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Praxe bytí-ve-světě

BEING WITHOUT A GROUND

Praxis of Being-in-the-World

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The basic goal of the dissertation is to interpret the primacy of practice thesis according to which “the intelligence and intelligibility of human life is to be explained fundamentally in terms of practice” (Blattner 2008) as an attempt at what Merleau-Ponty calls a “radical reflection,” that is, an attempt on reflection that seeks ‘to understand itself’ by accounting for its own situated, factual origin. The central part of this project is a phenomenological investigation of what Wittgenstein has described as *a form of life*: by trying to understand what a practice is and how its intelligibility occurs and develops, we will conceptualize the facticity of human existence and its specific *intelligibility* or *meaningfulness*.

In the first chapter, we provide a background for our investigation by discussing the family of neo-pragmatic approaches and outline the distinctive feature that differentiates neo-pragmatism from existential phenomenology. Namely, we demonstrate how deep suspicion towards ontological problematics motivates neo-pragmatists to explicate the primacy of praxis in epistemic terms of linguistic praxis. The typical to neo-pragmatism priority of the epistemic starting point over the ontological one results in different versions of the same problem: once we have picked the investigation of a particular *condition of possibility*, a socio-linguistic practice of the game of giving and asking for reasons as our starting point, we have committed ourselves to the task of explaining the whole domain of human intelligibility in epistemic terms, which is a move that limits the number of available explanatory strategies and eventually results in truncated accounts of meaningfulness of human life. Taking as our examples the works of the most prominent contemporary pragmatists (Brandom (section i of the first chapter), Rorty (section ii) and Habermas (section iii); additionally, we also investigate the neo-pragmatic authors such as Peregrin and Rouse who seek to reconcile this linguistic praxis with the naturalistic ontology), we argue that the lack of ontological questioning results in under-explaining the source of normativity in Brandom’s account, inflation of truth and relativistic implications in Rorty’s work or inability to deal adequately with the ‘expressive rationality’ in Habermas.

In the second chapter, we proceed to existential phenomenology that offers us a chance to approach the problem of praxis from an ontological perspective. Existential phenomenology starts with returning to the *being* of an individual that is seen as a condition of any kind of meaningful appearance of the world. At the same time, the methodological specificity of phenomenology consists of emphasizing the ecstatic nature of such a being – subjectivity *inherently* relates to the world because being a subject simply consists of being-related to the world. The crucial methodological element of this starting point is the emphasis on the mutuality between the world and subject. Existential phenomenology abandons the traditional transcendental model of argumentation that relies on a rigid distinction between *explanans* and *explanandum*. Instead, the phenomenological strategy places both

parts of the relation between subject and the world on an equal footing: just like subject is unintelligible without the world where it settles, the world is unintelligible without being expressed from a particular standpoint. Not only this methodological switch helps phenomenologists to avoid charges in subjectivism and foundationalism; it also makes it possible to formulate a more flexible approach that is not restricted to epistemic tools only.

Based on this discussion, we investigate (in section 2.ii) how this starting point of phenomenology along with its methodological emphasis upon mutuality can be expressed in pragmatic terms. This step relies on early Heidegger's work. In *Being and Time* and especially in paragraph 32, Heidegger argues that understanding, as an ability to access entities 'as they are', is "co-disclosed" by 'significance,' i.e., a holistic organization of entities and events where each particular part has a function and place ('in-order-to') and 'for-the-sake-of-which,' which is a term that emphasizes that significance as a whole does not have any further function but corresponds to Dasein's ability-to-be and embodies a certain potential for its being. From this standpoint, the disclosure of significant entities is 'equiprimordially' also a disclosure of a certain praxis of living a life.

In the rest of the second chapter (section 2.iii), we investigate how pragmatically oriented phenomenologists (most notably by Dreyfus and other philosophers such as Okrent, Wrathall, Haugeland and others) have tried to use the Heideggerian vocabulary in order to formulate a phenomenological version of the primacy of practice thesis. Dreyfus offers us a number of crucial insights concerning the functions and importance of the background practices; explicating the notion of average intelligibility, he demonstrates its pragmatic function and its status of the "source of intentionality." However, we also argue that Dreyfus misses the specificity of existential argumentation and sticks to a more traditional transcendental argumentation, which rigidifies his account of background practices into a one-sided explanatory element, which results in hypostatization of practices and obscures the possibility of their development and occurrence. Based on this, we argue that Dreyfus and the like-minded pragmatically oriented philosophers offer an insufficient account of the primacy of practice thesis, which should be reformulated in order to meet the phenomenological approach more optimally.

