

Saturday Night Philosophy: Philisophical Cafe



The latest edition of Wrocław's **Philisophical Cafe** takes place this Saturday at 6pm in Kino Nowe Horizonty. Far from being a flash in the pan event, the Philisophical Cafe has grown in stature after several successful editions. But what exactly happens, and what does the event look like? We hunted down Italian philisophical consultant Guido Giacomo Gattai, who runs the Cafe, to find answers to these very questions:

So Guido, what exactly is the Philosophical cafe, and what's the concept behind it?

A Philosophical Café is basically an invention by Marc Sautet. One day in 1992, he went with a friend to the Café au Phares in Place de la Bastille in Paris, and they were discussing some philosophical topics together. At one point another customer overheard them, and misunderstood the situation they were talking about. The man then butted into their private conversation, and started talking as if it were some kind of a public event. Sautet enjoyed this humorous yet unintended situation, so he started going every Wednesday to the same café studying, time after time, a way to improve the conversation.

Even though time has passed, the Philosophical Cafés in Café au Phares are still on every week, and not only there: you can find other such events in Paris and in a lot of other cities all around the world. For example in Wrocław too



What format does the event take?

The format of the event is very simple: at the beginning we decide the topic that we want to talk about, and then we discuss it. My role is to coordinate all the speakers in order to let anyone be free to express what they want to say, without interruptions from others, and repetitions of the same topic. It is easier said than done however!

How do you think the participants feel after they've attended the cafe?

When going out from a Philosophical Café you tend to feel a bit strange: you feel deeply challenged, yet you always think that the discussion didn't quite reach the depth we were looking for. That's why we always have some food and a beer together afterwards – because philosophy is like life: you never feel fulfilled, you can never get enough.

Have there been some heated (but respectful) arguments during the philosophical cafe, or is just a self appreciation society?

Respect? There is nothing like respect in philosophy! When you express the very conceptual base of your way of life you can be so engaged that you might well beat somebody up. We almost need a security service! Well, no, I'm only joking of course But sometimes people inevitably bring very personal issues to the table, which do evoke emotional responses. Nevertheless, at least in the end we really know



each other. In a lot of organized meetings you can't properly meet the others. Here you really do – in every sense of the word.

What kind of topics tend to come up each month? Have you had someone mention something bizarre or controversial?

As I mentioned before, we always have very specific topics, and what's more – no topic is ever simple or empty when you start to dig in deep. The best part of this job for me is always to listen to what people have to say. We had a very engaging discussion about racism in Poland and abroad, and not everybody was against! Because it's not TV, people do not want to please each other, they really want to say what they think. I love these spontaneous reactions and seeing people 'unmasked'.

You work as a philosophical consultant. Just what does your job involve, and in what situations do people or companies hire your services?

Well, theoretically any problem can be faced through philosophical consulting. Nonetheless, the reality is that most people and companies don't consider this, and at first they call somebody else, such as a psychological, advertising or financial consultant. It depends on the kind of problem really. When nothing else really works, they call me, probably thinking something around the lines of "It must be better than doing nothing, what can a philosopher really do for me?!". In the end however, they are normally surprised at how effective philosophy can be – I've never left a single problem unsolved. Maybe it's just luck, but I think that the method works pretty well. The main idea is just to apply some logical analysis to the problem, not bringing any ready made solution but creating a solution together with the client. It seems very simple if I describe it like that, and indeed it is. The most simple things might not be the most difficult, but they can certainly be very effective.

The cafe has been running for a few months now, and is clearly as popular as ever. Do you think you can maintain the same amount of interest over a long stretch of time?

Absolutely, I believe it can even get better! I am sure that the interest will grow as it's already growing, and for a very simple reason. I have been in the international community of philosophical practice for many years now, and I know a lot of colleagues that do the same thing all around the world. Roxana Kreimer in Argentina, Carmen Zavala in Chile, Young E. Rhee in South Korea and so on. They all started with a small group and reached 100-150 people per week in a few years. Now the question is: do I think that Wrocław will react in the same way as Buenos Aires or Paris? I think that Wrocław will react even better because it is a very young and sparkling city, one that's full of life. The people here seem very interested in discovering and practicing new and engaging ways to improve self-knowledge and connect with other people.

Kino Nowy Horizonty is the venue for cafe on Saturday. Wrocław Uncut are big fans of the ambitious plans KNH have for the future, and we imagine you are too. Would you recommend people come here to see their movies instead of going to a commercial multiplex?

That's a bit of a leading question, isn't it? Of course yes – I am a big fan of Roman Gutek, and I organize the café at KNH because I feel a strong connection with their idea of cinema: not merely a movie in a box but a real life space with good, fresh food, real Italian coffee, tables to study, chess boards and other board games. I've organized the FilosoFestival in Florence for 7 years and it's 3 days have a very similar feeling to this, so to see something like that open all year looks like a dream come true! 😊

Lastly, any guesses for the first topic on the agenda on Saturday?

I really have no clues, and that's the best part of my job: like an archaeologist of the soul, I never know what I am going to find, but I can always be already sure that it's going to be something shining and magnificent.

Thanks for talking to us Guido, we wish you all the best!

You can find the full event info for this Saturday's Cafe [here](#), and for more info on Guido and what he does for

a living, you can check out his website at: <http://guidogiacomogattai.com>.