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Sources of Metaphilosophy: Philosophy at Different Stages of Ancient Culture

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Abstract--The concept of “metaphilosophy” appeared in the 40s XX century, though it is based on the positions of antique philosophy. Understanding of this phenomenon of culture can be found in philosophy from the early stages of its existence. The authors considered the philosophical discourse from the position of historical-philosophical and metaphilosophical methods combined. The research was aimed at studying the transformation of understanding and functioning of philosophy of the ancient philosophical tradition and its peculiarities at all stages of development. It was found that in the pre-classical period of ancient Greek culture, philosophy functioned primarily as intelligence about nature and later became a striving for wisdom and knowledge. A philosopher was perceived as a practitioner of what he taught, wrote and researched. The further development of metaphilosophy was influenced by a two-vector understanding of ancient philosophy – theoretical and practical.

Keywords--ancient culture, ancient philosophy, history, philosopher, way of life.

Introduction

The concept of “metaphilosophy” emerged relatively recently, in the 40s XX century. Although this branch of philosophical knowledge is explicitly less than a hundred years old, discussions about the essence, meaning and tasks of philosophy have taken place from the very beginning of its existence. It can be said that it is in antiquity that we see the first in the history of philosophy of perception of the understanding of this phenomenon of culture, which emphasized certain tasks of its existence. It is worth noting a number of fundamental studies devoted to understanding the understanding of the essence and tasks of ancient philosophy (Hadot, 1995; Hadot, 2002; Banicki, 2015; Cooper, 2012; Nussbaum, 1994; Foucault, 1986). Although, they undoubtedly describe the problems we are exploring in some detail, one can nevertheless speak of the prevalence of an emphasis in them on the classical and Hellenistic periods of the ancient philosophical tradition (Suryasa, 2019; Khan et al., 2021).

It is impossible to talk about which understanding of philosophy is more true or preferable. All of them are good and correct to their premises and in this regard are equally true. Their choice and development depend on the theoretical and practical needs of people. Something similar (or close to this) can be said about specific concepts of metaphilosophy. They also represent a certain whole, that is, a set of interconnected consistent statements resting on certain premises (axioms). And in this sense, they are true. This truth should not be confused with another as an accurate, adequate view of the world. It is talking only about the reaction of a very definite thinker to the understanding of philosophy. And, apparently, the main thing is that there should be more such approaches. The wider and deeper the system of ideas about it, the more confident and expedient humanity will react to the challenges of philosophical discourse (Smith et al., 2018; Tetty, 2020).

Thus, methodologically, it would be proceeded from the position of the famous historian of philosophy Oiserman (2014), who combined historical-philosophical and metaphilosophical research. This decision is explained by “the fact that the subject of both the history of philosophy and metaphilosophy is philosophy. One could, of course, argue that these disciplines discuss the subject in different ways: the history of philosophy allows us to understand what philosophy once was, and metaphilosophy clarifies, what it is now or what it should be. In addition, the historian of philosophy is concerned with concrete philosophers rather than philosophy as such, not with the idea of philosophy, unlike the metaphilosopher. However, to this one can answer that the metaphilosopher, in any case, cannot do without empirical material, even if he talks about philosophy in a normative way. And the history of philosophy as once and delivers such material that helps to see behind the particulars of philosophical theories certain essential features that are needed by a metaphilosopher for normative reasoning about philosophy, for reasoning about what it should be” (Vasiliev, 2019). Therefore, the purpose of this scientific article is to systematically show the transformation and peculiarities of understanding and functioning of philosophy at all stages of the development of the ancient philosophical tradition.

The functioning of philosophy in the pre-classical period: between “φιλοσοφία” and “ιστορία”

It is well known that thanks to the citation of the work of the ancient Greek philosopher and mechanic Heraclides Ponticus by the Neo-Platonist Simplicius, it is known that it was from the mouth of Pythagoras that the word “philosophy” was first heard (Laërtius, 1853; Cicero, 1918). Exactly, the question may arise: was there really no philosophy as a cultural phenomenon before, and if there was, then what did he represent himself and how was he understood? This formulation of the question is also due to the specifics of the functioning of the famous theological and philosophical concept ουσία: “ουσία του ὄντος” in the literal German translation means “the essence of being”: we say “being of beings”. “Essence” is something very complex and unusual because of the artificial linguistic form, which first arose in philosophical reasoning. Yet what defines the essence in the German linguistic form, we cannot attribute to the Greek expression. After all, ουσία is not an artificial term, which was originally invented in philosophical thought, but belongs to the everyday language and communication of the Greeks. Philosophy only took this word from the pre-philosophical language. So, if this could happen by itself, then we can assume that the pre-philosophical speech of the Greeks was already philosophical. And indeed, it is. The history of the main words of ancient philosophy is nothing more than an excellent evidence that the Greek language is philosophical, that is, it was not enriched with philosophical terminology, but already philosophized itself as a language and a way of communication (Kassen, 2011). Therefore, for example, it is incorrect to say that “ἀγάτη” is exclusively connected with sacrifice, or that “ἔρως” is only passion, lust (Turenko, 2017).

