

METAPHYSICS AND THE ACCESS TO REALITY¹

Резиме: Овај рад има намеру да анализира примере филозофа као сопствене процедуре за приступ стварности. У раду се анализирају неки примери традиционалне и савремене филозофије. Постаје јасно да су се примери филозофа, развили у исто време са филозофијом и постали релевантнији и суптилнији, као што налазимо у аналитичкој филозофији или феноменолошкој филозофији. У свом историјском развоју метафизика није често користила одређен специфичан дискурс. Метафизика увек има за циљ реалност и тражи различите начине да стигне до ње. Метафизика тражи начине и процедуре за контакт са реалношћу као инструмент за своје тезе и расуђивања. Један од тих начина је приказан у овом раду. Основна идеја овог рада је разматрање да примери модерне и савремене филозофије не обогаћују нашу основну спознају искуства, али помажу у разјашњавању појмова. Они имају структуру комплексног контрафактуала.

Кључне речи: Метафизика, пример, референција, контрафактуал, игра, експеримент, искуство.

The philosophers are not researchers of nature or human being, as scientists are: philosophers are rather logicians, metanaturalists, metasociologists, metapsychologists. In comparison with knowledge expressed *de re*, philosophers are not researchers of this but providers of some knowledge that may be expressed in the *de dicto* manner. Philosophers, as G. G. Granger (1987) notes, formulate a second discourse concerning scientific knowledge regarding nature of human beings, are preoccupied by second codification of knowledge. Philosophy, especially metaphysics, has appeared as the first elevation of human knowledge from the daily experience of reality. After establishing the approach and realizing a consistent evolution as a result of succeeding transcendence of beings, Metaphysics has inevitably reached *Nothing*, as Martin Heidegger writes. At this level, the Metaphysics can install the pure, genuine conceptual discourse that must be its own proper discourse, as Hegel claimed. In this modality Metaphysics does not have to know anything. The reality remains to be the object for various sciences. The reality is seen from the perspective of *Nothing*, and is

¹ The paper resumes closely the ideas from *Exemplele filosofilor in O anatomie a discursului filosofic*, Timisoara, Editura Augusta, 2002.

revealed by fear. Because of that, probably, we have not found in philosophy a science about objects or domains of objects belonging to existence, except the case of traditional Metaphysics which sometimes tries to build objects or at least to show us how they can be built for us. I find this idea in Milan Uzelac's book "Metafizika", where he notes:

*"However, when we say **thing** we can understand a completely concrete thing: a cup of coffee, which is in front of us at this very moment, and it has the characteristic of color – it is white – or that it is made of porcelain; this way the empty form **cup of coffee** is filled with meaning, with something that can be experienced with our senses."*²

But we find instead, mentioning and stories about all kind of things that can be considered to belong to a category with a very rich reference and diversity of examples. The function of these examples is known, but less analyzed. Their function is to sustain many kinds of logical, ontological, epistemological, semiotic or rhetorical theses. The examples represent the empirical material of philosophy.

All the philosophers and all kind of philosophies use examples. There are also philosophers that are more sober in this respect, as it is Hegel's case and Descartes' as well; but in their case the examples are not missing, as well. There are many philosophies and many philosophers where the examples support not only sustained philosophical tenses but also create the charm, sometimes unrivalled, of philosophical text as such. And, in assonance with the topic, I will sustain my affirmation using an example, a well known one: namely Plato's. I consider that the Platonic myths function as examples, i.e. they are a kind of example. In Platonic myths Hegel sees a *modality* to expose philosophy, a modality not fully adequate for higher content of the Platonism, this being the abstract idea. Hegel shows that in the exposition of philosophy, Plato mixes the manner of the representation (The Myth) with the authentic, speculative, mode of philosophy that can lead to a misunderstanding. This is confusion between the representations of what the philosophemes are related to and the Idea itself, with the authentic, speculative, philosophical thought. Because of that, Hegel specifies purposeful meaning of myths or of representations, as follows:

