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Philosophy as a Spiritual Way of Life and the Utopia of a University *Without Condition*

Abstract:

Starting from the premise, recently shared by authors such as Jacques Derrida and Pierre Macherey (for whom a state of crisis is inherent to the university) that of the humanities constitute the specific terrain in which to propose new experiments, this article attempts to verify what is at stake in an approach to philosophy as a way of life, in the context of the current academic form. In doing so, following Hadot and Foucault, it describes philosophical spirituality, and conversion, as the determining elements of a philosophy connected to the practices of existence. Secondly, it shows how the criticisms of the philosophy linked to the state, of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bourdieu – as well as the criticisms of the philosophy linked to the neoliberal market – determine the urgency of thinking of a philosophy as spirituality within universities. In what terms, however, is it possible to practice this philosophy without changing the very forms of the contemporary county university? And how is it possible to change the contemporary university without giving philosophy the utopian place it deserves?

Keywords:

philosophical spiritualities, utopian studies, conversion, university, Humanities

1. PWL as a Form of "Spirituality"

What is at stake in philosophy as a way of life? Or which way of living philosophically can be inferred from what Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault say when referring to the way in which philosophy touches life in ancient and modern times? They agree that living philosophically has something to do with the field of the "spiritual." They agree, saying that the core meaning of the spiritual consists of the ability to transcend and transform the forms of living. In this sense, if we can testify to several forms of non-philosophical spirituality, we cannot have a philosophy as a way of life without spirituality.[1] In his core essay on "spiritual exercises," Pierre Hadot defines them as practices that involve:

> A complete reversal of our usual way of looking at things. We are to switch from our "human" vision of reality, in which our values depend on our passions, to a "natural" vision of things, which replaces each event within the perspective of universal nature. Such a transformation of vision is not easy, and it is precisely here that spiritual exercises come in.[2]

For Hadot, the notion of spiritual exercises expresses the specific form assumed by philosophy in antiquity – recovered in certain strands of modern thought. As an "art of living," philosophy becomes "a concrete attitude and determinate lifestyle, which engages the whole of existence."[3] As such, the "philosophical act" is essentially "a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it," and raising "the individual from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life."[4]

Equivalent to, or interchangeable with, this kind of philosophy, these practices are characterized by Hadot as "spiritual." Hadot justifies his use of an expression that he admits is "disconcerting for the contemporary reader"[5] as follows: "It is neverthe-

1) See Ferraro, *Philosophical Mythoi*, 92–98 and 111–12
2) Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* 83.
3) Ibid.
4) Ibid.
5) Ibid., 81.

less necessary to use this term, I believe, because none of the other adjectives we could use – 'psychic,' 'moral,' 'ethical,' 'intellectual,' 'of thought,' 'of the soul' – covers all the aspects of the reality we want to describe."[6] Hadot chooses to call these exercises "spiritual" to emphasize the extent of the involved subject's transformation: the aim of such exercises is "a transformation of our vision of the world" and "a metamorphosis of our personality."[7] Precisely because the "spiritual" implies the involvement of "the individual's entire psychism" rather than mere thought, it reveals "the true dimensions of these exercises."[8] To complete this definition, Hadot adds a final Hegelian consideration: through spiritual exercises, corresponding to an act of "transcending" oneself, "the individual raises himself up to the life of the objective Spirit; that is to say, he re-places himself within the perspective of the Whole."[9]

Involved in spiritual exercises is a type of work, or *askēsis*, the aim of which is to transcend the individual, the spirit as *psukhē* – also in an immanent sense – to assume the "perspective of the Whole."[10] After all, following Rabbow and Friedmann, Hadot is careful to distinguish this philosophical notion of spirituality from the religious one. Ancient *askēsis* – which became the *exercitium spirituale* in the first centuries of Christianity – did not have any religious features in itself. It was not until later that it acquired its religious meaning, subsequently recovered by St. Ignatius. As such, this "spirituality," as an experience of transcendence, does not necessarily belong to religious practices and can therefore be used in ways that transcend them.[11]

Giving form to a type of "spirituality" that constitutes a common element of philosophical, political, and religious traditions, the different practices related to the "care of the self" characterize what can be defined as "spiritual," according to Foucault. As a genealogy of the "care of the self," the *Hermeneutics of the Subject* can be interpreted as a genealogy of Western spirituality, the relation between philosophical, religious, and other forms of spirituality. Foucault mentions the following characteristics of spirituality:

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6) Ibid.

