Institut International de Philosophie
International Institute of Philosophy

Problèmes Philosophiques d'Aujourd'hui

Tome 2
Langage, Sens, Interprétation

par les soins de
GUTTORM FLØISTAD
Université d'Oslo

KLUWER ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK, BOSTON, DORDRECHT, LONDON, MOSCOW

Philosophical Problems Today

Volume 2
Language, Meaning, Interpretation

edited by
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eBook ISBN: 1-4020-2195-X
Print ISBN: 1-4020-2194-1

Created in the United States of America

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PREFACE

Philosophical Problems Today is a new series of publications from the Institut international de philosophie. It follows upon *Contemporary Philosophy,* a series presenting philosophical research in various world cultures and so far published in eight volumes : Volumes 1-4 on European Philosophy, Volume 5 on African Philosophy, Volume 6 on Medieval Philosophy (Parts 1 and 2), Volume 7 on Asian Philosophy, and Volume 8 on Latin American Philosophy. Two future volumes dealing with Aesthetics and Philosophy of Religion are in preparation.

The new series is based on a different concept. Each volume consists as a rule of five articles or more. The articles are extensive reviews and discussions of topical philosophical problems and offer always some original contributions. The articles in the new series represent different philosophical traditions and may thus contribute to cross-cultural communication.

The languages of this new series are, as in the previous series English, French and German. Each volume should, as a rule, contain contributions from different philosophical cultures. Usually, the articles contain a bibliography selected by the author.

I am most grateful to the Secretariat of the Institut international de philosophie, especially Catherine Champniers. They have greatly helped in the preparation of the volume. The Secretariat has also been largely responsible for the contact with UNESCO and the publisher.

I also want to thank the authors, whose contributions have made it possible to complete the second volume of the new Series.

Guttorm FLØISTAD,
University of Oslo,
October 2003.

INTRODUCTION

Guttorm FLØISTAD

The present volume contains articles on problems pervading most philosophical traditions. They also deal with the future of philosophy. Most philosophers think that the future of their subject has never been as promising as now. Some philosophers are more pessimistic. They think that philosophy, especially professional philosophy in academic institutions, doesn't seem to make much progress and has in addition isolated itself from society at large. Some even question the notion of rationality in European culture and science.

Passmore writes on the variety of contemporary concepts of philosophy both in Europe, the United States, and to some extent in Africa and Asia. Earlier stages of philosophy, dominated by discussions between idealists, realists and pragmatists, have been left behind and replaced by a steady growth in professionalism in analytical philosophy. At the same time a number of other disciplines emerged inside and outside academic institutions, especially phenomenology, hermeneutical philosophy, non-analytical philosophy of religion, radical feminist philosophy, ethnophilosophy and post-modernism. No wonder, then, that Passmore, in view of the complexity of contemporary philosophy and of earlier debates, begins by observing that so far not a single philosophical proposition has ever won universal acceptance. This state of affairs together with the fact that the increasing professional character of analytical philosophy has led to cultural isolation and lack of clear progress, has caused some pessimism in view of the future of philosophy. Philosophers now « spend so much time fortifying their defences against critics » that it hampers progress.

However, most of the philosophers working in some branch of analytical philosophy are solely concerned with their profession and pay little attention to such criticism. And from inside the philosophical scene appears livelier than ever before. Disagreement « is a sign of vitality » (Feyerabend).

Passmore especially reviews and discusses the relation of philosophy to science and to mathematics and logic, the notion of applied

philosophy and philosophy outside the West, including India and some African countries. He concludes with a section on the end of philosophy.

The « intellectual interplay » between philosophy and science concerns a cluster of problems, for instance space and time, evolutionary theory, quantum mechanics, the character of scientific activity and the notorious mind-body problem. The latter calls for an interplay between philosophy and psychology, neuro-physiology and computer scientists. Mathematical logic is often entirely detached from philosophy, but has now returned « to the fold » as an object of criticism and « renovation ».

Traditionally, philosophical systems have not only presented an ontology and a theory of knowledge, they have also at the same time been applied philosophy, that is, ethics. Knowledge has by itself moral significance. It may therefore be disappointing to listen to A.J. Ayer's statements that it is a complete mistake for anyone to look to moral philosophy for moral guidance. A British sociologist offers little comfort either, maintaining that for 50 years none has expected philosophy to be useful. However, it is a recent fact that philosophers are members of committees for ethics, dealing with abortion, euthanasia, animal welfare, environmental preservation, and for business practice. It is nevertheless uncertain, according to Passmore, what the contribution philosophers can give *qua* philosophers (apart from analysing concepts and clarifying statements).

Other continents like Asia and Africa are to a great extent influenced by Western types of philosophy. Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, and analytical philosophy are prominent. Despite the considerable influence from the West, quite a few of the Asian countries, especially India, have developed philosophical thoughts and systems deeply rooted in their own religious and moral philosophical traditions. In Africa ethnophilosophy, that is, philosophy based on traditional African cultures, flourishes. From the point of view of Western analytical philosophy these systems of thoughts would hardly count as philosophy. The opposite would probably also be maintained. Analytical philosophy does not produce « wisdom ».

