

Philosophical generation as an optics in the study of Slovak philosophical thought of the 20th century

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Abstract

The term *philosophical generation*, or *generations*, covers one such initiative in new readings in the history of 20th century philosophy, ethics, and moral philosophy. It focuses its attention on interactions between philosophers as personalities, as teachers of philosophy, and their student-philosophers. It is interested in the interactions that shape the tradition of philosophical thinking and ethics in such unique environments as university departments, institutes of academies, scientific societies, journal editorial offices, or publishing houses. The present study provides an analysis of the existing state of the generational discourse in a historical-philosophical context starting from the 20th century. It focuses on the prospects and pitfalls of the applicability of this lens when examining Slovak philosophical and ethics work in the 20th century and today. It brings thinking about the extent to which the given approach could contribute to existing reflections of our philosophy and ethics and the effort to answer the question of our philosophical identity. It would make possible to point out perspectives and, at the same time, the pitfalls of grasping the formation of philosophical generations in the Slovak academic environment.

Keywords: philosophical generation, history of philosophy and ethics, 20th century, Slovak thought, new readings

We, or Introduction

The International symposium in phenomenology, which met at the beginning of July 2023 in Perugia chose *generation*, or *generations* as its thematic link.² The result of grasping this topic, with a few exceptions,³ caused feelings of some sort of disappointment among the present historians of philosophy. Perhaps that was due to the fact that historical-philosophical examinations were not a priority there.

The present article is oriented strictly at the space of the history of philosophy. More specifically, it is oriented at the concept and discourse of generation as a philosophical generation initiated in 2022 by the work of Yulia V. Sineokaya with the identical title (*Philosophical generations*). The present paper is focused not only on introducing the current discourse but represents the expression of examining the relations and developmental tendencies of Slovak philosophical thought of the 20th century and the present; the thought, which has developed within the interactive matrix among philosophical spaces (institutes of philosophy, departments of the Academy of Sciences, editorial offices of scientific journals, publishing houses,⁴ scientific communities), teachers of philosophy and their students, and teachers of philosophy, and philosophers themselves. The Slovak philosophical space is the *We* in this article.

What the work wants to solve and offer to reader is to supplement the existing rich investigations of our philosophical and ethical thinking by focusing on the perspective of the (un)usability of the concept of generations in the historical-philosophical investigation of our environment. It only marginally enters the space of research or analysis of ideological influences (mainly German, French, and Anglophone) shaping philosophical thinking, which formed internal coherence but also variety within nationally or linguistically related traditions.⁵

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² Symposium phaenomenologicum. International symposium in phenomenology 2023 – Generation(s).

³ A contribution (the result of dissertation research) titled *De la generation à la génération et vice-versa: les décalage generationnels dans la Critique de la raison dialectique de Sartre*, presented by Xenophon Tenezakis could be mentioned here.

⁴ To contribute to research presented, for instance, by Vladimír Bakoš (2009) or Jana Balážová (2002).

⁵ Created by authors like Ján Bodnár (1983), Elena Várossová (2005), Rudolf Dupkala (2021).

In addition to the investigation of peculiar philosophical environments, the present text aims to contribute to the investigation of individual personalities of Slovak philosophy⁶ within their timeframe, to expand their vision by an internal dimension, to deepen the understanding of personal and personality ties, relationships, life, and social circumstances that had overlapped into philosophical thought.

Through the given aim, this text can be thought of as an involvement in the exploration – historical-philosophical initiative – manifested in our geographical space through the lens of, for instance, a new reading of our native philosophical thought, as well as the formation of ethical thought within its broader interactive frameworks, represented by, e.g., *Ethical Thinking of the Past and the Present in the 20th and 21st century*.⁷ It is also necessary to highlight that these examinations are actively engaged by various views published in journals (Brennan, 2016; Belejkanicova, 2022; Cantrell, 2023).

The present text thus represents the intention to approach the optics of generations as a possible mode of access, leading to bridging two extreme positions: collective guilt towards periods and generations of philosophers on the one hand, and an equally inappropriate commemorative optimism on the other. The underlying interest in the philosophical thought of the 20th century and today is precisely that it is attacked most by the mentioned extremes and that these extremes emerge from its ranks. In this regard, it is also a moral challenge for contemporary inquiry. This creates circumstances that have the potential for new historical-philosophical readings and investigations.⁸ The above-mentioned potential is, to a large extent, completed by the fact that the immediate actors, the creators of generations, are still present and active in this environment. At the same time, this represents a significant historical-philosophical challenge.

