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LUDWIG FEUERBACH ON TALKING TO ONESELF IN THE CONTEXT OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY: A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH

Talking to oneself appears in ancient Greek philosophy as a technique of subjectivity aimed at moral and intellectual self-formation, the development of thought, and serving the good (or the not-so-good). This practice anticipates Christian practices of repentance for sins, psychoanalytic therapy, and bourgeois individualism [28, Theaetetus; 33, p. 155; 13, p. 218]. Later, starting from the 19th century, talking to oneself is considered, among other things, an anthropological given – something that makes us human – representing an internal dialogue with others, enabling self-control, and ensuring socialization [26]. From the 20th century onwards, talking to oneself as a technique of subjectivity has been criticized, serving as a metaphor for monological, arrogant, anthropocentric, atheistic, colonizing, and modernist reason. However, this critique occurs alongside the continued development of ideas about its moral-intellectual benefits and anthropological character [25, pp. 49-50; 6, p. 10].

Western philosophers, starting from antiquity, noted that talking to oneself allows one to instill thoughts of one's own genius and to remain in an ecstatic affective state of autonomy [30, 139]. At the same time, the inner voice could also be the cause of depressive self-suggestions, a voice of critical others, preventing the thinker from living normally [27, Chapter XXXVII. That We Laugh and Cry for the Same Thing]. Talking to oneself is a peculiar practice that in antiquity raised questions about people who engaged in it both privately and publicly [14, Pyrrho]. Later, it became associated with madness and schizophrenia if the voices in one's head were perceived as real or seemed to be separated from the person.

Nevertheless, in the 21st century, many popular (and academic) psychology books teach how to dispel negative self-talk while practicing positive self-suggestions and affirmations [20]. Undoubtedly, this understanding of talking to oneself lacks the exploration of the dialogic nature of human existence and the indication of the socio-political consequences of such a practice. This is why it is important to refer to the history of the philosophy of talking to oneself, so as not to reproduce masses of narcissistic, self-assured, individualistic personalities, but to

create conditions for understanding oneself and others to build a society that does not repeat the tragic consequences of the monologism of the Western modernist project. If, as some philosophers have said, talking to oneself is the result of engaging in philosophy or even philosophy itself [14, Book VI, Antisthenes; 31, p. 107; 32, p. 102], then the analysis of this practice deserves primary attention, and saving it from extremes becomes an urgent socio-political endeavor.

In this context, we turn to the works of Ludwig Feuerbach to explore how he analyzed talking to oneself and how his views on this subject correlate with the history of philosophy. To this end, a corpus-based approach will be employed, using the AntConc software [2] to search for the vocabulary of talking to oneself in all available texts by Ludwig Feuerbach in German. The goal is to contextualize these findings through the direct contexts of Feuerbach's works, as well as other philosophers. The corpus-based approach allows for a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the relevant vocabulary, determining its semantics based on the immediate lexical environment. This method has been increasingly used in philosophical research [7; 8; 10].

For our study, we have compiled a corpus of Feuerbach's works in 13 volumes [15; 16; 19]. The total volume of the corpus amounts to 1.9 million words (tokens). The operationalization of our research is as follows: 1) generating the phrase «talking to oneself» («spricht mit sich selbst», including a distance of 1-3 words before and after the verb; «Selbstgespräche»); 2) reading and selecting relevant fragments; 3) reading the relevant fragments in the broader context of the corresponding texts; 4) summarizing and typologizing the semantics of the term «talking to oneself».

A total of three fragments containing the target phrase were found. Let us analyze them in detail.

The first fragment: «der Mensch kann sich selbst genügen, weil er sich selbst als Einen weiß, sich von sich unterscheidet, sich selbst der Andere sein kann, *der Mensch spricht, unterhält sich mit sich selbst*, und weil er weiß, daß sein Gedanke nicht der seinige wäre, wenn er nicht auch, wenigstens der Möglichkeit nach, der Gedanke Anderer wäre» [15, Band 2, p. 198 – italics are ours – I. I.] («man can be self-sufficient because he knows himself to be a whole, because he distinguishes himself from himself, and because he can be the other to himself; man speaks to and converses with himself, and because he knows that his thought would not be his own if it were also not – at least as a possibility – the thought of others» [18, Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy]).