Thoughts of a possible end of philosophy among some philosophers appear to have a least three sources, the disillusionment about the present outcome of analytical philosophy, the impossibility of fulfilling the dream of finding an unquestionable foundation for knowledge and connected with this, the end of the philosophy of Being (Heidegger).

Others think that it is definitely too early to introduce « funeral rites » (Derrida). On the contrary, the present scenario of philosophy is richer and more promising that ever before (Hector Neri Castañeda). Passmore, the author of *The Perfectibility of Man,* reminds us, though, of

Rorty's saying that philosophy should not forget one of its major traditional tasks, to contribute to the education of the public. Or in the even stronger words of Abraham Kaplan : the task of philosophy is to provide values according to which people can live.

That present day philosophy is immensely productive is evident from the contributions by *Granger* and *Ladrière*. They write on closely related topics. Granger on the various approaches in the philosophy of language, whereas Ladrière focuses on the philosophy of meaning. In their reviews and discussions they take into account not only analytical approaches including semantics and semiotics, but also philosophy of science, mathematical logic, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and some aspects of philosophical anthropology and aesthetics.

Granger traces the sources of contemporary philosophy of language back to Frege, Husserl, Russell, Carnap, and Wittgenstein. From these sources whole clusters of problems have arisen. In the philosophy of symbolism, Granger reviews and discusses three types of problems, the problem of developing a logico-mathematical system, of a formalization of the natural languages and the problem of determining and explaining meaning in language. The latter problem appears to be a crux in philosophy in general. Does language have a priority over thought, or thought over language, (Dummett) is just one out on many relevant questions. Granger reviews three well-known areas, philosophy of intentionality (phenomenology), the relation of meaning and reference and the question how linguistic acts can be explained, whether intentionally or causally. Some philosophers think that they are quite different types of explanation (e.g. von Wright), whereas others think that physical and mental acts are identical and should be explained causally (Davidson).

Philosophy of symbolism points to a broader area than logic and mathematics. It points to aesthetics. Meaning is a complex notion, also involving an account of symbols in terms of myths and structural analysis (Lévi-Strauss, Goodman). Granger points to Ricœur, who focuses on two closely related aspects of language and linguistic meaning, the semantic and the pragmatic aspect. Ricœur also calls for a more « militant hermeneutics » requiring a reinscription of theories of texts, of interpretation and explications, into a theory of action. Ricœur has himself contributed to this project. Habermas' idea of communicative action may certainly also be applied to texts.

The problem of language and meaning is by no means exhausted by this review. Any analysis of meaning should take into account both experiences and communication, in addition to the rules constitutive of use of language. Meaning somehow unifies the elements constitutive of

experience : the objects, the situation and the events together with man and language. Experience is thus essentially relational.

This relational character of experiences raises several questions : how to specify the truth condition for a phrase, and : are meaning conditions independent of the truth conditions ? And how are meaning and values interrelated ? In trying to answer these questions language plays of course an important role. Language is at once both the original domain of objectivity and the possibility of communication, of man's « pragmatic competence ».

Ladrière deals with these and other related problems in two steps, in a *first* step from the perspectives of phenomenology (Husserl and Heidegger) and analytical philosophy (starting as did Granger, with Frege and Wittgenstein), and in a *second* step from the perspectives of semantics and hermeneutics. It goes without saying that the various perspectives or approaches are closely interrelated to the effect that the exposition often « jumps » from one field of inquiry to another. Such interdisciplinary inquiries are a most promising challenge to present-day philosophy. It follows from the interdisciplinary notion of meaning.

An elucidation of the notion of meaning requires an analysis of the notion of understanding and interpretation and of related concepts such as significance, explanation, intentionality, and communication (V. Parret, Bouveresse, Rosenberg, de Gelder, Zaslawsky). Other notions that need to be taken into account in an explanation of meaning are game-theoretical semantics, involving the distinction between abstract meaning and strategic meaning (Hintikka) and the semantics of attitudes (introduced by Jon Barwise and John Perry). Apel (inspired by Peirce, Heidegger and Habermas) calls for a transcendental analysis of meaning and language and introduces a transcendental semiotics, pragmatics and hermeneutics.

Between meaning and significance Ladrière observes a double mediation, clearly inspired by hermeneutics : the signification articulates the meaning of a phrase. On the other hand, it is the context of meaning, or the meaning horizon, which transmit the signification. Thus semantics and hermeneutics both serve to elucidate the congruence between meaning and significance.

In these analyses one should not forget that the concrete reality of language is communication or interlocution. Communication is based on at least a partially shared world of experiences (a lifeworld). A person's existence is primarily coexistence. The same holds true in communication with a text. A text is a manifestation of a world (Ricœur). Thus semantics and hermeneutics are working on the same project.

