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Стаття «Філософія як інтелектуальна ініціатива» присв'ячена осмисленню особливого статусу філософії в наші дні та значення її академічного спадку щодо пошуків шляхів розвитку творчого і незалежного мислення.

Ключеві слова: філософія, навчання, гра, квест

Статья «Философия как интеллектуальная инициатива» посвящена размышлению об особом статусе философии в наши дни и о значении её академического наследия для поиска путей развития творческого и независимого мышления.

Ключевые слова: философия, обучение, игра, квест

The article is devoted to reflection on the specific status of philosophy in our days and the significance of its academic heritage for contemporary challenges that inspire for searching ways of developing creative and independent thinking.

Key words: philosophy, education, game, quest

Philosophy always speaks on primary, urgent, and vital things. However, as long as philosophy exists it is reproached for its perplexing overcomplication of simple things and detachment from reality. Such reproaches equally go to both pure academic philosophy and the philosophical life style though there are plenty of apologetic arguments for both.

The academic tradition in philosophy comes from and is relayed as questioning and as approaching a teacher for knowledge and wisdom. This determines the cultural status and social role of philosophy – it turns any human being into a disciple, even if his/her status is that of a founder of a teaching. Philosophical inquiry, whether it concerns fundamental objects or the superficial things of daily life represented through the game of its signs, ever turns us to diverging series of feasible and reasonable motives multiplied by our expectations or acceptable suppositions. So the space between suppositions and propositions appears to be too wide and that is why communication in philosophical discourse becomes possible only for those who are wandering in this labyrinth not too far from each other. But the very opportunity of entering this area depends on the readiness to be puzzled and an ability to respond to provocations. This makes gaming technique or game like a method of thinking and getting knowledge quite important for contemporary philosophy.

“Quest” has recently become a wide spread form of business training and also a kind of entertainment. Because of its use of representation and strategy, it can also be implemented as an educational game, aimed at improving analytic

and creative thinking, and fostering communication within group work. One of the difficulties that teachers of philosophy face is communicating the philosophical heritage in both its meaning and its applicability to everyday life to students coming from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of time for even a basic program, much less additional special courses, in the Ukrainian educational system, as well as the persistence of a Marxist ideological schemes of teaching. The communication of the content of the philosophical heritage, required by both the standards of higher education and the tradition of philosophical development, is a necessity; however, overcoming the suspicion of philosophy in its connections to ideology and supposed separation from “real life” requires integrating philosophical discoveries into everyday life through the use of new forms.

The original motivation behind organizing a philosophical foot-quest at our Polytechnical University was to address these issues and to shape an entertaining form of presentation for the students, but the experience of preparing and carrying out the quests provided new methodological solutions for ordinary teaching, and had unexpected results for the involved professor’s professional growth. During the foot-quest there is an almost carnivalesque moment, a turning point of views on themes and problems, and of students’ values, priorities, and abilities. The search for “moves” in the development of the tasks making up the quest provided new and unusual prompts for later classroom discussions. It also motivated students to think on their own, initiating their creativity and research interests. Despite the game format, students seem to be much more focused and serious than they typically are in a usual class structure. This may be due to the students’ immersion in philosophical problems represented as a series of tasks and riddles during the quest.

For a foot-quest the whole of the university’s territory becomes a game area with previously chosen points (free lecture rooms, laboratories, corridors, outdoor spaces, etc.) at which game agents give tasks to players and, if the players are successful, a task-riddle that leads to the next point and the next agent. The starting and finishing times are marked for each team, with the fastest team winning. The general time results are modified with the subtraction of some minutes for exceptionally bright solutions or the addition of some minutes for incorrect solutions. The games usually run for four or five hours, and were organized outside of regular class times.

“Quest” is an extracurricular activity, but as we usually have more interested students than available resources there is a month long preparation for students that also acts as a selection process. A month before the game the quest theme is announced. The basic tasks for preparation for the quest requires learning about specific philosophical trends, terms, and notions, and reading additional

literature or viewing films. At the end of the selection process we typically have twelve to fifteen teams of five, which is the optimal number of players. We have found that although there can be different numbers of players on the teams, since the quest conditions should be equal for all the teams the quest runs more effectively if there is the same number of players on each team. Each team develops its own name and logo for registration.