Thus, the logic of talking to oneself is revealed in Feuerbach's work through the simultaneous presence of human wholeness and fragmentation, individual and collective thoughts, and considering oneself from another's perspective. Notably, Feuerbach begins by indicating human self-sufficiency but concludes by acknowledging the individual's connection to others. Moreover, Others are present within an individual despite their capacity to perceive themselves as self-sufficient. Feuerbach further expands on this idea in a broader context: self-sufficiency is an exception, while sociability («we are not indifferent», writes the philosopher) is the rule. People seek to communicate with others to attain truth, which cannot be

achieved in isolation. Truth, like the good, is communal and collective, uniting the «I» and the «You». Therefore, regarding the practice of talking to oneself, the following points can be noted: indeed, this practice may create the impression of self-sufficiency, as the «You» is already present in the «I», with the «You» observing the «I» from within itself. However, such an impression obscures the mediated and social nature of the «I» and its inherent desire for communication, truth, and the good. Talking to oneself only makes sense as an element of public communication, a shared pursuit of truth and the good. Otherwise, if talking to oneself is absolutized, it leads to indifference, immorality, arrogance, and self-sufficiency.

Feuerbach creates a philosophical anthropology of talking to oneself, considering this practice as a characteristic of the human being, reflecting the social and communicative nature of humans. He also points out one negative consequence of this characteristic, as well as a possible other consequence. Thus, talking to oneself, by its nature, is a characteristic of human nature, but the actual realization of this characteristic in human life can lead to various moral outcomes. Therefore, internal division is important as it indicates the anthropological duality of humans. However, the internal division should not be considered more significant than the actual division of «I» and «You» in the real world.

It is noteworthy that before Feuerbach, the doubling of oneself was primarily conceived in a moral-intellectual sense. For Shaftesbury, the ancient aphorism «know thyself» was interpreted as «Divide your-self, or Be Two», and the practice of talking to oneself was considered a privilege of «Philosophers and wise Men» [31, p. 107]. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the doubling of oneself in talking to oneself had distinctly autobiographical and moral connotations: communicating with a younger version of oneself by reading one's early works to converse with oneself as a friend [29, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker, First Walk*]. Similarly, for Feuerbach's contemporary, Søren Kierkegaard, the doubling of oneself is a privilege of those who possess «inwardness [and] also has a propensity and a proficiency for making his monologue into dialogue», and for those who are «religiously awakened persons» [24, p. 60]. Such doubling aims to achieve insights and revelations, making it an intellectual-moral exercise for the chosen few. Feuerbach breaks with this tradition, paving the way for a dialogical understanding of the human being, which became a crucial foundation for the philosophy of dialogue and the ethics of the Other in the 20th century [4, p. 120; 9, pp. 149-150; 3, *The Two-in-One*].

The second fragment: «Der Mensch denkt, d. h. er *conversirt*, er *spricht mit sich selbst*. Das Thier kann keine Gattungsfunktion verrichten ohne ein anderes Individuum außer ihm; der Mensch aber kann die Gattungsfunktion des Denkens, des Sprechens» [15, Band 7, p. 25 – italics are ours – I. I.] («Man thinks - that is, he converses with himself. The brute can exercise no function which has relation to its species without another individual external to itself; but man can perform the functions of thought and speech» [17, *The Essential Nature of Man*]).

