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COOL PHILOSOPHY OR THE ART OF RESTRAINING FROM JUDGING WITHOUT BEING INDIFFERENT

Abstract: Although philosophy is primarily based on the exchange of arguments in support of or against a thesis, it is also based on certain cognitive and value *attitudes* supporting the argumentation. When discussing a problem, it is not the opponents philosophers *care* about but being “right”. Were their argumentation not guided by such an attitude the philosophical discussion would turn into an arbitrary sequence of statements without any focus on the very matter. The problem arises in the case of self-reflection – when philosophers realize that they are starting from certain presuppositions that limit their attempt to solve the problem – or meta-reflection – when it becomes clear that reaching a consensus in the discussion is impossible due to the different starting points of its participants. This insight might have a distancing effect with regard to one’s assumptions or the assumptions of philosophizing in general. To achieve such (self)distancing, it is necessary to assume a different attitude in the discussion – or to assume none at all! The goal of this presentation is to investigate the *suspension of attitude*, avoiding a one-sided identification with one point of view and enabling a broader perspective on the constellation in which representatives of different positions are involved in the discussion of a problem. In the history of philosophical thought, there have been attempts to formulate such a neutral habitus: Pyrrhonians sought *suspension of judgment (epoché)*, Adam Smith proposed the instance of an *impartial spectator* during the assessment of morally sensitive situations, Max Weber advocated *value neutrality* when dealing with science. The key question is whether the restraint we are discussing here rests on a special (personal) *disposition* or *value attitude* gradually built up and accepted with full awareness. *Indifference* as a character disposition is not suitable as a basis because it is essentially anti-theoretical. Another basis must be found on which to establish distance from philosophical biases, and it will include *coolness* (in the sense of the absence of strong emotions) and *prudence*. At the same time, however, there will be *engagement* in the matter because without this philosophy loses its seriousness.

Keywords: argumentation, disposition, value attitude, restraint, impartial spectator, value neutrality, Pyrrhonians, Adam Smith, Max Weber.

1. The Initial Problem

First of all, I would like to introduce the problem I will be dealing with in my paper. My starting point is the distinction between *dispositions* and *values*, as indicated in the title of the conference. There is something like *indifference*, a quality we attribute to people who do not develop a particular attitude towards a certain issue or situation. One is indifferent if one does not care whether an issue or a situation will be perceived in a positive or negative light. In other words: one does neither have a positive nor a negative attitude towards the issue or situation at hand, therefore, one does not evaluate it. It could even be said that the presupposition for evaluating something as good or bad is the lack of indifference towards the object of evaluation. Indifference, in this sense, makes the act of biased evaluation impossible or at least difficult. Indifference could, thus, be seen as a *non-evaluative disposition* in contrast to, for example, benevolence as a positively or callousness as a negatively evaluated disposition. However, I am interested in finding out whether indifference can also be recognized as a *disposition for evaluation* in certain cases, that is, as a *manifestation* of a *value attitude*.

In order to understand the meaning of indifference, its *psychological description* should be distinguished from the *philosophical* one. Indifference can be attributed to someone as a *character trait*. We can recognize an indifferent person by the way they¹ behave and act: their reactions are rarely intense, and their bodily movements are rather slow and almost lifeless. Such a person seems to have no feelings, and if they do show them, their expression lacks vitality. From a semantic point of view, this description is related to the *phlegmatic temperament* described in the framework of ancient medicine and psychology. According to the system of *humoral theory*,² a person whose physical constitution (dominance of cold body fluids: *phlegm*) correlates with calmness, slowness, and, to some extent, lethargy is described as phlegmatic. Paradoxically, one could say that someone with a phlegmatic temperament appears to be completely *untempered*. In a philosophically (more precisely: ethically) relevant sense, indifference is a characteristic of a person lacking *interest* in something, which means that in a situation where they need to act in accordance with advice or instructions, they are not going to fulfill the task with tremendous vigor and intensity and will rather give the impression of not caring. So, here, indifference is characterized by the readiness to act or perform

