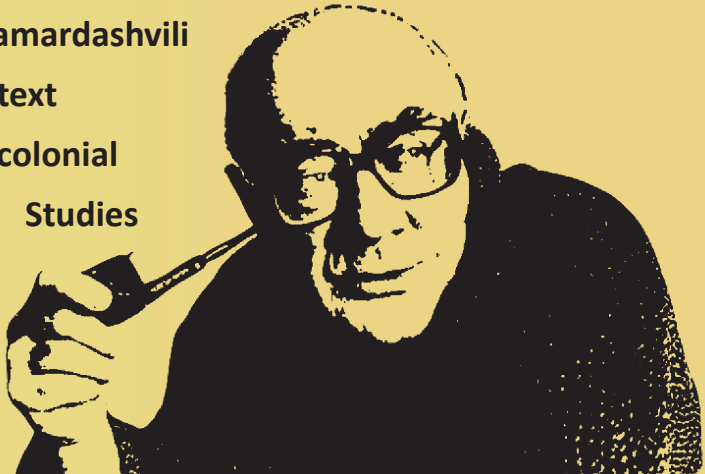


GIORGI TAVADZE

POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS II

The Thought of
Merab Mamardashvili
in the Context
of Postcolonial
Studies



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**The Thought of Merab Mamardashvili
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PREFACE

The present research is, in a certain way, a continuation of the text published in 2021 under the title *Postcolonial Interventions I: The Phenomenon of 'Homo Sovieticus' in the Context of Soviet Ideological Dimension: A Philosophical Analysis* (Tbilisi: East European University, Varlam Cherkezishvili Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies). The reference to Mamardashvili found in this study (p. 49, note 135) has now become the subject of special analysis.

The acute global crisis of democracy, accompanied by the unprecedented rise of populism, political cynicism, and conformism, as well as the marginalization of free thought and the decline of the public sphere, highlights once again the intellectual legacy of figures like Merab Mamardashvili. I believe that a critical analysis of his thought will help us to better understand not only the historical peripeties of Georgia's recent past but also the pressing problems facing our society today. Many key issues discussed by the Georgian philosopher — such as the suppression of critical thinking, colonialism, the rule of law, and the necessary conditions for cultivating democratic culture — remain as urgent today as ever.

Giorgi Tavadze

Tbilisi, September 10, 2024

1. INTRODUCTION: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Postcolonial studies, as an academic field, emerged in the second half of the 20th century, focusing on the complex relationships between former metropolises and newly liberated colonies. The works of authors such as Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), Edward Said (1935-2003), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (b. 1942) have had considerable influence on the development of postcolonial theory. Initially, postcolonial theory concentrated on the British Empire, the Middle East, and South Asia. However, after the fall of the USSR, there has been ongoing discussion about the applicability of the postcolonial perspective to the former “socialist camp” and post-Soviet space.¹

In the present paper, the thought of Merab Mamardashvili is discussed within the broader context of postcolonial studies. I want to remark from the outset that my goal is not to forcibly fit Mamardashvili’s ideas into a postcolonial perspective. Instead, I aim to demonstrate that Mamardashvili’s views are valuable and interesting within this context, primarily because the Georgian philosopher regarded the Soviet Union as a colonial and totalitarian empire. Towards the end of the 1980s, Mamardashvili began to reflect on the possibilities for societal development under decolonial conditions, as the Soviet regime was disintegrating almost literally on a daily basis.

The issues grappled with by Mamardashvili – such as the phenomenon of “homo sovieticus”, the mechanisms of the ideological apparatus of the totalitarian state, and the challenges in the trans-

1 A. Прусаускас, СНГ как постколониальное пространство, *Независимая газета*, 07.02.1992; Marko Pavlyshyn, Post-colonial features in contemporary Ukrainian culture. *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 6.2 (1992), pp. 41-55; David Chioni Moore, Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique, *PMLA*, Vol. 116, No. 1 (2001), pp. 111-128; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nancy Condee, Harsha Ram and Vitaly Chernetsky, Are We Postcolonial? Post-Soviet Space, *PMLA*, Vol. 121, No. 3 (2006), pp. 828-836; Tamar Koplatazde (2019), Theorising Russian postcolonial studies, *Postcolonial Studies*, 22:4; Viacheslav Morozov (2021), Post-Soviet subalternity and the dialectic of race: reflections on Tamar Koplatazde’s article, *Postcolonial Studies*, 24:1, pp. 159-166.

formation from a totalitarian society to a civil society – were, for him, problems existing in a post-imperial situation. To address these issues and find solutions, it was necessary to uncover what had occurred during the Soviet period, how societal consciousness had changed, what the Soviet legacy entailed, and how it could be overcome. In this regard, it can be said that Mamardashvili is one of the first (if not the first) postcolonial thinkers in the post-Soviet space.

Paying attention to Mamardashvili and his thought will help fill the gap that exists within postcolonial studies. This gap exists due to scholars' widespread focus on the Russian language space and Russian perspective. The result is that the intellectual life of the geographical peripheries of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union is frequently neglected.² Further, discussing Mamardashvili's ideas from the postcolonial perspective will enrich postcolonial studies, which frequently focuses on literary theory. In his interviews and public lectures, Mamardashvili actively discussed the phenomenon of the totalitarian state, the issue of colonization, the relationship between the metropole (Russia) and the colony (Georgia) as well as between Russians and Georgians, and the perspectives and dangers existing on the road to post-totalitarian development. Therefore, the analysis of Mamardashvili's thought and its key issues within the discourse of postcolonial studies, on the one hand, will foster rethinking the intellectual legacy of the Georgian philosopher within a broader scope and, on the other hand, broaden the horizon of postcolonial studies with regard to the post-Soviet space.

2 Tamar Koplatadze, *Theorising Russian postcolonial studies*, passim; Harsha Ram, *Between 1917 and 1947: Postcoloniality and Russia-Eurasia*, in: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nancy Condee, Harsha Ram and Vitaly Chernetsky (2006), *Are We Postcolonial? Post-Soviet Space*, *PMLA*, Vol. 121, No. 3 (May, 2006), pp. 832-833. Taking into consideration the fact that Mamardashvili's works were published mostly in Russian, this silence gives rise to even more questions. Perhaps this might be explained by the fact that until recently Mamardashvili's works were not available in English. This situation is slowly changing. See Merab Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*. Edited by Julia Sushytska and Alisa Slaughter, Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2020.

2. SOVIET SYSTEM AND *HOMO SOVIETICUS*

Firstly, I will offer a short outline of Mamardashvili's evaluation of the Soviet system, as his reflections on the Russian/Soviet empire and colonization are derived from this. The Georgian philosopher thought that the Soviet system was “absolutely unique,”³ to an extent that is unimaginable for Europeans.⁴ Mamardashvili implies that for contemporary Europeans, it is impossible to grasp the experience of living in the Soviet Union through thought alone. This absurd, “bitter and pointless” experience can only be understood “from within”, through direct experience.⁵

According to Mamardashvili, the nearly 70-year-long Soviet rule left a deep imprint on the societal body. In his interview with Anne Chevalier, conducted on August 20, 1990, in Tbilisi and first published in 1991 under the title “Life of a Spy”,⁶ Mamardashvili refers to Kafka's *Metamorphosis*: “Even if we slept for seventy years, this was not the peaceful sleep of a saint, who awakens in his beauty and cleanli-

3 See მერაბ მამარდაშვილი, „საუბრები ფილოსოფიაზე“ [Merab Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, in Georgian]. Edited by Gia Nodia, Tbilisi, 2015, p. 6 (hereafter referred to as *Talks on Philosophy*. Translations from the Georgian are mine).

4 It is noteworthy that Mamardashvili himself highlights “Europeans” and not, for example, “Americans” or “Africans.” European social, political, and cultural space was the center of intellectual focus for the Georgian philosopher. Cf. M. Mamardashvili, “European Responsibility”, in: Merab Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*, pp. 57-62. See also J., Sushytska and A. Slaughter, Introduction, In: M. Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*. Edited by Julia Sushytska and Alisa Slaughter, Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2020, pp. 17-18; Michail Ryklin, Eine Philosophie der Freiheit: Merab Mamardashvili und die Metaphysik der Agora, *Osteuropa*, 2015, Vol. 65, No. 7/10, p. 632; Caryl Emerson, Preface, in: Merab Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*, pp. 9-10. For Mamardashvili, as “internal stranger” in relation to Western culture, see J. Sushytska, Metics and the art of playing with contradictions. *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society*, 2(1), (2019), pp. 408-425.

5 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 7.

