Nicholas Dungey

Michel Foucault and Franz Kafka

Power, Resistance, and the Art of Self-Creation

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Nicholas Dungey’s general research is an attempt to move beyond the modern conception of subjectivity, language and power, and the politics they give rise to. He is particularly interested in the aesthetic intersections of language, power, subjectivity, and literature, and the possibility of reconstituting personal and political space. In his book about Michel Foucault and Franz Kafka, Dungey seeks to reconcile Foucault’s dialectics of disciplinary power and resistance as the agonistic struggle in which authentic subjectivity can be created, and the way that Kafka experienced this struggle in his life by being a writer and, at the same time, a member of family, a friend, and an employee. Foucault’s theory shares similarities with Nietzsche’s — it introduces us to the world as a ground for the interplay of power. And we should have no illusions that power is a kind of metaphysical substance, that is, it is always dynamic, always “in the process”. Kafka thought that he could recreate himself, his self, only through the process of writing, by being a writer. It was the Dionysus project of ever creating and destroying oneself. After the first chapter in which Dungey introduces us to Foucault’s theoretical work and demonstrates its application to Kafka’s novel The Trial and short story In the Penal Colony, he focuses on the possibility of self-creation through art and self-creation as art. In the second part, he also rejects approaches to Kafka which are in search of Kafka’s true self, because he argues that Kafka was well aware that he is the process, and would never be able to finish. Foucault’s theory sets the ground point of resistance in the ethical substance, which is the pure possibility for resistance to disciplinary power. For Foucault, one can resist only through the art of self-creation, and this is the core of his new ethics. This review has taken on the task of introducing inextensively the possibility of synthesising Foucault’s theoretical positions and Kafka’s life as a work of art.

We can understand discourse as the mise-en-scène of the interplay of power. In other words, every disciplinary power requires a context so that it can be exercised. Dungey writes that, for Foucault, and no less for Kafka, this context is the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment releases the subject who is now free to do whatever he wants, as long as it is within the boundaries of what is normal. The enlightened subject is seen as a naturally rational human being, and the development of society set off in the direction of normalising and disciplining individuals. Distortion was made and some historical facts became an integral content of rational human nature as such. One could call it theoretical or practical delusions, but we would not go far with it. Foucault brings us the Apparatus of resistance, so that we can supply our understanding with critical conciseness. The individual or the subject is not a metaphysical substance, but rather another context of the interplay of power, one place of this interplay. This is the reason why Dungey criticises psychoanalytical approaches to reading Kafka which have the ambition to find Kafka’s “true self”. There is no Kafka’s true self, or better yet, there is no Kafka’s true self outside his actions, his life as a work of art. Discourse is arranged, Dungey argues, so that it better serves the purposes of surveillance, normalising, and disciplinary power. Space and time are also organised in the mantra of increasing the centres of disciplinary power. We cannot see the authority of knowledge in the same way; our knowledge is visible and graded. Dungey writes that the spaces in which people dwell have their disciplinary pattern. Schools, prisons, and military institutions are only radical examples of how spaces can be organised so that disciplinary power can have its desirable effect. This radicalisation is just a pointer; it
shows us the possibilities of discovering disciplinary power in our everyday routine. The organisation of space and time inscribes onto one’s body and into one’s soul the patterns of behaviour requested by society rooted in the Enlightenment.

Through an analysis of the said titles, Dungey wishes the reader to notice the way in which disciplinary power works in Kafka. For example, the officer in the short story *In the Penal Colony* operates a machine which has a normalising function. The goal is to make a perfectly functional member of society. “The machine metaphor” – if the Apparatus in the story is a place of the distribution of disciplinary power – is intensified with the way Kafka names his characters by their function. Dependency on a function in the interplay of power is who you are in a given context, in a given situation. In *The Trial*, Joseph K. has failed to use the authority that the person of his social standing should have. He was arrested for a crime he was not aware of, and could not defend himself because he was denied information about the same. The two men that came to arrest him were instructed not to give him any information about his arrest. Dungey argues that we are always already arrested, and that Kafka wrote his novel with this in mind. There is no metaphysical self that can be excluded from the interplay of power, no lethargic and objective watcher. One is always already arrested, always on trial, and one can only “get away from here” with the growth of power, going away in the increasing of power with no illusions that this fight is not what it is – an everlasting agon of disciplinary power and resistance which never ends in a static self. This leads to Foucault’s account of ethics and the ethical project of aesthetical self-creation that Dungey supports with Kafka’s diary entries which, according to him, prove that Kafka experienced his life in the same pathos as Foucault did a few decades later. This pathos consists in the perpetual destruction of what we have to become, in order to open the space for something new, something of even greater will to power.