Meaning remains in any case a paradoxical entity. It cannot be discussed without being used. That is, meaning cannot be made an object

for investigation independent of the inquiry. Meaning is constitutive of our consciousness, of the *lumen naturale.* As such it is always presupposed as well as ahead of any specific inquiry. That is to say, meaning is not only determined by the object to which it refers, it is also determined by the meaning horizon. Meaning is in an important sense historical. Hermeneutics is after all a theory of the transmission of historical meaning. And whatever the achievements of Heidegger's, phenomenology and philosophy of Being, it has clearly shown the historical character of the human being or *Dasein.*

This means, I take it, that the history of philosophy is not only a training area for philosophers ; it presents in itself a rich variety of problems and challenges for contemporary philosophy. Witness the contributions by Hintikka, Hartnack, Wiehl, Moutsopoulos, Huber, and Ströker.

The Frege-Russell ambiguity thesis and its historical origin is the topic of *Hintikka*'s paper. The thesis concerns the meaning of verbs for being « like *is* or the ancient Greek *estin* ». They are certainly used in different ways in different contexts. The ambiguity thesis holds that the variety of meaning of *is* is not primarily context-dependent, but inherent in *is* itself.

The thesis distinguishes between four different meanings :

the is of predication (the copula)

the is of existence

the is of identity, and

the is of subsumption.

The first-order logic takes care of all meanings. The existential qualifier ($\exists x$) covers the is of existence, the is of predication is expressed by juxtaposition, the = takes care of the is of identity, whereas a general conditional accounts for the is of subsumption. Anyone who is using first-order logic as a framework of semantic representation is in fact accepting the ambiguity of verbs like is. This is adopted by nearly all logicians – although Hintikka holds, in another publication, that a closer look into the logic of the natural and formal language shows that the ambiguity may be avoided.

In his article Hintikka focuses on the genesis of the ambiguity theses, mainly with respect to the notion of identity. The name that immediately comes to mind is Aristotle. The story of the logical behaviour of verbs begins with him. He recognized the Frege-Russell distinction, but did not consider it as an ambiguity. The trouble is, however, that the various senses of *einai* show different logical behaviour. The identity sense, for instance, is transitive, whereas the predicative sense is not. Aristotle also distinguishes between numerical identity and identity in species – although the former plays no part in his

syllogistic theory. He is, however, unable, from his premisses, to express « numerical identity of classes ».

Some of the difficulties involved in Aristotle's position are discussed by a number of modern logicians, including Frege and Russell. Hintikka especially reviews the position of Frege, Wittgenstein and Kripke. They all advanced interesting proposals for the solution of the is of identity, but they all failed. Frege relied on his sense-reference distinction in his logic and failed to introduce the notion of functional dependency and functional instantiation. Wittgenstein simply tried to solve the problem by eliminating the notion of identity. And he too did not look to the notion of functional dependency for help. The weakness in Kripke's account of identity is his view of variables of quantification. They have no descriptive content, but may be replaced by names that directly refer to some bearer. Even if this replacement did work, it would not solve the problem. What is needed, also to get both Wittgenstein and Kripke right, according to Hintikka, is to work out an identification system that is independent of any reference system.

That ontology and language have bearing upon one another is obvious. How the relationship is to be determined is an issue of long standing. An explanation in terms of correspondence and reference is clearly incomplete as is shown by recent discussion (e.g. Searle and Heidegger). *Hartnack* enlarges the context of discussion by pointing to certain features in the history of ontology. Is ontology a theory of some permanent being or of something permanently becoming ?

Aristotle and Hegel are key names. Aristotle's ontology as a theory of becoming *and* being solves a contradiction inherent in pre-Socratic theories, between Heraklit and Parmenides, between a theory of being as continually becoming and of being as permanently being what it is, respectively. Aristotle solves this ontological inconsistency by pointing out that becoming of an entity is perfectly compatible with the entity being the same. In the organic world it is most evident: the phenomenon growth takes care of both dimensions, becoming and being the same. Later Christianity, Cartesian rationalism and empirical epistemologies distorted this original ontological insight. Philosophy had to wait until Hegel for a proper restoration and deepening of the Aristotelian view.

With respect to language this means, according to Hegel, that a language is subject to being and becoming. It remains the same in different usages. There are many different languages and they are each used in different ways. What remains the same is a logical system of categories. In a surface sense we may be said to live in different worlds. But that possibility arises on the ground that we, in a deeper logical sense, are living in the same world. It is thus no contradiction to maintain

that language is at the same time both permanent and continually changing.

By comparing Gadamer and Adorno, Reiner *Wiehl* offers a contribution to our reflection on aesthetics. He first points out a number of similarities between the two aesthetic theories and then goes on to show that, despite the similarities, the differences and (assumed) disagreements are considerable.

The common framework of the philosophers is obvious – they both speak of the truth of art, of an aesthetic experience, of the historicity of art, and they both refer to Hegel's aesthetics as an important source of inspiration. But this common framework has no definite meaning. For what is truth of art ? Truth in this context is not a prepositional truth. It is rather a property of aesthetic experience. But what does it mean to have (or make) a true experience of art ? Gadamer, according to Wiehl, answers in terms of a perfect interpretation of a piece of art (or a text). The experience inherent in an interpretation that reaches perfection (i.e. a complete coherence of all parts (motives, colours, sentences) may be called true. As any piece of art, classical and modern, allows for an indefinite number of interpretations, the art object itself transcends all interpretations. Gadamer obviously has in mind that true interpretations of the past are important contributions to the *sensus communis* of a society.