If we proceed from the generally accepted chronology, then obviously the Milesian school “did not know” the word “philosophy”. Hence, as Lebedev (2018), emphasizes: “The early Ionian “physiologists” did not call themselves “philosophers”, they called their new science “intelligence about nature” (περὶ φύσεως ιστορία). Whatever Popper told us, it was precisely an empirical science based on observation, natural analogies, and empirical “proof” (τεκμήρια). There was no religious or ethical component in it, not because it was still “immature” or had not grown to Socrates and Plato, but because it was not their business and not their subject. It is foolish to reproach the compiler of a first-class geographic atlas for not touching upon the question of the meaning of human life in his atlas”.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that Deleuze & Guattari (1998), say explaining the reason for the appearance of philosophy as follows: “One of these characters is a friend; they even say that it reflects the Greek origin of philosophy – in other civilizations there were Sages, and the Greeks show us such “friends” who are not just more modest sages. As they say, it was the Greeks who finally recorded the death of the Sage and replaced him with philosophers, friends of wisdom who seek it, but do not formally possess it. However, the difference between a philosopher and a sage is not just in degree, as if on a certain scale: rather, the fact is that the ancient eastern sage thought in Figures, while the philosopher invented Concepts and began to think with them. All wisdom has changed a lot” (Salmon et al., 2006; Savolainen, 1995; Wickens et al., 2002).

This is confirmed by the thought of the Greek scientist [Kulabaritsis \(2011\)](#), “philosophy was born speaking in Greek – a language that for at least a millennium remained its only language. And although the hegemony of the Greek disappeared in the West in the Roman era, we can add here the second millennium, because Latin-speaking philosophers continued to use Greek until the beginning of the Middle Ages. The historical connection between a specific language, namely Greek and the development of philosophy, is a unique phenomenon in history. Hence we can conclude that the Greek language is the language of the philosophy of par excellence” ([Al-Sofi & Abouabdulqader, 2020](#); [Liu, 2018](#)).

Proceeding from this, a philosopher in the pre-classical period is not only one who is looking for the nature of being, understanding certain universal phenomena of the world, human life, but is directed to more practical activity, more “down to earth”, if you will. His goal is to understand not only the “metaphysics” of being and human existence, but also their “physics”. It is not for nothing that the so-called “Seven Sages of Greece” lived simultaneously with the Milesian school, who were often not teachers (with the exception of Thales), but “their wisdom, as [Chansyshev \(1981\)](#), emphasizes, cannot be attributed to either science or mythology. Here, apparently, the third spiritual source of philosophy manifested itself, namely, everyday consciousness, especially the one that reaches the level of worldly wisdom and which manifests itself in proverbs and sayings, sometimes rising to great generalization and depth”.

Consequently, they were really a kind of “friends”, helpers, advisors for the inhabitants of the cities where each of these “Seven Sages of Greece” lived. “That is why it is so difficult to find out what “friend” means, even among the Greeks and especially among them. Perhaps the word “friend” denotes a certain intimacy of craftsmanship, like a master's taste for material and potential dependence on it, like a carpenter with wood – a good carpenter is potentially dependent on wood, so he is a friend of wood? This is an important question, since in philosophy “the friend” is no longer understood as an external character, example, or empirical circumstance, but something internally present in thought, a condition of its very possibility, a living category, an element of transcendental experience. Thanks to philosophy, the Greeks decisively changed the position of a friend, who turned out to be correlated no longer with another person, but with a certain Being, Object, Integrity” ([Deleuze & Gvattari, 1998](#)).

At the same time, the “Western Greek lexeme “φιλοσοφία” created by Pythagoras, on the contrary, initially set itself educational tasks, had a strong religious and moral component and opposed the endless Universe of Anaximander with its cosmogonic vortices a finite harmonious musical and mathematical space (another semantic neologism). created by the divine mind. Pythagoras did not invent the words “philosophy” and “space” themselves (just as he did not invent the word “harmony”), but he invented their new, God-seeking, life-building and teleological semantics, which was later assimilated by Plato” ([Lebedev, 2018](#)).