7) Ibid., 82.

8) Ibid.

9) Ibid.

10) Sellars, *Self and Cosmos*, 42, and Testa, *The Great Cycle of the World*, 62.

11) Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 82; and *La Philosophie*, 151–54.

> Spirituality postulates that the truth is never given to the subject by right. Spirituality postulates that the subject as such does not have right of access to the truth and is not capable of having access to the truth. It postulates that the truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge (*connaissance*), which would be founded and justified simply by the fact that he is the subject and because he possesses this or that structure of subjectivity. It postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself. The truth is only given to the subject at a price that brings the subject's being into play.[12]

A second aspect of Western spirituality mentioned by Foucault concerns "conversion." Foucault clarifies that "from this point of view there can be no truth without a conversion or a transformation of the subject." Conversion takes the form of "a movement that removes the subject from his current status and condition," and does this in two ways: the first consists of "an ascending movement of the subject himself," and the second "a movement by which the truth comes to him and enlightens him."[13]

The third aspect of Western spirituality according to Foucault is the "rebound effects," that of the truth on the subject. "If I call this 'philosophy,' then I think we could call 'spirituality' the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth."[14] In short, for Hadot and Foucault, what characterizes a practice as "spiritual" is the aim of transforming the subject: when these practices of transformation are connected with access to a non-predetermined truth and the right action, spirituality becomes strictly "philosophical." If it is true, as Hadot and Foucault suggest, that we need to approach "spirituality" as an independent notion – a "meta-philosophical" notion – a philosophy that informs the way of living cannot be detached from spirituality. To philosophize means to assume a perspective that tests the limits of ourselves, and of ourselves as agents of testing in the world: it is what Foucault named a "critical

12) Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 15.

13) Ibid., 15–16.

14) Ibid., 15.

ontology of ourselves."[15] From this perspective, we try to test ourselves and the conditions in which our philosophical act is done.

2. Criticism of Academic Philosophy According to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

The main paradigms of modern academia, as drawn at the beginning of the nineteenth century, could be clarified as follows: firstly, we encounter the paradigm of the Prussian University, as projected by Alexander von Humboldt, then the paradigm of the French *Ecole Normal*, and finally the English and American colleges and universities. What characterizes the differentiated development of the three university forms is the direct connection with the needs of the state. Modern universities are born following the necessities of the modern state, as an essential ganglion of the state's structure, precisely with the aim of developing the executive elites.[16]

In this form, humanities have a pivotal function: that is, the function of organizing and somehow directing the academic structure. In this organization, humanities, and philosophy in particular, assume the role of constructing the academic "discourses." The positivistic turn, in which science apparently holds the leading role, does not modify, in truth, the inner organization. Philosophy soon claims its role, becoming the philosophy of science, or philosophy of history. Philosophy maintains, as such, the role of expressing the relations between the different kinds of knowledge. With the improvement of scientific and technological advances, natural sciences and humanities increase in specificity, and distance from philosophy; although the organization of the academic world and the modalities through which the "academic word" is expressed remain substantially unchanged. The relationship between academic

15) In the later stages of Foucault's research trajectory, the genealogical project of a "hermeneutics of the subject" converges with the critical stance of modern philosophy, articulated by Foucault through the concept of an "ontology of the present." Through his engagement with Kant's essay on the Enlightenment, Foucault delineates a genealogy of his own intellectual endeavor in the history of ideas, undertaken across his career. Moreover, the alignment of the earlier archeo-genealogical approach with what Foucault designates as the "critical ontology of ourselves" – a position he considers fundamental to the modern philosophical project – sheds light on the critical paradigm he adopted in the 1980s and its continuity, albeit with notable differences, with his previous models of the history of ideas. On this topic, see Ferraro, *Care of the Present*, 117.

16) Humboldt, "Über die Organisation."

knowledge and power continues to be deeply influenced by the organization of the modern state. Philosophy, as a practice, cannot move differently; its legitimacy is founded in the constellation of what Foucault determined as the complex relation between wisdom and power.