For Nietzsche and Foucault – and Dungey argues that Kafka was of the same perspective – life can be vindicated only as an aesthetical phenomenon. This *self* that emerges through resisting a disciplinary power must be beautiful in its uniqueness. Dungey argues that the process of the aesthetical creation of subjectivity has its teleology, although the book brings no illusions concerning the same – the process of self-creation as an ethical need manifested through resistance to disciplinary power is one that never ends. Dungey brings one quote from Kafka’s diary entries:

“When I look into myself I see so much that is obscure and still in flux that I cannot even properly explain or fully accept the dislike I feel for myself.”

As Dungey also notices, Kafka is never deduced into thinking that the process is over, that he has reached the highpoint and that his everlasting agonistic misery has come to an end. At this point, one can also identify the grounds for the argument that Dungey places before the approaches that view Kafka’s true self hidden somewhere in or between the words he wrote. Kafka is a writer, and the writer is, in fact, the very act of his writing. Kafka needs to write, it is his *place* of resistance. Dungey writes that the diary entries play a very important role in the process of Kafka’s self-creation. By writing about his most inner feelings about life, family and literature, he could destroy them altogether and move on in his will to power, understood as the moment of self-conditioning. Only by writing the truth about himself to himself could he start the gigantic project of becoming the one that he must be. One must, according to Foucault, understand one’s place within the historical context and do what is in one’s power to resist the disciplinary power, and it is in the process that one can collect the sweet prize of becoming oneself.

In general, the second part of the book is the peak of the book’s great project. The aim is to show how Kafka’s life was in the sphere of immanence what Foucault’s theory was in the sphere of reflection, and that Kafka really did live his life as literature, as art. In Kafka’s texts, from his diary entries to his fictional work, we can find different literary expressions of the agon consisting in the opposition between disciplinary power and resistance. Dungey writes carefully and soberly, but at the same time he writes with great passion.
about a theme he “went out” to explore. The book offers a plausible theoretical synthesis and could be a useful tool for students and scholars interested in Foucault and Kafka.

To understand oneself as the place of the interplay of power, and that nothing is beyond this interplay. No lethargic self is to be found in the unexplored depths of one’s soul. There is only the possibility of resisting a disciplinary power, and one must (in the language of ethics) resist in order to create what is to be the self.

