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An Apology for the Obscurity of Philosophical Discourse: the Fruitfulness of Obscurity

Abstract

The article examines the distinctive features of philosophical discourse, such as clarity and intersubjectivity in philosophical communication. The possible reasons for the obscurity of philosophical texts and the complexity in communicating meanings are analysed. It is claimed that the obscurity of philosophical texts and eventual incomplete understanding is not a sign of their inferiority but the fruitfulness of philosophical discourse, which can generate new meanings.

Keywords

Discursive Thinking, Philosophical Discourse, Communication, Language, Clarity, Comprehensibility

> Are you a bad philosopher then, if what you write is hard to understand? If you were better you would make what is difficult easy to understand.
> —But who says that's possible?
>
> L. Wittgenstein

> I do not fit into any discourse, and I have to speak only on behalf of myself and for myself, in presence not of a listener or interlocutor but a eavesdropper: as of I were thinking aloud, without addressing anyone and not demanding a response.
>
> V.V. Bibikhin

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Concept of Discourse

The concept of discourse is distinguished by its semantic depth and blur of its conceptual boundaries: speech, text, the method of text generation, the linguistic context in which a text is created and perceived—all these are called "discourse." Despite the diversity of the "trendy" uses and interpretations of the terms "discourse" and "discursiveness" in various contexts, we can identify some of their most common constitutive features.

Discursive thinking primarily contrasts intuitive thinking and presumes consistent reasoning in concepts and judgments. Discursive thinking is viewed as the opposite of an intuitive instant grasping of the whole. Moreover, discourse is created in a specific semantic domain and designed to generate and convey meaning, i.e., it necessarily presupposes intersubjectivity and communication. Consequently, a necessary attribute of discourse is clarity, understood as objective transparency of meaning, achieved by the unambiguity and accuracy of terms, simple syntax, a coherence of presentation, and possibility for adequate understanding by the communicants, i.e., intelligibility of the discourse by the participants.

In other words, if discourse is speech, then speech must be clear, conceptually and logically correct; if it is text, then it must be coherent and consistent; if it is a method of text generation, then it must be rational. Finally, if it is a language context, it must ensure the participants' effective communication, mutual understanding and interaction.

1.2. Philosophical Text vs Discursiveness

Provided that the expression "philosophical discourse" is quite familiar, why shouldn't it be located among the other kinds of discourse, i.e., political, legal, and even musical and everyday discourse? The specificity of the language of philosophical texts, the peculiarities of communication within the framework of philosophical problems, the method of "gaining knowledge" itself raises doubts about the possibility of philosophical discourse. Moreover, doubts about the discursiveness of philosophy have a lengthy history, which is equal to the history of philosophy itself.

First of all, these doubts concern the principal *expressibility of philosophical truths*. The problem of expressibility embraces the possibility of clarity, consistency, and adequacy of the existing language. Already in antiquity, there were doubts about the possibility of language to express philosophical truths:

> On this account, 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, *Letter* VII, 343a; Plato 1997, 660).

Secondly, there are many reservations concerning the problem of communication in the space of philosophical discourse, i.e., the problem of understanding, continuity, conventionality regarding the terminology and structure of knowledge, the postulational character of at least some of the conclusions, the hierarchy of authoritative authors, and other issues. The whole history of philosophy is not a peaceful conversation between speakers of the same language, based on mutual understanding and mutual ideological enrichment, as A.V. Akhutin put it, but rather a dispute of "copyrighted misunderstandings" (Akhutin 2014, 4).

The Russian philosopher V.V. Bibikhin, not groundlessly, opposes the language of philosophy to discourse, calling the latter "creeping" for its methodological consistency. Based on a famous saying of Heraclitus, "Lightning governs all living [things]," Bibikhin develops his idea about the characteristics of philosophical problems and philosophical language:

> living [nature] is governed neither by reasoning nor by creeping discourse but the lightning imperative (Bibikhin 2002, 136 (my translation)).

Consequently, a natural question arises despite this uncommon understanding of the relationship between discourse and philosophical utterance: Is it possible for a philosophical utterance to generate discourse? Isn't the concept of "philosophical discourse" an oxymoron?

Let us consider in more detail the signs of discursiveness concerning philosophy.

2. The Problem of Clarity in Philosophy

2.1. The Requirement for Clarity in Philosophy

The requirement of clarity, transparency for any message, besides consistency, is usually taken for a postulate. Since the goal of any message is to make thought intersubjective, the transparency of the message is a necessary precondition for communication to ensure mutual understanding between the persons taking part in it. The clarity of the uttered statement makes dialogue possible, demonstrating the author's rhetorical skill and his degree of mastery of the material.

The thesis of inadmissibility of ambiguity in philosophical statements is often reinforced by citing Ludwig Wittgenstein' proclamation:

> what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence (Wittgenstein 1974, 3).