It is believed that generation as discourse and (as) optics could complement the existing positions of exegesis of the history of philosophy. To enrich them in how the personalities of philosophers, the environment, and their interactions can be viewed. As a procedure and optics, it will not thus constitute something that would clarify all possible interactional links; it will try

⁶ Thus further develop the works of Zlatica Plašienková (2015) or Erika Lalíková (2001).

⁷ It was deliberately put without the use of italics, as the intent was to point here to a long-term research initiative of the collective of authors. From their research results, focus should be put on the second continuation of the collection *Ethical thinking of the past and the present in the 20th and 21st Century*, from 2023. In the first content section entitled *Philosophical-ethical thinking of the 20th century*, Jan Svoboda's contribution named *Hugo Fischer: Realism, Europeaness and the value of democracy* will be particularly interesting. This text can be seen as an exceptional addition to the professional discussion across established interpretations in the history of Czech and Slovak philosophy. One of the compilers of the collection, Ján Kalajtšidis, in his contribution *Christian socialism in the reflection of Slovak evangelical thinkers of the first half of the 20th century*, points to an area of thinking that was on the relatively significant periphery of research interest in our environment. With his contribution, he creates space for further research. Another 4 contributions in this section: Vasil Gluchman's *Samuel Štefan Osuský and Marxist-Leninist philosophy*, Lukáš Švaňa's *Socio-political topics in the Marxist reflections of Andrej Sirácky*, Pavol Krištof's *Hanus' concept of culture and pluralism as a moral problem*, Marta Gluchman's *The value of justice in the literary work of Milo Urban* are all the result of the authors' long-term interest in the investigation of the Slovak ethical discourse that is presented in a literary manner but at the same time possesses an unquestionable topicality also for the investigation of moral attitudes in today's lived reality.

⁸ When bridging these extremes, František Mihina's evaluations addressed to his teacher Igor Hrušovský are particularly inspiring. Assessing the philosophical contribution of Hrušovský, Mihina points, for example, to Ladislav Szántó's contribution to the clarification of materialist dialectics in Hrušovský's work from 1942, *The development of scientific thought*. In the controversy or criticism of Nikolai O. Lossky (or also Jozef Dieška) and intuitive realism, he points out Hrušovský's inclination towards authoritarianism and notes: "In today's return to Hrušovský, it seems that although he rejected their position unusually strongly, he understood less the nature of their argumentation" (Mihina, 1998, p. 586). It is a form of a return of the student (who is an established teacher and thinker) to his teacher and a philosopher; a form of reflection of Slovak philosophical thinking by Slovak philosophical thinking in kinetics, which we would like to follow up on.

to approach how it might be possible to glimpse or initiate a discussion about such interactional links.

The discourse itself is approached through the four most prominently resonant conceptualizations of generation: Karl Mannheim (1952), José Ortega y Gasset (1957), Sineokaya (2022), and the one brought by William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991). The focus within the texts in question will be put on those conceptual elements⁹ that could be used for historical-philosophical research, the study of the Slovak philosophical environment; that is, the second main purpose of this work. However, the presented effort cannot be ended with a definitive full stop, it is discursive. It admits a resolute *No!* for assessing the kinetics of philosophical thinking in our country from the position of a generation.

The conclusions will be programmatically formulated as a stimulus for our joint thinking about who we are philosophically and why, as well as what we are not and cannot or do not want to be. For this, framework probe or an example in the legacy of Ladislav Szántó will be used.

Generation among sociology, history, and the history of thought

From the 20th century onward, there has been an interest in understanding what a generation is. It is possible to observe this interest developing across several disciplines: sociology, literary science, history and, of course, the history of philosophy – the disciplines and understandings between which complementarity can be observed.

