R. Plečkaičio filosofinis palikimas

ROMANAS PLEČKAITIS' METHODOLOGY OF HISTORICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH

Gintaras Kabelka

Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų instituto
Lietuvos filosofijos istorijos skyrius
Saltoniškių g. 58, LT-08105 Vilnius
El. paštas: kabelkag@gmail.com

The article analyzes the methodology of Romanas Plečkaitis' research, in which the most important elements are: the conception of the history of philosophy as a process of transformation of philosophical problems, which initiates the historical study and provides the material and structures of the interpretation of results; the historical reconstruction of the problematic situation as a constellation of theoretical elements motivating the creation of a new theory; the objective historical understanding, which treats philosophy as the totality of objectively and universally functioning cognitional elements and excludes from the interpretation of the history of philosophy all subjective and metaphysical factors. The picture of progress of philosophy presented in the works of Plečkaitis involves the elements of paradigm shifts. He presents the radical modification of the solution of problems as the formation of a new problematic situation, which is regarded as paradigmatic for the solution of other remaining problems.

Keywords: Plečkaitis, methodology of history of problems, problematic situation, objective historical understanding.

Professor Romanas Plečkaitis was a pioneer of the Lithuanian research of the history of philosophy and the historiography of philosophy as an independent philosophical discipline in Lithuania. His writings had a significant impact on the majority of Lithuanian historians of philosophy, has led to an appearance of a certain research paradigm. For that reason, analysis of conceptual structure of Plečkaitis' works is important in the sense that it helps to establish the methodological features of this discipline. It should be noted that in the works of Plečkaitis, like in the works of many other historians of philosophy, research methodology is not explicated and operates implicitly. The present article is based on the claim that Plečkaitis' research bear characteristics of contextualist strategy of explanation (specifically – the methodology of history of problems). The paper aims to provide essential features of contextualist interpretation strategy, overviews different versions of methodology of history of problems; explicates essential elements (and their functioning) of Plečkaitis' research of history of philosophy; reconstructs images of the evolution of philosophy generated by Plečkaitis.

Contextualist strategy of interpretation in history of philosophy

Contextualism is the strategy of interpretation, corresponding to the classical model of writing history of philosophy (formed in the nineteenth century during the prosperous period of historicism), which aims to objectively explain a philosophical theory of the past through reconstruction of theoretical and/or socio-cultural context of its emergence. Contextualists aim to identify all possible (or the most important) relations of the object of study with other elements of its context (White 1975: 17–19). If historicism (apart from many of its possible meanings) is seen as the methodological requirement to individualize, interpret and understand each phenomenon of the past within the context of its era (Norkus 1996: 42), then contextualist interpretation strategy can be considered as an expression of historicist paradigm of studies in history of philosophy.

The major procedure of contextualism is known as historical reconstruction – an interpretation of the object of study within the period of its existence, say, as exact as possible theoretical reconstruction of functioning of certain conceptual structure (it may consist of the totality of theories, social, cultural and other factors of a particular historical period), to which the object belongs,. The object of study is potentially connected with indeterminate set of contextual elements, and the latter can relatively be divided into theoretical (the theories of the historical period, the problematic situation) and non-theoretical (social, political, cultural, religious and other factors). In the contextual interpretation by way of determining the links among theoretical elements the so-called internal history of philosophy is developed, and by way of including their relations with above-mentioned non-theoretical factors the "external" history of philosophy is developed, which represents the impact of historical context on philosophical theories. From the methodological perspective pure external history is cultural history, as its main object is a wide range of (non-philosophical) cultural phenomena and processes.

