

The Debate as a Mono-Dialogue – Comments on the Question of Philosophical Discourse

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It is almost a trite to say that in philosophy, questions matter most of all. Every question begets another question. Its questions are more essential than its answers as Jaspers say. Plato writes about a very important principle in his famous Seventh Letter, namely, the purpose of a debate. The idea of unwritten doctrine has been meaningful for centuries: The ceaseless work referred to here is nothing other than ceaseless discourse, or ceaseless debate. This debate has been interpreted in many ways in philosophy. This lecture analyses the forms of indirect and direct communication (based on the Sophists) and the essence of revelation (Schelling), and concludes that a new form of communication, which we might call mono-dialogue, emerged in the 19th century. Primarily found in the works of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it was not called this way by these authors.

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Introduction

I will start with a quote: “No, Socrates, I will not grudge it you; but shall I, as an old man speaking to his juniors, put my demonstration in the form of a fable, or of a regular exposition?” (Plato 1967, 320.c).

In fact, the great debate begins between the two most famous philosophers of the time, Protagoras and Socrates. The subject of the debate is the nature of virtue (ἀρετή) and its teachability. Although, the subject of the debate is irrelevant to our topic, its form is in the centre of our concern. In this paper, I am going to discuss three forms of expression: dialogue, mono-dialogue and revelation. In the first, at least two people are in opposition with each other, in the second, one person engages in a dialogue with himself, and in the third, one person declares himself to everyone else.

Dialogue

It has always been an evidence to me that Socrates’ attitude towards philosophy is to consider it rather a *modus vivendi*, i.e., not incidentally a verbal one.

It is almost a trite to say that in philosophy, questions matter most than anything else. Every question begets another question. Expecting answers from philosophy is problematic. It is rather like expecting absolute poetry from a poet,

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absolute music from a composer, or absolute painting from a painter. This apparently contradicts Wittgenstein: “If a question can be put at all, then it can also be answered.” (Wittgenstein, 1922, 6.5). But only apparently. “What can be shown cannot be said.” (4.1212.) Or when Wittgenstein wrote to Ficker: “The material will seem quite strange to you, but in fact my work has two parts, what I’ve written and what I haven’t written, and the second part is the most important” (Ficker 1969, p. 35). Is the second part really the most important? Unsayable most important than sayable? Plato seems to be writing about exactly the same thing in his famous *Seventh Letter*. The idea of the *ἄγραφα δόγματα*, or unwritten doctrine, has been expressive for centuries: “There does not exist, nor will there ever exist, any treatise of mine dealing therewith. For it does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth in the soul on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself” (Plato 1966, 341,c,d).

The uninterrupted work referred to here is nothing other than uninterrupted discourse. This continuous debate is also the essence of dialectics: to formulate questions that imply further questions. There is great power in knowing what you do not know. It’s the beginning of practical wisdom. If we are satisfied with the starting point of knowledge, we do not move on. Søren Kierkegaard says that it is still a beginning. (“Men *Ironien* er *Begyndelsen* og dog heller ei mere end *Begyndelsen*”) (SKS 1, p. 259). To be sure of knowing is not only a stumbling block, but an embarrassing folly. Socrates did not intend to impart knowledge (*quid*), but to teach us how (*quod*) to try to formulate a question. And the how is more important than the what. One possible form of the how is illustration (see the myth of Prometheus in Protagoras), while another one is reasoning (Socrates). Therefore, the question is: are there any other ways?

Philosophy is a form of verbalism. In essence, it is an attitude. Plato again. “Besides, I share the plight of the man who was bitten by the snake: you know it is related of one in such a plight that he refused to describe his sensations to any but persons who had been bitten themselves, since they alone would understand him and stand up for him if he should give way to wild words and actions in his agony. Now I have been bitten by a more painful creature, in the most painful way that one can be bitten: in my heart, or my soul, or whatever one is to call it, I am stricken and stung by his philosophic discourses, which adhere more fiercely than any adder when once they lay hold of a young and not ungifted soul, and force it to do or say whatever they will” (Plato 1925, 217.e, 218.a).

In the 19th century, some thinkers, such as Nietzsche or Kierkegaard, try to return to the original form of philosophy. According to G. Vattimo, Nietzsche, for example, carried out a “stylistic revolution” with his work *Zarathustra*. Vattimo also says that the “revolutionary” force of *Zarathustra* lies in the fact that “is not an essay, nor a tractate, nor a collection of aphorisms - that is, it is not the form Nietzsche had used before. Nor can it be called lyric in the strictest sense” (Vattimo 1992, p. 59). So, what is it? Vattimo tries to answer this as follows: “It is mostly a form of long prose poetry, the forerunner of which is presumably the New Testament. Therefore, it is composed in verses that express the didactic and

cultic purpose of the text” (Vattimo 1992, p. 59). This is this novelty that the George circle (George, Bertram, Hildebrandt, Gundolf) sees in Zarathustra, which makes Nietzsche an important player in the struggle against linguistic devaluation.

