

Lenart Škof

Academic Foresights

## Slovenian Philosophy



### *How do you analyze the present state of Slovenian philosophy?*

Up to the 1980s, there was only one 'official' tradition in Slovenia, namely dialectical materialism, or Marxism-Leninism. But already during the most trying years of the totalitarian regime, in the sixties and seventies, under the strong influence of Dušan Pirjevec, a professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenian philosophy underwent a rapid development following German philosophy (most notably Heidegger) and French structuralism combined with psychoanalysis. Following independence in 1991 a new philosophical constellation developed with the emergence of different philosophers from various generations. In the beginning of the post-Communist era, however, both former dissidents as well as a number of post-Socialist philosophers working within the young democratic state came into prominence.

Slovenian philosophy is now best known by its representatives from the 'Ljubljana Psychoanalytical School' guided by Slavoj Žižek. The school is currently situated at the department of philosophy of the University of Ljubljana, and at the philosophical institute of the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences, also in Ljubljana. Other major representatives of the school are, among others, Mladen Dolar and Alenka Zupančič. Influenced by Jacques Lacan as well as guided by different strands of (post-)Marxist legacy, this has given rise to a strain of philosophy marked by a combination of structuralist and psychoanalytical approach. with numerous works pertaining to a variety of philosophical fields (epistemology, political philosophy, ethics etc.). Another major contemporary influence and inspiration of the various philosophy research scholars working at the Philosophical Institute is Alain Badiou with his political philosophy and theory of the subject. At the same institute the internationally renowned Slovenian philosopher of aesthetics is working: Aleš Erjavec.

Another important tradition in Slovenia is the hermeneutical philosophy which takes its cue from the Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenological traditions. Its main representatives are Ivan Urbančič (he authored important works on Nietzsche), the former dissident and phenomenologist Tine Hribar with a sizeable and important opus

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of works ranging from ethics and hermeneutics to the philosophy of religion, and Dean Komel, who studied with Bernhard Waldenfels and Klaus Held. Komel is also among the most important Slovenian intercultural philosophers. Although there existed a close link also to another historical strand of phenomenology, namely to Brentano-Meinong tradition, Meinong is today preserved only in a few references by the Slovenian analytical philosophers (most notably in some of Matjaž Potrč's works). Meinong was introduced to Slovenia via the publications of the prominent founding father of contemporary Slovenian philosophy, France Veber (1890–1975). He was however forcefully retired and banned from academic life by the post-war Communist regime. His younger colleague and one of his most talented students, Cene Logar, suffered imprisonment for 9 years in Tito's gulag at now Croatian island *Goli otok*.

Other important representatives of modern Slovenian philosophy are Marko Uršič (originally coming from the analytical strand, his current huge project being on the philosophy of nature and cosmology) and Gorazd Kocijančič. Translator of the entire opus of Plato (and numerous other translations) he is the most prominent representative of the philosophy of Christianity in Slovenia, having developed an idiosyncratic philosophy based on readings both of Church fathers as well as the hermeneutical tradition, but working outside the official tradition of the Church or the theological faculty.

Analytical philosophy has also developed an influential strand in Slovenia operating from two centres – one at the University of Maribor with a group of analytical philosophers substantially influenced by the renowned Croatian analytical philosopher Nenad Miščević. At the University of Ljubljana there is another group working in many different strands (philosophy of language, philosophy of science, logic etc.). Matjaž Potrč (born in 1948) is the leading member of the group. Coming from the tradition of structuralism and philosophy of language his work later centered on the philosophy of mind, intentionality and the philosophy of psychology, all within the tradition of analytical philosophy. His overall philosophical approach is naturalism. In the last decade the main focus of his work was focused on metaphysics and semantics. Together with the American philosopher Terence Horgan, and drawing on the works of W.O. Quine, David Lewis and Hilary Putnam, Potrč defends an interesting combination of metaphysical realism.

At the Theological faculty in Ljubljana various philosophical research scholars are working with a main focus on ethics, social philosophy, philosophical anthropology and phenomenology (Lévinas).

Finally, a new centre of philosophy was recently founded in Koper at the University of Primorska and at the Institute for Mediterranean Humanities and Social Sciences at the Science and Research Centre of Koper. Drawing heavily on the philosophy of

Richard Rorty it has evolved into the foremost Slovenian centre doing innovative research in American pragmatism and democracy (including the philosophy of law). Other important points of reference include the feminist philosophy of Luce Irigaray, as well as environmental and intercultural/comparative philosophy (i.e. research in modern trends of African, Indian and Chinese philosophies).

***In your opinion, how will the situation likely evolve over the next five years?***

Slovenian philosophy will have to find a secure financial basis in order to be able to make further developments. Currently the most efficient research centers (as far as research projects in philosophy are concerned) are the above mentioned Philosophical Institute at the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Scientific-Research Centre at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and the Institute for Mediterranean Humanities and Social Sciences at Science and Research Centre of Koper (University of Primorska).

The state funding for research projects in philosophy depends on academic excellence in humanities, but there are recent trends to minimize the level of funding in the humanities as compared to other sciences or more applied research. On the other hand, young researchers are also at a disadvantage compared to experienced researchers, when it comes to make successful applications. This definitely is a problem for the further development of philosophy.

About the character of Slovenian philosophy in the near future: Since its beginnings Slovenian philosophy has been a part of European/Western philosophy with its major spheres of influence being represented by Germany, France and later the US, as well as by different intercultural contexts. Though traditionally there have been strong links between Slovenian philosophers and their colleagues from different other post-Yugoslav states, no trend in Slovenian philosophy shows that this link would substantially change the current and future situation of Slovenian philosophy, namely its orientation towards the Western part of Europe, in order to evolve into something bigger including more of the South-Eastern European traditions. Besides some contacts of individual researchers, there is also no substantial cooperation visible between Slovenian philosophy and other post-Communist states, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary etc. More contacts with these states exist only in the field of literary criticism and poetry.

***What are the structural long-term perspectives?***

Slovenian philosophy already operates at the crossroads of different traditions and

cultures. It has been situated in world traditions as well as local contexts since its early beginnings. My prediction is that its long term perspectives will remain within its present fields of interest and orientations, but a stronger awareness of its social role is needed. Indeed, Contemporary Slovenian philosophy grows out of a paradox: on the one hand, Slovenians have opted for democracy with its politico-ethical potential for the future growth of society qua community, but on the other hand most of the contemporary Slovenian philosophy is silent on or extremely critical of this specific task. Curiously, this holds true for the majority of traditions outlined above, including Christian philosophy. I am very concerned about this trend. The structural long-term perspective for the citizens of this small nation, and for Slovenian philosophy as one of its cornerstones since the early days of its struggle for independence, should be oriented towards those contexts where the spirit, or the ethos of community would take over from both resentment and from a cynical approach towards the democratic future and its social hopes. Traditionally Slovenians are divided along ideological lines between conservative (basic value orientation: integrative Catholicism) on the one hand and post-socialist (basically liberal) camps on the other. Yet, both camps preserve their ideological orientation and are not inclined to enter a communicative rationality of dialogue within the so-called 'cultural struggle'. Therefore, I venture to plea for a 'Rortyan' turn in Slovenian philosophy towards 'solidarity' as the guiding 'principle' in any philosophical endeavor.

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