Edmund Husserl considered the requirement for clarity to be an imperative of philosophy. The entire history of philosophy, starting from antiquity, seems to stress the need for clarity of philosophical discourse.

Thus, Socrates, striving for maximum clarity and transparency in reasoning, warned his friend Phaedrus in the dialogue of the same name against a common mistake of speakers, which used to lead to confusion and misunderstanding. The problem, in his view, is that people begin to discuss something without prior agreement on its definition, without specifying from the beginning what meaning they ascribe to a concept, groundlessly assuming that they know its exact meaning and everybody shares the same view about it (Plato *Phaedrus* 237c; Plato 1997, 517). Hence, Socrates always starts from the definition of the concepts under discussion when analysing a problem.

Aristotle also emphasises the need for clarity of statements.

> The excellence of diction is for it to be at once clear and not mean. The clearest indeed is that made up of the ordinary words for things, but it is mean (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1458a 18-20; Aristotle 1984, 5001).

Philosophical reasoning that goes beyond the generally comprehensible maxims of common sense is thus doomed to be incomprehensible. Aristotle suggests a compromise by recommending to mix the "strange" words with "ordinary" ones in order to make a speech "clear and not mean" (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1458a 16-18; Aristotle 1984, 5001) that is, to maintain its depth, without losing clarity:

> A certain admixture, accordingly, of unfamiliar terms is necessary. These, the strange word, the metaphor, the ornamental equivalent, etc., will save the language from seeming mean and prosaic, while the ordinary words in it will secure the requisite clearness (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1458a 32-37; Aristotle 1984, 5001).

Indeed, it is not easy to achieve clarity when expressing complex thoughts. Nevertheless, no degree of complexity can justify the lack of clarity. According to Aristotle, the lack of clarity in reasoning is a fundamental flaw and evidence of poor mastery of speech skills. To approximate clarity, shape

the vague, and complete the unfinished, give form to the indefinite amounts to increase its ontological status and approach the completeness of the Being.

We strive to achieve the utmost clarity and purity of thought by asking questions about the essence of things, the logic and mechanisms of our thinking about things, and the adequacy of our representations of things. More than any other kind of knowledge, philosophy faces the problem of ambiguity.

Unclarity accompanies philosophical texts so often that it has generated the prejudice that all philosophy is principally something incomprehensible, i.e., that philosophy and incomprehensibility are synonymous. Although a bearer of ordinary consciousness shows respect to the incomprehensibility, for instance, of mathematics, he speaks mockingly and dismissively of philosophy that is incomprehensible to him. The following typical sentence vividly expresses the situation: "We are simple people; we have no time for philosophy".

A non-philosopher views the reason for the lack of clarity in the philosophical texts not in his reluctance/unwillingness to understand a specific area of knowledge, but in the belief that the author does not understand the problem, and thereby expounds it confusingly ("being a fool"), or deliberately complicates the presentation in order to demonstrate his exclusivity ("cleverness"), or cheating, hiding its emptiness behind a complex "interweaving of words", or openly fooling the reader by inventing pseudo-problems. That is why a philosopher often hears the following impatient sentence:

> Couldn't it be said shorter? Could you say this in normal human language?

Unfortunately, the reproaches of philosophy for an "unclean game" are not always groundless. Sometimes there is dilettantism, fraud, emptiness, lack of understanding of the essence of a subject under discussion behind the ambiguity. In classical Greek philosophy, one can often find a bitter statement that people often impersonate philosophers who have nothing to do with it. It is not always easy to expose them (for example, in Plato's Dialogues *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Republic* and others). Meaningful inconsistency of texts is often mistaken for complex content, incoherence for complex syntax, pompous pathos for passionate ethical preaching. However, all this has nothing to do with real philosophy and its work or with philosophers.

In order to understand how fair the accusations of obscurity to philosophy are, it is necessary first of all to clarify what *clarity* is.

2.2. Semantic Variability of the Concept of Clarity

Clarity usually means plainness, the absence of ambiguity, the ability to read precisely the author's meaning, transparent syntax, and the use of accepted terminology, generally understandable by the reader. That is, clarity is usually understood as intelligibility. Wittgenstein declares

> For me on the contrary clarity, transparency is an end in itself (Wittgenstein 1998, 22).

However, clarity and intelligibility are not synonyms; on the contrary, in the context of philosophical discourse, they can be opposites. Clarity is the evidence of true meaning, and clarification is a complex set of actions aimed at discovering the truth, bringing it to light. It is known that Heidegger has interpreted the Greek word ἀλήθεια as "unconcealedness," "disclosure," "the state of not being hidden"; "the state of being evident," in contrast to λήθη ("lethe"), which means "oblivion", "forgetfulness", or "concealment" (Heidegger 1972, 70; 1992).