The methodology of history of problems

Historical reconstruction of contextualist research is just a formal methodological framework, which can be filled with a variety of different methodological practices and different theoretical elements of reconstructed context. One of the methodologies classified as contextual interpretation is the so-called history of problems. In methodological philosophical literature there are at least two methodological options that are identified with the term "history of problems". One of them has its origins in the methodology of history of philosophy developed by neo-Kantians (William Windelband). Under its influence Nicolai Hartmann formulated the final version of the history of problems, as a way of writing history of philosophy (Hartmann 1977: 3–77). History of philosophy is treated here as progressing history of solutions to eternal philosophical problems, it is moving in a spiral in which the gained philosophical knowledge is replaced by theoretical misdeeds, but in a broader perspective the direction of this spiral movement leads to

a more advanced knowledge. A problem is understood (in Kantian terminology) as a condition of opportunity for knowledge of history of philosophy: a historian of philosophy has to understand and evaluate the problems solved by thinkers of the past; this work is a sort of prolegomena to the new versions of solutions (which are often regarded as newly discovered problems) of the same problems. Here implicitly lies the actualistic research aspect of the history of philosophy: philosophizing of the past is inevitably associated with that of the present, but we cannot freely apply our own solution to the problems in order to assess the earlier ones (as many actualistic positions), on the contrary, our thinking is determined by the historical heritage, and only when we actualize (realize) it, can we begin to attempt solving philosophical problems by ourselves. At the same time a problem is perceived as an essential condition of existence of history of philosophy, ensuring the historical continuity of philosophical thought, it is ontologized: philosophical problems exist objectively and independently from particular philosophizing individuals – it is not a thinker who creates a problem, but rather a problem given in an a priori way leads to the thinking itself (Hartmann 1977: 7–8; Перцев 1991: 127–128). A problem should be understood as an immutable form of philosophical thinking –in the course of history it is filled with specific, different contents (Kang 1998: 80–82).

Another version of history of problems is formulated in the works of theoretician of history and philosophy of science Karl Raimund Popper (Popper 1972: 164–179). It is rather a methodological approach for history of science that includes specific questions of writing history of science, but some of its elements are effectively applied in historiography of philosophy as well – those are the notion of objective historical understanding and historical reconstruction of problematic situation. This understanding, "cleaned" from any subjective factors, examines the constellations and functioning of universal theoretical elements (in Popper's terms – objects of the third world). The knowledge generated by historical understanding is metatheoretical knowledge of a certain level of: it is not a claim to solve a theoretical problem, but an aspiration to gain historical metatheoretical understanding of a solution to a problem.

According to Popper the main task of historical understanding is a hypothetical restoration of historical problematic situation (Popper 1972: 168). This methodological procedure regards knowledge as the result of discovery and solution of problems: in order to explain a chosen piece of knowledge one has to restore the constellation of theoretical elements which caused the emergence (the problematic situation – the existing theories, their competitiveness, insufficiency of obtained theoretical results, etc.) and on the basis of the latter to understand why these and not other results of the solution to the problem were obtained or why exactly this new problem was discovered. Problematic situation should be regarded as the starting point of theorizing, which allows a historian of a certain field of knowledge to adequately understand and appreciate the novelty of the theory in question. Under this methodology the value of the analyzed theory depends on how many new problems are formulated or

how many new solutions to existing problems it contains. Philosophical historical interpretation based on this concept should serve as a reiteration of the discovery of past philosophical problems (which is due to the above-stated problematic constellation), and process of their solution (philosopher's own contribution to the third world realm), i.e., theorizing on the basis of the historically given, rather than arbitrarily chosen assumptions. This reiteration is different from hermeneutic "empathy" procedures of psychologist nature and their various metaphysical versions since it remains within a theoretical level – it operates on theoretical entities, rather than their presumed bases in trans-theoretical reality.

The methodological structure of Plečkaitis' research

From the research goals set in the most significant work of Plečkaitis, one can see the declaration of application of the inner and outer history: "History of philosophy of Lithuania is presented as the reception of philosophical theories created in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Modern period and the twentieth century and the contribution of philosophy created in Lithuania universal philosophical heritage. It is presented as a recognition of the impact of philosophical ideas on public life, the formation of science, education and evolution of cultural processes in our land" (Plečkaitis 2004: 14). Construction of inner history (which is based on the methodological approach of the history of problems) is supplemented with the influence of non-philosophic context (external factors) on the development of philosophy and the reverse influence

of philosophical ideas on public cultural contexts: this aspect of research is close to the cultural historiography. Functioning as the supplement of inner history, it allows to depict philosophy not in the abstract, the area separate from other areas of creativity, but also shows the position of philosophy in a broader non-philosophical context.

