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Neo-Cynicism of Peter Sloterdijk: a Revenge of the Enlightenment?

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In this article it is presented a reflection upon functions of the education in contemporary world in which predominate anti-Enlightenment tendencies. In this respect it is considered the personality of contemporary German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk who put forward an authentic philosophy that naturally continues the traditions of German Philosophy of life. In the article it is analyzed an evolution of scientific work of this philosopher, the influence of philosophy of the Frankfurt School on him. In accordance with the philosophy of Peter Sloterdijk contemporary mass consciousness in the West is characterized by universal diffusive cynicism that arose as a consequence of an unsuccessful Enlightenment. An opposition to diffusive cynicism is neo-cynicism in which humor and satire are used to unmask a mercenary and selfish nature with evil will that is hidden behind fine appearance of a humanist and an advocate of human rights.

Keywords: education, reforms, Enlightenment, the Frankfurt School, the German Philosophy of life, diffusive cynicism, reason, will, cynicism, neo-cynicism.

Russia went through many reforms in all areas of life after 1991 modern. The field of education is no exception, but the situation in this area is particularly important: it is the understanding (or misunderstanding) of what is happening depends on an understanding of general sense of reforms without any exception. Only education can provide such an understanding, because the education is not just a giving of information or inculcation of some skills. The education is a creation of a common view of the world and man's place in it. Without it all kinds of reforms are meaningless, because it is possible to undertake and to carry them only on some conditions. Firstly, one must have an idea of lines of development of

the contemporary world, its future. Secondly, one need to have an idea of the place of their country in the world, the one that it will take if everything remains as it was, and the place it can take with some changes in the economy, politics and culture. In its turn, the position of mankind in the future depends on the ecological state of the Earth, on the development of industry and the consequences of this development, the number of people on the Earth, on the harvests, the overall quality of life on the Earth, and so on. Thus, thirdly, it is necessary to have a general picture of the situation on the planet. Such a picture as Kant convincingly shown, can not give any of the special sciences (they are called private, that can

not embrace the world in general). To give such a picture can only education in general: data of these particular sciences are brought together in it by philosophy.

So it was decided to believe in modern times in Europe. So thought in Russia until 1991. Then enlightenment suffered a crushing defeat. In Europe, as it is to believe, the collapse of the Enlightenment began in the early twentieth century.

In Russia it is today. Performances of “healers” and even shamans arouse great interest in the general public. The authority of science to the masses in every way is undermined, but is rapidly increasing the influence of religions, not only “religions of the Book”, but primitive, pagan cults.

How philosophy responds to these processes in Europe and Russia? The philosophy known to us for the Modern age that foreshadows to the humanity scientific progress, the progress of the mind which will supersede and ultimately win all unscientific elements. Why do these unscientific elements appear again? And what is most importantly, why it is supported by the large sections of the public that are minded against the enlightenment?

These questions seek many modern philosophers. One of the most famous among them is Peter Sloterdijk.

The German bookstores have a special place for his books where his name is marked with stationary signs. These plates constantly costs about ten books by Peter Sloterdijk and commentator work devoted to his teachings. Baron von Dobenek even released a special handbook dictionary on works of Peter Sloterdijk, which was published twice and has 278 pages.

Peter Sloterdijk’s fame is well deserved because he put forward the original teaching that seamlessly continues the tradition of the German philosophy of life. Philosophy of Peter

Sloterdijk is controversial and of great interest to the media.

Peter Sloterdijk was born in 1947 in Karlsruhe. In 1968 he began to study philosophy, German studies and history at the universities of Munich and Hamburg. In 1971 he defended his master’s thesis on “Structuralism as a poetic hermeneutics”, and the following year wrote the essay “Structuralist theory of the history of Michel Foucault”. In 1973, this was followed by the work of “saving language games. Criticism of the linguistic constitution of the subject”.

His fluctuations between philology, linguistics, history and philosophy led him to his doctoral thesis in which he was on the intersection of science: it reflected the history studied in autobiographies in the time of Weimar Republic. Peter Sloterdijk wrote his doctoral thesis and defended it in 1976 under the supervision of Professor Klaus Briegleb in linguistics at the University of Hamburg, and the theme of it was: “Literature and the organization of life experience. Theory and history of autobiography in the time of Weimar Republic in 1918-1933: specific features”. (A significant part of the material out of it came in the “Critique of Cynical Reason”).

