



Mira Meksi

Philosophy between fragility and... indispensability

Mira Meksi regrets the state of philosophy publishing in Albania: secondary literature abounds but the original works themselves remain untranslated, and publishers operate a scattergun approach, lacking any sense of historical development in the field and responding entirely to intellectual fashion.

Recently, in Albania, some important philosophical works have been put into circulation, though in minimal numbers compared to publications in other fields. This prompts me to approach the connection between the presence and the role of philosophy in our country. Viewed in retrospect, the presence of philosophical editions in our cultural space is extremely fragile. This fragility is clearly shown through the almost total absence of philosophically authentic series. To date, philosophical works have been published only sporadically.

Besides this, the selection of these books does not follow criteria and a structure, much less a clear and well-defined strategy for the presentation of this field within normal dialectics. We are faced with such phenomena as the ability to find any book on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, while at the same time the works themselves that are the object of these studies still do not exist in the Albanian language. Furthermore, we may encounter another phenomenon, in which a publisher publishes a text by Aristotle, followed by a work by Ortega Y Gasset, or even visa versa: they might publish a work, for example, by Nietzsche, and immediately afterwards circulate a work of Plutarch.

This phenomenon, which makes it possible to skim past whole periods of philosophical development and their key representative works, creates a kind of confusion for the reader, further testament to the lack of an authentic strategy and a publishing programme. What could possibly be the reason for the absence of such a strategy, of a well-structured programme of philosophical editions in the light of historical development, thematically or following the worldview of these developments, which ends with a series of philosophical edition that amounts to more than simply a handful of titles, but rather the selection and publications according to a fixed order? Personally, I think that it is for more than one reason.

First, the absence of an authentic publishing programme is directly related to our publishers following impenetrable criteria for publishing philosophical works. The overwhelming majority of such editions are clearly the fruit of chance, rather than a systematic programme of the publishing houses. This is perhaps related to a kind of scepticism that publishers display towards these works. More often than not, our publishers target "fashionable" philosophical works to the market; for instance, they launch editions of Nietzsche, as he

remains one of the most scandalous philosophers (and the "fashion" is connected precisely to scandal), without any attempt to provide readers with the works of previous thinkers, thereby masking the fact that besides the originality of Nietzsche's thought, there is also the influence by and reaction to forerunning and contemporary philosophers. This makes the reception of Nietzsche's thought difficult: somewhere between half-comprehension and incomprehension.

Another reason is perhaps connected with the difficulties faced in the translation of philosophical works. I express this with full understanding of the difficulties of this task (perhaps one of the most difficult in the field of translation), but not its impossibility. The Albanian language, apart from the zigzag of its development, has shown its ability to express, and has in itself genuine philosophical notions and concepts, running directly through time to its renewal, enrichment, and cultivation.

As far this part of this problem is concerned, we can say that philosophical texts often bring to Albanian, alongside the difficulties of the subject matter, the difficulties of language reception, due to insufficient work and the evident lack of culture possessed by the majority of translators. In this way, a philosophical work translated into Albanian is doubly exposed to difficulty: first in reception and second in the obscurity of linguistic expression. This creates not only misunderstanding and an invitation to philosophically mistaken concepts, but also a kind of scepticism, and furthermore a kind of indifference and prejudice on the part of the reader towards philosophy itself. The role of philosophy does not depend so much on the essence of the philosophy itself, but rather on the space around it and approach to it, and ultimately on the way in which we conceive of it. If approached with indifference and prejudice, there is no doubt that the role played by philosophy will be small indeed. This is happening in Albania, where philosophy, as already mentioned, has a fragile existence.

In our times, due to the poor quality of most translations, there exists a kind of scepticism and prejudice in connection to philosophy. The reader reaches the point of considering the reading of a philosophical work a waste of time or an unattainable luxury. This happens not only with the simple reader, but also with a portion of specialised readers, who in many cases have not hesitated to show contempt towards the classics of this field. Such is the case with the jury of the annual literature competition organised by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, which refuses to consider a work such as Plato's Symposium on the official grounds that "it is a philosophical work". This is to say that it is not a cultural work, meanwhile bringing to light the fact that a second work of the kind will not be available in an Albanian translation for a long, long time!

Faced with such scepticism, prejudicial inspiration and superficial attitudes towards philosophy, we again pose the question: do we really need philosophy? Is its presence indispensable in the life and culture of a society? Undoubtedly yes. But, in order to support this answer, I want to emphasise that the time has come to be conscious of the fact that philosophy is not merely a field in which theories of knowledge are cultivated, or the nature and scale of human knowledge is investigated, but also a "hope and a social goal incarnated in a definite programme" (Dewey). Its role is not to make us change what we think of the world and others, but how to think of the world and others. In this context, the presence of philosophy emerges as indispensable; it greatly assists not only people's formation of different life perspectives, but also the

formation of society and the emancipation of its mindset. "Philosophy is a necessity for a thinking spirit. In this sense, it is not a luxury; it is a necessity for those with a desire to think", says Hegel, adding: "In order for philosophy to be cultivated, people need to have achieved a certain level of intellectual formation."

In a society many people certainly exist who, in one way or another, have managed to establish a sustainable relationship with the works in this field. Nevertheless, to change and advance, individual cultivation plays no role whatsoever. To change the behaviour, attitudes and worldview of a society, changing the mindset of an individual or group of individuals is not sufficient. What is required is change of, if not all, at least of the majority of a society, and that would be greatly facilitated by the ongoing presence of philosophy and philosophical editions at highest level.

Such a thing is well understood by anyone who has lived under a totalitarian regime. Before the 1930s, the few translations in philosophy that existed were mostly related to social and cultural factors, and predominantly lacked specialised language. This was resolved step by step, reaching a peak during the 1930s, when Albanian readers had the opportunity to read distinguished thinkers of both western and eastern worlds in their mother tongue for the first time. During these same years, we notice a series of radical developments and changes affecting intellectual and spiritual life. However during the years of the totalitarian regime, translations in this field were progressively and appreciably reduced, driven by ideological factors as well as cultural politics, thus strictly following a predefined and well detailed programme from the politically powered caste.

Regarding ideological factors, it is well known that in the Albania of "intensive scrutiny", all those philosophers reflecting on differences and controversies with the ideological thinking of the regime were "prohibited". It could not have been otherwise, since unlike other ex-communist bloc satellite countries, in communist Albania, just as in Maoist China, the political caste, wholly uncultivated in the field of philosophy, afraid that the "prohibited" would eventually emerge, instead of devaluing the prohibited, tended to make the vague theories and ideas of its ideologues randomly serve as "ingenious" or "historically trailblazing", as the most advanced thought.

Concerning the factor of cultural policies, the history of humanity through the centuries has clearly shown that it is not in the interests of the ruling class to have ruled subjects who are wise, developed in thinking and reasoning. From this perspective, I believe even a quick reading of the views expressed by Pausanias in Plato's Symposium (182b–d) would suffice. "In an intellectually prepared society, the possibility of kneeling down is many times smaller; nonetheless, it is worth saying that the true roots of submission to power usually lie in the darkness of ignorance and false mysticism."

With all of the above said, I believe that the message is clear: the time has come for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports to begin to fulfil its role as "co-ordinator of publishing and cultural initiatives" with a sense of responsibility, to more actively undertake a range of cultural policies, to show that we are in a democracy, and in a country where philosophy can be cultivated.

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