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The woodcut portrait of Regiomontanus from Hartmann Schedel's *Liber chronicarum* (1493).

Contents

The Question of Moral Evil in Plato's <i>Republic</i>	5
Manuel C. Ortiz de Landázuri	
Tolle – Lege: St. Augustine and the Oracle of Hermes of the Marketplace.....	17
Elisabeth Blum	
A Nominalist Deliverance from Error: On al-Ghazālī's Concept of Modality.....	26
András Kraft	
The Mathematical-Poetic Renaissance in Austria (Johannes von Gmunden, Georg von Peuerbach, Regiomontanus, Conrad Celtis)	37
Walter Seitter	
Philosophizing with Past Thinkers: The Historical Dimension of Philosophical Problems	46
Paul Richard Blum	
Liberty in the Work of Edmund Burke.....	57
Petr Vodešil	
Anti-Scientism, Conceptual Analysis and High-End Science Journalism	70
Filip Tvrđý	
The Identity of Philosophy of Psychology. Certain Remarks on the Value of Philosophical Considerations for Psychological Deliberations	77
Dominika Jacyk	
Darwin's Genuine Heir: An Appraisal of Alex Rosenberg's Contribution to the Philosophy of Biology.....	87
Vladimír Vodička	
The Philosophy of Deception.....	101
Petra Vašková	

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The Question of Moral Evil in Plato's *Republic*

Abstract | Although Plato's παιδεία, as developed in the *Republic*, shows the way to the contemplation of the Good, a problem remains which has to be examined: how does Plato explain the root of moral evil and why do we prefer to live in a world of appearances rather than pursue a just and noble life. The main question is if evil is due to a lack of knowledge (in this case, he would be a moral intellectualist), or if it is grounded on a bad psychological constitution (and, in this case, there would be a need to admit an internal evil in human nature). In this article I attempt to analyse a number of texts from the *Republic* and other dialogues in order to reach a possible answer and argue against certain intellectualistic views of Plato's moral psychology.

Keywords | Plato – the Body – Intellectualism – Justice – the Soul – Wrongdoing

Introduction

“Whereas good must be ascribed to heaven only, we must look elsewhere for the cause of evils.” (*Rep.* 379 b) The question of why human beings act in a morally wrong way is a problem that is difficult to explain. In the case of Plato, who was deeply influenced by his master Socrates, it seems that at least in the early dialogues (but also in some later ones) he admitted that nobody commits wrong willingly (ἐκούσιον), because if someone knew the real value of his wrong actions and the negative consequences for his life, he would not choose to do them.¹ This has been commonly referred to as “moral intellectualism”. This paper does not intend to examine in which sense Plato could be called “intellectualist” in his early dialogues, this being a term which could be called into question,² but rather explores how moral evil is explained by means of the development of his philosophy and the tripartition of the soul.³ In this paper I will attempt to clarify certain “intellectualistic” assertions and demonstrate, with the use of texts primarily from the *Republic*, that the question of moral evil is for Plato not only a matter of moral ignorance, but also a lack of certain good practical dispositions. In this sense I provide a means of interpretation which diminishes Plato's “moral intellectualism” as it is commonly understood. I would also like to demonstrate with this analysis of the texts that knowledge and moral actions go hand in hand in the Platonic παιδεία.

¹ Reginald Hackforth, “Moral Evil and Ignorance in Plato's *Ethic*,” *Classical Quarterly* 40 (1946): 118.

² Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Heda Segvic, “No One Errs Willingly: The Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 19 (2000): 1–45; Alexander Nehamas, “Socratic Intellectualism,” in *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 27–58.

³ An excellent explanation of the parts of the soul and desires can be found in John M. Cooper, “Plato's Theory of Human Motivation,” in *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 118–137.

One of the main questions concerning Plato's philosophy of moral evil is whether it is due to the body or to the soul. Although there are passages in which the bodily appetites seem to be the cause of moral evil, I would like to demonstrate how the soul is actually the last cause of moral evil and how the different approaches in the *Phaedo* and *Republic* seem to be complementary. It should be noted, however, that Plato did not develop a systematic account of evil: there is no defined metaphysical and moral explanation. I will consequently try to focus on certain references to different dialogues in order to find a psychological account of moral evil⁴ and demonstrate that Plato has the same concept of this phenomenon all through his dialogues (evil as the irrational), and that the different psychological approaches (*Phaedo* and *Republic*) can be seen as complementary.⁵

1 The cosmologic origin of evil in *Timaeus* and *Laws*

In order to understand Plato's doctrine of moral evil it may be of use to look briefly at the cause of natural evils, that is, the disordered motions and chaos that appear in nature. According to Cherniss, who investigates the sources of cosmological evil in the *Timaeus* from a metaphysical point of view, there are two main interpretations concerning the origin of evil. A number of authors believe that matter is the cause, while others view an irrational element in the soul of the world that would produce chaotic movements.⁶ This is also an important point for the question of human moral evil, because it is important to decide whether it is due to the body or rather it has more to do with an irrational element in the human soul. In the *Timaeus*, Plato speaks of an Errant Cause which is the principle of disordered motions in the world (48 a). In the tenth book of the *Laws* he provides an interesting reflection concerning the soul: it is the cause of self-motion in living beings (τὸ αὐτὸ κινεῖν, 896 a) and there is a soul of the world which causes all motions in all things. Plato then states that the soul is the cause of good and evil:

“– Moods and dispositions and wishes and calculations and true opinions and considerations and memories will be prior to bodily length, breadth, depth and strength, if soul is prior to body.

– Necessarily.

– Must we then necessarily agree, in the next place, that soul is the cause of things good and bad, fair and foul, just and unjust, and all the opposites, if we are to assume it to be the cause of all things?” (*Laws*, 896 d⁷)

This is a difficult passage to interpret, taking into account that Plato is trying to explain the motion of the universe. Certain interpreters have stated that there must be an irrational element in the soul of the universe which causes bad motions and evil, while others are convinced that there is an evil world-soul in the *Laws* opposed to the world-soul of the *Timaeus*,⁸ and finally it is possible that Plato's final vision of evil in the *Laws* is adapted just as it is directly by the

⁴ The aim of this paper is not to seek out the metaphysical account of evil in Plato's dialogues, but rather to see the psychological grounds of moral evil. Guthrie has discussed whether there are forms of evils in Platonic thought. See William Keith Chambers Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. V (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 92–100.

⁵ In this sense the “developmentalist” view seems to take a radical interpretation of Plato's psychology along the different dialogues. I do not see a radical change in his psychology, but instead different and complementary approaches in his dialogues, as I will try to show in this paper. A strong developmentalist view can be found in Christopher Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Brickhouse and Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology*, 193–247. Against the developmentalist interpretation, see Christopher Rowe, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶ Meldrum pointed out the problems of the origin of moral evil. See Michael Meldrum, “Plato and the ἀρχὴ κακῶν,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 70 (1950): 65–74.

⁷ For the *Laws* I use R. G. Bury's translation (Harvard University Press, 1968).

⁸ Harold Cherniss, “The Sources of Evil According to Plato,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 98 (1954): 26.

Demiurge.⁹ In any case, it would seem that Plato admitted that natural evil is not only due to the imperfection of matter, but rather that there must be an irrational element in the soul of the world, so that evil is caused by its motions and some ignorance or irrationality that can be present in this soul of the world. Just as Cherniss states: “Soul is good or bad according to its knowledge or ignorance, for soul is self-motion the mode or direction of which is determined by its knowledge, exact or erroneous, of the ideas and their relations to one another and which sets phenomena in motion in accordance with this knowledge or ignorance.”¹⁰

Natural evil is for Plato the lack of order and harmony, a disproportion between the natural being and the plenitude of the idea, so that evil can be understood as something that brings disorder and irrationality.¹¹ Evil appears in the natural world in the chaotic and disordered motions and is present in moral life in a lack of ordered and rational behaviour. In the case of moral human evil, these statements from the *Timaeus* and *Laws* allow us to think that the deepest cause of moral evil for Plato is not the body with its appetites (matter), but rather a foolish disposition of the soul (ἄμαθία) through which it prefers to contemplate good. Over the following pages I will try to show the psychological grounds of moral evil according to Plato in order to see in which sense the body or the soul is the main cause of moral evil. For this purpose I will first analyse Plato’s doctrine of moral evil in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* and then attempt to show the relationship between knowledge and ethical behaviour in order to determine which is the main cause of bad actions.

2 Appetites and bad dispositions as causes of moral evil

There are some passages in the *Phaedo* that throw light on an understanding of Plato’s concept of moral evil.¹² Plato’s negative vision of the body in this dialogue must be understood by taking into account the main question of the dialogue: does the soul continue living after death?¹³ Death appears in this dialogue as freedom from the body and its appetites, which are the main cause of error in the epistemological and practical field. It would seem that the body is the cause of moral evil, since it is the source of the sensitive appetites. The human soul, however, is just or unjust depending on the actions that one has done during one’s life, and in this way freedom from the body can be something good or bad. Although moral evil has its roots in the bodily appetites it primarily depends on the care of the soul towards itself (ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιμελούμενοι, *Phaedo*, 115 b). The exercise of recollection and taking care of oneself is a necessary condition of moral goodness. This “taking care” is a movement of the soul towards itself, is a self-decision and, in this sense, Plato is aware that the final root of moral good and evil depends on the personal way of life:

“Whereas, I imagine, if it is separated from the body when it has been polluted and made impure, because it has always been with the body, has served and loved it, and been so bewitched by it, by its passions and pleasures, that it thinks nothing else real save what is corporeal – what can be touched and seen, drunk and eaten, or used for sexual enjoyment – yet it has been accustomed to hate and shun and tremble before what is obscure to the eyes and invisible, but intelligible

⁹ Richard Mohr, “Plato’s Final Thoughts on Evil,” *Mind* 87 (1978): 572–575.

¹⁰ Cherniss, “The Sources of Evil According to Plato,” 27–28.

¹¹ Gabriela Roxana Carone, *Plato’s Cosmology and Its Ethical Dimensions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 185–188.

¹² David Sedley has recently pointed out a certain continuity between Plato’s psychology and the ethics of *Phaedo* and *Republic*. In both dialogues there is a purificatory virtue, real virtue, associated with the soul’s liberation (*Phaedo*) or the soul’s gaze (*Republic*). See David Sedley, “Socratic Intellectualism in the *Republic*’s Central Digression,” in *The Platonic Art of Philosophy*, ed. George Boys-Stones et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 84–85.

¹³ Dorothea Frede, *Platons Phaidon* (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 19.

and grasped by philosophy; do you think a soul in that condition will separate unsullied, and alone by itself?" (*Phaedo*, 81 b–c)

Human goodness for Plato in the *Phaedo* is presented as the purity of the soul, although this purity is only achieved through a process of self-clarification in which the soul must take care of itself. Moral evil is grounded on the appearances of the bodily appetites, but it is also a self-disposition of the soul. Human vice for Plato is not only a bad practical habit, but is primarily the soul's radical evil. Vice is a disposition of the entire soul in which the human being is not able to look towards what is truly valuable and, in this sense, is the real evil, because it does not allow for the fulfillment of a contemplative life.

The primary problem with Plato's account of moral evil is if it is due to the soul or to the body. The doctrine of the *Phaedo*, in which Plato accentuates the tension between the soul and the body, seems to place evil in the body:

"As long as we possess the body, and our soul is contaminated by such an evil (μετὰ τοιούτου κακοῦ), we'll surely never adequately gain what we desire – and that, we say, is truth. Because the body affords us countless distractions, owing to the nurture it must have; and again, if any illness befall it, they hamper our pursuit of that which is. Besides, it fills us up with lusts and desires, with fears and fantasies of every kind, and with any amount of trash, so that really and truly we are, as the saying goes, never able to think of anything at all because of it" (*Phaedo*, 66 b–c).

The body is the cause of natural evil because it may impede with its desires and needs our pursuit of truth. The body, however, is not the actual cause of moral evil, but is only that which hampers our activity of contemplation. The problem is not the body, but being a lover of the body instead of a lover of knowledge (68 c, 81 c–d). Plato does not speak of the will, but there seems to be a concept of the soul in which there is a free self-disposition towards the appetites and desires and, in this sense, one can be a lover of wisdom or of the body. Human beings can be governed by reason or by appetites. In the first case we are able to appreciate the real value of our actions, whereas in the second case we live for our pleasure, which is only apparent good. The kind of life we live determines the way we perceive the world and the genuine values.

"Lovers of knowledge recognize that when philosophy takes their soul in hand, it has been literally bound (διαδεδεμένην) and glued (προσκεκολλημένην) to the body, and is forced to view the things that are as if through a prison (διὰ εἰργμοῦ), rather than alone by itself; and that it is wallowing in utter ignorance (ἄμαθια). Now philosophy discerns the cunning of the prison, sees how it is effected through desire (δι' ἐπιθυμίας), so that the captive himself may co-operate most of all in his imprisonment" (*Phaedo*, 82 e – 83 a).

The roots of moral evil in the *Phaedo* are the corporal appetites, but in the next step there is a self cooperation in which the agent wants to continue living in this imprisonment. This is precisely the force of sensitive appetites which does not allow for the comprehension of the inner truths of goodness, justice and beauty, because pleasures and pains force us to think that they are what is most clear and real (83 c). The origin of error (and bad conduct) is grounded in the force of the appetites, as long as they represent immediate pleasure as the most genuine. The evaluative judgment that accompanies pleasure and pain is the cause of enslavement of the soul to the body, which brings the soul to the field of opinion (δόξα): the major problem is that the soul judges the immediate experience of pleasure as something truly valuable.

Plato's psychology of moral evil in the *Phaedo* is based on a conflict between body and soul. Even though it seems that the soul in its purity is good and the body is the cause of its bad decisions, it is also true that the soul after its life with the body can be pure or impure. In this sense, the soul lives in a bad disposition during its union with the body, but this bad natural state can be overcome by the soul.

3 Moral evil as injustice

Plato explains in the second book of the *Republic* that justice is the more genuine and better human good, whereas its contrary, injustice, must be understood as evil due to the intrinsic effects it has on the moral agent (366 c). In this way the source of moral evil is placed in the soul (injustice), and the body with its appetites is the cause of bad behaviour insofar as it is a principal of falsehood and appearance.¹⁴

Taking injustice (unjust acts) as the real moral evil, we understand Plato's effort in the *Republic* to study how a just order can be achieved. It seems, however, that justice is not merely a matter of order and proportion, but rather there must be a radical decision in the soul to live justly. This self-disposition towards justice appears clearly in the life and thought of Socrates, as for example in the *Gorgias*:

“– Acting unjustly is in fact the greatest of evils (μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν).

– Is it really the greatest? Isn't being treated unjustly a greater evil?

– Far from it.

– So as a choice (βούλοιο), you'd rather be treated unjustly than act unjustly?

– I wouldn't want either, personally. But if I were compelled to act unjustly or be treated unjustly, then I would choose rather to be treated unjustly than act unjustly.” (*Gorgias*, 469 b–c)¹⁵

Living a just life presupposes a pure disposition in the soul in order to live justly. If Socrates had to choose rationally (βούλησις), he would prefer to suffer unjustly. This is an interesting point in Plato's ethics because it demonstrates that moral goodness (justice) comes only when the soul wants to live justly despite the most terrible difficulties, as Socrates says to Crito during his imprisonment:

“Do we maintain that people should on no account whatever do injustice willingly? Or may it be done in some circumstances but not in others? Is acting unjustly in no way good or honourable, as we frequently agreed in the past? Or have all those former agreements been jettisoned during these last few days? [...] Isn't it a fact, all the same, that acting unjustly is utterly bad and shameful for the agent?” (*Crito*, 49 a–b)¹⁶

Although Plato did not develop a philosophy of the will, there is an implicit element of authentic volition of justice and the good in some of his moral proposals which is a necessary condition to live well and justly. Socrates' argument for remaining in prison is that he wants to live justly whatever the consequences might be, because justice is the most genuine good.

Up to this point it seems that there are two related lines of thought in Plato's account of moral evil. On the one hand it seems that a soul is bad according to its ignorance or foolish disposition towards the contemplation of truth. In this sense, the main source of this ignorance is the body with the force of the appetites (*Phaedo*, certain passages of the *Republic*). On the other hand a soul is bad when it acts unjustly and, in this way, the main source of injustice is the weakness of the soul, which does not choose a life according to justice (*Crito*, *Gorgias*, certain passages of the *Republic*). I am of the opinion that both lines of thought are related and complementary.¹⁷ I would dare argue that the body is not the principal cause of moral evil in Plato's philosophy,¹⁸

¹⁴ Fritz-Peter Hager, *Die Vernunft und das Problem des Bösen in Rahmen der platonischen Ethik und Metaphisik* (Bern and Stuttgart: Paul Haupt, 1963), 111; Thomas M. Robinson, *Plato's Psychology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 43.

¹⁵ For the *Gorgias* I use T. Griffith's translation (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ For the *Crito* I use D. Gallop's translation (Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁷ This is a problem related to the two visions on justice: on the one hand, justice is the harmonious inner disposition of the soul, on the other hand, justice is only possible if there is a stable disposition to act justly towards others. See Gregory Vlastos, “Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*,” in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 113–115.

¹⁸ Alfred Edward Taylor was of the opinion that the doctrine of matter as the source of evil is not Platonic. See Alfred Edward Taylor, “An Unplatonic Theory of Evil in Plato,” *American Journal of Philology* 58 (1937): 45–58.

although it is the source of confusion in the soul because it hinders the right appreciation of the good.¹⁹ The force of the appetites causes us to err towards what is truly valuable, but this “blindness” can be overcome. One can act justly or unjustly willingly, and the moral value of our actions depends on a vital decision towards justice.

