

Truth, Representation and Interpretation: The Popper Case

Gerard Stan
Al.I. Cuza University of Iasi

Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine several points of reference regarding the way in which Karl Popper built up his philosophical discourse. I locate two specific ways in which Popper interpreted and used ideas belonging to other philosophers. Thus I distinguish in Popper between a projective hermeneutics (where the author uses a thesis that forms a part of his own philosophy in order to reconstruct and understand the ideas of another philosopher) and an ideological hermeneutics (where he uses a statement expressing an interest of the community whereof he is a member in order to interpret and reconstruct the text of another philosopher). In so doing I also highlight the considerable asymmetry between a representationalist hermeneutics, and a projective and, respectively, an ideological one. Whereas in the first case the interpreter wishes to unveil a truth about the philosophical text, in the other two he is rather expressing a desire to talk about himself, his own beliefs and convictions, or about the beliefs of his community of reference.

Key words: Popper, truth, interpretation, representationalist hermeneutics, projective hermeneutics, ideological hermeneutics, beliefs

If we were to make a rough conceptual distinction which is often used (especially by the historians of philosophy) between the various styles of philosophical reflections, we could say that there are purely constructive philosophies, *on the one hand* and polemic philosophies that extract their substance from the interpretation and critical evaluation of texts and arguments proposed by other philosophers, *on the other hand*. In this paper, I aim at investigating the logical hermeneutical strategies that helped Karl Popper to articulate his own

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philosophical discourse. The Austrian philosopher built a type of philosophy that could be easily included in the latter aforementioned category. This does not mean that Popper's philosophy lacks a constructive dimension; on the contrary, it has one. However, it seems that the way in which the Austrian philosopher understood to approach a series of texts, arguments or conceptual distinctions proposed along the history of philosophy turns his philosophy into a successful instance of polemic philosophy. The analysis of the way in which Popper articulated his own discourse is only a pretext for carrying out a series of investigations on more general and important issues such as evaluating what is specific to the interpretation of philosophical texts and the extent to which this activity may be subordinated to the more general activity of finding the truth. The thesis I claim is that in the interpreting activity, the interpreter does not have to seek any truth, but rather several appropriate ways to express his own interests or the interest of his community.

My approach will be carried out along several paths: *firstly*, I will make a short imaginary experiment and I will try to see how a history of philosophy written by Karl Popper would look like. *Secondly*, this enterprise will help me establish the articulations of the method of interpretation used by Popper when selecting from the texts of other philosophers, the themes or arguments he analyzed and critically debated on. *Thirdly*, starting from Popper's method of interpretation, I will try to evaluate a fundamental issue for any theory of interpretation: to what extent does truth play or can play the role of a regulative idea of interpretation? Based on this, I will distinguish between two different types of hermeneutics: *representational hermeneutics* (that tries to offer us a more precise representation of the essential conditions of the possibility of a text) and *projective hermeneutics* (the one that does not aim at correctly representing something essential for a text, but rather give a meaning to it). *Fourthly*, based on these distinctions, I will try to give a reconstruction of the viewpoint from which Popper analyzed and ideologically interpreted a series of texts of classical philosophy.

1. How Would a History of Philosophy by Popper Look Like?

We cannot understand the way in which Popper's philosophical discourse was built if we do not analyze the way in which the ideas and themes of classical or contemporary philosophy influenced Popper's writings. In what follows, I will underline how Popper succeeded in critically valuing the ideas of other philosophers in order to promote his own ideas or to defend specific ideals of the community to which he belonged. In this purpose, I will use an imaginary experiment and try to picture how Karl Popper would have written and conceived a history of philosophy. *Firstly*, this experiment will help me to identify the philosopher that Popper believed to be important both to the history of philosophy in general and to the genesis of his own philosophical ideas; *secondly*, I will identify the specific way in which Popper used the ideas of classical philosophy to sustain and argument his own philosophical ideas.

Starting from the main themes and motives of his philosophy, we could believe that a history of philosophy written by Popper would be centered on following the destiny of the concepts of *freedom* and *knowledge*. By „freedom”, Popper understood political freedom and by „knowledge” – people's tendency to a better understanding of physical and historic reality. In other words, we would not have dealt with history as a „chronicle”, that is a simple sequencing of facts such as the life and work of philosophers, but rather with true rational reconstructions of the history of philosophy. As Rorty noticed, Popper would have given himself the right (and so he did several times) to bring certain philosophers to the spirit of his philosophy, even before starting to argue with them. (Rorty 1998, 252) Thus, the histories given by Popper would have been rational reconstructions of the philosophical destiny of the two main concepts of Western thought – the concepts of *freedom* and *knowledge*.