Therefore, it is precisely this condition encountered by Nietzsche in 1879, when he definitively decided to leave the philological profession at the University of Basel and follow his "philosophical conversion." As we know, Nietzsche's choice does not result in philosophical activity practiced in the academic space from which, after all, he came. A few years earlier, after having demonstrated the influence that Schopenhauer had on his own reflections on the ancients in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche also revealed the debt he owed to Schopenhauer as an "*exemplum vitae*." In *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874), Nietzsche indeed highlights the direct connection that is established between an existential attitude and the strength of a thought. The main aim of the philosopher and educator can be revealed not through words, but rather through an example of living. In Schopenhauer, Nietzsche precisely found a philosophical practice distanced from the State. Reading Schopenhauer overturns Nietzsche's system of values, but at the same time helps him focus on himself and rediscover what is at stake as a human being. Pierre Hadot makes Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator* a canonical example of what can be interpreted as "philosophy as a way of life."[17] For Nietzsche, educators' aim is not to impose their word or their way of being on their students, but rather to show them how to live. In this sense, educators' impact on their students, like Schopenhauer's on Nietzsche, should have precisely the characteristics of a call to a philosophical conversion:

> Your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you that the true, original meaning and basic stuff of your nature is something completely incapable of being educated or formed and is in any case something difficult to access, bound and paralysed; your educators can be only your liberators.[18]

17) On this topic, see also Ferraro, "Exercícios de inatualidade."

18) Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator,* §1, 129.

Similarly, in the Preface of *Human, All Too Human* I, Nietzsche describes the "great liberation" through which the "young soul" moves to its form as a "free spirit":

> The great liberation comes for those who are thus fettered suddenly, like the shock of an earthquake: the youthful soul is all at once convulsed, torn loose, torn away – it itself does not know what is happening. A drive and impulse rules and masters it like a command; a will and desire awakens to go off, anywhere, at any cost; a vehement dangerous curiosity for an undiscovered world flames and flickers in all its senses.[19]

To show the relevance of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche chooses as polemical opposant the academic model of philosophy, and his contemporary model of learning. His current learning system had its roots in medieval academia the medieval scholar still appearing as the aim of the perfect education. Hence, the "third perilous concession which philosophy makes to the state. Above all, when it appears as knowledge of the history of philosophy."[20] This makes the philosopher just a "learned presenter of what others have thought: and as to that, he will always have something to say his pupils do not already know."[21] In this context, it appears very difficult to substitute the old rules with a new idea. What kind of philosophical freedom is possible within a state university? Nietzsche argues:

> Considered more closely, that 'freedom' with which, as I have said, the state now blesses some men for the good of philosophy is no freedom at all but an office of profit. The promotion of philosophy nowadays consists, it seems, only in the state's enabling a number of men to *live* from their philosophy by making of it a means of livelihood.[22]

Nietzsche takes care specifying that "Whether truth is served when one is shown a way of living off it I cannot say in general, because here it all depends on the quality

19) Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* I, *Preface* §2, 7.

20) Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator,* §8, 186.

21) Ibid.

22) Ibid., 184.

of the individual who is shown it."[23] Thus, it is possible for a philosopher to agree with their society or state. Nevertheless, there is a condition and a risk. According to Nietzsche, the condition *sine qua non* is that the "aims" of the state and the philosopher coincide; the risk is that, if the premise is not guaranteed, the philosopher becomes a simple function of the state machine, and Nietzsche appears particularly afraid of this: "Because every state fears them and will favour only philosophers it does not fear."[24] Indeed:

> The state never has any use for truth as such, but only for truth which is useful to it, more precisely for anything whatever useful to it whether it be truth, half-truth or error. A union of state and philosophy can therefore make sense only if philosophy can promise to be unconditionally useful to the state, that is to say, to set usefulness to the state higher than truth. It would of course be splendid for the state if it also had truth in its pay and service; but the state itself well knows that it is part of the *essence* of truth that it never accepts pay, or stands in anyone's service.[25]

The risks of the "agreement" between the state and philosophy appear much too high to Nietzsche. His conception of philosophy as something that should transform the ways of living, particularly of new generations, appears as being in definite contrast with the aims of the state.

> As long as this officially recognized guild of pseudo-thinkers continues to exist, any effectiveness of a true philosophy will be brought to naught or at least obstructed, and it will suffer this fate through nothing other than the curse of the ludicrous which the representatives of that philosophy have called down upon themselves but which also strikes at philosophy itself. That is why I say it is a demand of culture that philosophy should be deprived of any kind of official or academic recognition and that state

23) Ibid.