"Mythical form of Platonic dialogues," he says, "is the attractive element of these writings, but it is a source of misunderstandings. It is such a misunderstanding to consider these myths as being the most excellent in Plato's writings. Many philosophemes are made more affordable by being exposed

² Milan Uzelac, *Metafizika*, Vršac, 2006, p.129

mythically, but this is not the true exposure. Philosophems are thoughts and in order to be pure, they should be depicted as such."³

As it can be seen, Hegel does not appreciate myths too much in the exposure of philosophy and by this the examples as well. Myth, i.e. example, in our equivalence would only have an exterior role of seduction and ensuring affordability for the highest content of philosophy. Hegel says directly:

*"It is about seduction, a way to arouse the interest for the content: it is something educational. The myth belongs to human [...] it is a popular procedure."*⁴

This improper way of exposure of philosophy was also noted in the manner in which things are presented in analytic philosophy, both English and American, but in another sense than Hegel's interpretation. Philosophers belonging to analytical orientation have built a case or an example, which is an *idealization* of situations, and they supported the philosophical theses on these cases, which were usually illustrations. The bad part of the procedure is that the examples that are constructed in this way, appear as they were constructed to correspond to philosophical thesis, so that such a procedure would in fact be self-misleading. It is required, therefore, that instead of building examples of idealization or imaginary, it is advisable to use examples from real cases whose description is appropriate to the actual situation. These would be examples or rather situations that would give us an exact idea about our knowledge or the philosophical approaches.

Objection is serious but not fatal. Because it has been proved that the classical analysis of knowledge based on imaginary cases contained in the so-called "Gettier's problem", has been put in difficulty and outdated, and it is not necessary for us to reproduce it here. But the idea that we can rest on such cases remains valid in the light of considerations that what is true for the real cases should be valid for whenever possible and vice versa. However, one of the cases envisaged by Gettier refers to some possible situations in which the subject is asked when he intends to obtain a true and reliable knowledge about a person who wants to get a job. With the help of the idea discussed above we find the following problem concerning examples of philosophers: what is and what role do they play in philosophy? Are they as Hegel said an improper and popular exposure of philosophy? Are they a form of rhetorical attraction, awakening the interest for a future conceptual development? Are they a way of an incorrect reasoning, a form of circular argument? I think that we can accept Hegel's idea regarding

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Prelegeri de istoria filosofiei*, Editura Academiei R.P.R., vol. I, p. 477.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p.304.

consideration that the myths, taken as examples, represent an inappropriate exposure for philosophy. Let us take the myths of Plato, the cave myth, the myth of Gyges, both from *Republica*. What are they exactly? Narratives about people that are tied in chains so that they can see only the bottom of the cave etc., or who may have a ring that would make them invisible. Is this the myth or a narrative example? But narratives are not yet examples, or are not examples of Plato, but some narratives and nothing more. These are examples that support philosophical concepts only when they take the form of a conditional or counterfactual.

In my opinion, people who are tied with chains in the cave are interesting only if they wonder what would happen when they set their eyes on the real things, after an experience in which they saw only shadows of these things on the cave wall. Likewise, in the myth of Gyges, possession of a magic ring becomes interesting only after we see how would the man that is correct and the man that is incorrect behave in such situation. The myth of Gyges may be reconstructed as a complex conditional.

If people were tied in the cave, they would not recognize the real things as real, they would continue to believe that the shadows are real things: if some people would have a ring that would make them invisible, they would make unfair things regardless of how they behaved before. Of course, without analyzing any further, we can say that these examples cover logical imperfections of material conditionals. It could be, for example, that the cave myth may be reconstructed as an optativ conditional that, as we know, presents some problems concerning legitimacy of utilization.

