The Role of the Philosopher as Social Thinker and Critic, Revisited

RAMON C. REYES †
Ateneo de Manila University

It is not usually the case that a businessman or an artist or an engineer is asked to define his or her role in the community. Their respective functions seem evident enough.

The case of the philosopher however is quite different. Earlier, during the time of the Ancient Greeks, the philosopher did have pride of place in society. He was looked upon as the man of wisdom, as the teacher and adviser to the king or the prince. With the coming, however, of the Renaissance and the emergence of modern experimental science, and later of the social sciences, the relevance of philosophy has been put more and more into question. As has already been said before, in the beginning there was *myth*os. Next came *logos* or *philosophia*. But finally came *mathematized experimental science*. And since then, myth and philosophy have been on the defensive, finding it increasingly difficult to keep their respective roles in a world that continues to rationalize itself scientifically and technologically more and more every day.

We will have no time in this paper to deal with the continuing role of myth in contemporary life. On the other hand, regarding the role of philosophy, it is best perhaps that we take some time to go back to the very origins of philosophy itself and to follow its evolution even if only in rapid, sketchy fashion in order to understand whether philosophy should have a role to play in our life and world today.

The ancient Greeks, who started philosophy, at least as far as the Western world is concerned, knew of course that philosophy and philosophical questionings could come only after the basic necessities of life had been satisfied. As the Romans, who took over after the Greeks, said "*Primum vivere, deinde philosophari.*" First to live, and then to philosophize.

On the other hand, these ancient Greeks felt that a life lived purely on the level of material and pragmatic satisfactions was not much of an existence either. The very course of one's life eventually leads one towards further questions and considerations that must be faced. Otherwise, "an unexamined life would not be worth living." This then

was how philosophy began some two thousand five hundred years ago, when these ancient Greeks, having taken care of the problems concerning the basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter, clothing and remedies for pains and ailments, and having sufficient measures to assure the survival of the clan, the community and the nation, now started asking strange new questions that were of universal scope and reach, asking, for example, what ultimately are the constitutive structures of reality? What is Being? What is justice? What is good? What is truth? What in the end is the sense and purpose of our human existence?

In the course, of their reflection, the ancient Greeks eventually came to understand that man was fundamentally a νουσ or *Mind*, that part of him believed to be immortal, elevating him to the level of the gods. As νουσ, man participated in the λογοσ, understood to be that all-encompassing impersonal self-originating rational principle underlying all reality, rendering the world as one whole intelligible universe, as manifested in the ordered κοσμοσ. And as participant in the λογοσ, man as νουσ was seen to be connatural with the λογοσ itself. By way of his νουσ then, man was seen to be able to go beyond the level of mere, apparent reality and raise himself to the level where he is able to contemplate that which is immutably and universally true, the level wherein the constitutive structures and ultimate ground of all reality are revealed, thus, the level of Being itself. And to the extent that man came up to that metaphysical level, he was thought to undergo a transformation of life, ushering him into a heightened existence of fulfillment and wisdom. Hence this whole search or quest was eventually called Φιλοσοφια, or love of wisdom.

In the succeeding Middle Ages, philosophy in the Western world remained by and large a philosophy of Being as it was during the time of Greek Antiquity, except that the very notion of Being did undergo a sea change, a radical change. For what the Ancient Greeks saw as an impersonal rational principle underlying all reality, the *Logos* was seen by the Christian Medieval philosopher as *vestigia Dei, traces of the Divine*, traces of a Personal God, He Who is Pure Act, Pure Being, Pure Love, He Who knows every human person in his or her uniqueness, He Who is Source and Ground of everything that is.

However, in the time of the Renaissance, toward the end of the 15th century, there emerged modern experimental science, which was a different type of *logos* or rationality, a new approach to reality, a way—*met-hodos*,—a method that was to be *hypothetical, empirical, experimental,* and *mathematized*, in contrast with the traditional metaphysician's speculative attitude toward reality or Being.

Given this new approach to reality, as proposed by the modern scientist, the philosophers of the age, starting with Rene Descartes, felt

more and more constrained to re-think their position as philosopher.[1] As a result of this re-thinking of the philosopher occasioned by the emergence of this new method introduced by Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton, philosophy eventually became more and more a *critique* or an epistemology. This is evident in the case of Immanuel Kant, who was driven to admit that unlike the experimental scientist, he in his metaphysical speculations had been constructing theoretical concepts over and beyond what was given by experience. The philosophers of that age realized that their metaphysical concepts could hardly be said to be verifiable the way the scientific theoretical constructs and models proved themselves to be at least working hypotheses, falsifiable if not wholly verifiable.

