

MERAB MAMARDASHVILI: PERCEPTION OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY – A ROAD TOWARDS SELF-AWARENESS

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Abstract

European identity, essence of European society and nature of European culture: from this “starting point” Mamardashvili considered philosophy as one of the most significant factors of his own experience and thinking, for it was a philosophical practice of the individual experience of the man who “was awakening not in Europe but elsewhere – in a provincial country” where he was getting aware of his own self, his own country and culture.

The specter of the issues dealt with in this article rest upon the works by Mamardashvili dedicated to the *European theme*, especially his paper “European Responsibility” delivered in Barcelona in 1989, the full version of which was first published in the Proceedings of the conference dedicated to M. Mamardashvili’s 80th anniversary (see “European Responsibility”, ed. T. Iremadze, Tbilisi, Nekeri, 2011).

Mamardashvili’s philosophical style revealed internal relation to the European philosophy; he was not accidentally called “Georgians’ Socrates” or “A Frenchman in Georgian [Soviet] philosophy”; he was almost the sole person in the thinking world saturated with the soviet ideology who utilized his own understanding/perception of the European identity for quite specific

purposes: to show the roots of tragic consciousness of the Soviet people, reveal the factors hindering freedom of thinking and mental activities.

According to Mamardashvili, the analysis of the above stated problems is related to the understanding of European responsibility that means the perception of European culture and values as well as the roots of European identity. The European identity does not have age; it is in permanent process of birth. If we pursue successively Mamardashvili's judgment, it will become clear that the European identity represents the synthesis of two elements – civic idea of the Greco-Roman world and Christianity, namely, the idea of the Gospel.

First and foremost, two things should be taken into consideration here: a) The Roman concept of a legal state; Merab Mamardashvili calls his country a postcolonial one, inasmuch as it is not the heir of the Roman legal state. b) The idea of the Gospel in a man. Gospel is an idea, interior voice, consciousness in a man; it is essential to hear this voice and follow it. In the European culture it somehow acquires a form a universal law. Europe is the world where the progressive forces of history and the background of self existence can revive. The European endeavor is the constant attempt of self-awareness and self-realization of a man in a historical form, which eventually causes the rehabilitation of civic society.

Keywords: European society, individual experience, European responsibility, self-awareness, self-realization

Introduction

European identity, the essence of European society and the nature of European culture! These are the problems reflections on which significantly determined the style of Mamardashvili's thinking and philosophizing. Owing to the analysis of such issues the Georgian philosopher represented a rare

exception in the Soviet philosophy and enchanted European intellectual society. From this “starting point” Mamardashvili considered philosophy as one of the most significant factors of his own experience and thinking, for it was a philosophical practice of the individual experience of the man who “was awakening not in Europe but elsewhere – in a provincial country” where he was getting aware of his own self, his own country and culture.

The specter of the issues dealt with in this article rest upon the works by Mamardashvili dedicated to the *European theme*, especially his paper “European Responsibility” delivered in Barcelona in 1989, the full version of which was first published in the Proceedings of the international conference dedicated to M. Mamardashvili’s 80th anniversary⁴⁷.

Short Biographical Notes. Georgian philosopher and public figure Merab Mamardashvili was born in 1930 in Gori, Georgia (Stalin’s home town). He graduated from the faculty of Philosophy of the Moscow State University (1954). In 1962 he defended Candidate’s dissertation [Moscow] and in 1970 – Doctoral dissertation [Tbilisi].

In 1961-1966 he worked in Prague as a staff member of the journal “World and Socialism Problems” and from 1968 – as the deputy editor of “*Voprosi filosofii*” (“Issues of Philosophy”). He delivered lectures at the universities and higher educational institutions in Moscow, Riga, Vilnius and Rostov. In 1988-1990 he gave lectures in Barcelona and Paris. He often participated in international conferences, congresses and seminars in France, Germany and the USA. In 1980 he returned to Georgia and worked at the Institute of Philosophy of the Georgian Academy of Sciences as well as gave lectures (on Proust’s philosophy and phenomenology) at Tbilisi University.

⁴⁷ See “European Responsibility”, Proceedings of the International Conference dedicated to Merab Mamardashvili’s 80th Anniversary, Compiler-editor: T. Iremadze, Tbilisi, “Nekeri”, 2011.

At the same time he actively participated in social life. Merab Mamardashvili died of heart attack at Moscow airport in 1990.