The third chapter occupies a central place in this work. Here, we reformulate the primacy of practice thesis and offer an alternative account of meaningfulness based on Heideggerian vocabulary that was investigated in the previous chapter (section 3.i). Instead of following Dreyfus and arguing that the meaningfulness of human life discloses depends upon conformist socialization that introduces us into certain contingent practices, we argue that practices themselves are a result of Dasein's dynamic settling into the world, a settling that has no other aim but to *maximize Dasein's ability-to-be*. The

meaningfulness of practices corresponds to their ‘disclosive potential’ – their ability to offer a complex set of interactive possibilities that would be able to efficiently maximize Dasein’s ability-to-be. In this sense, we treat practices as *ways of building relations* between Dasein and the world that lead to the *intensification* of this relation. Taking as our model example games, we demonstrate how the meaningfulness of practices follows from the interactivity of their possibilities that leads to disclosure of further, context-dependent possibilities and how it offers ‘something to do’ to Dasein.

In the second section of the third chapter (3.ii), we also argue that the disclosure of interactive possibilities (and, thus, maximizing our ability-to-be) goes hand in hand with the foreclosure of non-interactive ones. Based on systematic criticism of both early and later Heidegger, we arrive at a pragmatic notion of foreclosure: possibilities become interactive and meaningful if all alien non-interactive possibilities are *foreclosed*, that is, *not given* in the current situation; being absorbed in a situation, I tend to simply foreclose, ignore everything that is not interconnected to the situation. Such withholding alternative possibilities is nothing but the reverse side of maximization of our ability-to-be. To be Dasein, an ecstatic movement to the world means disclosing certain possibilities while withholding other ones. We argue, in such a way, that constant disclosure and foreclosure of situations is a skill in which every socialized individual is expected to be proficient. Only through the constant opening and foreclosing of the world can Dasein maximize its being without being reduced to only one set of possibilities and without acquiring too many of them, which would either ruin the balance and finally collapse incompatible possibilities together or simply preclude from settling in different situations extensively enough.

In the fourth chapter, we demonstrate how this line of thinking remains capable of accounting for ‘realistic intuitions’ and preserves the possibility of reaching universal validity. This also helps us to avoid charges of “performative self-contradiction.” We start this analysis (4.i) by arguing in favour of distinguishing between cognitive and non-cognitive practices. Whereas non-cognitive practices (such as for example, games or art) are *not constituted* by the need to respond to contradictive evidence and reach universal validity, cognitive practices *necessarily* presuppose such a need. Relying on the works of Haugeland, we argue that the cognitive requirement to account for contradictive evidence is based on the “existential commitment” of a cognitive agent, which is a commitment that is meaningful only in a certain type of situations while being meaningless in others.

In the second section (4.ii), we offer a genealogy of this cognitive commitment based on Heidegger’s analysis of Plato’s Mythos of the Cave. We claim that cognitive understanding occurs in the context of our attempt to objectivize the meaning-formation by subordinating it to an objective criterion. *What* such criterion consists of is irrelevant; the crucial element of the cognitive practice

consists of an ability to prescribe one and converging individual perspectives into the same logical space where reconciliation between them is promised. The objectivity of understanding is achieved through placing different perspectives in the same logical space where it becomes possible to filter out what is context-dependent and look for what is objective or context-transcending and confirmable from any standpoint.

In the third section (4.iii), we demonstrate how the subordination of the formation of meaning to the external criterion goes hand in hand with a particular way of maximizing our ability-to-be. On the one hand, the cognitive practice involves a constant attempt to distinguish what is given only to me or my community and what could be potentially confirmed by everyone. Thus, cognitive praxis must continuously filter out its own perspectival contribution in order to reach a universally valid conclusion. On another hand, however, cognitive praxis as such is an attempt to settle in the world; in and of itself the cognitive praxis is neither true nor wrong, neither correct nor incorrect – it just is something we do, one particular way of asking the world about the possibilities it can offer to us. Thus, the attempt to arrive at universal truth remains eventually dependent upon the particular position that Dasein happens to occupy.