Life according to justice is a radical disposition: to act justly is not only to have a certain inner order in the soul and actions, but also to hold a vital decision concerning justice. In this sense there is an interesting statement in the *Gorgias* when Plato describes the situation of the soul after death:

“Once it is stripped of the body, everything in the soul is plain to see – both its natural characteristics and the things which have happened to it (παθήματα), the things a person had in his soul as a result of his approach to all his activities.” (*Gorgias*, 524 d)

Plato's narration of the judgment after death indicates, at least metaphorically, that moral evil is above all a quality of the soul due to the free decisions in the different circumstances of life, so that each individual is able to pervert his or her own soul with unjust conduct. It could be said, then, that moral evil is due to the soul that, through its decisions and actions, becomes good or bad. Although moral evil is grounded on a bad psychological disposition, it is a matter of the soul to choose to act justly or unjustly, and in this way it can be explained with the conjunction of two elements:

1. A bad desiderative disposition that forces the human being to take as valuable what is bad and unjust.
2. The lack of a radical decision to act according to justice, which does not allow the soul to appreciate what is actually valuable.

There is, therefore, a vicious circle in which the intelligence becomes blind to contemplate the good and act according to it, and the lack of decision towards justice is also the cause of that “blindness”. Knowledge and action go hand in hand in Plato's thought. In this sense bad actions are due to a lack of education (ἀμαθία), which is not only a lack of knowledge, but primarily a problem of harmony in the soul.

“In all these fields when he speaks of just and honourable conduct, he will mean the behaviour that helps to produce and to preserve this habit of mind; and by wisdom (σοφία) he will mean the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) which presides over such conduct. Any action which tends to break down this habit will be for him unjust; and the notions governing (ἐπιστατοῦσαν δόξαν) it he will call ignorance and folly (ἀμαθία)” (*Rep.* 443 e – 444 a).

Ἀμαθία, as will be explained later in detail, is not a lack of theoretical knowledge but a bad rational disposition in which the soul is governed by the force of the appetites. Σοφία, on the other hand, is a principle of order, a knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) that presides, that is, a good rational disposition. The terms concerning moral knowledge in Plato (σοφία, ἐπιστήμη) refer to a practical order due to education of the character.

Injustice in the *Republic* appears as a lack of harmony in the soul due to the conflict between desires.²⁰ Moral evil is consequently grounded in the soul and the body does not play a role in the moral life. I will now attempt to examine the origin of these bad desires that lead us to act morally wrong.

¹⁹ Hager, *Die Vernunft und das Problem des Bösen*, 111.

²⁰ An interesting question concerning the tripartition of the soul is if it is the soul as a whole responsible for the bad motivation or only part of it. See Hendrik Lorenz, “Desire and Reason in Plato's *Republic*,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004): 86–87.

4 The psychological and moral basis of moral evil

Moral evil is presented in the *Republic* and other later dialogues (*Sophist*, *Laws*) as an internal conflict of desires in which the sensitive appetites rule over reason,²¹ whereas moral goodness is the order that reason gives to the different desires according to the knowledge of the Good.²² Human beings live in a kingdom of appearances because they have not been capable of bringing up the practical dispositions required in order to apprehend the Good: there is no inner good and order (justice) and there is no contemplation of the Good. A text in the IV Book of the *Republic*, in which Plato provides a possible explanation of wrong behaviour, can be interpreted in this fashion:

“– Don’t you agree that men are unwilling (ἀκουσίως) to be deprived of good, though ready enough (ἐκουσίως) to part with evil? Or that to be deceived about the truth is evil, to possess it good? Or don’t you think that possessing truth means thinking of things as they really are?

– You are right. I do agree that men are unwilling (ἄκοντες) to be robbed of a true belief.

– When that happens to them, then, it must be by theft (κλαπέντες), or violence (βιασθέντες), or bewitchment (γοητευθέντες).

– Again I do not understand.

– Perhaps my metaphors are too high-flown. I call it theft when one is persuaded out of one’s belief or forgets it. Argument in the one case, and time in the other, steals it away without one’s knowing what is happening. You understand now?

– Yes.

– And by violence I mean being driven to change one’s mind by pain or suffering.

– That too I understand, and you are right.

– And bewitchment, as I think you would agree, occurs when a man is beguiled out of his opinion by the allurements of pleasure or scared out of it under the spell of pain.

– Yes, all delusions are like a sort of bewitchment.” (*Rep.*, 413 a–c)

Plato points out here the main source of moral evil, and places the lack of truth as something that no one would choose consciously.²³ If the agent were in a space of free decision in which he was completely aware of the real value of his actions, with all its consequences, he would not act wrong. Moral error is consequently due to a lack of appreciation. It should be noticed, however, that this lack of awareness is caused primarily because the agent prefers to remain in the field of appearance. In this way Plato can state that a person living in appearances will be easily stripped of truth and act wrong, due to those three reasons: he will be persuaded to act like the majority of people do, will avoid pains at any rate, will seek pleasures instead of what is just and noble. At the beginning of book IX there is a text in which Plato seems to link moral evil to a bad desiderative disposition common to all humanity, but that can be moderated with reason:

“Among the unnecessary pleasures and desires, some, I should say, are unlawful (παράνομοι). Probably they are innate in everyone; but when they are disciplined by law and by the higher

²¹ Gerasimos Santas, “The Good of Justice in our Souls,” in *Goodness and Justice* (Cornwall: Blackwell, 2001), 128–129.

²² Mariana Anagnostopoulos, “The Divided Soul and the Desire for Good in Plato’s *Republic*,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Plato’s Republic*, ed. Gerasimos Santas (Hong Kong: Blackwell, 2006), 181. A topic of current discussion is if the three parts of the soul are three different agents in the soul or rather three agencies. See Álvaro Vallejo Campos, “The Theory of Conflict in Plato’s *Republic*,” in *Dialogues on Plato’s Politeia (Republic)*, ed. Noburu Notomi and Luc Brisson (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2013), 194. Some scholars understand these parts as different subjects of desire (Bobonich), whereas others prefer to take them as different agencies of the same soul (Price). See Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*, 219; Anthony W. Price, *Mental Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 54.

²³ The main problem is how to understand the word ἐκουσίως in this context. I dare argue that the distinction ἐκουσίως/ἀκουσίως refers to a state of awareness about the real value of actions, rather than to the presence of will in those actions. One commits a bad action ἀκουσίως because there is a psychological process in which the agent does not see (or does not want to see) the genuine good.

desires with the aid of reason, they can in some people be got rid of entirely, or at least left few and feeble, although in others they will be comparatively strong and numerous.” (*Rep.*, 571 b)

Here Plato seems to state that there is some kind of wicked disposition common to all humankind. Bad desires and actions spring from this evil root that can be, however, softened with the use of reason. It would consequently be clearer that the starting point in moral life is a situation of cloudiness towards the contemplation of the Good. There seems to be a wicked and evil disposition in a human being, certain kinds of antinatural (παράνομοι) appetites which can enslave us to appearances. A similar idea is developed in the *Timaeus* when Plato explains that there is a type of soul in the human being that is the origin of evils:

“They also housed within the body another type of soul, a mortal kind, which is liable to terrible, but inevitable, experiences. Chief among these is pleasure, evil’s most potent lure; then pain, fugitive from good; and then those mindless advisers confidence and fear, and obdurate passion, and gullible hope. Into the mix they added unreasoning sensation and ever-adventurous desire, and so, constrained by necessity, they constructed the mortal soul.” (*Timaeus*, 69 d)²⁴

In this sense moral evil is grounded on an irrational psychological disposition: there is something in the soul of the human being that tries to govern over reason, and this could be the main cause of our errors in the ethical field.

It is of importance from my perspective that there are two kinds of explanations of moral evil in Plato’s philosophy which are not in contradiction, but rather try to answer different questions. From a natural point of view, the question is how is it possible to commit wrong. Moral evil is due to an innate bad psychological disposition that impels us to seek bodily pleasures in a disproportionate way. This is the cause of our lack of vision of what is mostly pure and true. From a psychological and ethical point of view, the question is if moral evil is due to the soul or to the body, that is, if moral evil can be overcome. I have tried to demonstrate that moral evil depends in the end in the self-decision of the way of life of the moral agent and, in this sense, Plato places moral evil in the soul.

5 Evil as the irrational: “no one does wrong willingly”

At this point I would like to analyze briefly in which sense the Platonic ethics could be called “intellectualistic”. Taking the expression οὐδείς ἐκὼν ἀμαρτάνει in a strong sense, it would seem that moral evil is not a matter of the human will,²⁵ but rather a human condition which cannot be overcome. In contrast, there is an exterior element to the core of the human soul that impels people to do evil (sensitive appetites). Plato is aware, however, of the moral responsibility of the individual, as it is shown in the judgment after death in the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. No one would choose something bad for oneself, and if one does, it is because there is a lack of knowledge in the agent, and this lack of knowledge would be specifically the source of moral evil. It is not possible here to analyse in detail the expression οὐδείς ἐκὼν ἀμαρτάνει along the different dialogues, but I would like to make some remarks taking into account the exposition of the topic in the *Republic*:

“– When a belief passes out of the mind, a man may be willing (ἐκούσιος) to part with it, if it is false and he has learnt better, or unwilling (ἀκούσιος), if it is true.

– I see how he might be willing to let it go; but you must explain how he can be unwilling.

– Where is your difficulty? Don’t you agree that men are unwilling to be deprived of good, though ready enough to part with evil? Or that to be deceived about the truth is evil, to possess

²⁴ For the *Timaeus* I use R. Waterfield’s translation (Oxford, University Press, 2008).

²⁵ Tobias Wildauer, *Die Psychologie des Willens bei Sokrates, Platon und Aristoteles* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1877), 234.

it good? Or don't you think that possessing truth means thinking of things as they really are?" (*Republic*, 412 e – 413 a).

Evil is presented in this text as a lack of knowledge or, more precisely, as the unawareness of what is real and valuable. This is a topic that appears throughout different dialogues (*Protagoras* 358 c–d, *Gorgias* 468 d–e, *Meno* 77 c – 78 b, *Timaeus* 86 b–e, *Laws* 860 d – 861a), and in all these cases Plato seems to state that the main cause of wrongdoing is a lack of knowledge or at least some psychological disposition that forces the agent to take as valuable something that is not truly good (*Laws* 689 a). The distinction between ἀκούσιος and ἐκούσιος has to do with the interior assent to the contents of thinking, and evil, then, can be understood as a lack of knowledge in the sense that the agent gives assent to something which is not really valuable.

A lack of knowledge is the main source of moral evil, although the question now is if this is only an epistemological disposition or whether it also depends on the ethical disposition and the way of life one has chosen. When Plato states that no one acts wrong willingly (οὐδεὶς ἔκων ἀμαρτάνει), he is trying to explain that it is impossible to choose evil as long as it is evil (*Gorgias*, 468 d).²⁶ If someone chooses evil it is due to a foolish disposition (ἀμαθία: *Protagoras*, 358 c; *Rep.*, 535 d–e, *Laws*, 689 a) in which the sensitive appetites and desires rule the soul and do not allow the government of reason. This "ignorance" or foolish disposition can be overcome by the agent.²⁷ The rational part of the soul is only able to contemplate the good if it rules at the same time over the sensitive appetites.

The expression οὐδεὶς ἔκων ἀμαρτάνει is referred to as the impossibility of choosing evil as evil because if someone acts wrong, it is due to some kind of ignorance (ἀμαθία), grounded on a foolish way of life. In the earlier dialogues this ignorance is a lack of wisdom in a wide sense (σοφία is the condition of a person that knows what is real and good, but is also a person that acts good based on what is real). Virtue is related to some kind of knowledge (*Meno*, 88 c–d), but it does not seem to be a theoretical knowledge (is not ἐπιστήμη,²⁸ *Meno*, 99 c), but rather a practical knowledge of what is good and evil (*Charmides*, 174 b–c). In the *Republic* and other later dialogues, ἀμαθία is primarily the life according to bodily appetites and appearances, as it is also explained in the *Laws* (689 a). There is also an interesting passage in the *Sophist* in which Plato makes a distinction between moral vice and ignorance:

– Then there are, it appears, these two kinds of badness in the soul. Most people call one of them wickedness (πονερία), but it's obviously a disease of the soul.

– Yes.

– They call the other one ignorance (ἄγνοια), but it occurs only in a person's soul they aren't willing to agree that it's a form of badness.

²⁶ As Gulley points out there is a problem of interpretation of some expressions related to οὐδεὶς ἔκων ἀμαρτάνει which has to do with the application of modern concepts such as "will" and "determinism", whereas here ἔκων means that the agent does not act according with what he really should want rationally. Norman Gulley, "The Interpretation of 'No One Does Wrong Willingly' in Plato's Dialogues," *Phronesis* 10 (1965): 94–96.

²⁷ The process of education plays a major role in order to overcome ἀμαθία. The aim of Plato's παιδεία is to provide a psychic harmony in which reason can govern the other parts of the soul. See Christopher Gill, "Plato and the Education of Character," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 67 (1985): 1–26; John M. Cooper, "The Psychology of Justice in Plato," in *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 138–149.

²⁸ "Auch für Plato hatte der enge Zusammenhang von σοφία und ἐπιστήμη mit τέχνη und δημιουργία tiefere Bedeutung; seine Anschauung vom Wissen des Handwerkers ist gewissermaßen das noch unverarbeitete Material für sein philosophisches Denken. Im Handwerker verkörpert sich für ihn der Begriff ἐπιστήμη mit der in ihm liegenden Problematik, die darin besteht, dass das Wort auf der einen Seite die Gewissheit, auf der anderen Seite die Richtung auf ein Ziel forderte. Und diese beiden Seiten schienen sich auszuschließen: der Handwerker mochte Sicherheit besitzen, dafür blieb er auf sein Spezialfach beschränkt; dem, der vorgab, eine weitere Weisheit zu besitzen, war leicht zu beweisen, dass er nichts wusste." B. Snell, *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissenschaft in der vorplatonischen Philosophie* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1924), 12–14.

- One thing must be granted - the point I was in doubt about when you made it just now - that there are two kinds of deficiency in the soul. We need to say that cowardice, licentiousness, and injustice are a disease in us, and that to be extremely ignorant of all sorts of things is a kind of ugliness." (*Sophist*, 228 b)²⁹

Plato distinguishes between two kinds of evil in the soul: on the one hand the moral vices (what in other dialogues is called ἀμαθία, a foolish disposition) and on the other hand ignorance (ἀγνοία). It seems clear that ἀμαθία is something different from ἀγνοία: the foolish disposition in the practical field is different from the lack of knowledge as an epistemological disposition. Moral evil is due to an irrational disorder in the human soul, the government of appearances over reason. If one chooses to act wrongly, it is mainly because there is a conflict of desires and the agent does not see or does not want to see the real value of their action. The real "I" of the human being is the rational part:³⁰ one wishes (βούλεται) something willingly (ἐκὼν) in the way that one acts as a rational agent. It is impossible to wish evil rationally: if it is desired, it is because there is an irrational part in the soul, the sensitive appetites. The expression οὐδείς ἐκὼν ἀμαρτάνει must be understood then as a sort of explanation of the psychological process involved in the bad moral action. The agent who acts in a morally wrong way does not see (or does not want to see) the real goal of their existence and their absolute good because they seek through the force of their passions an immediate good that is not truly valuable. No one chooses something bad because it is in itself bad, but rather there is a process of self-deception in which the subject takes it as valuable and worthy. Morally bad actions are due to a certain "blindness" of the soul: the agent prefers a particular pleasure or avoids a certain pain instead of seeking what is truly good for themself.

With the expression οὐδείς ἐκὼν ἀμαρτάνει Plato is not excusing the agent of moral responsibility. Nevertheless, the punishments and awards after death and the necessary personal effort to act justly are signs of moral responsibility. The following text in the *Republic* should be understood in this sense:

"Also with regard to truth, we shall account as equally crippled a mind which, while it hates deliberate falsehood (ἐκούσιον ψεῦδος), cannot bear to tell lies, and is very angry when others do so, yet complacently tolerates involuntary error (ἀκούσιον) and is in no way vexed at being caught wallowing in swinish ignorance (ἐν ἀμαθία)." (*Rep.* 535 d-e)

What do we mean when we say that the agent can complacently tolerate involuntary error? In which way is this error involuntary (ἀκούσιον)? The agent can be aware of the bad behaviour and falsehood of others and condemn it, but may not be ready to recognise their own errors and ignorance because they prefer to continue living as they do. The interesting point of this passage is that Plato seems to say that it is possible and also necessary to be aware of one's own falsehood and to deny it. The involuntary falsehood (ἀκούσιον ψεῦδος) is a lack of awareness towards truth that can be overcome by the moral agent and, in this sense, it seems that the ἀκούσιον-ἐκούσιον distinction in Plato does not refer to a philosophy of the will, but rather connects with the level of awareness of what is more real.

In connection with what has been explained it is interesting to observe the relationship between virtue and knowledge that Plato establishes in certain passages of the *Republic*. After the cave allegory, for example, Socrates states that wisdom is the virtue of a divine faculty which can be used for good or wrong depending on the direction towards which it is turned: wisdom comes when there is a virtue of the soul that enables one to see what is really true. If a clever

²⁹ For the *Sophist* I use N. P. White's translation (Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

³⁰ C. D. C. Reeve, "Soul, Soul-Parts, and Persons in Plato," in *Reason and Analysis in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. Georgios Anagnostopoulos et al. (New York: Springer, 2013), 150.

soul does not live according to virtue, however, it will be unable to see things properly and their evil will be greater:

“And yet if the growth of a nature like this had been pruned from earliest childhood, cleared of those clinging overgrowths which come from gluttony and all luxurious pleasure and, like leaden weights charged with affinity to this mortal world, hang upon the soul, bending its vision downwards; if, freed from these, the soul were turned round towards true reality, then this same power in these very men would see the truth as keenly as the objects it is turned to now.” (*Rep.* 519 a)

In this text it is possible to see the relationship between knowledge and virtue: in order to see what is truly good, a previous exercise of virtue through a process of education is necessary. Moral evil is not only a matter of knowledge, but rather of disposition towards what is real and true (*Rep.* 409 d–e). Moral virtue does not only depend on the development of the intellect, but it is dependent on practice and order in the passions. In this sense, moral evil is connected with a lack of rational order in the human soul.

