

Lectures on contemporary philosophy
for doctoral students of the Institute of Physical Chemistry,
Polish Academy of Sciences

I. Consumer society and the morals

- a. The emergence of consumer society changes the morals of individuals. Means and measures that so far have been supporting the formation of the individual's self-knowledge and the individual's autonomy of action disappear in line with changes in the social reality – the culture has commercialised. The works of sociologists, such as Baumann, Giddens, Eriksen, etc., indicate that elimination of ethical values from the life of an individual is followed by a further and further reaching decomposition of the individual's identity, contributing to consumer attitudes. An individual treated as a consumer becomes a product himself in the market of consumers. Sociological studies monitor the changes taking place in this area and allow for assessment of change in the meaning of concepts that are constitutive for the understanding who is, or rather who was the man: individuality, identity, responsibility, freedom, happiness, commitments towards the society, science, art and broader - culture.
- b. The necessary measures for creating and maintaining identity. The most important one is the duty to get to know oneself. As to this obligation, it is worthy to refer to the ideas of the philosophers: Kant, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Ricoeur, Spaemann, etc. The philosophers have understood the self-knowledge as the knowledge of traits an individual identifies with, i.e., a certain attitude paradigm or the life style, and as an insight into oneself. Both traits of the identity are important, nevertheless the second one – insight into oneself – seems to be more fundamental.
- c. The consequences of giving up the duty to be oneself – the awareness that we are individuals. Replacing the sense of the individual autonomy with a network of mutual contacts and interrelationships. „I” and „you” transform into „we”, meaning a community, groups of sports fans, rock group's fans, homosexuals, political party members, etc. The present-day world offers humans unprecedented richness of opportunities to create oneself, one's own identity; it does not need norms, ideals. It's enough to choose behaviour, clothes, and the way of spending free time, etc., to smoothly define the identity developing in time.

Discussion of questions

Do we need reflection, the duty to get to know oneself, to experience values that give us a sense to the meaning of life?

Is creating of one's own style of conduct inseparable from the concept of the good?

In shaping our lives in moral aspects, do we have to have a certain vision of the good, of what is valuable by itself, what we should love and admire?

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II. Theory of language

With the rapid development of empirical language sciences in 19th and 20th century philosophy started to focus on language. Comparative studies have shown a constitutive role of language that forms a spirit of human communities and determines thinking. The language is not only a means of communication, but also shapes our thoughts and perception. German logician and mathematician Gotlob Frege authored and substantiated the statement on the explanatory primacy of language over thought. Traditional philosophical questions about the structure of being (ontology), the foundations of moral life (ethics), or the consciousness (epistemology) have been transformed into the questions about conditions of understanding propositions and about meaning, as well as about the use of such words as: consciousness, necessity, freedom, good, truth, beauty, etc.

Discussion of questions

Are we so restricted by grammatical structures of our language that we cannot get out of the categorisations fixed in the language's grammatical structure?

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III. Problems of the theory of science

The problems of the development of science, the structure of scientific theory, verification and falsification of hypotheses, rationality of knowledge, truth, etc., are among the central topics of the contemporary philosophy and incessantly accompany science. They are addressed by science methodologists, historians, philosophising physicists, mathematicians, biologists, etc. It is enough to mention the works by Popper, Quine, Kuhn, Lakatos, Feyerabend. The discussions did not lead to a unanimous picture of science. Disputable are not only the details: relationship between theory and observation, methods of justification, but also the basic concepts: confirmability, validity, background of knowledge, incomparability of theories, etc. We do not know, in fact, what is the exact meaning of the term „science”. We are not able to decide without hesitation, which elements of knowledge – physics, biology, history, sociology – fall under the notion of science, and which do not (A. Chalmers, *What Is This Thing Called Science*, in Polish: *Co zwiemy nauką*, transl. A. Chmielewski, Wrocław 1993, p. 208).

Discussion of questions

Do we have a clear criterion separating science from non-science?

What factors are to be considered in defining the content of the notion of „science”?

If we do not have a clear criterion of scientificity, is then everything justified in science – every conception of science and of scientific method?

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