1 For stylistic reasons, I will use the singular form of the pronoun “they” instead of masculine and feminine pronouns.

2 On the historical development of this psychological theory cf. Arikha, 2007.

a task, and all of this obviously depends on the *attitude* towards the matter itself. In other words, the trait of indifference refers to *character* in a psychological sense, and to a specific *attitude* in a philosophical or ethical sense. Or, in accordance with the main topic of this conference: indifference in the psychological sense is a *character disposition*, and in the philosophical sense a *value attitude*.

Although the consideration of the character of indifference is primarily of psychological and, seemingly, axiological importance, I would like to deal with this characteristic – in a dual sense: as a disposition and as a value attitude – from the perspective of *metaphilosophy*. Hence, I am interested in the status of indifference in the field of philosophy. Metaphilosophy is a discipline exclusively dealing with the reflection of the structure of philosophical speech and thought, without an explicit attitude towards philosophical pretensions to possessing truth. It is not intended to identify the philosophical position corresponding to reality, but to help understand what it actually means to take up a philosophical position. Does this mean that the metaphilosopher should be *indifferent* to philosophers arguing the case of their thesis in order to defend it from objections of those who disagree? If a metaphilosopher (at least in an ideal case) does not interfere in philosophical discussions and disputes, does this mean that the solution to a problem does not concern them and that they “do not care” which of the participants in the discussion is right? If this is the case, could they be accused of being “indifferent” to or even “ignorant” of philosophy? Or might the fact that they behave this way, i.e. that they remain “cool-headed” when dealing with philosophical discussions, rather be an indication of some kind of excellence, the ability to preserve impartiality in the face of philosophers’ *non-objectivity*? These issues should be considered separately, so I will skip them here. Regardless of the answers to these questions, I think that metaphilosophy can serve as a useful aid to orientation in the field of philosophy, even if it does not evaluate the pretensions of philosophical authors concerning the truthfulness (or at least truthlikeness) of their theories.

Now I would like to point out the tendencies of gaining control over situations in order to avoid the adoption of a dogmatic attitude in discussions that are abundant in philosophy itself. The goal is to show that it is not only possible “outside” of philosophy, i.e. on a metaphilosophical level, to distance oneself from a standpoint and simultaneously demonstrate one’s engagement in thinking but also in the framework of philosophy itself. To be indifferent in philosophy may also be a sign of wisdom and a prerequisite for gaining wisdom.

2. How to Restrain from Judging in a Philosophical Manner

My intention is to illustrate with a few examples how certain thinkers restrain from judgment within philosophy. I will consider whether this is done more passively, based on some disposition of the character, or rather actively, by building a position on certain arguments. In other words, we will see whether someone is predisposed to not adhering to a specific philosophical position due to their character or whether they are able to distance themselves from certain philosophical solutions to problems due to a belief reached through critical self-reflection. The three examples I will consider can also be understood as forms or ways of restraining from philosophical reasoning: 1) restraining from judgment in the ancient tradition of *radical scepticism* (*Pyrrhonism*) (the so-called *epoché*), 2) observing a problematic situation through the eyes of an unbiased observer (as suggested by Adam Smith), 3) Max Weber's recommendation that those dealing with science should – at least at the academic level – be *unprejudiced*. Let us consider these examples one by one.