Conclusion

In Plato's philosophy bad actions are due to a state of “ignorance” or “lack of education” (ἀμαθία), but this “ignorance” must not be understood as a lack of theoretical knowledge, but as a bad ethical disposition towards pleasures and pains. Wicked actions are due to the force of the appetites that push the agent towards the pursuit of pleasure. A person who does something morally wrong is not at all conscious of the badness of their behaviour because they do not perceive it as bad. They in all likelihood know that their behaviour is wrong, but they do not see it at all because their bad disposition towards pleasures and pains maintains them in their blindness. This ignorance is rooted, however, in a certain kind of bad inner disposition, as Plato points out in the text of the *Republic* (571 b) and in some passages of *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, although texts like this can be helpful to understand how Plato links moral evil to some kind of psychological dispositions, it should be noticed that the question of moral evil is an unsolved problem for Ancient Greek philosophers. It is a problem that nearly remained unsolved for Plato³¹ (who, as it has been shown, links moral evil to a lack of comprehension of real value), and it is a problem that was difficult for Aristotle to solve.

The problem of moral evil in Plato's *Republic*, in connection with other dialogues, can be summarized in the following thesis:

1. The greatest evil is to commit injustice (*Gorgias*).
2. Injustice is some kind of disproportion and inner disorder (*Republic*).
3. This disorder is due to the force of the appetites, which motivate one to pursue moral evil. There is a brutish (evil) disposition in the human being (*Republic*, *Timaeus*).
4. That brutish disposition is the cause of strong and bad desires and also of an error of evolution towards the real value of things and actions. Moral evil is caused by an error of knowledge, but also by the kind of life one chooses to live.

I have tried to demonstrate that the root of moral evil in Plato's *Republic*, in connection with other dialogues, is not only a matter of knowledge, but of a bad psychological disposition towards

³¹ From a cosmologic point of view the problem of evil in Plato's philosophy remains without an answer, because he does not explain why the soul of the world should ever lapse from complete and accurate knowledge of the ideas. See Cherniss, “The Sources of Evil According to Plato,” 27. The question remains also unanswered in moral life: why does the soul prefer to live in an opinion, rather than to contemplate true ideas?

pleasures and pains. The initial disposition for the contemplation of truth is some kind of intellectual blindness due to pleasure and pain, so that the soul lives in a region of appearances and opinion (δόξα). The moral progress of human beings is a process of catharsis in which one is able to assimilate goodness and justice, but it seems that a first decision is needed in order to seek the good. A good life is not only a matter of knowledge but also involves practice and self-decision.

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Tolle – Lege: St. Augustine and the Oracle of Hermes of the Marketplace¹

Abstract | Starting from the episode of Augustine's conversion to chastity as described in his *Confessions*, we here try to show how the planned, the incidental, and the succeeding interpretative reading combine in the structure of a multiple oracle, proving God not only the creator of order, but also the lord over coincidence and the author of history. The event in the Milan garden offers us a more complex and dialectical understanding of the relation between divine providence and human freedom in Augustine than the deterministic predestination formulated during the Pelagian controversies. Reading a text becomes the model for understanding the world and acting out God's eternal plan under the conditions of temporality.

Keywords | St. Augustine – Oracle – Cledonism – Coincidence – Divine Providence – Book-Metaphor – Self-Referential Text.

If it were possible to summarize the intention of St. Augustine's *Confessions* in one sentence, we might say: he wants to show God to be not only the Creator of order and architect of the world, but also Lord of coincidence and author of history. This is, evidently, neither a purely theological nor purely philosophical enterprise. There is no intention of such a division in Augustine. His "Christian philosophy" is, precisely, the unity of both, showing *the one divine truth of reality and revelation as understood and interpreted by human intellect*. The immensity of this task to explain reality from its very principle, namely the transcendent God, and the natural limit and inadequacy of the means (that can, at best, achieve *learned ignorance*) calls for a concentration of all the capacities of human reason and will. Indeed, "the created order speaks to all, but is understood by those who hear its outward voice and compare it with the truth within themselves."² The signs for the truth that reach us from without must be seen to accord with the truth of the inner light, which is none other than the divine presence at the most intimate center of the human person. This is not just the source of all knowledge, but also of all goodness and all life. Therefore we should not expect Augustine's theology to be a separate discipline from his anthropology, nor his metaphysics from his ethics.

Of course this will not prevent us, as his readers, from taking a more specific interest, e.g. in the psychology or the hermeneutics of the *Confessions*. But it also implies that virtually every passage can be read either from a theologian's or a philosopher's perspective and lends itself to a meaningful interpretation within the whole work. This may justify my choice of a famous and central episode from the autobiographical part, Augustine's conversion to chastity in the Milan

¹ This study is a result of research funded by the Czech Science Foundation as the project GA ĆR 14-37038G "Between Renaissance and Baroque: Philosophy and Knowledge in the Czech Lands within the Wider European Context".

² Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 10. All English quotations from Augustine are taken from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

garden³, which might not, on first sight, lend itself easily to a philosophical interpretation. However, as I hope to show, it is also central for a deeper understanding of the interaction of divine providence and human free will. Here Augustine's position (at least at that point, before the notorious Pelagian controversy) appears to be considerably more complex and refined than just a straightforward doctrine of predestination with the *de facto* denial of any positive contribution from human spontaneity. While the non-accidental character of "coincidence" is maintained, it presents itself as the combined result of divine and human agency.

The Event

Let us first recall Augustine's inner conflict, its crisis, and the circumstances leading to its dramatic solution. Augustine had just completed the third decade of his life, when he finally gained the intellectual certainty of the truth of Catholic Christianity, the faith of his childhood. Now he desires to match his life to his faith. He has given up his secular professional ambitions and sent away his concubine of many years and mother of his son. On parting she vows never to take another lover. All his ambition to dedicate himself to a higher love notwithstanding, Augustine finds himself, much to his humiliation, incapable of a similar resolution. Sojourning with some friends and former students in Milan, he keeps daydreaming about an ideal life of celibacy, shared possessions and religious contemplation, but shows no confidence whatsoever in his ability to embrace chastity for good. His widowed mother Monica advocates marriage and has her eye on a suitable girl, who is still somewhat too young to be married. Equally unconvinced of both alternatives and welcoming the delay, Augustine finds himself in limbo: while reason and spiritual inclination urge him to resign all secular concerns, the fear of committing himself and then relapsing into greater sin calls for a compromise. A visitor reports the spontaneous decision of two young men to enter a monastic order, and how their wives-to-be followed their example of holy virginity. This triggers a violent attack of shame and self-loathing. Here is how Augustine describes his inner and outward reaction:

"What accusations against myself did I not bring? With what verbal rods did I not scourge my soul so that it would follow me in my attempt to go after you! But my soul hung back. It refused and had no excuse to offer. The arguments were exhausted, and all had been refuted. The only thing left to it was a mute trembling, and as if it was facing death it was terrified of being restrained from the treadmill of habit. (...) Then in the middle of that great struggle in my inner house (...), distressed not only in mind, but in appearance, I turned on Alypius and cried out: 'what is wrong with us? What is that you have heard? Uneducated people are rising up and capturing heaven, and we with our high culture without any heart – see where we roll in the mud of flesh and blood. Is it because they are ahead of us that we are ashamed to follow?' (...) the heat of my passion took my attention away from him as he contemplated my condition in astonished silence. For I sounded very strange. My uttered words said less about the state of my mind than my forehead, cheeks, eyes, color, and tone of voice. (...) The tumult of my heart took me out into the garden where no one could interfere with the burning struggle with myself..."⁴

³ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

Blinded to his surroundings, unaware of being followed by his concerned friend, Augustine had stumbled out of the house, tearing his hair and gesticulating frantically, while storming against his incapacity to command his own will:

“The one necessary condition, which meant not only going, but at once arriving there, was to have the will to go – provided only that the will was strong and unqualified, not the turning and twisting first this way, than that, of a will half-wounded, struggling with one part rising up and the other falling down. (...) What is the cause of this monstrous situation? (...) The mind commands the body and is instantly obeyed. The mind commands itself and meets resistance. (...) Mind commands, I say, that it should will, and would not give the command if it did not will, yet it does not perform what it commands. (...) So the will that commands is incomplete, and therefore what it commands does not happen. (...) The self that willed to serve was identical with the self that was unwilling. It was I. I was neither wholly willing nor wholly unwilling. So I was in conflict with myself and dissociated from myself. The dissociation came about against my will. Yet it was not a manifestation of the nature of an alien mind but the punishment suffered in my own mind. And so it was ‘not I’ that brought this about ‘but sin which dwelt in me’, sin resulting from the punishment of a more freely chosen sin, because I was a son of Adam.”⁵

Perfectly aware in his conscience of the right path to take, but still held back by the whispering voices of petty sensual habits that keep mocking him (“Do you think you can live without us?”), Augustine is crying over his own weakness: “How long, how long is it to be? Tomorrow, tomorrow. Why not now? Why not end my impure life in this very hour?”⁶

Of course nobody could endure for long in such a labile equilibrium. What is needed now is just a small, decisive push in one direction, a sign that will shape his whole future life. And the sign does not fail him.

“As I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl, (...) saying and repeating over and over again ‘*Tolle, lege, tolle, lege*’ (pick up and read). At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children’s game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one. I checked the flood of tears and stood up. I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find. For I had heard how Antony happened to be present at the gospel reading, and took it as an admonition addressed to himself when the words were read: ‘Go, sell all you have, give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ By such an inspired utterance he was immediately converted to you. So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting. There I had put down the book of the apostle (...). I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: ‘Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts.’ I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.”⁷

⁵ Ibid., 19, 21, 22.

⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁷ Ibid., VIII, 29.

So far Augustine's own vivid report. Pious painters have added angel's wings to the image of the chanting child, while philosophers may recall Socrates' boyish daemon. But even if the term is not used here, hardly anyone will fail to realize the nature and meaning of the event: We were witnessing an oracle. Not any simple oracle, actually, but a threefold oracle, as shall be shown presently.

Cledonism

In a time when Christians and pagans were not just living door to door, but often sharing the same household (or even the same bed in marriage, as was the case for Augustine's own parents), the similarity between the situation described in Book VIII of the *Confessions* and a widely practiced form of divination, called *clledonism*,⁸ must have been evident – much more so, than it appears to us nowadays. Cledonism was practiced in various cities and connected to the cult of more than one god, e. g. Zeus, Demeter, or Hermes Agoraios (Hermes of the market place). It is common to many cultures and very old, like many a ritual of “popular religion” or superstition.⁹ Basically it consists of interpreting an utterance overheard incidentally as the divine answer to a concrete vital dilemma. Whoever felt unable to solve a problem by reasoning, or was eager to secure good luck by acting in accordance to divine advice, would meditate his question in prayer or whisper it into the ear of a statue of the god. Then, sealing his ears, he would walk a certain distance. The first words heard upon unsealing the ears were regarded as the god's response.¹⁰ These were believed to be even more certain and auspicious if they came from a child, a drunken man, or a fool: the irrational nature of the speaker enhanced the accidental nature of the sentence.

One of the reasons for the popularity of this type of divination was the belief that the condition for the oracle to take effect was that one had clearly registered the words and understood their sense, actually formally accepted the answer. This added an element of human resolve and freedom, thus somewhat reducing the risk inherent in other forms of oracle: the danger of being tragically overwhelmed by an unwittingly triggered process.

The parallels of the ritual of *clledonism* to Augustine's experience are striking. The “sacrifice of tears”, the temporary loss of full command over his senses, his walk, as he puts a distance between himself and his friend, the urgent imploring: “Let it be now!”, the childish voice chanting, the deliberate interpretation of the words as a divine response: all this put together meets the conditions of the ritual, though Augustine does not force God's hand by intentionally determining the time and setting the scene. Yet neither is his part limited to a mere passive intuition and acceptance of God's decree. His demeanor is described more correctly as an *act of faith*,¹¹ i. e. as a real, temporal, human action which not just demonstrates, but rather constitutes faith.

Cledonism, however, constitutes only the first stage. The degree of coincidence (and accordingly the space for direct divine intervention) is enlarged, since the message received is an invitation to perform a different, though related form of divination: the *book oracle*, a ritual more familiar to us, since it was practiced up to present times. But before examining more closely

⁸ For general information see “Cledonism” in *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, accessed May 24, 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cledonism&oldid=544407871>. For a detailed account see: John J. Peradotto, “Cledonomancy in the Oresteia,” *The American Journal of Philology* 90, no.1 (1969): 1–21, esp. 2–7.

⁹ Unlike Zeus, Demeter and Hermes are gods of distinct “pre-Olympian” and chthonic character.

¹⁰ Hermes, linked to travel and crossing borders in general, and specifically to speech and the transmission and interpretation of messages (see Plato, *Cratylus*, 383) was the most likely addressee; note the derivation of the term “hermeneutics” from his name. Pausanias lists various statues of Hermes Agoraios (in Sparta, Thebes, Athens, Sykion, etc.), the most important being the one in Pharea (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 7, 22,2) with an account of the ritual of cledonism.

¹¹ I am well aware of the sinister connotations this term acquired a millennium later owing to the Spanish inquisition, but the abuse of a term should not prevent us from the correct use of a concept.

the meaning of this final stage of divination, let us listen once more to the actual words of the mysterious child and try to find out some more about the “game” played here.

“*Tolle – lege*”: “*Take and read*” is the translation usually given to the words of the oracle, closely following the interpretation given by Augustine himself. But why would a playing child repeatedly sing out these words? The idea of a connection to some children’s game is immediately suggested by Augustine, though he fails, as he tells us, to remember or to guess, what game that might be. But a different translation of the same words might give us a clue. Of course Augustine was fully aware, that “*Tolle – lege*” also means: “*Lift and choose*”. This ambiguity is a very important detail, which is inevitably lost in translation. Actually, lifting and choosing (or, rather, choosing by lifting) is quite easily connected to a primitive form of lottery, by which children of the different epochs and cultural environments used (and, maybe, still use) to avoid quarrels, when dividing amongst them their treats or little treasures. Some small objects are hidden by one child under bowls, or cupped hands, or simply in closed fists behind the back (“left or right?”), while the other child has to choose his or her portion blindly.¹² Here we discover a second instance of “employing coincidence” in Augustine’s narrative: the words interpreted as the response of the oracle might, originally, belong to a similar, if more trivial and less imposing ritual.

Reading

Now let us turn with Augustine to the book he opens randomly, reading his future out of the first sentence that meets his glance. Here, again, we find the planned event intimately united to the incidental: the passage is picked blindly, but not the book, which is the same copy of the *Letters of St. Paul*, where Augustine had been previously seeking and finding enlightenment. In fact, book oracles were not, as a rule, practiced on trivial or random texts, but rather on religiously relevant ones, such as the *Bible*, the *Koran*, or Hymn books.¹³

Unsurprisingly, Augustine treats his book respectfully. But this would not necessarily be always the case. Sometimes the volume was thrown, to make it *fall open* in the right place, or even cut with a knife: the blade was inserted between the pages of a bound volume, while a scroll might be actually pierced by the point. Such violent performance shows, how in the book oracle human activity is also involved, at times to the excess of literally extorting an answer. Sacred texts were frequently used for all but saintly purposes, and book oracles thrived on both sides of the borderline between piety and blasphemy.

It is an interesting detail that Augustine does not receive his message merely through the spoken word, but, ultimately, turns to the written page. Few authors in world literature show an equal awareness of the power and the risks of writing, reading, and being read. Few pages are to the same extent “performative” texts, as the opening passages of the *Confessions*. Book X, dedicated to the analysis of the mental faculty of memory, opens with self-referential considerations about the book he is just writing and asks the questions: Does it make any sense to write it in the first place, seeing that the *Confessions* are addressed to the omniscient God? Why should human readers, not being the addressees, read it at all? How ought it to be read, and how will it, inevitably, be misread? This is not merely some anticipated self-defense against attacks from political adversaries. Augustine has pondered deeply the relation between writer and reader, between text and message, between truth and interpretation. He finds it a highly complicated,

¹² A less innocent derivate from this childish oracle is a notorious confidence trick played with three cups and a ball or a coin. A structural kinship between divination and gambling is evident.

¹³ Probably owing to a medieval tradition that imagined Vergil as an arch-magician, his poems were also often consulted.

dialectical relation, as is evident not only from the passages on Bible interpretation¹⁴, but, foremost, from the complex structure of the entire book with its *indirect* involvement of the reader, who is encouraged, while reading, to mind his own biography and to detect the work of divine providence in the progress of his, the reader's, own life.

Reading appears in the *Confessions* not as one possible mental activity among others, but rather as the model case for understanding as such. The firmament itself, by which God separated the waters beneath from the waters above¹⁵ (interpreted as the divide between pure angelical minds and time-bound human minds) becomes a book: "For the heaven will fold up like a book, and now like a skin is stretched out above us."¹⁶ Here Augustine understands the Bible to be referring to itself. But for all the sublime authority of this book, given to the mortals as their specific way of learning immortal truth, it is not the text the angels above the heavens are reading. Theirs is an even greater book:

"They have no need to look up to this firmament and to read so as to know your word. They ever see your face, and there, without syllables requiring time to pronounce, they read what your eternal will intends. They read, they choose, they love. They ever read, and what they read never passes away. By choosing and loving they read the immutability of your design. Their codex is never closed, nor is their book ever folded shut. *For you yourself are a book to them, and you are for eternity.*"¹⁷

Here the different books read, as well, as the different methods of reading employed stand for the different kinds of cognition. Pure angelical intellects have immediate intuitive understanding and thus are shown reading without utterance. Time and flesh bound human minds think in discourse, passing from one concept to the next. Therefore they are imagined as reading aloud, which was still the common praxis among Augustine's contemporaries.¹⁸ Closer to the simplicity of God's truth, the angels need no screen, no physical media, no signs to make immaterial truth apparent, and no multiple interpretations for their understanding. There is no need for them to translate eternal truth into a multiplicity of meanings and actions, as mortals are bound to do. But angels run a high risk for a high privilege: once fallen, their very immediateness and lack of inner contradiction makes them incapable of repentance and conversion.