We could believe – and we would not be in the wrong that much – that in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper left us the draft of a history of philosophy which was centered on the concept of political freedom. Even if the purpose of this

work was clearly different as it contains many chapters of systematic analysis of concepts and theories, I am fully convinced that a history of philosophy written by Popper – in the part devoted to the analysis of various constructions of the concept of political freedom – would have firstly included an overview of the writings of the authors analyzed in *The Open Society*: Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Marx, etc. Secondly, the part devoted to the understanding of the evolution of the concept of knowledge in a possible history of philosophy by Popper, would have been harder to rebuild because Popper did not leave any work in this respect. Yet, the references to classical problems of knowledge are not entirely absent in his works. Departing from a series of articles and conferences, we could establish to a certain extent, the important moments of a history of philosophy written by Popper and centered on the issue of knowledge. The Ionian philosophers, especially Thales and Anaximander would be of particular interest to Popper as he relates their activity to the appearance of the critical attitude in philosophy. Plato would have his place in such a history because he gave value to Popper's distinction between „optimistic epistemology” and „pessimistic epistemology”, but also Aristotle due to his belief in the cognitive virtues of the essentialist definition. Bacon could be also found here due to his infinite trust in observations as part of the cognitive process, as well as Descartes for his belief that reason guarantees the truth. Last but not least, David Hume should also be included for his argument against induction; Kant would have been a critical rationalist *avant la lettre*, if he had not missed this chance by not being critical enough to Newton's physics. A history of philosophy by Popper would perhaps remind of Berkeley, Hegel or Mill; however, the information in Popper's texts related to these authors' relation to the problem of knowledge are scarce. Yet it is certain that if this matter had been pursued until present day, his history would have also included the reflections of Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap or Schlick. For the moment, we managed to see the authors Popper would have evoked if he were to write a history of philosophy. In the next subchapter, I will try to find out the possible criteria that this selection would be based on.

2. Selecting the Relevant Information and Historical Interpretation

Popper would not be content to simply invoke a list of names and clear up a series of philosophical themes such as the problems of knowledge as classical authors developed them. He would have tried to see only the solutions that were more important to his philosophy. For a better understanding of the presentation of this imaginary history of philosophy, we must have in view the demands that needed satisfying by any historical approach according to the Austrian philosopher. In what follows, I will show that how Popper understood history in general and what he believed it must be followed in the historical presentation of social, political, military or cultural facts.

Popper was extremely certain that history could not be understood as a series of events that occur when necessary due to the action of inexorable laws. There are no universal laws in history and, consequently, the explanatory model in natural sciences, i.e. the deductive-nomological model cannot be applied to history. In history, facts that need to be explained are unique events that cannot be „connected” to certain universal laws. For a better understanding of historical facts, a more adequate model needs to be drafted to grasp *the logic of the specific event or situation*. To build a model is „to explain and understand events in terms of human actions and social situations.” (Popper 1994 a, 166) What would be the relevant elements in analyzing the logic of a social or cultural-historical situation? *Firstly*, the social or cultural institution of the time as they managed to impose certain ideas and a conduct for individuals in almost any situation. *Secondly*, the aims of the actors in a certain situation must be taken into account. *Thirdly*, the information of the actors is also relevant. Information and purposes are not understood by Popper as „psychological facts, established by psychological laws, but rather as *elements of the objective social situation*”. (Popper 1994 a, 167) In other words, to rebuild the logic of a situation, the following aspects should be taken into consideration: the influence exerted by certain institutions, the

aims of the people involved in the particular situation and the information they have.

If we were to consider the aforementioned elements in the analysis of a philosophical text, Popper believes we should be careful at the influence exerted by institutions ranging from political to cultural-educational ones, the problems thought to be important by the author in the particular context and last, but not least, the genesis of the intellectual profile of the philosopher, the books he read, the influence others had on him and the presuppositions he more or less assumed. The fact that these elements are significant in understanding a particular cultural-historical situation was acknowledged by Chladenius, Schleiermacher or Dilthey. Popper highlights only the fact that reconstructing the logic of a situation is a *selective process*.