Thus, Feuerbach defines talking to oneself in terms of thinking. This tradition traces back to Plato, who first defined thinking in such a manner in

Western philosophy [28, Theaetetus]. However, while Plato's definition pertained to the impossibility of talking about one thing as another (akin to the logical law of non-contradiction), Feuerbach's focus is on the social anthropology of talking to oneself, rather than the logic of statements. Interestingly, Feuerbach references not Plato but a comparison with animals in this context, highlighting the anthropological rather than logical interpretation of talking to oneself; similarly, Immanuel Kant compares this practice with the Indians of Tahiti who also used it, indicating his anthropological thinking [23, p. 86]. Feuerbach characterizes talking to oneself as evidence of a person's connection to the human essence, to humanity, through the mediation of thought and speech. Thus, talking to oneself is essentially talking with others, without their actual presence but within their internal, spiritual, and verbal presence. This distinguishes humans from animals, making it an anthropological, anthropogenic characteristic.

In a broader context, Feuerbach discusses the separation of inner and outer life in humans, as opposed to the merging of these aspects in animals. He also notes that a human is simultaneously «I» and «You», capable of putting oneself in another's place, thinking from the perspective of the species, and connecting and separating oneself from others. When a person thinks, they mobilize the thoughts of others, contemplating others, universalizing their thoughts, defining phenomena and their relation to them from the perspective of their connection to the species, and striving for a universal human understanding and attitude. In this fragment, talking to oneself is devoid of references to moral-intellectual exercises and consequences, instead highlighting the capability that defines the human essence.

Importantly, Feuerbach points to two divisions within a person in the context of talking to oneself: inner and outer life, and «I» and «You». A person leads a double life regardless of their conscious individuality, as the other is always present in their speech, thought, and life, even in their absence. Thus, an individual is essentially dual, divided, directed towards the other, and composed of others.

It is important to note that in the 19th century, some thinkers also began to anthropologize talking to oneself, but pointing out similarities with animals rather than differences. Karl Groos, for example, mentioned a parrot that talked to itself. According to Groos, communication in the animal world and among humans, including collective play, is based on imitation and the repetition of actions and sounds of their peers [21]. Herbert Mead also argued that people become human by adopting the viewpoint of the group and relating to themselves from the perspective of the group, which has analogies in non-human animals. Birds respond to social stimuli in much the same way as infants, who, like parrots, mimic their parents: «When one bird follows another's song it is not imitating but calling up in itself its own song. If the sound it hears from the other bird calls out a different response but one nearly like the original, there is an assimilation of repertoires» [26, p. 152]. Moreover, contemporary science has proven the existence of sophisticated vocalized communication in animals. Researchers have discovered that African elephants produce specific sounds to communicate with individual members, essentially naming each other. Additionally, it is known that «[b]ottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and orange-fronted parakeets

(*Eupsittula canicularis*) are known to identify each other by mimicking the signature calls of those they are addressing» [12]. Of course, it is still unknown whether these animals can speak about others and themselves in the third person, but we cannot deny their complex social relationships, which necessitate vocal communication. Ultimately, if talking to oneself in humans characterizes the ability to take the position of another for socialization, then in the complex social relationships of animals, the necessity of such a position may also be an evolutionary achievement. This allows them to acquire the necessary skills and abilities of their species, such as vocal communication, which are essential for survival and reproduction.

The third fragment: «Insofern ich noch nicht standhaft bin, unterscheide ich freilich die Standhaftigkeit von mir, setze sie über mich als Ideal, personifiziere sie mir, rede sie vielleicht sogar in einsamen *Selbstgespräch* so an, als wäre sie ein Wesen für sich, verhalte mich also zu ihr, wie der Christ zu seinem Gotte, der Römer zu seiner Tugendgöttin» [15, Band 7, p. 155; italics are ours – I. I.] («Insofar as I am not yet steadfast, I certainly distinguish steadfastness from myself, set it above me as an ideal, personify it, perhaps even address it in solitary soliloquy as if it were a being in itself, thus relating to it as the Christian relates to his God, the Roman to his goddess of virtue» [translation is ours – I. I.]). Thus, Feuerbach approaches the concept of talking to oneself within the framework of internalizing and approaching the ideal of steadfastness. In self-dialogue, steadfastness as an ideal is represented as a separate being, which helps the thinker compare such personification with religious-mythological consciousness, wherein there is essentially a similar personification of concepts, ideals, and human abilities. This personification leads to the separation of these qualities from individuals, turning them into autonomous entities.