24) Ibid.

25) Ibid., 190–191.

> and academy be relieved of the task, which they cannot encompass, of distinguishing between real and apparent philosophy.[26]

What Nietzsche defends, is indeed a spiritual practice of philosophy, aiming to transform existence through a free choice, based on a rupture with a model. His opposition to academic philosophy appears reflective of promoting philosophy as a way of life. The well-being of philosophy cannot coincide with the well-being of the State. As a point of reference, Foucault's and Hadot's conception of philosophical spirituality, as well as this "fracture," pointed out by Nietzsche, should be taken into account.

3. Bourdieu's Criticism of Modern Academia

More recently (1984) Pierre Bourdieu, in his sociology of modern academia, reflected on this topic, analyzing in the French context how different forms of power condition the expression of free research.

> The secret resistance to innovation and to intellectual creativity, the aversion to ideas and to a free and critical spirit, which so often orientate academic judgments, as much at the viva of a doctoral thesis or in a critical book reviews as in well-balanced lectures setting off neatly against each other the lates avant-gardes, are no doubt the effect of the recognition granted to an institutionalized thought only on those who implicitly accept the limits assigned by the institution. And nothing helps more than the doctoral thesis to reinforce the dispositions required. This happens through the intermediary of the diffuse control which the patriarchal authority of the 'doctor's father' tends to exercise over all practices, notably over publication, via self-censorship and obligatory reverence towards masters and academic production, and above all via the prolonged relation of dependency in which the thesis maintains the candidate and which most often has no connection with the technical necessities of a true apprenticeship.[27]

26) Ibid., 190.

27) Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, 95.

Bourdieu is also careful explaining the risks that humanities run in a similar context, that of accepting and being made uniform by scientific and academic rules which overdetermine their expression. Indeed, Bourdieu writes of a "rhetoric of scientificity destined to produce a fiction of science,"[28] which is often based on the "exaltation of academic 'reliability'."[29], an instrument of normalization which connects scientificity and morality. Academic discourse can pretend legitimacy only when based on specific criteria: it is what he defines as a "*scientific effect*,"[30] which gives discourse its specific social value.

Nevertheless, these criteria are determined by the historical conditions in which they are defined and in which they pretend to pre-determine the scientific paths: it is important, thus, to sociologically – and perhaps philosophically – understand how the scientific criteria are determined, and clarifying the social interests defining the social norms on which these criteria are based. It is pivotal, according to Bourdieu, to approach scientific and academic criteria as a specific result of a "struggle between different representations."[31] In this sense, scientific representations – a representation socially recognized as scientifically "true" – have a social force. It gives to those who practice it a sort of trust, a "monopoly," concerning the "legitimate viewpoint."[32] The risk concerning the unquestionable position of these scientific criteria is that we can often encounter a "self-fulfilling prophecy."[33] In this way, nothing more can be added, beyond what is socially recognized as scientific. Rather, Bourdieu argues, "truth has no intrinsic force"[34]: it only consists of a "force of belief in truth, of belief which produces the appearance of truth."[35]

Now, if natural sciences are more aware of what is at stake in the evolution of scientific paradigms, only social sciences and humanities can really question what Foucault defined as being the "forms of veridiction" of discursive practices, as the scientific discourses are. This is the main aim of the Humanities, along with the

28) Ibid., 28.
29) Ibid., 95
30) Ibid., 29.
31) Ibid., 28
32) Ibid.
33) Ibid.
34) Ibid.
35) Ibid.

defense of philosophical autonomy from any heteronomic conditions, at the same time, defending the independence of the society.