Any type of history „must be *selective* unless it is to be choked by a flood of poor and unrelated material.” (Popper 1957, 150) The one who aims at understanding a social, political or cultural fact must consciously accept „a *preconceived selective point of view* into one's history; that is, to write *that history which interests us (...)*. All available evidence which has a bearing on our point of view should be considered carefully and objectively”. (Popper 1957, 150) Ergo, when the logic of a situation is rebuilt, one must depart from a viewpoint that one is personally interested in¹, leaving aside all the data which is not related to this specific viewpoint. Popper calls *historical interpretation* this type of understanding of fact or event.

When analyzing the texts of classical philosophers that had in view the matter of knowledge, Popper respects the demands he himself has established with respect to historical interpretation². Theses such as: „critical spirit is the rational debate of hypotheses, theories and arguments that can be proved to be false”, „the truth of an opinion does not depend on its origin”, „the grow of scientific knowledge is rather possible through the advancement of daring theories than systematic observation”, „there is no pure observation, that is independent of any theory”, etc. are preconceived viewpoints that helped Popper to understand Anaximander or Plato, Aristotle or Descartes and Bacon. Thus, only those thoughts, texts and classical arguments that sustained preconceived theses according

to the *selection principle* have become relevant. Neither was Popper interested in the doctrine of these philosophers, nor did he try to present in detail various texts as in the well-known history of philosophy. A doctrine, argument, text or relation between philosophers were of interest to Popper to the extent that they gave him the possibility to make a logical reconstruction from the perspective of one of his theses. We could say that a history of philosophy by Popper which is devoted to the problem of knowledge would be a history starting from one of the basic theses of critical rationalism.

3. Projective Hermeneutics

The reconstruction of „situational logic” and the historical interpretation may be framed in a more particular hermeneutics than the traditional one. Unlike the classical concept of interpretation that was backed up by a *representationalist hermeneutics*, the type of interpretation proposed by Popper could be attributed to *projective hermeneutics*. *Representationalist hermeneutics* tries to find the sense of a text through an appropriate representation of the author’s intention, the presuppositions that govern the text, the influences that made the text possible, the social-political context of the text, etc. The sense of a text would become visible when we get a clear picture of one or several of the aforementioned elements. It is as if the sense would be „buried” in a text and bringing it to light would be possible through an appropriate representation of the elements that are strongly related to it.

Projective hermeneutics is no longer a hermeneutics of the sense which was found or discovered, but rather of given senses. When Popper rebuilds the logic of a text or a situation he is not interested in finding any sense, *but rather in giving one* to the text: the thesis or privileged viewpoint that makes this reconstruction one of the multiple possible senses. The text does no longer have a sense, but a plurality of senses. Sense is not revealed or „disclosed”, but projected and given.

Practicing such a hermeneutics, critics could object in two ways to Popper’s approach. *Firstly*, that his interpretations are subjective or even arbitrary³. Yet, this reproach is not

ungrounded. As long as Popper's interpretation does no longer aim at discovering a preexisting sense, but rather giving new senses, it is only natural that they have a subjective connotation. But giving a sense is not necessarily an arbitrary pursuit. This is visible in the fact that the elements of the subject of study must be correctly exposed in advance. *Coherence and fertility, not objectivity* are the main indicators of a successful historical interpretation. As Jürgen Habermas pointed out, „a correct interpretation, therefore, is not true in the sense in which a proposition that reflects an existing state of affairs is true. It would be better to say that a correct interpretation fits, suits, or explicates the meaning of the *interpretandum*, that which the interpreter is to understand (...) Understanding what is said requires *participation* and not merely *observation*.” (Habermas 1990, 27) The interpreter's participation by imposing a thesis that may give fertile coherence to the situation is considered to be the essential feature of the historical interpretation proposed by Popper and the basis of any projective hermeneutics.

Secondly, Popper could not be blamed for being a historicist⁴. In other words, he would see the history of philosophy as an evolution towards critical rationalism and the understanding of the idea that truth is not an express one, that there are no sources to found knowledge and we could never be certain that a proposition is true. Popper started from several of these theses when interpreting the classical philosophers but, at the same time, he admitted that there are other multiple starting points in understanding those particular philosophers. These theses became fruitful when Popper tried to rebuild in a logical manner certain significant situations in the history of philosophy. Theses to lead to different interpretations can be found anytime. It is especially this position that discards Popper from historicism. Historicists „do not see that there is necessarily a plurality of interpretations which are fundamentally on the same level of both, suggestiveness and arbitrariness (even though some of them may be distinguished by their *fertility* - a point of some importance).” (Popper 1957, 109) Historicists only accept the History of Philosophy, unlike

Popper who believes in histories of philosophy. The one he would have written could be one of them.