Hence, in seeking to keep a legitimate realm for himself, the philosopher of that age found himself constrained to remain within the boundaries of what can be experienced. Instead of soaring into flights of metaphysical inference and speculation, philosophy eventually turned from being a metaphysics into an epistemology. In other words, philosophy became an investigation into the assumptions and conditions of possibility implied by human knowledge and experience, thus, an investigation regarding the *a priori* concepts and conditions presupposed in all sorts of human knowledge, whether scientific, or aesthetic, or moral, or historical. Thus, remaining grounded in experience, the philosopher proposed merely to unpack the principles and categories constitutive of human experience, implied by the very structure of human experience. In this manner, philosophy was able to claim for itself a justifiable domain in the face of the challenge posed by scientific rationality. Immanuel Kant called this new philosophical approach *Critical Philosophy*, the method of bringing to light the "transcendental" or "*a priori* conditions of possibility" of human experience.[2]

The philosopher however did not remain too long preoccupying himself simply with the uncovering of the conditions of possibility of human experience. Eventually, he came to realize that there was much more that could be done than the mere explicitation of the *a priori* conditions of possibility of human experience. After all there lay before the *transcendental consciousness*—the main and fundamental presupposition and condition of all human experience—a whole field of lived experiences that were intuitively given and that could be explored and described faithfully by human consciousness (or more technically, by

[1] See for example René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and the *Meditations*, trans. and intro. F.E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1971).

[2] See for example Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965).

the *transcendental ego*). If we perform ἐποχή (or a "breaking away") what happens is a kind of purification, a μετάνοια or change of mind, which enables us to break away from the habitual attitude of viewing ourselves merely as beings of sense passively registering sense impressions and images of the world. We thus realize that man is first of all a consciousness, one that is conscious of himself and of the world. In doing so, man gains access into this life of original consciousness, and becomes transparently clear and absolutely certain of himself, self-aware, and aware as well of a whole vast field of different primordial experiential meanings. And since such meanings are not the results of metaphysical speculations nor of scientific constructions, but are "lived experiences" immediately and intuitively present to consciousness, they are just as "apodictic" or absolutely true and certain as the consciousness subtending them. And so, the *Phenomenology* of Edmund Husserl came to be.

As *Phenomenology*, philosophy then would mean the faithful description of those primordial experiences of man as present to *transcendental consciousness*, such as the experience of *embodiment*, of *temporality*, and of *historicity*, as well as the experience of the *Self*, of the *Other*, and of the *They* or the *Social*.[3]

Eventually, however, Husserl came upon a paradoxical predicament in the course of his phenomenological descriptions. Phenomenology, by way of *reduction* (from the Latin *reducere*, to lead back to), consists essentially in leading everything back to the *transcendental consciousness* that had previously undergone the discipline of the ἐποχή. In the end, nothing could be considered as true and valid meaning except in so far as it could be shown to be intuitively, immediately present to this *transcendental consciousness*. Nothing then would be a thing-in-itself. There is no world except as present to consciousness. Everything was seen to be reducible or lead-able to the *transcendental consciousness*. However, in this regard, Husserl encountered a problem that proved to be more recalcitrant than he had first estimated, namely, the problem of the other consciousness.

Common sense would seem to show that the presence of man to man, otherwise called the "*I-Thou*" relationship, is one of the more fundamental relations of man. Yet, establishing this relationship phenomenologically, in other words, considering the *other* man as present to *transcendental consciousness* proved to be quite paradoxical, since to reduce the other consciousness into a mere object for the *transcendental*

[3] See for example Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

consciousness would tend to go against the obvious fact that the other consciousness is precisely *other* consciousness, another *transcendental consciousness*, with its own outlook and sphere of meaning, not just a mere object for the original *transcendental consciousness*.