Roni Rengel

Carlos Fraenkel

Teaching Plato in Palestine

Philosophy in a Divided World

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Teaching Plato in Palestine is a 240 page long monograph that evolved from an article originally published in the magazine Dissent when Michael Walzer was a co-editor. The author’s initial idea was to discuss classical and medieval philosophy with young Palestinians who were devout Muslims. In this form, it can be considered to be a result of Fraenkel’s everyday way of communicating philosophy, consisting of five chapters in which he discusses Plato with Palestinians, Maimonides with Indonesians, Spinoza with Jews in the United States, Marx with Brazilians and, essentially, anthropological and bioethical issues with the Mohawk people in North America, with Plato, Aristotle and Socrates being silent followers since Palestine. In a special chapter on “Diversity and Debate”, we learn that the book is a result of eight years of experience of working out a concept of philosophising outside classrooms and in concrete situations, and Fraenkel explains his motives for writing the book and his position on the purpose of philosophy and debate, whilst offering a variety of arguments on issues regarding tradition, cultural imprinting, faith, truth and reason via issues from the philosophy of communication, rhetoric and bioethics, such as, for example, the problem of ethnocentrically-grounded ideas of debate, or the issue of philosophy not being accepted everywhere where it appears. His position is coordinated by an axis of diversity, in a sense that his book and this special chapter aim to point out the simplicity of apparent differences that should make us fully aware of the dangers of misconception, misunderstanding and ideology, and by an axis of dialogue, in a sense that he finds nothing more useful than discussing differences, a difficult process that may eventually result in better interrelations. This position is defended through Aristotle and Plato’s theory, that is, through the idea of nurturing right approaches within the moral dimension of acting or, in other words, through the claim that you do not simply possess ethics, you acquire it through learning from a young age and adapt yourself to upholding it through nurture. The exposition of the content of Fraenkel’s travels and seminars is a combination of journalistic reports on people and situations he worked in, and a dialogic exchange of knowledge and opinions on subjects chosen to be discussed during seminars, all of which is spiced up with personal details on how he met certain people and how the situations he was in came to be. This includes less important information on means of travel or Fraenkel’s personal life – although it is worth noting that, at some point, the book is also a certain summary of impressions and memories – as well as some rather important information on how philosophy as an institutionalised phenomenon has come to be in the lands he visited. This is particularly challenged in chapter five, in his discussions with the Mohawks. In this sense, whoever is looking for a deeper, broader dialogic development of the issues discussed should avoid this book because it is not up to standard, either in the way in which it develops arguments or its structural focus. However, in light of its purpose and objectives, this issue does not matter because it will serve as guidance for teachers to come and as an interesting read to others, mostly because it offers a number of examples of exceptions to general rules, meaning that diversity continues to sustain itself and develop in an increasing number of shapes that struggle between authenticity and cultural norms, including Fraenkel’s witty offerings of philosophy whenever someone begins to deal with absolutes or responds to situations inappropriately. Ultimately, this book indirectly offers evidence that human beings are, before anything else, human beings, individual lives open to interpretation. Furthermore, the reach of this book, apart from sharing valuable insights, is twofold: firstly, it suggests abandoning the safe space of identity bubbles and ivory towers in order to pursue the meaning of philosophical engagement; secondly, it offers...
a teaching template for bringing philosophy to a broader public and for bringing a broader public to philosophy.

In my personal view, what this book really does is point towards an uncertainly dubious role of philosophy in the contemporary world and then offer solutions to understanding what kind of role it has and why it should matter. Challenging a commonly held belief in a war-torn land is bold and necessary, and it shows how the right questions asked in the right manner can stimulate a revision of previously held knowledge.

"By giving students the basic semantic and logical tools they need to clarify their intuitions and to analyze arguments for and against the views, philosophy could help to extend and refine the debate that naturally arises in a pluralistic society from conflicting interests, values, and worldviews. And it could also help citizens make wise use of the power they have in a democracy" (p. 86).

Yet it is precisely this, somewhat veiled and entirely silent dimension of problems hiding between rows of printed words and fired bullets that has gotten me worried while reading the book. The question of the purpose of professors of philosophy – if the underlying idea is anything but a walled-out analysis of who said what or walled-in analysis of language – is manifested rather strangely when you realize that even Fraenkel has discussed philosophical issues in a more or less secure context, with people, mostly students, willing to discuss classical and medieval philosophy anyway. This fact repeats a line already drawn within the idea of institutionalized philosophy, perhaps eventually reaching out via the idea of practical application, and philosophy considered to be a calling, perhaps eventually reaching out via living a difference in making. If what Fraenkel has been doing during the past decade is to be endorsed – and it most certainly is – then we still have not crucially stepped forth from a two and a half millennium old belief that philosophy occurs either when common social troubles are ironed out or in isolation from the outside world. Fraenkel’s experiences across the world show us exactly that. For example, when it becomes obvious that discussions in Indonesia might work because there already exists a certain consensus on a means of communication and education in plural society, we are again to wonder whether philosophy can or cannot ever reach the public in a sense that it structurally embodies a healthy culture, and furthermore, whether philosophers can or cannot ever operate philosophically in insecure conditions.