H.J. Schmidt observes in agreement with Vattimo’s analysis that Kierkegaard is a “master of small forms” (Schmidt 1983, p. 203), and it is also true of Nietzsche. The small forms, of course, do not simply mean short analyses, but the preservation of the articulation of thought in speech. According to Karl Löwith: Nietzsche’s philosophy is neither a uniformly closed system nor a multiplicity of aphorisms falling apart, but a “system of aphorisms” (Löwith 1986, p. 15). *Zarathustra* is composed of “small forms” in the same way as the monumental *Either-Or* by Kierkegaard. In both works, there is a need for transcending speculative (Hegelian) analysis. Both have the considerable merit of creating a new style, and breaking away from the highly exciting and precise, but austere language of German idealism. The importance of speech, or the importance of the verbal, is central even in the written text. We simply “hear” Zarathustra’s parables, like the ecstatic perorations of *Eremita* by Kierkegaard, but each of them refers back to an ancient tradition and to the greatest masters of argument and persuasion, to whom we owe the creation of rhetoric: the sophist philosophers within Greek philosophy. In Sophist philosophy, as Werner Jaeger writes, the ability to speak is crucial in everyday life (Jaeger 1934, p. 369). It was not confined to the field of politics in the narrow sense but had a broader spectrum. The development of the Greek λόγος becomes a kind of inner necessity, in accordance with the meaning of the Greek word. Accordingly, Jaeger rightly observes that, before the Sophists, we cannot speak of grammar, rhetorics or even dialectics in the strict sense of the terms, that is why the Sophists can legitimately be considered to be the founders of these disciplines (Jaeger 1934, p. 398). Speech then becomes what would later become an evident requirement: the expression of the unity of words and thoughts. Rhetoric is not cool and measured, but passionate for the sake of debate, even as its logical structure becomes more conscious. Especially from Socrates onwards. Speech is a δισσοὶ λόγοι (contrasting arguments) which carries with it the dual function of speech (Zeller 1928, p. 96). Although little is known about its content (since both grammatical and rhetorical writings of the Sophists are lost), their essence can be reconstructed from other sources. What is certain is that the purpose of speech was persuasion seeking to present the argument from the side of the counterarguments. The prospective orators had to find their own counter-arguments and, building on them, refute their own claims. There were two forms of exposition: the long, extended exposition, and the short dialogue based on counter-arguments. Both are excellent examples of the dialogue of Protagoras. However, here, it is Socrates who uses it against the Sophist sage. (They tested all areas of persuasion, the simple explanation for this being that their activities were not theoretical but very practical. This practical aim is matched by the development of an increasing level of speech, of which linguistic reflection is an integral part. To take an example, Hesiod or Solon could not yet distinguish between a poet and an impostor, both of which were covered by the concept ψεῦδος).

Sophistical argumentation thus gives a very special role to the formal cultivation of discourse, which in debates becomes increasingly logical. Without this, the debate either strays into the formal maze of eristic, or becomes a monologue hidden in dialogue. One of these can be observed in the second generation of the Sophists, who also proclaimed with great enthusiasm that their art could transform a weaker argument into a stronger in the courts.

Dialogue becomes a monologue when the other participant only has a dramaturgical function, as it can be observed in their explicitly Platonic “dialogue”, where, let us say, a Glaucon plays only a formal role. Here the dialogue ends. To put it more correctly, the dialogue is replaced by expository communication: dialogue, taken in its former sense, ceases, or it is at least transformed, when something new and not less interesting begins.

Mono-dialogue

I call this new form of communication mono-dialogue. Why? The dialogue remains formal, but the debate based on opposing arguments of at least two partners is transformed into a kind of internal debate. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are absolutely close to a formal system of non-real dialogue based on the Sophist tradition. In these non-real dialogues, however, the rhetorical elements are displayed in a different background. No one thinks seriously that Zarathustra’s realistic interlocutors are the agora’s stiffly awaiting the appearance of the tightrope walker (Nietzsche 2006, p. 7), or that Constantin Constantius (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 149, SKS 4, p. 7) has little interest in the nameless young with whom he is having his “dialogue”. However, monologue is not a real designation, nor is it revelation. It is rather something that is neither a dialogue nor a monologue, but a transitional or intermediate form in between: let us call it “mono-dialogue”. Zarathustra does not argue. His argument is a so-called apparent pseudo-argument. Nietzsche is, of course, arguing, but with himself. By creating an incognito, he creates a debating partner. For him, the power of the word lies in the poetic form while the power of persuasion does not lie in utterance, but in suggestion. In accordance with the Heraclitan form that he admires so much, he does not make a clear statement, but relates the interpretation to the interpreter, thus relativizing the content of the communication, in other words, extends the possibility of interpretation. Nietzsche says that no one understand fully his work Zarathustra.

