

Thesis of PhD Dissertation

PHILOSOPHY OF EUGENE POSCH

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I. Background

According to originally plan I intended to deal with a more extensive domain. My interest was directed toward the (mechanical) materialist *and* positivist tendencies in the sphere of history of Hungarian philosophy. In an initial stage it turned out that if I want to give a relatively all-embracing picture about a selected theme, the field has to be restricted. After taking a survey of the philosophical field in point I came to the conclusion that Eugene Posch's papers deserves attention most of all. I might as well say, among Hungarian materialists he was a *par excellence* philosopher. (Other proponents of materialism were self-taught, non-professional persons.) Inter alia Posch's materialism makes the theoretical life-work noteworthy for a historian of philosophy because in the history of Hungarian philosophy mechanical materialism could not obtain a considerable influence. Probably it is bound up with the fact that the philosophical achievement of materialistic trend is the least analyzed in the history of Hungarian philosophy up to now.

II. Aim of my research

The dissertation presents the theoretical achievement of Eugene (Jenő, in his German publications: Eugen) Posch in the form of a monograph. The most

important aim of my work is to give an overall picture about his philosophy – respectively his standpoint, theories, arguments, counter-arguments. In keeping with the monographical treatment of the subject his articles, written in less academical style or that belong to the borderland of philosophy, is taken into consideration as well.

Apart from some short articles Eugene Posch's life-work has not been analysed yet. Of course my essay does not involve that research in connection with Posch's philosophical life-work would be concluded once and for all. (For example further biographical information, coming to light professional letters or anonymous written articles could tinge our overall picture of Posch's philosophy.) My investigation can be regarded as a phase of Posch's studies.

III. Methodology

The method of elaborating the subject is subordinated to the reconstruction of Posch's philosophy. Although I sketch the historical-academical context of Posch's time, my writing does not fall under „intellectual history” or „history of ideas”, but history of philosophy. Consequently – apart from the biographical chapter and other short passages or remarks – I do not make allowance for extratheoretical considerations such as social or political situation. Except when a relation between a theme and some social factors is too conspicuous.

My historical approach is positivistic but it does not mean bald statement of the facts. Besides the reconstruction of Posch's theses and arguments my work includes a critical reflection: I draw attention to coherence-problems, insufficiency, unclarity, ambiguity.

I expound Posch's two most important work in separated chapters. His other subjects come on according to disciplines. This mode can be applied because Posch's essential philosophical conviction (his fundamental principle) was constant. (In the history of Hungarian philosophy this counts up as rarity. The majority of Hungarian philosophers changed governing idea during their career.) Posch lived up to his principles: he strove to solve every arising problem within the scope of materialism.

IV. Posch's theoretical achievement

1. The area of Posch's philosophical interest and fundamental attributes of his theory

Eugene Posch prepared the majority of his papers at the beginning of the 20th century. He wrote two books, published both of them in two bulky volumes.

He was the most radical proponent of materialistic philosophy. (Of course in the history of Hungarian philosophy when talking of 'positivism', we do not mean the group of logical positivism but rather Comte's school.) Materialism can be assumed as a version of positivism, but Posch has a strong commitment to materialism. In accordance with Posch's standpoint positivism as endeavouring to scientism is unsatisfactory for the philosophical purpose: positivists are not rigorous enough. Only materialism – and its terminology – can secure the philosophy against spiritualistic balderdash and other kind of idealistic ideology.

His early book was entitled *Theory of time*. In this book he argues for an antirealistic approach of time. He reduces the time (more precisely: our time-concept) to psychological processes. According to his train of thought the language plays a significant role in the psychological formation of time-realism.

His second book was entitled *Our mental phenomena and their nature*. I pay stressed attention to the theses of this book, because it contains the comparatively most settled standpoint of the author. (The first book and several articles deal with more particular problems.) In this book Posch adopts a reductive strategy: he explains mental phenomena as movements (visible motion and/or invisible innervational moving). Thus all kind of psychic processes are physical processes. Among several mental phenomena Posch regards the mental image as a cardinal point of support of idealism/spiritualism.

Mental image \approx behavior + physiology \approx „macro-movement” + „micro-movement”

Their origin is a physiological process, which is a result of adaptation to environment. Posch took over this insight from Herbert Spencer's objective psychology, but Posch elaborated it in the direction of a more radical theory. In contrast to Spencer (and some of the contemporary motor theories) Posch expanded the principle of adaptive function to higher mental functions, to intellectual ability. According to his assumption these phenomena would originate in physiological organization.

In connection with the language Posch's endeavour was to construe mental words and expressions in a behaviourist and/or innervational way. He makes every effort to point out the mistakes that are originated from admitting everyday language to professional (or fact-finding) language. The naïve (folk) psychology is a stressed target for him because its terminology causes ambiguity in the scientific (theoretical) nomenclature. Posch uses also etymological arguments to demonstrate that originally mental expressions do not refer to spiritual entity but to behaviour. The metaphorical usage of these words leads to formation of mental (i. e. pseudo) concepts. From a scientific point of view as far as their theoretical legitimation is concerned they carried out a kind of abuse of the language.

2. Further significant features of Posch's train of thought:

- His theory is linked to the concept of determinism: there is not free will.
- The mental phenomena are not entities, but (physiological) processes.
- Introspection is not cognition. It is human operation, but it does not yield facts.
- There are not soul, consciousness, self.

3. Differences between his two books

In the early book he accepted (tacitly) the positive ontological status of mental image. In his later work he rejected it; he argued that the existence of the mental image (and other classes of mental states) is a helpful assumption pragmatically, but to understand the mind scientifically this hypothesis is needless and this spiritual „sphere” can be eliminated.