Husserl never quite satisfactorily succeeded in resolving this paradox except perhaps toward the end. And it is in dealing with this same paradox which probably led his disciples to finally recast the phenomenological consciousness or *transcendental ego* no longer as the quasi-absolute center of reference of all meaning, but rather as a consciousness immersed in the world, caught in a web of various relationships with other consciousnesses. In effect, *transcendental consciousness* is never and has never been a worldless solidary consciousness, all by its lonesome self, and in full possession of itself. Rather, it is a consciousness fundamentally rooted to the world together with other consciousnesses, imbedded in a dense social, cultural, historical milieu. The "later" Husserl called this situation *Lebenswelt* or *Lifeworld*, the concrete world wherein the individual finds himself from the moment of his birth related and involved in various ways with the community of other consciousnesses.

More recently, philosophical reflection has gone through a radical transformation, occasioned by what is usually called the "linguistic turn," a new way of thinking introduced by philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl-Otto Apel, and Jürgen Habermas. The "linguistic turn" represents the position that man is a being of language, and that philosophical reflection is closely intertwined with language with all its strictures and limitations. If such would be the case, then the fundamental problem of truth and validation could not be a matter for a solitary individual consciousness in dialogue solely with himself, reflecting upon his personal insights and experiences. The philosophers of the "linguistic turn," first of all, would hold that apart from the categorization of language, no reflection would be possible, philosophical or otherwise, since the individual consciousness would not be able to make sense of his own personal insights and experiences except by means of the words and categories of language. Hence, the question of truth and validation according to the "linguistic turn" can only be by way of language and the linguistically bound community, discussing, arguing, eventually coming to a consensus regarding whatever matter under consideration.

In sum, philosophical thought and reflection can only be by way of language, and thus by way of the community. To think is basically to verbalize and categorize one's insights and experience, and to transmit them to the community of consciousnesses for discussion and debate, eventually for confirmation and approval. And all that by way of language, of course.

The philosopher of Antiquity, truth to say, was not completely oblivious of language. But his understanding of language was that it was some sort of incidental medium of no great consequence, since the mind eventually could go beyond language to allow man an immediate grasp of reality or Being itself. True, the philosopher of old did take note of the fact that due to language, human knowledge proceeded discursively, by concept, by subject and predicate, by argument from judgment to judgment. Nonetheless, it was understood that as long as the rules of discourse and logic were followed, the individual thinker who was contemplating Being in the end grasped the fundamental structures of all reality, in short, Being as such. Provided then that the philosopher took care that his thinking was carried out properly, the philosopher of Antiquity believed that, as νουσ, or *Mind*, man was able to gain access to the λογοσ and thereby was able to grasp Being as such and all its constitutive structures. And all that by his own solitary, individual self.

Today's philosopher of the "linguistic turn," on the other hand, understands that all thinking and reflection can only be by way of language and the linguistically inter-connected communicative community. The question of truth and validation then is a matter not for the solitary individual thinker but for the whole communicative community, discussing, arguing, eventually coming to consensus, by way of language of course.

In this regard, it will be evident that there could be no such think as a *private language*, a language understandable only to a single, solitary person. As Wittgenstein would point out, such a solitary private language would be untenable, since, under the circumstances, there would be no points of reference other than the solitary person himself and his private experiences and insights. In the last analysis, the solitary thinker would have no way of telling whether what he thinks and says is indeed true or not independently of the confirmation by the community of other consciousnesses.

Hence, language is fundamentally communication or dialogue, man and man saying things to one another, discussing, arguing, confirming, eventually coming to a consensus regarding the world, regarding man, regarding the human community itself. Consequently, philosophical reflection, in so far as it is inextricably tied up with language, could never be a purely private affair, such as in the case of a solitary thinker contemplating Being all by himself. Nor could it be the solitary Cartesian *Cogito* coming to the realization of the indubitability of "*I am, I exist.*" Instead, philosophical reflection could only be by way of language, hence by way of dialogue and argumentation within the linguistically bound communicative community that eventually comes to a consensus regarding what the world, man, and the human community itself might well be.

There is no guarantee, however, that the communicative community will easily or soon come to a consensus. There are bound to be deep disagreements and dissensions. Consensus among philosophers, for example, is oftentimes only partially achieved by way of keeping separate, different schools of thought, with hardly any meaningful communication among them. That would only mean however that discussion and argumentation must go on among the different schools of thought, if philosophy is to remain true to its role and vocation.

On the other hand, consensus does not mean any factual or contingent agreement among the communicative community. Rather, what is to be sought is a rationally grounded consensus attained when the communicative community, having duly considered all the evidence, comes to an agreement that is approved by all parties.

