



Philosophy

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Philosophy – community

In the history of philosophy, we find abundant resources for reflecting on the theme of community.¹ Community may be approached from a metaphysical and anthropological perspective, insofar as it can be understood as constitutive of the human being itself. The human person exists with and for others. Community may also be examined from the standpoint of social and political philosophy. From this perspective, it is recognized not only as the arena of social and political life but also as an ideal to be attained. In ethics, too, the category of community assumes great importance: the normative dimension of human existence does not occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, it inevitably refers to concrete communities and their respective traditions.

Perhaps because we are increasingly aware of the importance of community for human beings – along with its fragility and the new factors that threaten its erosion – the question of community occupies a prominent place in contemporary philosophy, in thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, Martin Buber, Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Jürgen Habermas, among many others. For several of these and other authors, community is often presented as a kind of antidote to the excesses of contemporary individualism and to a somewhat disordered preoccupation with personal autonomy. It is simultaneously the grounding and the goal of authentic human existence.

¹ For a historical approach to philosophical reflection on community, see: Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy C. Campbell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Reflecting on the question of community is undoubtedly an important philosophical task. We may ask, however, whether philosophy – especially insofar as it remains faithful to its original vocation – might itself be generative of community.² Today, philosophy is largely understood as an academic discipline of a predominantly speculative character. Philosophers reflect on the world and on human experience using diverse approaches and methodologies. Philosophy is practiced primarily within universities, according to the norms and conventions of academic life. In a certain sense, we might say that philosophy now inhabits an ecosystem different from the one in which it was born.

In its beginnings in Ancient Greece, philosophy was primarily a way of life. There was certainly room for the speculative exercises characteristic of philosophy as we know it today. Yet philosophy was far more than a speculative activity. Philosophical reflection took place within the context of a community and was accompanied by a set of spiritual and ascetic practices.³

In the present context – marked by intense social tensions and by technological developments that lead us to question the very nature of human existence – philosophical reflection acquires renewed relevance. Philosophy is called to reflect critically, deeply, and creatively on reality and on human experience in its various dimensions. It is, par excellence, a mode of critical thinking that questions the foundations and presuppositions of what we do and who we are.

The emergence of artificial intelligence renews the significance of philosophical activity. Machines are now capable of performing, with speed and precision, many tasks that until recently were exclusive to human beings. AI compiles and organizes information, produces and revises texts, solves problems, and simulates artistic creation. In this new and challenging context, the exercise of genuine creativity and critical spirit can only be achieved by human beings. Machines do not replace human beings; rather, they demand that we become truly human by exercising our most authentic capacities. In this sense, in the face of the rise of AI, philosophy becomes a universal necessity.

² See, for example: Noa Lahav Ayalon, «Philosophical community from a historical perspective», *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 110 (April 2025): 40–45.

³ See: Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

Precisely because it is one of the highest products of human genius, philosophy should be devoted to helping humanity become more fully human. To do so, it must value and cultivate the communal dimension of human existence. It is not merely a matter of reflecting on community, though that remains a task of the utmost importance for philosophy. It is a matter of cultivating the communal dimension of our existence as human beings. Perhaps this is utopian, but I believe philosophy would be more faithful to its vocation if it were practiced within living communities where our humanity is nurtured through the exercise of intelligence, creativity, and spiritual depth.

During the modern period, knowledge became increasingly specialized and fragmented. The various disciplines acquired growing autonomy and often struggle to engage in genuine dialogue with one another. Yet the most pressing and significant problems facing humanity cannot be resolved without the contribution of multiple disciplines. In this context, philosophy may work as a bridge among different forms of knowledge. In other words, philosophy may be called to function as a true hinge of knowledge, building bridges and articulating an overarching vision of humanity's fundamental challenges. In some sense, when questioned about their foundations and presuppositions, all disciplines ultimately converge upon philosophical ground. Philosophy can therefore contribute to the cohesion of the scientific community by ensuring that different disciplines remain in dialogue, without losing sight of the major challenges and questions of our shared humanity.

We inhabit a polarized and divided world. Conversations, even among friends, easily assume a tense or even aggressive tone, as if there were no common humanity that we all share. Here, too, philosophy has an important mission. The attitudes proper to the philosopher create the conditions for genuine encounter and authentic dialogue: analysing questions with depth and rigour; identifying and exposing prejudices and biases; humbly recognizing that the world can be interpreted in many different ways; maintaining openness to the truth and a sincere search for the good.

In conversations blocked by certainties, it may be salutary to reaffirm, sincerely, "I know that I know nothing." In the face of black-and-white portrayals of reality, we might acknowledge, as good philosophers do, that our world and our humanity are multi-coloured, proposing nuanced interpretations of events and circumstances. To simplistic answers

to complex problems, we might oppose the wisdom of the history of thought, which has already tested many of the solutions we believe to be new. Philosophy can reflect on community, but it can also help create the conditions under which healthy political and human communities may flourish in contemporary societies – communities in which diversity is not experienced as a threat.

References

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