The other difference is rather technical. In his early book – although he believed in materialism – he reckoned such a view as acceptable that the mental and the physical (language) are two ways to describe the phenomena which themselves are neither mental nor physical. It is a standpoint by means of which certain idealistic/spiritualistic objections can be declined. In the following years he changed his view: the ontological position has primary importance, without which the validity of a theory is ambiguous, its truth will not be verifiable.

Posch also deals with such questions which pertain to other theoretical fields. He writes several articles for the periodicals of that time in themes of

linguistics, ethics, anthropology, metaphysics, pedagogy, psychology of music, history of church. In addition three articles are written in German, published in German learned journals.

4. Posch's style

Systematizing his theories, theses, arguments and counter-arguments a specific difficulty comes up. It is his unsystematic style. Although he divides the books into chapters, it frequently occurs that the most important arguments can be found somewhere else – in a chapter dedicated to a totally different problem. For this reason the analyser has to take other parts of book into consideration in order to reconstruct his standpoint at issue.

5. Foreign influence

A lot of philosophers and psychologists influenced Posch's approach, but in spite of the fact that Posch paid much attention to the analysis of the foreign authors, he cannot be regarded as a follower of the philosophical mainstream, because taking every question of detail into consideration even the most accepted authors' theories receive more critiques than appreciative comments. Influence of foreign authors reveals itself in an unusual way. He supports not a

philosophical school or any kind of “-isms”, but rather a certain proportion of theoretical sentences, leaving its context out of consideration.

In a chapter of the dissertation I draw a comparison between the theory of Posch and the authors cited (and/or criticized) by him.

6. The effect of his writing on his contemporaries

Posch thought of his reader as who are willing and able to intellectual effort.

He presupposed the reader's foreign language skill. He cited length French and German authors in the original language. Posch threw difficulties in the way of unobservance of stylistic aspects and construction lines. In addition the failure of theoretical openness for materialism among contemporaries contributed to inefficiency of his works. (Aport from some views and critical articles.)

V. Summarizing and evaluating conclusions drawn through investigation of Posch's papers

A today's reader may face scattered comments that often remind of later authors' important sights. Above all some theses of the not much later logical positivism and psychological behaviorism appear in his later papers. There are such

(critical) sentences, whose theoretical message – on a less precise manner, but – almost checks up with later authors' sentences. (Particularly Carnap, the early Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, the early behaviorists.)

Nevertheless it is true that – as a consequence of dominating critical attitude – many aspects of his subject are not treated by him. We can have reservations about his certain resolving. In his early book the distinction between (memorial) mental image and actual sense data raise several question to be solved. In his later book there are unacknowledged problems: ambiguity deriving from broad meaning of wording; incompleteness of the reduction of mental phenomena (mainly the mental images); rudeness of semantics of mental language, coherence problems among his different arguments be based on critique of language.

Despite all these, if we want to be fair, we may not leave his special historical situation out of consideration. On the one hand it is true, speaking in a general way, that such kind of school as materialism and positivism are under the necessity of theoretical destruction. Denying postulation of their theoretical opponents is integral part of their teaching. Consequently the process of theory building come after critical phase. Posch did not want to leave argumentative quibble to the spiritualists, for this reason he was bent on obviating all kind of idealistic train of thoughts. He considered it as the first and most important role. Especially as the spiritualistic ambitions returned with renewed strength.

On the other hand if we look at his life-work with a today's eye, it can be understood, why he did not solve the remaining problems. These problems cause difficulties even for present-day thinker. It is enough if we think that the naturalizing of mind intrigues erudite philosophers. (Posch did not use this expression, but we do not misrepresent his teaching with this wording.)

All things considered we can declare that Eugene Posch – in comparison with average of his contemporaries – was a philosopher of a relatively high standard.

VI. Publications in the topic of history of Hungarian philosophical (mechanical) materialism

A materialista filozófia szorgos napszámosa: Posch Jenő. [Eugene Posch, a hard worker of materialistic philosophy] *Magyar Tudomány*, 2013/3. 314-325.

A francia felvilágosodás filozófiájának egy magyar követője. [A Hungarian proponent of philosophy of French Enlightenment.] In: Garaczi Imre – Kalmár Zoltán (ed.): *Pro Philosophia Évkönyv*, 2012/13. 5-15.

Posch Jenő materialisztikus érzelemfelfogása. [Posch's materialistic approach of emotion] In: Laczkó Sándor (ed.): *A szerelem - Lábjegyzetek Platónhoz 11*. Szeged, Státus kiadó, 2013. 370-391.

Gergő Endre materialista pszichológiája a XX. század elején. [Endre Gergő's materialistic psychology at the beginning of the twentieth century] *Magyar Pszichológiai Szemle* 2015/3-4. 557-577.

Külföldi hatások megjelenése Posch Jenő filozófia-felfogásának keretei között [Appearance of foreign influence within the scope of Eugene Posch's philosophical approach] In: Mester Béla (ed.): *Régiók, határok, identitások: (Kelet-)Közép-Európa a (magyar) filozófiatörténetben*. Budapest, Gondolat, 2016. 191-215.

A further article and reviews

Iskola és tudományosság. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2005/1. 41-51.

Mindörökké evolúció. *Magyar Tudomány*, 2012/3. 380-383.

A szabad elme illúziója. *Magyar Tudomány*, 2014/7. 889-891.

Háttér előtt *Magyar Tudomány*, 2014/9. 1150-1151.