Not so in Adorno. He speaks of an authentic piece of art as showing the complexity of present-day society. Society finds itself reflected to some extent in the art objects. And the truth of a piece of art lies in the experience of its imperfection.

Hegel's philosophy of art enters into Adorno's and Gadamer's philosophy in that the truth of art is historical. Every authentic piece of art reflects a certain stage in the cultural development. To Gadamer this presents no difficulty. Interpretations of objects of art (literature) may reach perfection, be it classical or modern. To Adorno art changes from classical to modern to avant-garde, often being separated from the social and political reality. The way later stages of art reflect reality may be even more imperfect – as is the truth of our experience of it.

The relation of immanence and transcendence is the topic of *Moutsopoulos'* contribution. They are at the same time opposed to each other and complementary. Immanent is everything that is present in our consciousness. Transcendent is what is beyond, out of reach for the human mind. In archaic thought the transcendent is supranatural, it is even regarded as the realm of the irrational. It is on the epistemological level that two phenomena appear as opposites and complementary to each other. Plato formulated a doctrine of reminiscence to the effect that

the realm of ideas is something transcendental, but nevertheless to some extent, present in the human mind, that is immanent.

At first sight, this appears paradoxical. For how can something transcendent at the same time be immanent without losing its transcendental character ?

To assume as Moutsopoulos does, a dialectical relationship between the immanent and the transcendent makes sense. Husserl's view on the intentionality of consciousness offers no sufficient explanation, because an intentional act appears too static. Consciousness is on the contrary an existential or living entity that continually stretches out, « transcending » all object-directed intentional acts.

The source of this type of transcendence Moutsopoulos finds in the freedom of the mind. Freedom requires actualisation, and in its actualisation the transcendence becomes immanent in consciousness.

Moutsopoulos illustrates his point by a critical comment on Sartre's well-known dictum « my existence is my freedom » (mon existence, c'est ma liberté). This cannot simply be an equation. It must rather mean that freedom is experienced as the prime quality of consciousness. Freedom does not explain its own origin. Its origin is the consciousness. And in the freedom of our consciousness the relation of immanence and transcendence may be conceived as dialectic. In our freedom the transcendence imposes itself on the immanence.

This distinction between permanence and change, as mentioned earlier, is well known, in a wider sense, from the history of philosophy in general. It refers in fact to the fundamental problems in metaphysical systems. It is the problem of the One and the many, of what exists absolutely without relation to anything else, and what exists relatively, that is, in relation to something else. It is the distinction between what is *causa sui* and complete and what is caused by other things and therefore by itself incomplete.

We often say today that we are living in a plurality of worlds. On one interpretation this means that we, or most societies today, are multicultural. This applies especially to values. Values are relatively valid. What we rarely bear in mind is that a notion like relativity – and this is an elementary lesson from dialectics from Plato to Hegel and philosophical hermeneutics – gets its meaning from the opposite, the Absolute.

In the history of Western philosophy it turns out that the notion of the Absolute is by no means permanent. The notion is historically conditioned. *Huber* outlines and discusses the change of the notion in the various epochs up to our time.

The history of the problem of the Absolute develops from the Greeks and onwards in two directions. On the one hand it concerns the

logical-ontological structure of being, or how what we call reality is constituted. It is the history from Parmenides to our time, *via* Plato and Aristotle. On the other hand it concerns the question of ethics, and the ethical foundation of actions. In Plato those two directions are indistinguishable. Knowledge or rather insight is by itself morally significant. Knowledge offers sufficient guidance for action. Oneness and goodness go together.

It is just this unity of ontology and ethics that does not survive the influence of the natural sciences from the Renaissance onwards. Kant distinguishes between knowledge and ethics and is only able to preserve the ethical absolute, the categorical imperative. Reality is not seen as constituted by the One, or substance, or God. It is constituted by the categories of the human mind. What remains after Kant is the (transcendental) « I » in Fichte, a rather poor concept compared with earlier conceptions of the Absolute.

That ethical values today by most people and certainly to most philosophers are seen as relatively valid does not mean that the absolute in all respects has disappeared, neither in the ontological sense, nor in the ethical. The mere notion of relativity is by itself a reminiscence of the distinction between the absolute and the relative. The fact that we no longer are able to form a clear notion of it does not mean that it in no way exists.

The idea that Being as well as ethical absolute principles historically is said to be somehow present in things and actions as their unifying dimension, still makes sense. Things as well as actions have something in common ; something that transcends things and actions and at the same time is immanent in them. They partake in something more comprehensive, in « Being » : Huber, obviously inspired by Heidegger, recurs to this terminology, and speaks of the Absolute as « presens » (*Anwesenheit*). Human being continually transcends itself and the world that belongs to him. And in this transcending character of man's own being, its relativity, lies also the possibility of encountering a transcendent being.