4. Criticism of Contemporary Academia as a Function of the Market: The Bibliometric Dystopia and the Citational Academic Subject

In contrast to the past, specifically the academic model of philosophical practices in which the State plays the most relevant role, contemporary academia has its bases not just in the aims of the State, but also those of the neo-liberal Market. More precisely, Nietzsche had already pointed out what he calls in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, "the greed of the money makers," promoting culture to secondary ends, instead of disinterested feelings. In this case,

> Education would be defined by its adherents as the insight by means of which, through demand and its satisfaction, one becomes time-bound through and through but at the same time best acquires all the ways and means of making money as easily as possible. The goal would then be to create as many current human beings as possible, in the sense in which one speaks of a coin as being current; and, according to this conception, the more of these current human beings it possesses the happier a nation will be. Thus the sole intention behind our modern educational institutions should be to assist everyone to become current to the extent that lies in his nature, to educate everyone in such a way that they can employ the degree of knowledge and learning of which they are capable for the accumulation of the greatest possible amount of happiness and profit.[36]

As is well known, in the last two decades, most Western (not exclusively) university systems have created several promotional schemes, increasingly based on some sort of measurable academic output, usually in the form of published papers. Publishing in highly ranked journals has increasingly been recognized as the key to climbing

36) Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator,* §6, 164.

the academic ladder.[37] This has resulted in the well-known *publish or perish* paradigm which most academics are obliged to follow from the beginning of their career. From an institutional perspective, this corresponds to the heavy reliance on bibliometric measures to quantify academic prestige, through academic accounting substantiated by rankings. In fact, on aggregate, more research output is rewarded, leading to universities manipulating the rankings to appoint highly renowned academics in their field.[38] As Sharpe and Turner argue in a very important article on this topic:

> Where previously no such possibility existed, metrics promise to document the hard numerical truths about the conduct of individuals across any range of activities, while leaving these individuals formally "free" to pursue their tasks and enterprise themselves. Armed with such metrics, meanwhile, managers and their decision-making prerogatives are liberated from the direct need to attend to or comprehend the on-the-ground concerns, specialised knowledges and responsibilities of their line workers.[39]

To achieve its explicit aim of defining a rational/scientific ranking of publication, when applied to the humanities, the *publish or perish* system reveals itself as intrinsically irrational. Taking into account the noncoincidence between humanities, social and naturalistic epistemologies, this paradigm results in a heterogeneity of its ends. In fact, by tightening the forms of research and academic discussion, it defines only one order of legitimate discourse to be practiced in academics. This restriction results in a new disciplinary model of academic subjects – a "citational subject" – unable to critically approach the historical and interdisciplinary methods needed by humanistic pedagogical *curricula*. Nevertheless, the contradictions observed in the humanistic example can be also observed in other cases.

On the prosecution of Foucault's and Bourdieu's studies, Sharpe and Turner identify the effects of neoliberal policies:

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37) See CRUI Foundation, *CAF Università*; and Pinto and Zellini, "The 'Academic Difference.'"

38) On this topic, see Saltelli, Theben, and Scandurra, "Smashing the Glasshouse."

39) Sharpe and Turner, *Bibliopolitics*, 155.

> The connection between liberal-capitalist social relations and the kind of quantitative measures for human conduct that metrics promise might seem direct and unchanging. Markets are competitions and competitions must have winners and losers. In order for different parties to be so ranked, some common measure or "universal equivalent" or "metric" is required, starting from money itself. . . . And understanding how neoliberalism breaks with its liberal predecessors also allows us to see the politico-economic causes behind today's veritable explosion of forms of metrics, reaching from biometrics *via* bibliometrics even into the sacred groves of academe.[40]

From a Foucauldian perspective, proliferating metrics and today's bibliometrics show the instances of a neoliberal, managerial technology. As an added example the academic application of the project-financing method leads to the loss of scientific objectivity towards research. Particularly, in hyper-specialized education, such as the humanities, complex approaches to reality and problems, which are the core of humanist paths and academic curricula, are lost. The authors also show how the bases of the bibliometric, "scientific criteria" are rooted in a well-determined social construction: that of bibliometric criteria accompanying social improvement of expertise, trained through the same metrical criteria. In the European context, academic teaching, with the implementation of the so-called "Bologna Process" starting in 1999 – whose explicit aim was to "rationalize" and thus integrate the various teaching models of European countries – has in fact been subjected to educational standards and a metric-based curricular paradigm through the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits model. This model runs parallel to the one introduced in research through the bibliometric paradigm and, as such, has codified and narrowed the scope for self-reflection for those involved in the teaching of the humanities, both on the part of teachers and students.[41] When quality is reported through quantitative metrics, everything undefinable through those criteria is automatically irrelevant or marginalized. Bibliometrics do not need to question themselves.

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40) Ibid., 152.

