

# A really existing philosophical practice

Willi Fillinger

Of course the title of my lecture is a little bit ironical. I do not pretend to be the only one who has a really existing philosophical practice. The serious basis for using this expression is my experience that a philosophical practice needs – among many other things – a physical presence in the public and an understanding and recognition as professional work.

Early in 2007 I rented a former shop in a popular quarter of Zurich for my philosophical practice. This means that the people can see me working in my practice and they realize that there is a philosopher in their neighbourhood.

This kind of physical publicity fits to my idea of a philosophical practice and it makes it real in the sense that a growing number of people know me and my activity and recognize it as real work.

My offer to the public contains philosophical reflection in various forms:

- individual talks, partly as philosophical clarification of an individual “stand point” (Standortbestimmung)
- reading philosophical books in groups (2 evenings per week)
- café philo in a near restaurant (once a month)
- lectures and seminaries on different subjects.

The abstract recognition of our work is of course the money some people are ready to pay for certain activities. The concrete recognition is what people do with the effects of our work. Today work is certainly an important subject of philosophical discussions. On the other hand it is important to understand philosophical reflection itself as work and not as a pure spiritual insight.

The specifics of our work is that the object of work is “every-day” consciousness (Alltagsbewusstsein). And of course not only that of the others but of our own. This “every-day” consciousness is a tricky one. It is not only the awareness of experience and action in daily life but also a speculative consciousness which contains highly metaphysical entities such as destiny, callings and other kinds of myths. It is a consciousness with an own history and a certain life philosophy.

The task of the practical philosopher is not to confront this “every-day” consciousness with the newest stand of philosophical discussion. Nor has he to understand this consciousness in a global way. During the individual talks, by reading philosophical texts, in the discussions about theories and concepts it’s actually all about differences and dealing with differences. We cannot avoid the insight that these are differences in the interpretation and the supposed conditions of this interpretation. What happens in such an interaction is of course very complex. Often it is important not to seek a quick consensus. As at least two people are involved, this work is not a production in the common sense. But it is also not a pure understanding through which the world becomes clear and transparent. Maybe it can be called successful work when there remains in the “every-day” consciousness a difference which makes a difference.

The practical philosopher has in my opinion not only to know the tradition of philosophy. Even more important is a form of judgement which separates the essential from the non-essential and relates the thoughts to the drama of human existence.

In this way, philosophical reflection becomes a social and political matter.