Granting the radical transformation in contemporary philosophy following the "linguistic turn," the followers of Husserl would point out, nonetheless, that such a transformation should not mean the eradication of his fundamental insights. It would seem evident, for example, that philosophy does not usually begin as a coterie of thinkers conversing, arguing, debating, and then coming to some consensus. Rather, as Husserl would have it, philosophy begins usually with the individual thinker, the *transcendental ego*, reflecting upon his own experiences, which have meaning *antepredicatively*, and thus prior to the categorizations of language, contrary to what the "linguistic turn" philosophers would claim. Some of these primordial experiences are those of the *I* or the *Self* communicating with the *Thou* or the *Other*, and eventually with the *Them*, which is the community of other consciousnesses or *transcendental egos*. And there are also, as we have previously seen, the primordial experiences of *embodiment*, *temporality*, *historicity*. If such experiences could have meaning only upon the categorization of language, as the "linguistic turn" philosophers would claim, then it seems that the very application of the language categories on the matrix of experiences would be purely haphazard and arbitrary, since the categories of language would have no distinctive features in the matrix of experiences to latch on to, these experiences being supposedly devoid of all meaning originally, prior to the categorizations of language.

Of course, the *transcendental ego* would eventually have to verbalize his experiences and communicate them to others for their criticism and eventually their confirmation. Nonetheless, if these primordial experiences and insights would be devoid of all meaning prior to the categorizations of language, then the *transcendental ego* would have no clue as to which category to apply to what experience, since these experiences and insights supposedly would have no meaning prior to the categorization of language.

Furthermore, it seems that when the community finally comes to an agreement or consensus, such a consensus would signify not so much a mob or a crowd of yes-sayers coming to a jolly, rowdy agreement. Rather, consensus would mean a rationally-grounded agreement, where each individual member of the communicative community, thus each *transcendental ego*, having considered all the personal experiences available, eventually decides personally to give his consent. This means then that such personal experiences of the *transcendental ego* should have meaning prior to consensus, thus prior to the categorization of language. Otherwise, this consent given personally by each member of the community, by each *transcendental ego*, based on evidence and personal experiences available to itself, would have no sense.[4]

By shifting to a different viewpoint, one can see language as comprised of a set of material signs. These signs are initially vocal but eventually become inscribed; they are ordered semantically and syntactically, that is, as vocabulary and grammar. They signify meaning in reference to the real outside world. Originally, the early Greeks thought that as a system of signs, language was essentially a faithful representation of reality. It seemed clear to them that words were primarily names which corresponded to individual real substances or objects, and statements were basically analyzable into subject and predicate, thus into the name of the individual substance, and the qualities and attributes seen to be inherent to it. Closer scrutiny in recent times, however, has shown that this is not exactly the case.

First of all, today's "post-linguistic turn" philosopher understands that there is no direct, immediate mind-to-reality contact. Nor could there be a direct, immediate soul-to-soul contact among men and women. Thought must pass by way of the medium of language, a system of signs governed by rules of semantics and syntax. Thought and language are so intimately intertwined such that there is no way thought could possibly free itself from its immersion in language to come to an immediate and full grasp of reality or to a soul-to-soul communion with one another. There could be no perfect coincidence of thought and reality, not even in the case of the philosopher, since language, so closely intertwined with thought, constitutes some kind of a dense, resistant medium for thought. Thus, in this regard, philosophy eventually shifted away from the task of a direct and immediate contemplation of Being to the more humble

[4] Dan Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity: A Response to the Linguistic-Pragmatic Critique*, trans. Elizabeth A. Behnke (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001), 188-206.

task of the *interpretation* of reality, based on evidence filtering through the rather dense, resistant medium of language. This new approach has eventually come to be known as *hermeneutics*.

Furthermore, it has been seen that there is no natural link between the signs or words and the real world, for language as a system of signs is culturally based. It has been shown that the functioning of this system of signs is governed by conventionally and culturally set semantic and syntactic rules that determine the unities of meaning. Hence what may be meaningfully said can be things or referential matters that may be talked about and what may be attributed or predicated of such referential matters. In such wise, language could not verily be said to be a perfectly true picture or representation of the objective reality out there. As has been seen, it is culture and its language that decide what may be spoken of and what are to be referred to as the meaningful wholes and entities. Briefly put, it is culture and language which structure and determine the way the community is to experience and to view the world.

