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Psychoanalysts seclude themselves to the basement,
Transcendental philosophers lose themselves in the clouds,
While a philosophy practitioner receives her guests in the mezzanine.

Dedication to the 40 years of philosophical practice

Opening lecture at the 16th International Congress on Philosophical Practice on July 27, 2021
in Saint Petersburg

Esteemed colleagues,

How I would have loved to first address our friends in Russia with the phrase “here in Saint Petersburg”, if it had been possible and permissible! But, as you all know, concerns about our fragile health and requirements by the authorities have prevented a real, collegial, sociable reunion or warm acquaintance supported by physical closeness, and so we now have to make a makeshift electronic connection with one another, imagining the actual location of this 16th international event for the promotion of philosophical practice.

But let us stick with it, as, according to the words of the good old Plutarch, is the way of a philosopher who, “like the bees collect honey from the thyme, the bitter, dry herb, often extracts useful and good from the most unfortunate of circumstances”. 1 Alain, a descendant of Plutarch in his attitude, basically said the same thing again in the drier tone of his “Deliberations”:

“Common usage has always named “a philosopher” that who knows how to see the best side in every occurrence; because only that helps. ” 2

Speaking of which: Alain, as Émile Chartier called himself, this extraordinary thought supplier for philosophical practice, died 70 years ago, one more reason to remember him gratefully.

But let us stick to his and Plutarch's cited encouragement: If we now have to only think about the real, intended location of our event, owing to adverse circumstances, then this may at the same time remind us of the fantastic achievements of thought: because that which is distinctive is a real ability to think, to visualize what is absent, while our senses remain slavishly tied to the present ... I was also able to let Plutarch from Chaironeia, who was unfortunately almost forgotten or simply ignored in strict academic circles, have a say as if he were one of and among us, although he lived in this world almost exactly two millennia before us. So let us not let our thinking, as it happens in some places in accordance with modernity, spoil us: The spirit, which is also able to become at home in the distance and in every historical past, is bound to thinking, just as it is the spirit, the one, according to Hegel's phrase, “is with himself in the other”. But that is possibly the finest, most accurate and at the same time the simplest formula with which one can describe what characterizes the encounter of the practicing philosopher with his guest: He understands the person seeking advice by being able to “think in his place”, by first trying to feel at home in the other, and then, if possible and advisable, setting out with him into further, possibly more beneficial or demanding regions. But such determinations actually sound as if I wanted to impose the entire theoretical burden of philosophical practice on a few sentences, which is by no means my intention.

But I am willing, not least because our Russian friends asked me to remind you with this lecture: the philosophical practice that we all share as a common idea, a shared project, connected under the umbrella of the appointed institutions, turned 40 this year, which, if measured by the age of a person, would justify the expectation of viewing her as “grown up”.

But, as a precaution, let's simply put the question of "being an adult" in philosophical practice aside, and instead ask whether one may say: Philosophical practice is celebrating its "40th" year of birth"? Or, to put it another way: Are ideas also "born"?

I think anyone who is not afraid of metaphors, although philosophical practitioners cannot afford to be shy with them, because it would deprive them of what is possibly the most subtle and helpful means of communication ..., anyone using these semantic bridges, will in no way find it inappropriate to say that an idea is born after someone has been pregnant with it for a while. That's how it was in 1981, 40 years ago, after an unusually extended pregnancy, almost as if I were a she-elephant who, as is well known, stays pregnant for a good two years ...

So at that time I decided, after "careful consideration", as it is called, "to bring the idea of philosophical practice to life". A strange phrase: "bringing something to life" ... And then? Then one needs to ask and decide: has the time really arrived? The fact that we are now gathering here for the 16th International Congress of Philosophical Practice probably allows us to answer: Yes, it did indeed come at the right time. At least for us, who have taken this newcomer into our care and are now discussing with each other how things *should* continue with it, *can*, or maybe *ought*...

