

THE "HOW" OF PHILOSOPHY: A CASE FOR RHETORIC

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I think it is essential to any
specimen of linguistic communication
that it involve a linguistic act.
J.R.Searle: What is Speech Act?

That at this junction and this time the discourse of philosophy in Slovakia is being perceived as substantially wanting and up to challenge is small wonder. The disqualification of established ideologies, rituals, and discourses is but a run-of-the-mill aftermath of the collapse of the symbiosis between a given sociopolitical order and its semiotic scaffolding.

Less competitive polities, deficient as to political participation and legitimate public contestation, are prone to produce official discourses (that of academic Fach-philosophy included) which display an apparent tendency to a reduced and ever shrinking deployment of rhetorical strategies.

By "rhetorical" I primarily mean here something more than the whole inherited repertoire of speech figures which has survived up to date within the theory of tropes and is by and large associated with some authors' indulgence in finicky stylistic embellishments, i.e., metaphors, similes, metonymies, synecdoches etc. more often as it were, *post festum*.

As employed in this gloss, the term "rhetorical" actually implies the entire Aristotelian majestic edifice consisting of a theory of argumentation (the invention of arguments and proofs), a theory of style, and a theory of composition. I am also sharing the original emphasis placed upon the first of the three areas covered by the classical non-restricted rhetoric, as the theory of argumentation alone can provide for rhetoric's meaningful nexus with philosophy (through demonstrative logic). The latter in its turn, Paul Ricoeur contends, informs rhetoric with the philosophical sensibility without which it becomes an erratic and futile discipline.

In addition to the above, congruent with the current challenges which face our philosophical discourse is the twist of the term "rhetorical" traceable back to the pre-Aristotelian, Sicilian, tradition, where rhetoric was taken as an art, or instrument, of how to make oneself univocally understood, how to sway the public opinion to your side; an art that powerfully contributes to the establishment of the human political dimension and expansion of the public space as against that of family relations; a skill in persuasion, and a set of techniques enabling discourse itself to arrive at a considerable degree of self-reflection and self-consciousness. For expediency and brevity considerations I have pigeonholed all these as "civic" dimensions of rhetoric.

It is for one thing.

Now for another. To the "rhetorical" realm I do also ascribe both exciting and embarrassing plethora of achievements and difficulties, insights and pitfalls involved in the speech-act conception of human intercourse over-arched by the pioneering authority of J.Austin and J.Searle. Their revelatory findings have once and for ever incapacitated linguistic utterances with no eye for the addressee, or lacking avowedly explicated dialogical intention, or being just mere descriptives or informatives. Discourse should be organized in a way securing conveyance not only of its meaning, but its illocutionary *force too*. For you will not have secured understanding of the utterance, P.F.Strawson argues, you will not have performed the act of communication you set out to perform, unless your *complex* intention is to make yourself understood. These rhetorical concerns might be conventionally referred to as "intersubjective", or "dialogical", for what is being pursued here is, after all, responsiveness and responsibility of discourse.

As to the philosophical discourse, its rhetoricity is hardly compossible with a commitment to or a taste for - exclusively propositional, presentational, and rational account emblematic of many a text book style - with its a quest-for-eternal-cum-sacral-cum-single-Truth univocality and solemn pomposity; - vocabulary and modality of the philosophical unshakeable certainty and decidibility, which knows no innuendos and implications; - excessive use of notional lexics that is more often than not off the mark, when it comes to mediating between the "bubbling sap of life" and its "pulp", on the one hand, and their linguistic fixation-crucifixion.

The heterogeneity of discourse and being is so radical that there is no gainsaying or downplaying a dramatic character of whatever attempt, let alone infelicitous, to capture reality which defies even that finest categorization and predication. The "originary violence of naming" (J.Derrida) causes *losses* partially remediable by recourse to rhetorical means ("rhetorical" in terms of rhetoric at its fullest) which make for securing, e.g. by metaphoricality of discourse, a better grasp - via the invocation of a more inclusive human sensorium.

But, as P.Ricoeur's caveat has it, the rhetoric of the philosophical discourse must be "subdued", i.e., all the speech figures exploited should not violate ontological and epistemological principles underlying tropology.

Let us consider metaphor by way of example.

Broadly speaking, rhetorical style presupposes a duly proportioned combination of safe lucidity, eloquence, and the thought provocative novelty, and metaphor has always been by far the most appropriate candidate for taking up the cited challenges, what with its vividness, facility, terse elegance, and the interplay between the intimately known and the distantly intriguing: surprise is one of the crucibles here.

Now, what ontological and epistemological nexus are being exploited for the functioning of this trope and what is to be borne in mind to prevent it from slipping into a mere "ornament", outdated, superfluous, and commonly ridiculed?

To begin with, all human knowing is a "metaphorical" subsumption under the already accepted paradigm; each and every definition rests on the same epiphoric

(those of change) principles as metaphor. So therefore, metaphor as a deviation of meaning at the word level, as just an accident in naming is nothing very much conducive of the philosophical "enigma", surprise, and wonder, hence is beyond our focus. For the purposes of enhancing the philosophical discourse, we are in no need of pleasing ornamental discreet raisins, alien and loud, in the monotonous paleness of the pastry. It is an enlightened use of metaphor as a phenomenon of predication, of shifted attribution at the sentence-level of discourse that is attracting our attention. Proceeding from its paradigmatic structure - resemblance - metaphor gets two ideas collide or play against each other, the effect arrived at being perplexity, surprise, instruction towards acquiring a new knowledge. The latter's trigger has been the tension encompassed within the phenomenon of metaphor.

Perhaps, a helpful clue to an efficient and apposite deployment of metaphors (and similes, metonymies etc., for that matter) is a sensitive observance of the mimetic principle, where mimesis is not only construed as the materialization of the *referential function* of discourse, but, as mimesis *phuseos*, it is also responsible that this referential function should convey reality in its unfolding, i.e. natural *process*. In Paul Ricoeur's words, it is just the case of that dimension of reality that does not enjoy due treatment by means of the "simple description of that-thing-over-there. To present man "as acting" and all things "as in act" - such could be the *ontological* function of metaphorical discourse, in which every dormant potentiality of existence appears *as* blossoming forth, every latent capacity for action *as* actualized".

The "deconstruction turn" and the end-of-philosophy debate - via its "genealogical", "archeological", unmasking, and deconstructing/re-constructing procedures - have heralded a new rhetoric (in the broadest sense) of the philosophical discourse as against the previous one caught up in the snakes of oppositional rigidities that have fallen short of an actually *mimetic* account of reality. It is the rhetoric and logic of double-edgedness of words and multiaccentuality of connotation; of A and not-A; of continuum (not only of its extreme ends). In a word, "an-other-logic", i.e. the *Thou*-logic at it most dialogical, the *différance*-discourse at its most veritable to the immediacy of Being.

They say first things first, but do we know which things are *first*, what problems are *central*? Says J. Derrida: "we must begin where we are".