6 Мераб Мамардашвили, «Жизнь шпиона», *Искусство кино*, 5 (1991), стр. 31-39.

ness. In dreams, we have been transformed, degenerated. After all, one might awaken as an insect, like one of Kafka's characters. [...] [P]erhaps people awaken, and they already have been transformed into insects."⁷ The metaphor of sleep can be understood as indicating the political passivity of citizens and the lack of critical consciousness. This passivity and closedness led to disastrous results, Mamardashvili thought. Soviet citizens found themselves in an "embryonal" condition towards the state. They were expecting protection and care from the state but simultaneously were denying their autonomy and independence.⁸ "Soviet man is a product of [...] invisible changes, degradation, and progressive deformation."⁹

The lack of critical discourse is the main characteristic of such a condition. In his well-known interview conducted during his visit to the USA and published in the same year,¹⁰ the Georgian philosopher remarked that the Soviet Union was a state that completely controlled the structures of consciousness and cut at its roots every attempt at critical thinking. I think what Mamardashvili meant here is a lack of public critical discourse, which is a necessary precondition for the ex-

7 М. Мамардашвили, Жизнь шпиона, в сборнике: М. Мамардашвили, Сознание и цивилизация [М. Mamardashvili, *Life of a Spy*, in: М. Mamardashvili, *Consciousness and Civilization*], Санкт-Петербург: издательство «Азбука», 2011, стр. 248 (hereafter referred to as *Life of a Spy*).

8 Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 249-250.

9 *Ibid.* p. 248.

10 "The Civil Society: An Interview with Merab Mamardashvili", *The Civic Arts Review*. Vol. 2, no. 3 (1989). I was not able to locate a stable hyperlink for this interview on the internet (previously working ones are no longer accessible). Therefore, below, while citing from this interview, I will refer to the pages of the 2011 Russian edition of *Consciousness and Civilization* where the interview is included (translations from Russian may include modifications to existing English translations): see М. Мамардашвили, Гражданское общество, в сборнике: М. Мамардашвили, Сознание и цивилизация, стр. 201-214 (hereafter referred to as *The Civil Society*). It should also be noted that in 1989, after many years of authorities refusing to grant him permission to travel abroad, Mamardashvili finally visited foreign countries and immediately engaged in discussions with Western intellectual circles.

istence of civil society. This attitude is demonstrated in Mamardashvili's specific use of the words "death" and "life": the former denotes the totalitarian state and the elimination of critical thought, whereas the latter signifies the dynamics and vitality inherent to civil society.¹¹

The absence of critical discourse within a totalitarian state, according to Mamardashvili, creates a social condition in which individuals are unable to grasp societal processes and form adequate judgments.¹² Mamardashvili was interested in the totalitarian state, first of all, regarding the phenomenon of thought/consciousness. "The object of my interest is that thinking which unfolds in the head of the social subject, i.e., the citizen."¹³ Because thought is "an element of social and cultural structures,"¹⁴ the influence of the totalitarian state necessarily has a detrimental impact on it. This condition, though, does not imply that thinking about specific topics and their discussion is forbidden. "That would have been a classical despotism,

11 Cf. for example, M. Mamardashvili, *The Civil Society*, p. 207: "That is what happened also in the October Revolution. The state stepped in and tried to mediate everything. And that was the death of civil society. The state condemns citizens to a life after death, to that minimal life which is guaranteed by the state but which cannot develop." See also, M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 184: "In Georgia, we live under the conditions of the Soviet regime. This is a life of ghosts in the afterlife. We have tasted death for quite a long time. Of course, when I speak about "death," I do not mean physical death, but every apparition of life, every imitation, every dead part of us which is always included in our lives, in our souls."

12 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *The Civil Society*, p. 209: "There is still a very primitive social grammar in the Soviet Union, the result of long centuries of shadow existence. [...] People didn't know the difference and were not equipped to examine it critically, historically. There is still something woefully lacking in the average citizen's sense of reality, something broken in their relationship to the world around them. They lack drive, they lack a love of life, they lack the will to self-determination. They are people without consequence, that is people who cannot understand social processes, who are unable to make social judgments and who lack the ability every citizen must have to relate external events to their internal convictions. In Marxian language they are alienated."

13 M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 6.

14 *Ibid.*

which is expressed in the form of censorship.”¹⁵ The totalitarian system actually penetrates even deeper: it colonizes thinking in such a way that it eliminates the possibility of thinking *differently* beyond the established framework. “According to its internal law, ideology should reach the point where its effect will be measured not by what it makes one believe, but by what it *does not enable* one to think about.”¹⁶

In this regard, it is interesting to note a parallel between Mamardashvili and historian Mikhail Heller (1922-1997). Jewish by descent, Heller was a Soviet citizen who spent six years in a Soviet concentration camp. After his release, Heller moved first to Poland and then to France, where he actively published anti-Soviet works. In his *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man* (1985),¹⁷ Heller says that one of the main goals of the Soviet ideological apparatus was to eliminate the opportunity of thinking differently within individuals and eradicate critical attitudes towards the outer world.¹⁸

Therefore, being a victim of totalitarian ideology, according to Mamardashvili, is not reduced to the situation when the individual accepts some statement of official ideology. The situation is more complex: an individual might even negate the official ideology but still think within space of language and the conceptual boundaries prescribed and established by the entrenched ideology. This condition is described by Mamardashvili in the following way:

“Already for several generations, we are born into an atmosphere

15 Ibid., p. 8.

16 Ibid. Italics are mine.

17 Михаил Геллер, *Машина и винтики: история формирования советского человека*. London: Overseas Publications Interchange LTD, 1985. For English edition see Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man*. Translated by David Floyd. London: Collins Harvill, 1988.

18 See Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man*, p. 102; Giorgi Tavadze, *Postcolonial Interventions I. The Phenomenon of ‘Homo sovieticus’ in the Context of Soviet Ideological Dimension: A Philosophical Analysis*, Tbilisi: Varlam Cherkezishvili Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies, 2021, p. 31 ff.

permeated by blood, dirt, and falsehood, like air filled with raindrops. No one will be able to claim to escape from this period and not bear the marks of such a birth on their body and within their soul.”¹⁹

Ideological apparatuses of the totalitarian system, which channel human thought in the direction desirable for the system and uproot critical thought and the possibility of thinking differently, in Mamardashvili’s view, create a deformed space of language within which the Soviet citizen (also known as *homo sovieticus*) exists. To illustrate the deformation of language, Mamardashvili uses an example from the Afghan (colonial) experience of the Soviet Union: instead of the word “war,” Soviet ideology used the term “international help,” and instead of “Soviet soldier,” “soldier-internationalist” was used. Mamardashvili claims that the very use of these phrases already conceals the real nature of war (= colonial aggression) and eliminates the possibility of posing a question regarding the real nature and aims of the war.²⁰

In Mamardashvili’s view, by using the concepts established by ideological state apparatuses and thinking and acting within the official framework, Soviet citizens were forming their own selves as the subjects of ideology by their own agency. We have to consider that “first of all, we have to deal with ourselves, that *we ourselves are the subjects of totalitarianism*, burdened by its customs. Our thought has been destroyed by it and we are thinking with such a destroyed

19 See M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 9. See also, *ibid.*, p. 166: “For several generations, all of us have been born in such a mental atmosphere, like within an amniotic sac, and we have been soaked in the liquid that is socialist or Soviet thought.”

20 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 10; M. Мамардашвили, философия действительности, в сборнике: М. Мамардашвили, Сознание и цивилизация [M. Mamardashvili, “Philosophy of reality”, in: M. Mamardashvili, *Consciousness and Civilization*], стр. 168 (hereafter referred to as *Philosophy of reality*). The sinister resemblance with the contemporary situation is striking: the Russian government conceals its own aggression in Ukraine with the term ‘special military operation’ (специальная военная операция) and portrays it as a struggle against ‘fascism.’ In the contemporary Russian state, the deformation of the space of language (and, relatedly, the space of thought) has reached an alarming level.

thought; we have been grasping everything with the consciousness ruined by totalitarianism.”²¹

Essentially, Mamardashvili claims that within the totalitarian state, as a result of the influence of ideological apparatuses on individual and collective consciousness, Soviet citizens developed patterns of thought and action specific to the totalitarian system. The Soviet citizen, or “homo sovieticus,” is an infantile individual, dependent on the state and lacking critical thought. This claim about the socially passive Soviet citizen, who was a victim of the totalitarian system, had already been voiced in intellectual discourse by figures like Mikhail Heller, who, in his *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, discussed the Soviet state’s attempts to create a new “Soviet Man.”

As mentioned above, there are certain parallels between the approaches of Heller and Mamardashvili. Like Mamardashvili, Heller speaks about infantilization,²² the elimination of critical attitudes toward reality²³, and the desire of subjected citizens to merge with the system.²⁴

This latter point, the acknowledgment of the totalitarian system by its citizens, aligns Mamardashvili’s and Heller’s views with the ideas on ideology proposed by Louis Althusser. The above-quoted phrase from Mamardashvili – “we ourselves are the subjects of totalitarianism” – attests to this. Similarly, Althusser is interested in the mechanism of functioning of ideology, which, without using external force, makes individuals act according to the dominant ideology.²⁵

21 See M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 13.

22 Cf. Giorgi Tavazde, *The Phenomenon of ‘Homo sovieticus’*, pp. 53-55.

23 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

24 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

25 Cf. *Ibid.*, 25. On the relationship between Mamardashvili and Althusser, see Evert van der Zweerde, *Between Althusser and Arendt: Mamardashvili and the Political*, in: *Rethinking Mamardashvili: Philosophical Perspectives, Analytical Insights*, edited by V. Luarsabishvili, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022, pp. 155-186; Встреча: Мераб Мамардашвили – Луи Альтюссер, ред.: Е. Мамардашвили, Москва: Фонд Мераба Мамардашвили, 2016; Miglena Nikolchina, *Inverted Forms and*

In general, Mamardashvili is inclined to the static model of “homo sovieticus,” which represents the Soviet citizen as a product of the totalitarian system and attributes specific traits believed to be induced by this very system.²⁶ Empirically, this model is problematic.²⁷ However, we can look at this issue differently if we ask, like Althusser, why individuals act according to the dominant ideology while still thinking they act on their own.²⁸

In Mamardashvili, we see a similar attempt. The Georgian philosopher tried to describe and critically analyze the linguistic space within which Soviet citizens existed, and the patterns of thought they used in their everyday lives. Mamardashvili believed this linguistic field and these patterns were ordered to appear as given and transparent, while they were constructs of the dominant ideology. Individuals were using these patterns, but by doing so, they were becoming subjects of the totalitarian system.

