

RECENSIONES / BOOK REVIEWS / RECENZJE

Między Mitem a Logosem. Europejski podręcznik filozofii
[Between the Myth and the Logos. The European Textbook of Philosophy], Warszawa 2000, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2000, 296 p.

Redakcja naukowa: L. Dreyer, G. Goedert i M. Muck.

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There is a difficulty in distinguishing the cultural heritage of Europe from the cultures deriving from the European tradition. They do not want to be regarded as the provinces under the European domination. This is not the only problem which emerges when we describe European civilization as a product of Greek and Christian traditions. The authors of the textbook entitled *Between the Myth and the Logos* were confronted with much greater difficulty, namely, with the need of defining what in the European philosophy and culture makes a whole, and what stays apart from this unity and determines the unique character of the currents of thought specific for different European regions and countries. It was essential therefore to select philosophers and their works in such a way, that the choice might reflect the unity of European philosophy and, at the same time, save the differences existing between philosophers and between methods of philosophy conditioned, to a certain extent, by the economical, political and cultural specificity of the European countries.

The authors do not inform us directly about such differences but they invite readers to discover them on their own, with the help of the numerous biographical notes and the specific textbook composition which, to tell the truth, is not very systematic. It is important to stress that this textbook was written with an idea of teaching the fundamental ways of philosophical thinking, i.e. for investigating the truth through continuous efforts to separate the *myth* from the *logos*. To achieve this

aim the authors present the basic philosophical ideas and their evolution starting from the beginnings of European philosophy in ancient Greece and closing with the contemporary struggle to answer the traditional questions. The attempt to systematize the textbook's content in view of the fundamental problems and not according to their historical evolution is nothing new; what is original is the presentation of these problems intended to show the fundamental spiritual identity of Europeans. The reader is not burdened by comparative analyses which in an unabridged form would give him knowledge on similarities and differences between the answers to the same questions given by different philosophers. He gains a chance of a personal discovery of these similarities and differences. The *Proposals of subject to workout* at the end of each chapter determine the additional help, together – as I have already said – with the extensive biographical notes on several philosophers. At this point, the authors mainly lay stress on the connection of the individual biographies both with the given epoch and, what is fairly important for the „European” textbook, with the historical circumstances with which every philosopher had to cope. Although these circumstances were as different as they only could be, the reader may easily notice that in spite of these sometimes extreme differences, the range of the fundamental problems and the general method of reaching a solution is basically the same.

One can blame the authors that the information which is included in the biograms is not too legible and that to understand them one needs sometimes an additional historical knowledge. However, it is difficult to consider it as a serious flaw of the textbook. Actually, its purpose consists not in teaching the history of philosophy or the political history of Europe. The lack of some historical data is unavoidable and should rather encourage an individual research. Nobody should recommend flooding the reader with a detailed information on historical facts which in the face of a great number of the presented philosophers would make an impression of chaos and might also cause that the biographical notes and comments would stop fulfilling their task.

Making it possible to discover the identity of the European culture is, nevertheless, one of the textbook's aims, but one can doubt whether it is the most important one. Moreover, the idea of European textbooks in itself may provoke an anxiety whether didactical aims do not remain dependent on the political aims which are determined by the need of unifying Europe. As the proper aim, independently of the way of reaching it, we can accept an aspiration to develop a right European consciousness. This will finally lead us to the cultural unification of Europeans. This is analogous to the economical and political process of

unification. We must not suspect anything wrong in such an aspiration, provided that the common sense will not be overstepped and that it does not adulterate reality in favor of a political correctness. The authors of the textbooks selected to be used in the countries of the united Europe must find the golden mean between overstressing this which is common and this which stimulates the consciousness of the beneficial differences. It might seem that the authors of *Between the Myth and the Logos* have managed to find perfectly that golden mean. This seems even more important when we take into our consideration the fact that among the academic disciplines, philosophy is certainly the most open to the influences of political ideologies.

Because the main aim of the textbook is to give possibility of teaching philosophy according to the European standards, it will be reasonable to ask what that European standard is and whether teaching philosophy in various European countries, based on textbooks written by the „local” authors, is different from teaching philosophy based on the „European” textbook. Provided that the European philosophy does really exist, there is another question that arises, namely whether teaching is possible in the other than all-European standard. The authors of *Between the Myth and the Logos* give the indirect answer to that question. It is evident that the basic canon of philosophical texts recognized as European is simply one. It appears less clear whether the way of the texts' interpretation and the way of giving answers to the traditional philosophical questions contained in these texts is the same as the one given at the same time, independently of language and culture, in formation of the less renowned European philosophers. The selected texts in the book prove that this is not the case.

The methodological indications assigned for philosophy teachers prove that the authors of *Between the Myth and Logos* do not want to Europeanize the secondary school students in an importune way. However, the authors recommend to interpret the texts placed in textbook directly after reading and according to the rules used by teachers of that definite country. This indication is of great importance, because it takes into consideration the fact that according to the teacher's point of view in several countries different interpretations of a same text will be accepted as appropriate. Though the textbook includes some suggestions which concern the individual students' elaboration, however, these matters will be submitted to various interpretations according to the understanding of the texts.

The main aim of the textbook was reached in unexpected simple way without using any artificial manipulations: the textbook mainly consists of the classical, ancient, Greek text fragments, which are supplemented in ingenious way by extracts from the nowadays or previous European

philosophy scripts. Even though there might be a question of the representative character of one or another philosopher from the later epochs for the philosophical Europeanism, still it seems nobody would deny that there is no European philosophy without the philosophical ideas of ancient Greece. Thanks to this measure, the authors of the textbook avoided the accusation of arbitrariness in deciding what is more or less European in the European philosophy. On the other hand a controversy may arise on the choice of modern „reflects” of classical philosophical problems.

While preparing the textbook destined for secondary school students, the authors had to choose the presented texts in an interesting manner, and in a way, which would not discourage students to this subject. The fact that in the textbook there are not such names as Sartre, Bergson, St. Thomas and many other renowned great European philosophers, comes from the basic task of the textbook, which is not – I repeat once again – teaching the European history of philosophy. The authors tried to persuade the students that the philosophical problems, which were brought up in ancient Greece, are still up to date and, according to the new contexts, they are still finding new solutions.

As the textbook is based on the ancient Greek philosophical texts, consequently it conveys the ideas connected with understanding of the most essential task of philosophical investigation. In a way which is characteristic to the ancient Greek mentality philosophy is presented by the authors as a continuous struggle of intellect against myth. By these means the authors tried to overcome another stereotype concerning Greek philosophy, i. e. the belief that philosophy begins at the point where mythology ends. However, while it is difficult not to agree with this standpoint, there is no way, both in Greek and later European philosophy until today, to discern clearly enough the borderline between mythological and philosophical reality explanation. Therefore, the fragments of the texts were chosen to expose the mutual penetration of *myth* and *logos* in European mentality. This approach seems to appear fairly bold and, may be, even too risky. It might have aroused violent protests in philosophical circles one hundred years ago. The contemporary crisis of the rational philosophy revealed, however, that „the trending away from *logos* and the increased interests in myth” should be inscribed in European spirituality together with the never-ending efforts to extend the concept of reality accessible to *logos*' rule. The optimistic conviction that the main trend of European philosophy is rationality seems premature, and the authors of *Between the Myth and Logos* had managed to recognize this state of affairs.