

DOI:10.14394/eidos.jpc.2020.0050

Przemysław Bursztyka
Editor-in-Chief
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4978-198X>
pbursztyka@uw.edu.pl

The Primacy of Practice

The status of philosophy of culture seems to be notoriously unclear. Since its birth as a methodologically self-aware discipline, it constantly provokes controversies and questions concerning its nature, scope, and objective field of cognitive interests. Is it to be conceived – as it was intended by Wilhelm Dilthey – as a kind of philosophical foundation for *Geisteswissenschaften* and even more specifically for *Kulturwissenschaften* – in which case it would play a parallel role to philosophy of science in its relation to natural sciences? Or is it to be understood as a kind of inter-discipline or trans-discipline whose task is to provide a synoptic view on the world we live in and try to understand? Or perhaps one should see it as a particular meta-philosophical orientation – understood rather in terms of a specific approach or a form of sensitivity than as a discipline which would be fully determined with regard to its methodology and objective field of cognitive interests? Or, as some scholars quite convincingly suggest, should be seen first and foremost as a way of life oriented around human intellectual and spiritual growth? Or still as something else? Furthermore, even if we assume a common agreement with regard to its nature and status among other philosophical (sub-)disciplines as well as its relation to humanities and natural sciences – it does not mean that it will be followed by a similar agreement with regard to its most adequate methodological approach. Should it be: descriptive, archeological, critical, procesual, teleological, normative? Perhaps a synthesis comprising all of them? Or still something different?

Needless to say that that most of these controversies are caused by the peculiar nature of the (non-)object of the discipline in question, namely culture itself. So, it seems that from the very start we are trapped in a kind a circle: to determine the nature of a discipline we have to determine precisely its *object*. But, each attempt to determine the *object* is always already an act undertaken from within the discipline. It is its actualization. There is no pure, so to speak, innocent starting point here – we always already find ourselves *in medias res*. To further complicate this picture one can say that every act of determining the *object* is not distantiated with

respect to it, but rather belongs to the *object* itself. In other words, every actualization of the discipline is at the same time an actualization of the *object*. Putting aside, for time being, all complexities of this circularity let me just underscore one of the crucial features of all genuinely philosophical reflection on culture – that is, the intransgressible *entanglement of practice and field*, where, as I suggested above, each act of the practice arises out of and belongs to the field.

In this light, philosophy of culture finds itself in an apparently unfortunate situation. That is, its reality is that of a constant quest for its own identity. Now a question appears: is this not a universal characteristic of philosophy in general? Does not philosophy as such suffer from, or simply finds itself within, the very same predicament which decides at the same time about its most basic “weakness” and its most vital strength? For what distinguishes philosophy from other domains of human intellectual activity – especially from science – is, among others, this particular orientation of philosophy expressed in its essentially self-referential character.

Philosophy, from its very beginning, appears as a problem for itself, as an object of its most vivid cognitive interest. If there is any universal, or at least trans-historical, feature of philosophy it is its inherent, open-ended quest for its own identity, its own self-understanding, its own definition. There is no philosophy which would stand above or beyond its own cultural facticity, its own historical actualizations and articulations. There is no, so to speak, philosophy-in-itself. *Philosophy emerges out of culture as its ultimate possibility of self-questioning and self-critique*. As such it is itself a cultural phenomenon which, as all other cultural phenomena, is the object of that questioning and critique. As a cultural phenomenon and as a *cultural practice* it essentially refers to itself in a twofold tensive mode – as a critical recognition of its own cultural facticity and as a never-ending attempt at transcending that very facticity; at providing a universal, all-encompassing conceptual representation of reality. In this sense it is involved in a paradoxical (if not hopeless) enterprise of grasping itself *in statu nascendi*, or in its purity. In fact, its every particular self-articulation reveals its own facticity, and in this way proves the aforementioned project to be impossible. Instead, that very project appears to be a source of indefinite possible self-articulations.

For these reasons Zofia Rosińska – to whom we are honored to dedicate this issue of the journal – has underscored that philosophy of culture is above all *metaphilosophy*. However, not in a sense of an abstract philosophical analyses of ways, modes and methods of philosophizing.¹ Rather it is to be a philosophical reflection on culture understood as an originary realm of all human meaningful activities, of *philosophy* in its pre-theoretical, pre-reflective form; philosophy as it originates from the primordial realm of social *praxis*. Therefore she distinguishes *implicite* and *explicite* philosophy of culture. While the latter is methodologically and conceptually rigorous philosophical reflection on the universe of cultural meanings, the former is identical with these very meanings as they are present and operative in our everyday lives; that is, before any philosophical theorization and conceptualization; and as such they present either spontaneous, immediate, pragmatic, or essentially non-speculative/pre-conceptual (e.g. artistic, mythical), responses to the very same questions philosophy poses. “Culture being the origin of philosophy *explicite* is also philosophy *implicite* as present in human activities and works. That means, philosophy of culture while referring to culture refers to philosophy.”²

The implications of this perspective are significant for our understanding of both culture and philosophy in their intransgressible entanglement. First, if culture emanates philosophy from itself, then it should be understood in terms of a cultivation of its inherent possibilities of self-understanding. Culture, in a form of philosophy, critically refers to itself, questions itself, tests its limits. Second, this questioning and testing taking place on the

1) See Zofia Rosińska, “Wstęp” in *Co to jest filozofia kultury?* eds. Zofia Rosińska, Joanna Michalik (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2006), 7–8.