In confirmation of the words of the Russian scholar of antiquity, a couple of ancient testimonies can be cited. For example, a quote from [Herodotus \(1920\)](#), “A

guest from Athens! We have already heard a lot about your wisdom (sophiês) and wanderings, namely, that you, striving for wisdom (philosophêôn) and wishing to see the light, traveled many countries". These lines from Herodotus, as [Hadot \(1995\)](#), emphasizes, shed light on how wisdom and philosophy were understood then. Solon went on trips to gain new knowledge, to enrich his ideas about reality and about people, to discover other lands and other customs. Note once again that the pre-Socratics apparently designated their intellectual activity with the word history – “research”. Knowledge such as that which Solon acquired over the years of wandering can make the one who possesses it a good judge in everything that concerns human life ([Hadot, 2002](#)).

It is also pertinent to recall one of the fragments of Heraclitus, namely: “Men-philosophers should know a lot” ([Diels, 1912](#)). In this regard, we can emphasize that “the first Greek thinkers, replacing mythological narration with a rational theory of the universe, at the same time retain the threefold scheme that structured mythological cosmogonies. They put forward a theory of the origin of the world, man and state. This theory is rational, since it seeks to explain the world not through the confrontation of the elements, but through the struggle of "physical" realities, of which one subjugates the others. This decisive turn is reflected in the polysemantic Greek word physis, in its primary use denoting the beginning, development and the end result of the process due to which something new is formed. The object of the intellectual activity of the early Greek thinkers, which they call research, history, is the general physis” ([Hadot, 2002](#)).

Consequently, “metaphilosophy” in the period of early ancient Greek thinkers developed in two vectors: philosophy itself (Western Greek tradition) and history (Ionian). In fact, by this, the theoretical and practical (more precisely, applied) aspects of the existence of philosophy were laid. Already at the very origins, they understood that the essence of philosophical activity cannot be limited only to logical inferences and philosophical research, but it is also necessary for understanding the world (both in the physical and in the metaphysical planes) and man in all aspects of his life ([Wu et al., 2012](#); [Malmström et al., 2009](#)).

“Metaphilosophy” in the classical and Hellenistic periods: theory vs practice

Posing the question of the relationship between the “gray-haired” theory and the “evergreen” tree of life, [Hadot \(2002\)](#), writes, that the primacy and decisive role of life in relation to theoretical constructions were expressed in ancient philosophy with particular clarity. After all, the ancient philosopher is, first of all, the person who lives a philosophical life and tirelessly improves himself, and ancient philosophy is a consciously and freely chosen philosophical way of life. This does not mean that the understanding of philosophy as a theoretical, “conceptualizing” activity was not characteristic of the philosophers of antiquity, but only implies that philosophical discourse was not at all considered an end in itself. In ancient thought, philosophical discourse was essentially aimed at justifying, explaining and theoretically substantiating the philosophical way of life ([Garntsev, 1999](#)). In this regard, as noted by [Krotkov & Nosova \(2009\)](#), “philosophical self-reflection, i.e., metaphilosophy, has the goal of constituting the problem field of philosophy, its language and methods, a complex of links between philosophy and science and religion, culture in general. The empirical basis of metaphilosophy is a

discourse about questions (problems) that are considered to be philosophical” (Tsatsakis et al., 2018; Crivellato & Ribatti, 2007).

Hence, “at the moment when the question of self-reflection about what philosophy is, is maturing within philosophy, and this happens almost simultaneously with the emergence of philosophy itself, then at the same time there is a question about what philosophy is not. For example, the formation of classical ancient philosophy can in many ways be viewed as a matter of metaphilosophical comprehension and separation of philosophy from sophistry, philosophy and philodoxia (love of opinions). "And those who value everything that exists by itself should be called philosophers (lovers of wisdom), and not lovers of opinions” (Safonov, 2020). D. Cooper in this context identifies five vectors of understanding philosophy in the classical and Hellenistic periods:

- Socratic
- Platonic
- Aristotelian
- Epicurean and skeptic
- Stoic (Cooper, 2012)

Although, in our opinion, it is still more appropriate to divide the fourth vector, which means to distinguish between the epicurean and skepticist vectors of “metaphilosophy” in the ancient period of its development. At the same time, the Czech researcher K. Banicki, as if summing up Western researchers of “metaphilosophy” in antiquity, distinguishes mainly three directions of understanding the essence and tasks of philosophy in this period of the history of philosophy: philosophical therapy Nussbaum (1994), spiritual exercises Hadot (2002), and self-care (Foucault, 1986; Banicki, 2015).