Mannheim formulates his view as a sociologist in the 1920s against the background of the controversy with *Geschichtstabellensoziologie*, which focuses on the time duration of a generation. Mannheim considers the temporal point of view to be completely irrelevant.¹⁰ The dispute about whether a generation lasts one and a half, two, three, or even six decades is only a demonstration that the actors of the dispute “became victims of “misunderstanding” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 286). The “generation phenomenon” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 286) becomes worthy of investigation the moment we step outside the framework of temporality, but also of thinking about generation as a social group, sect, association, or organization. It is something that is inherent to a certain society as such. Certain in the sense of the width of the optics used, not necessarily the territory. That is, for the generation, it is determining as well as stabilizing “that people become witnesses and participants of the same events” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 288). This would make it possible to single out a huge number of “affected” people in the human environment. However, the German sociologist offers a clarification: “participation in a common destiny” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 304). It is through co-participation that the generation is integrally connected to the motifs of *Zeitgeist* and *Lagerung*, namely that it is the space for the formation of the “paradoxical dynamics” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 314) that shapes them. It is the dynamics of change. On the one hand, changes of generations, but also changes within those generations. The dynamizing element is the presence of a variety of positions, inconsistency in interpretation, different attitudes towards what is experienced and of what we are a co-participant. A change of generation is not necessary. Tensions of this kind can create “groups” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 304) and “separate [...] units” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 306) within a generation. Their presence also has a highly creative dimension. In the sense of variation of interpretations and attitudes towards jointly experienced and shared events, they can be an interesting subject of research. Mannheim reveals one more aspect that is worth detailing. It describes the relationship between the teacher and the student against the background of change,

⁹ For example, the concept created by Howe and Strauss as a *generational theory* is the subject of extensive studies, which cannot be followed up in detail here.

¹⁰ This is a question that Ortega y Gasset, as well as Howe and Strauss also deal with. For the purpose of the present paper, this question does not play a fundamental role, and so it will not be its focus. In the case of Mannheim’s critical remark, however, it is directly related to his approach.

creation, and variation of attitudes. It is a relationship full of contradictions and tensions “between one possible subjective center of vital orientation and another subsequent one. This tension appears incapable of a solution except for one compensating factor: not only does the teacher educate his pupil, but the pupil educates his teacher too. Generations are in a state of constant interaction” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 301). It is worthy of special attention because it can significantly reduce the number of actors in a generation, even filter it to such an extent that each element of interaction can have its institutional affiliation, even the first and last name. It is also stimulating in that it attributes formative potential to both actors, binding them to one another, creating a situation that is not entirely self-evident. Even the absence of this joint commitment, the position of the teacher as the one who knows and the student, or the pupil, as the exclusive receiver of learned contents, is something that is meaningful.

The well-known ideas of Robert Wohl about the fact that historical generations do not give birth, but create, would probably best describe the setting of the book, which “presents the history of the future” (Howe & Strauss, 1991, p. 8) to grasp the generation as a phenomenon of history.¹¹ A generation is a social group of peers, a part of the population of a given time, which becomes the result of initiations and transformations determined by individuals and events that are a human creation.¹² A generation is what determines and will determine the nature of history, which affects people outside the generation as an experienced circumstance. In its womb, the existing state is born, but also the one where the territorially defined community (in their case, chiefly American)¹³ will be able to achieve. Changes in society reside in a generation. They happen through the recurrence of “dominant and recessive generation” (Howe & Strauss, 1991, p. 447). Aware of the difficulty and sensitivity of the assessment of dominant and recessive generations, Howe and Strauss initiate the necessary need to look at past events in such a way that “you need to step outside your inner-absorption, take a look at like-minded ancestors” (Howe & Strauss, 1991, p. 11). This positionality is key to grasping the core of their interest in generation: the assessment of dominance and recession. Their assessment is not interesting for the specific parameters and criteria of dominance and recession (for Howe and Strauss, they are given by the realities of American society), but for its perspective of dominance and recession as such. The fact that we would consider the change of generations in this distinction. At the same time, the proposed step is interesting, but it carries a preference for a common way of thinking with the investigated ancestors. The preference we live and nurture at the same time, i.e. what aspect we investigate and why we are interested in it at all, acts as a chiseling factor for our probe into the activities of generations. At the same time, it can enter the space of the future. Here, the (not self-evident) position that we can draw inspiration from the past for the change brought about in the future should naturally be accepted. Thanks to it, we can explore the rich metamorphoses of the past from the positions we prefer. Investigate when and what circumstances favored our preference, as well as what hindered its formation. This preference could be, for example, philosophical work determined by the “only truth” (religiously or ideologically determined), and work formed in the space of the discourse of different positions.

