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One of the characteristic features of the publication is its division into several chapters, out of which each one is devoted to another issue and each can function as an autonomous whole, independent of other parts. This trait is idrrd far from disadvantageous, not only for the fact of the book "falling apart" into a number of "mini-handbooks", which can be considered both a disadvantage and an advantage (an advantage because it allows the reader to start reading with a random chapter, without the need to get familiar with the previous ones). This fact, in the case of The History of Philosophy, is not a disadvantage first of all because each chapter (and, which is important, various chapters had been prepared by various authors) shows philosophy as an absolutly most important form of human activity.

Treating philosophy as an attempt of man to find his own place in the world, the Author does not try to narrow the contents of the book down to the issues commonly considered as "philosophic" and present in every philosophy handbook. Reading the work one gets the impression of the historical changeability of philosophical reflection and its strict bonds with extra-philosophical areas of human activity. According to the assumption taken by the Author, it is not possible to understand philosophy (also European philosophy, in spite of what its proponents say about its universal character), neglecting its bonds with science, religion, art or social and economical systems.

This type of "contextual" approach to philosophy seems to be very right, although from philosopher's point of view – somewhat risky, as one has not only to have an in-depth knowledge of philosophy, but also an extensive and detailed knowledge about issues which are but loosely connected with philosophy – or even not connected at all. One must also admit that to the Author of the publication this orientation in such extra-philosophical disciplines poses no difficulty whatsoever and even the reader who himself commands extensive knowledge e. g. in the field of physics or biology, sometimes is surprised at the freshness of look and the ability to aptly recognize some philosophical aspects of the issues with which the above mentioned disciplines deal. The Author tries thus

to present the Reader not only with very specific, almost professional knowledge of philosophy, but he also emphasizes the interdisciplinary character of the most important philosophic questions. The History of philosophy not only teaches philosophy but also enables one to see how philosophy and other fields of knowledge interpenetrate.

Thus, reading the handbook one does not get the impression that philosophy is a closed academic discipline, isolated from the world, or an area which in the best case is interesting to the specialists. Quite the contrary. The Reader learns that philosophising consists usually in seeking the answers to certain questions everywhere where these answers can be found, not only in the writings of the classics. The picture of the philosopher which emerges from The History of philosophy is far from the common (and, alas, maintained also by some philosophers) image of the humanist which, in spite of his vast knowledge, cannot manage to solve a simple mathematical task.

The book, as the very title suggests, is a handbook of history of philosophy. The Author's special sensitivity to the historical changeability of philosophical theories is one of the special traits of The History of philosophy and after finishing the reading it appears that the image of philosophy one has taken out of the book is a dynamic one. Philosophy, with which the Author makes the Reader familiar, turns out to be rather a process, marked by internal tensions and contradictions, than a set of ideas which last throughout the ages in an unchanged form. Comparing the book with other philosophy handbooks, one should stress that, to a much bigger extent than it usually happens, the Author has managed to show philosophy as a multi-layer, incredibly complex process of change and as a continuous shaping of the image of the world. Although all philosophers do realize the fact that philosophy, as a certain generally conceived area of human activity, is changeable, yet a great majority of handbooks take the form of a kind of a list of main philosophical systems, which in turn are presented as certain closed, finished wholes – and if it happens that one of the philosophers had in the course of his life changed his views a number of times, then his philosophic work is divided into two or three periods, out of which every one is treated as a more or less coherent philosophical system. This kind of approach is completely alien to the Author.

In today's didactics, it is very common to think that gaining knowledge should be an activity which requires no effort and the knowledge itself should be the result of performing certain activities planned by the authors of various didactic ideas which in turn should provide the learner with entertainment and mental pleasure. If a certain amount of effort should be inevitable, certainly it should not be excessive. This kind of view has been functioning among pedagogists and psychologists for a long time and – for a long time, probably from the moment of its creation – it has also found ardent opponents (it was criticised, e. g. by Bertrand Russell, who tried to prove that in practice it brings the

learners at least as much harm as benefit). The Author of the handbook had decided, as it seems, to take quite the opposite stance. What speaks for this thesis is the way of presenting the material and also, at first glance, a little old-fashioned style of lecture. Knowledge has been expounded in a very accessible way, often in the form of smaller captions which – treating the handbook as a basis for studying philosophy – one can simply learn by heart, gaining this way a certain portion of true, unquestionable knowledge of philosophy (and not, as it often happens, only a subjective conviction about having knowledge).

The critics of such an attitude would probably ask, what benefit the reader derives from appropriating the information expounded in the book in this completely, it seems, anachronistic way? Well, there is one undisputable benefit: knowing about philosophy all one can learn from the handbook in question, practically without further reading, one can start reading the basic philosophical works on one's own. In other words, the book contains actually all that one should know about philosophy in order to start one's own adventure with philosophic literature.

Last, but not least, one should stress that the book has a great many good points from the point of view of popularisation: an exceptionally clear, and at the same time very convincing way of explaining philosophical issues, a certain clearly felt distance to what one is writing about and to one's own views, numerous interesting examples from the history of philosophy and history of science. The Author does not simplify the theories he presents and he does not try, e. g. for the sake of abbreviation, sketch the most difficult problems in an uncomplete way, departing from the assumption that their exhaustive exposition and presentation in such a way that they may be understood by the Reader should not be possible in such a handbook. So, in spite of the fact that the aim of the book is to pivot the Reader's attention and arouse his interest in philosophy, the Author does not try to interweave the discourse with fragments whose task would be to provide the Reader with easy entertainment. However sometimes it seems that he is consciously avoiding excessive, detailed differentiation or he is eager to avoid language which would be too precise and strict, preferring free, at places even literary style, it all ultimately leads to deepening the Reader's knowledge of philosophy – and not to its shallowing – so, it proves to be an absolutely right gesture. Even if here and there an inquisitive reader should find some simplification, certainly in the case of *The History of Philosophy* this simplification does not mean deforming the content.

The handbook is a work which fulfills a task of a double nature: it can serve as a basis for systematic study of philosophy, but it can also be treated as a popularizing publication, whose basic task is narrowing the distance between philosophical reflection as practiced by professional philosophers and the popular idea about what this reflection is. The book in a masterly way encourages one to pursue further philosophical study.