Indeed, there is no interlocutor in this text. Neither does the “old saint” (Greis, der Heilige) we know, hiding in his forest, humming and singing praises to his god and doing nothing else (Nietzsche 2006, p. 12, Nietzsche 1980, p. 13). In no sense is he a partner of Zarathustra. At the same time, there is no need for an interlocutor, since the speech is not a simple account of a conversation that has taken place, as one might suspect in many Socratic dialogues, but the discursive unfolding of a train of thoughts, and one feels it is taking place before one’s eyes. I have called this aforementioned non-real dialogue a “mono-dialogue”. This means that even if the speech is sometimes embedded in the form of a dialogue, it is not

in order to pretend that there is a real dialogue, but in order to play freely between the diversity of points of view within a unity of thoughts, in order to clash arguments and give free rein to thoughts to the fullest extent. The aim is to show polysemy and multiple facets, it is not to fabricate a pseudo-dialogue. In addition to the use of an incognito, the use of irony is a method that runs through a mono-dialogue. Kierkegaard's Scholars studying his works get it wrong by focusing on the external incognito (who the author of the book is, what his name means, etc.) rather than on the internal incognito in the text (e.g., the young man in *The Repetition*). Kierkegaard engages in a dialogue with himself through numerous roles. To put it more precisely: he explores the same question from several angles. The pseudonym, along with the multiplicity of the characters, is a particular poetic schizophrenia. Philosophy itself is a particular form of schizophrenia. Or, as Schelling says: a form of madness (see Schelling 2016, pp. 468-477).

So, I think that a distinction should be made between external and internal incognitos. The first is more formal in the sense that it is not substantive, not tied to what is being said. The second, on the other hand, is substantive, closely tied to the idea that is being expressed. As far as I know, there is no example of the first in the case of Nietzsche, but the second occurs frequently and has a great importance. It is a truism that Zarathustra is Nietzsche, and like all truisms, this is only half true at best. It is a truism that Constantius is Kierkegaard, and this is also a half-truth. In the incognitos that appear, it is important to highlight the diversity of the perspectives. One speaks more freely when seeing things from several perspectives, without having to stick to one aspect, sometimes as Friedrich Nietzsche, sometimes as Zarathustra, or Søren Kierkegaard, Constantius, and even the young man. And so on.

In comparison, the madman plays a special role in *Zarathustra*, as does the ecstatic performer in the *Either-Or*. The madman is the true figure of the mono-dialogue, as is the old saint. The madman, like the saint, "delivers" a concrete discourse to Zarathustra who also argues with him. His figure is real in a sense that he can speak in his own voice. He can speak where no one can speak from facelessness, with few exceptions. The madman is Nietzsche's real alter ego, or his interlocutor. He says: "Spit on the great city and turn back!" (Nietzsche 2006, p. 141, Nietzsche 1980, p. 224).

One of Kierkegaard's alter-egos, Constantius (SKS 4), speaks in a similar way when talking to the other, the young confidant (*Deres navnløse Ven*) (SKS 4, p. 67). In this case, the dialogue is different in that the narrative element is accompanied by a fictional dialogue. Constantin Constantius (the most steadfast, like a rock, Peter), i.e., Kierkegaard, wants to persuade his young friend, whom he calls only "the young man" ("devoted, nameless friend") (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 212), i.e., Kierkegaard, to complete a love story according to a preconceived plan. Meanwhile, one important question is raised by the possibility or impossibility of "repetition", whether it is the possibility of recollection or repetition that makes life worth living.

Kierkegaard writes of himself - in an unabashed reference to Diogenes: "In the excavation of Herculaneum and Pompeii, everything was found in its place just as the respective owners left it. If I had lived at that time, the archaeologists,

perhaps to their amazement, would have come upon a man who walked with measured pace up and down the floor” (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 318). In *The Repetition*, Constantius (an alter ego) descends to Earth from an aristocratic height, like Zarathustra from his mountain - and has a conversation with the “young man” (another alter ego). Constantius, or Kierkegaard, always felt himself at a certain spiritual height. We do not know to what extent Zarathustra (or Nietzsche) was serious about coming down from the mountain. It is very difficult to say. It is as difficult as defining the nature of the relationship between Constantius and the young man. What do we know factually about this duo? We know that they know each other and the young man both admires and hates the master. “You have demonic powers” (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 333), or you are “more silent than the grave.” (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 333), etc., says the young. Like the relationship between the old saint and Zarathustra. The saint lives at the top of the mountain (not at the top, but not in the depths, either), and when Zarathustra meets him on his descent, the address reveals that this acquaintance has a history. “Back then you carried your ashes to the mountain: would you now carry your fire into the valley? Do you not fear the arsonist’s punishment?” (Nietzsche 2006, p. 4.) An argument breaks out, but it ends peacefully. And Zarathustra does not want to take anything from the saint - indeed, he gives him nothing.