But now some questions arise: Does the fact that we have welcomed philosophical practice make its existence in the world a fact? Does it have the status of an unequivocal reality? Is it recognized as reality, which in its case is the real question: for as spiritual reality it is real, provided that it enjoys recognition as reality. And then: There is no doubt that Philosophical Practice exists worldwide, as this congress once again proves, but will it stay that way? Will it grow, increase, develop, learn, in a good sense to find its own, possibly predetermined, and therefore appropriate self-consciousness? In other words: does it have what I wish for it, as one wishes their children, a good, hopeful future ahead of her? Ahead of it and therefore ahead of us? Is it already being perceived to the extent that it deserves it or must we hope for the time being that it will still acquire the recognition of its merits?

Well, such thoughts finally take me where I actually wanted to go from the beginning, namely to a laconic note by the brilliant Georg-Christoph Lichtenberg, this special case among thinkers. As a borrowed headdress, it would have delicately adorned that I would like to try here, as the motto. Now I put his aphorism in the middle of the text, because it is in a good place here too. So here is Lichtenberg, the first professor of experimental physics and the first German aphorist:

"One begets the thought, the other baptizes it, the third begets children with it, the fourth visits it on its deathbed, and the fifth buries it." 4

You see, I find that comforting. In such a recurring cycle, many are busy with the same idea, and everyone does their own thing with it, as best as they can ... However I don't want to conceal the fact, and our congress will help... Involuntarily I transfer Lichtenberg's masterful, but cold sentence, to the story of the thought that I created and brought to life at the time.

I can also consider myself honored to have carried it to the baptism, from which the child got its name. Well: and if the term philosophical practice came together with others in the meantime and thus, to a certain extent, fathered children, it probably did not come about entirely without my involvement. And now? Now increasing age requires me to wait with the appearance acquired wisdom for the "fourth" who, according to Lichtenberg, will appear on the deathbed of philosophical practice. If we practice calm, we say: Let him come! The only thing I don't agree with is her funeral, to clarify this, at least not yet.

But for the moment all personal dismay should remain unattended to, so that instead of this we can jointly appreciate Lichtenberg's grandiose sentence as a large-scale enlightenment idea that it is according to its content. What does it mean? Ideas, too, like the gods once were, are mortal. It is like that. They rise if and insofar as this is granted to them, they prevail and assert

themselves, then they get mixed up, and at some point, as well demonstrated by Lichtenberg, they no longer assert themselves on their own, but when it goes well, they associate with other thoughts, become the impetus for further, new thoughts and ideas with which they joined forces and which then came into play. (still thinking, as said and admitted, about philosophical practice!) They remain only underground, possibly incognito, as a ferment, perhaps, that drives and causes unrest.

But do you understand, dear colleagues, what that means? As Hegel understood, everything is immersed in the medium of history, that is, it comes and goes and does not remain, unless it is transformed or, as it is said in the biblical tone, it goes under like the seed that goes under the must, so that it will bear fruit. And the phrase already used earlier, that philosophical practice had been "brought into being", does not remind us of the majestic, solemn tone of the biblical account of creation, so that it can be said: "post-paradisiacal" will be the downfall of such a recreated life and be allowed to die according to the oldest and most anciently confirmed law?

For this time I leave this question unanswered and instead allow myself a little aberration or an excursus that may connect a thought of the excellent Nicholas of Cusa with the biblical myth of creation and the "birth" of the idea of philosophical practice that concerns us here. How does this work together?

Nicholas of Cusa's idea, deviating from the usual exegesis, was that at the beginning a being had been called on the scene with divine authority, which does not simply live in this world as a creation, for its part nothing but "creature" that behaves accordingly and follows its purpose once provided, but a being has been called that in turn becomes creative, which can be translated: man is the being that has spirit, more precisely: it is spirit. That, in turn, as Nicholas of Cusa understood, means: Man is not only responsible for the world, he also not only has to preserve it, but is called to continue creation in the right spirit, for example by creating institutions, legal systems, works of art or even: he calls an act of amazing self-power! - the philosophical practice - "into life", something that did not exist up to then and that is now a reality, purely "he-thought" and initially nothing but a mere idea, a conception, something conceived. But that such a thought actually was able to and became a reality, that can be reliably recognized by Lichtenberg's sentence, by the fact that this new reality is able to free itself from the dependence on its creator and gradually become independent, begins to lead a life of its own and soon goes its own way, incidentally, not always the way intended by its "creator" ...