Yet the book in the sky is not exclusively an image for the Bible. The whole contents of the firmament, this visible, sensible, and temporal world is a book for incarnated spirits to read, transcendent sense written in physical signs:

"What is inward is superior. All physical evidence is reported to the mind which presides and judges of the responses of heaven and earth and all things in them, as they say: 'we are not God' and 'He made us'. The inner man knows this – I, I the mind through the sense perception of my body. (...) Surely this beauty should be self-evident to all who are of sound mind. Then why does it not speak to everyone in the same way? Animals both small and large see it, but they cannot put a question about it. In them reason does not sit in judgment upon the deliverances of the senses. But human beings can put a question so that 'the invisible things of God are understood and seen through the things which are made'¹⁹. (...) Created things

¹⁴ Cf. especially Augustine, *Confessions* XII, 16–42.

¹⁵ *Gen.* 1, 16–18.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* XIII, 16, quoting *Isa.* 34, 4 and *Ps.* 103, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 18; note the close connection between reading and choosing in this passage.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, VI, 3 on Ambrose's exceptional capacity of reading in silence.

¹⁹ *Romans* 1, 20.

do not answer those who question them if power to judge is lost. There is no alteration in their voice which is their beauty. (...) It is rather that the created order speaks to all, but is understood by those who hear their outward voice and compare it with the truth within themselves.”²⁰

It is the specifically human task to know by understanding, i. e. by reading supersensual meaning out of concrete things, and, literally, *making sense* out of them.

Divine Providence and Human Free Will

I think that the connection to the episode interpreted by me as an act of divination is clear: miracles or oracles are just special cases within this general rule of interpreting the world. Those are merely such situations where things speak loudly and clearly, highlighting the non-accidental, providential character of the event. For Augustine, coincidence is just a name for our ignorance of the causes, or for God’s hidden council. While reluctant at first, he later adopted Vindicianus’ views:

“I asked him why it was that many of their [the astrologers’] forecasts turned out to be correct. He replied that the best answer (...) was the power apparent in lots, *a power everywhere diffused in the nature of things*. So when someone happens to consult the pages of a poet whose verses and intention are concerned with a quite different subject, in a wonderful way a verse often emerges appropriate to the decision under discussion. He used to say that it was no wonder if by some higher instinct from the human soul, that does not know what goes on within itself, some utterance emerges not by art but by ‘chance’ which is in sympathy with the affairs or actions of the inquirer. This instruction, either by him or through him, you [God] gave me.”²¹

We find this passage in the context of Augustine’s criticism of various rituals of divination, and foremost of animal sacrifice and astrology, which he regards as totally incompatible with Christianity. He discourages divination, judging it, mostly, to be vain human curiosity molesting oracles about trifles. Following the highest authority of Christ’s own words, Augustine holds a faith dependent on signs and wonders to be weak and immature. But then, this was, for all his refined intelligence, exactly his case in Milan. His immature faith failed to keep pace with his own intellectual insight. Therefore a sign was required and received, although it is easy to see, why Augustine carefully avoids the terms *divination* and *oracle* in his narrative.

Astrology is condemned as an unchristian and false belief, because it perverts the natural order by deeming human souls to be inferior to, and dominated by celestial bodies, but foremost because it abolishes human free will:

“A true Christian piety consistently rejects and condemns this art. (...) Astrologers try to destroy this entire saving doctrine when they say: ‘The reason for your sinning is determined by the heaven’, and ‘Venus or Saturn or Mars was responsible for this act’. They make a man not in the least responsible for his faults, but make him mere flesh and blood and putrid pride, so that the blame lies with the creator and orderer of the heaven and stars.”²²

²⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* X, 9–10.

²¹ Ibid., IV, 5–6.

²² Ibid., IV, 4.

But if astrology is rejected on the ground that it denies the spontaneity of human actions, takes a deterministic stance, and, ultimately, blames evil on God, how can this view be reconciled with that strict doctrine of divine predestination allegedly held by Augustine? Is such doctrine not subject to the same, identical objections?

I think a structural analysis of the event in the Milan garden presents us with a key for a deeper, more dialectical, and therefore more adequate understanding of the coexistence of divine providence and human free will in the *Confessions*.

The problem is well known, and its divergent solutions have led to the confessional divide between Christian denominations. Given the absolute freedom and omnipotence of God, can there be any space for genuine human freedom, except, possibly, a negative freedom to sin? (And even this negative freedom appears, at a closer look, doubtful and illusionary.)

Yet man's responsibility for his own sin has to be maintained both for theological reasons (it plays a prominent role in the bible), and on the philosophical ground that in sin human freedom becomes apparent as a divergence from, or negation of divine command, which, in turn, cannot be understood to contradict God's own will. (This is a specific dilemma of monotheistic systems).

Human will is easily observed in its rebellion, its agency clearly (on reading Luther's "*De servo arbitrio*" one is tempted to say, obnoxiously) visible. But what happens to it, when it tries to accord itself to providence? Does it just become invisible, or even vanish entirely and cease to exist? All theological reluctance to ascribe good deeds to human spontaneity notwithstanding, this would make moral obligation meaningless. Therefore the problem cannot be described (let alone solved), unless a space for relative human autonomy can be established *inside* God's providence.²³ Such relative human autonomy (related, always, to God's will) seems to be incompletely presented as a mere lopsided freedom to sin.

In divination we can see a deliberate human attempt to accord his decision and his willful action to the divine decree. Human agency is undeniable, since the situation is arranged, or, at least partly provoked by the inquirer, while the result is subjected to his interpretation and consciously accepted. On the other hand, room is made for 'chance', i. e. direct divine manifestation, and all human interpretation departs from the premise that God has spoken. It is the very intention of this ritual to amalgamate the human and the divine intention into a united action in which the human and the divine causation might ultimately become identical. Yet human action remains, and divine action becomes visible.

The solution offering itself to the problem of human "authorship" of their own deeds under the "guidance" of providence lies in the assumption of different spheres or modes of free action. Such spheres cannot be understood as "parallel worlds" without any intersection, but rather as interaction from opposed, mutually exclusive positions that need not and, in this case, cannot be symmetrical. Such a relation can only be described dialectically. While Luther had little use for dialectics, Augustine delighted and thrived in it.

Author and Co-author

One of the emotionally most repulsive images of determinism is that of human marionettes going through their motions pulled by strings by the divine author of the play, who is, at the same time, the sole spectator. To my view this impression changes considerably, if we imagine God as the author and director of the play and men as live actors, genuine interpreters of their part and, at the

²³ No monotheistic religion could consistently maintain an absolute human autonomy from God's will, nor is this at all possible or required for a limited being.

same time, the audience. It makes a difference, if we think of the whole play as staged for the sake of its actors. (At a certain point even the director might appear in a short, but not insignificant role).

Once more the book written and the book read can serve as a suitable model for the interface of God's and man's freedom. When the author has finished writing, the book is complete. In a sense (or, in the case of an autobiography, in more than one sense) the author remains present in his work, even when he has "consigned" it to the reader. But in a different sense the book is still incomplete without the reader – so much so, in fact, that the reader needs to be virtually anticipated in the act of writing. It is correct to think of the spectator as a co-author, although he is never participating in the same creating process, in the production of the object as such. But without an observer and interpreter it would remain meaningless, and a work of art is never a meaningless object. Understanding art presupposes that it is already "there" in a sense, complete or whole, and virtually meaningful. Yet, the spectator's part is a genuinely constitutive act in which not the object, but its meaning is first created. While always dependent on the object, this meaning is not an "objective" quality.

I need not enlarge here on the various possibilities of changing, adding to, or distorting art by interpretation. There are countless opportunities to "sin". The necessity of translation into the observer's "*hic et nunc*" serves as an appropriate analogy for the translation of God's eternal plan into time and space by free human agency. Seeing the abundance of self-referential observations in the *Confessions*, such a notion seems to agree with its author's intentions.

Since such a reading does not enforce a denial of all human freedom, we may conclude in the words attributed to Ignatius of Loyola: "Pray, as if everything depended on God, and act, as if everything depended on you";²⁴ or, even bolder: "Pray, since everything depends on God, but act, since everything depends on you!"

After all, this is just one aspect, although an important one, of the fundamental problem every philosopher confessing to one sole divine principle has to grapple with: the transcendental perfection of this sad temporal world. Or, in Christian terms: How can this ephemeral valley of tears represent God's good eternal creation?

Randomness resolving itself in meaningful coincidence in the act of divination proves, by that very act, that there is no coincidence with God. It is our human partiality and the resulting "ego-central" perspective that are to blame for "accidents", resulting in misreadings and "bad acting". We perceive reality just as we "make it out" in our spatial and temporal dimensions. For the author telling us the story of our lives, and telling universal history to the world, the context is always clear, the meaning always present, and the plot always beautiful.

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²⁴ Apparently only by oral tradition, since I could not find this exact wording in his writings or in the memories of his contemporaries. But the point of this response to a question about divine predestination does not contradict the general drive of the founder of the Jesuit Order.

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A Nominalist Deliverance from Error: On al-Ghazālī's Concept of Modality¹

Abstract | In his *The Deliverance from Error* al-Ghazālī describes error as a sickness. Adhering to this metaphor, al-Ghazālī prescribes certain intellectual strategies for regaining one's health. This paper reconstructs the proposed remedy for the philosophy of his day, that is, Avicennism, which al-Ghazālī attacks on specific key issues in his *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. The paper focuses in particular on one refutation from the *Incoherence's* first discussion, which deals with the issue of the pre-eternity of the world. In it al-Ghazālī advances a nominalist interpretation of modality, which allows him to reject the conclusiveness of particular Avicennan proofs. Moreover, al-Ghazālī employs this nominalist approach when dealing with the issue of causality. Al-Ghazālī realized that there is no definite criterion to choose between the two viable options of occasionalism and secondary causality; both theories are equally possible. The fact that he defines possibility in a nominalist, that is, non-temporal framework, allows him to suspend his judgment and circumvent the pressing question: which theory is true *now*? In essence, by reading the *Deliverance* and the *Incoherence* synoptically and by building upon the scholarship of F. Griffel it becomes clear that al-Ghazālī's modal nominalism proposes an "intellectual surgery" that delivers from sickening error in the domain of speculative philosophy.

Keywords | al-Ghazālī – Modal Nominalism – Error – Secondary Causality – Epochē

The Errors of the Avicennians

In his autobiographical account, *The Deliverance from Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*), al-Ghazālī associates error with doubt, confusion, contradiction, a weak personal character and the human condition in general. Moreover, he considers intellectual error to be a particular characteristic of his time.² He presents error as being diametrically opposed to truth, which is hermetically sealed off from error; error and truth do not mix, which makes discriminating between the two a feasible task. It is the aim of his *Deliverance* to summarize the various disciplines that al-Ghazālī investigated in his lifelong quest to refrain from error and to attain reliable and indisputable

¹ This paper was originally prepared for the *Sixth Oxford Medieval Graduate Conference* that was dedicated to the topic of "Error: Aspects and Approaches" and was held in April 2010. Due to the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull and the subsequent shutdown of air traffic over northern Europe this paper could not be delivered. Since then the paper has been slightly revised. I would like to thank, at this point, the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback. For a discussion of al-Ghazālī's psychology of error, see now Taneli Kukkonen, "Al-Ghazālī on Error," in *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazālī. Papers Collected on his 900th Anniversary*. Vol. 2, ed. Frank Griffel (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3–31.

² Richard J. McCarthy, trans., *Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī* (Louisville, KY: FonsVitae, 1980), 91. Hereafter: *Deliverance*.

knowledge.³ He examines besides Kalām, Isma‘ilism⁴ and Sufism also Philosophy,⁵ which he structures into six disciplines: mathematics, logic, physics, metaphysics, politics and ethics. In evaluating metaphysics al-Ghazālī asserts that:

“It is in the metaphysical sciences that most of the philosophers’ errors are found. Owing to the fact that they could not carry out apodeictic demonstration according to the conditions they had postulated in logic, they differed a great deal about metaphysical questions. [...] But the sum of their errors comes down to twenty heads, [...] It was to refute their doctrine on these twenty questions that we composed our book *The Incoherence*.”⁶

Al-Ghazālī accuses philosophers – in particular al-Fārābī and even more so Avicenna⁷ – that in matters of metaphysics they do not live up to their own epistemic demands. They admit of theories without sufficiently investigating their demonstrability.⁸ Uncritical acceptance (*taqlīd*) of scientific theses is scholarly misbehavior. Especially so, since it might foster academic arrogance, which often leads to blasphemous tendencies such as reducing religious duties to mere pragmatic and didactic habits.⁹ In order to counter and prevent such blasphemous tendencies, al-Ghazālī attacks scholarly *taqlīd*. He does so by querying key philosophical doctrines and by refuting their supposed demonstrability; he exposes scientific claims that were erroneously believed to have been syllogistically proven.

According to al-Ghazālī, these errors led him to compose the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*). The *Incoherence* deals with sixteen metaphysical and four physical propositions whose demonstrative proofs al-Ghazālī is eager to falsify. The entire work is structured around three central philosophical claims: [1] the denial of bodily resurrection, [2] the denial of God’s knowledge of particulars and [3] the affirmation of the pre-eternity of the world. Each proposition implies, in the end, a denial of Allah’s sovereignty, whether it is by means of negating [1] the accountability to or [2] the omniscience of God or by rejecting [3] the divine will. Al-Ghazālī identifies such a position as evidence for unbelief (*kufr*), which he considers a capital offense.¹⁰

³ Concerning further aims of the *Deliverance*, see the revealing study by Kenneth Garden, “Coming Down from the Mountaintop: Al-Ghazālī’s Autobiographies in Context,” *Muslim World* 101/4 (2011): 581–596.

⁴ On al-Ghazālī’s stance towards the Isma‘ilis, see the study by Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam*, Ismaili Heritage Series 5 (London: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001).

⁵ For a keen observation concerning the literary construct at work here, see Kukkonen, “Al-Ghazālī on Error,” 4–5.

⁶ *Deliverance*, 66.

⁷ See Michael E. Marmura, trans., *Al-Ghazālī: The Incoherence of the Philosophers / Tahāfut al-falāsifa, a parallel English-Arabic text* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 4[11]. Hereafter: *Incoherence*; the first number refers to the page, the number in brackets indicates the paragraph. Concerning the identity of those against whom al-Ghazālī wrote his *Incoherence*, see Jules Janssens, “Al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut: Is it really a Rejection of Ibn Sīnā’s Philosophy?,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12/1 (2001): 1–17, who argues that al-Ghazālī polemizes not so much against Avicenna himself but rather against contemporary Avicennians.

⁸ See *Incoherence*, 9[26].

⁹ See *Incoherence*, 1[2]–2[4], *Deliverance*, 63. See further Frank Griffel, “Taqlid of the Philosophers: Al-Ghazālī’s Initial Accusation in his Tahāfut,” in *Ideas, Images, And Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 273–296.

¹⁰ *Incoherence*, 226[1–2]. It should be noted that unbelief, in this context, was equated with apostasy, which is punishable by death. For al-Ghazālī’s interpretation of apostasy, see Frank Griffel, *Apostasy and Toleranz im Islam: Die Entwicklung zu al-Ghazālī’s Urteil gegen die Philosophie und die Reaktionen der Philosophen* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 217–335.

Against the pre-eternity of matter

For our purposes it is important to appreciate the issue of the pre-eternity of the world. Numerous scholars have paid due attention to this issue.¹¹ Above all, it has been pointed out how crucial it is – according to al-Ghazālī – to understand that an eternal world does not need a Creator.¹² An eternal world could exist without any creating cause at all.¹³ In order to prove the erroneousness of the pre-eternity of the world, al-Ghazālī devotes much of his *Incoherence* to falsifying various clusters of eternalist arguments, among which only the fourth argument of the first discussion will be examined here. In his refutation of this argument al-Ghazālī makes use of a nominalist interpretation of modality, which not only provides him with a method for falsifying his opponents' eternalist line of reasoning but also allows him to take a cautious stance on the sensitive issue of secondary causality. That is to say, it will be shown how al-Ghazālī's rudimentary notion of modality from the first discussion can be applied to the seventeenth discussion, which deals with the notorious issue of whether the connection between cause and effect is governed exclusively by the Godhead (occasionalism) or also through the intrinsic natures of objects in the outside world (secondary causality).¹⁴ Furthermore, it will be argued that with his notion of modality al-Ghazālī develops a quasi-surgical method that cuts out particular errors from the philosophers' teachings while allowing for the suspension of judgment concerning issues that cannot be demonstratively proven.

In the first discussion of the *Incoherence* al-Ghazālī attributes the following reasoning to his opponents, who argue in favor of the pre-eternity of the world:

I.4. PhilArg:¹⁵

- (P1) Every temporally originated thing is – prior to its existence – either possible, impossible or necessary in existence.
- (P2) That which is impossible never exists.
- (P3) That which is necessary never ceases to exist.
- (P4) Every temporally originated thing is – prior to its existence – possible to exist. (P1, P2, P3)
- (P5) The possibility of existence is an attribute and, thus, needs a substrate.
- (P6) Possibilities cannot be reduced to God's power to enact it, since our knowledge of God's enacting power is defined by the range of possibilities.
- (P7) Nor can God's knowledge serve as the substrate for the possibilities of existence – since knowledge requires a knowable to which knowledge refers.¹⁶

¹¹ See, most notably, Michael E. Marmura, *The Conflict over the World's Pre-eternity in the Tahafūts of Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1959); Lenn E. Goodman, "Ghazālī's Argument from Creation (I)," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 2/1 (1971): 67–85; idem, "Ghazālī's Argument from Creation (II)," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 2/2 (1971): 168–188; Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 58–77.