41) In this sense, Sharpe and Turner's analysis of the research model aligns well with Saltelli, Theben, and Scandurra's, focused on the pedagogical model. On this topic, see also Muller, *Tyranny of Metrics*.

5. The Utopia of a University Without Conditions

Academic organization moved in this direction, when Jacques Derrida held his conference on the "university without conditions," in 2001. Derrida explained his "utopia" of the modern university, and in particular, of humanities and philosophy within this kind of university.

> This university claims and ought to be granted in principle, besides what is called academic freedom, an *unconditional* freedom to question and to assert, or even, going still further, the right to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the *truth*. However enigmatic it may be, the reference to truth remains fundamental enough to be found, along with light (*lux*), on the symbolic insignias of more than one university.
>
> The university professes the truth, and that is its profession. It declares and promises an unlimited commitment to the truth. No doubt the status of and the changes to the value of truth can be discussed *ad infinitum* (truth as adequation or truth as revelation, truth as the object of theoretico--constative discourses or as poetico-performative events, and so forth). But these are discussed, precisely, *in* the University and in departments that belong to the Humanities.[42]

As such, universities and humanistic departments should be the first places where the struggle for truth takes place. Their freedom – and the freedom of truth, of course – depends on the capacity to maintain these characteristics. The principle of the "unconditional university" or the "university without condition" is the "right to say everything, whether it be under the heading of fiction and the experimentation of **knowledge, and the right to say it publicly, to publish it**."[43] Nevertheless, Derrida argues "it has never been in effect." Indeed this principle also exposes "the weakness or the vulnerability of the university," its impotence, "the fragility of its defences

42) Derrida, "University Without Condition," 24.

43) Ibid., 26.

against all the powers that command it, besiege it, and attempt to appropriate it."[44] Indeed, a university without condition is necessarily a "stranger to power, because it is heterogeneous to the principle of power": "the university is also without any power of its own." Because its independence would be its strength, this university cannot be otherwise than "without defence."[45] Derrida almost fears the same principle of University as being under attack: "to what extent does the organization of research and teaching have to be supported, that is, directly or indirectly controlled, let us say euphemistically 'sponsored,' by commercial and industrial interests?"[46]

As we see, the problem remains the same in the case of Derrida, Bourdieu, and Sharpe; as well as that of Hadot, Foucault, and Nietzsche. How should a free philosophical practice be defended, one directly concerning choices of living? How should a philosophical practice be defended that is capable of giving itself the ability to criticize "without conditions"? In this "unconditionality," we find the unique premise by which academic knowledge agrees with the philosophical practice of thought as a "way of life"; and a disinterested "spiritual activity," as argued by Hadot and Foucault. Derrida's idea is clearly utopian, sharing the same characteristics: it intrinsically criticizes the "normal," letting reality mirror itself. As in the case of any utopia, its strengths do not necessarily reside in reality: "what is needed then is not only a principle of resistance, but a force of resistance – and of dissidence."[47]

This force seems indeed to be connatural to the humanities: "This principle of unconditionality *presents itself*, originally and above all, in the Humanities. It has an originary and privileged place of *presentation*, of manifestation, of safekeeping in the Humanities. It has there its space of discussion as well as of reelaboration."[48] For this reason, pivotal for Derrida is the question of what "professing" means; which kind of responsibility and freedom, beyond the simple knowledge, is at stake in the figure of the Professor? Moreover, only humanities can recognize, as their task, the investigation of what can be known and thought about their history. To critically approach their

44) Ibid., 27.

45) Ibid., 28.

46) Ibid.

47) Ibid.

48) Ibid.

meaning and historical institutionalization, the humanities should never renounce studying their history, understanding the conditions through which a configuration of thoughts and practices was born, and understanding the possible conditions to recreate themselves in other configurations. For Derrida, of course, it is not a mere question of theoretical approach, rather it is a performative practice, based on the insistence of a utopian expression: "as if."