Mamardashvili discusses, for example, the case of building a factory. The factory is being built, and it is said that by this, socialism is being built. This means that building a factory and building socialism are equated. If the individual accepts this formulation, this “transparent” statement, they perceive everything through this perspective. Similarly, if one says that a Soviet soldier fighting in Afghanistan is not an “occupant” but rather a “fighter internationalist,” by using the latter

Heterotopian Homonymy: Althusser, Mamardashvili, and the Problem of “Man”. *boundary 2*, 41 (1) (2014), pp. 79-100; Annie Epelboin, The Crossed Destinies or Two Philosophers: Louis Althusser and Merab Mamardashvili, *Transcultural Studies*, 5 (2009), pp. 1-16.

26 See, for example, M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, pp. 123-124: “Firstly, due to some mutation and then after intentional influence, a new anthropological type was formed, which at the same time is a deformed version of the normal, traditional human species. [...] We do not say the whole truth when we say that we are occupied by the empire; we are also occupied by the new human. The occupational force is not only an imperial force. It is a certain human type and social, mental, and everyday structures.”

27 Cf. Giorgi Tavadze, *The Phenomenon of ‘Homo sovieticus’*, pp. 22-23.

28 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

phrase, one is subjected to a language field structured by the dominant ideology.²⁹

Therefore, it could be argued that Mamardashvili's inclination towards the static model of "homo sovieticus" is driven by his method, which is founded on the analysis of the space of language and the patterns existing within it. This linguistic space is deformed by totalitarian ideology. Therefore, by using its constructs, individuals become subjects of the totalitarian system, whether they intend to or not.³⁰

However, Mamardashvili does not stop his analysis there and attempts to transcend the model of the citizen subjugated by the system. In certain circumstances, there are people who adapt better to the system than others. It can be said that they "fool" the system and even profit from it. Certain groups do this better than others. This issue brings us to the topic of the relationship between metropole and colony.

29 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, pp. 10-11.

30 Cf. M. Nemtsev and V. Faybyshenko, The Political Thought of Merab Mamardashvili, in: *Rethinking Mamardashvili: Philosophical Perspectives, Analytical Insights*, p. 133. It should be noted that in Mamardashvili (as well as in Heller), the functioning of the totalitarian mechanism is not confined to the boundaries of the Soviet state. Structures of thinking are damaged everywhere where totalitarian ideological apparatuses operate. "The same happens everywhere: in socialist Vietnam, or socialist Poland, or in Socialist Russia" (See M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 90). For a similar statement in Heller, see M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel* p. 29.

3. MAMARDASHVILI ON THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, RUSSIAN AND GEORGIAN PEOPLE, AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GEORGIA AND RUSSIA

In Mamardashvili's view, the destructive influence of the ideological apparatuses of the totalitarian state on the collective consciousness of society is what essentially distinguishes the Soviet empire from European "classical empires." The ideological and party-subordinated space of language established by the Soviet state encroached upon the consciousness of all citizens regardless of their nationality. It is in this light that Mamardashvili's following statement should be understood: "For example, we think that our enemy is Russia. In reality, our enemy is the Soviet system."³¹ He also made the following statement: "The Russian empire can be defined in the following way: this is not an empire of the Russian people, but an empire achieved through the means of the Russian people."³²

Following moments could be emphasized here: 1. Mamardashvili thinks that the *Soviet* system, *Soviet* thinking, and the *Soviet* person represent the real danger and not the Russian state;³³ 2. The Russian people are to the same degree victims of the system as, for example, Georgians and Armenians. It could even be said that Russians suffered more: "We made ourselves survive, we adapted the Soviet system to ourselves and have not impoverished to such an extent as the Russian village. We live better than the inhabitants of Moscow or

31 M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 12.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 19. Cf. also M. Nemtsev and V. Faybyshenko, *The Political Thought of Merab Mamardashvili*, p. 144.

33 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 124: "We do not say the whole truth when we say that we are occupied by the empire. We are also occupied by the *new human*" [italics mine]. See also *ibid.*, pp. 166-167: "Actually we are occupied not only by the empire and the people representing it – Russians – but also by Sovietism, which is a set of – sometimes visible and sometimes invisible – economic, mental, psychic, and domestic structures."

others.”³⁴ Despite recognizing the dominant role of Russia within the Soviet system, he gives more weight to the totalitarian system of ruling which, after incessant pressure on the collective consciousness, created a different type of human, or “homo sovieticus.”

As the recently quoted citation shows, Mamardashvili thinks that the Russian people did not profit more from the Soviet system than, for example, Georgians. On the contrary, he claims that the Russian people possess certain features which make them especially vulnerable and adaptable to imperial and totalitarian rule.³⁵ This had a detrimental impact on the Russian people, Mamardashvili thinks, to an extent that they became impoverished and their overall cultural level diminished. This stance is demonstrated by many bitter remarks towards Russians in Mamardashvili’s interviews towards the end of the 1980s. One of the notoriously well-known is his following statement: “On the table, I put a tablecloth and not a newspaper. Russians are ready to eat herring on a piece of newspaper. A normal, non-degenerate Georgian could not do this.”³⁶

In the following quote, Mamardashvili outlines his underlying assumption: “I could say that the phenomenon which is called love of life, or taste of life, is somehow damaged in the Russian people. In contrast, we Georgians [...] do not have a broken or damaged relationship with life as a phenomenon. Well, it is a little bit damaged, but its foundation is sound.”³⁷ Thus, Mamardashvili’s view on the empire rests on the assumption that there is a metaphysical problem, so to

34 M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 14. Mamardashvili returns to this theme of adapting, fitting within the system (see below).

35 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 19 and p. 26. At the same time, he stresses the significance of additional factors that accelerated the course of events toward totalitarianism, given the existing predispositions of the people. Among these factors, he highlighted the “mutations” that occurred after the First World War (*ibid.*, p. 26).

36 M. Mamardashvili, *Life of a Spy*, p. 256.

37 See M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 27. Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 89-90, where Mamardashvili states that due to the “knightly” trait of Georgians (i.e., not imposing their own tragedy on others), many “destructive structures” of socialism could not completely eliminate Georgian mentality.

speak, in a colonizing nation, which exists to a lesser extent in the conquered nation, which, with its resourcefulness, even managed to live in better economic conditions than the conquering nation.

What is the metaphysical problem Mamardashvili is referring to? According to Mamardashvili, the source of this problem is the King of Russia Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584), whose tyrannical rule “made the king the central social and political reality. Nothing was important if it did not coincide with the will of the king. The whole society became an elongated shadow of the king. But shadows are not real. Since then, unreality has become the condition of social life in Russia. Russia became a shadow society.”³⁸ Presumably, the establishment of the absolute power of the king and the persistence of such unchecked power afterwards, according to Mamardashvili, is the reason that caused traits in the Russian people that favored subjugation to totalitarianism. In Mamardashvili’s view, a “kind of mystical point” emerges in the collective consciousness, with its forms of expression being different (the idea of Russia, the King, the Emperor), and individuals establish a dual relationship with it. On the one hand, they acknowledge the power of this supreme authority and subjugate themselves to it. On the other hand, they themselves develop a desire to dominate others.³⁹

Here, once again, a parallel can be made with Althusser: on the one hand, individuals respond to the hailing of the Subject and establish themselves as subjects of the dominant ideology.⁴⁰ On the other hand, they imitate the Subject. In *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, Heller describes a similar phenomenon: “Each of the Party secretaries (in a republic, a region or a district) was a mini- Stalin in the area under his control. Stalin delegated a small part of his authority to each of

38 M. Mamardashvili, *The civil society*, p. 205.

39 М. Мамардашвили, *Философ может не быть пророком*, Фонд Мераба Мамардашвили, <https://filosof-mozhet-ne-byt-prorokom>. See also, M. Nemtsev and V. Faybyshenko, *The Political Thought of Merab Mamardashvili*, p. 143.

40 Cf. Giorgi Tavazde, *The Phenomenon of ‘Homo sovieticus’*, pp. 23-24.

them and required complete subordination in return.”⁴¹ It might be said that what Althusser refers to as the “Subject” becomes a “mystical point’ in Mamardashvili.