¹² Creation, for al-Ghazālī, implies deliberate action realized in finite time. That is to say, the Creator is a subject with a genuine will and with the capacity to temporally realize it. See *Incoherence*, 47[4], 60[18]. See further Kwame Gyekye, "Al-Ghazālī on Action," in *Ghazālī: la raison et le miracle. Table ronde Unesco, 9–10 décembre 1985*, ed. Mohammed A. Sinaceur, Islam d'hier et d'aujourd'hui 30 (Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1987), 83–91 and Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Alghazali," in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge E. Gracia and Timothy B. Noone (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 118–126 (at 120–125).

¹³ According to al-Ghazālī it is well conceivable that a totality is uncaused, while all its constituent parts do have causes. See *Incoherence*, 82[20]. See further Goodman, "Ghazālī's Argument from Creation (II)," 182.

¹⁴ Cf. Blake D. Dutton, "Al-Ghazālī on Possibility and the Critique of Causality," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10/1 (2001): 23–46 and Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 172–173.

¹⁵ *Incoherence*, 40[113]–41[114]. For this argument, see further Marmura, *The Conflict over the World's Pre-eternity*, 138–161, esp. 140–142.

¹⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.7, 1011b25–28 in *Aristotle's Metaphysics. Vol. I*, ed. William D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), where Aristotle qualifies true knowledge as correspondence with the physical world.

- (P8) Matter is the substrate for the possibility of existence.¹⁷ (P5, P6, P7)
 (P9) The possible precedes the actual in time.¹⁸
 (P10) Matter, the substrate of possibility, precedes the existent in time. (P8, P9)
 (P11) Matter itself does not inhere in anything and it does not come to be.
 (P12) What does not come to be is without beginning.
 (C) Matter, the substrate of possibility, is without beginning, it is pre-eternal. (P10, P11, P12)

According to this argument, matter, the material basis of the cosmos, is pre-eternal. However, eternity is a divine characteristic. Therefore, the conclusion implies that matter and God are coextensive in being both pre-eternal. This coeternity seems to defy the fundamental difference between the Almighty's infinity and the finitude of creatures. More importantly, however, weighs the Avicennian claim that is implicit in the notion of coeternity. If the Creator and matter are coeternal then God must have created matter in such a way that it is simultaneous with Himself. That is to say, the Creator is here understood as a cause that necessitates its effect without the possibility of temporal delay.¹⁹ Al-Ghazālī strongly objects to this claim, since if the cosmos is nothing but the Creator's necessary emanation then creation cannot be the result of a deliberate and willful action. Creation, however, means exactly that to al-Ghazālī: voluntary action in time.²⁰ In order to defend his standpoint, al-Ghazālī advances three counterarguments.²¹ Possibly, the strongest of these builds upon our intuitive knowledge concerning the possibilities of universal properties. One way to reconstruct the argument is as follows:

I.4.-2. GhazArg:²²

- (P1) The mind judges universal attributes (e. g., *blackness*) to be possible before their existence.
 (P2) The possibilities of universal attributes (e. g., *Blackness is possible*) do not inhere in matter.²³
 (P3) Knowledge requires a knowable to which knowledge refers.²⁴
 (P4) If the possibilities of universal attributes do not inhere in matter, then there can be no knowledge regarding the possibilities of these universals. (P2, P3)
 (P5) Yet, we do have knowledge regarding the possibilities of universals (i. e., we can judge whether *Blackness is possible*). (P1, P2, *pace* P4)
 (C) The possibilities concerning universal attributes do not inhere in matter (P2), but they are formulated in the mind. (P1)

This counterargument revolves around a *modus tollens* (P4), which is based on the assumption that there can be no knowledge concerning the possibilities of universals, unless these are instantiated in matter. Both parties – al-Ghazālī as well as his philosophical opponents – agree

¹⁷ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII.7, 1032a20–22 in *Aristotle's Metaphysics. Vol. II*, ed. William D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

¹⁸ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX.7, 1049b10–19 in *Aristotle's Metaphysics. Vol. II*, ed. Ross.

¹⁹ *Incoherence*, 15[15].

²⁰ *Incoherence*, 56[4], 60[18]. In this al-Ghazālī follows John Philoponus (d. ca. 570), see Hugo Rabe, ed., *Philoponus. De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899), 566.6–8: εἰ γὰρ καὶ μόνῳ τῷ βούλεσθαι ὑφίστησιν ὁ θεὸς ἅπαντα, ἀλλ' ὅτε καὶ εἶναι αὐτὰ βούλεται. Translation in James Wilberding, trans., *Philoponus against Proclus's 'On the Eternity of the World 12–18'* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 70: For although God causes all things to exist by willing alone, nevertheless, He also wills *when* they exist. See further Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 51–56 and 68–76, esp. 71.

²¹ *Incoherence*, 42[117–119].

²² *Incoherence*, 42[118].

²³ *Incoherence*, 44[127].

²⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.7, 1011b25–28 in *Aristotle's Metaphysics. Vol. I*, ed. Ross.

that universal forms (e. g., *blackness*) do not inhere in matter (P2).²⁵ Yet, al-Ghazālī upholds that we do have knowledge about the possibility of universals, since we can judge such statements as “Blackness is possible” or “Justice is necessary.” This does not mean, however, that the possibilities of universal forms inhere in matter as P4 would imply; P2 precludes this option. Instead, al-Ghazālī boldly upsets the *modus tolleus* by asserting that “[...] the mind, in judging possibility, does not need to posit [something] having existence to which it would relate possibility.”²⁶ Modal terms can be attributed to universal attributes without presupposing any material substrate. Al-Ghazālī might imply here that the mind functions as their substrate, but he refrains from saying so explicitly. In fact, al-Ghazālī abstains from addressing such crucial questions as whether modalities inhere in the mind only or from where they originate.²⁷ He persistently avoids the issue of the ontological origin of modal concepts.

Modalities as mental judgments

What matters for al-Ghazālī is to reject the initial premise (i. e., I.4. PhilArg: P8) that matter serves as the substrate for the possibilities of existence by showing that universal forms – together with their possibilities – do not need to inhere in matter. Thus, he argues that modalities behave like universals in being mental entities.²⁸ Ontologically, modalities are forms – similarly to universals such as “harmony and agreeableness” – that do not need instantiation and thus differ essentially from particular forms such as “white,” “ferocious” or “humorous” that do require instantiation.²⁹ Moreover, we are given a fairly clear definition of modality:

“The impossible consists in [1] affirming a thing conjointly with denying it, [2] affirming the more specific while denying the more general, or [3] affirming two things while negating one [of them].”³⁰

Modal concepts are defined by virtue of [1] the principle of contradiction, [2] logical implications and [3] the denial of generic transformations. Considering the principle of contradiction al-Ghazālī states: “The impossible consists of conjoining negation and affirmation.”³¹ In addition, logical implications further specify the scope of modal concepts; it is just as impossible to violate deductive relations as it is to violate the principle of contradiction. Finally, impossibility is qualified in terms of generic transformations: a cup cannot become whiteness, since a substance such as a physical object cannot transform into an accident such as a color. A cup may become white, that is, it may acquire a new accident, but it cannot change its ontological genus. Al-Ghazālī agrees here with Aristotle in that any change requires a substrate, that is, a thing that

²⁵ For Avicenna, they inhere in the Active Intellect. See Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93–94.

²⁶ *Incoherence*, 42[118].

²⁷ R. Frank understands the lack of further specification as an indication that al-Ghazālī considered modal concepts to be “simply given.” See Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), 63. In contrast, B. Hennig asserts that al-Ghazālī is clear insofar as modal concepts only need a mental substrate. See Boris Hennig, “Ghazali on Immaterial Substances,” in *Substance and Attribute in Islamic Philosophy. Western and Islamic Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Christian Kanzian, Muhammad Legenhausen (Heusenstamm: Ontos Verlag, 2007), 63–65.

²⁸ *Incoherence*, 44[127]. It can be debated how seriously al-Ghazālī subscribed to the view that universals are mere mental entities, since in a subsequent discussion he portrays the nature of universal concepts quite differently. See *Incoherence*, 199[75].

²⁹ It should be noted that al-Ghazālī provides this characterization about universals and not about modalities. See *Incoherence*, 179[3]. But, due to the similarity between modalities and universals – see *Incoherence*, 44[127] – the characterization in question can be applied to modal concepts as well. For further analysis, see Hennig, “Ghazali on Immaterial Substances,” 58–65.

³⁰ *Incoherence*, 175[29]. The numbering is mine – A. K.

³¹ *Incoherence*, 38[104].

persists throughout the change and guarantees the persistence of the changing subject.³² All three conditions together define modal concepts in that each condition portrays an instance of conceptual compatibility. Mutually exclusive terms or propositions cannot be logically conjoint whether [1] it is the conjunction of affirmation and negation or [3] the attribution of a generic change to any given substance or whether [2] it is by assigning one property to a substance whose nature is essentially unable to hold such a property. For instance, it is conceptually incompatible to assign action to the inanimate.³³ Thus, one can establish that conceptual compatibility is the criterion of modality.³⁴

Al-Ghazālī's notion of modality did not evolve in isolation from his predecessors. Modal nominalism, the theory that modal notions do not derive from dispositions in the external natural world but from mental contents,³⁵ has been advanced by earlier Ash'arite *mutakallimūn* such as al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013). Al-Bāqillānī taught that the divine omnipotence entails the possibility of God having been able to create an entirely different world.³⁶ Neither essences, nor natural potencies, nor the composition of the entire world could qualify His absolute sovereignty. Furthermore, it might have been Avicenna himself who provided the fertile ground on which al-Ghazālī developed his modal conception, but this is still a matter of debate.³⁷ What seems certain is that al-Ghazālī, unlike Avicenna, clearly separates modal concepts from the material plane and its temporal dimension by defining modalities in terms of conceptual compatibility rather than by understanding them as innate potentialities. Modalities are no longer teleological potencies that strive for self-realization in time. Not everything that is possible, thus, will come about. Modalities are timeless, logical relations, which determine the absolute limits of divine omnipotence. That is why al-Ghazālī is persistent in emphasizing that not even God can enact the logically impossible.³⁸

In accordance with the correspondence theory of truth, modal realism claims that modal concepts refer to potencies in actual things of the outside world. Potencies are material dispositions which result from a given substance's material composition.³⁹ The theory of possibilities inhering in actual, *realiter* things not only seems to be intuitively apparent, but also offers epistemological advantages. One advantage is the theoretical verifiability of modal propositions by

³² *Incoherence*, 176[35–36]. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* I.9, 192a29–30 in *Aristotelis Physica*, ed. William D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1950. See also Lenn E. Goodman, “Did Al-Ghazālī Deny Causality?,” *Studia Islamica*, 47 (1978): 83–120 at 118–119, who observes how al-Ghazālī significantly departs here from the Ash'arite understanding of change. In Ash'arite atomism generic transformations are not considered impossible, since there is no need to postulate a substrate that underlies change. Strictly speaking, there is no change at all in Ash'arite atomism but only constant recreation.

³³ *Incoherence*, 58–59[13] and 167[5]. See Goodman, “Did Al-Ghazālī Deny Causality?,” 90 and Gyekye, “Al-Ghazālī on Action,” 84–86. Consider, likewise, the impossibility to create knowledge in the inanimate, see *Incoherence*, 175[33].

³⁴ See Taneli Kukkonen, “Possible Worlds in the Tahāfut al-Falāsifa: Al-Ghazālī on Creation and Contingency,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38/4 (2000): 488–490.

³⁵ It should be noted that the term “modal nominalism” is used here differently from its contemporary use in modern metaphysics, where it pertains, first and foremost, to the ontological status of possible worlds. In contrast, “modal nominalism” is defined here in accordance with al-Ghazālī's critique of the Avicennian position pertaining to the ontological status of modal concepts; a critique that, arguably, lies at the beginning of venturing beyond the Aristotelian understanding of modality.

³⁶ See Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 52. For further conceptions of modality, including that of al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), see Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 167–172.

³⁷ For Avicenna's modal theory, see Allen Bäck, “Avicenna's Conception of Modalities,” *Vivarium* 30/2 (1992): 217–255 and idem, “Avicenna and Averroes: Modality and Theology,” in *Potentialität and Possibilität – Modalaussagen in der Geschichte der Metaphysik*, ed. Thomas Buchheim et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001), 125–145 and Henrik Lagerlund, “Avicenna and Tūsī modal logic,” *History and Philosophy of Logic* 30/3 (2009): 227–239. See further Kukkonen, “Possible Worlds,” 495–497 and Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 168–169.

³⁸ *Incoherence*, 174[27]–175[29]. See Goodman, “Did Al-Ghazālī Deny Causality?,” 116–119. R. Frank has put al-Ghazālī's position most succinctly: “For al-Ghazālī, thus, God may not, strictly speaking, be said to create *ex nihilo* but rather *ex possibili*.” See Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 63.

³⁹ See Blake, “Al-Ghazālī on Possibility,” 40–44.

means of investigating the dispositions of the material objects referred to. This correspondence guarantees the world's inherent intelligibility; the same fundamental reality is expressed in terms of propositions as well as in terms of physical characteristics. Such a realist view has the further advantage of avoiding circular definitions, since modality is not defined by notions ending in an “-able” (e. g., capable, conceivable, etc.), but rather is explained through reference to material dispositions.⁴⁰ Another characteristic of the realist view is that it goes hand-in-hand with a temporal commitment. Based on Aristotelian principles,⁴¹ the archetypal modal realist upholds that whatever is possible will eventually come about at one point in time.⁴² An eternal world supports this conception, since the infinity of time allows for all possibilities to be eventually realized. That is, those who interpreted possibilities as innate potencies were generally bound to a statistical understanding of modalities.⁴³

For al-Ghazālī a major problem with this realist interpretation of modality lies with the qualification of divine omnipotence. Counterfactual propositions are excluded from such a universe. Whatever happens, happens (at least in part) according to natural dispositions and not solely on the basis of divine decree. In order to safeguard the divine sovereignty, al-Ghazālī denies potencies and reduces modalities to mental judgments. As a result, the verifiability of modal propositions is derived from the analytical plane of conceptual compatibility, which goes hand in hand with the elimination of the temporal commitment. It is conceptually compatible that a substance such as a book may turn into a horse, or a staff into a snake.⁴⁴ This does not mean, however, that such a transformation will ever take place. In a nominalist modal framework, possibilities – particularly absurd possibilities – do not need to be actualized in order to be genuinely possible. It is this feature that al-Ghazālī exploits when dealing with the question of how causal relations operate.

⁴⁰ See *Incoherence*, 41[114].

⁴¹ For instance, Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX.3, 1047a12–14 and IX.8, 1050b6–8 in *Aristotle's Metaphysics. Vol. II*, ed. Ross, as well as Aristotle, *On the Heavens* I.12, 281b25 in *Aristotelis De Caelo. Libri quattuor*, ed. Donald J. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955). See further Jaakko Hintikka, *Time and Necessity: Studies in Aristotle's Theory of Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 104–105.

⁴² This is the so-called *principle of plenitude*, which states that every possibility will eventually be actualized. On the *principle of plenitude* in Aristotle, see Hintikka, *Time and Necessity*, 93–113. For further discussion on this principle with regard to al-Ghazālī and Averroës, see Taneli Kukkonen, “Plenitude, Possibility, and the Limits of Reason: A Medieval Arabic Debate on the *Metaphysics* of Nature,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61/4 (2000): 539–560. For Avicenna's use of this principle, see Lagerlund, “Avicenna and Tūsī modal logic,” 231–232.

⁴³ Whether Avicenna and his followers wholeheartedly subscribed to this archetypal view is doubtful. For instance, Bäck, “Avicenna's Conception of Modalities,” 231–236 has shown that Avicenna held a weak version of the principle of plenitude, which did not call for the *de re* actualization but only for the *in intellectu* actualization of all possibilities at one given time. Be that as it may, it is the archetypal view that al-Ghazālī argued against in the *Incoherence*, as evinced by the I.4. PhilArg, which has been discussed above.

⁴⁴ See *Incoherence*, 171[18]–172[19].

The thorny issue of secondary causality

Much ink has been shed on the famous seventeenth discussion of the *Incoherence*, which deals with the notorious issue of causality.⁴⁵ Among the various interpretations that have been advanced only a few have appreciated the pivotal connection between causality and modality.⁴⁶ For instance, B. Dutton reads al-Ghazālī's critique about modality as an argument designed to support occasionalism, the doctrine that God directly creates every physical and mental entity parallelly but in accordance with the other while there being no natural connection between these two dimensions. At this point a skeptic might ask: how is the structured order of the cosmos to be guaranteed if God is the single necessitating cause of everything? Put differently, what guarantees that God does not create invisible, ferocious monsters that disturb our everyday life without us being able to know about them?⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī is well aware of the fact that occasionalism might lead to skepticism. As noted above, doubt is associated with error and as such needs to be remedied.⁴⁸ Thus, al-Ghazālī answers this challenge by introducing the divine habit as a regulatory qualification and as a "safeguard measure" that guarantees the reliability and calculability of the world's order.⁴⁹ However, this answer does not seem to have fully satisfied al-Ghazālī, since he continues to elaborate on the issue of causality and presents his second major response: a modified account of secondary causality.