> Like all acts of institution, those that we must analyze will have had a performative force and will have put to work a certain "as if." I just said that one must "study" or "analyze." Is it necessary to make clear that such "studies," such "analyses," for the reasons already indicated, would not be purely "theoretical" and neutral? They would lead toward practical and performative transformations and would not forbid the production of singular *oeuvres*.[49]

Thinking of "as if" – as a drop on the rock – imperceptibly but decisively has the strength to modify institutions, practices and ways of thinking, already evidenced throughout history. Is it possible to imagine a revolution without an "as if," and is it otherwise possible to imagine our forms of living without an "as if"? "This force in keeping with an experience of the 'perhaps' keeps an affinity or a complicity with the 'if' of the 'as if.' And thus with a certain grammar of the conditional: 'what *if* this arrived? This, that is altogether other, *could well* arrive, this *would* happen.'"[50]

Like the ancient *memento mori*, the "as if" could be present in a modern *hypomnematon*, as a memory of the unconditionality of any existence. Moreover, it can open an institution to its proper unconditionality – those of the humanities, in particular – where nothing less than existence is at stake. In this way:

> One thus touches on the very limit, *between the inside and the outside*, notably the border of the university itself, and within it, of the Humanities. One thinks *in* the Humanities the irreducibility of their outside and of

49) Ibid., 50.

50) Ibid., 54.

> their future. One thinks *in* the Humanities that one cannot and must not let oneself be enclosed within the inside of the Humanities. But for this thinking to be strong and consistent requires the Humanities.[51]

6. Macherey, the "Parole Universitaire," and the Risk of a Passive Revolution

In reference to the utopian proposal of Derrida, Pierre Macherey wrote about the "academic word," "la parole universitaire."[52] Beginning from a principle that the current form of the university is in crisis, Macherey states that the constitutive aspect of the university is its crisis, as illustrated by Kant's *Conflict of Faculties*.[53] Its normative rituals – its discursivities and its practices – pretend to define the university as an unalterable temple, where academic forms are always born from crisis, in relation to the crisis. In this sense, the "academic word" has always been at the crossroads of "inside" and "outside." Nevertheless, this is also an expression of the academic form from its modern origin: when integrated into the organisms of the State, academic practice appears necessarily "territorialized." According to Macherey, we need therefore to "de-territorialize" the university, to understand the crisis which crosses its practices and discourse. To answer the current crisis of the academic world – firstly, the crisis of the humanistic and philosophical word within the university – Macherey reflects on the apparently unrecognizable lines of tension that cross the university. One of the ways to practice this tension is by making a genealogy of the academic forms: recovering, for instance, those forms of academic organization that Western civilization experienced before modernity, as were the cases of the medieval academies, or the academies of the eighteenth century. Those academies or universities were born from an aggregation of teachers and scholars that made a community, based on their common desire to learn and to experiment with certain form of living. The genealogical recovery of these spaces somehow recovers something of the unconditionality

51) Ibid., 54.

52) See Macherey, *La parole universitaire*, 7–31.

53) The recent Covid-19 pandemic, along with the consequent suspension of academic activities and the need to implement remote teaching, has triggered extensive reflection on the crisis of the university on the one hand, and on the possible role of philosophy in times of crisis on the other. For more on that see Sharpe, "Good Person for a Crisis?"

highlighted by Derrida, and something of that disinterestedness on which Hadot had based his conception of philosophy.

For Macherey, the complexity of the *universitas* needs to emerge from the surface of the discursivity. It is precisely this complexity that the "university" takes with itself, that should be compared, and in this way historicized in the forms of the current *academias*.

To respond to its incontrovertible crisis, the "parole universitaire" should rediscover itself, to open itself to that outside, without which it is condemned to repeat itself meaninglessly. As Derrida stresses, and Macherey repeats, the crisis of the university is exactly the same crisis as that in which sovereign institutions live, for instance our democratic institution. Two paradigmatic answers are possible: the closure in the fortress of what it has done – the legality of an operational mode that loses its social legitimacy in the long term; or in contrast, a constitutive opening to experimentation with other ways of being, of other forms to practice and pronounce the "parole universitaire." It is needed therefore to open the university to transforming social contexts, so it can have a "view from above" typical of ancient stoicism. A bit more difficult, sometimes, because it is certainly more a "view from inside."