To date, the philosophy department of the Odessa Polytechnical University (Ukraine) has run four quests with three teachers and a few senior student assistants: “Philosophy begins from surprise,” “Welcome to reality,” “Language games – games of mind,” and “Homo ex machina.” Each subject sets its own conceptual accents and methodological solutions for the game’s plot, style, structure, and content. For example, in the preparatory work during the selective tasks for “Language games – games of mind” students were asked to design advertising posters for a philosophical trend – analytic, scientism, hermeneutics, structuralism, semiology, etc. – in order to find a corresponding visual form for ideas about linguistics. The use of marketing strategies for the purpose of delving into the question of language may seem suspect, but it was pertinent given the contemporary economical orientation of specialized thinking. (One is even reminded that Kant himself did not exclude the wager as a method of estimating judgments.) The selective task for the quest “Homo ex machina” was to create a visual expression (photo-collage or poster) or write a short essay on the theme “Myths, superstitions, and rites of the machine age.”

For the quest “Language games – games of mind” we selected the most significant conceptual and theoretical points of linguistic philosophy: the constitution of reality in language games; the correlations between language and speech, verbal and non-verbal parlances; the correlation of sign, meaning, and sense; sense and interpretation; the war among languages; language as a form of life, etc. This allowed us to draw up the structure of the quest: the content and sequence of stages that represented the structures of language and understanding in symbolic form. In order to make the game structure foreseeable for players all the teams got a specially decorated instruction card at the start, which marked the direction of their way in the game with famous quotes or aphorisms:

“The most energetic language is the one, where a sign speaks before any speech...”

“In the beginning there was the Word...”

“Language is determined not by what it lets, but what it makes tell...”

“Deep inside the speech there is the hidden sense...”

“To imagine any language is to imagine a form of life...”

During the first stage the teams had to execute a task on “vidioms” – a game based on Pictionary but with idioms on the intellect, mind, and language for prompts. After working with idioms, the students worked with aporia or paradoxes – Achilles and the tortoise, the paradox of the liar, and others – and took a photo or video of their vidioms. The best afterwards had time taken off their total game time. Another task was to expose illusions or visual “puns” in Dali’s and Escher’s pictures.

During the second stage there were tasks on word-formation and on the derivation of sense from puns and word combinations. The latter, for example, looked at certain words that players had to put together into meaningful verse: code, delirium, contradiction, and rite.

To play with conceptions of linguistic philosophy, we chose the well-known tales of Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland,” A. Miln’s retelling of “Winnie the Pooh,” and Kozlov’s “Hedgehog in the Mist” for students to reread before the beginning of the game. The familiarity of Russian speaking audiences with these texts and the openness of the texts to multiple interpretations were important for developing the sense of play necessary for the quest. The use of three works prompted us to divide the teams into three possible paths after the first stage: Alice’s path, Winnie the Pooh’s path, and the Hedgehog’s path. This allowed us to make the quest into a multi-vector one, thereby greatly increasing the versions of the tasks. The style of presenting the task and the agents’ work were developed according to the version of the task.

Some of the tasks were conceived to combine several items representing language games – play on signs or symbols, correlation among signs and between sign and cliché, puns, sense transformation, war of languages, and others. The real difficulty was finding an appropriate symbolic form for such purpose. As each of the tales has the same personage – Rabbit (Rabbit in “Winnie the Pooh,” the White Rabbit in “Alice in Wonderland,” and Hare in the “Hedgehog”) – the teams had to find and identify the one from their path tale among three true Rabbits and fifteen false rabbit-agents having apparent rabbit attributes: signed with long ears, pictures of rabbits, toy rabbits, and so on. Of course, only the true Rabbits had specific marks based on their descriptions in the tales. Besides this all our rabbit-agents had to move over the university’s outdoor territory in order to enact the troubles in searching and correlating eluding signs. The search for the true agent revealed how much our minds and our thinking depends on stereotypes and clichés of perception, and social and cultural patterns of expounding signs. In addition to fulfilling the task given by the true agents, the teams had to find the same agent for a second time and for another task. Of course, the agent had already changed his location – in such way we tried to demonstrate the elusiveness of sense. The search for the true

rabbit-agents also gave rise to many funny situations when teams chose a false rabbit-agent and had to do an absurd task, finally receiving dismissal with the auction house cliché “May you win next time!”

At this stage the task was to work on the texts to see “the war of languages” For the first part students had to identify the abstract of their text out of the three (which had been radically changed). For the second part of their task the students had to restore the initial text from a transformed abstract of their tale in which technical and scientific term and expressions had been substituted for words and phrases. Students had to figure out the alien formulas and return as closely to the original text as they could.