The following fundamental methodological elements of the history of problems function in structure of inner history of philosophy presented by Plečkaitis: treatment of history of philosophy as history of discovering and solving of problems (or change of problematic situations), and a historical reconstruction of the problematic situations in preference of objective historical understanding, an image of progressive development of philosophy. These principles are supplemented with the elements of methodology of actualization – rational reconstruction – that enrich the historic problematic research by establishing links between philosophizing of the past and present. There are no metaphysical implications of neo-Kantian tradition of history of problems in Plečkaitis' works: they are focused on cognition of the history of philosophy, and not the considerations of its ontological status.

Plečkaitis structures the researched material on the basis of the problematic approach: the object of study is a philosophical theory, regarded as a result of discovery and solution of problems. In applying this approach the fundamental structural unit of the history of philosophy is a problem (Heidemann 1977: 190) – the specific questions given to the philosophers by the tradition and the results obtained, which in turn lead to the possibility of new answers or

the need to raise new questions (to discover new problems). A problem here is taken to include the problematic situation and the specific theory it produces as a result of the problem's solution.

Complexity of the application of problematic approach in methodology of historiography of philosophy is best demonstrated not in the study of professional philosophy (where the researcher finds sufficiently defined problem area and only has to explain their formation, in such a case the structure of problematic approach is less complex, it does require to identify to the solution of which problem do some results of theorizing belong), but rather when unprofessional ideas, that are usually expressed in so-called para-philosophical texts (fiction, journalistic, religious, legal, etc.) and do not constitute a systematic structure are included in the creation of a broad image of the past of philosophy. Plečkaitis copes with this difficulty by presenting the existing material not according to personalities (such distribution would produce a gallery of creations of individuals, understood as the mini system of philosophy, and would thus presupposes a systematic approach, but would not give the image of problematic whole), not as a loose descriptive presentation of their views, but by grouping the material according to the solved problems, assigned to practical philosophy. In this way, an era such as the Renaissance (which is dominated by para-philosophical writings) analyzed material acquires more systematic character –separate issues (e.g., the nature of human beings, their place in society, expectations of life after death, the state and public structures, etc.) are

joined into groups, which can be regarded as philosophical disciplines retrieved from historical writings (philosophical anthropology, philosophy of religion, social, political philosophy).

In the analyzed study the problematic approach creates a kind of conceptual net, which is "thrown" onto the realm of philosophical considerations given in the free form and which structurizes it according to model of problems solved in professional philosophy. It was argued by the researcher as well: "When the human problem was discussed in the historical, literary and political journalistic works, humanists grasped the general ideas of philosophical anthropology by means of historical and philological anthropology" (Plečkaitis 2004: 70). The aforementioned conceptual net is often based on the contemporary problematic terms (such problems and their solutions which were not known to earlier thinkers), therefore the boundary between historical and rational reconstruction blurs in this case. The application of a problem as the basic structural unit in researching non-professional philosophy makes the latter to appear on a par to professional philosophy: para-philosophical texts are treated as equally valuable results of solutions to problems obtained from theoretical assumptions of the situation, rather than from subjective factors of a thinker or a mere reflection of public cultural context (though the value of the latter is not fully eliminated).

The historical reconstruction of problematic situation was the most important methodological procedure in Plečkaitis' research (see Plečkaitis 2004: 59–69, 84, 127–135, 296–298, 312–320, 353–364, 382,

407–409, 429–432, 472, 491–492, 570, 582, 586–588 etc.): it was the methodological core of his works which was supplemented by secondary, complementary elements that supplement philosophical historical interpretation of the problems. This principle of research follows directly from the conception of philosophy as a totality of problems: the given theories are treated as a result of new or old problems (the ultimate point of the process of theorizing) and in order to explain their origin one has to look for the starting point – the constellations of philosophical ideas, that led to exactly this and no different process of theorizing. The reconstruction of problematic situations is the most important tool of development of genetic interpretation in theoretically complex – problematic – level. Its aim is to restore the problematic context of researched theory (solved problem), composed of the previous results of same problems, also to indicate the innovative elements of this theory (cognitive value).