Another famous example of logic and philosophy is the story about Buridan's donkey. This example appears in the form of a story about what happens if a donkey is put in front of two stacks of hay, of the same quantity and quality, at equal distance from it. The conclusion of the story is that the donkey cannot decide which of the stacks to start feeding from and, consequently, would die of hunger. So, if p, then q, again with all the surprises of logical material conditional. Thus the result is a probable one; unsure as it is the conclusion of a reasoning of this type. Narratives serving as a core of the examples of philosophy are not simple representations, as Hegel suggested, but they have a logical structure and a finality - ontological, epistemological, pragmatic in relation with concepts. Examples have a fundamental role in most cases, in elucidation of concepts. The cave myth in Plato's dialogue intends to clarify what is meant by knowledge, the essence of truth and being, as

Heidegger interprets it.⁵ The myth of Gyges helps clarifying the concepts of justice and law, and the example of Buridan's donkey, the concept of decision.

But what do these examples have, however, in common with the representation, as Hegel noted? By representation we understand here, of course, *sense data*, the element that relates our mind with extracognitive and extralinguistic reality, on which our human knowledge is based. Examples of the philosophers provide this element of touch with reality, because they contain representations, reproduced in the form of narratives or descriptions, as we had mentioned above. But these representations, because they want to convey the reality, are not treated in philosophy in a systematic manner, as they are offered in the scientific observation or in the scientific experiment. In brief, representations offered by philosophical examples can be characterized as representations of significant cases, categorically significant, but are most often imagined. From another point of view, these situations are the desultory effect of elections, even if we cannot characterize them as being random.

I often mentioned that the situations are imagined. Because Plato, Gettier or Buridan's opponent did not meet in experience the described situations, we could say that these examples were not related with any real experience, but with a possible one, and in some cases, such as that of a magic ring, with an impossible, a purely fictional one. And yet, even this last situation works, namely, it offers the possibility of some conclusions that cannot be considered absurd or false only because they are built on the experiences of a fictitious, practically unattainable description. This kind of philosophers' examples can therefore be considered some mental experiments. Using a characterization, we are inevitably reminded of what Thomas Kuhn wrote about them, referring to Physics, more precisely, referring to the elucidation of Galileo's speed concept and the progress made by him in comparison with Aristotle. Mental experiments help researchers to reach the laws and theories that are different from those they had previously claimed. One must see if philosophical examples meet the conditions emphasized by Thomas Kuhn that belong to mental experiment in Physics. But the fact that they play an essential role in clarification of theoretical concepts and sentences is doubtless. Because of that, philosophy can actually intervene even in science, as Kuhn remarks:

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Doctrina lui Platon despre adevăr* în Martin Heidegger, *Repere pe drumul gândirii* (Milestones on the Road of Thought, tr.n.), Editura Politică, București, 1988.

*"In some cases even philosophy will become a scientifically legitimate instrument, a role it does not usually have."*⁶

Two ideas of Thomas Kuhn about mental experiments are essential as they regard the issue that we are discussing. The first refers to the fact that the mental experiment does not provide new information about reality, but uses the existing and already known one. This has been probably, the reason for a lot of people to scorn philosophy, without being aware that it lies on a unilaterally empiricist position and it is in the end, fallacious. They do not take into account the other side of the function an example has, that of elucidation of theoretical concepts and theses.

The second idea is that of verisimilitude of imagined situations. It is about the imagined situations in which researchers are able to apply the concepts in the same manner as in the past. We do not know if examples of philosophy should meet such a condition and what this means. Alexis Meinong's theory of object suggests, perhaps, that such a quorum is not required for entities that can exemplify it. Usually, we claim that we cannot apply our concepts to impossible objects such as a square circle. But Alexis Meinong's theory of object suggests that we can do this or even must do this. More recently, philosophers have developed an apparently strange theory of impossible possible worlds. These are, briefly, the worlds of sentences and entities that are not submitted to standard Logic, but one can think of them as existing.