Can we imagine a philosopher carrying wounded Palestinian children away from conflict and spending an evening discussing the problem of evil and theodicy? Or venturing into the Indian slums and getting people to question their cultural and religious system or their social role? Or explaining the use and abuse of faith and politics in African states where every 20 seconds a child dies from lack of sanitation? Is this why Fraenkel has never really dug into the idea of Allah when he spoke with Muslims in their land, or called to arms in socially severely mangled Brazil? What happens here with all the philosophical concepts and all the intellectual potency we can muster? Is it possible that this is where philosophy could (should) reach its pinnacle, not by communicating knowledge, but by shaping from spoken or written analyses into creation which is ridden of the necessity of examination and discovery? Is one the lover of wisdom, or, in other words, its carrier, what could be more fulfilling and purposeful than being wisdom itself? And yet, scholars will be offended by such an idea. This is nicely described, again in the chapter on Brazil, on pages 87 to 89. There is much more that can be discovered with Fraenkel’s book in this context. For example, the way that certain systems in culture, such as education, continue to operate regardless of the conditions created by the authorities, ultimately showing how they have been misplaced from their purpose in itself, and have rather become clusters of cogs in some one’s machine. This can be seen in the chapter with Plato in Palestine, and in the chapter with Marx in Brazil. Philosophy, then, is challenged with the issue of intellectual elitism, the issue of substantiating a breeding ground for ideology and the issue of neutral, sterile analytics merging journalism with conceptual design. Fraenkel’s book indirectly outlines all these problems, and provides a number of peculiar situations – on all narratological levels of communication between author, characters and readers – that challenge these issues and invite a revision. The book is most certainly contemporary. It is easy to read, it has a wealth of interesting information, it offers an idea of philosophical education including a number of examples from across the world, and it probably indirectly anticipates many projects that will occur in the future. I highly recommend the following two chapters: “Citizen Philosophers in Brazil” and “Diversity and Debate”. And I do recommend reading and studying this monograph. However, what I would also like to suggest to its readers is the following: read Fraenkel’s content to discover the underlying structures of the actual, which has not been addressed properly yet, and which has not at all been addressed by this adventure.
This will supplement Fraenkel’s endeavour and perhaps facilitate the further evolution of applied approaches.

Luka Perušić

Boran Berčić

Filozofija [Philosophy]

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Boran Berčić, a full professor of philosophy at the University of Rijeka, has been engaged in higher education committedly for almost 15 years. This book is primarily the crown of his teaching efforts and an admirable pedagogical legacy for all newcomers to philosophy. His energy, enthusiasm and philosophical vividness are sublimated in an impressive two-volume book, and more than 900 pages (!) of an incredible enterprise of thought.

In the “Foreword” of Volume 1, the author explains his motives and gives some tips for reading the whole work. He is aware of good translations into the Croatian language of some introductions to philosophy, but also clearly states that they are often too difficult for non-philosophers, usually cover only a (smaller) part of philosophical problems and are always determined by the philosophical positions of the respective authors. These reasons motivated him to try to offer a systematic, yet at the same time widely comprehensive introduction to philosophy. If we take a look at the content, the methodology and the style of these two volumes, it is obvious that the author has not only succeeded in his mission, but has also given much more to his colleagues, and to the reading public in general, and those interested in philosophy in particular.

There is probably no better way to start an introduction to philosophy which at the same time wants to be philosophical than to question the meaning of life. This is the title of the first chapter, in which the author, with elegance and admirable comprehensiveness, opens the horizon of philosophical problems with the question of the meaning of life. After he presents the motivation for asking the question and justifies its logic, he convincingly and progressively leads the reader to the optimistic conclusion that, even if we do not have a straightforward answer to the title question, this does not mean that life is meaningless. On the contrary, questioning the perspective of exclusive instrumental rationality, we could plausibly argue in the direction that the very meaning of human life is in a continuous process of finding and creating its meaning.

In the second chapter, the author critically analyses Epicurus and Lucretius’s arguments for the irrationality of having fear from death, concluding finally that, despite the fact that these arguments are interesting and of high quality, death is something bad for us.

The third chapter entitled “Destiny” deals with fatalism. The author presents the main arguments for fatalism and some crucial objections to this view. Giving some additional objections, he finally concludes that the fatalist is, at best, faced with the uncomfortable dilemma: if sophisticated fatalism has content, it is implausible and most probably untrue, and if it is immune to any empirical fact, then it is without any content and states nothing. The implausibility of fatalism opens the playground to another problem, which is presented in the following chapter on free will.