The clarity of truth lies in its openness; clarification removes the veil of obscurity from the truth. Comprehensibility is the openness of the text to understanding; the content and form of its message must correspond to the capacity of the addressee to grasp its meaning. A philosopher strives for clarity but does not aim at comprehensibility, i.e., he seeks to express his thought *clearly* but is not particularly concerned about its *intelligibility*. His text may remain unclear for one reason and incomprehensible for other reasons; it can be just as clear but incomprehensible or clear and understandable. The requirement for clarity does not mean adaptation to the epistemological capacities of the reader; it entirely disregards the perception capacities of the reader.

Clarity concerns the relationship of a statement about a thing with the truth, i.e., clarity is a measure for its truth. The requirement for intelligibility concerns the relationship of the conveyor of a message with his potential receptor; i.e., intelligibility concerns the sphere of communication. Understandability is a prerequisite for successful communication; honesty is secondary here.

If one understands clarity as proximity to the truth and maximum adequacy of an intelligible statement of a flashed thought, then the clearer the statement, the farther it is from the intellectual experience of the interlocutor. That is, the requirement for clarity in the ontological sense (as proximity to the truth) can lead to a decrease in clarity in the didactic sense, that is, intelligibility.

The lack of clarity of a philosophical text must not be the result of haste or ineptness of correctable formulations, not an accidental "side effect" of the complexity of its problems. Unclarity is the essence of the "philosophical affair," the philosophising as a way of interacting with reality and understanding it, the way of life (or mode of existence) of a philosopher, and the pressing tasks he encounters. Although obscurity is not conscious choice or intention, it is an inevitable (and necessary, as shown later) companion of the philosophising.

2.3. The Reasons for the Unclarity of Philosophy

Among the reasons for unclarity, three of them are, in our view, the most important.

A) The idiosyncrasy of the subject matter of philosophy: its principal expressibility. Wittgenstein, who is popular among the lovers of quotation who follow the principle "One hundred most famous philosophical sayings," exclusively for his requirement for clarity, also highlighted the impossibility to follow this requirement:

> There really are cases in which one has the sense of what one wants to say much more clearly in mind than he can express in words. (This happens to me very often) (Wittgenstein 1998, 108).

A philosopher's thought is inexpressible because it is always turned to the roots, the foundations of the Being. The reason for Heraclitus' "darkness" is not his (intentional or accidental) vague manner of expressing thoughts but the thought itself; it is unusually profound and new. As Heidegger expressed it,

> Heraclitus is thus ὁ Σκοτεινός, 'The Obscure,' not because he intentionally or unintentionally expresses himself in a manner that is incomprehensible, but rather because every merely reasonable thinking excludes itself from the thinking of the thinker (i.e., from essential thinking) (Heidegger 1994, 24).

B) The idiosyncrasy of the language of philosophy: the capture of the thought and its adequate perceptibility. It is always questionable to which extent a text expresses an original thought of an author adequately; a text can be poorer or richer than the original thought. Very often, a philosopher painfully feels the imperfection of the capacities of the language for expressing their thought and comes to despair from the unsuitability of the expres-

sive means they have available H.-G. Gadamer recalls that once, M. Heidegger, while reading his text, hit the table with his hand so that the cups rang and shouted: "Das ist alles Chinesisch!"—"All this is some kind of Chinese!" (Gadamer 2016, 56).

After some time, the author's text may seem alien to the author, as if he had nothing to do with it. This phenomenon is partly explained by the idea of Yuri M. Lotman about text (and sign) as a thinking structure. This means that the text, possessing its internal logic, is able not to *follow* the whimsical thought of the author but, on the contrary, *to carry* it, more or less successfully, not to fix and preserve meanings, but to create them. Different readings can reveal different meanings in the text, including those of which the author is unaware, i.e., the author may not understand the meaning of their text, as if they were acting as a medium and speaking on behalf of spirits.

C) The philosopher's loneliness in thought and the possibility of communication. The obscurity of philosophical texts would not be a problem if it concerned only a lay reader. However, a philosophical text often turns out to be unclear not only for an inexperienced non-philosopher but also for another philosopher, causing bewilderment, ridicule, anger, accusations of unprofessionalism, dismissive neglect because neither thought nor language can be shared with somebody else. L. Wittgenstein admitted that

> Almost the whole time I am writing conversations with myself. Things I say to myself *tête-à-tête* (Wittgenstein 1998, 106).

Arguing with predecessors and contemporaries, contradicting themselves, a philosopher seeks and paves their way in the darkness. A philosopher is not a preacher; hence, only what was conceived and thought alone in solitude turns out to be genuine in philosophy.

Philosophical texts are often at odds with ordinary rules of discourse that naturally raise questions. Can the principally volatile and unwarranted philosophical thought in the discourse be understood traditionally? Is it possible to call "discourse" a ragged narrative, replete with unexpected and often unclear metaphors, allusions, author's neologisms, and consisting of happily (or accidentally) snatches of meaning caught up in it? Can the obscurity of philosophical reasoning be discursive? i.e., not only *obstruct the discursiveness* of the text but *create discourse* in a characteristic way of its own?