Plečkaitis' research typically reconstructs two problematic situations: the first could be described as central or global – the constellations of theoretical elements that formed in Western philosophy, the prevailing problems of the time, the second problematic situation is peripheral or local – theoretical situation obtaining in peripheral context (in this case – Lithuania). Central and peripheral contexts are linked by the relationship of cause and effect (the elements of the former determine the appearance of the elements of the latter), but this dependence is not absolute: the partial autonomy of peripheral context is indicated by reconstructed peripheral problematic situation in which, next to the central

theories, there also are specific exclusively local problem constellations. The fact that in the peripheral context a specific problematic situation can be reconstructed shows that the emerging problems are effected not only by the central problematic situation, but also by the local constellation of ideas (competition of theories).

The literature with contextual interpretation is often limited to providing one way dependence of peripheral context on the centre: it is determined which theoretical statements or principles of a separate context are derived from the universal philosophy, and which are different from it. In such works the theories of the past are treated as separated "private" entities (atoms), which are separate from or connected to similar statements, discoveries or solutions of problems of peripheral context are thereby understood as an integrated entirety. However in the research under discussion, as mentioned, the object of study is treated as a fragment of permanent universal process of discovering and solving problems, potentially linked to a number of previously defined theories or coexisting competing theories. Those two problematic situations directly related with each other, existing in one historical period, form a "horizontal" (simultaneous) level of the problematic reconstruction. In Plečkaitis' research it is often the problematic situation of Medieval philosophy. It is complemented by "vertical" level – problematic situations of the earlier periods of history of philosophy (ancient, early medieval) whose philosophical issues have been further developed by the medieval philosophers. Thus, the historical reconstruction of the problematic

situation is at least of three levels, including problematic situations of ancient, medieval European philosophy (different medieval periods are treated as one) and medieval philosophy in Lithuania. The reconstruction of the central problematic situation consisting of levels of solutions of several historical periods results in a very broad explanatory context of the object of study (Lithuanian philosophical theories) – it implicitly includes the ancient philosophy and the totality of different Medieval ways of theorizing (and through rational reconstruction – contemporary philosophy as well). In other words, the interpreted element is woven into the broad contextual network establishing its links with the very remote theoretical elements. Usually contextual interpretations are limited to the indication of the object of study with the elements of the direct context (in case of peripheral philosophy – research of reception of theories of universal philosophy). Studies of history of problems by Plečkaitis that directly analyze Lithuanian philosophy, implicitly consider the history of universal philosophy: as the central problematic situation is constructed from several different periods of problematic levels, genetic research is made of the theories of philosophy, identification of problematic conditions which led to their emergence.

The chosen approach of the so-called objective historical understanding access implies the conception of philosophy the structure of generally valid, objective knowledge. This means that from interpretation of emergence of the theory of philosophy subjective and invalidated on the theoretical level factors are eliminated: philosophy is not regarded as an expression of existential aspirations, mystical experiences, or other subjective factors instrumental to the practical activities of the thinker or the like. It is rather regarded as an objective independent theoretical framework that was formed in discovering and solving the problems identified in accordance with the received conditions for solutions (the original problematic situation).

Interpretation of the development of philosophy

Treating philosophy as the totality of discovery and solution of particular problems, its evolution is portrayed as a permanent quantitative and qualitative growth (although not always consistent, with some declines or exceptional changes) of this totality – hence, progressivist image of its development functions in presentation of the history of problems. The approach of objective historical understanding, by dissociating itself from trans-theoretical factors (which are basically non-historical – independent from the conditions of the historical context), treats the object of study as a product of the specific historical (problematic) situation, and that product is portrayed as a static element within the history of philosophy as a whole. The dynamic factor arises in the structure of contextual interpretation when these static elements are connected into the broader whole, presented in the historical timeline. The basis of progressivist interpretation of development of philosophy lies within the structure of the problematic situation: according to the constellation of the previous results of solutions to problems, a new solution to a problem is obtained (or a new problem is discovered), which in turn

