

Notes on leaving academia / Poznámky na okraj doktorátu

Radek Ocelák

February 5, 2016

1 So, what if there is nothing more for us in academia? For gifted people in their mid twenties, a. has been the natural choice for centuries. But is that still so?

2 You have been studying language, meaning etc. for some seven years. A. offers you forty more. Isn't *that* frightening? (Surely you can survive long within a. There are plenty options.)

3 Is Russell's analysis of definite descriptions correct? Did Grice get the maxims right? Questions such as these are great to think about once or twice, but how tiring to see them discussed every now and then! And for the rest of one's life?

4 What you wanted to know about language and meaning, you have learned. The honest thing: go apply that. Go where? Where people speak: about things *other* than language and meaning, that is to say.

5 My past questions are dealt with; I am fine. A dispreferred approach in a. The deep trouble of contemporary a.: zero incentive to admit that your problem is solved, or never made sense in the first place.

6 In ten or fifteen years, a. would become a life sentence.

7 "Since 1990 he has published 156 journal papers, received 23 grants." God protect me from that sort of career.

8 „Join other 8 million researchers.“ What can eight million people investigate? (Academia.edu has twenty-five.)

9 Empirical research, too much of an idol. Isn't most empiria boring rubbish? Empirical: the keyword enabling a. to absorb unprecedented amounts of people. "More research is needed to..." — how many times have we read that, and written?! ("Little attention has been paid..." is another one.)

10 We were mistaken in thinking that the existence of a phenomenon by itself provides justification for exploring it.

11 The desperate need for research questions. Zooming in is always possible: reducing your field as a way of becoming a leading expert in one.

12 We are very careful with real solutions. Finding a solution might spoil the whole traffic. (Especially when it's a dis-solution.)

13 Be constructive; be kind and positive in presenting your criticism. — But aren't there fields so perverted that destruction or leaving are the only honest options?

14 Science, *scientia*, is as clean and dignified as ever. It just looks as though it has been slowly moving out of a.

15 I feel good about my last couple of papers. There's a nice chance they make a little bit of sense. Yet, those months of most concentrated work, and the impact they seem to have in the world... can you imagine more inconclusive effort?

16 What is for sure is that I have not been very successful in gaining attention. Citations may not mean attention, but I don't even get citations. (Attention, in turn, may not mean impact.) One work of mine has got 3 so far, and they are all self-citations. That looks rather desperate, doesn't it?

17 Some of my critical papers: people who in various senses depend on maintaining the impression my views are wrong will argue that they are wrong. What discussion, then? I have stated my views for anyone interested.

18 You should go way deeper to substantiate your claims. Learn more about semantics, metaphysics, philosophy of science..., before you can address your issues seriously. — What is *serious*, here? My reasons may be too weak to convince anyone within the field, but they are strong enough for me to act upon. My own measure of "serious".

19 But then you don't get *published!* — What do you mean, get published? Can't you publish with a single click nowadays? — But that doesn't count! — Well, in a. it doesn't.

20 2011 — There we were, eager and open-minded, ready to postpone everything besides our studies, enter science. We sat in large rooms, light and newly furnished, and studied endlessly, according to the instruction by our teachers. Only later we realized how those teachers, too, were persons in an environment, sometimes trapped. Also, trapped in the role of authorities over our way to science.

21 Most of my present heroes work outside a. That is a fact. Surely there are scholars I admire for what they have achieved. But one cannot help seeing too many compromises in a., even with those figures. Contemporary a. is not where everyday human heroes are.

22 I mostly like what I have done in a., but I doubt I could go on with the same level of enthusiasm. Besides, my work has been too much of a negation. That only makes sense for a while.

23 And yet, personal enthusiasm, or faith, is the only general way of legitimating a scientific work which has no straightforward application. For, only experts are capable of assessing the work on specialized topics — and they are, by the same token, ones who generally have their own stakes in the game, in the traffic going on. As concerns objective measures: whatever measure you publicly regard as an approximant of quality, you thereby create impetus to aim for that measure *rather than* quality.

24 *Assessment* cannot be detached from an *authority* who takes *responsibility*. Where we recognize no authority, we cannot make ourselves subject to assessment.

25 Recently, I received a considerable sum for what is called my scientific results. This and this much for a Scopus-indexed paper, this and this much for an international conference poster. It is about OK when it's one-off, but in a long term, it is quite certain I couldn't go on incorrupt.

26 The only valuable work of science, even more of humanities, is the one you would do even without getting anything for it. The rest is rubbish. (What about fame? Should we tolerate that reward?)

27 Of course a scholar cannot live out of nothing. Here we are at the idea of basic income: getting enough without relation to what you are doing.

28 Replicating knowledge, teaching the youth what you have learned from the older, without applying and validating in between; that is surely deplorable.

29 Have you really brought that many young people, enthusiastic and credulous, into your field, hiding its miserableness, knowing they will always stand below you when it comes to dividing resources? Teaching as bringing the youth, the best of it, into the same trouble?

30 Often we have no idea where else to go (for comparable money, effort, social acknowledgment, etc.), and so we stay. The longer we stay in, the harder the riddle.

31 I should be able to defend my work before any person that is open-minded and educated — within a minute, and not lie to them. I found that very hard.