But that is one of those experiences that we rightly say in retrospect that we had to go through them. Because experience is often what only distills itself from the disappointment of our expectations. But irrespective of the experiences acquired with such meanings, another, no less grandiose idea of Lichtenberg applies, and this too is suitable to be placed in front of the philosophical practice as a motto:

"You have to do something new to see something new." 5

This, dear colleagues, has been confirmed in our circles, I believe, for many, many years, and we can be grateful for it.

But for my part, because that is expected from a review of the past 40 years, I will report something about what I learned to see in a new and different way as a result of the new thing we do. In other words, I want to share some of the experiences I have acquired. Or: What has turned out differently in the course of the past decades than I expected? What did I not "expect", as they say, or: what above all surprised me?

Well, I think something like this: very soon, through the experiences in the consultations, I had to recognize and learn to appreciate that people are far more peculiar, more stubborn in a good

sense, more individual, some even more original than I had previously imagined and therefore expected.

The result? In the meantime I think no one has understood another unless he has acquired the eyes to see that this other is unique. However, this experience has meanwhile become a principle for me that can be formulated as follows: If at the beginning of an encounter I am tempted to discover the many undoubtedly existing sides of a person that he shares with others, that make him a "contemporary", I am therefore tempted to perceive these sides of him all too clearly, then I know: I'm about to be wrong about him, I let myself be blinded by what does not matter. Because, formulated as a principle: *Typifying is the bankruptcy of human knowledge*. The type belongs in comedy. What is typical is weird, or worse, ridiculous. You may have heard a hint towards the psychological habit of assessing the patient according to categories, which are called diagnosis, and worse: not only assessing, but also treating them thus.

Incidentally, it is this experience that again and again strengthens my principle of being skeptical of all theories, insofar as they schematize the individual, and all of them do it: theories, so to speak, cannot do otherwise. With which the right moment has come to add a sentence that I have given philosophical practice as a further motto on the way. We owe it to Goethe:

"Theories are usually hasty thoughts of an impatient mind that would like to get rid of the phenomena and therefore insert pictures, concepts, and often just words in their place." 6

And since I like to invite the thoughts of others, to talk to them in their own way in the respective context, I would like to add two more mnemonics to Goethe's dictum. The first, again an aphorism, is from the pen of the French moralist La Rochefoucauld and reads:

"It's easier to get to know people in general than just one person." 7

We owe the other and second main thought, a strangely simple, almost simple-mindedly pious, to the spiritual mentor of Simone Weil, Gustave Thibon:

"One does not treat in a universal way what God intended to be fundamentally unique." 8

The sentence would be worth including in the immovable inventory of valid maxims. In any case, it belongs to the convictions of philosophical practice and is an established principle for me.

Now this conviction of fundamental individuality is connected in the strangest way to another thought coming to us from a conceivably different direction, namely that which Schopenhauer presented in his "Transcendent Speculation on the Apparent Intentionality in the Fate of the Individual", which Schopenhauer announced in his exemplary, skeptical and thoroughly reserved manner grandiose, mysterious text, the motto of which is preceded by a hardly less sibylline sentence from Plotinus, translated:

"There is no chance in life, only harmony and order." 9

This taught me: If I dedicate myself to a person with such an assumption, with the assumption of that intentionality addressed by Schopenhauer, which belongs to the fate of the individual, this allows me to appreciate the often strange paths that people take, their peculiarities, and to respect them, first of all to respect them as they are, as they have become, to recognize them, to accept them. In other words: The first and almost the one thing that matters, which is why philosophical practice invites to understand the people who come to us, as they come to us, in order then, in the second step, to educate themselves about themselves, which of course, as experience shows, brings movement into one's life with beautiful regularity.

Let's look at this in a particular case. The person who comes to us for advice is depressed. Then it is the philosophical practitioner's first assignment to understand what is bothering him. The second, already more challenging, is understanding how much it is bothering him. Last but not least, the philosophical practitioner is called upon to understand and relate his suffering as something that is by no means (or extremely seldom, from experience) "endogenous" or "primitive" (a burden that a psychology user often places on patients), but rather the subjective manifestation of an objective course of the world, with which personal history can be read as belonging to cultural history.