The different ethical preferences and moral values (also religiously or ideologically determined) influenced rendering changes and, at the same time, become a rendering of challenges with possibilities and obstacles in the current research of ethics and philosophy in

¹¹ Their historical approach is seen as a complement to the discussion formed by Mannheim, Ortega y Gasset; a discussion to which Johan Huizinga or rather August Comte and Wilhelm Dilthey also contribute.

¹² They are not interested in the myriad of fates that would not have a human signature, for example the impact of the destructive force of the elements.

¹³ The interest of this author pair goes beyond the geopolitical framework of the USA and North America. It refers more broadly to the Western world, i.e., to an entity whose determination represents a particular interdisciplinary issue. An issue that goes far beyond the scope of the present approach to an author’s legacy.

the 20th century. It is one of the contributions which the present paper can offer to contemporary inquiry of the philosophical and ethical issues. It can help to focus attention on the identity of traditional values which are discussed, too. Last but not least, it makes it possible to map such preferences in previous generations of philosophers and the wider philosophical production.

In his *Revolt of the masses*, Ortega y Gasset tries to grasp the strange non-physiological anatomy of a human being who is in abundance during his period, and who is peculiarly average. It is the *man of the masses* whose mediocrity is determined by him “by believing that they have a right to an opinion on the matter without previous effort to work one out for themselves” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 122). This significant feature of his makes him belong to the “absurd type of human being which I have called the *rebel mass*” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 122). When the Spanish philosopher and writer thinks about the crowd, he does not mean a social class, but “t a kind of man to be found today in all social classes, who consequently represents our age, in which he is the predominant, ruling power” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 122). Just as *Geschichtstabelle Soziologie* was for Mannheim, Western history was for Howe and Strauss; the rebellious man of the masses represented the stimulus for thought for Ortega y Gasset. His remarks on generation take shape against the backdrop of his diagnostics and antics. Like Mannheim, Ortega y Gasset would perceive change and its dynamics as a key component of generation. He points to the dynamic unity that creates the plurality, and notes: “If this plurality disappears, the dynamic unity falls apart” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 14). Elsewhere, he attributes to this plurality the quality of “militarization” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 186). Within the generation, it is possible to identify two periods determined by two forms of action and mutual interaction. They are inevitably linked to the existence of another, previous generation. Ortega y Gasset leads the mentioned interaction between the new generation and the one that follows this new one. It is necessary to take into account that we are moving within one separate generation. He writes: “the new generation carries out the propaganda its ideas, preferences, and tastes, which finally arrive at power and are dominant in the second half of its course. But the generation educated under its sway is already bringing forwards other ideas, preferences, and tastes, which it begins to diffuse in the general atmosphere” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 109).

He cites Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein as examples. The former “was able to found his system of physics without knowing much philosophy, but Einstein needed to saturate with Kant and Marx before he could arrive at his own keen synthesis” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 126). In addition to thinking in a straight line, he also offers other reasoning. Indeed, if the thoughts, hobbies, and tastes of such an educated generation are set against, for example, revolutionary changes, then it becomes “substantially restorative in spirit, striving to restore the past” (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, p. 109). At the same time, he emphasizes that a restoration cannot be understood as an immediate return to the old. It would be contrary to the nature of the restoration, at least in Ortega y Gasset’s understanding. Namely, the moment of *raising of a generation* carries within it a moment of continuation, but it has the conceivable possibility of modifications or metamorphoses. At the same time, it in no way excludes another form of continuation, namely the expansion of the established starting points or moving the interest further, for example by developing a partial issue into the form of a new central motif of the next (*raised*) generation and, at the same time, also the one for whom the already *raised generation* will be old within the established genealogical set.