4. Ideological Interpretation through Projective Hermeneutics

To be more precise, Popper did not always depart from a thesis of his own when he interpreted the texts of classical or contemporary philosophers. In „the logical reconstruction” of an argument, idea or classical text, he did not always defend personal ideas or beliefs. Referring to Plato, Hegel or Marx’s texts, Popper spoke not only in his name, but also in the name of a large community he belonged to, that is the community of free men. Consequently, we could identify in Popper a variant of projective interpretation, that is *ideological interpretation*. Before identifying Popper’s motives for the controversial, one-sided interpretation of Plato, Hegel or Marx’s texts, I will try to define what I understand by *ideological interpretation*.

For a start, I will base my definition on several concepts which are likely to lead to a good understanding of the idea of ideological interpretation; such concepts are the ones designed by Umberto Eco in *The Limits of Interpretation* as the main instances that must be taken into account in interpretation: *intentio operis*, *intentio auctoris*, *intentiones lectoris*. (Eco 1994, 62) The three concepts may be considered to be distinct poles of an interpreting situation, determining a field of interpretation which is subject to a dialectics of absence and presence. The logic of this dialectics may be sustained by an ontological certitude related to *intentio operis* and *intentio auctoris* on the one hand, and by the indetermination of the reception pole to a certain extent, on the other hand. If we refer to the same text, departing from its simple physical reality, we could believe that it owes to the former and present existence of the intention of the author and text. Thus, a text would not be a text, part of a symbolic environment, but rather a part of the physical environment. In this sense, the first part of intentions has a more clearly defined ontological status. Moreover, even in the production stage, the intention of text and author are possible due to an anticipation in the direction of potential *lectoris*. If readers, with their possible intentions were absent from the view of the

author and text, we would obtain a product that could never leave the author's private life and enter the public space of reading and interpretation. Thus, the intentions of the author and text are the same in any text but, at the same time, the reader or interpreter's intentions are anticipated as potentialities. The first two types of intents act as formal constraints determining a potential range of interpretations from the part of the reader. Any reading should determine an update of a possible interpretation. In other words, the logic of interpretation is so natural that it affords discontinuities between *intentio auctoris* and *intentio operis*, on the one hand and *intentiones lectoris*, on the other hand.

How is an ideological interpretation born? It occurs in the virtue of the possible game in this field of interpretation governed by the three types of intentions. Yet, neither *intentio operis* nor *intentio auctoris* make the ideological interpretations possible, but those *intentiones lectoris* that cannot be taken into consideration from a formal viewpoint and have the status of elements of interpretation. In these conditions, ideological interpretation is not an interpretation in itself, but a use, in Eco's terms. The element that an interpretation is based on does not get his legitimacy from the author's intentions or the intentions of the interpreted text. When we use and explicitly and ideologically interpret a text, we do not question the interests of the community that the interpreter belongs to. Any ideological interpretation of a text is its treason of deforming as no use is legitimate and made formally possible by the elements of the same text. An ideological interpretation does not owe too much either to the intentions of the author or text; to the reader's even less as they are formally determined by the aforementioned two.

5. The Act of Interpretation and the Seeking of Truth

The act of interpretation as it was thought by classical interpreters and Eco has the idea of truth as regulative idea. By means of interpretation, reconstitution of something true for the author or text was aimed at; in this paradigm, the model reader was a purely passive receiver who had delivered a sense,

something true for the already given text. Ergo, a good interpretation was supposed to faithfully present the mechanism of the author's thought, the deep structure of the text – from grammar to explicit or implicit presuppositions that made his existence possible –, or the legitimate intentions of a reader. Furthermore, it was believed that there was a nature or essence for thought as there was a nature for the text and proposition. A good interpretation would be the one that succeeds in giving the most faithful representation of these essences. In these conditions, interpretation would equal knowledge or a representation of something that is essential, a metaphysical act of knowledge.