After that began the time on his own philosophizing. Peter Sloterdijk went to learn to India in 1980, where he listened to the preacher Bhagwan nicknamed as “religious Wittgenstein” for what it “means” religious games¹, parodies, deconstructions, experiments, and positive creation develops a kind of comparative study of religion (Religionwissenschaft), without rejecting anything and not putting theoretical critique” [1, p. 17].

Subsequently Peter Sloterdijk did not answer the questions about the aim of his trip to India and what he learned from Bhagwan. He confined himself to the assertion that the Western world now has completely forgotten how to understand this kind of knowledge.

However, the analysis of the subsequent work of the philosopher of Karlsruhe gives an idea of the general trend of its development and, to some extent, the meaning of studying of contemporary religious practices.

Every thinker, by choosing the direction of the movement, must determine two things: a) what is the historical situation he is situated together with his contemporaries, that what is the starting point of his journey, and b) in what the direction from the starting point one should go to reach the goal.

The definition of the reference point in Peter Sloterdijk arose under the influence of the ideology of older Frankfurt School. This was unanimously said by researchers of Peter Sloterdijk. The presence of such an effect is recognized by himself. It would be surprising if there was no such an effect: the beginning year of study at the University of Peter Sloterdijk is 1968, the year of the student revolt in Europe, the peak performance of "New Left". Ideological inspirers of the rebellion and philosophers were the first generation of the Frankfurt School, in the first place Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno.

These thinkers were forced to emigrate from Germany, where National Socialists came to the power. But, once in the U.S., they have concluded that in the conditions of bourgeois democracy humanitarian intelligentsia can not realize itself. Under totalitarian regimes, where the state controls all aspects of life of individuals, an intellectual in the humanities is under pressure from the government, a rigorous censor of his work. In a democratic society, however, his works are not in demand by the public. Russian humanists and social scientists faced with this in the past twenty years. They called for the establishment of democracy, freedom of speech, hoping it will allow them to express themselves smoothly and without censorship, but it turned out that these thoughts were not in interest by the

public that is affected by epidemic consumerism, the public which determines the demand in the market.

Concluding that the person is alienated both in totalitarian, and the bourgeois-democratic societies, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer blamed it on the rationalist style of thinking. According to Karl Marx's famous statement that the kingdom of reason can not be anything other than a bourgeois republic, the thinkers of the Frankfurt School began to expose the Enlightenment as alienated, bourgeois ideology. All that is generally called industrial society was represented by them as an infringement of human freedom and individuality. The mind was understood as aggressive beginning in the person, which initially is intended to conquer and subdue firstly the nature and then, other persons. As a result, the nature is transformed by the mind into raw materials for production: there is no beauty, no life in it. The price of this is the fact that the same rationalist attitude applies to people. The Auschwitz appeared as a factory for people processing for which they are a raw material. The Auschwitz was a factory for people processing: in one shop there was a "gold mining" where special teams pulled out gold teeth of the people killed with gas; in the other shop they extracted human skin for wallets and lampshades; in the third one they extracted human fat as raw material for the production of soap; in the fourth one they extracted human bones, which after burning used for fine filtration of various substances.

From the Frankfurt School Peter Sloterdijk borrowed, firstly, the negative attitude of the industry in its former condition. In the industrial society, industry is the most vivid and overt aggression embodiment of bourgeois rationality. Peter Sloterdijk has devoted many pages to the industry in particular, the military industry, that is dehumanizing, and threatening human life in general and the development. In "Air

Trembling: At the Roots of *Terror*” (2002), he actually put on the same level an uncontrolled industrial development and terrorism: in both cases there is a destruction of people’s lives through the destruction of their environment. Gas War, the history of which Peter Sloterdijk says in the first chapter, is considered by him as State terrorism by using the latest advances in science and technology [2, p.7-47]. The apex of rationalism Peter Sloterdijk considers the “smart weapons” (homing missiles, etc., equipped with computers), as well as the atomic bomb, the greatest achievement of science and technology.

Following the Frankfurt School, he believes that we should not fight with mould and with dampness, that is, not with the investigation, and with reason. The struggle for disarmament and for the environment is a struggle with the consequences, and the reason appears, as has been said, in the aggressive rationality of bourgeois consciousness, that is embodied in the industry and arms race. “What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts” [3, p. 2].

Here, however, the way of the Frankfurt School and Peter Sloterdijk diverge.