In sum, language is a communal institution whereby man addresses himself to another and *vice versa*, not in a direct, immediate, heart-to-heart fashion, however, but by way of an unavoidable detour through a common pre-existing code, a system of concrete, culturally-established signs or symbols. It is clear that language is flexible and creative due to the presence of metaphor and other linguistic devices. However, because language is also a code with its own semantics and syntax, and whose patterns are culturally institutionalized, it still sets the boundaries of what might be thought and spoken about and what can be thought and said about them. Language then is at best a historically conditioned, social medium of thought and communication that imposes certain limitations and contextuality to all thought and knowledge.

Nonetheless, this does not signify that due to man's immersion in language, he is henceforth condemned to a form of linguistic, cultural relativism, with each linguistic or cultural group having its own truth and cultural world, hermetically sealed from the other.

Different cultures of the world communicate with one another and understand one another. This situation makes translation possible: though it is never accomplished perfectly, it is still sufficient for various cultures to understand each other. Different groups realize in the end that they are all situated in one and the same common world, and that they all share a core of common human truths and experiences, such as that of birth and death, youth and old age, pain and pleasure, victory and defeat, frustration, sadness, happiness, fulfillment and pure joy.

The contemporary philosopher has noted a further complication. He has become aware that language is man addressing himself to another,

eventually to the whole community. His address is done not quite in a purely detached, constative, or descriptive manner. One also speaks to enjoin the other to look at things in a certain way, to request or command the other to do something, to invest the other with some power or authority, or to promise or commit oneself to another. In other words, language is essentially not really descriptive but fundamentally *performative*.[5] Language is essentially *speech act*.[6] In which case, language then is not some kind of detached, contemplative, a-temporal representation of reality. Language is man, self-involvedly acting, interpreting reality in various ways. Surely, such interpretations must be possessed of meaning and capable of validation. Nonetheless, there is not but one type of meaning and validation, for language is not one, with one single, total, detached view of reality. Language is multiple. There are many types of language, each type being a certain self-involving activity, a certain interpretation, embodying its own *form of life*, having its own type of meaning and validation. In brief, language is primarily not representational, representative of or depicting reality from a presumably detached, a-cosmic, a-temporal, vantage point. Rather, language is interpretational or interpretative. Language is man, from within a concrete, social, historical context, interpreting and acting upon reality in various ways.

Then there is human action. Language as we have seen is essentially speech act, thus human action. And there is action of course in the more usual sense, man intervening in the course of events within the world. But to the extent that such intervention in the material world is human action and not just animal reflex behavior, it is goal-oriented, it is meaningful, it is suffused in language. Thus to act is to interpret, whether we take "act" in the sense of speech act or in the more usual sense of intervention in the world. Man is not only one who speaks and responds by way of meaning and language, but also acts and interacts with others. Man belongs to a community of agents—actors, co-actors, inter-actors, who act in terms of meaningful goals and purposes.

Another implication of language is the world, the place, the situation man finds himself to be in, the locus of all his life and action. Man, the subject, the speaker and correspondent, actor and co-actor is in the world and is part of the world. Consequent upon man's embodiment, man's being grounded in the world, there is no soul-to-soul contact among human beings, but only by way of language through its semiotic,

[5] See for example J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed., ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[6] See for example John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

semantic and syntactic structures and rigidities. Thus by way of this rather opaque, dense medium that is language, nevertheless, there is contact among human beings. At the same time, it is precisely through and by this same language that man seeks to invest the world with meaning. The world is that out of which language emerges, and that to which eventually all language refers. The world is that out of which man interprets and invests with meaning by means of language. The world is that which man acts upon, seeking to transform it, investing it with meaning.

Philosophy has undergone various transformations starting from the early contemplation of Being all the way to the contemporary "linguistic turn." Given this, one may ask, "So what?" What does all this signify in the end? What ultimately is philosophy good for? What is its use? What is the role of the philosopher in life and society today?

Certainly, the philosopher of today is cognizant of the fact that he is not the master thinker, possessed of a grand metaphysical scheme that entitles him to be the philosopher-king who will partition, organize and guide the community in accordance with his grand vision.