It also proves to be helpful for the depressed if we succeed in conveying to him that it is definitely not speaking against him if life is difficult for him. No, on the contrary: a philosophical mind has always seen lightness of attitude to life as unnatural.

This is the opportunity to once again invite someone else's thought to it, a wise résumé, in turn gained from lifelong experience, a note from the theologian Helmuth Thielicke.

"Dangers to humans are invariably [I would say more cautiously: often] the downside of their grandiosity and rank. His greatness and his misery go hand in hand. [...] The forms of failure, of existential failure, do not come from the inferior realm, the animal cellar vaults so to speak, where the wolves howl (Nietzsche), but they occur in the "mezzanine" of personality, where people abuse their freedom and squander the privilege of their destiny." 10

Whenever I read this passage again, I have to think of Sigmund Freud's reply to Ludwig Binswanger's celebratory speech on Freud's 80th birthday in 1936, and you can see right away, now I'm finally there, where I was going, the self-chosen title of my lecture points me to the cited basement and the mezzanine ...

At that time, owing to his caution, the master had cleverly avoided listening in person to this speech by his friend, who was so irreversibly devoted to philosophy. He had stayed away from the ceremony because, as he announced, he did not feel very well. But then he read the speech in which Binswanger had named the limits of psychoanalytic thinking in the most serious and noble way imaginable. I recommend that you take this opportunity to read this excellent text, which precisely marks the position of Dasein (existential) analysis, of that notable forerunner of philosophical practice, to orthodox psychoanalysis. Title: "Freud's Concept of Man in the Light of Anthropology". The all-grounding basic thesis of analysis, Binswanger lends itself to psychoanalysis in it, reads (to quote at least as much) ... :

"In diametrical opposition to millennia-long tradition of the essence of man as homo aeternus or coelestis and as ... historical man or homo universalis, and in just as much opposition to the modern ontological-anthropological conception of man as a historical, as a homo existentialis, is what Freud deals with ... the scientific idea of homo natura, man as nature, as a natural creature." 11

Thus Binswanger has put in the right light what today's aphorist by grace brought again, distilled and concentrated, succinctly to the formula with which now not only psychoanalysis, but scientific psychology in general is described. We owe them to the recently deceased, unique Nicolás Gómez Dávila:

"Every scientific psychology is inherently wrong because it wants to understand that as an object, the very nature of which is to be a subject." 12

But back to Freud. So he had read that lecture by his so dubious friend Binswanger and then felt compelled to thank him in writing for it, but also to put him in his place on this occasion. In other words: The fundamental question mark that Binswanger had placed behind Freud's life's work had to be eradicated by means of a targeted counterattack, and the damage that would otherwise be expected to psychoanalysis had to be warded off. I mean: This letter from

Sigmund Freud, dated Oct. 8, 1936, sent from Berggasse 19 in Vienna, in the IX. District, may claim to be called "historic". As you will soon hear, I obtained the formulations of my title from him. I quote:

"Dear friend!

What a nice surprise your lecture was! Those who had listened to it and reported to me were visibly unaffected; it must have been too difficult for them too. In reading I enjoyed your beautiful diction, your erudition, the scope of your horizon, the tact in contradiction. As is well known, one can tolerate unmeasured amounts of praise.

Of course I don't believe you. I only ever stayed on the ground floor and in the basement of the building. They claim that if you change your point of view, you will also see an upper floor where such distinguished guests as religion, art and others live. You are not the only one in it, most cultural representatives of Homo natura think so. You're conservative in that, I'm revolutionary. If I still had a working life ahead of me, I would dare to give those highborn a place to live in my low house. I have found it for religion since I came across the category of "collective neurosis". But we'll probably talk past each other and our dispute will only settle down centuries later. With warm friendship ... "13

His friend Binswanger, who reported on a visit to Freud in Vienna in April 1913, told us how Freud thought of billing a higher human fortune in those vaulted cellars in which psychology is at home. At that time he had visited Freud with Paul Häberlin, the philosopher whom many remember today only because of his friendship with Walter Benjamin. For his part, Häberlin left his memories of this visit to Binswanger, who shared them with us in his little book, "Memories of Sigmund Freud". I quote:

After Häberlin had opposed "Freud's derivation of the phenomenon of conscience ("censorship") in an interview," but Freud stuck to his view, and after Freud had asked his guest "whether Kant's 'thing in itself' is not the same as what he (Freud) 'understands' by the unconscious, what Häberlin had laughingly denied, as goes without saying, Freud said .. "Philosophy is one of the most decent forms of sublimation of repressed sexuality, nothing more." Thereupon Häberlin asked "the counter question", "what then is science, and in particular psychoanalytic psychology." 14

So much for a small, entertaining deviation, as it is advisable in the context of a long-winded lecture, especially when it is nearing the end ... At the same time, however, I would like to use the opportunity to explain that I am in this conflict on the side of Binswanger and his analysis of existence, i.e. with a view to the question: whether people now belong in the basement, i.e. must be understood as children of the same and lifelong cellar, or whether they belong in the lighter rooms of the mezzanine, where a philosopher can offer them new outlook and views.

Above all, however, and with that I allow myself to put a thesis that, at worst, can be understood as a declaration of war on depth psychotherapy, but above all they are by no means up there, on that higher floor, as Freud does suggest in a sugary tone of voice, only "distinguished guests", but there are cynics among them, cunning, hard-nosed, embittered, life-disappointed, outright scoundrels behind the facade of bourgeois propriety; there are depraved people and all-and-everything-negatives among them; fearful and desperate people, those who have lost the courage to live after their experiences; there are those who think they have finished with everything and have everything behind them, who may have passed themselves by for a lifetime and are no longer close to themselves; there are sober and disillusioned ones who now cannot find a way back into a life that they approve of, found a better future and held out the prospect of a better future; then virtues rub against vices and even more often, in the spirit of resentment, these rub against those (even if the corresponding terms are no longer in vogue ...); there are weak ones who suffer from their weakness, and the strong who do not know what to do with their strength; there are supposedly gifted people who lack the simplest wisdom of

life, so that they become everyday failures, and experts who lack education. We also meet religiously neglected people there who have got lost in the mazes of esotericism. As you know, we can go on and on and enumerate who is looking for help, advice, but primarily enlightenment, from the practical philosopher, on how they got into their misery. Last but not least, there is good and bad up there, on the upper, noble floor, as has always been the case.

But all of this creates conflicts that seem extremely tragic, which requires us to understand them as tragic conflicts and to appreciate them in this way. However, these are conflicts that do not arise from a collision of the lower forces, i.e. the basement and basement powers, but rather those "high-born" on the upper floor or the "mezzanine of personality" get entangled in these conflicts, which means: there are collisions of the mind, of conceptions, judgments, of self-images and assumptions about the meaning and course of this world. Last but not least, there are ideological controversies in the broadest sense, with the addition of worldview, are neither harmless nor mere "theories", because, depending on how I see the world, I understand the world, so I will act, I will feel belonging to some, rejecting others as strangers.

For a consultation, however, this means: What entangles people, as Thielicke said, in conflicts and in some cases makes life difficult for them, possibly making it unbearable, are not infrequently their best sides, their most decisive, most justified convictions, their real moral qualities that do not require therapeutic moderation, for a lazy balance, for life peace, but strengthening possibly even if this life becomes coloured with tragedy.

It is a good moment to quote Georg Christoph Lichtenberg again, from whom I wanted to borrow the motto from the beginning. Otherwise I quote him far too little, and yet I owe him so much. Lichtenberg gave Philosophical Practice one of its principles, of which I believe that the experience of forty years of engagement in counseling has strengthened it, so that it is now even more solid and unshakable than ever before.