3. The Clarifying Obscurity of Philosophical Discourse

Although it may seem paradoxical, what is often perceived as "obscurity" of philosophical discourse contributes precisely to the ontological clarification of truth, its adequate expression, and unifies thinkers in a shared space and affair.

3.1. Clarity as Clarification of Meaning (as a Condition for Approaching the Truth)

The obscurity of philosophical texts is often ascribed to the excessive complexity of the language, namely, in the invention of new words, for instance, by M. Heidegger, M.M. Bakhtin, J.-P. Sartre, M.N. Epstein, the abundance of metaphors and allegories, references to other cultural texts (Heraclitus, Nietzsche), in a manner of utterances replete with violations of the rules of academic and even ordinary discourse, such as heavy syntax (Hegel, Heidegger, Levinas), negligence of presentation, inconsistency, repetitions (Mamardashvili, Bibikhin), excessive conciseness, unspoken thoughts, semantic autonomy of fragments (Heraclitus, Bakhtin, Wittgenstein), "oracular" manner of exposition, allowing opposite interpretations (Heraclitus).

A philosopher always strives for clarity. Clarity of meaning is understood as maximal correspondence between what is uttered and thought. For this reason, they invent their terms and use such means as specific syntax, punctuation, and even graphic views. All these features of the philosophical language that, superficially viewed, obscure the meaning, in reality, serve to clarify it.

Let us illustrate it with some examples.

Negligence of Formulations

When reading philosophical texts, an impression of general negligence is often shaped to terms used in occasional or at least loose meanings. This is primarily because the philosopher thinks about hardly definable things, such as the Being, time, life, love, loneliness and others. In this case, a philosopher faces a difficulty (*aporia*): they principally cannot refuse from giving definitions, but at the same time, they understand that no definition will be the ultimate one. Such concepts cannot be definitively defined, and at the same time, one cannot abandon the task to provide definitions. M.N. Epstein sug-

gested calling *infinitions* (a term derived from the words "definition" and "infinity") such non-ultimate definitions that assume infinitely many attempts to define a concept.

> Infinition is an infinitely deferred definition that defines a certain concept and at the same time indicates its indefinability. Infinitions are often used about fundamental, all-defining and undefined concepts (Epstein 2017, 15 (my translation)).

Furthermore, a philosopher often deals not with methodological reasoning but with an instant grasp of meaning, requiring instant fixation/objecttification in a word. They do not have time for rhetorical perfection.

Socrates repeatedly said that he used the first words he came across. (Plato, *Symposium* 199b; Plato 1997, 481). In Plato's Dialogue *Phaedrus*, he confesses his ignorance, bad memory, foolishness, inability to pronounce beautiful speeches (in comparison, for example, with the orator Lysis) (Plato, *Phaedrus* 235c-d, 236d; Plato 1997, 514-515). His student Alcibiades says that, at first glance, Socrates' speeches seem ridiculous and primitive.

> If you were to listen to his arguments, at first they'd strike you as totally ridiculous; they're clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He's always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners; he's always making the same tired old points in the same tired old words.

But, he says,

> If you go behind their surface, you'll realise that … they're of great—no, of the greatest—importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man (Plato, *Symposium* 221e-222a; Plato 1997, 503).

Socrates turns everything upside down. He poses questions about what seems to everyone understandable and straightforward before these questions are formulated. He makes unclear what is clear, unstable what is stable, destroys and rearranges the ordinary order of things. Where does the smoothness of the syllable come from, where things lose their place, and the ordinary meaning slips away? However, most importantly, smoothness is not only impossible here; it is not needed at all. An unsophisticated, at first glance, speech is freed from the beautiful in favour of the necessary, from the generally accepted in favour of the particular. It describes the world uncloudedly by linguistic habits as if seen for the first time.

L. Wittgenstein gives a convincing apology for negligence

> A mediocre writer must beware of too quickly replacing a crude, incorrect expression with a correct one. By doing so he kills the original idea, which was still at least a living seedling. And now it is shrivelled & no longer worth anything (Wittgenstein 1998, 108).

Indeed, perfectionism concerning a philosophical text can often lead to the opposite result. Rigorous formulations, an abundance of references, explanations for each comment, extensive reference material, thorough introductions and subsequently, a scrupulously studied and cited historiography of the issue—all this can deprive the text of the necessary energy, dialogism and impulse that encourages contemplation, reflexion. On the contrary, rough, hastily formulated ideas, unexpected allusions, reasoning cut off in the mid-sentence keep the philosophical text alive.