2) Zofia Rosińska, “Wstęp,” in *Co to jest filozofia kultury?* eds. Zofia Rosińska, Joanna Michalik (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2006), 7.

theoretical level corresponds to what culture is on the level of a phenomenological ontology of the human being, on the level of historically determined lived-experiences of individuals and communities: an open-ended effort of *humanization* of reality, that is, of making it more and more comprehensible, livable, but also irreducibly plural (what does not necessarily stand in concert with comprehensibility or rationality) – in terms of potential perspectives, world-views or axiological frameworks and correlatively in terms of possible fields of experience. In this sense culture is, as Rosińska claims, everything what humans do, what and how they experience, who they are and how they are becoming.³ If that is so, it would be incorrect to limit culture, as an ever-increasing web of experienceable fields, to rationality.⁴ Third, there is a dimension of verticality inherent to culture which does not have to be explained in theological or metaphysical terms, but which find its justification in the abovementioned phenomenological ontology of human being, that is, within the limits of individual and collective experiences. This vertical dimension does not necessarily inform us about any concrete transcendent and absolute figure of meaning, or the ultimate Sense. It rather points at an indefinite pursuit inherent to culture to go beyond the horizontal plane of immanence, to transcend what is already established and time-honored, to be directed toward the irreducible otherness,⁵ to the unconditional, the ideal, and the possible. This leads us – following the logic of Rosińska’s anthropological philosophy of culture – to the fourth point. Culture, as is clear from what was stated above, is a realm of intransgressible factual determinations, but it is also, and more importantly, a realm, as we know it already from Cicero, of human self-cultivation and growing in excellence. It is a realm in which we are permanently *practicing* our ethical or, more broadly, axiological dispositions. In short, it is a realm of values among which we move in our day-to-day lives and for which, in this or that way, we have to opt.

Returning to philosophy itself – I have mentioned above that its double nature decides about its “weakness” but also determines its essential strength. As at once originating from culture and driven by a trans-factual, apriorical aspiration it necessarily becomes plural, polyphonic, possible rather than simply actual. As such, it is a powerful tool of resistance against all tendencies toward one-sided objectification, unification, standardization or inertia which constantly haunts cultural universes of meanings. In this sense there is a particular ethical, or more broadly axiological, obligation inscribed into philosophy – it is to be a means of, an essential for maintaining cultural vitality, *possibilization*. That is, philosophy should not only be open to the irreducibly plural character of the human world, a cultural defense mechanism against all forms of de-humanization, but even more importantly it should relentlessly introduce a moment of creative deviation into already established cultural systems of meanings. In this sense, philosophy as *the ultimate possibility* of culture is, by its nature, paradoxical – it belongs to culture, but at the same time as the activity of questioning and critique it introduces a moment of *negativity* into it, and therefore it is out-of-place. Such figure of a stranger who introduces a moment of unrest, a stranger who belongs to culture as its limit-phenomenon – but at the same time is out-of-joint – points at philosophical potential to reveal and cherish culture as a reservoir of *indefinite possibilities*.

However, the role of philosophy is by no means limited to this *negative* (or subversive) function. First and foremost it is to be interpretative and projective. That means, it is to reveal and articulate these meanings which are always already present in culture, to make them resonate; and even more importantly to uncover them as

3) Zofia Rosińska, “Słowo wiążące. Rozeznanie aksjologiczne,” in Zofia Rosińska, *Nie tylko to racjonalne: Teksty z filozofii kultury* (Warszawa, Oficyna Naukowa, 2020), 8.

4) See Rosińska, *Nie tylko to racjonalne*. See also Cassirer’s critique of rationality as exclusively defining features of human culture in Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 25–26.

