

In memoriam

Nenad Mišćević (1950–2024)

On May 11th 2024, we lost Nenad Mišćević, a doyen and key figure in Croatian analytical philosophy, one of the most renowned Croatian philosophers in the world. This is what he was. But what essentially defined him was that he was a philosopher with his whole being, in every manifestation of his existence, not just by profession, not even just by vocation. From his high school days to his last moment, he directed and pursued all his activities—intellectual, social, emotional, and organizational—towards philosophy. I can personally testify to a good deal of those activities. Through his philosophical work, Nenad created his enviable philosophical reputation worldwide and, of course, in Croatia. However, what was more important for the environments in which he worked was that he inspired, if not founded, institutions where philosophy thrived everywhere he stayed. In personal contacts, he was an unsurpassed motivator, encouraging and motivating all those with interest and ability to engage in philosophical thinking and writing.

In the early days of his career, this encouragement was directed to postmodern philosophy. But for most of his life it was analytical philosophy. Starting with a circle of young philosophers and logicians, proudly referred to as the “Rijeka Circle,” he created a pool for talented scientists who soon became the driving force of philosophical activities at various faculties. Nenad’s professional path first led him to the Department of Philosophy at the Zadar Faculty of Philosophy. Soon, the small department became a significant center of analytical philosophy, where Nenad’s personality attracted young promising philosophers, many from the mentioned “Rijeka Circle,” as department employees and numerous rising stars of philosophy as guests, who are today leading world philosophers. I’ll mention only Georges Rey and Michael Devitt, with whom Nenad remained friendly throughout his life. After being expelled from Zadar, he got a job at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Maribor. I believe Slovenian colleagues would agree that Nenad’s role in constituting that department and its analytical orientation was enormous. Parallel to his work in Maribor, he became engaged at the Central European University in Budapest (CEU). Finally, and certainly not least importantly, Nenad played an enormous role in creating the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka. Although he was not employed there full-time, he remained an external associate until the end of his life.

*Regarding Nenad's personal philosophical development, his period of learning began right after high school, when he spent the school year 1969/70 in Chicago. There he studied philosophy and classical philology (ancient Greek). From personal conversations, I got the impression that his stay in Chicago did not leave him with the fondest memories. After returning, he studied in Zagreb, where he experienced some more disappointments. His true philosophical ascent occurred during his postgraduate studies in Paris. At that time, postmodern and post-structuralist heroes were just articulating their philosophical positions. Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida were real stars whose seminars he attended and privately discussed with them. He had especially close contact with Althusser. This engagement with postmodernism resulted in books *Marxism and Post-Structuralism*, *The Speech of the Other*, *Essays in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, and *White Noise*, which had an exceptional impact on the domestic philosophical public. However, after this youthful intoxication, a sobering followed. In a brief autobiographical note Nenad provided a concise but perhaps the most illustrative sketch of the poststructuralist deconstruction technique: "You slip under Schelling's skin, poke at his metaphors, reverse and ironize his story, add a bit of psychoanalysis and attribute various things to him to show that he is actually, through no fault of his own, a victim of metaphysics. This amused me for seven or eight years, but after a while, it started to seem somewhat dishonest to me. [...] I didn't like it, it was mean, and great philosophers didn't do this."¹*

A break with postmodernism and deconstruction followed, and he became acquainted with analytical philosophy. He familiarized himself with it gradually, reading and introducing himself to this different (compared to previous engagements) and difficult subject matter. At the same time, he continuously participated in significant analytical philosophy conferences, presenting and building his own philosophical name and position. Parallel to his own improvement, Nenad spared no time and energy to encourage others to engage in philosophical work and their personal advancement. The result was a series of collections co-authored with less experienced authors, who paved their own paths through these activities, following Nenad's guidance.

*Nenad engaged in and left a significant mark on many disciplines characteristic of analytical philosophy. To a superficial connoisseur of Nenad Mišćević's work, he is a philosopher of language. However, he was equally knowledgeable in almost all philosophical disciplines. This breadth of interest and activity can be followed through texts published in the domestic and international journals. From around 1985 onwards, he published a series of articles in *Croatian Philosophical Investigations* (and *Synthesis Philosophica*), mainly in the fields of philosophy of lan-*

¹ S. Prijic-Samaržija and P. Bojanić (eds.). 2012. *Nenad Mišćević – All Faces of Philosophy*. Belgrade: University of Belgrade, The Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, p. 13.

guage and philosophy of psychology (i.e., philosophy of mind). After that, roughly from 1990 forward, an interest in epistemological topics is visible. This can be found in articles in Dometi and again in Philosophical Investigations. A significant area of Nenad's work is epistemology and the philosophy of mathematics (in Acta Analytica and the Slovenian Scientific Journal) to which he contributed original theoretical theses. This line of interest, roughly speaking, can be followed from 1995 onwards. Simultaneously with his interest in the philosophy of mathematics, his published texts show contributions to the philosophy of science. What Nenad gained special recognition for globally is the philosophy of politics, particularly his contribution to understanding the phenomenon of nationalism. In 2001 he published a text on nationalism in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the book Nationalism and Beyond (2001). His other important books are Rationality and Cognition (2000), Philosophy of Language (2003), Nationalism: The Ethical View (2006), Curiosity as an Epistemic Virtue (2020) and Thought Experiments (2022).

Apart from scientific achievements it is especially important to highlight Nenad's unparalleled impact on promoting the reputation of Croatian philosophy on the international philosophical scene. This reputation was created directly, through numerous connections that Nenad built with leading contemporary philosophers, through numerous conferences and symposia he participated in, and by organizing visits of many philosophers to domestic institutions. Indirectly, it was created through the work of people who gained philosophical recognition under Nenad's mentorship, as well as through the activities of institutions established due to Nenad's efforts.

Recognizing the full breadth and reach of Nenad Mišćević's philosophical work, we are only gradually becoming aware of the void his departure has left, first in the lives of those of us who knew him well and socialized with him, and then in the entire cultural, especially philosophical, space to which we belong.

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