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The Power of Voice

Ernst Cassirer rightly observed that culture, in all its manifold forms, requires expression and, accordingly, is always mediated by some means of communication. These means are extremely diverse – from simple gestures and face expressions or drawings on the stone walls to sounds combined in sophisticated ways into musical compositions, subtle languages of literature, carefully arranged moves of dancers and actors, mathematical formulas, and – more recently – whole worlds created in the digital, virtual realm. There is, however, one medium that seems to be a more primordial and originary conveyor of culture than the others, namely the human voice.

Compared to – for example – writing, voice turns out to be a much more complicated phenomenon. First of all, mostly everything that could be written, can also be spoken. Secondly, and more importantly, voice allows for modalities that are unattainable for writing. Speaking in an articulated, regular manner and thus conveying a semantic content is just one way of using our voice. But voice does not necessarily need to be semantic. Sometimes we also shout, roar, howl, scream, or cry. In such cases, voice activates our most primeval forms of expression, linking us to the animal kingdom. But, on the other hand, voice – both in its semantic and asemantic mode – is a medium of music. As such, it sets us apart from the realm of animality, and allows for participation in the purely human realm of aesthetic experiences.

Voice defies not only the divisions between the biology and culture, the a-semantical and semantical or bodily and intellectual. The mysteries and ambiguities it brings go way further, to the very core of subjectivity, identity, and self-awareness. Our voice, conceived as the locus of ourselves (both in the sense of a psychological "inner" voice or a stream of consciousness, and in the sense of a literary or narrative voice, for example, a manner of speech and a general standpoint). Only seemingly it belongs solely to ourselves and is detached from the voices of others. On the contrary, our inner monologues always contain other voices, as Mikhail Bakhtin rightly observed in his famous study on Dostoyevsky. Also the choice of a particular, individual fashion of

speech or one's own philosophical viewpoint involves negotiating and dialoguing with the voices of the other authors, as it has been aptly described by Harold Bloom (for one).

Yet another set of philosophical problems related to voice should be singled out. At least since the time of Socrates, voice has been identified with the realm of the ethical. All kinds of moral imperatives may be conceived of as voices we tend to listen to or to ignore. This is, however, not limited to the relation between the individuals and their own consciences or moral frameworks. In fact, most of the ethical acts and interventions conducted in the social realm may be articulated as "speaking for" some cause, value, person, or group. Such is the case of climate activists that voice their concern for the future of the planet and its inhabitants. Such is also the case of the ones supporting manifold minorities whose voice often is too weak to be heard. On the other side, there is the voice of prevailing power that often aims at deafening and silencing the other voices, especially the ones that try to emancipate themselves from it. This may take various forms. One example may be manipulating the public sphere by spreading fake news and wrongful opinions, another one could involve expanding the power of already mighty corporations through influencing the politicians by lobbyists. Yet another case is spreading the vicious, untrue, and absurd discourse in order to justify a brutal war and stupefy the aggressor's nation to keep it in line. Fortunately, in all such cases, there always appear voices of resistance, opposition, sanity, and reason.

The essays collected in the current issue of *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* reflect the above-mentioned problems, among others. The Thematic Section opens with a text commissioned by us from Graham Harman, an author who has developed his own, exceptionally strong and original voice within the polyphony of contemporary philosophy. Harman's position, dubbed by himself Object Oriented Ontology, aims at bringing back a new sense of realism into the most recent continental style of thought. Building on Aristotle, Leibniz, Twardowski, Latour, and most importantly, Husserl and Heidegger, Harman wants to bring the real-life objects such as "hammers and railway platforms" back into the focus of philosophy. This strategy puts him at odds with various strands of postmodernism announcing the "end of metaphysics" or concerned with abstract entities of purely textual nature. In this essay Harman, for the first time, develops a direct, extensive polemic with Derrida by addressing his early book on Husserl, *Voice and Phenomenon*. This brilliant and detailed interpretation, raising many problems concerning Husserl, Derrida, voice, and its relations to *logos* and presence, leads to a fundamental question whether a philosopher should put himself in a position of somebody who speaks the voice of history itself.