On the other hand, because of the "linguistic turn," the philosopher of today is not necessarily one who spends all his time simply twiddling with so-called special languages and other linguistic niceties. He does not only ascertain whether they have the proper semantic and syntactic structure, the proper grammar and vocabulary, because doing so would be tantamount to treating these languages as if they were independent realities-in-themselves. Such attitude is unmindful of the fact that language is, first of all, man addressing man regarding the world, man addressing the community of consciousnesses through discussion, argumentation, and consensus formation.

The "linguistic turn" has also shown us that philosophy cannot be condemned to some kind of paralysis, as to be found, for example, in the case of the "early" Wittgenstein, who assigned no legitimate role for the philosopher.[7] As Wittgenstein would have it, things are what they are, as found in those different languages or *forms of life*. Hence, as long as man takes each of these languages or *forms of life* as they are, there would be no problem. The confusion arises only when the philosopher starts asking questions that really have no answers, for in the last analysis, they are meaningless because they have neither positive content nor basis in concrete reality. Some of these questions are: "What is Existence?" "What is Being?" "What is Truth?"

[7] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).

And yet, despite what the "early" Wittgenstein thought, it could be maintained presently that philosophy is not dead. There remains a role for philosophy in this contemporary world of science and technology, of Facebook and Twitter, of hackers and cybercrimes. Man, by way of a self-reflexive language, remains as a searcher for truth: truth regarding man and human affairs, the human community, and the world, which is the locus of man's life and action.

In this sense, the contemporary philosopher retains from his Greek forebears that sense of the λογοσ, that sense of radical questioning, that capacity and search of man for truth and reason. What he has let go, consequent upon the realization that philosophical reflection is immersed in language, is that ancient belief that man, through philosophy, could gain full access of the λογοσ, and thereby grasp Being as such and all its fundamental structures.

And so, taking cognizance of the fundamental strictures and limitations imposed by language, philosophy today sees itself either as *linguistic analysis*, as *deconstructive critique*, or as *critical hermeneutical* philosophy.

As *linguistic analysis*, philosophy distinguishes and tries to understand the different types of language or speech acts. Some examples are *formal language* ("$a^2 - b^2 = [a + b] \cdot [a - b]$"), *scientific proposition* ("H_2O boils at 100 degrees Celsius."), *economic language* ("The price of a good or service is determined by the law of supply and demand."), *political language* ("Power resides in the people."), *poetic language* ("This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper."), *decree* ("I pronounce you man and wife."), *commitment* ("For better or worse, till death do us part."), *moral discourse* ("Thou shall not kill), and *religious language* ("In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.").

Linguistic analysis tries to ferret out the determining concept, specific meaning, and logic of each type of language and to delineate its particular boundaries and limitations, and to situate its proper place in human existence. The diversity of existing language types is recognized. Each of them is accepted as a legitimate form of life, a valid realm of human meaning. Hence, no one language, for example, scientific language, is to be used as measure and norm for another, let alone for all others.

As *deconstructive critique*,[8] philosophy tries to debunk or unmask the metaphysical naiveté of various established positions. It seeks to show

[8] See for example Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1979); Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews*

how man, forgetting his situation as immersed in language and discourse, has been misled into such so-called insights of "immediate and intuitive presence," "self-evident truth," "deep meaning," or "expert knowledge." These illusions or delusions surreptitiously convert themselves immediately into dogmatic positions of power and domination.

It was no accident then that the metaphysician of old saw himself as deserving to be philosopher-king. Possessed of a grand metaphysical vision independent of language, he thought of himself as having the calling to be the "guardian" of the communal life, and thus to govern and partition the citizens into different social classes, and guide the whole community in accordance with his great vision.

We have also witnessed more recent avatars of the great metaphysical vision; these have led to the establishment of modern utopian and totalitarian regimes enslaving men, women, and children. Furthermore, deconstructive critique shows how certain dogmatic and rational assumptions have resulted in forms of religious, ethnical, social, sexual, and psychological discrimination. We have also seen in our contemporary society how the possession of so-called "scientific," "objective," "absolutely certain" expert knowledge has led some to believe that they are entitled to rule over society as the *technocrats*, and that they have the prerogative to set up systems of technological rationalization and standardization that then to level down all the other individuals and groups that do not qualify as technocrats.

