophy is characterised by a critical spirit and an investigative curiosity; therefore, it is no surprise that, in philosophy, no statement is regarded as exempt from critical analysis and further investigation. In the process of inquiry, it is insisted on critical distance, which allows one to perceive the nature of the object under consideration, and on an antidogmatic approach which does not take any supposition to be correct without previous verification and analysis.

<sup>18</sup> Greek noun πόλεμος means 'war', and the adjective πολεμικός (= polemic) means 'warlike, belligerent, hostile'.

<sup>19</sup> In addition to criticism as a genre, which is concerned with evaluation of works of other philosophers, there is also criticism as a way of thinking characteristic of philosophy. The best-known philosophical critiques were written by Immanuel Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason/Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, *Critique of Practical Reason/Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, and *Critique of Judgment/Kritik der Urteilskraft*). Karl Marx, in the critical tone, wrote the following works: *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts)*, *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung.)*, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie)*, and *Capital (Das Kapital)*, subtitled as *Critique of Political Economy (Kritik der politischen Ökonomie)*. In collaboration with Friedrich Engels, Marx wrote the works *The Holy Family, or the Critique of a Critical Critique (Die heilige Familie, oder Kritik der kritischen Kritik)* and *The German Ideology. Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets (Die deutsche Ideologie. Kritik der neuesten deutschen Philosophie in ihren Repräsentanten, Feuerbach, B. Bauer und Stirner, und des deutschen Sozialismus in seinen verschiedenen Propheten)*; Friedrich Engels is the author of the text *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy (Umrisse zu einer Kritik der Nationalökonomie)*, and Jean-Paul Sartre published the work *Critique of Dialectical Reason (Critique de la raison dialectique)*, and so forth."

<sup>20</sup> Entire philosophical trends have a designation – critical in their name: criticism, critical critique, critical theory, critical rationalism, and so forth.



Philosophers depart critically from the previous philosophical tradition either through developing a sceptical position towards the acquired knowledge or through the need for a fresh beginning and grounding.<sup>21</sup> Critical remarks and doubts about the truth of ingrained viewpoints on the world are often stated within the framework of thought experiments. Some sort of a possible scenario is presented in them, in which the relations are different from the ones that come into standard pictures and representations. In this way, the limitations of our conceptions of the world are indicated and their subjective character is demonstrated.

### *Concluding Considerations*

When speaking about a particular field of mind or a scientific discipline, the method employed by that discipline is always stated, as well as technical language used in it. It should be emphasized that philosophy utilizes specific terminology and various methods for the treatment of its subject of study, but also different manners of setting forth its content. In other words, philosophemes are put forth both through metaphors and in the form of logical demonstrations. However, when describing philosophy, the importance and diversity of ways of expounding its content are often overlooked.

It is noticeable that some periods of philosophy's development are dominated by a specific tendency in the manner of writing, teaching, and expounding philosophical knowledge. Whether critiques, analyses, treatises, dialogues, studies, essays, novels, aphorisms, or philosophical systems will be prevalent and topical in a particular age, depends on whether the view of the world is predominantly scientific, philosophical, religious, or mythological, as well as on the current issues of the period, the position of human beings in society, and whether the world is seen as whole or fragmentary.

Philosophers select the form of presenting their teaching so that, first of all, it corresponds to the themes one tries to tackle and present. One can also notice the popularity of certain genres in some periods and epochs. Furthermore, philosophical teachings are shaped in view of the targeted goals the author seeks to realize.

The motives for writing a particular philosophical work can vary greatly. The author, through his or her writing, strives to give an introduction to some problem area, to analyze a problem, state a position, give moral instruction or advice

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<sup>21</sup> In the modern era, the need for a fundamental break with the philosophical tradition is shown by René Descartes and Francis Bacon. Namely, they believe that uncritically acquired philosophical heritage brings misconceptions, wrong assumptions, and a dogmatic approach to authorities. Therefore, it is necessary to start afresh, in search for new, methodologically reliable, firm, and certain foundations.

on how one should live and what values one should pursue, describe different theoretical positions, provide an interpretation of a contentious issue, develop comprehensive teaching and present it as a philosophical system pertaining to the reality as a whole, to test the strength of the argument, present the inner train of thoughts, offer criticism of standard beliefs, study sceptical arguments, etc. Moreover, works are written with the intention of giving advice or criticism, introducing a new principle, heralding the next era, or starting a different kind of interpretation within the given discipline. Consequently, philosophical works are written in such a way so as to correspond in their form to the discussed problems, as well as to the targeted goals and authors' intentions concerning the manner of analysing and treating that problem area. What is more, a personal moment is present to a considerable degree in philosophical works, determining the style of writing and the chosen form of presentation.<sup>22</sup> Various forms of expounding philosophical content make philosophy similar to literature.

Behind ramified forms of expounding philosophy and the disciplinary division of knowledge, still lies the idea of philosophy as a whole. The key question is: What is it in the nature of philosophy that enables its expression and emergence in different forms and genres? The problem area one deals with and the aim one aspires to determine the choice of form of expounding the philosophical teaching. However, that which enables the emergence of different ways of expounding philosophy has more profound philosophical reasons and goes into the very nature of philosophy.

During its history, philosophy has changed its content and its nature, in its progression from the love of wisdom to linguistic games. Philosophy does not have a strictly defined subject of study, nor does it practice only one form of philosophizing. Hence, it is impossible to find out one common generally accepted definition of philosophy that everybody would agree upon. Turns in understanding what philosophy is and should be brought about different ways of setting forth its content.

The diversity of forms of expounding philosophy is also linked with the methods present in philosophy. During two and a half thousand years of philosophy's continuance, numerous philosophical methods arose and established themselves, approaching the topic of their analysis in specific ways. It is precisely the variety of philosophical methods of thinking, from the dialectic method to the procedures of mathematical analysis, which offer the possibility of formulating different techniques of expounding and presenting philosophical content. Therefore, we can conclude that the variety of philosophical procedures and

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<sup>22</sup> By this characteristic, since it allows subjective, i.e. personal point of view, that is, it does not require common consent on stated positions, philosophy reminds of art. On the other hand, when it stresses the claim to validity, correctness and coherence of statements, it emphasizes its scientific character.



methods, on the one hand, as well as the diversity of definitions and conceptions of philosophy, on the other, had a significant influence on the emergence of numerous philosophical genres and forms of exposition. This kind of genre diversity is an asset and a richness of philosophy.

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## О могућим формама излагања филозофије

### Резиме

У овом раду бавимо се анализом различитих начина излагања филозофског садржаја. Полазимо од разлике између усмених и писаних начина презентовања филозофског знања, затим правимо класификације филозофских текстова с обзиром на различите критеријуме. У централном делу рада анализирамо основне научно-филозофске форме излагања филозофског садржаја: прологе, трактате, есеје, медитације, афоризме, аутобиографије, писма итд. Крајња намера овог рада је да истакне везу научних форми и одређених филозофских садржаја, као и блиску повезаност форме излагања и циља којем аутор тежи. У закључном поглављу одговара се на питање: Шта омогућава да се филозофски садржаји могу на различите начине излагати и презентовати? У одговору на ово питање истичемо важну особеност филозофије по којој је она ближа уметности него науци.

*Кључне речи:* филозофија; класификација; принцип класификације; форма; садржај; метод.



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