It goes without saying that this knowledge of the absolute is not knowledge in any usual sense. It is what is sometimes called *experiential* knowledge (Ch. Taylor) or in Huber's words, in *der denkenden Erfahrung*. In this existential or experiential knowledge, man is no spectator. He is part of the « cognitive » process and thus continually transformed, thus becoming increasingly aware of the finitude and limitation of his own being.

It is doubtful whether professional philosophy ever will have access to this experiential or existential insight. The professional philosopher keeps himself programmatically as it were, outside the

cognitive activity. The only way it seems to experience the absolute, its *presens* in our existence, is a long-time study of the history of philosophy. Metaphysical systems in particular are throughout a manifestation of man's deepest experiential knowledge.

Edmund Husserl purports to write a sense-history of European culture in order to understand and correct the modern type of rationality in our science and culture. Elisabeth *Ströker* gives a fine and critical presentation of Husserl's last major work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology.* (It is also her last work finished just before her death 2001). The modern rationality has created a crisis in both science and culture because it alienates man both from nature and society. Husserl does not share the pessimism of Oswald Spengler and other German philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. He strongly believes that the European culture and science are strong enough to overcome the « decline ». The way to do it, Husserl thought, was to show the origin of both science and culture in man's subjectivity. Every culture and every science could only have become what they are through the constitution of them in human consciousness. These intentional constitutions resulted in a variety of ideas.

Now, any culture and science are historical products. Husserl, Ströker shows, therefore thought is necessary to go back to the beginning in Greek science and philosophy. From them we can learn to distinguish between *doxa* or mere opinions and *epistema* or true knowledge, and the method by which we would arrive at true knowledge. True knowledge for the Greeks included also knowledge of the just and the good.

Husserl did not manage to work out his sense-history. He thought, however, that he by a reconstructing of the notions of rationality and the variety of cultural expressions through the ages would be able to restore a more encompassing notion of rationality, unifying man, culture and nature.

He died (1938) just before the outbreak of World War II with a strong belief in the inner strength of our science and culture.

CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTS OF PHILOSOPHY

John A. PASSMORE

There is not a single philosophical proposition which, except for relatively short periods of time in particular circles in particular countries, has won universal acceptance. This is equally true of propositions *about* philosophy – about its subject-matter, its methods, its objectives. Are these two facts, constantly invoked by internal or external critics of philosophy, of any real consequence ?

There are now those who would deny that they are. Philosophical systems, they would say, are nothing more than elaborate fictions. What is called « disagreement » is, on this view, simply « difference ». We should welcome it, just as we welcome the differences between *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot.* If we criticise particular philosophers it should not be on the ground that they are mistaken, but simply as lacking originality, craftsmanship, imagination, style. This one might call the « aesthetic » response to philosophical disagreement. A second response is historicist. Philosophers, it is then said, simply reflect the culture in which they live. Since there are divergent streams in any culture and even more obviously in cultures over space and time, it is not in the least surprising that philosophers disagree ; if they did not do so, they would not be exercising their proper, reflective, social function.

Very few philosophers, however, would be happy with either of these responses. They are far from seeing themselves either as exceptionally abstract fiction writers or as museum specimens for sociologically-minded historians, a view which inevitably involves an absolute relativism. They are hoping to answer, or at the very least to clarify, consequential questions. Yet, just for this reason, they cannot be wholly complacent about the extent of philosophical disagreement.

Admittedly, philosophers can point to the fact that disagreements persist over considerable periods of time even in the physical sciences, as about cosmological issues or the mechanisms of evolution or the causes of dinosaur extinction. But neither in the natural sciences nor even in such controversial areas of the humanities as archeology or history could one plausibly assert, as I began by doing, that « nothing at all has been finally settled ». No doubt, at any given time there are

Guttorm Fløistad (ed.), Language, Meaning, Interpretation, 11-44.

philosophers who would deny this, confident that they or some philosopher to whom they stand in the relation of a disciple have finally decided some particular issue ; one might say, even, that their thinking thus is what keeps philosophy going. But if not so long ago it seemed reasonable to assert that, anyhow, no one would ever again defend the ontological argument or the doctrine of representative perception, that so far philosophy makes progress, one could not now make even these limited claims.

This certainly does not demonstrate that it is impossible in principle to establish with at least general, even if not wholly universal, agreement any philosophical proposition whatsoever. Indeed to establish that would itself be to demonstrate the truth of a philosophical proposition and one which could only be demonstrated by making use of philosophical premises. But it is scarcely surprising that many philosophers should be troubled by the extent of philosophical disagreement, and should set out either to find a way of securing agreement – or at the very least to try to account for disagreement – in a way that does not make philosophy a wholly nugatory inquiry.

Of course, there are other philosophers who do not let their sleep be troubled by worries about what philosophing is. They learn to philosophise in particular institutions in particular countries ; they practise philosophy, with no qualms, as it is practised in a particular tradition, with its own unquestioned criteria of success and failure. That is just as well. A period when, as F. Alquié wrote in his *Signification de la Philosophie* (1971), « the energy of philosophers is almost wholly devoted to arguing about the nature of philosophy » is unlikely to be a philosophically fruitful one. But circumstances can arise in which the question has to be faced who counts as being a philosopher and what as philosophy.