5) For an original and radical conception of culture of transcendence (as opposed to culture of immanence) based on an irreducible directedness toward the absolute otherness understood as the unique sense see Emmanuel Lévinas, “Meaning and Sense” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 75–107.

expressions of the most vivid human existential and axiological concerns, as the traces of human exercise of freedom at its limitations as well as ever renewed attempts at self-understanding. In other words, philosophy (of culture) understood as metaphilosophy is, as Rosińska would put it, a constant practice of enlightening human, always en-cultured, existence. That is, to elucidate different forms of human experience and to show them as meaningful and value-laden. And it is to do so not necessarily by reducing them to rationality, but rather by situating them always within frameworks which are proper to them. In this sense, philosophy is a permanent, challenging *practice* of recognition which allows individualization and inclusion of different experiential phenomena.⁶ That means, it has to be not only interpretative but also, as I have mentioned, projective. It is to project, from within its own cultural situatedness, new meanings on always available concepts and categories; it is also to project new concepts by means of which the world we live in can be more (or again) significant and experientially broadened. It opens up/projects new experiential fields, new dimensions of reality, new actualities.

This issue of our journal gives justice to the abovementioned entanglement of philosophy and culture, of practice and field. It shows this entanglement in the whole variety of aspects – from the general methodological problematic, through social-political and, so to speak, intra-philosophical dimensions, to the limit question of philosophy of culture, namely the question concerning the relations between culture and nature. In this way the issue contributes to the main task of each philosophy which consciously refers to itself through the reference to its own origin – it *reflectively practices* our being-in-culture: it possibilizes and dynamizes established categories, provides new perspectives on the question of our identities, projects new ways of thinking from within and through culture, proposes strategies for cultural re-construction, undertakes, in original and novel ways, the ongoing quest for philosophy's identity.

We start our Thematic Section with an essay by Jean-Michel Salanskis who proposes his own original version of philosophy of culture called etho-analysis. Having Lévinas as his source of inspiration Salanskis presents culture in a deontological perspective – as the realm where particular idealities working as *solicitors*, that is, as sending a call for being actualized, find a resonance in readiness of a certain community to undertake a concrete shared practice governed by a precise (even if not necessarily explicitly codified) ethos. That is, in a response of a particular community constituted by a recognition of prescriptions inherent to a given solicitor. In other words, each cultural meaning appears at the intersection of a call and collective *responsibility*, to share meaning is to belong to a community of those who hear the call and are ready to take responsive attitude. Culture, as Salanskis claims, is thoroughly “corrupted by calls and demands” which precede and motivate our practices. Nothing in culture is simply actual; whatever is actual belongs to culture only as far and as long as it is still experienced as possible – that is as a request, a call requiring our response, or to be more precise: our readiness to be moved, attracted, motivated by it.

This conception of culture is interestingly supplemented by Jared Kemling's essay which stands in an apparent opposition to it. In Kemling's view culture is the realm of human free actions or practices aimed at growth and flourishing. Therefore, after presenting four different forms of philosophy of culture (descriptive, critical, procesual, and teleological), he postulates that philosophy of culture – in order to become a genuine part of culture – cannot be reflectively detached from culture, but should take a form of a cultural philosophy – a free reflective practice at human intellectual and spiritual thriving. In this sense the opposition between the perspectives proposed by the first two essays is only superficial. What Kemling reveals before readers can be, in fact, articulated as inherent to a genuine philosophy of culture call/demand to become a creative exercise in human freedom and in this way to productively contribute to cultural reality.

6) See Zofia Rosińska, “Recognition and Diagnosis from the Perspective of an Anthropological Philosophy of Culture,” *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 2, no. 2 (4) (2018): 91. <https://doi.org/10.26319/4718>.

The next two essays by Kenneth W. Stickers and Iñaki Pertierra present interesting and original re-interpretations of Scheler's and Gadamer's concepts of culture as the dynamic and tensive realm of meanings and values. In case of Scheler, as Stickers argues, combining his two different theories of culture – one presenting cultures in terms of a particular orders of values and the other one as an interplay between “real and ideal sociological factors” – we can arrive at a comprehensive theory of culture which not only comprises materiality and ideality of culture and gives a good explanation of their dynamic interrelations, but also grasps both vertical and horizontal dimensions of culture. Pertierra, in turn, shows how Gadamerian hermeneutics of culture makes it possible to think about culture in terms of a changeable, dynamic horizon of meanings constituted by an immanent interplay of sameness and difference as well as actualized and re-actualized in a practice of dialogue with different horizons, that is, as an interplay of identity and otherness. In this perspective culture appears to be “both self- and other-referential.”