In the desire to make a clearer delimitation between a general and special hermeneutics, Schleiermacher, for instance, was convinced that general hermeneutics should be concerned with discourse as an act of the life of individuals „to the extent that the life of man is one and the same” *on the one hand*, and with „*the nature of proposition as act of thought*” which is the same in all languages, *on the other hand* (Schleiermacher 1998, 18). The essentialism of his position can be seen when he states: „General hermeneutics certainly goes as far as the extent to which the understanding of the utterance derives from the general nature of the proposition” (Schleiermacher 1998, 18). Even if a proposition may be expressed in different languages and its construction may be influenced by various contingencies due to specific languages, it possesses a nature of its own, something essential that allows the interpreter to recognize it in various forms. Finally, to interpret is to find Truth in a proposition or with respect to the act of thought.

Ideological interpretations cannot be based on such theoretical considerations. An ideological interpretation cannot aim at giving a good representation of the nature of a proposition, text or of act of thought. The regulative idea of ideological interpretation is not and cannot be the truth. However, this does not mean that a series of adventures of lost philosophers or reflections of people that have not understood anything are to be seen in the ideological interpretation of the philosophers' texts. There are no a priori principles that any hermeneutics should be aware of or requirements for any interpretation to

meet. We do not have to see the idea of hermeneutics or that of interpretation as being indeterminably related to the idea of truth.

We must get used to the idea that the interpreter is not a magician who has a privileged relationship with the nature of propositions or the essence of the acts of thought. On the contrary, we should see in the interpreter, a scholar that defends his own theoretical interests or the interest of his community, conveniently using the texts of others. The interpreter is not a commenter or a doxographer and does not want to preserve unaltered any inherited or discovered truth of the philosophers' texts. Seldom he wants for the other philosophers' texts to help him tell his own story. The interpreter wants „to say something to someone”, not „to understand what is said”. According to Habermas, „interpreters relinquish the superiority that observers have by virtue of their privileged position, in that they themselves are drawn, at least potentially, into negotiations about the meaning and validity of utterances.” (Habermas 1990, 31) I would say it is even more than that: the interpreter does not negotiate only sense, but he also builds and gives it. In most of the cases, he has a great desire to share something about himself or the community he belongs to, than a desire to tell the Truth about a text. The given sense is related to his interests or the ones of the community and not to a truth buried in the texts he uses. The one who ideologically proceeds to interpretation has his community as friends, not the truth. Yet this gesture does not essentially and naturally have a negative feature. On the contrary, it gives a human and moral dimension to interpretation and it even places it in the sphere of intellectual honesty.

We must not see something that could negatively influence or disturb the clarity of an interpretation and the truth or the discovered sense. On the contrary, the interpreter interested in the fate of his ego and community will believe that his desires, faiths and aims of the community are influencing the possible sense and interpretations. „Our beliefs are not obstacles between us and meaning, they are what makes meaning possible in the first place.” (Rorty 1991, 82) When an interpreter aims at giving an interpretation to some texts, he

will try to tell „a story about their relation to other texts, or the intentions of its author, or what makes life worth living, or the events of the century in which the poem was written, or the events of our own century, or the incidents of our own lives, or whatever else seems appropriate in a given situation.” (Rorty 1991, 82) A story in which concepts, theses or arguments of other philosophers are analyzed or mentioned, is relevant only if the interpreter knows how to promote his interests or the ones of his community, as major characters. Therefore the pleading of pragmatic philosophers such as Rorty „to make a freer and more flexible use of philosophical texts, rather than treating them as lumps to be swallowed or spite out.” (Rorty 1991, 91) Philosophical texts do not have an internal structure like a crystal structure, for instance. Consequently, when we interpret a text we do not have to refer to any essential structure of its nature like in the analysis of the crystal structure of a diamond to assess its qualities.

6. Popper and Ideological Interpretation

After mentioning the way in which the term of ideological interpretation may be used, in my opinion, and the nature of the relation between projective hermeneutics and ideological interpretation, I will try to rebuild some of the considerations and presuppositions that Popper’s interpretation to Plato’s *Republic* and other classical texts was based on. We will have to consider that when writing *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, the aim of the Austrian philosopher was not to contribute in any way to the fall of the great masters of thought, as it was believed. (Habermas 1990, 1) Popper did not have a personal reason for fighting to discredit philosophers like Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Hegel, Marx, Wittgenstein or Adorno, by any means. Moreover, I think it will be a big mistake to try and explain his attitude by a condition of health, the fact that he might have hated the great figures of the history of philosophy or simply that he was an ignorant.