In the end, any philosophical position that forgets its own situatedness in language eventually deceives itself into thinking that it holds the whole and final truth, thereby reducing the *Many* to the *One*, and the *Other* to one's own totalizing grasp. In forgetting that philosophical reflection is inevitably embedded in language, undeconstructed philosophy fails to see that at best human truth and knowledge could only be by way of dialogue and eventual agreement and consensus within the human community.

Finally, as *critical hermeneutics*,[9] philosophy reflects on the language situation itself and its various implications. Hence, language is man saying something about the world to someone, eventually to a community of consciousnesses. Thus, implied in the very language

and Other Writings by Michel Foucault, 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

[9] See for example Karl-Otto Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); see also Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

situation is man as member of a linguistic community of speakers and respondents, of acting and inter-acting co-agents. Implied too in language is the world, the frame of reference of all forms of language and the locus of human action. And finally, man acts in the world, either through language as mode of action or other usual types of human action, both of which imply language.

Given the "linguistic turn," man is understood as subject, as the one who speaks and addresses the *Other*. Yet there is also man as the *Other*, *He* or *She* who is addressed and who in turn responds and speaks on *his* or *her* own account. As subject and respondent in and through language, man them demands respect. Man belongs to the human community, which is essentially a community of language. Accordingly, man deserves to be addressed and treated in terms of meaning, and not by way of deceit, manipulation or violence.

Philosophy, given the transformation effected by the "linguistic turn," must continue to bear witness to that sense of man as νους, as capacity for truth and reason, but this time by way of language. In effect, this continuing demand for truth and reason should be understood today as a relentless demand for dialogue and discussion in order to arrive at rational agreement and consensus. Hence, in this regard, the philosopher of today must assume his role in society as social thinker and critic. He is the one who could keep alive that sense of being man, as a being of language and reason tasked to continue dialogue and discussion to arrive at a consensus.

Of course, living in an imperfect world, the philosopher recognizes that, there may be times when one needs to resort to controlled violence. There may be situations that call for the measured use of violence as last resort for the defense and preservation of the very possibility of discourse and dialogue within the human community. However, such use of violence will always have to be within the limits provided by law, thus within the boundaries of discourse. Furthermore, in such emergency situations, the philosopher should remain ever vigilant and critical, lest such use of violence degenerates into sheer brutality without meaning, or is used as an excuse to impose one's own discourse and will upon another.

Furthermore, in an imperfect world, the philosopher does recognize that there is an inevitable need for political power and authority, so that the community, confronted by communal problems, may arrive at a communal decision and proper action. But similarly, the philosopher must constantly be watchful of this exercise of political power to ensure that such use of power of man over man remains within legal limits, namely within discursive boundaries. The philosopher must ensure that such use of power remains within a perspective of progress that leads to a better human community, better communication, and

broader participation in community dialogue and debate, all of these in view of rational agreement and consensus.

More positively, the philosopher of today has to speak for every man and woman, in so far as they are all, in principle, members of the community of discourse and dialogue, deserving of respect both as subject and as respondent in the communal discussion and dialogue.

It would be the role and task of the philosopher therefore to advocate for ever broader participation in the various discourses, both within the community and among the different communities and countries of the world.

Within the community, the philosopher should work toward the removal of all those different barriers and obstacles that deprive individuals and groups of participation in the various discourses of the community, whether moral, economic, social, political, or cultural.

Beyond natural and traditionally imposed boundaries, the philosopher must speak for the opening up of more and more avenues of dialogue among the different groups of the nation and among the different nations of the world, on the various levels and dimensions of human existence.

The philosopher must help toward the understanding and appreciation of the particular meaning and validity of the various different discourses and languages of the world. He must try to help understand how each legitimate type of language or discourse essentially possesses its own proper relevance and significance for human existence. The philosopher must strive to show that communal life and culture could not very well be reduced to a single aspect of human existence, such as the technological, the economic or the political. He has to recognize that there are other dimensions such as the aesthetic and the poetic, as well as the moral and the religious, which represent the higher human values that in the last analysis provide the ultimate meaning and satisfaction of all human existence.

Finally, the philosopher of today has the task of keeping alive and vibrant that ideal yet implied ultimate goal of all human striving and action—the Truth. Indeed, the whole Truth. Such task would involve, among other things, the formation of a final, full consensus that binds together all persons and all nations, as members and co-participants in the one global human community of meaningful word, meaningful labor, meaningful action, and meaningful belief.

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