We can try to observe our universities, particularly the social and cultural organization of our humanistic institutions, through the lenses given by Hadot and Foucault: we have some difficulty in finding the possibility of "philosophical spirituality" they encountered in both Antiquity and Modernity. The differentiation between what is philosophy as a way of life, what it is not, and the debates on when and how it disappears, reveal that it is not simply based on the differentiation between the different approaches, or the "breaks" between life and philosophy: the "conditions" in which philosophy is practiced appear to be equally determining factors.[54]

Based on the aims of the State or the Market, our institutions and philosophy conceived as a way of living seem to be condemned to definitive dissonance. Derrida and Macherey try to let us imagine a possibility: questioning the unconditionality of the university and the "academic word" recalls some possibilities from the past, obliging the university to open its doors to the outside. PWL is an outsider practice

54) The medieval Scholastic, according to Hadot and Descartes's reason, according to Foucault, are precisely two institutions of philosophy determining its own practice.

which is probably the reason for its great social success. Outside of the universities, there is a great demand for philosophy.[55] On the other side, when we improve the presence of a PWL in the universities, we accept academic current of governmentalization, for example by submitting articles on philosophy as a way of life in top-ranking journals, we publish with scientific editors and we obtain projects.

What is the real risk of this practice? I found it expressed in Gramsci's notion of "passive revolution." In this, the Italian philosopher describes those forms of conservative restoration in which something of the revolutionary demands are accepted within a framework that is only illusorily transformed. Moreover, social needs are only partially accepted, without observing the causes of crisis or discontentment. The outside is just integrated, without any change, in truth. The "as if" is substituted by an "as usual." Hence, the "academic word" risks only changing its object.

Of course, to see the risks correspond to observing the outside, to practice the unconditionality of humanities. If humanities, and philosophy in particular, can be defined as disinterested research promoting a transformation in the way of living and the systems of truth, questioning the way of looking at the world, and even converting ourselves to erstwhile unsuspected beings that are free, only a free academic discourse and academia without conditions – that is, disinterested in its own topic – can create this utopia. As Voltaire said at the very end of *Candide*, "one must cultivate one's own garden." It is a provocative mention of a conservative expression, used in this case as an exhortation to criticism. Voltaire allows Candide to articulate precisely what is expected of a character with his attributes: an individual who is firmly convinced that he lives in the best of all possible worlds. Thus, the character's final words, which, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, persist in expressing his unwavering belief in the benevolence of his world, ironically serve to warn the reader: "We must cultivate our own garden" makes sense only if one assumes that all is well. At the same time, these words reflect what Voltaire himself is doing by writing, ironically, about his world and its inhabitants. There are at least two ways of cultivating "one's own garden": that of Candide, and that of Voltaire himself. Revealing the actual conditions of a society or institution, however, makes a "passive revolution" impossible. In this way, dissent manifests itself in an

55) Sellars, "What is Philosophy as a Way of Life?"

unexpected and ironic manner, using a common proverb to convey precisely the opposite of its conventional meaning...[56]

We are far from the possibility that the "spiritual" and "transformative" forms of the Humanities, like PWL, could not only engage with but also rewrite the academic world itself, both in research and teaching. The neo-scholastic forms or, at times, outright sophistry that prevail through bibliometric parameters increasingly narrow the scope for expanding and implementing new models. However, these models are already being widely recognized as dysfunctional and inadequate in serving the purposes they claim to uphold. The saturation provoked by the model of "publish or perish" and the recurrent burnout crises experienced in the academic world are symptoms that highlight these dysfunctions.[57] These are symptoms that the Humanities can effectively bring to light. More and more, these models are openly revealed to be ideologically aligned with an economic model of humanity in which transformation is excluded. It is from this crisis of the "university discourse" that PWL can benefit – not only by integrating itself into the current system but by defining alternative models of education and research. In truth, Voltaire created his own garden, inspired by Epicurus and laughing as Epicurus. Nietzsche imagined a community of friends in the future. Creating institutions was always possible. The first step is to imagine them, to let the "as if" cross our lives and our institutions. The "garden" of the ancients, like that of the moderns, was such a created utopia. As utopias usually do, it provoked a need for new gardens – ways of living philosophically, themselves (without conditions?) – for the following generations.

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56) For an interesting perspective on how philosophy is practiced outside of the university, directed toward a broader and not necessarily academic audience see Spence, "Philosophy Plays." Also worth mentioning are the activities of the project "Mapping Philosophy as a Way of Life" (2023–2024), which, in addition to the research component related to PWL, have implemented a strong element of exchange between the academic and non-academic worlds: https://pwl.fcsh.unl.pt

57) On this topic, see also Dinis, Ferraro, Pais, and dos Santos, "Decent Work and Burnout."

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