The Author's Vocabulary

In addition to using occasional, "close at hand" words that approximately convey a thought, a philosopher is compelled to invent his language to adequately express his thought since he cannot find an exact match among the existing words. Among the inventors of words are M. Heidegger, A. Bergson, G. Gadamer, E. Levinas, E. Husserl, M.M. Bakhtin, M. Epstein. A student of Heidegger from the USA recalls that in response to his requests to expound this or that confusing terminology of his work in more straightforward German, Heidegger was usually dumbfounded, wholly absorbed in the task. Very often, he remarked with bitterness that it would be better to present everything differently while admitting, at the same time, his incapacity before the task (Gray 1977, 75-76).

Philosophy does not use mechanically existing concepts that have been shaped from the folding of thought about things. Every time, it turns to the things themselves, following a complex and unpredictable path anew, reinterpreting concepts ("phenomenon", "good", "measure"), using them in a new meaning ("presence", "event", "concern", "abandonment"), or creating new concepts ("existence", "Dasein" (Heidegger), "externality" ["vnenakhodimost'"] (Bakhtin), "all-unity" [„Alleinheit"] (V. Soloviev), "chronocide" (Epstein). Analogous words from everyday discourse cannot replace these concepts; we cannot express them in "easier" or even more different ways.

The emergence of new concepts in philosophy is a natural and fruitful process; it evidences a new possibility to look at reality from a different perspective.

The Metaphorical Nature of Philosophical Language

As V.V. Bibikhin claims,

> We do not control the language. Consciousness assigns a meaning to a sign, but then the sign breaks out of the power of consciousness and advances its own life: it gets blurred, bifurcated, disappears, passes into another sign (Bibikhin 2002, 76-77 (my translation)).

Signs turn out to be somehow interconnected not because of rational grounds (etymology, grammatical rules) but due to a suddenly emerging new meaning. These unexpected connections are most often revealed in the metaphorical language of poetry and philosophy.

A metaphor has not only a didactic purpose (how to better explain the meaning of some abstraction by drawing an analogy with something evident) but, most importantly, an ontological status since it indicates the internal connections of phenomena. Moreover, a metaphor connects not just one phenomenon of the world with another; it stitches together entire layers of reality, dissimilar at first glance, reveals the regularities of the general structure, its deep meanings, and thereby helps to view the general coherence and unity of the world. The Heraclitean metaphors of the bow and the lyre not only revealed an unexpected essential similarity of different objects (the degree of tension of the bowstring and the lyre string ensures their functionality) but also served as an illustration of the universal principle of the interaction of opposing forces. His metaphors of Being as fire and time as flow also became famous, thanks to which the most complex "undefinable" (as said above) concepts appear in visible forms.

The rejection of verbalisation and conceptualisation of an abstract phenomenon in favour of a form enables us to understand this phenomenon in all diversity of its aspects, which is irreducible to a definition given the following of all the rules. For example, Heraclitus explains the nature of the cosmos, presenting its various models through metaphorical analogies or codes (cosmos as Logos, cosmos as an oracle, cosmos as a stadium, as a temple, as an organism, etc.) (Lebedev 2014, 59-96).

M. Heidegger and F. Nietzsche often use poetic metaphors to convey meaning adequately. It is known that F. Nietzsche included his poetic works in his philosophical works. Similarly, in Heidegger's works, there are frequent quotes from Friedrich Hölderlin, Georg Trakl, Rainer M. Rilke, which sound like oracles and are subjected to detailed interpretation.

The metaphors used in philosophy are not confined to the verbal form. Thus, M. Heidegger, in his treatise *The Origin of the Work of Art* (*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*), gives us an example of an artistic metaphor for lonely, poor, joyless life, Vincent van Gogh's picture "A Pair of Shoes" (1886)".

Sometimes, to maximise expressivity, thinkers resort to original techniques, combining the usual verbal form of expression with elements of formulas, signs, using wordplay and unexpected allusions. Thus, the Russian philosopher and cultural theorist Grigory S. Pomerants (1918–2013) suggests a definition of a human that resembles a mathematical formula:

> A man in this world is one, divided to infinity (Pomerants 2010).

Philosopher and cultural theorist M.N. Epstein highlights that the essence of a human is the ability to love by resorting to a graphic transformation; he replaces the four letters in the Cyrillic word for "human" (человек—chelovek) with the corresponding Latin letters: che*Love*k (Epstein 2017, 18).

Thus, these examples of using metaphors unambiguously indicate the author's intention to clarify their thought, both in the didactic and ontological senses.