It may, for example, have to be decided whether particular persons are to be included in a philosophical dictionary, not because their ability is questioned but because doubts are felt about whether that achievement is in philosophy rather than in theology or sociology or lay preaching. Or administrative disputes, often very bitter, can arise about whether a particular course of studies is suitable for offering within a philosophy department. Or philosophers may find themselves confronted by colleagues or government officials who, particularly in these financially straitened and utility-driven days, have to be persuaded that philosophy is something more than an elaborate intellectual game, undeserving of public support.

As Julia Kristeva has remarked: « In the redistribution of modern discourses, it is philosophy that comes out as necessarily losing ». In England philosophy departments have been closed down ;

in France Claude Lefort has told us that philosophy is « on its way to losing its credit altogether » as « an enterprise both chimerical and defunct » (Montefiore, 1982). So philosophers can be compelled by external pressures to face questions about philosophy's subject-matter, its objectives.

Our principal concern, however, is with a different class of cases when philosophers themselves, for internal reasons, are deeply dissatisfied with what they see as the lack of progress in philosophy. They come to believe that this is because philosophers have been working with erroneous ideas about what the aim of philosophy is or how it ought to be conducted or what kinds of questions it can profitably take up and that philosophy will make no progress unless it reforms itself in these respects. There is novelty in such dissatisfaction with the philosophical *statu quo,* issuing in proposals for change which will at last set philosophy on a progressive course – Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Brentano, Husserl, Carnap, are notorious, but by no means the sole, exemplars. The development of science, first natural, then social, particularly gave rise to a search for a province philosophy could still claim to rule and a method peculiarly its own. In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, a number of new factors have come into operation which complicate this perennial quest for philosophy in a new key.

The first is the attempt totally to professionalise philosophy ; the second is fresh relationships between philosophy, mathematics, logic and science ; the third is the rise of « applied » philosophy ; the fourth is the emergence of attacks on philosophical Occidentalism ; the fifth is the growth of radical feminism ; the sixth is the emergence of doctrines about « the end of philosophy ». By no means all philosophers are disturbed by these phenomena ; many work away in their chosen field without paying any attention to them, but they provoke others into views about philosophy and its methods which are largely peculiar to the last few decades.

PROFESSIONALISAT1ON

In order to avoid controversy about the nature and limits of artistic endeavour, a « work of art » is now sometimes defined as anything accepted as such by « the Art-world ». In the same spirit, philosophers, tired of disputes about the nature of philosophy, sometimes define it as what is accepted as such by « the philosophical world ». But what does this mean ? Consider the elucidation offered, although not finally accepted, in *The Institution of Philosophy* (Cohen and Dascal, 1989) :

> « Philosophers are individuals employed by philosophy departments at reputable learning institutions, who read (and eventually publish in) prestigious philosophical journals, participate in philosophical conventions and so on. Similarly a philosophical text is a piece of discourse produced *qua* exercise of one of the institutionally acknowledged forms of philosophising, or else a piece not so produced but recognised as of philosophical value by philosophers ».

On the face of it this is preposterous, instantly dismissable as a definition. But it is worth considering, all the same, as an introduction to the unprecedented condition of philosophy in those countries where such a definition could be considered worthy of serious consideration, especially the United States.

Why do I call it preposterous ? Because it would compel us to conclude that what have always been regarded as the great philosophers of the past are improperly so described. For the most part, the Founding Fathers of modern philosophy were not « employed by philosophy departments in reputable learning institutions » – this is true of Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz. Not only that, they directed, Leibniz apart, their controversial energies against those who were thus employed, the « school men ». They neither read nor published in « prestigious philosophical journals », for there were no such journals. Neither, for the same reason, did they « participate in philosophical conventions ». At most they corresponded with one another. As for the « institutionally acknowledged forms of philosophising », they rebelled against these, too, seeking to introduce quite new methods. Even in our century, Russell when he published *Principia Mathematica,* Wittgenstein when he wrote his *Tractatus,* were not University teachers and neither work was orthodox in its form. In both France and England, not until the later decades of the nineteenth century did the Universities become, even, the principal centres for philosophising ; neither Mill nor Maine de Biran was a University teacher. And not until 1876 did either country have a philosophical journal. Even then, they were self-described as journals of psychology as well as philosophy.

Then how could any such definition be taken seriously, at least in the United States ? There philosophy, as distinct from wisdom, has for long, Peirce apart, been centred in Universities. Furthermore, over the protests of William James, the United States set up, decades earlier than such English speaking countries as England and Australia, graduate schools which set out to professionalise philosophers. More than that,

however, many philosophers would now contend that the definition is not at all preposterous if it is read as a contemporary definition of contemporary philosophers. That it does not apply to past philosophers is, in their eyes, irrelevant; only philosophy as it now is should be of any concern to contemporary philosophers. There is no longer room, they would add, for that looseness of structure which enabled so many « outsiders » to make crucial contributions to philosophy and is often regarded, therefore, as a virtue.