Popper was interested in defending the interests of the community of free men he was a member of, rather than giving learned interpretations in the spirit of Truth to the texts of classical philosophers or argue with the persons he disliked. In

a way, Popper does not even betray Plato as Plato's *Republic*, as well as *The Open Society* have the purpose of defending the fundamental value of society. In the opinion of ancient Greeks, social and political values were higher than justice as opposed to contemporary thought where freedom is the dominant one. Thus Plato's vision on society was a holistic one – justice being only possible through a harmonious mixture of the parts of society, while Popper, by defending freedom – an individualist value in itself – had to be an anti-holist and consequently, against Plato. In Popper's hands, Plato's *Republic* was simply a good instrument for building a discourse in favor of the open society and arguments for the defense of freedom.

If we are really interested in the stake of *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, it would be better to have Popper's opinion on this: „The writing extended into 1943; and the fact that most of the book was written during the grave years when the outcome of the war was uncertain may help to explain why some of its criticism strikes me to-day as more emotional and harsher in tone than I could wish. But it was not the time to mince words – or at least, this was what I then felt. Neither the war nor any other contemporary event was explicitly mentioned in the book; but it was an attempt to understand those events and their background, and some of the issues which were likely to arise after the war was won.” (Popper 1971, V) Generalizing violent action as a way to solve the problems of the time, the rise of right-wing and left-wing totalitarianism, the ideological drift of the free world are reasons that determined Popper to write *Open Society* and *The Poverty of Historicism*. In his *Autobiography*, the philosopher confesses: „*The Poverty* and *The Open Society* were my war effort. I thought that freedom might become a central problem again, especially under the renewed influence of Marxism and the idea of large-scale «planning» (or «dirigism»); and so these books were meant as a warning against the dangers of historicist superstitions.” (Popper 1974, 91) The „bad luck” of Plato, Hegel or Marx's writings was that they could be easily rebuilt with the help of a vocabulary containing words such as „dictator”, „oppressor”, „tyranny”, „totalitarianism”, „rational society”, „planning”, „state control on all social and economic phenomena”, „total submission of society to

state”, etc. As a result, they could be equally used in justifying or making totalitarian or authoritarian regimes legitimate, but also for denouncing such regimes or fighting against them.

Popper should not be condemned for choosing the second variant. He tried to be the opposite of that type of philosopher that would rather pretend to be a magician or a prophet, than a honest intellectual. „The worst thing that intellectuals can do – the cardinal sin – is to try to set themselves up as great prophets vis-à-vis their fellow men and to impress them with puzzling philosophies” (Popper 1994 b, 83), philosophies that give the impression they have solved the mystery of existence in general and of historical existence in particular, philosophies that believe to have solved all the present and future problems of mankind. This is not so dangerous in itself as there have been and still are philosophers-prophets and foreseeing philosophies; but that there are also disciples who strongly believe in their ideas and act on them. Popper’s critique and arguments are less pointed to Plato, Hegel and Marx, than to those who believe without any critical research in the Truth of ideas claimed by their philosophies. What Popper believes is that any man, including the philosopher, should be a rationalist, that is a man who wants to learn from others, not simply accepting any doctrine, but allowing criticism to his ideas and criticizing the ideas of others. The stress falls here on the terms *critical discussion*: the rationalist does not believe that he himself or someone else has innate or intrinsic wisdom (Popper 1994 b, 205).

Consequently, we should not dogmatically believe that if we are ruled by philosophers, proletarians, capitalists or by a state viewed as an embodiment of objective Reason, we will live a better life. No one, not even a genuine prophet, and philosopher that pretends to be a prophet can guarantee us this even less. What is important is to create institutions that allow us to peacefully and non-violently dismiss inefficient rulers or authoritarian intentions. When everyone admits their capacity of making mistakes, hardly can one defend one’s ideas at any cost, believing that they would contain some absolute truth. Any absolute defense of absolute truth leads to violence. By his two works, *The Open Society* and *The Poverty of Historicism*, Popper hoped that he would be able to come up with a vaccina-

tion against violence, drawing attention to great spirits that sometimes present their ideas as absolute truth and, by the faith they generate in people's minds, they can imprison their thought for several centuries. All authoritarian and totalitarian regimes have been favored by a series of political behaviors and actions generated by the non-critical learning by some of debatable philosophical beliefs. Popper tells us a simple thing: if great intellectuals are likely to believe certain things, ordinary people will tend to believe them even more and act accordingly. The solution would be handy: in politics, people should see the real, particular interests of their community, and not the *a priori* interests established by philosophers. The maximum actions of an individual in politics should not be any relevant truth revealed by a philosopher, but rather an enunciation that reflects one of his particular interests or of the community he belongs to.