In opposition to authoritarianism and the dominance of one person’s will over society, Mamardashvili introduces the principle of the rule of law. Because, in Mamardashvili’s opinion, the rule of law was absent in the Russian Empire, he calls it a “seeming empire.” He also refers to the figure of the king as a “fiction” which opposes the “state affair” or the rule of law.⁴²

Following the above, Mamardashvili reasons that because of these circumstances, “[e]nlightenment bypassed Russia,” and this significantly contributed to the 1917 revolution. The destruction brought by the revolution, together with the havoc and shock caused by WWI, created favorable conditions for the emergence of a totalitarian regime on the territory of the former Russian Empire.⁴³

Mamardashvili’s view on Russian people exhibits similarity to the thesis of “internal colonisation” of Russia, which posits that the Russian people themselves became objects of imperial colonisation, with the Russian imperial system primarily colonising its own people.⁴⁴ In Mamardashvili’s view, the Soviet Union is a “very peculiar empire.” On the one hand, it is an empire because one large nation (Russians) oppresses other nations. On the other hand, “Russian people are not a metropolis in a classical sense.” By “classic empire,” Mamardashvili refers to a political unit (e.g., the British Empire) where one side—the metropolis—is more civilized than the colony (although such an understanding is highly problematic) and profits from colonization. In contrast, Mamardashvili believes that Russia was “always a contrary phenomenon to this,” as colonies frequently were in better economic

41 Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 95.

42 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 28.

43 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *The civil society*, p. 205. See also id., *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 28.

44 Cf. Tamar Koplatazde (2019), *Theorising Russian postcolonial studies*, pp. 5-6.

condition than central parts of Russia. However, Mamardashvili reasons that the government is able to “govern the whole Soviet Union” by exploiting certain traits of the Russian people.⁴⁵

Mamardashvili’s views on Russians, Georgians, and the Russian Empire are problematic in several respects. Below, some of these issues are highlighted:

The thesis that the Soviet empire was ruled by exploiting certain traits of the Russian people and that the Russian Empire was not an empire for the Russian people but rather an empire achieved through them is problematic because it attributes to the people traits that are seen as unchangeable over centuries, which are then exploited by rulers (who, if they are Russian, would presumably also possess these traits, though their will to rule appears stronger). Additionally, the idea that the Russian people have been victims of their “negative” traits, as mentioned above, aligns with the thesis of “internal colonization.” However, researchers point out that this position overlooks the subjugated status of non-Russian peoples within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, portraying Russia as a “benevolent colonizer”— strict with itself but lenient and beneficial to others.⁴⁶

It bears emphasizing that Mamardashvili’s position is complex: he explicitly states that one major nation (the Russians) is oppressing other nations,⁴⁷ but at the same time, he portrays Russians as victims (who became such due to external factors), thereby diminishing their agency in the historical process. Simultaneously, according to Mamardashvili, another oppressed nation (in his case, the Georgians), through their resourcefulness, finds itself in a better position and achieves economic welfare within the empire. The Georgians adapted to Soviet life, adjusting to a situation that was more or less the same across the Soviet Union due to the high permeability of

45 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, pp. 26-27.

46 Cf. Tamar Koplatadze (2019), *Theorising Russian postcolonial studies*, pp. 6-7.

47 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 26.

society by the totalitarian system⁴⁸ (although totalitarianism had its negative effects on the Georgian people as well⁴⁹). In both cases, Mamardashvili attributes certain traits to nations and considers them crucial in the historical process. Practically, these traits determine the extent to which a given people are capable of enacting social change. Based on these considerations, Mamardashvili asserts that the Enlightenment “bypassed”⁵⁰ Russia. However, it should be noted that despotic regimes were not absent in Europe, either before or during the Enlightenment (e.g., absolutist France or Prussia).

48 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 30. On the basis of this “adjustment”, according to Mamardashvili, the cultural phenomenon of “understanding” emerged, prompting citizens oriented toward individual survival to engage in intentional behaviors aimed at evading the system. These behaviors respond to the “unjustness” of the system with their own “unjustness.” Instead of the principle of free labor, where an individual creates a product based on their work, an environment focused on ‘redistribution’ emerges, in which individuals try to take as much as they can from the system (see, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 30-32, as well as pp. 20, 23, 34, and 37, where Mamardashvili discusses the “adjustment” of collective farming by Georgian peasants. For the thesis that the Soviet government rules society through this phenomenon of “adjustment,” see *ibid.*, pp. 250-251). “I understand that you too have to live, to feed your family, your children. And if you are stealing? I know what the law obliges me to do, but I do not do it, because I *understand* you. [...] How many times have we clearly understood what was right and yet did not do it anyway, because the situation was such that if we loved our relative, or those closest to us, we could not act otherwise?” (*ibid.*, pp. 30-31, italics mine).

A society where such a mentality is established is called by Mamardashvili a “mafia” or “anti-society.” This is something “which satisfies humans’ social needs under conditions where the dissociation of natural, normal social ties has occurred” (*ibid.*, p. 301). Elsewhere, he calls it the “body of death,” which emerges after “adjusting” the system to oneself and adjusting oneself to the system. “In order to see reality, we need to break this chain of adjustment. This means that sometimes we have to break connections of love and mutual understanding, to disturb the coziness. If we have enough power and bravery to stand beyond this, we will have a chance for *meeting* and *seeing*” (*ibid.*, p. 37, emphasis in original).

49 See *ibid.*, pp. 14 and 18 (corruption), pp. 21-22 (the loss of the ability to conduct foreign policy independently, coupled with the idealization of pre-colonial foreign policy conducted by Georgian kings), and p. 90 (damage to structures of thought). Since, in Mamardashvili’s view, concepts of thinking and acting are closely interlinked, by “structures of thought”, he refers to actions “enacted in the form of our everyday civil orientations, our inner choice” (*ibid.*).

50 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *The civil society*, p. 205.

These broad historical-philosophical generalizations are quite problematic, as they inherently risk absolutizing cultural traits, neglecting social changes, and oversimplifying the complexity of historical processes. I believe it would be more appropriate to discuss Mamardashvili's statements within a political-rhetorical context, which will be addressed below (see Section 5).

In addition, Mamardashvili's perspective on the Russian people contains another contradiction. On the one hand, he states that the Russian people possess certain traits that support the existence of an empire in Russia.⁵¹ However, he also acknowledges that these traits alone are insufficient for an empire to emerge; additional external factors, as mentioned above (for example, World War I), are necessary. On the other hand, Mamardashvili distinguishes the traits of the Russian people from what he calls "the fate of a certain space",⁵² which leads to the endless repetition of certain actions. Specifically, he argues that within this Russian space, people are not inclined to think critically, view their lives from a metaphysical perspective, or perform "certain spiritual acts". As a result, they perpetually delay these actions.⁵³ Thus, while certain traits may be associated with the

51 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 19.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88, 91, 241-242. It should be noted that, according to Mamardashvili, these "certain spiritual acts" are precisely what transform a people or ethnos into a nation. Mamardashvili offers a metaphysical conception of this transformation, which can be summarized as follows: there exists a so-called field of "eternal present." All humans strive for self-fulfillment, and using Mamardashvili's metaphor, they attempt to gather the fullness of life into a single point. These efforts at self-fulfillment occur within this "field," which is "filled" with religious experiences and symbols. This field of self-fulfillment is universal to humanity, and Mamardashvili calls it the "eternal present." An ethnos exists within this field, and through access to this metaphysical field, members of an ethnos become members of a nation (cf. M. Мамардашвили, "Одиночество - моя профессия...", [M. Mamardashvili, "Solitude is my profession"], интервью Улдиса Тиронса, в: М. Мамардашвили, *Очерк современной европейской философии*. Санкт-Петербург: "Азбука", 2012, pp. 539-541. Hereafter referred to as *Solitude is my profession*). One might discern here a Platonic motif, as outlined in the *Republic*: after escaping the cave, one gains access to metaphysical reality and then returns to the polis. Something

people, there is also a distinct characteristic of this specific space. I find the relationship between these two aspects to be ambivalent. Furthermore, alongside his thesis on “the fate of a certain space”, Mamardashvili also admits that the structures of a totalitarian system operate in the same way everywhere.⁵⁴ This raises the question of whether, in the case of Russia, “the fate of a certain space” is reinforced by the functioning of the ideological mechanisms of the totalitarian state, or if this “fate” alone is sufficient to create a totalitarian regime.

Mamardashvili’s central focus is the totalitarian state and its unique characteristics, which create a situation that transcends ‘traditional’ postcolonial relationships and establishes an entirely new kind of reality. Because Mamardashvili considers the Soviet totalitarian system and its influence on individual and collective consciousness to be crucial, he sharply distinguishes between the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, refusing to view them in the same context: “Today, our relationship with Russia is altogether different from what 19th-century Georgia’s relationship with St. Petersburg was.”⁵⁵ For

similar occurs for the members of an ethnos in Mamardashvili’s conception. To this, the Georgian philosopher adds another dimension: the nation is what happens in the *agora*, in the form of a community of citizens; the nation is something that undergoes an everyday plebiscite. Here, Mamardashvili draws from Renan’s conception of the nation (see Ernest Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’ in: *Nation and Narration*, H. Bhabha (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 19), though he does not explicitly mention him. See also M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 230: “A nation is a self-active, self-creating entity, which is born every minute by our effort.” Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 303.