Secondary causality refers to the efficient causal connections between created beings. Provided that these created beings are animate they can causally affect their environment also through actions.⁵⁰ If they are inanimate then their intrinsic natures determine how they operate as causes. For al-Ghazālī the important issue is to define secondary causality in such a way as to ensure that the Almighty is able – *ex hypothesi* – to intervene and to change any given causal relation. For this purpose al-Ghazālī denies the necessitarian character of secondary causal relations. As al-Ghazālī puts it:

"The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary, according to us. But [with] any two things, where [1] "this" is not "that" and "that" is not "this" and where [2] neither the affirmation of the one entails the affirmation of the other nor the negation of the one entails negation of the other, it is not a necessity of the existence of the one that the other should exist, and it is not a necessity of the nonexistence of the one that the other should not exist [...]."⁵¹

⁴⁵ See, among others, Michael Marmura, "Ghazali and Demonstrative Science," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3 (1965): 183–204; Michael Marmura, "Ghazalian Causes and Intermediaries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115/1 (1995): 89–100; Dutton, "Al-Ghazālī on Possibility," 23–46; Barry S. Kogan, "The Philosophers Al-Ghazālī and Averroes on Necessary Connection and the Problem of the Miraculous," in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981), 113–132; Binyamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality," *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988): 75–98; Omar E. Moad, "Al-Ghazali's Occasionalism and the Natures of Creatures," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58/2 (2005): 95–101; Goodman, "Did Al-Ghazālī Deny Causality?," 83–120; Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 22–31; Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 15–22; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 147–213.

⁴⁶ See Dutton, "Al-Ghazālī on Possibility," 23–46; Jon McGinnis, "Occasionalism, Natural Causation and Science in al-Ghazālī," in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. James E. Montgomery, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 152 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 441–463 and Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 172–179.

⁴⁷ *Incoherence*, 169–170[13].

⁴⁸ See *Deliverance*, 55.

⁴⁹ *Incoherence*, 170[14]–171[17].

⁵⁰ *Incoherence*, 167[4–5].

⁵¹ *Incoherence*, 166[1]. The numbering is mine – A. K.

Al-Ghazālī asserts that secondary causation is not a logically necessary relation, since it is neither a case of [1] identity (there is no logical contradiction in supposing a secondary cause without an effect), nor does it behave like [2] a logical implication. If secondary causal relations are not necessary, then the relationship between cause and effect is *a priori* separable. Counterfactually, a secondary cause *can* exist without an effect ensuing.⁵² Having said that, the nominalist, that is, atemporal,⁵³ interpretation of modality does not require that the contingency of secondary causation entails the eventual interruption or cessation of causal relations. Put differently, the fact that secondary causal connections are not coextensive with logical relations does not affect their permanent reliability.

Repeated observation undoubtedly teaches us that natural phenomena do behave in a lawful, uniform manner. However, the reason for this regularity is not known. For al-Ghazālī, it is explicable in two ways: in an occasionalist and in a naturalist account. With regard to the latter, al-Ghazālī postulates a strong existential dependency, since causal relations are not necessary but contingent relations that depend upon God's creative action. If God had not created the universe, secondary causal relations would not exist. Moreover, the contingency of causal relations also entails their dependency in matters of efficacy. If God did not provide for the sufficiency of secondary causes, no effect would follow from them. Thus, secondary causes are in constant need of a divine sufficiency-injection in order to operate.⁵⁴ On all accounts, God is an indispensable factor in the mechanism of secondary causation.

This implies that al-Ghazālī sketches a notion of scientific knowledge that cannot omit presupposing a divine presence. Demonstrative knowledge about natural phenomena is possible only as long as one considers this knowledge *ceteris paribus* – supposing God's persistent habit of maintaining the cosmological *status quo*. While in an occasionalist universe demonstrative knowledge is provided directly by God,⁵⁵ in a naturalist framework natures do play a role, but only a contingent one that constantly presupposes divine supplement.⁵⁶

It is an unknowable truth whether nature's regular patterns are due to direct divine agency or due to the efficacy of secondary causes through which God operates only indirectly by means of constantly sustaining the order of secondary causation.⁵⁷ Both accounts, the occasionalist and the naturalist, are – each in itself – logically consistent approaches: they are compossible. F. Griffel is correct in pointing out that compossibility makes particularly good sense in a nominalist interpretation of modality.⁵⁸ Accordingly, al-Ghazālī's modal theory allows him to suppose two mutually exclusive accounts of causality without running the risk of implying that both explanations will be realized at one point in time. Al-Ghazālī's notion of modality, thus, methodologically supports his suspension of judgement and his unwillingness to choose between these two viable explanations. This *epochē* fully accords with al-Ghazālī's persistence throughout the *Incoherence*

⁵² Conversely, however, every effect must have (at least) one cause. The important issue here lies in the fact that al-Ghazālī denies the sufficient character of secondary causes, while accepting their necessary function; that is to say, secondary causes alone do not suffice to bring about an effect. See *Incoherence*, 167[5]–168[6]. See further Goodman, "Did Al-Ghazālī deny Causality?," 91.

⁵³ As indicated above, the realist view on modality generally implied a temporal commitment, which did not apply for the anti-realist, i. e., nominalist, view.

⁵⁴ See Peter Adamson, "Al-Ghazālī, Causality, and Knowledge" (paper presented at the 20th World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, 1998), accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Medi/MediAdam.htm> and McGinnis, "Occasionalism," 449, 455–459.

⁵⁵ Marmura, "Ghazali and Demonstrative Science," 200–204.

⁵⁶ See McGinnis, "Occasionalism," 455–459. Cf. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 83–86.

⁵⁷ It is noteworthy that secondary causation does not deny the possibility of miracles. Miracles could be enacted, for instance, by speeding up natural processes. See *Incoherence*, 172[19].

⁵⁸ Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 176.

of only destroying and falsifying his opponents' doctrines and of not advancing any particular system of his own.⁵⁹

The implications of the two possible accounts are noteworthy. In an occasionalist universe there are no natures, since all atoms and accidents are (re-)created by God every single moment. Since there are no natures, there are no potencies either, which could limit the divine omnipotence. That is exactly why B. Dutton concludes that al-Ghazālī's modal nominalism supports the occasionalist reading of causality.⁶⁰ In a naturalist universe, on the other hand, created beings causally effect one another in accordance with their inherent natures. If one allows for secondary causal efficacy it seems hard to deny *de re* potentialities, which are material dispositions resulting from the natures of *realiter* things. If al-Ghazālī allows for both causal theories to be equally viable explanations, then one is faced with two different theories of modality: (I) a strong modal nominalism that reduces all possibilities to mental judgments and (II) a weak modal nominalism which claims that some possibilities do not need a material receptacle while allowing other possibilities to subsist as *de re* potentialities. That is to say, al-Ghazālī leaves not only the matter of secondary causality unresolved but concomitantly also the issue of what type of nominalism he subscribes to: (I) a moderate occasionalist understanding that emphasizes divine omnipotence, which is only qualified by conceptual compatibility and which entails that modal notions derive from mental judgements alone or (II) a semi-naturalist comprehension that allows for some modal notions to correspond to material potencies, while denying those potencies to be necessary and causally sufficient in character.⁶¹

Conclusion

In summary, al-Ghazālī's nominalist approach (the strong as well as the weak version) falsifies the demonstrability of the pre-eternity of the world (as well as of the incorruptibility of the soul)⁶² and supports his equivocal interpretation of causal relations. That is, on the one hand, he refutes key doctrines of unbelievers (*kuffār*) while, on the other, he abstains from uncritical acceptance (*taqlīd*) by avoiding to choose sides on indemonstrable matters. In his *Deliverance* al-Ghazālī instructs the reader:

"[...] were the perplexed person to say that he is perplexed, without specifying the problem about which he is perplexed, one should say to him: "You are like a sick man who says that he is sick, but does not specify his illness, and yet requests a remedy for it." He should be told that there exists no cure for sickness in general, but only for a specific sickness such as a headache or an attack of diarrhea or something else."⁶³

⁵⁹ See *Incoherence*, 7–8[22], 46[133–134], 106[39]. See also *Deliverance*, 66. One might question, at this point, whether al-Ghazālī can be considered a nominalist after all, given this outspoken non-commitment to any particular theory. Yet, if modal nominalism is understood as defined above (i. e., modal terms are reduced to mental judgments), then al-Ghazālī is a nominalist, insofar as he endorses this theory at *Incoherence*, 42[116], 44[127]. If one was to object and say that he endorsed this theory only for the sake of argument, I would reply that the applicability of this theory to more than one discussion in the *Incoherence* (see below n. 62) as well as to his persistent *epochē* portrays an underlying theoretical standpoint rather than mere eristic expediency.

⁶⁰ Dutton, "Al-Ghazālī on Possibility," 40–46.

⁶¹ Al-Ghazālī recurrently emphasizes his indecision in this matter by stating that God is the real cause "either through the mediation of His angels or without mediation." *Incoherence*, 167[5]. See further *Incoherence*, 171[18], 172[21].

⁶² See *Incoherence*, 205[18]–207[23].

⁶³ *Deliverance*, 75–76.

Read in this context, al-Ghazālī's modal nominalism presents a definite remedy that performs "intellectual surgery"⁶⁴ on speculative philosophy by way of denying the demonstrability of some of its key doctrines, which – to his mind – cause sickening doubt or even lethal apostatical unbelief.

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⁶⁴ I borrow this term from Eric L. Ormsby, *Ghazali* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 76.

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The Mathematical-Poetic Renaissance in Austria (Johannes von Gmunden, Georg von Peuerbach, Regiomontanus, Conrad Celtis)

Abstract | The University of Vienna was founded in 1365 and of course there was also a philosophical or artistic faculty. The question raised in this paper is what was the fate of “philosophy” at that faculty. Under the influence of the nominalistic school of Paris the interpretation of Aristotelian texts was the main work – with a strong emphasis on the *Physics*. The faculty experiences an enormous upswing in the middle of the fifteenth century with two different “wings”: the mathematical sciences (algebra, astronomy, geography) and the humanistic disciplines rhetoric, poetics (inspired from Italy) which were cultivated on a high level by young scholars and for some time under the eyes of the Greek Cardinal Bessarion (who was present in Vienna in 1460–1461). Several decades later, around the turn of the century, this constellation received a new appearance with the extremely energetic humanist Konrad Celtis (1459–1508): a great organiser of academic life and a poet with rather prosaic topics: the use of classical texts for the education of the youth, social and cultural development in German and Central European towns. If he made a philosophy it was a pragmatic or performative one. His striving was more “artistic” than “philosophical”. He promoted the development of intellectual life in Vienna in this manner, philosophy having had there a rather weak position up until the nineteenth century.

Keywords | University of Vienna – Philosophy – Mathematical Sciences – Humanistic Disciplines – Cardinal Bessarion – Konrad Celtis – Performative Philosophy

Austria, as part of the Holy Roman Empire, had the status of a duchy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – just like the neighbouring country of Bavaria. Its territory was slightly larger than that of today’s Austria: some further regions in southern Germany belonged to the country which was governed by certain branches of the Habsburg dynasty. This dynasty was able to secure the crown of the Empire for itself (Emperor Frederick III (1415–1493) in the fifteenth century; it began already to expand to Bohemia and Hungary – but with varying success: it was the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus (1443–1490) who occupied Vienna and transferred his residence there in the 1480s. Austria arose as a world power at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

According to Hans Rupprich, the first migration of the Italian movement of Humanism into the German-speaking countries went by way of Prague, where Emperor Charles IV (1316–1378) maintained direct contacts with renowned Italian personalities such as Cola Rienzi (1313–1354) and Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) (whose *Renovatio Romae* could be seen as the first formulation for “the Renaissance”). The Emperor founded the first more or less German University in Prague (1348). Its important employees included Heinrich von Mügeln (1319–1380) (who later

moved to Austria) and Johann von Neumarkt (1310–1380) (who became Bishop of Olomouc); both of them also wrote in German. The Emperor's son-in-law, rival and imitator was Rudolf IV (1339–1365), Duke of Austria, who in 1365 founded the University of Vienna.¹

The first information regarding philosophical activities in Vienna indicate that the commentaries by Johannes Buridanus (1300–1358), particularly those about *Logica vetus*, *Physics* and *De anima* were a matter of interest in Prague and in Vienna.² The statutes of Viennese University stipulated in the 1380s that all of Aristotle's works had to be taught. In reality only logic, natural philosophy and ethics were cultivated. Thanks to the nominalistic school of "terminism", logic flourished in Vienna.

As early as 1364, right before the university was founded, a commentary by Albert von Rickmersdorf (1316–1390), the first chancellor of the Vindobonensis, of the Aristotelian *De caelo et mundo* was copied. Over the following decades Buridanus' *Physics* was often interpreted. Heinrich von Langenstein (1325–1397), who was called "Doctor conscientiosus", came from Paris and wrote a treatise about concentric spheres and epicycles. Johannes Stedler von Landshut interpreted the Aristotelian *De generatione et corruptione* and the *Physica* (1430). Aristotelian works on physics were the subject of numerous interpretations over the next decades. It is of interest to note that no great interest was shown in metaphysics.³

The third main emphasis was the interpretation of Aristotle's Practical Philosophy, with here the focus being on the individual ethics. Andreas von Schärding commented, however, on *Economics*. The most productive decades for the latter field were 1420 to 1460.⁴

At about the same time, in the first half of the fifteenth century, Austrian-born Johannes von Gmunden (1380–1442) raised the standard of the Philosophy Faculty in Vienna. He began with commentaries of Aristotelian works. He taught mathematics and astronomy as of 1419 with his speciality being the making of graphic and three-dimensional models with cardboard. He produced planetary lists and calendars (one of which was the first printed calendar), astrolabia and a huge geographical map of the world designed from a topographical list.⁵ He published a leaflet (in German!) against an apocalyptic prophecy.⁶ With these activities he transcended the confines that until then had constricted the philosophical (or artistic) faculty: the seven disciplines of

¹ See Hans Rupprich, *Die Frühzeit des Humanismus und der Renaissance in Deutschland* (Leipzig: P. Reclam, 1938), 7ff.

² Mieczysław H. Markowski, "Der Nominalismus im 15.–16. Jahrhundert," in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, ed. Michael Benedikt et al. (Klausen-Leopoldsdorf, 1996), 140.

³ Ibid., 144ff. Heinrich von Langenstein confirmed this tendency with publications against astrologists, apocalyptic prophets and beggar monks growing excited about the Immaculate Conception; see Hubert Pruckner, *Studien zu den astrologischen Schriften des Heinrich von Langenstein* (Leipzig-Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1933). Also other prominent (Aristotelian) "nominalists" in the fourteenth century did not interpret the *Metaphysics* – and were reserved for astrology (more than many (Platonist) "humanists"); see also Helmut Grössing, *Humanistische Naturwissenschaft. Zur Geschichte der Wiener mathematischen Schulen des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts* (Habil. Wien, 1981), 63ff.; Helmut Grössing, "Zur Biographie des Johannes von Gmunden," in *Johannes von Gmunden (ca. 1384–1443). Astronom und Mathematiker*, ed. Rudolf Simek et al. (Vienna: Fassbaender Verlag, 2006), 11ff. For the ascent of astrology with the platonizing humanists see Wolf-Dieter Müller-Jahncke, "Inclinant astra, non necessitant. Horoskop und Individualschicksal im frühen 16. Jahrhundert," in *Der die Sterne liebte. Georg von Peuerbach und seine Zeit*, ed. Helmut Grössing (Vienna: Erasmus, 2002), 173ff; Pico della Mirandola criticises the "magic turn" of the neoplatonists: the celestial bodies have effects on the earth only through their course, their light and their warmth: Müller-Jahncke, "Inclinant astra, non necessitant," 180.

⁴ Markowski, "Der Nominalismus im 15.–16. Jahrhundert," 147ff.

⁵ For the production of maps Johannes collaborated with the monastery of Klosterneuburg; the world maps were focused on Jerusalem, whereas one excellent map of Central Europe, the Fridericus-Map (1421), was centered on Hallein (Salzburg), (Peuerbach and Klosterneuburg are indicated); see Franz Wawrik, "Die Beeinflussung der frühen Kartographie durch Johannes von Gmunden," in *Johannes von Gmunden (ca. 1384–1443). Astronom und Mathematiker*, ed. Rudolf Simek et al. (Vienna: Fassbaender Verlag, 2006), 45ff.; for the tools see the essays in *ibid.*: 91ff.

⁶ Grössing, "Zur Biographie des Johannes von Gmunden," 106ff; Floridus Röhrig, "Das frühe Auftreten des Humanismus im Stift Klosterneuburg," in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, ed. Michael Benedikt et al. (Klausen-Leopoldsdorf, 1996), 155–156.

trivium and quadrivium and the Aristotelian books (as far as translated). He resigned on pure book work and worked with other “media”. It can be argued that Johannes von Gmunden introduced “Mathematical Sciences” in a broader sense (and as chance has it this expression also appears in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* with astronomy, geodesy as examples).⁷

He founded the “First Viennese Mathematical School” and ushered in one of the very few great epochs of the University.⁸

His successor was Georg von Peurbach (1423–1461), also Austrian-born (from Upper Austria). After his studies in Vienna he went to Italy where he met the Cardinal and humanist Nikolaus Cusanus (1401–1464) and, of course, also became acquainted with Italian humanism. After his return to Vienna he led there a kind of dual life. At the university he taught rhetorics and poetics, on Virgil and Horace. As an astronomer and mathematician he experienced both challenges and commissions working for the imperial chancellor Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini (1405–1464), the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus (1443–1490) (who had done his studies in Vienna), Emperor Frederick III (1415–1493), as well as one or the other comets, the Greek Cardinal and humanist Basilius Bessarion (1403–1472) who spent the years 1460 and 1461 in Vienna trying to persuade the Emperor to launch a crusade against the Ottomans.⁹ And in this connection especially his disciple Johannes Müller (who became his close collaborator and is also known under his posthumous name Regiomontanus) deserves special mention. He produced calendars, horoscopes, sundials, astronomical almanacs, lists of eclipses, studies on comets, amendments and translations of ancient works (such as, for instance, the *Almagest* of Ptolemy), separate treatises on astronomy and mathematics.¹⁰

Although Georg von Peurbach worked on the level of both trivium and quadrivium, he expanded explosively those frames. As was the case with the Renaissance and humanism in general, his work was not an imitation of something preexisting, but a cascade of explosions. His death, at the age of 39, did not really interrupt that cascade. His work was continued and given to the just invented letterpress. His astronomical observations and measurements did not abandon the Ptolemaic geocentrism, but were so meticulous that they were also transmitted by academic teachers such as Albert de Brudzewo (1445–1497) in Krakow to Nicolaus Copernicus and Konrad Celtis.¹¹

Johannes Müller (1436–1476, later called Regiomontanus), a native of Franconia, was a kind of child prodigy. He enrolled at the University of Leipzig at the age of 11 and one year later calculated an astronomical almanac, which was better than the one that had recently been printed

⁷ Grössing, “Zur Biographie des Johannes von Gmunden,” 107; Aristotle, *Met.* III, 997b 3ff.