2.1. Suspension of Judgement (*epoché*)

In some phases of the history of philosophy, a certain exhaustion from fruitless discussions is noticeable, when one party to the dispute does not accept the standpoint of the other and vice versa. It is, of course, possible to introduce new perspectives on the matter discussed. This, however, only multiplies points of contention and further postpones the possibility of resolving the dispute, be it only by a temporary consensus of all parties involved. Apart from that, there is a radically different strategy striving to avoid rather than resolve the dispute – namely, excluding philosophers (if they can even be called that) completely from such discussions. This alternative approach to philosophy, which is, in fact, rather some kind of abandonment of philosophy or distancing from it, should have been an alternative to the *dogmatic attitude* and *academic scepticism* in late antiquity. Adherents to Pyrrhon's philosophy, the so-called *Pyrrhonists*, renewed his teachings at the beginning of the new millennium. Sextus Empiricus, who was actually a physician, systematized this teaching in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. It is the most important document for the study of *radical scepticism*. The main idea of this sort of philosophizing is outlined in the following quote:

Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity.³

The concept of *equipollence* is defined as follows:

By 'equipollence' we mean equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing: none of the conflicting accounts takes precedence over any other as being more convincing.⁴

Ultimately, the main goal of radical scepticism is to gain *tranquillity* of the soul by *suspending* the judgement on philosophical problems:

Suspension of judgement is a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything. Tranquillity is freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul.⁵

What is the point of this sceptical strategy? In philosophical discussions, dogmatic participants usually opt for one thesis and reject the counterthesis, i.e. they bring forth good arguments in support of the former or argue against the latter. When discussing with their opponents, they are not indifferent at all – on the contrary, they are highly engaged, frequently presenting their arguments or objections with emotional involvement. This makes philosophical discussions to a certain extent intense and fierce. Pyrrhonian sceptics, on the other hand, deem restraint from final judgement and remaining undecided, i.e. not opting for any position, the best approach, as they realize that every relevant statement in philosophy can be supported by an argument, but also disputed by a counter-argument. The reason they deem this the best approach is psychological – namely, the recognition that indifference towards the philosophical discussion of an issue leads to *tranquillity*, the ideal ancient thinkers aspired to. In other words, the suspension of philosophical reasoning helps to achieve tranquillity. The reason why sceptics stay out of philosophical discussions is simply pragmatic: they just do not want to be upset by discussions. Their primary goal is to stay calm and find inner peace.

Does this mean that Pyrrhonians are *indifferent* to philosophy? It seems that they are not interested in which of the philosophical positions is “right”, which of the philosophical statements “corresponds” to reality

3 Sextus Empiricus, 2000, p. 4.

4 Op. cit., p. 5. In other words, all philosophical perspectives are equally right or wrong. (Therefore, in Smiljanić 2006, the author demonstrates the importance of *perspectivism* for metaphilosophical discourse.)

5 Ibid.

and what reality is “in itself”. Dogmatic philosophers would denote sceptics “anti-philosophers” (Plato would probably consider their position “mysological”). However, it would be too hasty or even dogmatically malicious to consider radical sceptics the opposite of philosophers. They *care* about philosophy as well, explicitly identifying themselves as philosophers and comparing themselves to dogmatic thinkers and academic sceptics. Moreover, their radical criticism of all preceding philosophy (including their own!) is due to their striving for correct opinions and developing well-thought-out attitudes that influence everyday practice. However, criticism in this context does not represent the mere destruction of a position, but rather a suggestion for autocorrection with *psychotherapeutic* value – a kind of *mental therapy* for philosophers. Although they did not yet have this intention, we could say that the Pyrrhonians’ way of speaking and thinking laid the foundations for a *psychology of philosophy*: the task of this approach would be to examine why proponents of a certain thesis stick to their position or even defend it rather aggressively (e.g. with a certain anger towards those who do not share their point of view), when consensus with other thinkers is lacking or adequate solutions to a problem cannot be reached. The reasons for such behavior cannot be of a purely theoretical or even rational character, as the minimum rational condition for a successful discussion is, first and foremost, to listen to our opponent without interrupting him or her and drop any negative emotions during the discussion. Philosophical discourse should not be a training ground for inappropriate emotions and resentments. It should rather provide an opportunity for open discussion and fair exchange of arguments, even if the viewpoints of the discussants diverge diametrically. This might be an idealization of this kind of discourse, but at least it is an ideal one should strive for in order to avoid dogmatism and intellectual narcissism. After all, dogmatism has a negative connotation regardless of this philosophical context. The radical sceptics can take the credit for pointing out the necessity of critical self-reflection concerning one’s own point of view and were thus – at least I assume – responsible for developing *metaphilosophy* as a special form of thinking.⁶