The Frankfurt School is in hopeless captivity and boundless pessimism. They can not imagine any change to the existing world order that is based on the global tradition of rationalism, which, in their view, begins with the ancient Greek myths. The majority of the population is infected with rationalism, and so ready to play the role of “social engineering”, “living machines”. That type of “authoritarian personality”, which is generated by the scientific and technological enlightenment, is the base of totalitarian regimes. Such an “authoritarian personality” of proto-fascist type is already spread in the United States considered a stronghold of democracy. “According to the overall pessimistic position of Adorno

(“where see, everywhere is a geek”), the majority of the American people in one way or another in some way can be subsumed under the concept of “authoritarian” (and therefore “fascizoid”) personality. Only a small group of people involved in the avant-garde consciousness (i.e., discovered the propensity for avant-garde art and the avant-garde type of behavior) is excluded from the circle of media “authoritarian” disposition sentenced in advance to become a breeding ground and the material of the fascist regimes. <...> The only practically political conclusion from this position can only be a revolution of despair, organized by a handful of representatives of the avant-garde of the revolutionary consciousness without people and against the people, as it is seen as a bearer of “fascizoid” consciousness and a support of “pro-” (or “before-”) fascist regimes” [4, p. 25].

Peter Sloterdijk criticizes the Frankfurt School for such pessimism. Preaching elitism they doom themselves to solitude in the fight and to failure. They are not even saved by the image that was invented for the contemporary critical intellectuals Pasolini, the image of the Corsair, the free pirate, who in the name of high culture attacks all low and bourgeois. This guerrilla war is doomed to failure, and the general tone of the speeches of the Frankfurt School is complaints and groans of the wounded.

Peter Sloterdijk writes in the “Critique of Cynical Reason”: “Pasolini spiced up the dull pseudocritique a bit in that he at least designed a convincing costume: that of the *buccaneer*—pirate writings. The intellectual as buccaneer – not a bad dream. We have scarcely ever seen ourselves that way. A homosexual gave the warning signal against the effeminization of critique. Like Douglas Fairbanks leaping around in the cultural rigging, with drawn sword, sometimes the conqueror and sometimes the conquered, knocked about unpredictably on the seas of social alienation. The blows fall on all sides. Because

the costume is amoral, it fits morally like a second skin. The buccaneer cannot assume fixed standpoints because he is constantly moving between changing fronts. Perhaps Pasolini's image of the pirate intellect can reflect light on Brecht, I mean on the young, bad Brecht, not the Brecht who believed he had to conduct classes on the Communist galley" [5, p. xxxvi].

The irreconcilability of critics, its severity and fighting spirit, just as in the contemporary human rights advocates, should not deceive us. These people do not expect to win; on the contrary, the victory would hurt them. Only when one is defeated, one can feel the pain and suffering alone can reveal the truth. Critics, such as those who created the Frankfurt school, take the battle to suffer, and this suffering, to discover new truths, just as it did, for example, Gandhi, the preacher of philosophy of nonviolence.

Therefore Peter Sloterdijk continues: "The offensive posture in the myth of the buccaneer is inviting. One reservation might be the illusion that the intelligentsia is based on brawling as such. In fact, Pasolini is a beaten person, like Adorno. It is the a priori pain – it makes even the simplest things in life difficult for a person – that opens his eyes critically. There is no significant critique without significant defects. It is the critically wounded in a culture who, with great effort, find something healing, who continue to turn the wheel of critique. Adorno dedicated a well-known essay to Hein-rich Heine, *Die Wunde Heine* (*The sore, Heine*). This sore is nothing other than the one that bores away in any significant critique. Among the great critical achievements in modern times, sores open up everywhere: the sore, Rousseau; the sore, Schelling; the sore, Heine; the sore, Marx; the sore, Kierkegaard; the sore, Nietzsche; the sore, Spengler; the sore, Heidegger; the sore, Theodor Less-ing; the sore, Freud; the sore, Adorno: Out of the self-healing of deep sores come critiques that serve epochs as

rallying points for self-knowledge. Every critique is pioneering work on the pain of the times (*Zeitschmerz*) and a piece of exemplary healing" [5, p. xxxvi].