It inspires historical-philosophical thinking about the fact that there are such thinkers who can create independently, i.e., they do not need strong starting points and will become determinants for others (a kind of one option for the creation of a generation). In such a case, it should be the subject of a separate assessment whether the absence of such strong starting points is not covered only by a lack of interest in admitting such starting positions. At the same time, it leads to thinking about another possible approach to the creation of a generation, namely that

the strong concepts of older generations will become the basis for a qualitative shift in thinking and its conceptual grasp (the example of Einstein), which will become directly paradigmatic for the next generations.

Generation as an optics for the history of philosophy and ethics

As has already been indicated, the discourse of generation of Sineokaya (2022) immediately moves into the environment of the history of philosophy. She thus makes the mentioned concept a *philosophical generation*. She installs it with the interest of looking into the history of philosophy as the history of philosophical generations; not with the interest of creating a new correctness of interpretation, but to provide the possibility of a new interpretation. The author's vivid reflections on the fact that the relevance of the term and concept – philosophical generation – can be questionable, considered professionally illegitimate, especially from the point of view of the established terminology of culturology, sociology, social psychology, or anthropology, are highly discursive. Sineokaya focuses on this phenomenon in 20th century Russia. She tries to demarcate philosophical generations and addresses possible contributors while focusing on the philosophical space of Moscow: Moscow universities are represented, dominantly Moscow State University, and also members of the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences. *Voices of philosophers*, which is what Sineokaya calls the introductory part of her concept, transformed into an extensive book publication of an anthological nature.¹⁴ It is in this part that the reader can learn that the author defines generations on the basis of a particular temporal relationship and adapts the structure of the work to it. This temporal affiliation is not tied to the duration of a generation. Its distinctiveness lies either in the affiliation of the authors to the period as the time of the beginning of their philosophical work, or the affiliation is formed on the basis of the author's own identification with the values of the relevant philosophical decade, the affinity of the researched topics, the texts read, the personalities critiqued. Thus, six or seven generations are profiled,¹⁵ starting from the 1920s, to the philosophical generation of the 2010s. At the same time, the author is aware that, in the Russian environment, it would be possible to consider other names and approaches to generations of thinkers: post-Stalinist, reactionary, *glasnost*, *perestroika*, market reforms, protest, dogmatic, adogmatic, Marxist-Leninist, reformed Marxist, generations of Friedrich Nietzsche, Ivan A. Ilyin, Martin Heidegger, or Jacques Derrida.

In the thoughts of the compiler and oracle of this work, there is something like fear, doubt, even skepticism, whether this concept will be accepted in the interpretation of the history of Russian philosophy (Sineokaya formulates it most openly on page 15). Actually, this concern can be seen as an expression of the author's desire for this to happen. After reading this monumental work, it is possible to observe that the given approach has ambitions to be as paradigmatic for the study of (primarily)¹⁶ Russian thought, as the view of the *VECHI* collection on the Russian intelligentsia before the first revolution, or the optics of Michail A. Maslin's

¹⁴ Its extent is 1232 pages, and it joins together more than 40 authors – female and male philosophers.

¹⁵ The issue becomes whether defining generations in the 20th century is possible only after the death of Stalin.

¹⁶ The fate of Sineokaya moves this lens further and installs it in a larger global discussion. With her significant contribution, she connected the issue of the philosophical generation of historians of philosophy within the framework of the World Philosophical Congress in Rome. Her fate is the fate of several authors of this work, which were published in January 2022. Right before Russia's attack on Ukraine, Sineokaya left the country, and went to Paris. Here, Juliette Faure gives an extensive interview published under the title *La guerre a mis fin à la recherche intellectuelle libre en Russie* in the pages of the daily *Analyse Opinion Critique* on 10/26/2022. Here, she describes the formation of a new tendency in Russian thought – Russian military philosophy. She believes that a new generation will not arise from the efforts of Aleksander Dugin, Konstantin Malofeev, Aleksander Borodaj and their intellectual circle united around the Tsargrad media holding. A group of thinkers that considers the incorporation of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences into the structures directly controlled by the High Command of the Armed Forces as a strategic task.

intellectual double for the study of the history of Russian philosophy formulated in the 2010s. Philosophical generation in Sineokaya's grasp so far resembles a challenge and a conceptual sketch rather than something clearly methodologically anchored. This is not and does not have to be a deficit; it creates space for interactions and joint thinking. After all, Hans Georg Gadamer's magnum opus *Truth and Method* also required decades of conceptual maturation in the *Introduction to the spiritual sciences*.