Examples of philosophy are not the result of an organized and systematic observation of objects of the outside world. Their logical and epistemological function is prevalent, given the gains of own observation. Aristotle, whose works are full of examples, seems to have understood them in this way and used them as such. Therefore, probably because of that, Bacon said that Aristotle trapped experience in the chains of logic. But, in my opinion, Bacon was not right in his assessment, not that his remarks about Aristotle would be inaccurate, but because the experience captured in philosophical discourse by examples has, by nature of the procedure, a subordinate status to logic. This is well illustrated by the case of analytical philosophy.

Direction of analytical philosophy is connected with contemporary Linguistics, and pragmatic turn in evolution of western philosophy. This has led to transformation of the examples given by philosophers not so much of their general function. Favorite examples of philosophy of this direction are sentences of all sorts, designed to help

⁶ Thomas Kuhn, *O funcție pentru experimentele mentale* (A Function for a Mental Experiments, tr. n.), București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982, p. 284.

clarify the logical and ontological concepts, or of other areas of philosophy, based on analysis of their structure and functioning of these concepts in language. On the basis of such analysis denotative phrases, defined descriptions and undefined, referential and attributive use of expressions and other such phrases and uses are identified. In this kind of analysis famous examples of sentences have appeared, such as: "The present king of France is bald" or "Walter Scott is the author of Waverly", belonging to Bertrand Russell. To G. P. Grice, who made important distinction between referential and attributive use of words belongs the following example: "Smith's killer was insane". To W. v. O. Quinne belongs the sentence which says: "The number of planets is greater than seven" related with the sentence: "9 is necessarily greater than 7". These last sentences have contributed, as is known, to clarify the concepts of analytic and synthetic.

What can be said about these examples? It can be said that although they have the same function as the former and to a certain extent, the characteristics of a "mental experiment", they are still different from them. The narratives that are considered as myths and examples are simultaneously mental experiments with a structure of conditionals. In the narratives that are considered as myths and examples and simultaneously mental experiments with a structure of conditionals, the discussion was about extralinguistic entities, with the help of which imagination of more or less credible experience was based. In the example of Buridan's donkey the real representation of the animal is important as well as our human experiences about it, so that we can understand the modeling that is proper for the example and the paradigmatic character of the situation in relation to one or another philosophical thesis regarding free will and decision. In these examples with sentences this representation and mentioned experiences matter less. When analyzing the sentence "The cat is on the mat" or the phrase "It is possible that the cat will be on the mat" (J. Austin, N. Rescher) our representation on, and experiences with the cat do not really matter. Mental experiment takes the form of a *puzzle*, in which the game belongs to the mind and it is more a logical and linguistic one. In my opinion, in these examples the referent of the word "cat", as an entity, matters less than the referent of the word "cave" from Plato's myth. In the first example the word "cat" is more important just as in Plato's myth the representation or the description of the cave that we have on the basis of experience than the word "cave" as such is more important. However, representation or designation of the cave is to my mind and to my language the substitute of the real cave. Description of the cave, including a defined description, in relation with the name "cave" functions as an "object". Regarding examples of analytical philosophy,

one can explain their reasons well enough with the words of Bertrand Russell in his work *On denoting*. He writes:

*“A logical theory may be tested by its capacity for dealing with puzzles, and it is a wholesome plan, in thinking about logic, to stock the mind with as many puzzles as possible, since these serve much the same purpose as is served by experiments in physical sciences.”*⁷

As one can see, Bertrand Russell considers that the examples of experiments of logic, philosophy and natural sciences are related. But a classification of examples in philosophy is required, made by several criteria (domain of philosophy, the historical stage, the philosophical categories to which they refer their logical formula). After several classes of examples are obtained, one might detect and describe their functions in the philosophical discourse. In my opinion, it is not wrong to claim that examples in philosophy have not only accompanied its history as a funny story or subsidiary, but have supported it or even led to some changes in philosophy, some quite important. What appeared for the first time in Bertrand Russell’s mind: the idea of a defined description or an example of it?