⁸ For the radiation of those Viennese “mathematicians” see Katherine Walsh, “Von Italien nach Krakau und zurück. Der Wandel von Mathematik und Astronomie in vorkopernikanischer Zeit,” in *Humanismus und Renaissance in Ostmitteleuropa vor der Reformation*, ed. Winfried Eberhard et al. (Cologne – Weimar – Vienna: Böhlau, 1996), 278–279.

⁹ The Emperor had no time, however, for a crusade. At that time no good Christian prince was willing to undertake such a dangerous operation. An exception was the little and bad and unlucky – excommunicated – signore Sigismondo Malatesta who in 1464 led a crusade to Greece where he liberated his Holy Tomb: that of Plethon. I am indebted to him for an acquaintance with Plethon. And to another contemporary of Plethon and Sigismondo: the painter Piero della Francesca, whose fresco (depicting Saint Sigismundus, Sigismondo Malatesta and the Castellum Sismundum) was of interest for me; see Walter Seitter, *Piero della Francesca. Parallele Farben* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1992), 75ff.

¹⁰ Grössing, “Zur Biographie des Johannes von Gmunden,” 116ff.

¹¹ For a good introduction to the mathematical works of Johannes von Gmunden and Georg von Peurbach see Christa Binder, “Die erste Wiener Mathematische Schule (Johannes von Gmunden, Georg von Peurbach),” in *Rechenmeister und Cossisten der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Reiner Gebhardt et al. (Freiberg: TU Bergakademie Freiberg, 1996), 3ff.; Wolfgang Kaunzner, “Über Georg von Peurbach und die Mathematik des 15. Jahrhunderts,” in *Der die Sterne liebte. Georg von Peurbach und seine Zeit*, ed. Helmut Grössing (Vienna: Erasmus, 2002), 43ff.; eine moderne Einschätzung von Peurbachs astronomischen Beobachtungen versucht Hermann Mücke, “Überprüfung von Beobachtungen Georgs von Peurbach,” in *Der die Sterne liebte. Georg von Peurbach und seine Zeit*, ed. Helmut Grössing (Vienna: Erasmus, 2002), 105ff.

by Gutenberg. He moved to the finest university of that time, Vienna, in 1450,¹² just when Georg von Peurbach had returned there from Italy. Johannes Müller became his private disciple and boarder. He participated in the projects of his master: horoscopes for the Imperial family, the composition of the *Viennese Arithmetic Book*, corrections of the *Almagest*. Cardinal Bessarion invited both astrologers to Italy in the year 1461, Peurbach died suddenly, and Müller went to Rome, then to Ferrara, Venice, Padua and wrote there *De triangulis omnimodis*, dedicating it to the Cardinal. He continued to Buda (Hungary) and worked for the Archbishop of Gran and King Matthias Corvinus, who was the most splendid “Prince of the Renaissance” and proprietor of the largest library at that time.¹³ He could have found employment at the new Hungarian university of Istropolis,¹⁴ but instead continued to work at Gran and Buda. Political problems in Hungary prompted him to go to Nuremberg, where he combined theoretical work with developing gauges and setting up a printing press. He published his *Ephemerides* which became important for Portuguese navigators and for Christopher Columbus.¹⁵ The Pope at the time called him to Rome to work on the reform of the calendar. There he died at the age of forty.¹⁶ He bequeathed an extensive legacy that Copernicus was to refer to when he worked out the heliocentric theses (which only in the year 1838 was proved by another “regiomontanus” scholar: Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel (1784–1846)). Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) in his humanistic diction: “Regiomontanus in his days was the torch in the world.”¹⁷

Regiomontanus continued with Peurbach's work and surpassed him in flexibility and speed. The two formed a great machine (stemming from Parisian-Viennese scholasticism, inspired by antiquizing Italian humanism). Although it functioned only 25 years, it emanated further up until the end of the century, when Vienna saw a second upswing of intellectual life; when Nicolaus Copernicus studied at Krakow, Bologna and Padua; when Martin Behaim, a disciple of Regiomontanus at Nuremberg, went to Lisbon and participated there in the consultations on oceanic expeditions.¹⁸ A further emanation could reach Piero della Francesca's small panel depicting the *Flagellation of Christ* and found in Urbino. According to Berthold Holzschuh and to David A. King, the epigram on the astrolabe built in 1462 by Regiomontanus and dedicated to Cardinal Bessarion is a cryptographic or steganographic text that can help to decipher the very enigmatic panel: the young man in the scarlet cloth could well have been Regiomontanus...¹⁹

¹² According to David A. King, *Astrolabes and Angels, Epigrams and Enigmas. From Regiomontanus' Acrostic for Cardinal Bessarion to Piero della Francesca's Flagellation of Christ* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007), 234; for a summary of Vienna's position see Michael Shank, “The Classical Scientific Tradition in Fifteen-Century Vienna,” in *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation*, ed. F. Jamil Ragep et al. (Leiden – New York – Cologne: Brill, 1996), 115ff.

¹³ The Hungarian King himself had studied at Vienna's university together with Johannes Müller; see Eva Frimmová, “Der Humanismus in Pressburg am Ausgang des Mittelalters,” in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, ed. Michael Benedikt et al. (Klausen-Leopoldsdorf, 1996), 275.

¹⁴ Rudolf Mett, “Johannes Regiomontanus, ein Schüler des Georg von Peurbach,” in *Der die Sterne liebte. Georg von Peurbach und seine Zeit*, ed. Helmut Grössing (Vienna: Erasmus, 2002), 94–95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 97ff.

¹⁶ Rudolf Mett, *Regiomontanus. Wegbereiter eines neues Weltbildes* (Stuttgart-Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1996), 29ff.; Menso Folkerts, “Johannes Regiomontanus – Algebraiker und Begründer der algebraischen Symbolik,” in *Rechenmeister und Cossisten der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Reiner Gebhardt et al. (Freiberg: TU Bergakademie Freiberg, 1996), 19ff.

¹⁷ Mett, “Johannes Regiomontanus, ein Schüler des Georg von Peurbach,” 101ff. The preparation of heliocentric theses was prepared by Viennese mathematicians and at the same time by Islamic astronomers by “freeing astronomy from philosophy:” see Michael Shank, “Regiomontanus on Ptolemy, Physical Orbs, and Astronomical Fictionalism: Goldsteinian Themes in the “Defense of Theon against George of Trebizond,” *Perspectives of Science* 10, no. 2 (2002): 179–207; F. Jamil Rageb, “Freeing Astronomy from Philosophy – An Aspect of Islamic Influence on Science,” *Osiris* 16 (2001): 49ff.; F. Jamil Rageb, “Copernicus and his Islamic Predecessors: Some Historical Remarks,” *Filozofski vestnik* XXV/2 (2004): 125ff. A simultaneous colleague of the Viennese astronomers was the Persian-Turk Ali Qushji (1403–1474).

¹⁸ Mett, “Johannes Regiomontanus, ein Schüler des Georg von Peurbach,” 153ff.

¹⁹ King, *Astrolabes and Angels, Epigrams and Enigmas*, 120ff; <http://web.uni-frankfurt.de/fb13/ign/Code/Text/FROM%20ACROSTIC%20TO%20PAINTING.pdf>

Helmut Grössing states that in the second half of the fifteenth century the University of Vienna yielded its position as the best quadrivium-school to the University of Krakow. Brudzewo, who was mentioned as a teacher of Copernicus and Celtis, had become well-known by commenting and teaching Peurbach and Regiomontanus.²⁰

There was a new upswing of mathematical studies in the last years of the fifteenth century (in a larger sense: including astronomy, astrology, cosmography, cartography) in Vienna. Some of the leading figures included: Andreas Stiborius (1464–1515), Johannes Stabius (1468–1522), Georg Tannstetter (1472–1535), Heinrich Schreyber Grammateus (1492–1525)²¹, Christoph Rudolff (1500–1543)²². These Viennese mathematicians that worked from the nineties until the thirties are sometimes summarized as “Second Viennese Mathematical School”.²³ A label that may be legitimate, since one of the protagonists, Georg Tannstetter himself formulated a historization of the Viennese intellectual life in his *Viri Mathematici* (1514) (reaching from Heinrich von Langenstein up until himself).

The scientific achievements of those men were considerable. They worked in extremely different circumstances, however, (compared with the middle of the fifteenth century). The new Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519) was a dynamic, expansive, and “actionistic” ruler, who expected a great deal from everyone – also from intellectuals. He also installed an intellectual leader – who was more of a *vagans* than a *clericus*.

Before I turn to the extraordinary figure of Konrad Celtis I will first look at the central decades of the fifteenth century, from 1420 until 1460, when the “First Viennese Mathematical School” in a very productive manner combined the mathematical quadrivium with the modernized trivium. What was consequently the fate of the discipline we call “philosophy”. Its fate in Austria was the avoidance, even the rejection of philosophy. As we saw, as early as the first decades of the existence of the university the so-called philosophical – or “artistic” – faculty realized its programme in a rather “positivist” agenda which was very compatible with the profile of the seven “liberal arts”. There the Aristotelian orientation minimally contradicted that direction.

In the fifteenth century there was a well-known and particularly active philosopher, the already cited Nikolaus Cusanus, renowned because of his diplomatic activities between Rome and Constantinople and between Rome and Vienna. He was also Bishop in Tyrol and therefore not very far from Austria.²⁴ He knew Georg von Peurbach and Regiomontanus – but they only discussed together astronomy. His neoplatonist thinking was very idiosyncratic, inspired by mathematical and mystical traditions. It met with only a sporadic reception in Austria.²⁵

Konrad Celtis (1459–1508) was a native of Franconia who studied in Cologne. He travelled to the Hungarian Court of Matthias Corvinus, the already mentioned Renaissance Prince. We must presume a deep affinity between the two extremely active and curious personalities. Some years later Konrad established a similar relationship with Maximilian. Konrad began his humanistic

²⁰ Grössing, “Zur Biographie des Johannes von Gmunden,” 253; ders.: *Naturwissenschaften in Österreich im Zeitalter des Humanismus*, in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, 260.

²¹ Manfred Weidauer, “Über den Cossisten Heinrich Schreyber (Grammateus),” in *Rechenmeister und Cossisten der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Reiner Gebhardt et al. (Freiberg: TU Bergakademie Freiberg, 1996), 107ff.

²² Wolfgang Kaunzner, “Christoff Rudolff, ein bedeutender Cossist in Wien,” in *Rechenmeister und Cossisten der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Reiner Gebhardt et al. (Freiberg: TU Bergakademie Freiberg, 1996), 113ff.

²³ Grössing, “Zur Biographie des Johannes von Gmunden,” 261.

²⁴ For the political activity of Nicolaus Cusanus see Walter Seitter, “Der andere Sigismund und der eine,” in *If you get what you want, you don't want it. Wunscherfüllung, Begehren und Genießen*, ed. R. Pfaller, B. Hofstadler (Frankfurt, 2016): 279ff.

²⁵ Stephan Meier-Oeser, “Die Rezeption der Philosophie des Nikolaus Cusanus in Österreich,” in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, ed. Michael Benedikt et al. (Klausen-Leopoldsdorf, 1996), 293ff.; Kurt Flasch, *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2008), 181ff.; Emerich Coreth, “Philosophisches Denken in Österreich,” in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, ed. Michael Benedikt et al. (Klausen-Leopoldsdorf, 1996), 36.

studies of poetics and rhetorics at Heidelberg. And then he made a big study-trip to Padua, Ferrara, Bologna, Florence, Venice, Rome. He lectured poetics at Erfurt, Rostock, Leipzig. He was crowned by the Emperor Frederick III as “poeta laureatus”. In 1487 in Nuremberg (following the coronation of Petrarca in 1341 and the coronation of Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini in 1442). Celtis founded the *Sodalitas litteraria Vistulana* in Krakow, a group which was engaged in scientific and artistic activities. After further travels he became in 1491 professor of rhetorics and poetics at Ingolstadt. He founded the *Sodalitas litteraria Rhenana* at Mainz and Heidelberg.

The Emperor appointed him lecturer for rhetorics and poetics in Vienna in 1497 where Celtis founded the *Sodalitas litteraria Danubiana*. He made a contract with the Emperor on the founding of the *Collegium poetarum et mathematicorum* in Vienna in 1501: an academic, semi-autonomous institution, with four professors: two for poetics and rhetorics, two for mathematical sciences; the final certificate was to be the coronation as *poeta laureatus* – by the “superintendent” Celtis.²⁶ Celtis quasi-emperor?²⁷

The four chairs provided by Celtis correspond to the medieval organisation of trivium and quadrivium and its humanistic *aggiornamento*.²⁸ Was Celtis only an organizer of the sciences? What did he teach and write?

Celtis was primarily a humanist specializing in literature, in poetics, rhetorics – expanding the scope of his interests to also include medieval and recent authors. His intention was not a pure history of literature but an encyclopedic use of texts, for which the classical term “chrestomathy” had already been coined.²⁹ He saw the utility of poetry in the civilization of the first nomadic human beings and in the popular disguising of philosophical truths concerning nature.³⁰ Philosophy and politics consequently emerge as domains of questions – and that is a new level in the story I am currently telling.

Was Celtis a philosopher? It seems he had philosophical ambitions, which he formulated in only a sketchy fashion. He referred to himself as the “doctor triformis philosophiae”, which means “philosophia spiritualis”, “philosophia moralis” and “philosophia naturalis”.³¹ He tends towards the third, which has to be executed in astronomy, geography, biology and mathematics.³² It is astonishing to read that he announced to his “academy” mathematical-geographic lectures on the Ptolemeic *Geography* – lectures beginning at 8 in the morning in his rooms and spoken in Greek, Latin, German (simultaneously).³³ Announced in Latin verses.

“Cosmography” was an important term for Celtis. Geography was actually a method for his encyclopedic philosophy. This began with his journeys and found there its most material and most complex execution in the foundation of the *Sodalitates litterariae* at Krakow, Mainz

²⁶ Helmuth Grössing, *Humanistische Naturwissenschaft. Zur Geschichte der Wiener mathematischen Schulen des 15. Und 16. Jahrhunderts* (Habil. Wien, 1981), 254ff.; Michael Benedikt, “Denk- und Handlungsformen des Konrad Celtis,” in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, ed. Michael Benedikt et al. (Klausen-Leopoldsdorf, 1996), 319ff.

²⁷ See the inscription in the picture (made by Hans Burgkmair) *Insignia poetarum*: Jörg Robert, *Konrad Celtis und das Projekt der deutschen Dichtung. Studien zur humanistischen Konstitution von Poetik, Philosophie, Nation und Ich* (Tübingen, 2003), 503; Kaiser Maximilian I. und die Kunst der Dürerzeit (Munich – London – New York, 2012), 190–191.

²⁸ Here I can cite a personal experience when in 2013 the Austrian Federal President awarded me The Austrian Cross of Honor, which bears the inscription LITTERIS ET ARTIBUS (within a golden Laurel). It seems evident that these words mean “science” and “art” (although the order of the two is not so clear). This inscription could also thus be the legitimate successor of Celtis’ bipartition of his college, and the Cross the successor of the Laurel.

²⁹ Grössing, *Humanistische Naturwissenschaft*, 258.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 260

³¹ *Ibid.*, 267–268. The topic of the “triformis philosophia” corresponds with the neoplatonic idea of the three holy languages, Hebrew, Greek, Latin; in this point Celtis deviates from Florentine neo-platonism: “amongst the Hebrews I never found a real scholar”.

³² *Ibid.*, 268.

³³ *Ibid.*, 263.

and Heidelberg, Oppenheim, Istropolis (Preßburg, Bratislava), Vienna, Augsburg, Olomouc, Nuremberg, Ingolstadt, Basel and Straßburg, Speyer and Schlettstadt, Erfurt. This was geography in the sense of genuine graphics in the earth of Europe, in the sense of a diagram empowering different towns. Celtis continued his geography with topographical works such as *Norimberga* (1495), *Germania Generalis* (1500), *De origine, situ, moribus et institutis Norimbergae libellus* (1502), *Germania illustrata*.

His most concentrated statement on philosophy is a rather Baroque woodcut drawn by Albrecht Dürer and depicting the enthroned *Philosophia* surrounded by various little figures and inscriptions.³⁴ The question concerning the previous existence of philosophy is answered in a multidimensional manner: not simply historically. By quoting four (or five) nations, however, with four (or five) different professions: the Egyptian and Chaldaean priests, the Greek philosophers, the Latin poets and rhetors, the German wise men.³⁵ Celtis constructs a concept of philosophy that is not univocal but differential which allows even him to be a philosopher.³⁶

His personal starting point is the double profession of the Latins: rhetorics and poetics. These are the two supplements to the linguistic trivium which form the basis of the seven liberal arts. As we have seen, Celtis has a rather prosaic conception of poetry: he primarily sees it as being *descriptio*, *evidentia*, *expressio* – of rather banal things: characters, actions, nations, countries, the course of the stars, the natures of things, the situations of souls ...³⁷

Peregrinatio, *eloquentia*, *descriptio* are the most humble activities that can constitute something like philosophy. In the woodcut we also find a rather Aristotelian schematism: the Greek letter *Phi* is placed underneath the stairway of the seven liberal arts and indicating *Physis* or *Physiologia* (in the sense of physics) as the beginning of philosophy, while the letter *Theta* is situated above the stairway and indicates *Theos* or *Theologia*.³⁸ Celtis conceives the philosophical activity as a bottom-up-processing and he himself is active in the earthly zones.

