

Book Review
PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS, EXPRESSIONS AND
FORMULAE

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Constantin Sălăvăstru, *Idea and Expression. A Journey to the World of Philosophical Ideas*, Iasi, “Al.I. Cuza” University Publishing House, 2016, 206 p, ISBN 978-606-714-290-7

In recent years, the philosophical literature in our country has diversified its area of preoccupations and of thematic analyses. Apart from the study of the means of conceiving philosophical formulae, the types of discourse or of construction of the philosophical text have extended their investigations regarding the presentation, argumentation and reception of philosophical ideas.

Such an effort is undertaken by Professor Constantin Sălăvăstru’s book dedicated to philosophical ideas, expressions and formulae, a work which adds to the series of research developed by the author in the field of logic, language, theory, and practice of argumentation or of the different forms of discourse.

Preoccupied with the integration of philosophical aspects to the more extended framework of “the expressivity of philosophical ideas”, the author writes that the path followed by the philosophical creation “is the result of an original duality: doctrine on the one hand, and its form of presentation on the other. The doctrine is the result of the philosopher’s thinking, while his discourse expression is the result of the philosopher’s ability to express his ideas” (p.26).

Within this process of structuring a philosophical style, philosophical formulae are integrated into the act of elaborating a philosophical text. The philosophical formula, says C. Sălăvăstru, is a “discourse sequence which condenses an idea and (...) benefits from a relative autonomy of meaning” (p.28), helping in the process of setting the identity of a doctrine, of a current or of an author, in the assimilation of the values which define a philosophical discourse, as well as in the philosophical formation of the individual. Somewhat further, the author states that the propagation of these formulae “indicates the fact that such constructions are necessary for the space of reception of a philosophical idea”, and the studies consecrated to this field show that “philosophical formulae facilitate the communication of an idea and favor its understanding...” (p.33).

In the support of his statements, the professor from Iasi resorts to a profound analysis of different consecrated theses, ideas, concepts and expressions in philosophical thinking, he highlights numerous arguments and counter-

arguments, he reveals the multiple interpretations involved by one statement or another, without forgetting to build up his own perspectives. He capitalizes the wealth of ideas and meanings of different philosophical concepts in order to justify and support theses such as: the conditions of acknowledging the value of a philosophical text, the possibility of ranking philosophical formulae, determining the degree of philosophical depth of a philosophical formula, the difference between primary texts and secondary texts, the basis of ranking the categories which dominate the construction of philosophical concepts, the importance of these formulae in philosophical debates and in the dynamism of philosophical ideas.

A distinct chapter is consecrated to the genesis of philosophical formulae, where we should remember the conditions that must be met a statement in order to candidate to the status of philosophical formula, namely: it should be detachable, it should stand out from among others and it should be representative. We should remark in this context professor Sălăvăstru's critical comments to the way in which the demands mentioned above find their solution in the conception of different thinkers. Of particular interest are the points of view referring to the category relationship part – whole, the rhetorical and syntactical conditions of philosophical statements, the dependence of the statements on the historical and cultural context, the way in which the organization of philosophical statements is interpreted, the role of language subtleties for highlighting a philosophical text, the intervention of logical and rhetorical operations for the consecration of a philosophical conception, or the mechanisms which lead to the creation of new philosophical texts.

Tightly connected to the aspect mentioned above are the author's contributions to the analysis of the favoring conditions of philosophical formulae and of the standstills that may emerge in this process. "The analysis of the conditions of emergence of a philosophical formula, writes C. Sălăvăstru, show us which are the internal demands of a constructive type which may generate or guarantee the possibility of transforming the discourse sequence of a philosophical piece of writing into a true philosophical formula" (p.77).

In the professor's opinion, the favoring contexts of philosophical formulae regard the "elegance of philosophical formulae" (which evolve from the notoriety, prestige and recognition of the creator of philosophical texts), "the universal use of the philosophical formulae" (which ensures the conservation of the philosopher's authority and its amplification) and "the cognitive feature" of the philosophical formula (associated to the cultural space and the knowing interests which come in accordance with the cognitive intents of the formula). Of similar importance are the obstacles which intervene in the reception of a philosophical formula and in its circulation towards the interested public. We are talking about "ambiguity" (by which reception difficulties are generated among the specialties due to the different meanings which may be attributed to the philosophical formula) and about "absurdity" (where there is no meaning to be received in a given expression, generalizations which are much too wide or excessive problematizations).

C. Sălăvăstru rightfully wonders what is the use of a philosophical formula and which are the directions of this use? He proposes a response in which he synthesizes the discussions, observations and suggestions which focus on this issue, such as: philosophical formulae have a cognitive use, a paideical use, the use of 'storing' wisdom and a discourse use. Reading the pages which deal with this theme give the reader the possibility to question the diversity of the conceptions which emerge from one author to the other, the subtleties of understanding or the ambiguities of reception, not to mention the discourse mechanisms which it generates.

In the following chapters, the author revives certain themes with the purpose of deepening certain aspects already discussed and in order to make us better acquainted with the argumentation structures of philosophical formulae with the elements which concur to their expressivity, with the logical mechanisms which allow the production of philosophical formulae and their possibility of becoming instruments of manipulation.

Without resorting to detailed analyses, I will signal certain aspects which are defining to the issues hereby mentioned. First of all, the investigation of the situations which ensure the argumentative basis of the philosophical formulae reveals the importance of deductive mechanisms, of the analogical and inductive structures, without them covering "the functioning possibilities of rationality in the construction of philosophical formulae" (...) because "there are certain asperities which determine us to try to avoid such a generalization" (p.134).

Secondly, the analysis of the expressivity of philosophical formulae brings into discussion the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, respectively the means by which rhetoric may confer more dynamism to philosophy. "The idea of the affiliation of philosophical formulae to the rhetoric forms of expression, says the author, seems to be approved by many more of those who are preoccupied with this field. With regard to the philosophical texts, however, it is difficult to give a positive response: the writing of philosophical texts is not, as a whole, a metaphorical writing in the general meaning of the term" (p.155).

Thirdly, the analysis of the way in which new philosophical formulae are produced reveals the intervention of numerous logical operations and argumentation structures. The general idea supported by the author is that, "starting from a given philosophical formula which is created as an assertive sentence, we may obtain other types of possible formulae which differ from the basic formula: contrary formulae, contradictory formulae, sub-alternate or over-alternate formulae, sub-contrary formulae" (p.160).

Last but not least, in relation to the question whether philosophical formulae can become instruments of manipulation, C. Sălăvăstru does not hesitate to admit that on numerous occasions we can identify the presence of manipulation in the discourse action of philosophical formulae. From among the factors which bias the implementation of a philosophical formula, the author mentions the following: the

visible association of a formula with a famous name, the existence of a sensitivity of the receptor to the important figures of philosophy which influence their critical spirit, the effortless acceptance of certain conceptions or perspectives belonging to an acknowledged authority in the field, the impression of true sentences left by the philosophical sentences over a domain, the seductive expressivity of philosophical formulae which hides a valid rationality, the ingenious stylistics of philosophical formulae in the communication relationship with the auditor, the repetition of an idea which ends up being accepted as truth etc.

I would conclude by saying that Professor Constantin Sălăvăștru's work approaches a very actual theme, the ideas formulated are based on a critical and constructive analysis of the most recent research in the field, while the interrogative and systematic style of the text make it even more interesting. At the same time, the comparisons and associations that he makes with consecrated names in the history of philosophy, the subtlety of interpretations which it highlights, as well as the clarity of the ideas exposed confer originality and value to the volume, qualities which are essential in the field of philosophical debates in our country.