The Author's Punctuation

One reason for Heraclitus' "obscurity" is the omission of connectives. His obscurity created significant difficulties for interpreters. The meaning of Heraclitus's statements often depends on what connective parts of speech put the interpreters of Heraclitus in place of the missing ones (Wheelwright 1959, 13). The lack of connectives was attributed to his illiteracy, negligence, the influence of oral speech and even a conscious desire to make the text inaccessible to the uninitiated (the latter view was held, in particular, by Diogenes Laertius). However, there are grounds to believe that the author's punctuation (more precisely, the absence of punctuation and connective parts of speech) in Heraclitus served an utterly different purpose. According to A.V. Lebedev, the grammatical features of Heraclitus' style have a philosophical foundation. Heraclitus omits the connective "and" (καί) between opposites not because of negligence, as Lebedev claims. The opposites must not be isolated or separated by this καί because they are not autonomous entities but aspects of a single whole. In the language of Homer and Hesiod, opposites are separated, but in nature, all parts are integrated like letters

and syllables in one text, the Logos. Heraclitus omits the copula "be", but, as Lebedev points out, when he speaks of the Logos, space or deity, he uses the copula "be" and omits it when it comes to things that may change. Moreover, Heraclitus uses the definite articles τό, τά only to eternal entities, and avoids using the articles to phenomenal opposites, since the article substantiates a phenomenon, turning it into an autonomous thing (Lebedev 2014, 51-53).

Twenty-five centuries after Heraclitus, we can see examples when philosophers ignore the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation not because of ignorance but to express their position as clearly as possible. Thus, for instance, one of the features of Wittgenstein's style is the adherence to lowercase letters, the abundance of punctuation marks, the division of the text into paragraphs after almost every sentence. He did it deliberately:

> Really I want to slow down the speed of reading with continual † a punctuation marks. For I should like to be read slowly. (As I myself read.) (Wittgenstein 1998, 95).

The Complex Architecture of Text

In the case of philosophical texts, the reader is often faced with the fact that it is impossible to fit them into the linear format of "normal" narrative of a humanitarian text or the logic and rationality of scientific reasoning; it is impossible to outline them in the form of sequential theses.

Firstly, many philosophical texts tend towards a rhizome, i.e., they have a ramification structure. The ramification of the narrative is due to the ramification of the meanings in philosophising. Reducing the text to monadic ideas would mean resectioning the possible meaning "sprouts," i.e., semantic depletion and distortion. A smooth, grammatically and logically correct narration corresponds to the rules of language, logic, the standard epistemological and rhetorical trajectories. However, the most crucial in philosophy goes beside the rules since it corresponds to the heuristic, intellectual experience of the author.

Secondly, even the possibility of constructing a coherent text is questionable. This has led to another widespread style of philosophical texts: the aphoristic style. Aphorisms have not always the form of minted formulas; they often also bear traces of haste, as if the philosopher was in a hurry to fix an elusive thought in a sketch of the text, and does it for themselves, so that they are not primarily concerned about its completeness, formalisation, leaving a sense of innuendo.

The fact is that a philosopher does not read a report, does not expose a lesson, but enters into a dialogue with the reader, whose task is not to exchange ready-made thoughts but to generate and clarify them together. Innuendos allow for a different continuation, depending on the interlocutor's comprehension and the direction towards which they move. Wittgenstein writes

> Anything the reader can do for himself, leave it to the reader (Wittgenstein 1998, 106).

The scattered notes of M. Montaigne, B. Pascal, V.V. Rozanov, L. Wittgenstein can hardly be combined into a coherent text or distributed thematically. In the case of Wittgenstein, all attempts to categorise his notes give the impression of artificiality and arbitrariness. His philosophical thoughts are mixed with remarks of an everyday nature, but an attempt to separate them showed that within a context containing descriptions of time, mood, references to life events, aphorisms acquired depth and were understood differently. Wittgenstein explains the peculiarities of the stylistics of his texts in the following way:

> If I am thinking just for myself without wanting to write a book, I jump about all round the topic; that is the only way of thinking that is natural to me. Forcing my thoughts into an ordered sequence is a torment for me. Should I even attempt it now? (Wittgenstein 1998, 48).

Indeed, the gravitation towards such a style is an individual feature and not an attribute of philosophical discourse in general. However, firstly, this is a ubiquitous feature, and, secondly, Wittgenstein points out that he could write in a coherent style, only if he were writing a book, i.e., if he were writing *for others*. Likely, a coherent presentation by other authors capable of exposing this coherence is also nothing more than a concession to the reader.

The Author's Style

A.V. Akhutin drew attention to the following paradox: nothing universally significant can be said otherwise than in the author's style, in their language and on behalf of their thought (Akhutin 2005, 502). This is evidenced by numerous examples in the history of philosophy.

The language of M.K. Mamardashvili is distinguished by a bright style that is captivating and annoying. His language has no strict definitions and well-shaped concepts, but many metaphors, symbolic parables, and newly in-

vented words. He was accused of the sloppiness of his language; many complained that it is difficult to get through to the meaning because of the laxity of his language. He used ideas and names familiar to everyone, which became for everyone signs, but in a strange, unexpected sense. The unaccustomed train of thinking, the unusual for the academic style turns of speech, and the unexpected comparisons violated the inertia of perception, caused confusion, indignation, the need to deal with, to object, to say the same thing differently, thus triggering the mechanism of internal dialogue, co-reasoning, and co-thinking.