54 See above n. 30.

55 M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 12. In addition to the particular distinction between the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union drawn by Mamardashvili, he also used the term “postcolonial” in a specific sense. In 1988, at an international symposium on Europe’s cultural identity held in Paris, Mamardashvili delivered a speech that was later published under the title “European Responsibility.” In this speech, he stated: “[...] my country, where I was born, is a walking paradox: part of the ex-empire, it is at the same time post-colonial, in that it was not touched by the Roman conception of the rule of law” (see M. Mamardashvili, “European Responsibility”, in J. Sushytska & A. Slaughter (Eds.), *Essays and Lec-*

Mamardashvili, Imperial Russia represents traditional despotism, analogous to “classical empires.” In contrast, the Soviet Union, as a totalitarian state, is a fundamentally different phenomenon with a much wider and deeper influence. It is powerful to the extent that it even permeates the structures of consciousness.

However, *an overemphasis on the totalitarian state risks neglecting the dimension of nationalism. Imperial oppression was also national oppression.*⁵⁶ It seems that Mamardashvili attempts to avoid

*tures by Merab Mamardashvili, Ibidem Verlag, pp. 57-62; for this particular passage, see pp. 59-60). The fact that Mamardashvili uses the term “postcolonial” in a different sense from the established one is also noted by the translators (see J. Shushytska & A. Slaughter (Eds.), *Essays and Lectures by Merab Mamardashvili*, p. 60). The Roman conception of the rule of law is mentioned in his speech titled “On Civil Society” (not to be confused with his interview with the nearly identical title “Civil society”), although the word “postcolonial” is not used: “[...] we did not get far from Roman law, and, I hope, will never get far from it, but, on the contrary, will return to it” (ibid., p. 199). Presumably, by “postcolonial” situation Mamardashvili refers to the lack of the rule of law or lawlessness, which he sees as characteristic of the Soviet lifestyle and opposed to the European *modus vivendi*, to which the Georgian philosopher ascribes the principle of the rule of law. For a different interpretation, see V. Luarsabishvili, “The Freedom of Complaint: Mamardashvili on Georgian Society at the End of the 1980s”, in: *Rethinking Mamardashvili: Philosophical Perspectives, Analytical Insights*, pp. 103-104.*

56 It should be noted that this issue is sometimes neglected in contemporary scholarship on Mamardashvili. For example, M. Nemtsev and V. Faybyshenko, in their joint chapter, mention the separatist movement in Abkhazia (now self-proclaimed and occupied by Russia) and the ethnic tensions between Georgians and Abkhazians, but they do not address the role of Russia in systematically stirring up and fueling this opposition for imperialistic goals. According to Nemtsev and Faybyshenko, “tensions began to escalate in 1988, as perestroika-era policies created numerous possibilities for escalation” (see M. Nemtsev and V. Faybyshenko, *The Political Thought of Merab Mamardashvili*, p. 143). This seemingly “objective language” neglects Russia’s decades-long imperial and national oppression and its policy of *divide et impera*. Additionally, when the authors discuss Mamardashvili’s views on Abkhazians, they state that “he could not avoid ambiguous language” (ibid., p. 148). It is doubtful that Mamardashvili’s views on Abkhazians are more ambiguous than, for example, his views on Russians. Is such an evaluation of Mamardashvili influenced by the fact that the Georgian philosopher defends the idea of Georgia’s sovereignty within borders recognized by the international community (and *not* recognized by Russia and some of its satellites) and calls Abkhazian independence “mythic”?

the issue of nationalism by focusing on structural aspects, but this attempt is not entirely successful: nationalistic themes seem to slip in through the back door of his thought, as indicated above, where he attributes certain fixed traits to both the colonizing and colonized peoples within the political-rhetorical discourse.⁵⁷ Mamardashvili effectively concluded his discussion on the distinctive features of the Georgian people with his famous statement: “If my people choose Gamsakhurdia, then I will have to go against my people in the context of my own views and dispositions. I do not want to believe in this.”⁵⁸

57 In addition to the political-rhetorical and personal aspects (Mamardashvili, a predominantly Russian-language philosopher of Georgian ethnicity, who returned to Georgia and spoke primarily to Georgians there), these statements can also be understood in the context of the *Zeitgeist*. The rise of national liberation movements, the escalation of ethnic conflicts, and the general prominence of national issues in the collective consciousness created, so to speak, a conducive environment for such considerations

58 See М. Мамардашвили, *Верю в здравый смысл* [M. Mamardashvili, *I believe in common sense*], Фонд Мераба Мамардашвили, <https://mamardashvili.com/>. This pessimistic attitude is also evident in the lecture delivered at Tbilisi State University on September 22, 1990: “I lived in Russia for 30 years with the belief that I am a Georgian and that we, Georgians, are not as backward as Russians. [...] I was always saying this in Moscow and around the capital. But I have returned and found that this was an illusion, that the process of mental, psychological, and verbal enslavement has progressed too far and too deep” (see M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 242-243). Zviad Gamsakhurdia was one of the leaders of national-liberation movement in Georgia in 1980s.

4. WHAT IS THE RECOURSE?

As mentioned above, according to Mamardashvili, the dissolution of a totalitarian political structure does not equate to the elimination of the subject of totalitarianism — a subject who was constituted within totalitarianism, has been thinking within the framework established by that very system, and expresses thoughts within the linguistic field shaped by that system. But if this is the case, how is it possible to overcome this situation, if at all? What is the recourse? In Mamardashvili's words, "how can we escape from this [homo sovieticus – G. T.], how do we form within ourselves different footholds?"⁵⁹

First of all, the motif of awakening emerges here, echoing the earlier passage where Mamardashvili references Kafka's short story: "When we are awoken in front of a certain opportunity, in front of liberty itself, we are what we have been from birth and carry the marks of that birth."⁶⁰ Thus, while the totalitarian system brands individuals' thinking, there comes a day when they are awakened, new opportunities arise, the political structure of totalitarianism collapses, and the possibility of freedom emerges.⁶¹

59 See M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 124.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 9 (emphasis mine). See also *ibid.*, pp. 17-18: "A possible recourse will emerge when we begin to move. [...] It is our task to know where to direct this movement."

61 See M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 9. See also *ibid.*, p. 29: "We find ourselves in a post-totalitarian situation; we are coming out of the tunnel and have an opportunity to see ourselves." The metaphor of awakening implies the opportunity to see oneself. This constitutes a starting position, a point of departure from which transformation should begin, where individuals must act and think independently. In contrast, within totalitarianism, individuals lack this capability: "To this day in ourselves our selves were not active. We were marionettes of our own thoughts, which were not ours" (*ibid.*). For the notion of freedom in Mamardashvili, see Alyssa DeBlasio, *Thinking with Merab Mamardashvili: Freedom, (Trans)Nationalism, and the Relevance of his Philosophy for the 21st Century*, in: V. Luarsabishvili (ed.), *Rethinking Society: Individuals, Culture and Migration*, Tbilisi: New Vision University Press, 2021, pp. 11-13.

In Mamardashvili's view, this is a difficult,⁶² though not impossible, task.

Gaining independence is a necessary precondition. "Until we gain independence, we cannot see reality; we will not be able to understand ourselves."⁶³ However, because of the long-term pressure of the totalitarian system on consciousness, the mere restoration of independence, or its formal declaration, does not mean the elimination of the subject of totalitarianism or *homo sovieticus*. Mamardashvili argues that even in the absence of the totalitarian system, individuals continue to think and act within a deformed linguistic field. This specificity, which Mamardashvili believes differentiates Georgian society from other postcolonial societies that were formerly parts of "classical empires", explains why he states, after discussing the Gandhian version of independence: "In reality, our task is much more difficult than we think."⁶⁴ To achieve full emancipation, it is necessary to free oneself from thinking clichés and to establish practices aligned with thinking free of these clichés. "We need emancipation not only from the empire but also from certain inner principles of our own life."⁶⁵

Let us begin with the discussion of practices, which might be grouped into two dimensions: political and economic. Regarding the political dimension, Mamardashvili emphasizes the importance of active citizen involvement in public life. He juxtaposes two types of citizens. The first group consists of individuals who cannot connect public events with their own views.⁶⁶ The second group includes individuals "who are developed enough to have the capability for public judgment and the courage to undertake responsible and risky actions

62 See M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, pp. 184-185: "The first moments of an attempt to return [to life – G. T.] will be very difficult."

63 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

66 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *The civil society*, p. 209.

within society.”⁶⁷ They cannot thrive in a society where their actions do not reflect their values.⁶⁸

Mamardashvili’s position is somewhat idealistic, but this distinction is an important one in his social and political philosophy. Here, the inactive citizen is contrasted with the active one, who can challenge the birthmarks of fear and trembling towards the totalitarian system or overcome the “adjustment” and individualism of the conformist citizen and seek solutions to public issues.