Therefore, talking to oneself inherently contains the potential to work with concepts and ideals as percepts, as participants in the internal dialogue. Such a practice allows for the hypostatization of concepts and ideals, which is a negative consequence of self-dialogue. Instead of integrating these concepts and ideals, individuals infinitely distance themselves from them, becoming alienated as the object of thought becomes an independent subject, while the individual becomes merely its object. For Feuerbach, the inversion of religious-mythological consciousness is a consequence of the anthropological structure of the human being, including the practice of talking to oneself.

Similarly, Kant distinguished the human from the divine, linking religious behavior to a certain morality rather than to a transcendent access to God [22, p. 210]. Consequently, if, for Kant, some aspects of religious behavior were secularized through talking to oneself, for Feuerbach, all religion is reduced to a philosophical-psychological, anthropological foundation. Interestingly, Jean-Louis Chrétien places Kant alongside Feuerbach, who also considered prayer a form of talking to oneself, dividing the person into thinking and feeling parts [11, p. 20].

In the 20th century, religious thinkers were keenly aware of the dangers of explaining faith and the divine through talking to oneself, often expressing hostility towards this practice. Martin Buber wrote that atheism leads to the position where

«every alleged colloquy with the divine was only a soliloquy, or rather a conversation between various strata of the self» [1, Religion and Reality]. According to Buber, this forgetting of God indicates the impossibility for humans to reach an absolutely objective reality. Karl Barth clearly distinguished Christian ethics from talking to oneself: «Christian ethics is not part of this conversation which man carries on with himself. Christian ethics begins, therefore, not with what might be called reflection. It begins with hearing» [5, p. 106]. For Barth, people build principles and worldviews instead of listening to God. Meanwhile, Emmanuel Levinas argues that the philosophy of monologue, the philosophy of talking to oneself, is egology that denies God, since the entire world is appropriated by the «rational» soul, thereby annihilating any Other, which he calls a manifestation of «spiritual narcissism» [25, p. 49].

These statements are particularly interesting when viewed through the lens of Feuerbach's philosophy, as he developed a philosophy of dialogue, attempting to move beyond the absolutism of speculative philosophies. Feuerbach sought to derive the understanding of humans not from speculative-philosophizing minds, but from social communication. Consequently, his philosophy acknowledges and listens to the Other, desiring union with the Other, because only in this way are goodness, truth, and thought possible.

Buber, Barth, and Levinas critique talking to oneself from their religious perspectives because they see it as potentially leading to self-absorption and the denial of the true Other. For Feuerbach, talking to oneself is a deeply dialogical practice, highlighting the dual nature of human existence – both individual and collective. He acknowledges, however, the danger that this practice might create an illusion of self-sufficiency. When a person internalizes the «You» within the «I», the real external «You» can be mistaken for the internalized one, leading to a false sense of individualism and possession of the «You». Thus, the issue with talking to oneself is not inherent to the practice itself but arises from its particular use.

From the perspectives of Buber, Barth, and Levinas, believers have a better defense against the pitfalls of talking to oneself because the presence of God in their lives introduces an absolutely Other, mysterious, and unforgettable being. This divine presence prevents the collapse of the self into a monologue and the denial of others. However, Feuerbach might argue that believers risk isolating themselves in personal relationships with God (or with select close others and fellow believers), neglecting earthly concerns, or prioritizing only the land of the particular faithful. This can lead to egotheology, where the earthly «You» is devalued in favor of the heavenly «You», ultimately narrowing the scope of goodness and truth that can only be achieved through universal dialogue and community.