Free will is one of the most widely discussed philosophical problems, and it is not surprising that this chapter is one of the longest. The author gives an incredibly clear and comprehensive overview of the main positions in the discussion about free will: determinism, libertarianism and compatibilism. He presents the core arguments of all positions fairly, critically evaluating their strengths and weaknesses. As an honest philosopher with his own position, he gives some suggestions that can help to take compatibility as a plausible position, concluding that, in the light of the distinction between values and desires, we could consistently save free will in our deterministic mechanical world, taking our freedom as a possibility to act according to our own values. This is the only way of saving the possibility of moral responsibility and ethics in general, the topics of the following two chapters.

Although the problem of moral responsibility is closely connected with the problem of free will, the author wisely presents it in a separate chapter. Despite the complexity of the discussion, he succeeds in offering a highly comprehensive presentation of the problem, different positions and main arguments, without waiving philosophical thoroughness and broadness of implications for the most important practical philosophical discipline: ethics. He concludes the chapter with a plausible
perspective on the problem, the interpretation of moral responsibility as a mode of reason responsiveness.

The chapter on ethics is one of the longest. It should be stressed that, although ethics is a classic topic of every proper introduction to philosophy and that there are many books on ethics and bioethics written in Croatian, this chapter is most probably the first in trying to provide a systematic and philosophically precise overview of normative ethics in general with an incredible sense of readability for anyone interested in this important topic. As in the rest of the book, the author brilliantly introduces the reader to all the main ethical normative theories in the manner of a philosophical dialogue. He first presents the position of consequentialism and then that of deontological ethics, so as to draw them into a dialogue in part three, showing their strengths and weaknesses in dealing with ethical problems. At the end, he presents virtue ethics, suggesting that it is reducible, in large measure, to deontology and/or consequentialism.

“Social Contract” is the title of the next chapter focusing on the questions of the philosophy of politics. The chapter is wisely positioned after the chapter on ethics because there are many important features of ethical argumentation needed for understanding two important parts of this chapter. In part one, the author presents the social contract theory and its main positions. Very interesting is the inclusion of game theory in this context (when discussing the so-called prisoner’s dilemma). In part two, he analyses the problem of distributive justice, mainly focusing on the important positions of John Rawls and Robert Nozick in the overall discussion. The natural lottery argument is discussed at the end.

“Values” are the final chapter of Volume 1. Someone could question the author’s choice of putting this topic at the very end instead of the very beginning of the book, but there are good reasons for this: although values are in the groundwork of all of our thinking and acting, philosophical talk about values is quite demanding, which then requires that readers first become habituated to dealing with problems philosophically. The author decides to present the topic by explaining and elaborating the distinction between facts and values. He concludes that it seems that the gulf between them will always be open, although this is exactly the reason why we appreciate wisdom and prudence so much, with the two necessarily guiding us in our thinking and acting.

If we take Volume 1 to be dedicated to practical philosophy, Volume 2 focuses on theoretical philosophy, which is a fact that the author himself also notes in the “Foreword” to Volume 2. It begins with the longest, five-part chapter — “Knowledge”. Part one investigates the definition and nature of knowledge, showcasing the complexity of defining knowledge and the different ways in which our knowledge can be grounded. Part two is dedicated to scepticism, a crucial challenge to any epistemological theory (theory of knowledge). The other three parts present three different responses to sceptics: foundationalism and its attempt to find a foundational, irreducible ground of all our knowledge; coherenceism and its reliance on the coherence of all our beliefs; and pragmatism with its original way of introducing success as the criterion of truth (and knowledge), and of shifting the burden of proof to sceptics.

The following chapter entitled “Reality” is one of the rare chapters which should be read exactly after the preceding one, because it could not make much sense without some epistemological insights. The author opposes the two main metaphysical positions on reality in the first two parts: realism and antirealism. He then moves on to discuss verificationism as a specific position which tries to go along the said positions, arguing that the question about the real existence of the external world is simply — meaningless.