V.V. Bibikhin's philosophical texts are confusing because they do not have the standard advance of thinking from a problem statement to the conclusions. The same question may appear several times in a text, as if the whole reasoning that followed the formulated question does not contain a final answer and requires renewal of mental efforts again and again, from the very beginning. The text keeps a reader in suspense from the beginning to the end, and the result leaves no satisfaction from the solution of the problem, but a feeling of confusion, *amechania* (embarrassment), which is probably more productive than any ready-made answer.

Does a philosopher consciously shape their style? Can they correct it without the distortion of their thought? It is hardly possible. L. Wittgenstein, recognising the shortcomings of his style (primarily due to the lack of clarity, consistency and comprehensibility), came to a conclusion that

> You must accept the faults in your own style. Almost like the blemishes in your own face (Wittgenstein 1998, 104).

The Flaw of Clarity and the Fruitfulness of Obscurity of a Philosophical Text

As shown, the specificity of the language of philosophical texts is very different from the standard concept of discursiveness. The point is not only that any discourse has a vocabulary of its own, a form of verbal constructions (syntax), semantics and pragmatics. Philosophical discourse is a convincing demonstration that clarity is not always a virtue and ambiguity is not always a disadvantage.

The compromise suggested by Aristotle does not always help achieve the required clarity and preserve the originality and depth of thought. Sacrifices are inevitably needed. An author who wishes to be understood tries to become comprehensible. Thus, he puts his ideas in the Procrustean bed of the

acceptable verbal and mental constructions, narrowing and even distorting their meanings. However, clarity can be proved to be an illusion. The smoothness of presentation, the usage of familiar terms and ways of reasoning may lull the reader's attention. They may miss something new because they are confident that they understand the idea and recognise familiar paths of reasoning and acquainted terms. Bibikhin said that

> A philosophical text requires the same elaboration as a mathematical one [*because philosophy is not less rigorous*—our addition]. The fact that the philosophy of the illusion of clarity is more common than in mathematics complicates the work (Bibikhin 2002, 106 (my translation)).

The tendency for clarity and, thereby, complete comprehension, as an absolute value, would have entailed that the discovered meanings would have been simply preserved in rigid form, without increase or change.

However, what could be more important than clarity for a perceiver? The possibility of dialogue and the possibility of producing new meanings. Dialogue is meaningless if the interlocutors do not understand each other. However, it is equally meaningless if they understand each other completely. It is as if one were talking to themselves. Partial confusion and misunderstanding are not only inevitable but necessary for communication to make sense. As Bibikhin says

> The catastrophe that occurs with my thought in someone else's mind is simultaneously the birth of a new idea in it (Bibikhin 2010 (my translation)).

Thus, unclarity is not inevitable; it is not a defect, a shortage. Even in science that is supposed to be the ideal of rigour and unambiguity, obscurity can be fruitful. Thus, in mathematics, a verbal description of an idea precedes its formalisation; the verbal description may contain ambiguity before its explicit formalisation. However, in this way, the idea, which is not crystallised in formulas and formal definitions, keeps the possibility for constructing alternative explications and models. In the history of mathematics, the revision of the axiomatics of a theory is an often phenomenon. Alternative axiomatics offer different understandings and capturing of the initial intuitions. Thus, the ambiguity of initial insights is proved a fertile environment for the generation of new formal models.

A philosophical text's lack of linearity, discreteness, and internal inconsistency is justifiable and even fruitful. Philosophers are often accused of inconsistency, i.e., that opposite or contradictory statements coexist in their

texts (M.M. Bakhtin, A.F. Losev). This is a problem for those who cite and interpret their texts. Nevertheless, it is neither a problem for philosophy nor a fault for the philosophers.

V.V. Bibikhin, who for a long time served as a secretary of the outstanding philosopher A.F. Losev, typeset under his dictation many of the works of the latter since Losev had very poor eyesight. Thus, he noticed that Losev never crossed out what had been written, although, after a few pages, he could come to the exact opposite statement (Bibikhin 2009). The philosophical text does not capture frozen truths; it reproduces the train of thought. What appears to be an inconsistency of the philosopher is the result of their never-ending effort to find the truth. The "reliability" of philosophical work and the truth of philosophical ideas are *not provided by* strict definitions, formulas, logic, loyalty to school or tradition, the correctness of methodology, techniques, approaches. Strictly speaking, nothing guarantees this "reliability", except for the selfless, tireless, persistent search for the truth and willingness, if mistaken, to start all over again.