In our age, the sheer volume of available information and data constrains people to rely on trends and pre-existing structures in reading and receiving information to make sense of the otherwise overwhelming amount of data. People lose the ability to trace, to single out something significant by themselves. For this reason the quests were designed to force players to be extremely attentive to signs and hidden information in riddles. For example, each Alice path team received a doughnut wrapped in a piece of paper covered in numbers and letters that resolved into the code of the room they had to go to next. Similar papers covered pots for the Winnie path teams. Most of the teams assumed the papers were unimportant and tried to find the essential information inside the doughnut or pot – a few of the teams even threw their papers away and had to return to look for them. In other cases teams were given a letter of referral having a special mistake in its text or picture; the “mistake” revealed the right way to the next point.

Our quests always have a communication task in which players have to get a specific response from strangers. For the “Language games – games of mind” quest players had to find some language code (special words, phrases, emotional expressions) to persuade a stranger to do something quite unusual; for example, to loudly recite one of Winnie the Pooh’s poems at the nearest bus stop. An agent-onlooker (the team doesn’t know who it is) ascertains the completion of the task and gives out the next letter of referral or instructions. This kind of task was helpful for some of the younger players in getting over their reticence and diffidence.

In order to fulfil the task of interpreting a text players had to address to Psychoanalyst or Hermeneut (with teachers in these roles) who gave the players the abstract of corresponding tale and a shot instruction to find out its veiled sense according to psychoanalytical or hermeneutic procedures. In case the team failed it had an opportunity to ask only one specializing question for help.

The last stage of the “Language games – games of mind” quest was “To imagine any language is to imagine a form of life...” in which the teams had to restore thirty key words representing XX century civilization by the “remains of an etymological dictionary” which had only clarifications and none of the very words to be clarified (30 according to the number of letters in the Cyrillic alphabet). This part of the quest was inspired by Peter Ackroyd’s “The Plato Papers.” The fastest team could get time taken off by making what they saw as the most important symbol of our civilization out of plasticine while the other teams finished with the dictionary task.

The “dictionary” task was conceived as training for work on formal logical concepts and also as an approach to the concept of “trace” in deconstructive philosophy. The exercise of forming the symbol was aimed at bringing students to an understanding of identity. The image of a computer or its display was the most popular form, but there were also “1” and “0” representing binary thinking, “The Man in a Cave” as a symbol of loneliness and estrangement, “A Finger Pushing the Red Button” as a symbol of living under civilizational conflicts. So some of the players managed to see how rational principles generate contemporary technicism and its consequences.

This exercise urged us to select and expose to reflection conceptual points and theoretical principles of technical thinking and their humanitarian consequences in our next foot-quest “Homo ex machine.” This quest was concerned with the correlation between the artificial and the natural; mechanical and organic ways of thinking; algorithmic and heuristic styles of thinking, etc. The machine age developed specific relationships between the machine and the human being, resulting in man’s self-alienation, the overcoming of the “human factor” in technological progress. And, vice versa, we have the anthropomorphization of technical devices and even the moralization of machine functions (as if a device could have a will for good or evil)¹, the shaping of human life patterns by machine patterns, and the aesthetization of the machine. These points were taken for developing the content and structure of the game, which goal was to bring students to the recognition of the background, mainsprings, and the power of technical thinking. Some motifs, themes, and hints for the quest came from works popular among students such as “The Matrix” and “The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy” by Douglas Adams and others.

Quests have proved to offer valuable experience and a matter for analyses. To be sure, the class format enables students to develop many necessary skills – to distinguish between the essential and the accidental, to identify the problem and its possible solutions, to make conclusions taking into account different arguments or approaches and so on. However, the quest format sets up a

provocative, and much more active and vivid condition for developing these skills. The undoubted advantage of the foot-quest is that students are actively immersed in a living space while searching for solutions, and not isolated in a university room. Of course, the game area has its own conventions and limitations, but despite these the special atmosphere created by the quest conditions intensifies the players’ keenness of observation, and creative and critical thinking.

The work of putting together a quest presents real challenges for teachers as it demands quite new points of view on known subjects, ideas, and trends, to direct the imagination to solutions, presenting the project, finding links among different conceptions, designing the tasks and judging the participants. Thus quest has also proved to be a rather effective way of teaching teachers.

¹It should be noted that the Greek “mechanike” and the English “device” have further connotations of “trick” or “ruse.”