The philosophy of mind is the topic of the chapter entitled “Mind”. After discussing the question whether some of the differences between the mental and the physical (such as extensions in space, intentionality, rationality and privileged access) are real or just putative, the author presents all the relevant positions in the debate. He first presents the eliminativist theories of mind which deny the existence of mental properties (behaviourism and eliminative materialism), and the reductionist theories which accept the existence of mental properties, but only as a type of the physical, or as being reducive to the physical (physicalism and functionalism). Although some antireductionist arguments and critics are presented in discussing these positions, a general overview of antireductionist positions is given under the title of “Dualism” (interactionist dualism, parallelism: pre-established harmony and occasionalism, naturalistic dualism, dualism of properties and epiphenomenalism).

The chapter on “God” introduces the main problems in the philosophy of religion. The author first tries to explain the nature of the discussion about the philosophy of religion and the mere possibility of arguing about its main topics. In part two, he unveils the basic positions in the debate about the nature of God. A special part is devoted to the
discussion between theists and atheists about the burden of proof. The parts that follow present the basic arguments for believing in God (ontological, teleological and cosmological arguments) with their main objections and critics. The final part examines an argument for the rationality of believing in God (Pascal’s wager) and shows its implausibility.

“Why 2 + 2 = 4?” is the title of the following chapter, introducing the main problems of the philosophy of mathematics. In part one, the author presents all the relevant positions in the philosophy of mathematics, including their main arguments and their accompanying objections: fictionalism, nominalism, conceptualism, physicalism, Platonism. He concludes this part with a discussion about the nature of existence of mathematical entities (realism and antirealism in mathematics), the truth about mathematical statements and an explanation of mathematical truths. Despite the implausible arguments of mathematical realism, the author shows why this position is so vivid in the philosophy of mathematics, explaining some specific characteristics of mathematics.

The closing chapter is called “What is Philosophy?” This could surprise the reader who would perhaps expect such a chapter at the beginning of the book. But the author intentionally positioned it at the very end, guided by the idea that it would be inappropriate to talk about philosophy without some experience in philosophy itself. After reading both volumes, each reader could try to enter into dialogue with the author, and could try to find his/her own way of understanding what philosophy ultimately is. The author provides some valuable tips for everyone willing to be engaged in finding an answer to this question. He wonders (and discusses) whether philosophy is a search for truth, a discipline embracing those questions which have no standard methodology of answering questions (yet), or a science. He discusses a synoptic view of philosophy as the creation of the overwhelming picture of the world, the view that philosophy is its own history, and the view that philosophy is a conceptual analysis. He finally concludes by suggesting that viewing philosophy as a critical reflection of our own beliefs and acts is perhaps the best option.

In conclusion, I would like to single out at least three admirable features of this two-volume book. Firstly, it is an important philosophical contribution, which not only compiles fine-grained philosophical arguments in one place with the author’s original additions and defences of some theses, but is also a masterpiece of the popularisation of philosophy. More specifically, all the crucial philosophical problems are analysed in a systematic and thorough manner, without losing clarity and a sense of humour, which is really refreshing for every non-philosopher who wants to acquire concrete, broad and philosophically legitimate, but at the same time comprehensive, clear and easy to read information about most philosophical problems.

Secondly, the author indebted all his Croatian colleagues engaged in teaching. The pedagogical value of this book is astonishing. Showing the strengths and weaknesses of their core arguments, the author persistently evaluates all positions creating an atmosphere of a vivid philosophical dialogue. In this way, he teaches not just in philosophy, but also for philosophy and, broadly, for general critical thinking and reasoned discussion. It represents quite a useful schema for any philosophy teacher in his philosophy classes. On the other hand, this book is now an unavoidable philosophy textbook with useful tools for every teacher and student. It brings: questions at the end of each chapter which could be useful for both students (to test their understanding of the topic dealt with in each chapter) and teachers (as a guide for test questions), an impressive list of references for further reading, an instructive and detailed Index (in both volumes, on 53 pages in total!), including the names of philosophers, philosophical positions, main problems, relevant topics, etc.

Thirdly, no book trying to be, all at the same time, a philosophical introduction to philosophy, an overview of the history of philosophy (and philosophical problems) and a textbook of philosophy has ever been published in Croatia (and the wider region). This book successfully consolidates all of these features and is a unique and original enterprise. Thus, it is not only a philosophical or a pedagogical, but also a true cultural achievement, which deserves and obliges all of the author’s colleagues not only to applaud him sincerely, but also to be proud of being his philosophical counterparts.

Igor Eterović