Having independence and a free society is a necessary precondition for citizen involvement. This constitutes a political culture, an ‘experience of republican life’ (which, according to Mamardashvili, for example, Baltic states – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – had during their more extensive independence period⁶⁹), and is crucial for the normal functioning of society. In Mamardashvili’s view, for Georgian society, the lack of such republican experience constitutes a serious obstacle in the transformation process from totalitarianism toward political and mental liberation.⁷⁰

In the political philosophy of Mamardashvili,⁷¹ the notion of *agora* — critical and thriving public discourse — occupies a central place. It might even be said that in Mamardashvili’s understanding, the

67 Ibid., p. 213. For the notion of responsibility in Mamardashvili, see Andrew Padgett, *Dasein and the Philosopher: Responsibility in Heidegger and Mamardashvili*, *Facta Universitatis, Series: Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology*, 6, 1 (2007), pp. 1-21.

68 Ibid.

69 After the collapse of the Russian Empire, Georgia proclaimed its independence on May 26, 1918, but this independence was short-lived. In February 1921, Soviet Russia occupied Georgia and established the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Georgia regained its independence only in April 1991. In contrast, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia remained independent from 1918 to 1940.

70 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 14.

71 Regarding differing positions on whether one can speak about political philosophy in Mamardashvili’s thought, see G. Tavadze, *The Post-Soviet Scholar: From the Spaces of Inaction Towards Public Thinking and Multiple Agoras*. In: P. Gibbs, V. de Rijke, A. Peterson (eds.), *The Contemporary Scholar in Higher Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2024, pp. 175-176.

terms “agora” and “civil society” are identical and denote the the existence of critical public discourse wich fosters exchange of ideas and thoughts. With regards to the concept of agora, Georgian philosopher relies on somewhat idealized understanding of the Greek polis, or “articulated polis”, as he calls it.⁷² “Articulation” here implies self-expression and the discussion of public issues. “[A]rticulated space” is a “space of presence of all that one may feel, want, and think.”⁷³

Thus, Mamardashvili links the notion of agora with that of thinking. But thinking alone is not sufficient. In order for the agora to become an an event, thought must “roll around” within the agora, to “build up its muscles there, just as a snowman builds up its bulk with snow; it must acquire the strength to realize its own possibility.”⁷⁴ Mamardashvili deliberately uses physical metaphors, such as “muscles” and “roll around,” to convey the connection between thought and action. On the agora, thoughts, like physical objects, are presented and endowed with motion. “I can externalize my internal states, feelings, beginnings of thoughts, half-formulated, or even less sufficiently formulated thoughts, and give them motion onto the agora.”⁷⁵

Put another way, agora means public space (physical or non-physical, the latter being, for example, newspaper columns) within which citizens engage in critical thinking and exchange their thoughts in the co-presence of one another. “Agora offers me a chance to give existence to the non-existent [for example, half-formulated thoughts and

72 M. Mamardashvili, *Solitude is my profession*, p. 535. For a different point of view, see J., Sushytska and A. Slaughter, Introduction, In: M. Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*, p. 52.

73 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, “European Responsibility”, in: Merab Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*, p. 61.

74 See M. Mamardashvili, “Consciousness and civilization”, in: Merab Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*, p. 158.

75 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 112. Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edition, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 26: “To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.”

conceptions – G.T.] which are thrown into publicity.”⁷⁶ Mamardashvili strongly stresses the significance of the deliberation process and the opportunity to express and exchange opinions freely within a public critical discourse.

At agora, “citizenship is not a right, but a duty to participate in civic affairs.”⁷⁷ It is through this participation that individuals truly learn what they feel and think.⁷⁸ Thus, self-realisation is linked to *encountering others in their co-presence* and shaping one’s own thoughts and views through engagement in debate. Agora is a place laden with tensions and contradictions, where citizens discuss, debate, and develop “muscles of thought”, which are then translated into corresponding civic actions.⁷⁹ It is also the place where a nation is born, as the community of individuals is subject to daily refutation, validation, and plebiscite.⁸⁰

If the notion of the agora belongs to the political dimension, the conception of “liberating labor” or “free labor” pertains to the eco-

76 Ibid. Evert van der Zweerde sums up Mamardashvili’s effort in 1980s with the following phrase: “*making-present-of-thought* in culture and society” (see E. van der Zweerde, *Philosophy in the Act: The Socio-Political Relevance of Mamardašvili’s Philosophizing*, *Studies in East European Thought*, 58 (2006), pp. 179-203). It can be said that the agora is what enables and realizes this “making-present-of-thought”.

77 See M. Mamardashvili, “On civil society”, in: Merab Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*, p. 201.

78 М. Мамардашвили, Если осмелиться быть [M. Mamardashvili, If one dares to be], в сборнике: М. Мамардашвили, Сознание и цивилизация, стр. 79.

79 Cf. M. Nemtsev and V. Faybyshenko, *The Political Thought of Merab Mamardashvili*, p. 141 (authors emphasize the underlying connection between the articulation of thought and the political dimension in Mamardashvili’s work). In contrast to the agora, which represents a synthesis of thinking and acting, Mamardashvili uses “manifestation” to denote an emotional, affective stance that excludes the possibility of serious thinking and consideration of issues. Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 12. See also *ibid.*, p. 9: “Manifestation is not a place, a topos, where the act of thinking can occur” (an obvious allusion to the Georgian situation at the time, when manifestations had become a common *modus vivendi* during the rise of the national-liberation movement).

80 М. Мамардашвили, *Solitude is my profession*, p. 541. See also above n. 53.

conomic dimension. Mamardashvili refers to free labor relationships between individuals who are autonomous in deciding where to direct their labor and who take responsibility for their decisions. Establishing these free labor relationships is the means by which the Soviet citizen can transcend their infantile condition and replace dependence on the state with autonomy.⁸¹ “[...] Labor should be liberated, and the modern *European* principle of free labor should be implemented.”⁸²

In this regard, Mamardashvili is a liberal thinker who supports the limitation of state power in the economic sphere. Until individuals rely solely on the state’s help, they will not be able to develop their autonomy. “Democracy is freedom of labor, not the necessity of labor as formulated in socialist and communist utopias. Freedom of labor is the opportunity to do your work in the way you understand it. In other cases, there is no labor.”⁸³

For the enactment of the agora and the implementation of free labor practices, Mamardashvili argues that it is necessary to overcome entrenched thinking clichés. For example, the practice of free labor will not be realized if people continue to believe that the government should decide how to feed them.⁸⁴ It will not be possible to overcome Soviet mentality if lawlessness and bending the law are the default *modus operandi* for citizens⁸⁵ and if the linguistic field deformed by the totalitarian regime is not cleared.⁸⁶ This should be accomplished

81 M. Mamardashvili, *Philosophy of reality*, p. 176.

82 M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 24 (emphasis mine). Note the positive connotation that the term “European” carries. See also above n. 4.

83 *Life of a spy*, pp. 246-247.

84 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, p. 17. See also, *ibid.*, p. 24: “We do not need a party — whether good or bad, Communist or otherwise — that takes it upon itself to feed and supply the people. This is precisely the expression of the Soviet principle.”

85 Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

86 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, “De-Sovietization of thought and language”, in: მერაბ მამარდაშვილი, „ცნობიერების ტოპოლოგია“ [M. Mamardashvili, *Topology of Consciousness*], edited by N. Sakhokia, Z. Shatirishvili, Tbilisi, 2011 (in Geor-

on the agora—in a free and critical public space—through the exchange of thoughts and the development of ideas. Thus, the first step requires internal work and an *effort* toward self-realization⁸⁷ achieved through critical thinking, breaking free from the spells of ‘adjustment’ and ‘understanding,’ and taking responsibility for one’s actions (free labour). It is important to recognize that this process should involve interaction with others in the agora, exchanging ideas with fellow citizens. It might be said that Mamardashvili implied this outward vector—from the inner individual dimension to the external social sphere—when he remarked that “the greatest part of the human being is outside of him”⁸⁸, specifically in the linguistic space of the agora, where the impulses of life are pulsating within the social fabric.⁸⁹

gian), p. 194: “Today, after the Sovietization of language and speech, we need to find anew the meaning of every word.”

87 Cf. Cf. M. Mamardashvili, “European Responsibility”, in: Merab Mamardashvili, *A Spy for an Unknown Country: Essays and Lectures*, p. 62: “[...] to become human is a very, very long effort.”

88 Ibid.

89 For a discussion of Mamardashvili’s philosophy of the agora in connection with his metaphysics, see Michail Ryklin, *Eine Philosophie der Freiheit: Merab Mamardashvili und die Metaphysik der Agora*, *Osteuropa*, 2015, Vol. 65, No. 7/10, pp. 631-642; see also id., *Consciousness as a Domain of Freedom: The Metaphysical Theme in Merab Mamardashvili*. *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 49 (2) (2010): 28-50. For the importance of Mamardashvili’s conception of agora in the context of contemporary Georgian discourse, which is dominated by neoliberal agendas and Russian neocolonialism, see G. Tavadze, *The Post-Soviet Scholar: From the Spaces of Inaction Towards Public Thinking and Multiple Agoras*, p. 185 ff. See also A. Oleksiyenko, & G. Tavadze, *Decolonization of Post-Soviet Higher Education: Critical Inquiry Through a Reflexive Scholarly Dialogue*. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 0(0) (2024).