This is the end of the mono-dialogue, and the work ends with an apparent monologue.

Revelation

“When the Eleatics denied motion, Diogenes, as everyone knows, came forward as an opponent. He literally did come forward, because he did not say a word but merely paced back and forth a few times, thereby assuming that he had sufficiently refuted them” (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 243) – wrote Kierkegaard. This is a demonstration, so no further argumentation is needed. This is revelation.

The concept of revelation is very emphatically introduced into philosophical discourse by Schelling. For him, the connection between mythology and revelation is of particular importance. In my opinion, what can be highlighted from the point of view of the discourse is that mythology means the one who hides a secret (which is why the role of mysteries is so important in it), while revelation means the one who reveals a secret. Schelling himself puts it as follows: “The concept of revelation implies an inherent hiding. ...” (Schelling 1990, p. 10.)

Therefore, mythology is characterised by symbolic expressions. In contrast, revelation is allegorical rather than symbolic, where the central point is not nature, but man, and the teacher becomes more and more prominent.

The period itself (the 18th and the 19th centuries) uses the concept of revelation in numerous senses, such as Jacobi’s, or Herder’s or Goethe’s interpretation of the term. The concept plays a very important role in Lessing’s thinking, who formulates it as follows: “Was die Erziehung bei dem einzeln Menschen ist, ist die Offenbarung bei dem ganzen Menschengeschlechte.” (What education is to the individual, revelation is to the human race as a whole.) (Lessing 1858, p. 1). In

other words, Lessing draws a parallel between revelation (*Offenbarung*) and education (*Erziehung*), i.e., Lessing relates revelation as education to the whole human race. “Education is revelation that affects the individual; and revelation is education which has affected, and still affects, the human race” (Lessing 1858, p. 1).

Lessing sees revelation as a process in which humanity is becoming increasingly perfected. Revelation is therefore an act, an action, which everyone must go through and experience. Thus, the person of the teacher becomes more important than the action of teaching.

Zarathustra also teaches, in other words, he reveals. When he returns to the mountain, he gives again this final conclusion in a monologue: “I spoke my word, I break under my word: thus my eternal fate wills it – as proclaimer I perish! The hour has now come for the one who goes under to bless himself. Thus – ends Zarathustra’s going under!” (Nietzsche 2006, p. 178).

We see that mono-dialogue is now replaced by revelation. Hence, there is a biblical language. In the second half of Kierkegaard’s oeuvre, the incognito disappears, and so does the series of pseudonymous works. A martyr about to die has no need for an inner dialogue, and for a pseudonym, either. On the contrary: the martyr wants to fulfil his destiny under his own name. That is why he is a martyr. Thus, Kierkegaard publishes works under his own name. His last work, *The Moment* (SKS 13, Nr 1-10.), is an ecstatic revelation. He sends the last pages to the printing press from his deathbed. For him, it is finished. Nietzsche also abandons mono-dialogue and makes revelation. Like Zarathustra, he breaks down and weeps his pain in Turin, buried in the neck of a horse (Appel 2011, p. 224).

Zarathustra, the herald, and Constantius, the adviser, cannot convince anyone in this work. Both are apparently doomed to failure. Apparently, the magical power of words is worth nothing. No result. But one might ask: what exactly would the result be? What might we consider it to be? Would it be if, for example, the saint forgot to keep humming, or the young man sponged out his imaginary lover? Or would we march up the “hill” in massed ranks? Would that really be an achievement? And reassuring?

Conclusion

The point is made by Nietzsche in an unknown place in the work (as if he were speaking to Constantius): “Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally and we ourselves along with them, and that we have already been here times eternal and all things along with us” (Appel 2011, p. 224).

In other words, we have been here, and we are here to stay. In the deepest sense of the word, the breaking of the Word (*Wort, logos*), the falling away, the destruction, is true, as the one who descends can only “bless himself” (Nietzsche). Like Constantius, he believes in reconciliation, even though he knows well that it is as impossible in his life as it is in Zarathustra’s.

Then what remains? Nothing, but the magic power of words, the never-ending test of persuasion. I wrote this once, and I can’t write it any better today:

this is the beginning of the final descent of Zarathustra and Constantin Constantius - a descent that has continued to this day.

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