6 “Scepticism is a kind of liberation philosophy or, perhaps better, a liberation *from* philosophy. It frees us from involvement with all those problematic issues and lifts from our shoulders the burden of having to take sides in all those abstruse controversies.” (Rescher, 1985, p. 248) Such a position is akin to that of metaphilosophy. However, unlike the latter, scepticism advocates the thesis that philosophy is a research project doomed to fail, because no philosophical statement can be fully proven true and defended against other thinkers’ objections. In other words, scepticism itself is a philosophical position, albeit with a negative connotation. Cf. Rescher’s defense of

2.2. The Impartial Spectator

The way prejudices or affects hinder or even prevent the perception of all aspects of a situation relevant to making certain judgment or decision is especially thematized in *ethical* contexts. Whether someone acted in a morally correct manner depends on whether they were bound by their own domain of interest or whether they took into account the interests of others as well. In order to recognize the interests of others (at least to a certain extent), one must be able to put oneself in their position and, if necessary, account for their feelings as influential factors in human actions. We can call this process of imagining another's situation *sympathy*. In modern British moral philosophy, the term 'sympathy' is used to indicate the ability of a person to put themselves in another's position, at least in their mind. In his book *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) one of the main representatives of that philosophy, Adam Smith, considers the concept of sympathy to be crucial for understanding how we acquire the competence of moral reasoning in relation to our own as well as other people's actions and behavior. We cannot directly feel what a person is experiencing, but we can sympathize with them thanks to our ability to *imagine* what we ourselves would feel in that situation. Smith argues psychologically:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.⁷

The main difficulty in (imaginatively) taking another person's point of view is the strength of our *affects* and *feelings* coupled with our *self-love*:

When we are about to act, the eagerness of passion will seldom allow us to consider what we are doing, with the candour of an indifferent person. The violent emotions which at that time agitate us, discolour our views of things; even when we are endeavouring to place ourselves in the situation of another, and to regard the objects that interest us in the light in which they will naturally appear to him, the fury of our own passions constantly calls us back to our own place, where every thing appears magnified and misrepresented by self-love.⁸

An important factor in establishing sympathy is *temporal distance* – the more time has passed since we performed an action, the easier it is for

philosophical validity claims against their sceptical re-examinations in: op. cit., pp. 248–252.

7 Smith, 2004, p. 12.

8 Op. cit., p. 182.

us to observe its effects from the perspective of an *indifferent spectator*. In Smith's words:

When the action is over, indeed, and the passions which prompted it have subsided, we can enter more coolly into the sentiments of the indifferent spectator. What before interested us is now become almost as indifferent to us as it always was to him, and we can now examine our own conduct with his candour and impartiality.⁹

What does this mean? At the moment of performing an action, we are more strongly influenced by affects and feelings than afterwards. Therefore, it is much more difficult to make decisions under pressure of a current situation than to judge past events. This also means the affective background makes reasoning in specific situations difficult, and it is hard to achieve a high degree of impartiality under such circumstances. Smith's remark almost sounds like a proverb:

The man of to-day is no longer agitated by the same passions which distracted the man of yesterday,¹⁰

meaning that temporal distance is a prerequisite for appropriately judging a situation. (The use of 'cold' is also interesting: the less strong feelings influence our judgment, the "cooler" we become as impartial observers.) Furthermore, Smith identifies people's inability to move beyond self-interest to take up the position of an impartial observer as the main cause of their problems. Thus, he also calls self-deceit a "fatal weakness of mankind".¹¹ That is why it is necessary to take a step back and observe ourselves "through the eyes of others":

If we saw ourselves in the light in which others see us, or in which they would see us if they knew all, a reformation would generally be unavoidable.¹²

We can say that the attitude of indifference is embodied in Smith's idea of an impartial spectator: this observer is defined by the absence of interest in a certain situation in which an adequate judgment or decision needs to be made. Smith's (optimistic) assumption is that every individual is capable of activating that instance in themselves, and can, thus, distance themselves from the interests and values they usually adhere to. Consequently, we are not dealing with a mere innate disposition, but rather with the cognitive ability of evaluation, the success of which increases

9 Ibid., p. 183.

10 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 183.