5. FROM PHILOSOPHY TO POLITICS

At the end of the 1980s, Mamardashvili became actively engaged in the political processes unfolding in Georgia. Due to differing views, a conflict emerged between him and one of the leaders of the national liberation movement, future president of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939-1993), along with his supporters. Mamardashvili's phrase — "Truth is higher than homeland", said at a meeting of the Georgian National Front in 1989 — is notoriously well-known because it sparked significant controversy. This phrase is often quoted like an aphorism, taken out of its original broader context, which is provided below:

"When the youth awakens, when the first ray of self-consciousness enters their heads, when they open their eyes, they see that they are surrounded by vertically standing corpses, by dead people. This is the first feeling of the youth who awakens in our Georgia, or in Russia, or in Belarus, or in Lithuania. And when I understand this, I also understand that our place is not to be abandoned—we who transcended this dangerous spot and became humans, who acknowledge only one law above them: this personal conscience. And this personal conscience dictates to us—if we are Christians—that above all stands the bright spot of this conscience, which is truth. [The truth] is higher even than homeland, because sometimes we consider something as being in the homeland's interest that in reality is not. We see it as its interest because of passion, agitated blood in our veins, or native soil. We do not look beyond this, and looking beyond this is only possible under the star of truth, under its rays. By the way, this is the elementary Christian credo. I repeat: the truth is higher than homeland. Therefore, Georgia cannot be a fetish. In Christianity in general, there are no fetishes."⁹⁰

90 1989 წელი, სახალხო ფრონტის ყრილობა [Meeting of National Front, 1989], <https://youtu.be/j4P1wfohLSc?si=8JOMwcvttVMU-L7p> (4:44-6:44). With great probability, Mamardashvili's inspiration for his famous phrase was Russian philosopher Pyotr Chaadayev (1794-1856), who in his *Apology of a Madman* (written in

The problem Mamardashvili encountered was the opposition between philosophical and political discourses, a conflict with ancient roots. In Ancient Greece, the famous example of this confrontation is the figure of Socrates, as depicted in Plato's dialogues. In the allegory of the cave presented in Book VII of the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates describes the dangers faced by those who escape the cave but then return to enlighten others about the external reality, which the cave-dwellers mistakenly view as an illusion (514a-517c). The allegory of the cave highlights the tensions between philosophical and political discourses. Socrates became a victim of this opposition (at least, this is how Plato sees it). Before Socrates, Pythagoras faced a similar fate, either falling victim to the violence directed against his school or, most likely, fleeing to avoid death.⁹¹

Political discourse has its own terminology, tempo, and dynamics, often leaving little room for philosophical discourse. On one hand, Mamardashvili tried to convey his philosophical views, but because he was engaged in the turbulent events of his time, topical issues such as nationalism, nationhood, homeland, metropole, and colonialism naturally permeated his reasoning— all the more so because the format of public lectures was what made him popular in the Soviet Union.⁹²

1837, but published decades later posthumously) wrote: "Love for the homeland is a beautiful thing, but there is something more beautiful—love for truth. Love for the homeland begets heroes, and love for the truth creates sages, benefactors of humankind. Love for the homeland divides nations, nourishes national hatred, and sometimes cloaks the earth in mourning. Love for the truth spreads the light of knowledge, creates spiritual satisfactions, and brings humans closer to Divinity. The road to Heaven goes through truth, not through the homeland." See П. Чаадаев, *Апология сумасшедшего*, в: П. Чаадаев, *Полное собрание сочинений и избранные письма*, т. 1, Москва: "Наука", 1991, p. 523.

91 C. Huffman, "Pythagoras", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/pythagoras/>

92 During Mamardashvili's public lectures, the room was often packed with an audience, many of whom were standing. Cf. Alyssa DeBlasio, *The Filmmaker's Philosopher: Merab Mamardashvili and Russian Cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p. 6.

Therefore, after returning to Georgia in 1980, Mamardashvili's interviews and lectures often featured political-rhetorical elements (such as emphasis on the special talent and resourcefulness of Georgians, Christian motives, criticism of Russia and Russians etc.). This is not to say that all of Mamardashvili's statements during this period were political-rhetorical. It is impossible to know the intentions behind some specific statements. However, given the tense political situation in Georgia and Mamardashvili's involvement in politics, including his sharp opposition to Gamsakhurdia, the political-rhetorical aspects of his statements should not be underestimated. Moreover, in some cases, his conscious positioning against Gamsakhurdia is more evident, as seen in his criticism of the situation of chronic manifestations,⁹³ his claims to understand Christianity and its core messages,⁹⁴ and his open discussion of the existing antagonism with Gamsakhurdia.

Following the above, I disagree with the view that in 1990 Georgian society faced a choice between two discourses: one purely philosophical ("Gamsakhurdia's line") and the other purely philosophical ("Mamardashvili's line").⁹⁵ My argument is as follows: Mamardash-

93 Cf. M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*, pp. 8-9.

94 In 1990, during lectures delivered at Tbilisi State University, Mamardashvili frequently referred to the Gospels and discussed certain issues in the context of Christianity (see M. Mamardashvili, *Talks on Philosophy*). For the discussion of the role of Christianity in Mamardashvili's thought, see Nemtsev and V. Faybyshenko, *The Political Thought of Merab Mamardashvili*, pp. 146-147. On the other side of the spectrum, Zviad Gamsakhurdia considered the national issue within the context of Christianity. See ზვიად გამსახურდია, „საქართველოს სულიერი მისია“ [Z. Gamsakhurdia, *The Spiritual Mission of Georgia* (in Georgian)], Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1990. For a critical analysis of Gamsakhurdia's views as presented in *The Spiritual Mission of Georgia*, see Stephen H. Rapp Jr. *Dismantling Georgia's spiritual Mission: Sacral Ethnocentrism, Cosmopolitan Nationalism, and Primal Awakenings at the Soviet Collapse*, in: Krista A. Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum (eds.), *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2019, pp. 162-181.

95 For this perspective, see Заал Андроникашвили, Георгий Майсурадзе, *Грузия-1990: филологема независимости, или Неизвлеченный опыт*, НЛО, (1) 2007, <https://filologema-nezavisimosti-ili-neizvlechennyj-opyt.html>

vili's discourse was not purely philosophical but an attempt to introduce philosophical categories into the political space and processes, attempting to synthesize philosophical and political discourses. The result was a discourse that vibrated with the tensions of both dimensions, and it would be a mistake to regard it as purely "philosophical".⁹⁶ It would also be a simplification of the complex political reality to argue that Georgian society chose one of these discourses. The entangled, tension-laden, and antagonism-filled Georgian society of 1990, which would soon be shaken by civil war, was not in a position to choose between philological and philosophical discourses. The reality was too ambiguous for such a choice.

The tensions inherent between philosophical and political discourses meant that Mamardashvili's attempts to synthesize them were not always successful. This was most dramatically expressed in his speech at a meeting of the Georgian National Front (an excerpt of which was cited above). The reaction to Mamardashvili's speech was mixed, with a predominantly negative response. The Kantian or Chaadaevian motives behind his words were not apparent to all members of the audience. Consequently, his speech generated confusion and tension—already present at the sessions of the National Front—because the format of a political assembly was not suited to a public lecture. Messages that might have been clear to an audience accustomed to philosophical insights were not easily understood or

96 It should be noted that the presence of a political-rhetorical element does not inherently carry a negative connotation. For instance, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) is an anti-monarchistic pamphlet where political philosophy is masterfully interwoven with rhetorical elements and an analysis of the political situation. However, while the blend of political and rhetorical elements in *Common sense* proved beneficial for Paine, the same cannot be said for his *Age of Reason*, the first part of which was published in 1794. This work was used by Paine's opponents to accuse him of atheism (cf. J. Fruchtman Jr., *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Paine*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, p. 25). The attempt to synthesize philosophical and political discourses carries certain risks. An interesting approach in this regard is advanced by P. Ricoeur, who states: "[...] I propose to situate political discourse on the level of rhetoric." See P. Ricoeur, *Philosophy, Ethics, and Politics*. Edited by C. Goldenstein. Translated by K. Blamey, Polity Press, 2020, p. 37.

accepted by an audience focused on immediate political issues and expecting clear political messages from the speakers.⁹⁷

The likelihood of Gamsakhurdia's party winning the Supreme Council elections in the autumn of 1990 intensified the political-philosophical elements in Mamardashvili's philosophical-political discourse. The emotional tone now conveys the utmost tension, and what Nemtsev and Faybyshenko describe as the "subjugation of philosophical discourse to the current agenda"⁹⁸ becomes salient. In his paper "I Believe in Common Sense", published on September 21, 1990, in Russian, Mamardashvili supports the idea of a national congress (as an alternative to the Supreme Council), arguing that incompetent individuals might be elected to parliament. Mamardashvili essentially dismisses the effectiveness of democratic electoral mechanisms and advocates for the so-called national congress as "an organ of popular initiative", a "school for forging political cadres", intended to neutralize the potential consequences of "contingent" or "extremist" forces coming to power.⁹⁹

I find this reasoning highly problematic because, in my view, it contains elements of philosophical elitism and entails the possibility of future violence. If election results are not favorable to the one who expresses this view, the party that comes to power and forms the government could be labeled as 'contingent' or 'extremist,' and

97 This disposition is illustrated by the evaluation of Georgian historian Dimitri Shvelidze, who was also a witness to the event: "As a philosopher, Merab Mamardashvili was right. However, he would have been a thousand times more right if he had asserted his thesis at a philosophers' symposium or an intellectuals' meeting. The meeting of the National Front was neither the first nor the latter. It was a political gathering discussing the topical issues of the national-liberation movement." See დ. შველიძე, „პოლიტიკური დაპირისპირებები და ეროვნული ხელისუფლების დამხობა საქართველოში: 1987-1992“ [D. Shvelidze, *Political Conflicts and the Overthrow of the National Government in Georgia: 1987-1992*], Tbilisi: Artanuji Press, 2021 (in Georgian), p. 69.