Lichtenberg himself calls what I would like to quote from him as a principle, a "golden rule". And it goes like this:

"A golden rule: Don't judge people by their opinions, but by what these opinions make of them."
15

You may have to listen twice to appreciate this wise recommendation. But that means: the opinions that people hold "make something of them". And that is true. Conversely, this means: If we win a person on the path of insight, through the acquisition of another, we say: a more differentiated view of things that teaches him to look at life in a more diverse, more colorful way, perhaps from different, complementary perspectives, if we win a person in such a way, to revise his opinions and views, to refine, to sensitize them, to expand their scope, to insert their view into further horizons, we change them at the same time and we promote their advantages, and that means: His best virtues, and those are those that have always been respected: thoughtfulness, prudence, circumspection, the ability and willingness to weigh wisely, the determination to stand up for what has been recognized as right and to remain valiantly with what is considered good. That he remains loyal to what, according to his most conscientious consideration, ultimately and all in all, is important, to what he really, that is, emphatically wants.

In the best case, however, this is what he understands as: It wants to be willed by me. That's more than just wanting. That means: fulfilling what is intended for me.

It all boils down to a correction of Marvin Minsky's subtle thought ... "Thinking affects our thoughts." 16

That's right, I am tempted to say. But the reverse is also true and is the actual hope associated with philosophical practice: Thoughts influence thinking. Let's hope I'm right about that.

Now, however, as you will have noticed, there was no mention of the “transcendental clouds” - a word creation that, as far as I know, we owe to my teacher Odo Marquard. But this is a dark, possibly even a sad chapter. Whereby it is certainly not necessary to explain to philosophical practitioners who is meant by this: the theory-content, primarily self-occupied academic philosophy. They know nothing about those basement floors of the human and do not want to know anything about it, and in the mezzanine they only meet one another, which can be arranged in a lofty tone and in a climate of appreciative collegiality and may remind some of the old guild spirit. Perhaps, with regard to these, compared to us, noble and accurate colleagues, I will leave it with the simple hint of what once let me flee from their elaborate realms when I was pregnant with the idea of philosophical practice. That was a thought I got from C.G. Jung, and which could be reproduced as follows: "Inadequate theories" can be "put up with for a very long time" unless we tried them out in practice". Well, philosophical practice, on the other hand, is now the touchstone and thus the real case of philosophy, insofar as it has to prove itself in the encounter with people who turn to it and expect something, often a lot, sometimes too much from it.

With this in mind, dear colleagues: have the courage to make use of your philosophical faculties where required. With this I greet you all from Königsberg and thank you at the same time.

Footnotes & References

- 1 Plutarch, *Moralia* 467/6.
- 2 Alain, “The Duty to Be Happy,” p. 156.
- 3 See the article “Practice; Philosophische ”by Odo Marquard, in: *Historical Dictionary of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, Column 1307f, also available online here: https://www.achenbach-pp.de/de/philosophischepraxis_text_marquard_Woerterbuch.asp. Also: The “Chronicle of Philosophical Practice. 1981-1994 ”: https://www.achenbach-pp.de/papers/archiv_chronik_philosophische_praxis_1981-1995.pdf.
- 4 Lichtenberg, works in one volume, Hamburg undated, p. 73.
- 5 Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, Vol. II, Munich-Vienna 1992, p. 321 [No. 1770].
- 6 Goethe, *Hamb. Edition* vol. 12, p. 440.
- 7 *The French Moralists*, ed. v.F.Schalk, Vol. I, Munich 1973, p. 83.
- 8 Thibon, *Nietzsche and Johannes vom Kreuz*, Paderborn 1957, p. 44.
- 9 Plotinus, *Enneades* IV, L. 4, c. 35.
- 10 Thielicke, *Religion in today's society*, in: *Kindler's Enzyklopädie Der Mensch*, Vol. VI., P. 818.
- 11 Binswanger, *Selected Lectures and Articles*, Vol. I, Bern 1947, p. 159.
- 12 Nicolás Gómez Dávila, *Notas. Untimely thoughts*, Berlin 2006, p. 44. 2
- 13 Sigmund Freud, *Ludwig Binswanger, Correspondence 1908-1938*, ed. v. G. Fichtner, Frankfurt a.M. 1992, pp. 236f.
- 14 Binswanger, *Memories of Sigmund Freud*, Bern 1956, p.19f.
- 15 Lichtenberg, Vol. I, p. 789 [No. 966].
- 16 Marvin Minsky, *Mentopolis*, Stuttgart 1990, p. 58.
- 17 C.G. Jung, *Goals of Psychotherapy*, in: *Collected Works* Vol. XVI, p. 40.