Obviously, Popper betrayed the tradition of foreseeable philosophy, that is revealing great philosophical truths; he preferred to be accused of this especially to remain loyal to the community of free men. For this community, Popper did not prepare a new utopia, a new political doctrine or another set of obvious truths. Any community can solve its problems if led by men that, like Socrates, know how little they know and will be guided by their mistakes and the mistakes of others. Popper calls them *piecemeal engineers*. Such a leader must be part of a specific social class and must not have a certain political leaning, pay attention to mistakes and thus „will make his way, step by step, carefully comparing the results expected with the results achieved, and always on the look-out for the unavoidable unwanted consequences of any reform” (Popper 1957, 67). In such a vision, institutions are not purposes in themselves, they are rather instruments that occurred naturally in view of a gradual solving of the problems of the community. Popper tells us that there are no miracles in the life of our community if we blindly follow the prophets' prophecies.

When Plato, Hegel or Marx's philosophies can give birth, in the mind of men, to faiths that lead to violence in communities, then actions, interpretations and books that might diminish these acts of violence should be used, with all respect

to the aforementioned masters of philosophy. In their turn, to the extent that these actions and interpretations will be damaging, they should be criticized, interpreted or gradually replaced with others. Even if this game seems to be pertaining to one work or another, men and not books should come first. Anyway, in this game, as Popper imagined it, books shall never be burnt in public and no philosopher will ever be punished for his ideas. Such a game will not give anyone the possibility to say that one holds the ultimate Truth and that all books and libraries are useless or that an intellectual is a person that finds the ultimate Truth and utters it anytime he has the chance.

To conclude, an ideological interpretation of a text is neither wretched as in the case of fascist or communist intellectuals, nor spiritually poor or malignant as in the case of stupid intellectuals. On the contrary, Popper shows that an ideological interpretation might give birth to a series of beliefs and behaviors that are likely to defend the interest of the community. If an interpretation becomes an instrument that defends peace, freedom, justice and abolishes discrimination, etc. in a certain context, it is not only legitimate, but also desirable. This can be seen in the interpretations proposed by Popper to the aforementioned classical texts. Thus, the interpreter does not have to seek the ultimate truth when interpreting a text or give right interpretations of his intentions behind a text; however, he serves his community and can contribute to its defense, can maintain freedom and justice in all their forms.

NOTES

¹ This point of view can be ultimately regarded as a hypothesis. Usually these points of view can neither be tested, nor rejected. This may be the major drawback of what Popper calls historical interpretation.

² Even when it follows issues such as freedom or the body-mind rapport, Popper will abide by the rules of historical interpretation.

³ A radical critique to this type of hermeneutics is made by Allan Bloom at the end of the 80's. When referring to the analyses of the French deconstructivist scholars, Bloom wrote: „The interpreter's creative activity is more important than the text; there is no text, only interpretation. Thus the one thing most necessary

for us, the knowledge of what these texts have to tell us, is turned over to the subjective, creative selves of these interpreters, who say that there is both no text and no reality to which the texts refer. A cheapened interpretation of Nietzsche liberates us from the objective imperatives of the texts that might have liberated us from our increasingly low and narrow horizon. Everything has tended to soften the demands made on us by the tradition; this simply dissolves it.” (Bloom 1987, 379)

⁴ A historicist doctrine will try to explain phenomena and events as concrete manifestations of an unique law. For instance, Marx saw history as a history of social classes; Hegel saw manifestations of the absolute spirit in all historical events, etc. A history of philosophy conceived in a historicist manner would understand history in its passage as an evolution that aims at imposing certain ideas or concepts.

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Gerard Stan is Assoc. Prof. Dr. at the Department of Philosophy and Socio-Political Sciences of the Al.I. Cuza University of Iasi. His research interests are the theory of knowledge, the analytical philosophy and the communications theories. He is author of *Knowledge and Truth* (2007).

Address:

Gerard Stan

Al.I. Cuza University of Iasi

Department of Philosophy

Bd. Carol I, 11

700506 Iasi, Romania

Email: gstan@uaic.ro