Finally, in the last chapter, we tackle the problem of inter-practical interaction. While the methodological strategy that we rely on in the previous chapters consists of emphasizing the self-standing meaningfulness of various practices, i.e., their ability to produce meaning and their meaningfulness just for the sake of themselves, the fifth chapter investigates how various practices belong together and interact with one another. In the first section (5.i), we discuss instrumental practices, which are practices that are pursued *not* for the sake of themselves; their meaningfulness depends upon ('grounded in') the meaningfulness of other practices. The central claim of the first section is that instrumentality is a wrong way of approaching the question of inter-practical interaction *as such*; it represents only a special case of inter-practical interaction. Based on Heidegger's analysis of ontotheology, we argue that instrumental subordination and grounding are the basic explanatory tools of the philosophical tradition. Contrary to that, phenomenological pragmatism that we can build on based on Heideggerian guidelines should be seen as a counter-instrumental pragmatism, which is a pragmatism that treats *most* of our practices as meaningful for their own sake and on their own terms.

In the second section (5.ii), we investigate the integrative practices that organize practices into cultural space. Cultures have their specific styles and fundamental self-understandings, which profoundly affect many further cultural practices. These styles and self-understandings, however, should not be considered as a transcendental ground but rather as a *final outcome* of countless interactions among different practices. Cultural style and self-understanding are so profound, influential and

persistent exactly because they have a greater disclosing potential telling us more about what can we do and who can we be in our lives constituting an *axis* of a given culture and demonstrating to us the most interactive possibilities placed in the very midst of the cultural life. This figure of ‘disclosing axis’ helps us to investigate the question of how and why a range of diverse cultural practices hang together becoming unified into the ‘homological’ cultural space despite the incommensurability of their intra-practical possibilities.

Combining the primacy of practice claim with the phenomenological task of radical reflection this way, we arrive at the conclusion that the facticity of human existence shouldn’t be understood as a condition or a limitation but indeed, as a “coefficient” (Merleau-Ponty) of our inscription into the world. The limits it ‘imposes’ is always a *productive* guide into a situation that endows us with possibilities of being.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Publications

The Primacy of Practice and the Phenomenological Method – *Pragmatism Today*, Volume 11, Issue 1, Summer 2020

The World of Truth: On Merleau-Ponty's and Davidson's holistic argumentation – *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy*, Vol. XII, No. 2/December 2020

The Temporality of Maximum Grip. On Pragmatists' Reading of Merleau-Ponty – *Bulletin d'analyse phénoménologique*, Vol.17/January 2021

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Dostoevsky and Arendt on the Crisis of Tradition – *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy*

Heidegger and Patočka on the Primacy of Practice(s) – *Human Studies*, currently under review

D. Zahavi's Minimal Self through the Prism of Existential Phenomenology – *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, currently under review

Conferences

Remembrance, Forgiveness, Time - "Temporality of Forgiveness. A Merleau-Pontian Perspective"

Existential Philosophy for Times of Change and Crisis - "Crises of Possibilities: A Heideggerian Perspective on the Problem of Crisis"

Fourth EECF workshop – "Kant, Pragmatism and Ontological Crossroads"

Knowledge and Power: Epistemic Conflicts in Democracy. Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference at the University of Essex – "Epistemic Conflict from the Standpoint of Phenomenological Pragmatism"

Existential Philosophy for Times of Change and Crisis III - "Dostoevsky and Arendt on the Crisis of Tradition"

De la vie à l'Ereignis: Philosophie(s) de Heidegger - Université Libre de Bruxelles, "Dialogical Disclosure of Meaning in Heidegger's work."

Teaching:

Pragmatic Turn in Phenomenology – 2020-2021, Winter Semester, Charles University (with Associate Prof. Ondřej Švec)

Introduction to Existential Phenomenology (proposed and developed by me) – 2020-2021, Summer Semester, Charles University

Implications of Freedom: Sartre's Early Phenomenological Projects (proposed and developed by me) – 2021-2022, Winter Semester, Charles University

Philosophies and Phenomenologies of Praxis (proposed and developed in cooperation with D. De Santis) – 2021-2022, Winter Semester, Charles University (with Associate Prof. D. De Santis)

Tutorial – 2020-2022, Winter Semester, Charles University

Grants and Projects:

Kontinuita a diskontinuita ve filosofii, literatuře a umění (SVVI), principal researcher, 2021-2022

GAUK, principal researcher, 2022-2023

Kontinuita a diskontinuita ve filosofii, literatuře a umění (SVVI), principal researcher, 2022-2023

POINT, 2020; 2022 – a grant for a research stay