It is easy to find that J. L. Austin’s work about acts of language is full of examples of sentences and familiar phrases. That brilliant knowledge of language and its nuances, in my opinion, preceded his theory of speech acts, the splitting of sentences in performatives and constatives, or other linguistic categories designated by him. Moreover, the theory and examples that Austin supports are intimately linked, more than the cave myth in Plato’s gnoseological theory, because in the examples of Austin this relation is more explicit and more explanatory, while the cave myth has many unknown aspects. How do we know if people removed from the cave will see real things as illusions and shadows on the cave walls as real things? It is only a hypothesis. Of course, this hypothesis is provided by the example, but it took the work of Martin Heidegger in his hermeneutics to understand that the cave myth has revealed to us the essence of truth and being.

On this occasion we can state that examples in philosophy have changed not only in terms of anecdotic use, but also regarding their use. They became, as philosophy itself, more rigorous, more accurate, more nuanced. I would say that the examples are part of the exposure of one’s own philosophy and not the improper one, as Hegel stated. How could we discuss about universals in a relevant way if we did not give any example of universals? “Red” as a universal crosses all modern philosophy about universals from Husserl to W.v.O. Quinne, M. Loux,

⁷ Bertrand Russell, *On denoting*, in Bertrand Russell, *Logic and Knowledge*, 1968, p. 47.

and many others. Examples in metaphysical reasoning have the function of opening access to reality that it intends to support. But if ancient philosophy, especially, perhaps the medieval and modern philosophy were concerned about objective reality, existing outside the mind and outside language, in contemporary philosophy reality is internal for mind and language, it is the inner meaning of references for philosophical discourse. However, examples of philosophical discourse are responsible for coupling this with a reality understood metaphysically, by thinking in one way or another.

Of course, the examples have anecdotic parts, including stories such as that of the person whose memory is substituted with the memory of Napoleon and then the question is when he loses his own identity and identifies with Napoleon. (cf. Loretta Torraga, *Vagueness and Identity*, Boston, 1998) Of course, this example is interesting as it invokes the name and personality of Napoleon, just as a number of examples of American philosophers are interesting as they are invoking the name of USA presidents. Ex-president of the USA, found in the philosophical examples was Bill Clinton, but perhaps the names G. W. Bush and B. Obama have already been released as examples. It is a way of illustration due to, perhaps, the cult of English royalty, other than the Asian Oriental cult of emperors from oriental stories. However, examples are circumscribed by the culture philosophers belong to as well as their personal culture.

Examples from philosophy can be studied in terms of invoked entities. A few real or fictitious entities are missing from the books of philosophers. Pig (Austin), cow (Quinne), Donkey (Buridan), dog (Spinoza), horse (Aristotle), the cat, are just some of the entities used as examples. Vegetables and minerals, earth and stars are also present. An inventory of the universe of entities from philosophers' examples would be not only interesting and instructive, but also quite funny. This part of philosophical examples belongs to rhetorical type of seduction of philosophical discourse.

Резюме: Работа намеревается изучить примеры данными философам, как свойственную процедуру для доступа к реальности. Предлагаемый анализ относится к традиционной и современной философий. Становится ясным что примеры философов развивались вместе с эволюции философии и становились более тонкими, как это видно в аналитическом или феноменологическом философиях.

В своем историческом развитии метафизика не использовал очень часто специфический чистый дискурс. Метафизика всегда намеревалась дойти до реальности и страдалась обнаружить разные пути коснуться с ней. Метафизика искал шёлки и приёмы для контакта с действительностью как инструменты поддержания собственных тезисах и аргументов.

Центральная идея работы состоит в том что примеры найденные в философских текстах не обогащают наше оснвное знание об опыте, но помогают уяснить наши концепты. Они имеют структуру сложных контрафактуалов.

Ключевые слова: Метафизика, пример, референция, контрафактуал, игра, эксперимент, опыт.