98 Cf. M. Nemtsev and V. Faybyshenko, *The Political Thought of Merab Mamardashvili*, p. 142.

99 See M. Мамардашвили, *Верю в здравый смысл [I believe in common sense]*, Фонд Мераба Мамардашвили, <https://mamardashvili.com/>.

its 'neutralization' might not be ruled out. Regardless of the non-violent intentions the author of these words might have had, the bloody chronicles of the civil war unfortunately demonstrated how dangerous such statements were, as they were cultivated (and later translated into violent actions) precisely within the same body—the so-called national congress—that the Georgian philosopher envisioned as a “forging place for political cadres.” Mamardashvili himself did not live to witness these unfortunate developments. He died of a heart attack on November 25, 1990, at Moscow’s Vnukovo Airport while awaiting a flight to Tbilisi.

6. SUMMARIZING CONSIDERATIONS

The above can be summarized as follows:

- In Mamardashvili's view, the Soviet totalitarian system differs from other despotic or colonizing societies due to its unprecedented pressure on *thinking*. Unlike traditional colonial states (such as the Russian Empire or the British Empire), the Soviet Union was a totalitarian state that sought to exercise full control over the structures of consciousness.
- The ideological pressure exerted by the totalitarian state leads to the *deformation of the linguistic* field. As a result, the possibility of thinking differently than the established ideological categories is minimal. A new type of human, *homo sovieticus*, is formed—an infantile, state-dependent individual who acts and thinks within the framework established by the system. Overall, Mamardashvili is inclined towards a static model of *homo sovieticus*, attributing to it certain fixed traits.
- There are certain parallels between the views of Althusser and Mamardashvili on one hand, and Heller and Mamardashvili on the other. The similarity to Althusser's theory of ideology is evident when Mamardashvili asserts that Soviet citizens themselves become subjects of totalitarianism by accepting and making use of a deformed linguistic field. Another parallel can be seen in Mamardashvili's reference to a certain "mystical point", which creates relationships of subordination, akin to Althusser's concept of the Subject. The similarity with Heller emerges in the characterization of the Soviet citizen's infantile nature and lack of critical attitude toward reality. The relationship between the views of Althusser, Heller, and Mamardashvili warrants further study.
- *All citizens*—both from oppressed nations and the dominant one—are subjected to totalitarian pressure. Mamardashvili believes that within the Soviet system, Georgians adapted better

than Russians, as reflected in their relative economic welfare. However, the cost of this adaptation was the loss of political autonomy and the potential for developing a civil society.

- According to Mamardashvili, *the Russian Empire is not a classical empire* (for example, like the British Empire), despite the fact that the Russian nation oppresses other nations within its borders. Nor is it an empire of the Russian people, as rulers manipulate certain traits of the Russian populace, the most important of which is their desire to subordinate themselves to a “mystical point.” Thus, in Mamardashvili’s view, certain traits of the Russian people are exploited to govern the entire territory of the Empire in the name of the Russian people.
- The inclination toward authoritarianism and totalitarianism within the Russian people, in Mamardashvili’s view, was formed during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, when the figure of the king was absolutized and the potential for developing civil society was stifled. This is the reason why the Enlightenment “bypassed” Russia. That said, it should be noted that there is a contradiction in Mamardashvili’s views about the Russian space: on the one hand, he acknowledges a “fate of certain space” that fosters the development of totalitarianism in Russia; on the other hand, he believes that the ideological mechanisms of a totalitarian state function similarly in Russia and, for example, in Communist Vietnam.
- Mamardashvili’s views on nations (Russians, Georgians, etc.) are essentialist: they are ascribed certain traits which make them passive objects in the historical process. Notwithstanding Mamardashvili’s vision of overcoming the totalitarian legacy, this does not change the overall picture in which nations are voluntarily attributed certain negative or positive traits. In addition to this, overemphasis on the mechanisms of functioning of the totalitarian state neglects national oppression conducted by Russia with regards to colonised nations.
- Collapse of totalitarian structures creates new opportunities

and dangers. According to Mamardashvili, overcoming the corrupt Soviet legacy required a critical analysis of the deformed linguistic field (de-Sovietization), the “liberation of work” or the establishment of a free market, and the *creation of a free public space (“agora”)* within which citizens could debate, exchange ideas freely and without constraints, form new ideas, and act according to them. In this regard, the relationship between, on the one hand, Arendt’s views on the Greek polis and Habermas’s views on the development of the public sphere, and on the other hand, Mamardashvili’s philosophy of the agora warrants further exploration.

- It might be better to view Mamardashvili’s considerations on nations, as well as his broad historical generalizations, as *political-rhetorical statements*. By the end of the 1980s, Mamardashvili was actively engaged in the political processes happening in Georgia, and political-rhetorical elements in his philosophical discourse became more salient. It might be said that the Georgian philosopher tried to *synthesize philosophical and political discourses*.
- In the end, the attempt at this synthesis failed. As tensions in the political field intensified, political-polemical elements in Mamardashvili’s thinking took a dominant role, making the opposition between philosophical and political discourses even more apparent (as seen in the misplaced and misunderstood statement ‘truth is higher than homeland’ at the 1989 meeting of the National Front, and the controversial statements in the paper ‘I Believe in Common Sense’ in 1990). Moreover, the thoughts of the Georgian philosopher became a political tool in the hands of the elite opposed to the national government. Very shortly, the bloody reality of the civil war rendered both Mamardashvili’s and Gamsakhurdia’s views utopian.
- The above does not intend to diminish the worth of Mamardashvili’s thought. It is highly likely that he was the first philosopher in all post-Soviet space to attempt a holistic reflection on

the transformations occurring in the Soviet Union and to formulate his own vision of the transition towards a post-totalitarian democratic society based on liberal principles (it should be noted that his vision of democracy closely aligns with models of deliberative democracy). Additionally, Mamardashvili was a truly *parrhesiastic* intellectual who said what he believed to be true, despite the possible negative consequences. According to Foucault, in parrhesiastic speech (truth-telling, speaking courageously), the decisive moment is not the content but rather “the risk that truth-telling opens up for the speaker.”¹⁰⁰ Mamardashvili intentionally opened up this horizon of risks with his parrhesiastic statements, fully aware of the dangers involved.¹⁰¹

- The figure of Mamardashvili is important today for at least two reasons: on the one hand, his manner of philosophizing, bold speaking, and openly outlining his views remains exemplary, especially in a time when, despite formal democracy, there is a widespread tendency in intellectual circles toward self-censorship or ideological justification of power-holding politicians. On the other hand, his example serves as a warning of the dangers when an intellectual speculates with the idea of “truth” in the political sphere (this applies to both Mamardashvili and Gamsakhurdia). As it has been noted, “[d]emocracy has no claims in the philosophical realm, and philosophers have no special rights in the political community. In the world of opinion, truth is indeed another opinion, and the philosopher is only another opinion maker.”¹⁰² This does *not* mean that there is

100 See M. Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others. Lectures at the Collège De France: 1982-1983*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 56.

101 Cf. A. DeBlasio, Socrates as Symbol: Alexander Herzen, Merab Mamardashvili, and Alexander Pushkin”. In: A. DeBlasio and V. Juharyan (eds.), *Socrates in Russia*. Leiden: Brill, 2022, pp. 294-295.

102 See M. Walzer, “Philosophy and Democracy”, in: *Philosophy and Democracy. An Anthology*, edited by T. Christiano, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 272.

no such thing as truth at all. It *means* that what is considered truth in philosophical discourse is not the same within political discourse, whose internal logic is completely different. In this regard, Mamardashvili's figure is significant as a cautionary example, reminding us that attempts to synthesize philosophical and political discourses are fraught with risk. On the real agora, within the real public space, national, religious, political, and other passions clash with each other and shake the ground, and the star of "truth," unfortunately, shines all too dimly.

At the end of this seemingly pessimistic conclusion, I want to finish with a reference to one of Mamardashvili's favorite philosophers, and perhaps outline a future trajectory for research. *Immanuel Kant's* political philosophy points to the need for the legal ordering of public space. This idea is also echoed in Mamardashvili's thought.¹⁰³ In the political field, this perspective might be an effective alternative to the "truth" discourse. The rule of law, due to its universal (and formal) nature, represents one of the founding principles on which a democratic society should rest. It might be worthwhile to inquire into Mamardashvili's thought—an attempt to reflect on forming, maintaining, and strengthening autonomous and democratic (post-imperial, post-colonial) elements within the body of a disintegrating empire—in this regard.

103 M. Mamardashvili, *Consciousness and Civilization*, pp. 156, 158-160.

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