Expressing one's own position on how to perceive and define the very phenomenon of generation in the history of philosophy (philosophical generation) is not a thrown gauntlet for all of the participating authors. Some take this position as their own and devote themselves directly to the description of a generation. They do not need to judge the relevance of this label. They respond by describing the generation to which they feel they belong. They describe its atmosphere, creative challenges, and nuances that will never occur again or must be repeated. Boris I. Pruzhinin is one such author. He represents his reflection by modifying the widespread questioning of Russian society after the death of Stalin: "What will happen to us?" he writes about his generation in their sixties: "The unmasking of the 'cult'¹⁷ made us think about What happened to us after a few years?" (Pruzhinin, 2022, p. 478). It is considered one of the possible keys to mediate reflections on the tendencies that influence the philosophical generation. Through this question, it is possible to glimpse the published texts and the forms, metamorphoses of philosophical discussions, and their circumstances.

Among the authors who relate to the question of the nature of the philosophical generation, one of the reactions seems particularly stimulating. It is the reaction on the nature of the philosophical generation brought by Alexander V. Mikhaylovsky (2022). In his understanding, what makes a generation an intellectual entity distinguishable from other intellectual entities and, in a broader context, social entities, is the mutual programmatic confrontation between its members, which are formed together when working on common texts or when meeting with common leaders of philosophical thought. It is an identity that manifests outwardly not only by reading the same books, but also by reading these books in the same way. If the author projects this perspective on the philosophical generation to which he belongs,¹⁸ then its identity was shaped by the legendary Tuesday morning lectures of Vladimir V. Bibichin, which were carried out with the tacit approval of the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy (first Alexander V. Panin and later Vladimir V. Mironov) at Moscow State University. That is, Bibichin had no official relationship with this university. The Moscow lectures of two important European philosophers also had an influence on the philosophical generations described by Mikhaylovsky as well as its identity: Paul Ricœur (1996) and Umberto Eco (1997). The philosophical generation is characterized by the mutual interaction of its members, personalities who were not indifferent to each other, who showed an authentic interest in themselves and their work and often expressed it in a strictly critical spirit.

The philosophical generation approach and philosophical *We*

The challenge and conceptual sketch that is the philosophical generation for now makes even thinking about it questionable. If the introduction of the present article pointed out that a permissible response to the given discourse can be a resolute *No!*, it is possible that it could happen to the reader at this very moment.

However, if we were willing to join this discussion (which is not necessarily destined for success) at least by willingly thinking together about it, we could accept that several attributes and conceptual moments are being profiled here, which might not be in vain: the identity of the philosophical generations formed by the kinship of researched topics, read texts, critiqued personalities; co-participation in an event that can give rise to variations of interpretations and

¹⁷ As Josif Stalin's cult of personality. Author's note.

¹⁸ Mikhaylovsky perceives himself as a representative of the millennial generation.

attitudes towards jointly experienced and shared events (here, the event could be both the historical event itself and the event of a philosophical idea, text or, a philosopher influencing a generation); philosophical work determined by “the only truth” (religiously or ideologically established) and work formed in the space of discourse of different positions; dynamic unity forming plurality; the moment of *raising*, which carries within itself the moment of continuation, but, at the same time, has the conceivable possibility of modifications or metamorphoses, of transcending and grasping the raised generation as the old one for the formation of a new generation, which itself will raise. Each of them makes it possible to affect the formation of philosophical thinking, not excluding Slovak provenance, from starting positions that are not normally established and therefore worthy of attention.

The starting positions for the investigation of the formation of philosophical thinking are also offered here in another sense. If, for example, the programmatic confrontation between members of a generation is emphasized, which are formed together when working on common texts or when meeting common leaders of philosophical thought, then we can consider the absence of such ties; consider that the *philosophical We* is not the result of a programmatic confrontation. It is also possible to consider the formative potential that is attributed to both actors of the interaction between teacher and student. It can also be absent, it is not excluded that a student of philosophy would not be naturally accepted as an actor shaping philosophical thinking. Moreover, he would be accepted in this position only at a certain stage of his studies, only when he has sufficiently mastered his philosophical education. However, when is that?