The following essay by Małgorzata A. Szyszkowska is a cross-disciplinary study exploring an interesting entanglement of problems related to the phenomenon of song-singing. The effects of a singing voice, claims the author, extend far beyond stirring the aesthetic appreciation among the listeners. Using the examples ranging from Homer to Ursula K. le Guin and from Rousseau to Adorno, and Carolyn Abbate, Szyszkowska argues that song-singing, under certain circumstances, has the power to deeply change the listeners. This change is meant not just as influencing them affectively but rather as initiating a "profound change within the listener." In order for this to happen, though, a certain set of conditions must be met. First of all, the listener must be willing to change and needs to listen attentively. The voice itself, on the other hand, needs to possess some important qualities, both purely sonoristic (or "material"), and the ones that come from artistic education and training.

In the third essay, Adam Lipszyc gives a broad perspective on the role of voice in the psychoanalytical tradition. Obviously, speaking and listening is crucial for the very psychoanalytical practice as such, since the latter consists in the conversation between the patient and the analysant. But, more importantly, psychoanalytical theories often consider voice a crucial factor for the constitution of subjectivity. However, as Lipszyc's learned presentation shows, there has been little agreement among the psychoanalysts regarding the status of voice. The earlier theorists (Reik, Isakower, Freud), tended to identify voice with the paternal function. According to them, the voice of the father breaks the primordial unity between the child and its mother by installing in it the voice

of the conscience or superego which is both internal (belonging to the core of subjectivity) and external (coming from the outside). Other theorists, however (Lacan, Kristeva, Winnicott, Anzieu, Rosolato), take the opposite stance and identify the developmental role of voice with the maternal side. Here, voice is considered to form an "acoustic mirror" allowing for the child to mimic mother's speech and singing and, finally, to learn to speak. The article closes with the discussion of the famous, Lacan-based theory of voice developed by Mladen Dolar.

Last in the Thematic Section comes the essay by Jennifer Wargin, exploring the relations between the virtue of humility and social activism. The author builds her argument on the criticism of a theory of Paul Bloomfield, according to whom humility requires being quiet and unobtrusive and as such it is inconsistent with social activism that requires assertiveness and outspokenness. This inconsistency leads Bloomfield to denying humility the status of a virtue. Wargin argues that Bloomfield's analyses are based on a narrow and ill-conceived concept of humility that equates it with self-abasement. The author contrasts this account with her own that she calls "transcendent." According to this latter account, "the virtue of humility is in opposition to the vice of self-centeredness, a vice that can manifest as either excessively high views of the self or excessively low views of the self." On this account, claims the author, there is no inconsistency between humility and social activism. Wargin then illustrates her point with an interesting case study of a disagreement regarding the Black Power slogan that took place in 1966 between Martin Luther King and his followers on one side and Stokely Carmichael with Floyd McKissick on the other.

The Forum Section opens with the article by Michał Herer in which he analyzes the highly up-to-date topic of post-truth and the so-called "anti-mainstream" voices appearing in the public sphere (mostly the digital one). In order to test the status and value of these discourses, the author focuses on the climate change deniers and anti-vaccination movements and employs the Foucauldian (or actually ancient) notion of *parrhesia* to them. According to Foucault, *parrhesia* is "the free courage by which one binds oneself in the act of telling the truth." The proponents of the abovementioned alt-right discourses try to make the impression of being the *parrhesiasts* who dare to speak the truth against the powers that be (governments, mainstream media, pharmaceutical corporations, etc.). Herer pins down these post-truth speakers by noting that, instead of being the free and courageous individuals, they are actually the digital avatars that are proliferating the ready-made clichés planted by the very powers they seem to oppose. The article closes with an interesting deliberation concerning the need of supplementing the rational and scientific discourses with better symbolic and imagery resources in order to empower them against the post-truth strategies.

Second and last in the Forum Section is the essay by Vania Baldi and Nélio Conceição. The authors take up an interesting and under researched topic of the relation between film and philosophy. They begin with the inventive point that in our world oversaturated with images, cinema has lost some of its original appeal. In order to regain its cognitive and creative strength, films should enhance its relationship with philosophical topics and the figures of philosophers. A "short-circuit" between philosophy and cinema may help the latter to "avoid the narcotizing, bludgeoning effects of banal images proffered by the diffusion of techno-media on our ability to experience wonder and to admire." In their search for this short-circuit, the authors employ theories of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. Finally, interpreting the examples of Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein* and Safaa Fathy's *Derrida's Elsewhere*, they claim that movies devoted to the philosophical figures may have a special potential to trigger "philosophizing through film."