32 Are we firm enough to go private? Live off whatever we can, except public support? Do evening science; teach, write, present and publish what it makes sense to?

33 Perhaps, we cannot save science unless we are ready to leave. (Just as you cannot repair a car from within. Never mind that ship story of Neurath's.)

34 How sick a. is also reflects in how hard it is for Open Access to permeate. Once we are out and do not care about positions etc., doesn't OA become a piece of cake?

35 Obviously, you have to be right on the verge of leaving to be saying all this.

36 These remarks do not seem to result from material frustration. For a PhD student in Prague, I have been quite well-off; the tough years haven't yet come.

37 In some sense, the way of life devised by the early 21st century academics is quite uniquely miserable. Imagine, so many brilliant people, in such a civilized era, and what do they do?

38 In your academic engagement, you should follow an asymmetrical maxim. What you think makes sense in your work perhaps doesn't. What you think perhaps does not make sense, quite certainly doesn't.

39 Graduate studies, far from being some sort of academic kindergarten, are the years of reason most acute, work most thorough, mind most incorrupt. Surely you will not do much of scientific importance if you haven't had a research and a mind of your own during your MA and PhD.

40 The final achievement of a PhD in philosophy: the realization that there is no need to finish? Of course there is a lot of Wittgenstein in these views. — Also, much reference to an underspecified *we*.

41 For me, the adorable guys, Wittgenstein, Davidson, Rorty, Brandom, Stokhof, Peregrin and many others, have brought philosophy to a point where there's little personal need to go on. A picture of language, world, science, morality, etc. as coherent as one can hope for, and as satisfying. Does anyone locate the real problems of today in academic philosophy?

42 Philosophy as amazement over the ordinary. What a funny idea in this context that one should be a professional philosopher, a lifelong one.

43 Vedení jisté instituce si představuje, že za plný úvazek při mzdě nedosahující státního průměru získá ročně 8 publikací v časopisech indexovaných v databázi Scopus. Nová, netušená úroveň manažerského řízení vědy.

44 Mít předepsáno, kolik a kde publikovat; být permanentně pozadu. Nejprímější ze všech cest do vědeckého pekla.

45 Grantové financování – dnes už zcela přiznaně jen způsob, jak na několik let obhájit svoji další existenci. Dělat se bude zpravidla to, co už děláme. – Obhajovat svou existenci je třeba tam, kde je naše práce všem zcela lhostejná; jen ještě z nějakého důvodu přichází balík, o který se můžeme prát.

46 Paradoxně, *my* jsme generace, která má pod tlakem manažerského systému největší šanci. Západoevropský model jako zbraň akademické mládeže proti domácí zatuchlosti a těm, kdo v ní opečovávají své pozice; svým způsobem nástroj třídního boje. Nedává nám to ale návod, co si v tomto systému počít, až převládne.

47 Měl bys mít víc respektu k autoritám! – Ano, kdybys ho měl víc, mohlš načínat už sedmý rok v oddělení gramatiky Ústavu pro jazyk český. (Šest let vědecké praxe.)

48 Náš vlastní problém: velká většina zúčastněných by nebyla schopna relevantní vědecké práce pod *jakýmkoli* systémem. Spory o financování grantové, institucionální, „kafemlejnec“ jsou pak druhořadé.

49 Střízliví nám říkali: „Pozor, neuplatníte se!“ Měli ale říkat: „Pozor, uplatníte se, a bude to akademická *práce k hovnu* a dřív, než si toho stihnete všimnout, cesta ven pro vás přestane existovat.“

50 Autority a „authority“ na nás z pozice zkušenějšího přenáší práci, kterou by samy nepovažovaly za hodnou svého času; vyvíjejí tlak svých pochybných představ o tom, co bychom si měli ve svém věku a postavení odborně počínat. Názoru každé ze svých postupných autorit se dříve nebo později – vysměj. Byť i s láskou.

51 Nepotřebuji já svoji instituci, nýbrž potřebuje ona mě. Toto poznání přináší úlevu, na níž se nic nemění tím, že o tom instituce neví.

52 Zkoušky, známky, tituly. Komu bych měl ještě ve svých osmadvaceti co dokazovat? Někteří se tváří, že v tomto věku vlastní práce ještě nezačala, ale ve skutečnosti na ni může být už pozdě. Studoval jsem 8 let „na titul“, tedy pro něčí hodnocení, status přidělovaný jinými, a jsem stále méně ochoten tuto autoritu někomu přiznávat.

53 Můj čistý příjem z univerzity za dva celé roky doktorského studia 2014 a 2015 činí přibližně 415 tis. Kč (naprostou většinu tvoří nedaněná stipendia). K tomu asi 55 tis. z FLÚ AV ČR (+ pokrytí zdravotního pojištění). Tyto poznámky jsou tedy jen stěží dokladem materiální frustrace. Odráží se v nich nicméně úvahy o tom, jak snadno se chceme prodat soustavnému, nenápadnému křivení – realitě dnešního akademického provozu.

54 Dějiny jsme považovali za něco, co bylo dřív, a vida. Přizpůsobení se realitě přihlášek, grantů, publikací, konferencí, výkazů – naše malá akademická normalizace.

55 Nekurvit se? Nebo jen – nekurvit se tak lacino?