11 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 184.

12 *Ibid.*

with each common situation providing an opportunity to practice. It is, therefore, a learning process leading to the formation of an attitude and does not just happen on its own. The subject's activity is required, while the disposition of an indifferent person is usually of a passive character. If, on the other hand, we were to compare Smith's ethical principle with the teachings of Pyrrhonian sceptics, we could say that an impartial spectator would be acceptable to sceptics, because, thanks to taking the perspective of such a spectator, it would be possible to compare two or more philosophical theses to find equally good arguments in favor of each of them and thus establish equivalence between them (*isostheneia*). Both Smith and the Pyrrhonians describe a way to adopt and maintain an indifferent attitude towards things, judgments and situations, but in a way that is in accordance with rational behavior and moral norms.¹³ Their common intention is to avoid dogmatism and the influence of affects and passions on the process of correct reasoning. This should be kept in mind when I speak about the "coolness" of philosophy in accomplishing its intellectual mission in the paper's final section.

2.3. Value Neutrality

The third example of how to avoid bias in judgements does not come from a purely philosophical, but rather from a sociological perspective (however, related to the cultural-philosophical one). In fact, there is a relation to *ethical* considerations, but the focus shifts to the value orientation of those professionally dealing with science: *academic teachers*. Of course, we are talking about the famous lecture of the German sociologist Max Weber "Science as a Vocation" [*Wissenschaft als Beruf*], held in 1917, addressed to students in Munich and published in 1919. Weber's text is equally interesting for the sociology of education as for pedagogical philosophy and ethics of science. It is a plea for the *value neutrality* of science, namely an appeal to lecturers from various disciplines – especially those from the domain of humanities – to strictly avoid imposing their political and other value-driven attitudes, and to prevent them the indoctrination of students by suggesting that certain social values or political orientations are desirable or not. Weber thus advocates the idea of value neutrality, which means insisting on a strict separation between purely scientific and political or other socially relevant interests. Without this, he argues, scientific activity would turn into mere agitation and universities would become arenas for politico-ideological struggle. Weber explicitly rejects the politicization and ideologization of science:

13 The Pyrrhonian sceptics repeatedly draw attention to the fact that their behavior is compatible with "laws and customs". Cf. Sextus Empiricus, 2000, pp. 7, 9.

It is often said, and I subscribe to this view, that politics has no place in the lecture room. [...] [T]he genuine teacher will take good care not to use his position at the lectern to promote any particular point of view, whether explicitly or by suggestion. For this latter tactic is, of course, the most treacherous approach when it is done in the guise of “allowing the facts to speak for themselves.”¹⁴

Value judgment prevents or hinders orientation towards the facts on which scientific research should be based:

I am willing to demonstrate from the writings of our historians that whenever an academic introduces his own value judgment, a complete understanding of the facts *comes to an end*.¹⁵

Weber’s plea for freedom from value judgments should not be understood in the sense that science itself should be purified of any interest. That would be self-contradictory because every science comes at least with a research interest: a mathematician is interested in studying the relationships between numbers, a physicist in describing the structure of matter, a biologist in the functioning of living beings, a historian in interpreting the cause of historical events and the motives of the people involved, a sociologist in gaining insight into how a social system is organized, etc. This, however, does not just denote any interest, but a *scientific* one – specifically, the interest that leads to knowledge. Therefore, it is not surprising that Weber points out with a certain pathos:

[I]n the realm of science, the only person to have “personality” is the one who is *wholly devoted to his subject*. And this is true not just of science.¹⁶

Consequently, science is not devoid of interest; rather, it is based on commitment to a certain issue. Indifference towards the subject matter itself is impossible, but the crucial point is that a person engaged in science needs to distance themselves from particular interests and value preferences while engaged in science. A scientist can prefer a political or ideological position only outside of science, and never propagate their values *ex cathedra*. In short (expressed in Weber’s words): science needs teachers, not leaders. From Weber’s considerations on the “vocation” of science, one could therefore draw the philosophically relevant conclusion that there are two types of “indifference”: one towards the matter itself, where some non-scientific interest usurps the matter, and one towards values, in this case towards those who are externally threatening the neutrality of sci-

14 Weber, 2004, pp. 19–20.

15 Op. cit., p. 21.

16 Ibid., p. 10.

entific research. A person who is indifferent cannot be a good scientist, while someone being indifferent to non-scientific values ensures the objectivity of their research. Although Max Weber's consideration of this issue arises from sociological and pedagogical concerns, the conclusion remains useful for my final comment on the distinction between dispositions and values using the example of indifference.

3.3. Conclusion: How to Keep a Cool Head in Philosophy

Following this review of some examples from the history of philosophy and ethics (of science), we return to the starting point of this presentation: Is indifference merely a disposition for a certain behavior or something more – possibly an expression of a certain value attitude? Furthermore, how should we evaluate indifference in philosophy? Is it to be desired or to be avoided? I think the examples discussed – the sceptics' radical suspension of judgment, Smith's concept of the impartial spectator, and Weber's appeal for value neutrality in science – demonstrate that, in a philosophical context, indifference is indeed a positive phenomenon. Indeed, we could say that it constitutes an ethically desirable *habitus*. So, indifference holds a certain value, at least within philosophy. We could even say that an indifferent attitude is a necessary condition for "effective" philosophizing. This can be confirmed by all three examples of an indifferent attitude discussed in my paper.

Let us start with the suspension of philosophical judgment. According to Sextus Empiricus and other proponents of Pyrrhonian scepticism, a "real" philosopher is expected to restrain from judgement in philosophical disputes, given that it is mostly representatives of dogmatic positions that are involved in these.¹⁷ To avoid unproductive discussions with dogmatic philosophers, it is wisest not to advocate any position regarding the content of a philosophical question (e.g. offer a special solution to a philosophical problem), but to refrain from judgment and simply stand aside. What is key to this view of practicing (some may say: *not* practicing) philosophy is that we achieve tranquillity – Pyrrhonian scepticism is actually a kind of philosophical therapy: a remedy against excessive pretensions and claims to the exclusive right to the truth. It is regrettable that the *metaphilosophical* importance of this specific philosophical orientation is not sufficiently recognized.

17 *Academic sceptics* stand between dogmatism and radical scepticism and their agnosticism implicitly presupposes at least the possibility of the (ultimate) knowledge of "things in themselves", which is inconsistent and self-contradictory, and may even be a reason for a new dogmatic attitude. For more information about the difference between academic and radical scepticism see Sextus Empiricus, 2000, pp. 57–62.

When it comes to Smith's conception of the impartial observer, it could serve as a kind of *ideal* for philosophical thinking: in every discussion, especially with their dissenters, philosophers should strive to *better understand* not only their own point of view, but also others' perspectives. This can only be achieved if we distance ourselves from our own views and interests as well as from the more or less expressed emotions binding us to our position and if we take up the position of an external observer who is able to reach a more adequate and fair judgment both concerning the matter itself and concerning other perspectives on it. Therefore, the *hermeneutical* relevance of Smith's principle for philosophy consists in better understanding the intentions and motives of other philosophers and being able to appreciate the possible significance of their insights for the solution of a problem. It is *metaphilosophy* that could profit from this principle, as its task is to describe the structure of philosophical discourse and thought as *neutrally* as possible. To achieve this, it is necessary to adopt a position fundamentally distinct from the philosophical one – operating at a *higher level* of reflection, with sufficient distance from philosophy itself. What else could a metaphilosopher be but an *impartial observer of philosophy*!