The position of Peter Sloterdijk is uniquely defined: he is not going to give himself a propaganda capital, showing his wounds received in the fight against brutal bourgeois machine. All such demarches, known in contemporary Russia as "March of Dissent", can draw on its side supporters at least. Suffering does not add courage to fighters. Instead, it pushes those who want to resist the Moloch of rationalism, in the gloom. That is why Peter Sloterdijk distances himself from the Frankfurt School, saying that "It is not my ambition to enlarge this honorable infirmary of critical theories. It is time for a new critique of temperaments. Where enlightenment appears as a "melancholy science" (Adorno-Trans), it unintentionally furthers melancholic stagnation. Thus, the critique of cynical reason hopes to achieve more from a work that cheers us up, whereby it is understood from the beginning that it is not so much a matter of work but rather of relaxation" [5, p. xxxvii]. The work, which gives fun, work by choice – in contrast to dull labour, to which forces the society – this is a hidden reference to the "Human, all too human" Nietzsche, where he was called to such work.

According to the theory of Peter Sloterdijk, modern consciousness of the masses in the West is characterized by universal diffuse (i.e., pervasive scattering) cynicism that resulted from a failed education: "The discontent in our culture¹ has assumed a new quality: It appears as a universal, diffuse cynicism. The traditional critique of ideology stands at a loss before this cynicism. It does not know what button to push in this cynically keen consciousness to get enlightenment going. Modern cynicism presents itself as that state of consciousness that follows after naive ideologies and their enlightenment.

In it, the obvious exhaustion of ideology critique has its real ground. This critique has remained more naive than the consciousness it wanted to expose; in its well-mannered rationality, it did not keep up with the twists and turns of modern consciousness to a cunning multiple realism. The formal sequence of false consciousness up to now—lies, errors, ideology—is incomplete; the current mentality requires the addition of a fourth structure: the phenomenon of cynicism. To speak of cynicism means trying to enter the old building of ideology critique through a new entrance” [5, p. 3].

In the Enlightenment age philosophers proposed to enlighten the people the following ideas. The masses of the people are slaves of superstitions. Some of them are a result of simple ignorance, generating confusion. People just did not learn science, and therefore expresses the naive, primitive and inaccurate judgments about things. But there are other prejudices, which deceivers take advantage of making people believe, because they are called now as manipulators of public opinion. The religion, according to enlighteners, was born when a simpleton met with a deceiver. Someone who does not know the science is easily to be cheated. That is what do all kinds of priests, mystics, supporters of the irrational.

A person should get out of their captivity. He must reject prejudice, and for that he is to subject the Cartesian question everything he knows. He has to live only in accordance with his mind. The enlightener will help him awaken that mind, but he would not impose a ready-made opinions. “Have the courage to use your mind”, formulated the main slogan of the Enlightenment Immanuel Kant.

Philosophers enlighteners foreshadowed in the coming kingdom of the mind a complete rejection of violence and war. (Kant wrote a special work “Perpetual Peace”). After all, reasonable people can always be flexible minded

and find a peaceful solution to all problems. The State in the future will be more and more convincing, and less and less use of coercion. In general, it will die as a coercive authority and will become a manifestation of the Universal Mind on the Earth (as in Hegel). Advances in science will develop industry and agriculture, and they will provide the material well-being and prosperity of all people on Earth.

All these hopes were not realized: the two world wars and revolutions that accompanied them, have shown that the mind is not always accompanied humanity. It can be used for mass extermination, which in this case is justified most rational theories. The equipment, from machine guns and gas of the time of the First World War to modern nuclear weapons is not a friend of a man, but his murderer. The technology can enslave a man, make him his appendage.

The lessons of history in the twentieth century, including the industrial extermination of people in concentration camps, destroyed the idea of the mind as a means of salvation for humanity. He was treated just as a tool to ensure that what they want the will. But this will be both good and evil. The ill will can use the achievements of reason and science to the detriment of the people. The good will, good for them.

Therefore the debate between supporters of rationalism and anti-rationalism has moved into the sphere of ethics, where are questioned the good and the evil will. Enlighteners defended here theirs last bastion: the mind and good will are inseparable, a reasonable person can not be evil. (This point of view – of the indissolubility of truth and goodness – is known in philosophy since the time of Socrates, a man of understanding and knowledge the best can not be on the side of the worst, can not be a guide to the worst, and, therefore, evil man – the one who is calling for a better, of course, a well-wisher.) Anti-enlighteners argued that any will is evil. For whom destroys, it

always seems the former builder destroyed evil, whether it is a good or bad construction. Every evil person who is trying to adopt something new: he disturbs peace of the inhabitants of the old buildings (organizations, communities ...) In other words, humanity lives “beyond good and evil” (Nietzsche). This means that it does not affect and shall not affect the moral judgments. Angry any carrier of something new, kind, anyone who defends the old order. As such, the judge takes an absurd look. Is it good one who saves by the most severe measures the old order? And is evil one who plants a new order? Is not it better to see the world’s only life movement, in which the new is always pushes and wins the old, and the idea of “good” and “evil” to declare subjective?

