

Editorial

In an interview with Insite Malta, published in 2015, I had argued that there was no such thing as the professional philosopher. Of course, this statement was all too vague. It seemed to imply that all was philosophy, and that no distinction should or could be made between our work and the work undertaken in the physicist's laboratory, a view to which I no longer subscribe. Rather, the challenge posed to us, as our ability to pursue philosophy unreservedly is questioned, is precisely to examine the ways in which it is still possible to practise philosophy and to seek out truth as '*philosophers*', without suturing philosophy to any other discipline. But the question of what it means to practise philosophy as a philosopher is a slippery one, with an even slipperier set of answers.

I will not go into the question of truth *per se*. Suffice it to say that, since Plato and before, the search for a truth that could transcend the mundane has defined the struggle that is philosophy. STRUGGLE, KAMPF; because it is difficult to learn, and even harder to live with what we know, but also because knowing is not enough. ENOUGH; when will we be able to say *enough*? What good — ethical, political, scientific — is enough to release us from our obligation, and what evil is enough to justify the (perhaps violent) response which it demands from us? US; perhaps Kant was not altogether correct, and the questions which we must ask do not concern the *I*, but the *us*.

Lenin [...] defines the ultimate essence of philosophical practice as an intervention in the theoretical domain. This intervention takes a double form: it is theoretical in its formulation of definite categories; and practical in the function of these categories. This function consists of 'drawing a dividing-line' inside the theoretical domain between ideas declared to be true and ideas declared to be false, between the scientific and the ideological. (Althusser 2011, 196)

Kantian metaphysics had placed the subject's access to the transcendental object at the heart of its approach to philosophical truth. The way in which Kant separated the realm of the object of truth (the noumenal realm) from the realm of its subject, and of that subject's knowledge (the phenomenal realm), by means of the categories, would make it impossible for us to underwrite with certitude any attempt to bridge the gap between the 2; at least, not without a firm belief in the reliability of our own reason, a belief founded not on solid ground, but on the hope that human beings are indeed rational and autonomous.

This hope is always addressed to, and necessitated by, economic, political, social, material, scientific, and amorous situations. The hope for a better state of affairs *out there*, whether Plato's Republic, Kant's Kingdom of Ends, or Hegel's rational State, has always lain at the heart of philosophy, and it founds, or it *should* found, all of our attempts to draw a line between "ideas declared to be true and ideas declared to be false," (Althusser 2011, 196). Through action based upon what we experience as truth, we "[install] [ideas] in power;" (Althusser 2011, 198).

Lenin's observation formed part of his defence of Engels, who was accused of relativism by Alexander Bogdanov. "Engels in *Anti-Dühring*," writes Bogdanov, 'expresses himself almost in the same sense in which I have just described the relativity of truth' (p. v) — that is, in the sense of denying all eternal truth, 'denying the unconditional objectivity of all truth whatsoever,' (Lenin 2014). In response to Bogdanov, Lenin argues that, although the criterion of practice "is sufficiently 'indefinite' not to allow human knowledge to become 'absolute,' [...] it is sufficiently definite to wage a ruthless fight on all varieties of idealism and agnosticism," (Althusser 2011, 196). By idealism, he means the posing of philosophical questions in a manner divorced from everyday experience and the material world; by agnosticism, he means the indifferentism which is characteristic of those we call — disparagingly, and rightly so — 'armchair philosophers' or 'dilettantes.'

A dilettante is someone who *dabbles*, innocently, perhaps eruditely. There are many of these around, including (especially?) in academia; their concern with philosophy lacks a genuine drive to live by the discipline's truths. Echoing one of Aristotle's less astute conclu-

sions (if you will allow me this opinionated faux-pas), they say that their interest is motivated ‘for knowledge’s own sake.’ This phenomenon manifests itself in the unfortunate tendency to conflate the history of ideas, or the history of philosophy, with philosophy proper.

Let it be said that the study of ideas and of their history is an indispensable part of what it means to do philosophy. Hegel did much to show the relevance of the idea and its development to the practice of philosophy today, as can be seen, for example, in Moritz Sommer’s paper on Hegelian Phenomenology below, and in Jonathan Duncan’s use of ‘Force and Understanding’ as an interpretative tool for understanding Marx’s *Das Kapital*. These contributions also show, however, that it is only when it is accompanied by an attention to the history of the material circumstances of humankind that the history of thought and of its methods may come into its own. The *Phenomenology* itself is but a propædeutic, intended to bring us to an awareness of the need for militancy with regards to the defence of the idea of truth. The questions that the history of ideas should seek to answer are not questions concerning a philosophical content at all; rather, they concern life in the past and in the present, and the orientation of human thought towards its circumstances. Indeed, my most beloved texts, those of Kant, Hegel, Lacan, and Badiou, seem to whisper sedition as they are taken from upon their shelf; they are texts of freedom, and of the speaking of truth to power.

To practise philosophy as a struggle for truth — to be militant in philosophy — is to take a stand with regard to worldly and theoretical affairs alike; it is to be partisan. As defined by Lenin, the practise of philosophy requires us to draw clear lines between the true and the false; it requires us to dwell in the tangled knots that bind together each of Kant’s famous questions: what can I know, what ought I do, what may I hope? This was well known by those who took to the streets in May 1968; as disappointing as those events might have been, they reflected a social conscience and a collective orientation to truth.

The dilettante is not oriented towards truth; in his breast burns no fire for the real or for the right. Academic philosophy today often does not produce militants, but dilettantes; historians, ‘students.’ The

relationship between oneself and one's study is inert, one-directional; the object of study and he who studies are set apart from one another, in order to allow for the objectivity and dispassionate detachment that study requires. To be a philosopher, and to be a militant in philosophy, requires one to be both subject and object; to examine and ponder the events and the thought of time past, yes; but to be receptive to the present, to the events that are happening now, and to seek to witness their meaning and to influence their direction at the same time as they influence one's own practise. Such events do not reach us as philosophers; they reach us as teachers, as writers, as scientists, as subjects and citizens, and as people who love.

It is with pride that the editorial board and myself are able to say that the Maltese Islands have a peer-reviewed journal of philosophy. *Threads* as newly conceived in recent years, tries to serve as a platform for philosophical investigations into matters that matter; the effort put in to maintaining its independence and its broad reach means that it has no agendas. The process might not yet be as rigorous as that involved in journals with a high volume of submissions — this is intended to change by 2019, when the first issue produced on a 2-year editorial schedule will be published — but the general quality of submissions has steadily increased over the past years.

Philosophy can only really be pursued within a community, and this journal is intended to complement the arising of such a community here, on these Islands that have witnessed much. It is a source of disappointment, however, that few Maltese submissions were sent in, and that none made it through this year's peer-review process; I feel that a key reason for this is the fact that it is a local publication, and perhaps that is what saddens me most of all. The emphasis on publishing abroad at the expense of the local development of the discipline does not consider the fact that Maltese philosophy — of which there is a rich tradition — makes most sense when it is close to home, and when it attempts to engage with its circumstances instead of fleeing them.