Philosophy, as stated above, emerges out of the sphere of social *praxis*, but it does not leave it behind. It reflectively returns to its own origin. In so doing it can play two apparently opposite but equally engaged roles. It can support cultural reconstruction and help to build new, healthier collective identities which would give justice to vital needs, motivations, values and purposes of a community. Or quite to the contrary it can serve as an effective means of resistance toward any identification as presenting a risk of unintentional falling into a fundamentalism. In this second role it becomes a guardian of culture understood as a repository of indefinite possibilities. However, as another two essays show well, this opposition does not have to be a radical one. Agata Bielik-Robson in her original and inspiring interpretation of Derrida's conception of radical messianism articulated in “Marrano experience” shows in great detail its socio-political implications. The Marrano figure represents a radical vision of a universal community based on non-participation and resistance toward any form of identity. It “stands for the non-participatory remnant of otherness which is not just the other of this or that particular tradition, but is a bearer of a new universalism, based not on the abstract notion of human nature but on the non-identity; a distance-from-identity or ... ‘non-integral identity’.” Laura Mueller, in turn, presents a thorough analysis of American identity as essentially pluralistic, polyphonic, unfinished and ambiguous, as constantly re-actualized in a state of a lived uncertainty and as confronted with a constant risk of falling into fundamentalism. And she argues for defending a specifically American *Buildung* which would cultivate this form of an open identity. An effective tool of that is to be in a Modern Socratic Dialogue, which is based on the essentially pluralistic character of community, to create a non-dogmatic space for its members identities which cherishes plural origins and different voices.

The essay by Mikołaj Sławkowski-Rode offers a well-researched and interesting interpretation of the so called “Continental/Analytic divide.” The author presents the phenomenon in question in terms of two forms of culture understood here specifically as “philosophical temperaments.” The special value of the essay lies not only in a detailed analysis of the cultural context of this distinction, but even more importantly in defending it – against a growing tendency to bridge the gap between these approaches – by demonstrating philosophy's capacity of self-differentiation and pluralization, which, in fact, was always the case in the course of the history of Western thought.

It can be surprising but the word “nature” appears in the discourse of philosophers of culture as often (if not more often) as the word “culture.” It almost seems that philosophy of culture as such is driven by a kind of obsession with that concept. It is as if any positive content of the concept of culture would have to be designated by means of a negative reference to nature. It is as if nature could be conceived only as an absolute other of culture. And so we could not help ourselves but to give an expression to that obsession. Thus we end our Thematic Section with an excellent and thought-provoking essay by Mateusz Salwa postulating a radical reformulation of the relation between culture and nature. This project – based on the phenomenological-hermeneutic

method and supported by philosophy of dialogue – is not to be understood as simple theoretical re-description of that relation. It is to be a thorough ethical reconstruction of culture. The project guided by an ecological imperative is to lead to the recognition of a personalistic character of nature and to “a new sort of culture, one that hopefully will be less exploitative toward nature as well as toward humans.”

Our Forum section starts with an essay by a living legend of American phenomenology – Professor James G. Hart. His paper offers an impressive, detailed and multidimensional analysis of phenomenological ontology of persons understood in terms of their radical singularity which is grounded in “non-sortal unique essence” or self-individuating substance which transcends all concrete intra-worldly determinations. Hart’s analyses culminate in the interpretation of love as the act of “eternization,” which not only allows manifestation of that substance, but reaches it as if above the world, certainly not against, but regardless of all concrete embodiments, that is, “as inseparable from what is eternal.” The second essay in the Forum by Maciej Bednarski offers an inspiring interpretation of the ethical potential of literature as presented by M. Nussbaum and R. Rorty. The author supports his analysis by using the theoretical tools from philosophical theories of J. Rawls and J. Rancière.

I would also like to draw readers’ attention to two papers published in the third section of the issue. Randall E. Auxier takes us for a fascinating ride through *the middle ground between light and shadow* by offering his highly inspiring interpretation of the science fiction TV series *The Twilight Zone*. He uses as interpretative tools the crucial categories of his metaphysics of culture – “constellated possibilities,” “clustered possibilities,” “effective destining” – in order to show how they operate on the level of popular culture creating futural narratives which not only inform us about the hidden (shadowy) aspects of our identities, but also project them as our possible destiny – that is, whom we can (most probably) become; or not. In any case beware of this ride – you can end up in *the middle ground between shadows and shadows* only to experience the inability to know yourselves, and without knowing what is to be expected, hoped for, or believed. And yet you will find yourselves there with a deep, though hardly definable, feeling that your destiny is awaiting you. Such are the workings of our relentless imagination which is operative in popular culture long before any philosophical conceptualizations, as Auxier argues. And even if they are playful, they are not funny. Not at all.

Eli Kramer, in turn, offers us results of his research project devoted to Polish philosophy of culture. His essay, based on interviews with seventeen leading Polish philosophers of culture from three generations and his own research, provides an excellent, condensed picture of the subject matter. Kramer briefly describes its historical origins and transformations, and in the next step he more thoroughly analyzes its different dimensions, inspirations, the role it has actively played in social-political life, and specific kinds of sensitivities – as they appear out of the interviews. The essay is a great polyphonic synthesis of different views, a synthesis composed in a very thoughtful and attentive way and as such proves high hermeneutic skills of the author.