But in this case it is to recognize that every person has his own idea of right and wrong. The authors of ethical theories represent no exception. In each of them laid a subjective interest (subject, there may be not only the individual, but also a social group, and social class). But, representing his ethical theory as an expression of human values, as an expression of “objective truth” or immutable, centuries-old principles, rooted “in being itself,” “in the nature”, “the very essence of man”, such theorists hide their subjectivism, giving his objectivity – and, therefore, is cheating. They act as ideologues – that is someone else’s mind manipulators.

Modern Europeans, as is clear from the above statements Peter Sloterdijk, know better, but they do worst. They are at school are familiar with the theories of the Enlightenment. They share their “universal values” in words! But in practice they do not act as these require immutable and common in the West, moral rules like tolerance, political correctness, human rights, etc. The New cynic today knows that the rights and freedoms are above all, and happy to teach this art to all people in the backward countries. But he still considers himself the owner of higher knowledge;

advanced people know how to use the rhetoric of education for their own, selfish purposes, even naive people learn ethics universal. Under the guise of educational rhetoric people achieve their goals and defend only their own interests. So enlightened cynic, but it should be exclusively his selfishness, the requirements of his will, thus, not considering himself the reason a bad person. Someone who literally understands the requirement to comply with the ethics of reason and humanity, is not viable. Among the Russian youth it is called “nerd”, in the ranks of the intelligentsia in his glory impractical “idealist” who for the sake of ideals can donate their own wealth and even freedom. “A good man” is a man who keeps in his head the educational concepts that are learned from childhood, but really should only their selfish interests. Unlike outright villain, who did not even look back on educational ideals and has no idea of ethics education, the “enlightened cynic” is still limited his ego, he hesitates, doing evil, it works without any pleasure, arguing that in his place could be someone worse.

This is the portrait of a modern enlightened cynic affected diffuse universal cynicism, a victim of under-enlightenment. So what can one oppose it, according to Peter Sloterdijk? Humor and satire, the essence of which is that the felicitous mask humanist and a champion of human rights expose the self-serving and selfish nature of a person who cautiously is following his interests. Laughter, as Nietzsche said this in the “Human, all too human”, is a measure of truth in conversations about life. If I’m kidding, I point to the existing back of your humane and enlightened facade your true animal nature, prone to violence and selfishness, and everyone laughs, confirming that I was right.

Peter Sloterdijk such a whistleblower of the hypocrisy in public called Cynic. Cynic figure appears in the ancient world. The most famous

of the Cynics was Diogenes. The essence of his lewd jokes, revelations was the fact that all sorts of high-flown words of Plato's ideals, the sublime, over celestial world, he demonstrated biological life of his own body: in response to the talk of higher love doing masturbation, saying that he wanted to remove hunger, stroking herself hand on his stomach, and in response to a public talk about the spirit of the winds blew. In the ancient city such a figure could only be a single as an

exception, it had to prove the rule. But in modern society Cynic is massive and, in fact, finds a ready response: all kinds of "humorists, satirists," have an enormous success, through humor, "below the belt", joking about gluttony, sex, physiological release, using obscene language, which is entirely tied to the physiology of "below the belt".

Thus, the fact that earlier in the era of enlightenment, would be considered shameful, unworthy of civilized man, is now in full flaunt.

¹ As «linguistic games» in Wittgenstein.

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Неокинизм П. Слотердайка – реванш просвещения?

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В данной статье представлены размышления о роли образования в современном мире, в котором господствуют антипросветительские тенденции. В этом контексте и рассматривается фигура современного немецкого философа Петера Слотердайка, который выдвинул оригинальное учение, органично продолжающее традиции немецкой философии жизни. В статье исследуется эволюция творчества этого философа, влияние на него философии Франкфуртской школы. В соответствии с учением П. Слотердайка современное сознание масс на Западе характеризует универсальный диффузный цинизм, которые возник в результате неудавшегося Просвещения. Противопоставлением диффузному цинизму является неокинизм, в котором юмор и сатира используются, чтобы за благообразной маской гуманиста и поборника прав человека разоблачать корыстную и эгоистическую натуру, обладающую злой волей.

Ключевые слова: образование, реформы, Просвещение, Франкфуртская школа, немецкая философия жизни, диффузный цинизм, разум, воля, кинизм, неокинизм.