However, here it must be said that regardless of the above concepts of understanding the tasks and essence of philosophy, one can see that philosophy in antiquity, contrary to modern ideas about it, was not only and not so much a theoretical discipline, and even more so an exegesis of a certain kind of texts, but first of all – a way of life, which was based on this or that existential preference. And it is in this existential preference for a certain style or way of living that one should look for the beginning and foundation of the philosophical discourse that justifies, explains and conditions this way of life. In antiquity, a person is recognized as a philosopher not because of the originality or abundance of philosophical discourse, but because he leads a special life. In turn, discourse is recognized as philosophical only if it is translated into a certain way of life (Gadzhikurbanova, 2004).

Hence, as Garntsev (1999), emphasizes, “philosophical life and philosophical discourse are dialectically related: they are both incommensurable and inseparable. They are incommensurable, since philosophical life can do without philosophical discourse, which, moreover, cannot express the full depth of its existential background, sometimes associated with extraordinary experience. They are inseparable, since their all-round interdependence determines the completeness of the philosophical perception of the world, consciously brought to practical implementation. In other words:

- Firstly, the philosophical discourse, determined by the life choice, "articulates" and conceptually substantiates this choice.
- Secondly, discourse, expressing some kind of existential preference, becomes a means of active influence of the philosopher on himself and on others and thereby, according [Hadot \(2002\)](#), "performs an educational, educational, psychological, healing function".
- Thirdly, it, presenting itself in the form of a dialogue of the thinker with himself or with others, is an exercise in the philosophical way of life".

Based on this, we can conclude that the essence and task of philosophy in antiquity was not limited solely to the writing of treatises, the creation of certain academic institutions (Academy, Lyceum, "The Garden of Epicurus"), the development of new concepts and theories that would relate exclusively to this part culture of a given historical period. It was of great importance that philosophy, in general, and any of the schools of ancient philosophy influenced various other areas of the then society – politics, literature, art, religion, etc. The philosophical way of life was not limited to the bearers of it themselves, but was received by those or representatives of society (here, at least, remember the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius).

In confirmation of this, it must be said that "M. Foucault notes that "self-care" (as one of the key aspects of understanding philosophy in the Hellenistic period) involved not only exercises in solitude (a kind of moral meditation of an individual), but also a certain kind of social practice, carried out more or less institutionalized structures such as neo-Pythagorean communities and epicurean circles. At the school of Epictetus, several categories of students were divided: some went to him temporarily, others stayed for a longer period and prepared themselves not only for the life of an ordinary citizen, but also for taking high public positions, finally, the third, who themselves decided to become professional philosophers, went through school rules and practices for guiding consciousness. The institution of private consultants became widespread (especially among the Roman aristocracy), who became advisers in individual everyday matters, and sometimes inspire political decisions" ([Gadzhikurbanova, 2004](#)).

Therefore, we can see that antiquity is so relevant, since it is this period that opens before us the reading of philosophy not only in its theoretical, ontological, metaphysical reading, but above all in its practical aspects. Philosophy becomes a methodology of understanding, an art of questioning and a way of life. Philosophy is possible in action, in the act of thought, in mastering the art of reading texts. Philosophy is life. Ancient sources say, first – to live, philosophize – then. Philosophy as a practice of life acquires its own special reading in antiquity ([Dibner & Richards, 2005](#); [Wiebers et al., 2003](#)).

Conclusion

Thus, having systematically analyzed the features of understanding the functioning of philosophy at different stages of ancient culture, we can draw the following conclusions:

- In the pre-classical period of ancient Greek culture, chronologically and geographically, two vectors of understanding of philosophy can be distinguished. Initially, in the Ionian direction of early Greek thought, philosophy functioned primarily as empiricism, “intelligence about nature” (περὶ φύσεως ἰστορία). And only with the appearance of the personality of Pythagoras and his school (Western Greek tradition) philosophy became a striving for wisdom and knowledge of the universal phenomena of being. The geographic dichotomy of understanding metaphilosophy in this period of ancient philosophy is due, in our opinion, to certain geographical, cultural and socio-political characteristics.
- This dichotomous functioning of philosophy in the pre-classical period became the basis for the fact that in the classical and Hellenistic periods of antiquity it already existed in the unity of theory and practice. And this can be described as the “ancient project” of metaphilosophy. Consequently, the image of a philosopher at this stage of the historical and philosophical discourse was not an abstract figure in ancient society, who was only engaged in writing treatises, self-knowledge and didactic role, but was a living example, was a practitioner of what he taught, wrote and researched.
- We can see the idea of metaphilosophy in ancient society as two-vector: theoretical and practical. On the one hand, it is aimed at comprehending philosophical problems, the development of new concepts and concepts, and, on the other hand, philosophy becomes applied, since it gives an understanding of those or processes and phenomena that we can observe both in society as a whole and in the life of everyone. from us. This two-vector understanding of ancient philosophy led to the further development of metaphilosophy in particular and philosophy in general.

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