Feuerbach posits two extremes in the practice of talking to oneself: egology (forgetting the real «You» due to the presence of an imagined «You» within the «I») and egotheology (viewing communication with God, from Feuerbach's standpoint, as talking to oneself, thus potentially devaluing the real, human «You»). Both forms diminish the human «You» and any external presence, either by replacing it with one's own image of «You» or by presenting it in the form of

God. From Feuerbach's perspective, this limits access to goodness and truth, which are attained in unity, community, and universality – not through speculative abstraction but through universal dialogue.

For a genuinely universal dialogue, one should not dismiss the essential beliefs of its participants. Feuerbach, in this sense, was mistaken in entirely secularizing talking to oneself. Conversely, religious philosophers' outright rejection of secular self-talk could sow discord by moralizing the interlocutor. Both atheistic and theistic positions on talking to oneself tend to exclude each other, which contradicts their professed value of dialogue. Talking to oneself is inevitable due to human sociality and communicativity. The question lies in the extent of sociality and communicativity that one wishes to support, build, protect, and expand.

In conclusion, it should be noted that Feuerbach anthropologized the practice of talking to oneself, leading to its complete democratization. Talking to oneself became an essential characteristic of humanity, revealing its inherent dialogical nature, communicativeness, and sociality. A person is always split; there is always a «You» within the «I». From this, it follows that truth and goodness are matters of collective effort, universal dialogue, discussion, and unity. Truth cannot be established independently by individuals because such attempts are inherently false; autonomy results from the obscuration of the influence of «You» on «I». Therefore, the truth can only be revealed in connection and mediation with Others. Consequently, an intensive, polyphonic conversation with oneself serves as a school that teaches acceptance, recognition, and connection with Others.

At the same time, talking to oneself can not only convince a person of their autonomy but also hypostasize human abilities, ideas, and concepts as separate entities, thereby distancing the person from humanity, as occurs in religion. In this application of anthropogenic capability, there appears to be a cessation of dialogue. However, in Feuerbach's approach to religion, one can see a conscious narrowing of the circle of dialogue participants. How can one imagine the movement toward truth, which can only be collective, without recognizing the equality of dialogue participants who are equally dialogized?

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АНТРОПОЛОГІЯ КОХАННЯ, АБО ПРОБЛЕМИ ЛЮБОВІ НА ОСНОВІ ФЕЙЄРБАХА

Рантве бажання зробити минуце вічним народжує любов
РАМОН ГОМЕС ДЕ ЛА СЕРНА

Вступ

Раніше вважали божественним знанням те, що не має практичного інтересу, бо ти його вивчаєш вільно, а не з примусу. На наш превеликий жаль, з коханням це і сталося. Дедалі більше людей не здатні кохати і не бажають знайти коханого. Те, що раніше було винятком, прагне стати нормою. У цій роботі більше роздумів над питаннями, ніж відповідей. Поміркуємо разом із Фейєрбахом про таке почуття як кохання¹.

Складність вивчення любові полягає в тому, що любов це почуття. Почуття настільки непостійні, що розсудковому мисленню складно зачепитися за істину. Поки розсуд шукає у всіх почуттях спільне, то він не бачить тут же і відмінність цього спільного, коли ж він шукає відмінності в почуттях, не бачить, що їхня природа загалом одна й та сама.

Без розуміння, що таке почуття взагалі², не можливо просунутися далі в розумінні сутності любові. Наслідки такої зневаги до естетики проявляють себе в тому, що кохання зводять до біохімії мозку, спрощують кохання до якоїсь емоції (а вони є у тварин). Любов через її складність пізнання перетворюють на ірраціональну силу всього світу

1 В українській мові розрізняють любов узагалі та романтичну любов (кохати).

2 Відкриттям може стати й те, що "п'ять зовнішніх почуттів" теж суспільні почуття, та й усі почуття в людини можуть бути тільки суспільними, *по-людськи* розвиненими. Людина ще не народилася, а всі її почуття вже в інших людях. Це цілком логічно, адже кожне почуття вона привласнює і заново відтворює його становлення, а воно цілком об'єктивно відбувається.