Mamardashvili's philosophical practice was formed as a result of various traditions of thinking. It is an original synthesis of French (Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Proust), German (Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud) and Russian (Chaadaev) cultures. His fundamental works such as "Antique Philosophy", "Kantian Variations", "Cartesian Meditations" (the work was translated into French and published in France in 1977) were created under the influence of the classical philosophical ideas. Later the society gets acquainted with his other works: "Classical and Non-Classical Ideals of Rationality", "Talks on Philosophy", "My Attempt is Not Typical", "Lectures on Psychoanalysis", "Lectures on Proust", etc.

Friends, meetings and talks – usually in narrow circles – it was the style of his life and thinking as of an outstanding philosopher. Like Socrates, for him being a philosopher meant the whole life. His lectures – monologues from the outside but in fact dialogues with the own self, were the stimulus towards a new dimension, "Rebellion of an Idea", battle for the result that might not be guaranteed at all. Mamardashvili deeply believed that true freedom meant the unity of morality and freedom.

In Georgian [Soviet] philosophy Mamardashvili was perhaps the only one perfectly possessing the apparatus of western philosophical thought. The style of his thinking revealed internal connections with the western philosophy. Merab Mamardashvili was trying to break through the boundaries of Soviet system and introduce experience of other cultures into the Soviet philosophy. He paid particular attention to the problems that hindered free thought and the process of dialogue between different cultures. For him culture represents form, ability and skill of human existence and

behavior with strangers. “Culture is a reasonable and sensible behavior in front of strangers”⁴⁸.

Mamardashvili’s philosophical style revealed internal relation to the European philosophy; he was not accidentally called “Georgians’ Socrates”⁴⁹, or “A Frenchman in Georgian [Soviet] philosophy”, or else “The genuine heir of Hellenistic philosophy of Antique Colchis”⁵⁰; he was almost the sole person in the thinking world of the soviet totalitarianism, who utilized his own understanding/perception of the European identity for quite specific purposes: to show the roots of tragic consciousness of the Soviet people, reveal the factors hindering freedom of thinking and mental activities, to introduce the spirit of freedom into the non-liberated space saturated with the soviet ideology and awaken a personality in humans formed into “Homo Sovieticus”.

According to Mamardashvili, the analysis of the above stated problems is related to the understanding of European responsibility that means the perception of European culture and values as well as the roots of European identity.

The European identity does not have age; it is in permanent process of birth. If we pursue successively Mamardashvili’s judgment, it will become clear that the European identity represents the synthesis of two elements – civic idea of the Greco-Roman world and Christianity, namely, the idea of the Gospel.

⁴⁸ Compare. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy (Lecture Cycle)*, Tbilisi, 1992, pp. 196-197.

⁴⁹ Comp. J. P. Vernane, *Georgian Socrates*, translated by M. Kharbedia, see: “Arili”, 12 October (Tbilisi 2000), pp. 6-8.

⁵⁰ J. Bastenaire, *Le «Français» de la philosophie soviétique // “European Responsibility”*, pp. 16-23.

Here the Roman concept of a legal state is of paramount importance. Civil law reaches incredible heights in Rome and plays immeasurably big role in formation of a man as a citizen and personality. The progress of the idea of freedom had its accomplishment here. Although “the judgment of the Roman people lacks sense and soul, they still foster progress of freedom”, that is finally connected with the creation of positive law. Considering the main principles of Hegel’s philosophy of law, “unlike Eastern and partially Greek empires, the Romans⁵¹ introduced a new principle of law that was based on form and formalism; [...] it was the objective norm devoid of sense and soul that became a thing that makes freedom of soul, faith, customs-traditions and religion possible”⁵². It should be noted that simultaneous to this process, the freedom of idea was being developed in philosophy. The Roman legal state is a clear example of how a social or civil idea, an infinite ideal, can be accomplished in reality in a specific society.

According to Mamardashvili, Georgia has never been the heir of Roman legal state. In this context he calls his country a postcolonial one: as “the country where I was born is the wandering paradox of ex-empire and at the same time – postcolonial one [...]”⁵³.

The second element of European identity, according to Mamardashvili, is Gospel. Gospel is an idea, interior voice, consciousness in a man; it is essential to hear this voice and follow it. “It is necessary to walk without practical support or any guarantee, walking only according to the

⁵¹ On the other hand, the East and ancient Greeks considered moral interrelations and particular subjectivity as the principle of law.

⁵² See: H. Schneider, *History of Freedom in Hegel* // H. Schneider, L. Zakaradze, G. Tavadze, D. Labuchidze, T. Iremadze, *What is Freedom? Great Thinkers on the Essence of Freedom*, Charles Louis Montesquieu, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Herbert Spencer, Erich Fromm, Tbilisi, “Nekeri”, 2011, pp. 50-51.