Certainly, philosophers should also accept Max Weber's recommendation to devote themselves to the study of their subject without evaluation and ideological assumptions, especially if they are teaching at an academic institution. In philosophy, critical thinking alone is not enough to uncover the ideological presuppositions and dubious values guiding our opponents' positions. Philosophical thinking must also be *self-critical* – it requires philosophers to recognize the ideological background of their own thinking. On the other hand, as a connoisseur of Neo-Kantian philosophy, Weber was aware of the need to *distinguish values from facts* and to investigate values as a separate sphere (not of factual being, but of *validity*¹⁸) in the context of philosophy. (It is one thing to think about values, and another to represent values and submit our thinking and actions to them – the purpose of value neutrality is to prevent the latter from happening.) Last year, at the *First Analytical Forum*, I pointed out Rescher's distinction between *descriptive* and *prescriptive metaphilosophy*, considering that even at this level of thinking one should refrain from strong value judgments about philosophy.¹⁹ I tried to defend the idea of a metaphilosophy that strives to describe and explain philosophical phenomena instead of evaluating them (e.g. as 'true' or 'false', 'good' or 'bad', 'useful' or 'useless' etc.). Therefore, I consider this paper on the character of value indifference to be a contribution to descriptive metaphilosophy.

18 In German: *Geltung*.

19 See Smiljanić, 2024.

Finally, a terminological note: in everyday speech – at least in Anglo-Saxon usage – we describe someone who behaves moderately and thoughtfully in various situations, without strong passion and emotions yet in an acceptable and even desirable manner, as *cool*, since this behavior prevents them from losing composure while keeping the situation under control. A cool person does not allow their own emotions, unexpected circumstances, or other people to “throw them off track”. Whatever happens, they stick to their initial attitude, do not change it, and are yet able to overcome any unpleasant situation. Apart from that, we describe someone or something as cool when we appreciate their or its unobtrusive, relaxed quality. This combination of moderation and likability is characteristic of the state of someone or something cool (*coolness*). Semantically, the term ‘cool’ can be understood in two ways: first, as a reference to physical coldness or our subjective reaction to it; secondly, as an expression for something likable or pleasant. We can say that it simultaneously denotes both the sensory (a certain physically measurable temperature) and the non-sensory (an aesthetically sensitive effect). Although the predicate ‘cool’ may appear similar to ‘cold’, they are fundamentally distinct: coolness is a trait that attracts us, as opposed to coldness which typically usually repels (e.g. when we say that we dislike winter’s chill). Coolness thus represents a strange kind of coldness – one that irresistibly attracts us.

Hence, we can confidently say that philosophy itself becomes cool when it resists making hasty judgments about intensely debated matters. This philosophical restraint does not stem from mere hesitancy as a sign of character weakness – a mental disposition – but rather reflects a sophisticated position grounded in impartial observation. It demands both withholding judgment and avoiding attachment to particular values when examining complex issues. It is precisely this temperance that makes the mentioned philosopher cool. The fact that we are considering value neutrality as a kind of value attitude does not mean that we are contradicting ourselves, risking a paradox, as if we were to say: “Our interest is not to be interested in any of the parties in the dispute” or “We opt for the option not to opt for any position”. In a Weberian way, when I am devoted to the subject, I can never approach it with prejudice. I rather make room for further consideration and the discovery of new views on the matter. The Pyrrhonists simply said: “We are still investigating.”²⁰ And that is exactly what is cool about philosophy – that its search for truth keeps going on and that by discovering new aspects of reality we enrich our intellectual life.

20 Cf. Sextus Empiricus, 2000, p. 3.

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