3.2. Clarity as Comprehensibility (As a Condition for Communication). Idiosyncrasies of Communication in the Philosophical Community

The creation of one's own philosophy, when there are undisputable authoritative teachers or so many schools to follow, is all the time a start from the very beginning, a rejection or reinterpretation of someone else's experience of explaining the world. However, if every thinker always starts from the beginning and in a new manner, if the thought cannot be shared with anybody else, and understanding is so difficult to be achieved, then a question naturally arises: how is communication in philosophy possible? Is it possible? To whom the philosopher's messages are addressed? Do they have an addressee? Is there consistency in the history of philosophical thought, or is it a series of lonely thinkers?

Let us begin with the famous warning of Aristotle

> Piety requires us to honor truth above our friends (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.4 1096a 15; Aristotle 1984, 3725).

The philosophers often acknowledge the loneliness of a thinker in their search for the truth.

> To walk alone along a lonely street is part of the philosopher's nature,—notes Nietzsche.—His gift is the rarest gift of all, the most unnatural one in a certain sense, exclusive and hostile even toward others with similar gifts (Nietzsche 1962, 66).

L. Wittgenstein reflected on his loneliness in philosophy and the problem of apprenticeship by asking the following question:

> Is it just I who cannot found a school, or can a philosopher never do so? I cannot find a school, because I actually want not to be imitated (Wittgenstein 1998, 87).

It is impossible to share the semantic universe of another: they have a unique history, a code, a language of their own. It is impossible to extract and take over shaped meanings from someone else's text, but it is possible to discover the meanings introduced in the field by someone else's text, be inspired by someone else's text, and enter into a dialogue with them.

Reflecting upon the reasons for the radical difference in the philosophical patterns of truth, A.V. Akhutin insightfully notes

> Maybe the principal difference of philosophical minds does not indicate an inability to tune in thought to the truth but, on the contrary, clarify something in the structure of the truth itself? Maybe another philosopher says something else because maybe the truth itself—the "sophia"—is *always something else*? (Akhutin 2014, [not paginated] (my translation)).

Eventual misunderstandings due to the principal difference of the philosophising minds and even the conflicts thus generated are evidence of the truth's tacit completeness and depth. The ideas do not remain unchanged in transmitting from one mind to another. They continue to induce thoughts, transform the minds into which they fall, and transform themselves. Each thinker paves their way, insisting on them by engaging in polemics with the others. In A.V. Akhutin's words,

> [Every philosopher] saves the truth from another philosopher (Akhutin 2021, 56 (my translation)).

However, the most important thing is that they find their path because polemics are possible. Dialogue is possible because there are other philosophising minds. By daring to express themselves, a philosopher expects neither unqualified acceptance nor complete understanding. They hope only that their thought will be encountered by the thought of somebody else.

What unites philosophers if they are separated by thought, language, commitment to truth, and not school or tradition? If all philosophy is a ferocious debate and cacophony of divergent opinions, and school and apprenticeship are impossible, then how is discourse possible in the sense of communicative interaction?

If we understand the history of philosophy, not as a collection of ideas that belong to concrete "authors" or philosophising minds that do not have views in common but only shared responsibility for the truth, then precisely this shared responsibility, common cause, the common task will be what forms the philosophical discourse.

The internal unity of philosophical discourse is created and maintained by the tension of thoughts of everyone engaged in this shared space of philosophical problems. The unity lies neither in the agreement with the answers nor in the tension created by the questions. The internal coherence of philosophical discourse is provided not by the clarity and consistency of reasoning but by the feeling of a "common cause", the dialogic nature of the essence of philosophy.

Conclusion

We have grown up in the tradition of European rationalism so that we value coherent reasoning with a "beginning" and an "end", the logical and consistent, presupposing its perception by the interlocutor or listener, intended for the possibility of understanding. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's famous declaration should not be understood so that only what is clearly said has meaning and value, and everything that is not transparent, not entirely logical, should be scornfully rejected.

A philosopher does not consciously strive for ambiguity and does not accept ambiguity as a norm. On the contrary, they try to clarify everything that concerns their thought, whatever their research view is directed at, which causes their admiration. The omnivorousness of their interest in the world does not recognise other people's judgments on what "should keep silence." A philosopher does not complete what their predecessors started, does not attach their brick to a shared building, but starts from the beginning, from the chaos. They need the order created by others as an example of the *technology* of building order, as an *experience* of separating constructive elements from the spontaneity of the world, as a *source* of inspiration and new questions. Embedded in the primordial chaos, they search for a light of their own, in the way of adjusting a brick to another brick in an unsettled and

uninhabited before them world, making mistakes, getting confused in syntax, trying new words. The obscurity of the emerging text may indicate insufficient interpretation, the failure of attempts to penetrate the depth of meaning. However, the darkness of philosophical discourse is like the life-giving chaos, and the obscurity that it inevitably contains can be the keeper of implicit meanings and even their generator.

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