⁵³ M. Mamardashvili, *European Responsibility*, Translated by D. Labuchidze // *European Responsibility*, p. 209.

inner voice. This is how a human being revealed, as element breaking silence, as an acting element, as an element that creates history”⁵⁴.

By analyzing Gospel element, Mamardashvili highlights the peculiarity of European culture: this is an evident difference, inner principle, faith within each person that is called power of speech. Proceeding from the interior principle, the right of speech in Mamardashvili acquires essential importance and determines human’s effort and strives. The human’s most essential strive is self-realization. However, it is only reachable through speech and articulated space. According to Mamardashvili, the most part of a human being is beyond his humanness and exists in speech space. “[...] A human exists naked and only in front of a word, ... human is a human only when there exists a space of live agora, - full of speech articulation [...]”⁵⁵, that enables him formulate ideas and think what he is thinking about.

The history of a European man is formed with interrelation of these two elements. In this aspect it is a constantly renovated eternal effort.

For Mamardashvili the European culture is the first, and perhaps the last, answer to an important question – if there is a possibility of change in the world, if it is possible to liberate chained humans from this state and develop, elevate and accomplish perfect ideal. It is noteworthy that by highlighting priorities of the European culture Mamardashvili somehow responds to Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of “Great European Policy”⁵⁶. Notwithstanding totally different styles of thinking, these two philosophers can be united by an effort/endeavor “to outline contours of better future and strive towards better life. All this means the establishment of thinking with principally new responsibility that both these philosophers called *European*

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 209.

⁵⁵ Ibid.p. 212.

⁵⁶ See: T. Iremadze, *European Endeavor // European Responsibility*, pp. 198-204.

Responsibility!”⁵⁷. It should also be noted that Mamardashvili’s understanding of European responsibility, like Nietzsche, is directed against “minor European policy”. The difference is only in methodology: Mamardashvili makes emphasis on Europe’s sound pathos and stresses its priorities without sharp criticism of its so called “national neurosis” manifestations.

History is the basis of human existence and means of life. European effort/endeavor in historical form is an incessant attempt of self-realization by humans, which, finally, causes revival of civic society. According to Mamardashvili, it is civic society that is necessary for humans to be in history. His ideas about civic society proceed from his deep philosophical observation on consciousness and history⁵⁸.

Those without the history of a perfect system of civic society should understand that we can have it in form of historical perspective. “We who do not have the similar developed corpus of existence, are not characterized with the similar completeness and structure of civic society, still well understand this is exactly what we need to have”⁵⁹. There also exists in history the oblivion of beginning. Events originated in time and space, are connected with preservation of oblivion or its support. In such case it is most important to have ability to support this effort that is constantly ready to revive basics of its own existence. For Mamardashvili, Europe is the world where the revival of progressive forces of history and basics of own existence becomes possible.

In Mamardashvili’s works humans are perceived in the context of European identity. Humans are also in constant process of self-formation.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 201.

⁵⁸ L. R. Fletcher, A Slow reading of “The Civil Society: An Interview with Merab Mamardashvili” // European Responsibility, p. 96.

⁵⁹ M. Mamardashvili, European Responsibility, p. 210.

Consequently, history is the history of attempt to become a human being. “A human being does not exist, he is being created”⁶⁰. It is true, Europeans and Americans exist in the same historical moments but the chronologies of their historical moments do not coincide. Mamardashvili’s viewpoints appeared to be more future ideas inasmuch as they respond to the present day reality. What was significant for European culture is happening for us “now” and we may, perhaps, face the same dangers and responsibilities.

This danger is, first and foremost, a new, modern, contemporary barbarity; it can also be called a cultural barbarity. It is the state when a human being is given no chance to express what he feels, wants or thinks. Such life “is birth dead right in the embryo”, it is a refusal of freedom and thinking that is equal to death, that means denial of one’s own dignity. “History in most cases is a cemetery of what was left in the language of unborn souls”⁶¹.

Contrary to this, being a European means readiness towards constant renewal. It is “natural state” of a human. It is constant indefatigable effort towards perfection and better establishment. In European culture it acquires a form of a certain universal law: be just, follow your internal voice and never go against your own conscience. Here free thinking and strive towards perfection, Kantian – voice of my own conscience in me – and Christian-Evangelical principles – do coincide. European identity means devotion to these principles. Mamardashvili’s philosophical thinking was formed through these principles and he himself was always faithful to them. Moreover, personal freedom and supremacy of moral belief outline the whole content of culture for Mamardashvili. Thus, there is only one way out: to create a new or revive such effort, the firmness of which brands the

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 211.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 213.

effectiveness of Europe. It is equal to creation of such space where any person can mobilize his own sound efforts to achieve free consciousness, wait for his own self with the same efforts and achieve self-awareness.

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