

Review of Bachelor Thesis

Title: Jan Sokol's Ethics of Heritage: Assessing the Practicality and Universality of a Czech Philosophy

Author: Brighton Hugg

Reviewer: Mgr. Stanislav Synek, Ph.D.

The present bachelor thesis is a reworking of a text that was submitted in June 2024 and which I had the opportunity to evaluate. In this evaluation, therefore, I will partly use the previous assessment to focus on the comparison of the two versions. At the same time, I will focus (as a reviewer) mainly on the negatives of the thesis.

The main criticisms of the first version were the excessive thematic breadth of the work, the genre incoherence (the text oscillated in genre between an academic treatise and a celebratory essay on Jan Sokol), the absence of a clear (or clearer) presentation of Jan Sokol's ethics, and the absence of a deeper philosophical reflection and critique of Sokol's "practical philosophy". In the new (submitted) version, some of the criticisms have been corrected, but unfortunately others have not.

On the positive side, the passages that bordered on oral history (the interview with J. Tourek) and the passages devoted to the Catholic Church ("Catholicism as a Universal Institution" in the original version) have disappeared from the work. I also appreciate that the author has added a rather convincing presentation of Sokol's "ethics of the heir": *Gratitude and Responsibility* (ch. 3.2) and *Heritage and Inheritance* (ch. 3.3). A brief polemic with M. Rothband's libertarianism is also included.

Other shortcomings, unfortunately, remain: the work is still more of a *laudatio* than a genuine philosophical critique or a serious (critical) interpretation. The thematic breadth is still too great (moral relativism; institutions as a source of harm; freedom; corruption; technology and the question of free software; the environment).

Partial notes:

- on p. 15 the author apparently forgot to edit or include the last paragraph („Add somewhere: ...“)
- on p. 20 there seems to be a mistranslation: „the sweeping disdainful indifference, which is precisely what makes it impossible for them **not**[?] to function properly.“

Questions In the discussion, I would like to hear an answer to at least some of the following questions:

1. In chapter 2, the author claims: „*In order to understand someone's philosophy, it is important to build a deeper understanding of their experiences and influences.*“ – Does this mean that philosophy is something individual? On what does the author base this assumption – i.e. that in order to understand „someone's philosophy“ one needs to understand their individual life or life story?
2. How does the author understand the distinction between practical and theoretical philosophy (see p. 5) and what implications does he think this has for the thesis presented?
3. The author claims that humans have a „far higher responsibility to develop morality“ than animals. Does it follow that animals also have such a responsibility, only in lesser degree?
4. On p. 21 the author asks: „*How does Sokol compensate for the lack of freedom involved in depending on institutions and paying taxes?*“ – Does it follow that institutions and the payment of taxes are, according to Sokol, a limitation on human freedom?
5. On p. 24, the author writes that Sokol's practical philosophy provides each person with reliable standards for decision-making and action. Could the author then use them to answer the following ethical dilemmas?
 - Should abortion be legal?
 - Should euthanasia be legal?

- Imagine that three people are in acute danger of death, but can be saved by a difficult operation: a young homeless man on drugs; a middle-aged millionaire; a 70-year-old scientist. But a doctor can only save one. Who should he choose, according to Sokol's ethics?

Summary Despite the persistent shortcomings, I **recommend the thesis for defence** and suggest to evaluate it with the grade **good (3)**.

Mgr. Stanislav Synek, Ph.D.