It allows us to think about the formation of our philosophy as a product of intensive cooperation or the result of the performance of exceptional personalities, philosophers – generations formed by teachers, role models. It creates the possibility to ask about the connection between great personalities and the environments that shaped them, that they themselves shaped, and that subsequently shaped others, other generations. In this way, we could consider, for example, the Society for Research Synthesis, the creative contribution of Hrušovský, Jaroslav Dubnický, or others. About what they meant for the formation of the *philosophical We*, or perhaps even its absence.

Consider the departments of philosophy in the Slovak academic environment, the schools (phenomenological, environmental, bioethical, Kantian, Heideggerian, Patočkian, naturalistic, analytical, and modal metaphysical) of research that were formed within their frameworks, or even those whose research is losing momentum. About journals that are their *flagships*, and, at the same time, unique philosophical environments that have their share in shaping philosophical generations.

The beginnings, work, and the legacy of the Phenomenological Seminars initiated by Jozef Sivák and Jozef Piaček could be approached in the same manner. Their contribution to the formation of our philosophy and the position of phenomenological investigations within it could also be explored. These are undoubtedly significant across philosophical workplaces in Slovak environments. The memories, thoughts, and musings of these people could thus be systematically captured. Captured not because it should become a chapter with a period, or an exclamation point at the end. Rather captured in order to create content that can subsequently be critically examined and criticized in more detail.

It could also contribute to a different form of questioning: What did the thinkers themselves contribute to their generation? How can the deficits of their philosophical work be perceived? An opportunity would present itself to reveal that their actions were also shaped by the fact that they were a negative example for other generations. The stated concern can be easily questioned. It is permissible to think that such work is registered, but something else is of interest here. Other works and references are considered worthy of studying, following, and developing.

As we can see, the philosophical generation approach is full of methodological and hermeneutical challenges. Having said that, it also includes moral and ethical challenges and issues for the historian of 20th century philosophy and ethical thought. It opens a frame of morality and ethical values in academic inquiry in the field. This – ethical – approach lets us understand that our investigation into the history of thought and values is a process of shaping oneself and shaping the academic environment.

The values preferred by the researcher are not only *conditions sine que non* (using the words of Paul K. Feyerabend) of scientific work. Values are the pillars for one of the possible grasps of scientific work. They bring the perception of a valuable inquiry as a demanding action, a permanent fulfillment of an obligation towards the field and researched issues. It is demanding because life permeates its nature, it matures. It is challenging because it is quickly exhausted as empty declaration of values as the chain of words. It becomes exhausted at the moment when the fact is revealed that its biggest issue is not in understanding of values. It becomes complex at the moment of awakening to its content, to the fact that its expression brings with it a clear framework of values and, at the same time, an obligation to satisfy it. It carries in itself and for our life the determinations for scientific work in its daily manifestations. It is necessary to realize that the initial issue is the willingness to use these values as the tool as well as the fact that it must necessarily be an act of our consciousness, the consciousness of the historian of philosophy, religious thought, and ethics. We cannot accept attachment to values without their manifestation in the actions of our scientific life.

It is also negative in that turning attention exclusively to our research goals with full awareness of the obligation to the researched legacy becomes an immediate trampling. Such behavior is a greater pitfall than the unwillingness to accept established values. This unwillingness here, on the other hand, could represent something like a sober calculation, in which I am clearly aware that I am programmatically unable or, in short, unwilling to accept a commitment to the researched legacy. It would be a belief in my limitations, through which I cannot accept responsibility for the researched legacy, and therefore I do not want to make my inquiry in accordance with the values that would demand it. That is another level of assessment of the work of the historian of philosophy influenced by ethical frames and values.

Both cases, settings, or situations in research between which we could choose and at the same time collaborate at any time, represent what can cultivate and shape the historian of philosophy. In the case of acceptance of the value of the researched legacy, historians of philosophy are formed in the very process of grasping the extent of this commitment as well as in the constant guidance of ourselves in daily (research) fulfillment. In the case of acceptance that I cannot (or do not want to) accept the full shape of inquired legacy, turning to my priorities, can have a cultivating effect, in which, however, a different form of obligations and duties will inevitably appear, which I will face and which I can(not) resist. That is one of the important moments in the challenge named philosophical generation from the hermeneutic point of view which is directly influenced by moral values.