becomes the starting point for subsequent solutions, and so on. Thus, a separate theory, as a result of the solution of a problem inevitably presents new data, i.e. is more advanced with respect to its predecessors (in this structure lies a clearly implicit assumption that "defective" theories – those that are inferior to their predecessor and do not produce any new problematic situation – automatically "drop out of the game", are forgotten and are not addressed by the historians of philosophy; the latter study only productive solutions). Under this picture the development of philosophy, contemporary level of knowledge is considered to be the most advanced – it is taken for granted that our solutions to the problems have the richest (i.e. the most extravagant and heuristically most valuable) conceptual resources, which were accumulated during the entire development of philosophy (this assumption is functioning when history of problems is supplemented by the elements of rational reconstruction).

The above model of development of philosophy resulting from the study of problematic situations, at first glance appears to be purely cumulative: the development of knowledge is consistent adding of new statements to the totality of knowledge, this development is continuous, it highlights quantitative growth rather than qualitative changes. However, progressive image functioning in the works of Plečkaitis is based on revolutionary fractures of the history of philosophy – a paradigm shift: this element of the modern interpretation of history of science supplements the cumulative development model, inherited from Neo-Kantians, with the emphasis on qualitative changes. The examples of such fractures found in Plečkaitis' studies are the

entrenchment of the Modern worldview that replaced Scholastic philosophy, or the entrenchment of the Renaissance thought (Plečkaitis 2004: 58–61, 544) and the like. Since the structure of the problematic situation includes the poles of central and peripheral context, thus changes of central problematic situation have crucial importance for portraying the significant shifts of development of philosophy: when they occur, localized problematic situation inevitably changes (peripheral changes cannot lead to paradigm shifts). Radical change of solutions of problems (paradigm shift) is presented by methodology of history of problems as an emergence of a completely new problematic situation, and this new problematic situation is treated as a paradigm determining the character all remaining problems: it is the constellation of such elements which support a separate mode of philosophizing (paradigm).

Thus, the element of revolutionary fractures in the development of philosophy is not external to the history of problems, artificially imposed on it. Even though a paradigm change does not function in the classical version of the methodology (it consists of "spiral" development image of rises and falls), in this case it is portrayed using the methodological tools through the reconstruction of the aforementioned paradigmatic, revolutionary problematic situation. The paradigm change is seen apart from the extreme variations of interpretations existing in the methodology of history of science stating incommensurability of different paradigms: in Plečkaitis' works, in addition to new ways of solving problems, problematic continuity is also stressed:

it is shown what the new philosophizing inherited from the old one.

Theoretical version of methodology of history of problems formulated by Hartmann and practical functioning of its elements differ in Plečkaitis' studies because in the latter case the previously mentioned problematic situation includes the elements that are external to philosophy – scientific and technical progress, economic factors and so on. The traditional version of this methodology explains the development of philosophy only with the help of immanent elements. This means that the development of philosophy is treated as dependent on the progress of natural science and related factors (technical innovation, etc.) as their derivative. This reductive interpretation process is effected by the application of the above-mentioned approach of objective historical understanding: it treats philosophy as a part of general scientific knowledge, governed by the same rules of thinking. If science is driven not only by internal problems, but also the needs of empirical reality, thus the same influences apply to philosophy.

Plečkaitis represents the development of philosophy, understood as an objective system of knowledge, as controlled by the same processes, as science in general. Changes of scientific knowledge lead to changes in philosophy as one of the areas of that knowledge: science in the broad sense and philosophy are causally linked. This reductionist method of depicting of the development of philosophy minimizes the autonomy of philosophical thinking (if such thinking is understood as different from science). On the other hand, it helps to eliminate from the interpretation of the history of philosophy objectively unexplainable (subjective or other) factors and speculatively attributed metaphysical purpose. In Plečkaitis' writings history of philosophy is not a non-historical gallery of creations of unique personalities or development of theories governed by incomprehensible forces; it is rather a development of objectively emerging ways of thinking and their output, whose purpose is effective knowledge, capable of providing practical benefits to society and enriching the cultural consciousness.