How is this neglect of past philosophers, as now irrelevant, justified ? On standard historicist grounds. « Their problems », Gilbert Harman once remarked, « are not our problems » – a view, incidentally, which no one but an historian of philosophy is in any position to confirm or disprove. On this view, if we were to define philosophy in terms of its concern with a particular set of problems, just as much as on the institutional definition, it would apply only to present day philosophers, not to earlier philosophers, as they will have confronted not these, but different, problems. Progress, on this view, consists not in finding solutions but in raising new problems.

One advantage that might be claimed for such a dismissal of the past is that it offers a means of replying to certain objections which scientists sometimes raise against philosophy, that it has still not answered the questions which Plato asked and that it argues with long dead philosophers, presenting their views as being still worthy of consideration. For the first objection disappears if the problems philosophers now face are in fact totally different from the problems Plato faced and the second one goes if philosophers no longer cite philosophers from past times. And it is indeed true that although American-style articles, even very short ones, now usually contain long lists of references, these very frequently do not go back in time much further than five years, citing only the most up-to-date contributions to the contemporary controversies in which their articles are engaged. (The sheer volume of publications makes this reaction easy to comprehend as does the lack of computerised bibliographies beyond the last decade). Should we simply say, then : « Substantially, philosophy is now a wholly new subject and an institutional definition of philosophers gives a clear indication of who now counts as such » ?

Let us first ask ourselves why these striking changes in philosophical style have occurred. Three factors are particularly important : the rise of analytic philosophy, the expansion of universities, the speeding up of international communications. Analytic philosophy comes in various guises, sometimes attempting, as in the case of Carnap, large-scale constructions. But Bertrand Russell's description in our *Knowledge of the External World* (1914) of « the

new spirit in philosophy » as « consisting in the substitution of piecemeal, detailed and verifiable results for large untested generalities recommended only by a certain appeal to the imagination » is perhaps the best description of the style of analytic philosophising which now generally, although by no means universally, prevails in many different countries. Even large works are meticulous in their detail, closely argued throughout.

Analytical philosophising, however, must now be taken to include the minute examination of other people's « piecemeal » results by bringing forward counter-examples and pointing to logical gaps – or perhaps a similarly minute examination of someone else's criticism of the piecemeal results. A tremendous wave of philosophical activity can thus be generated by a single short article.

What the piecemeal approach seems to suggest, then, is the possibility of philosophical teamwork in which a large number of philosophers can make a small individual contribution to the solution of a large problem, so that generalisations are « recommended », not by the imagination, but by having passed through a great number of critical minds, examining every argument for and against the detailed particulars, every example or counter-example, in the minutest of fashions, forging it in the fire of controversies.

The speeding up of communications makes it possible for this kind of cooperation to be conducted on an international scale wherever analytical philosophy is practised, whether in journal articles, or in the conferences and seminars where such articles are delivered as papers or even in computerised electronic mail discussions. Philosophical discussion of the analytic sort, one might therefore say, is across space if only to a very limited degree across time.

That the philosopher finds himself surrounded by so many like-minded philosophers is a source of confidence. As Rüdiger Bubner has put it :

> « One can play down the question of the epistemological status of philosophical theories by simply pursuing what everyone is pursuing whether it be linguistic analysis or logic or theory of science. One then shares with everyone else the conviction of the importance of this pursuit which even seems well-founded so long as this conviction is everyone's conviction » (Bubner, 1981).

Admittedly it is far from being true that all analytic philosophers form part of a single network. Philosophy has traditionally been divided into less than a dozen segments – in the earlier decades of the twentieth

century only eight or so – and any particular philosopher would normally contribute to something like half of them, as philosophers otherwise so different as James, Bradley, Moore, Russell, Dewey, Croce, Bergson all did.

In contrast, Nicholas Rescher, from whom these statistics have been taken, distinguishes in the contemporary world some forty fields and goes on to distinguish six main, further subdividable, fields within one such a section, logic. No one would be surprised to find a contemporary philosopher devoting a lifetime to one of these sub-sections, developing detail, whereas philosophers had normally been notorious for the range of their generalisations. There are, of course, still analytically-inclined philosophers who, like Rescher himself, contribute to a variety of fields. But they are for the most part – again like Rescher – from an older generation. In spite of this specialisation, once more in the manner of normal science, the number of philosophers devoted to any one speciality is, by historical standards, exceptionally large. There is no risk that they will lose confidence as a result of intellectual loneliness.

There are now, then, thousands of philosophers, talented, highly trained, confident of their methods, doing exactly what Russell said they should do and institutionally compelled to publish. Is this to be the golden age when, at last, philosophers will have secured general agreement, comparable to the degree of agreement achieved by physical scientists, that they have solved the philosophical problems recognised by their contemporaries as such ? Older philosophers may often doubt this. A far from hostile Sidney Hook is not alone in judging that « Only the style of thinking has changed. It has become more scientific without the fruits of science... It has greater depth, complexity and subtlety of analysis and rigour of argument. But this has not diminished disagreement. It has preserved and intensified it » (Bontempo, 1975).