Its own pitfall is the degree of criticism, which cannot be derisive or vulgar, and not only because of the still alive animosities of an institutional and personal nature, belittling or downright vulgar. The fear of such an approach is associated, for example, with the work of Szántó. It is obvious that an integral part of his image will be his “meeting with Lenin”, which causes quite a mocking grimace on the face of a fair portion of the professional public. As the introductory part of the work indicates, the focus will not be put on a detailed analysis, as it definitely deserves more extensive space, at least in the form of a separate study. Instead, an advised framework probe, a sketch that could mark the space for further development will be offered.

Milan Zigo used to tell his younger colleagues that in the previous regime a philosophical text needed its own *parovoz*.¹⁹ In his time, Szántó was what Russian poetry terms *the ruler of dumas*.²⁰ This reveals the form of activity of this author and thinker, which is not known or perhaps does not want to be known. It is believed that Szántó does not use the approach of a *parovoz*, as he is so convinced, authentically passionate, even dogmatic,²¹ that he himself becomes a *parovoz* for his time. Naturally, not with such “pressure” as the triple-locomotive: Marx, Lenin, Stalin.

In relation to his creative legacy, through the lens of the history of philosophy as the history of philosophical generations, it would be possible to examine and subject to a new critical reading his philosophical thought, which appeared on the pages of such journals as: *Filozofia* [Philosophy], *Otázky marxistickej filozofie* [Questions of Marxist philosophy], *Slovenský filozofický časopis* [Slovak philosophical journal], *Filosofický časopis* [Philosophical journal], *Filozofický sborník SAVU* [Philosophical collection SAVU]. Such a new reading would be able to tell quite a bit about the nature of Szántó’s own convictions, as well as about the space of philosophical journals, as an integral element shaping the philosophical discourse of the time. As an element that had a significant influence on generations of philosophers, philosophy teachers, as well as their students. Naturally, Szántó was also active in the space of journalism for the wider (not only working) public, which did not resign itself to the need to think about the world in which it lived. This is how it was implemented, for example, in the *DAV* magazine. To a large extent, these were ideologically identical positions written in a language that could be described as more accessible.²²

The reading of his works and the knowledge of the biographical features leads to a belief that Szántó embodies several attributes integrally connected with the optics of the philosophical generation: the formative potential that is attributed to the teacher and the student in their interactions, including the identified absence; his work as an example of the philosophy of “one truth” in our country; the personality of Szántó as an example (perhaps even a negative) model of a thinker determining his generation; the work of Szántó as a commonly shared destiny of generations of thinkers, even in terms of the need to adopt a reserved attitude towards him, etc.

Conclusion

A closer approach would make it possible to observe and investigate *the generation of parovoz* in Slovak philosophy and the broader academic space, even with its possible consequences. Undoubtedly, one of them could be the fixation of a part of the academic spectrum on the fact that authorities are not questioned, and if one enters into a polemic with them, it is an attack on their person, not on possible meritorious or argumentative shortcomings, which could be made during the creative process.

This approach makes it possible to open up highly sensitive questions: What do we owe to the philosophers of the 20th century and what deficits, forms of injustice have we caused them? Such a form of grievance would also be that we would not be interested in them and relegate them to an imaginary archive entitled *Do not read, a useless ideological delusion!* Szántó would obviously not be the only victim here.

¹⁹ Rus. паровоз – steam engine, locomotive. In terms of prof. Zigo, it was something like an obligatory, ideologically charged part of the text, which allowed the text to be published, pushed it into print.

²⁰ Rus. *vlastitel dum* – *властитель дум*.

²¹ This term is used by Mihina to address the work of Tibor Halečka in the entry dedicated to him in the lexicon *Osobnosti slovenskej filozofie 20. storočia* [Personalities of Slovak philosophy in the 20th Century] (Mihina, 2023, p. 65).

²² The extensive work of Szántó is mapped out in an obscure, almost forgotten book compiled by Eva Vicenová (1984).

The present article does not want to open old wounds, but wants to offer the opportunity to look at the formation of ethical attitudes, thinking about morality, and philosophical discussions of the past, which have shaped our *philosophical We*.

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