Conclusions

Contextual interpretation strategy can be considered as an expression of a historical paradigm of research in history of philosophy. One of the methodologies classified as contextual interpretation is the so-called history of problems. History of philosophy is treated here as the progressing history of eternal philosophical problems. They exist objectively and independently from any philosophizing individuals – a problem is not created by the thinker, rather an a priori given problem leads to the thinking itself.

The most important elements of Plečkaitis' research are: the concept of the history of philosophy as a process of transformation of philosophical problems, which initiates the historical study and provides the material and the structures of the interpretation of the results; the historical reconstruction of the problematic situation as a constellation of theoretical elements motivating the creation of a new theory; the objective historical understanding, which treats philosophy as the totality of objectively and universally functioning cognitive elements and excludes from the

interpretation of the history of philosophy all subjective and metaphysical factors.

Progressivist image functioning in the works of Plečkaitis is based on revolutionary fractures in the history of philosophy – paradigm shifts. Methodology of history of problems presents radical change of solutions to problems (paradigm shift) an emergence of a completely new problematic situation. The problematic situation is treated as a paradigm affecting all the remaining problems: the constellation of such elements, which support a single mode of philosophizing (paradigm). In Plečkaitis' works in addition to new ways of solutions of problems problematic continuity is also stressed, it is shown what the new philosophizing inherited from the previous one.

Plečkaitis represents the development of philosophy, understood as an objective system of knowledge, controlled by the same processes as science in general. Changes of scientific knowledge lead to changes in philosophy as one of the areas of that knowledge: science in the broad sense and philosophy are causally linked.

REFERENCES

Hartmann, N. 1977. *Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte*. Stuttgart: Ph. Reclam jun.

Heidemann, I. 1977. Die Philosophie Nicolai Hartmanns im Aspekt der Probleme, in Hartmann, N. *Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte*. Stuttgart: Ph. Reclam jun.

Kang, J.-M. 1998. *Philosophische Philosophiegeschichte: Studien zur allgemeinen Methodologie der Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte [Dissertation]*. Universität Konstanz. http://deposit.ddb.de/cgi-bin/dokserv?idn=956427286 [žiūrėta 2007 10 02].

Norkus, Z. 1996. *Istorika: Istorinis įvadas*. Vilnius: Taura.

Plečkaitis, R. 2004. *Lietuvos filosofijos istorija*. T. 1: *Viduramžiai – Renesansas – Naujieji amžiai*. Vilnius: Kultūros, filosofijos ir meno institutas.

Popper, K. R. 1972. *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

White, H. 1975. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Перцев, А. В. 1991. *Типы методологий историко-философского исследования*. Свердловск: Издательство Уральского университета.

ROMANO PLEČKAIČIO FILOSOFIJOS ISTORIJOS TYRIMŲ METODOLOGIJA
Gintaras Kabelka

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje nagrinėjami Romano Plečkaičio filosofijos istorijos tyrimų metodologijos svarbiausi elementai: filosofijos istorijos kaip problemų sprendimų kaitos samprata – filosofiją sudaro nuolat kintantys problemų sprendimai; problema yra ir tyrimo prieiga, tyrimo medžiagą konceptualiai struktūruojantis veiksnys; probleminės situacijos (istoriniu momentu susiklosčiusi teorinių elementų konsteliacija, lemianti naujos teorijos sukūrimą) istorinė rekonstrukcija; objektyvaus istorinio supratimo prieiga, kuri filosofiją traktuoja kaip objektyviai ir visuotinai galiojančių žinojimo elementų visumą. Plečkaitis kuria filosofijos pažangos raidos vaizdinį, kurį papildo paradigmų kaitos elementais: radikalus problemų sprendimų pokytis vaizduojamas kaip visiškai naujos probleminės situacijos susiformavimas. Ši traktuojama kaip paradigminė, lemianti visus kitus problemų sprendimo būdus.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Plečkaitis, problemų istorijos metodologija, probleminė situacija, objektyvus istorinis supratimas.