Perhaps as a member of an older generation he is not, on historicist grounds, permitted to judge. But there is a distinct note of disillusionment in Hilary Putnam's later writings, which comes to a head in his significantly titled *Renewing Philosophy* (1993), as in the logician Hao Wang's *Beyond Analytic Philosophy* (1986). This is equally striking in Simon Blackburn's « Can Philosophy exist ? » with its detailed internal critique of analytical philosophy and its end-of-the-millenium Sisyphean conclusion. « Perhaps we are condemned to enact a perpetual tragedy : philosophical reflection must be practised, therefore it is practised, therefore it can be practised. But except in the small, not successfully, at least, not if there is a point to the process outside itself » (RP, 1993). Such pessimism is, of course, by no means

universal. But Blackburn's final remarks are no doubt accentuated by the failure of analytical philosophy to make any contact with the general culture of our time. This may be partly because philosophers now spend so much of their time fortifying their defences not only against actual but potential critics that the major drive of their work is disguised.

This section has concentrated on « analytical philosophy », an expression which covers, of course, a variety of different philosophical approaches, some of which, like « ordinary language » therapeutic philosophy, are now scarcely ever practised. That concentration reflects the fact that intense professionalisation, leading to institutional definitions of philosophy, is in this area most marked. But it disguises the weakest point in institutional definitions, the fact that everywhere analytical philosophy now exists philosophy is divided by the intellectual equivalent of a Berlin Wall, almost as difficult for philosophers to penetrate as that Wall was for Germans. That is no longer, so far as it ever was, a Wall between « Anglo-Saxon » and « Continental » philosophers ; it now exists wherever philosophy is practised. On the one side dwell analytical philosophers, on the other side, as was revealed in the battle for control of the American Philosophical Association, theologians, phenomenologists, post-modernists, radical-feminists, hermeneutical philosophers and so on. It is true that, as in the case of the Norwegian D. Føllesdal and the Finnish G.H. von Wright, attempts have been made to link analytic philosophising with in the first case, Husserlian phenomenology and, in the second case, Gadamer's hermeneutics – as, indeed, Gadamer himself partly does – but when it comes to uniting analytic philosophy and post-modernism, vigorous philosophical activities with doctrines about the death of philosophy, the task is formidable to the point of impossibility, although, as we shall see, Richard Rorty picks out some elements from each.

This is by no means the first time, shocking as Gilbert Ryle took it to be, that philosophers have « taken sides » in philosophy. In the early years of the twentieth century, just about every philosophical periodical was a place for disputes between Idealists, Realists, and Pragmatists. But they belonged to the same associations, respected one another, read one another, argued with one another. In the modern world, the debate on speech-acts between Derrida and John Searle is a very rare example of intellectual contact, of any sort, between what are normally quite different worlds, certainly not in agreement about who were the great twentieth century philosophers, or even their great predecessors, or about what counts as a « prestigious journal ». From that point of view an institutional definition is now totally

inappropriate, unless we are prepared to say, as admittedly some would, that only those who live on their side of the Wall count as being philosophers.

The institutional definition would also exclude those now numerous individuals who teach in departments which are labelled « philosophy », write in journals which describe themselves as being « philosophical » journals, without ever finding their way into « prestigious » journals. At most, then, it could demarcate that class of persons who are recognised by the established figures on one side of the Wall as being fit to be published in the philosophical journals in which those established philosophers write and as respectable candidates for posts in the universities where they teach from those many others who call themselves philosophers and are so described by the journals in which they publish and by the publishers of their books – if they write any – but are not, on these institutional criteria, « successful ». So its range of application is very narrow, even if, in compensation, it offers a degree of protection against obvious quacks.

PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

No one would now claim, what Descartes took for granted, that the natural sciences – he did not believe in the possibility of social sciences – all form part of philosophy. It is nowadays very rare, even, for persons trained to be philosophers also to make contributions to physics, or biology, or economics, although not at all uncommon for them to have been trained in the sciences, including mathematics under this head, and then to switch their attention to philosophy or at least to draw metaphysical conclusions from their scientific work, in the manner of the physiologist Sir John Eccles or the physicist Paul Davies or the biochemist Jacques Monod. Nevertheless, the relationship between philosophy and science is still a much disputed question, philosophy sometimes being regarded as a species of science, sometimes as taking science as its model, sometimes as using scientific results as its testing-points, sometimes as a topic to be investigated, sometimes as an enemy to be fought. « Philosophy of science » comes in many different varieties (Passmore, 1983).

The view that philosophy is continuous with science is by no means novel : one finds it argued both by Brentano and by Comte, to mention only two cases. One of its more notable exponents is W.V. Quine. Very often in statements about philosophy, however, « is » has the force « ought to be » ; what purports to be a general description of philosophers can in fact only serve as a description of what the describer regards as *good* philosophy. I have already suggested this in