In Celtis's macro-historic view the poets were the first philosophers and theologians,³⁹ poets with their metric and *staccato* language and myths with their figural, allegorical language. One of the greatest authorities for Celtis is Ovid. Ovid can be read in the sense of *interpretatio physica* and a *interpretatio ethica*, because he is a physical and a moral philosopher. Celtis' ambition is not only to give these interpretations but to write himself as a poet. Like Platon, Ovid and Ficino he views love as the most important subject of poetry.⁴⁰ And not love only in the grammatical singular form.

The *poema naturale* is a literary form that Celtis took from Ovid and Lucrece, Manilius and Boethius where antagonistic cosmologies are discussed: cosmology of eternal order, cosmology of accidental and confusional movements.⁴¹

³⁴ Robert, Konrad Celtis und das Projekt der deutschen Dichtung, 104 and Kaiser Maximilian I. und die Kunst der Dürerzeit (Munich – London – New York, 2012), 188.

³⁵ Ibid., 107ff.

³⁶ A few decades before Celtis, the Greek philosopher Georgios Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452) had insisted on the geographical dimension of the “physical” dispersion of wisdom, thereby avoiding a strict ethnocentrism of truth; see Georgios Gemistos Plethon “Die Gesetze,” in *Tumult. Schriften zur Verkehrswissenschaft 29: Georgios Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452): Reformpolitiker, Philosoph, Verehrer der alten Götter* (2005): 21; Walter Seitter, “Plethonische Anthropologie. Zwischen Politologie, Kosmologie und theologie,” in *Tumult. Schriften zur Verkehrswissenschaft 29: Georgios Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452): Reformpolitiker, Philosoph, Verehrer der alten Götter* (2005): 85.

³⁷ Robert, Konrad Celtis und das Projekt der deutschen Dichtung, 48, 66–67, 77–78.

³⁸ Ibid., 123ff.

³⁹ Ibid., 135ff.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 193ff.

⁴¹ Ibid., 312ff. Georg von Peuerbach also wrote a poem of this kind.

Celtis wrote one poem after another and composed collections of poems. The most famous entitled *Amores* constitutes with the *Odes* and the *Elegies* a descriptive, eloquent, self-fashioning and didactic autobiography or autography: the self-constitution of a certain kind of intellectual.⁴²

Celtis almost continues the Austrian evasion of philosophy. In any case he circumvents the main form of philosophy: the treatise-, tractatus-form we know from Aristotle and Kant, etc. He performs a turn towards a very indirect philosophizing, an elementary philosophy, a *philosophy for beginners*, a *performative philosophy* linking different writing acts such as inscriptions on woodcuts, academic programmes, topographic descriptions and the edition of antique or medieval texts.⁴³

The basic activity of this discontinuous performative eloquence is traveling, the main form is poetic writing about all manners of subjects. Instead of the fluent writing forming a line, Celtis realizes the positioning of words, the composition of word-figures, the combining of words and figures: a crafty script-writing, a “manneristic” art of scripture, a *bricolage* of movable types or an *emblematic writing* – inspired by heraldry.⁴⁴

The love stories and the friendships he relates are anchored in the geography of all of Germany, of an enlarged Germany, that he will raise to the dignity of other classical cultures. He even invents for Germany an archaic culture that was Celtic-Greek, a Pagan-Christian syncretism which now has to be revived. With such an fantastic construction Celtis works for the empowerment of German culture.⁴⁵ He consequently moves very slowly from the Latin to the “German Renaissance” with Nuremberg as the central metropolis, Würzburg as his native town: two alternative geographical centres (aside from Vienna, the imperial and academic centre). And all of this in Latin – and thus restricted to an elite public.⁴⁶ If the main point in the philosophical thinking of Celtis was the enthusiasm for nature he related it with the problem of theology where he abhorred scholastic formalism. He preferred the Renaissance-model of the “*prisca et vera philosophia*” that also allowed some syncretism of pagan and other religions, first of all poetic ones. He was fascinated by the difficult thinking of Nicolaus Cusanus and published the twenty *Propositiones* Cusanus had added to one of his last texts, the dialogue *Directio speculantis seu de li non aliud*, where this one searched

⁴² Ibid., 441ff. Celtis’ collections of poems belong to the kind of discourse that Michel Foucault described as “écriture de soi” which contains certain specimens of memoirs, confessions, essays, diaries – from antiquity to modern times; see Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Philippe Lejeune, *Les brouillons de soi* (Paris: Seuil, 2013).

⁴³ For the concept of “performative philosophy” see Antonio Cimino, *Phänomenologie und Vollzug. Heideggers performative Philosophie des faktischen Lebens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2013).

⁴⁴ An extreme example invented by Celtis is Der allegorische Reichsadler, engraved by Hans Burgkmair, in: *Kaiser Maximilian I. und die Kunst der Dürerzeit* (Munich – London – New York, 2012), 192–193. For this paradigm see Ludwig Volkmann, *Bilderschriften der Renaissance. Hieroglyphik und Emblematik in ihren Beziehungen und Fortwirkungen* (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1923) and about its place in the intellectual history see Walter Seitter, *Menschenfassungen. Studien zur Erkenntnispolitikwissenschaft. Mit einem Vorwort des Autors zur Neuauflage 2012 und einem Essay von Friedrich Balke: Tychonta, Zustöße. Walter Seitters surrealistische Entgründung der Politik und ihrer Wissenschaft* (Weilerswist, 2012), 22ff. In the twentieth century we saw such a processing of letters and words positioned horizontally and vertically and diagonally by Jacques Lacan. In the text of the *Menschenfassungen* you can find the invention of distique words.

⁴⁵ Robert, Konrad Celtis und das Projekt der deutschen Dichtung, 378ff.

⁴⁶ Celtis’ German “nationalism” occasionally had aggressive aspects see for instance Ivo Hlobil and Eduard Petrů, *Humanism and the Early Renaissance in Moravia* (Praha and Olomouc: Votobia, 1999), 176. Emperor Maximilian promoted the “German Renaissance” more radically with epic poems (in German) of an autobiographical nature and imitating medieval epics. As the “last knight” he would revive the Middle Ages – undoubtedly free of any philosophical ambitions, but not without the collaboration of scholars such as Andreas Stabius (astronomer and geographer); see Stephan Füssel, *Kaiser Maximilian und die Medien seiner Zeit. Der Theuerdank von 1517. Eine kulturhistorische Einführung* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 2003); Albrecht Dürer, *Die Weltkarte des Johannes Stabius*, in *Kaiser Maximilian I. und die Kunst der Dürerzeit* (Munich – London – New York, 2012): 202.

for a mystical way for transcending the opposition between a positive and negative theology. Celtis provided no commentary to Nicolaus' text but only translated the title into Greek and Hebrew.⁴⁷

Konrad Celtis died in the year 1508, but both his *Collegium* and the "Second Viennese Mathematical School" functioned until 1530. If this Austrian Renaissance had a certain profile it was far away from any purely philological or moral path. It combined poetical interests with a large spectrum of "mathematical" disciplines. We could almost speak of a "positivist" version of humanism, although the philosophical commitment was not particularly deep. The next great epoch of the Viennese university was to begin after 1850.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ Stephan Meier Oeser, "Die Cusanus-Rezeption im deutschen Renaissancehumanismus des 16. Jahrhunderts," in *Nicolaus Cusanus zwischen Deutschland und Italien*, ed. Martin Thurner (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 617ff.

⁴⁸ Helmut Grössing, "Naturwissenschaften in Österreich im Zeitalter des Humanismus," in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, ed. Michael Benedikt et al. (Klausen-Leopoldsdorf, 1996), 262. Vienna's scientific culture in the late nineteenth century was certainly further developed than that of the fifteenth. Philosophy could therefore also finally emerge – but with considerable difficulties and delays. See on this Walter Seitter, "Zur Bestimmung österreichischer Philosophie," in *Verdrängter Humanismus Verzögerte Aufklärung. 1/1: Philosophie in Österreich 1400–1650*, ed. Michael Benedikt et al. (Klausen-Leopoldsdorf, 1996), 55ff; Hans-Joachim Dahms und Friedrich Stadler, "Die Philosophie an der Universität Wien von 1848 bis zur Gegenwart," in *Universität – Forschung – Lehre. Themen und Perspektiven im langen 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Katharina Kniefacz, Elisabeth Nemeth, Herbert Posch und Friedrich Stadler (Wien: V&R unipress, 2015), 77ff.

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Philosophizing with Past Thinkers: The Historical Dimension of Philosophical Problems

Abstract | Philosophy appears to deal with propositions that stand alone; this paper suggests that every philosophical tenet has a history, which is necessary to know in order to understand the idea. This is evident in doctrines that are unusual. As Robin G. Collingwood suggested, if something seems absurd, it is the answer to a question that is not yet understood. This question may be enveloped in a story. Consequently, doing philosophy can mean telling stories that create a framework in which thinking takes place. For all thinking takes place in a framework that is not itself thematic in the thought, as Michael Polanyi said. Again, whatever is external to philosophical ideas is what can be captured in stories. So the question remains: how to detect, in a philosophical problem, its history? As this paper shows, most philosophers tell stories about how their ideas originated; many of them deliberately establish the framework with hints at the history of their ideas. Investigating the history of philosophical ideas, therefore, amounts to seriously philosophizing.

Keywords | Thomas Aquinas – Robin G. Collingwood – René Descartes – Immanuel Kant – Alasdair MacIntyre – Nicholas of Cusa – Michael Polanyi – History of Philosophy – Narrativity – Framework – Contextualization – History of Philosophical Ideas

1 If something seems absurd, it is the answer to a question that is not yet understood

Let me start off by telling you in advance where I got the notion that the pursuit of the history of philosophy amounts to thinking with the head of another. In his autobiography, Robin G. Collingwood describes thinking as a relation between question and answer. Embarking from the example of a particularly ugly statue, he formulates the conjecture that this object only seems ugly because the viewer does not recognize the intention of the artist and cannot know whether this intention might have been expressed successfully. From this, he deduces that one cannot figure out by the mere study of spoken or written statements what anyone thinks, but rather one must also know the question behind what was said or written, that was intended to be answered.¹ In parentheses, Collingwood adds that the author of any such statement trusts that his audience shares his initial question with him.² He thus points to an assumption that is only implicit and

¹ Robin G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 31. – I am grateful to Andrew Olesh, Jr., for translating this contribution from German into English. – This study is a result of research funded by the Czech Science Foundation as the project GA ČR 14-37038G “Between Renaissance and Baroque: Philosophy and Knowledge in the Czech Lands within the Wider European Context.”

² “A question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours.” (Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 31.)

that the author of any proposition simply cannot or cannot always make explicit. We need to come back to this later. Presently, it is rather important to see that Collingwood applies this type of argumentation to history and philosophy. For him philosophical problems are not perennial problems but rather such problems that evolve in the course of history so that “problems as well as their proposed solutions had their own history”.³ Just as technical means like ships in naval battles develop and thereby shape the actions of their commanders, so also the problems are always different every time in the course of the history of philosophy. Consequently, “we only know what the problem was by arguing back from the solution.”⁴ From this, he draws the radical conclusion (with which he not only ruffled the feathers of his Anglo-Saxon fellows but for which also their heirs today would declare him incompetent), namely, “For me, then, there were not two separate sets of questions to be asked, one historical and one philosophical ... There was one set only, historical.”⁵

From this, we can conclude that to understand a philosophical thesis always means as much as to interpret it historically, insofar as it is to be read as the answer to a question posed by the author. Whoever thinks that Immanuel Kant’s thesis, that it is the human mind that prescribes its laws to Nature (*Prolegomena* § 36), is nonsense, must read the main question of the essay along with his argumentation over again. And if the reader is still resenting the paradox, he should note that Kant anticipated that; and eventually the reader should ask himself on account of which way of posing the question he thinks the opposite is plausible. In doing so, he will hopefully discover that, while science may make use of plausibility, philosophy uncovers plausibility. To uncover plausibility in a philosophical statement is equivalent to finding and rephrasing the question to which the thesis is an answer.

2 If something seems absurd, there is a story behind it

In the 1980s, the German philosopher Hermann Lübbe lectured at many places on the topic “What does it mean: ‘This can only be explained historically’”? A truly German topic because explaining things historically is practically a national sport in Germany.⁷ Lübbe’s examples stem mostly from social and political life: odd road layouts, superfluous institutions – one can come up with any number of examples. The point is always that such apparent absurdities have a deeper meaning, one that can be laid out by a narrative. It is fundamental that there is not only an obvious reasonableness of facts, the one that would strike no one (for instance, that stamps are pasted on the front of the letter in the upper right corner), but also a latent one, which underpins the superficial. This hidden reasonableness can make sense of something that is on the surface nonsensical. And this subterranean reasonableness generally can only be disclosed or even brought about by telling a story. There is surely a story that explains how and why stamps are pasted where they are pasted⁸, and there is likewise one that makes an unreasonable street layout reasonable. If we apply this to a philosophical example, Kant’s laws of nature, then we may say: The theory of the dictation of the laws of nature seems counterintuitive, it is true, but

³ Ibid., 67.

⁴ Ibid., 70.

⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁶ Hermann Lübbe, “Was heißt: ‘Das kann man nur historisch erklären’?”, in *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung* (Poetik und Hermeneutik 5), ed. Reinhart Koselleck and Wolf-Dieter Stempel (München: Fink, 1973), 542–554.

⁷ In the satirist’s pun: a German “weiß nix, kann aber alles erklären” (knows nothing but is available to explain anything), which entails telling a story: Jürgen Kessler, ed., *Hanns Dieter Hüsch, Kabarett auf eigene Faust: 50 Bühnenjahre* (München: Blessing, 1997), 133.

⁸ Internet search engines provide such stories: “Can You Put a Postage Stamp Anywhere on a Letter? – Yahoo Answers,” accessed April 16, 2014, <https://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20111026054501AAXbgjF>.

there is a hidden meaning, which one can draw forth by telling the story that led Kant to this proposition, and this ‘story’ – that is, the thought process – makes the counterintuitive theorem reasonable. Stories, historical explanations, not only make *unreasonable* things reasonable; they even make reasonable things reasonable.

Now, one can argue that Kant’s thesis is not really explained by telling a story, but rather by reconstructing a thought process; after all he himself is not taking the paradoxical theorem and trying to make it plausible after the fact, but the whole time he has been working toward his thesis by strict scientific deduction. On the other hand, in addition to all the rigor of the argumentation itself, Kant himself refers to the genesis of his idea in the history of ontology and science in the Enlightenment. In the preface to the *Prolegomena*, Kant declared his intention to convince historians of philosophy that it is unavoidably necessary to suspend their work for the present, to consider all that has happened until now as if it had not happened.⁹ This statement can be read as a program that, for the sake of philosophical thinking, history has to be made not-happened, however only for a methodological purpose, to the effect that the meaning of the philosophical thought becomes understandable through history, and not just memorized “for the use of apprentices,” as poor teachers of philosophy would think.¹⁰ Upon closer inspection, the conceptual argumentation and the historical situatedness merge seamlessly into one another. This is why Kant himself agrees to tell the story that led up to his theory. Let us look at other examples, the very kind wherein the author points to the narrative as support for his core thesis.

René Descartes is undoubtedly the philosopher who introduced the myth that the philosopher as such must free himself from the historical conditions of his thought, so that there are still philosophers who believe that philosophizing takes place only and in principle in a history-free void. With his methodological doubt he ruled out everything that might be an external source of thought in itself, so that the pure *cogito* could remain. From this then follow consequently the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*. Regarding Descartes’ claim, two things are to be noted right away: first, that he embedded his thesis in an autobiographical, i. e. self-historicizing, narrative, and second, that it is famously not historically true. After all, it provoked hosts of historians to find his sources, especially in the philosophy of the Second Scholasticism, the Middle Ages and in Augustine. In the strict sense of the word, Descartes is lying; to his exoneration, though, one must point out that through the telling of his story, he is putting his readers on track. Had he argued purely conceptually that the *ego cogito* is the basis of personal being and therefore led to the adoption of the dual mode of being as an idea and as a physical thing, it would probably have been clearer but also more difficult to categorize historically. In that Descartes claims to have made his observations apart from the history of philosophy, he at the same time points to it. He who is poised on a tightrope above the abyss should not look down. But we historians have to read the forward-fixed gaze of the artist as an indication of the abyss. The Cartesian *cogito* is not a walk in the park. It is an attempt to cut out the historicity of thought in order to show forth the purity of thought. As readers of the historical Descartes though, we must ask: where is the problem across which he balances. His autobiographical tale of dreaming by the Swabian fireplace during the break in the middle of a military campaign invites us to include history in the pure thought of the *cogito*. When in the *Second Meditation* Descartes says that this “I am” is “a being who doubts, perceives, affirms, denies, wills, wills not, and something that also imagines

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge [England] and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5 (A 255).

¹⁰ Ibid.

figuratively and feels,”¹¹ he says exactly that: the *cogito* is mired in doubt, motivations, fantasies and feelings. The history of pure thought is part of thought; otherwise thought would be not pure but rather empty.

I have chosen the metaphor of the tightrope over the abyss in order to recall Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*. Thus, man is not a mere idea, man is not even a man, he is only a transition: “Man is a rope tied between beast and Overman – a rope over an abyss.”¹² For our purposes, we may gather that it would be absurd to regard a philosophical concept as if it had neither origin nor as-yet-unreached destination.

I would like to mention briefly one more example, that of Nicholas of Cusa, who famously upon completion of his work on “learned ignorance” related that the thought came to him on the ship during the voyage from Byzantium to Venice. Before I call to mind the details of the voyage, I would like to immediately point out the paradox that a highly abstract thought is presented as the result of a journey, a journey that cries out to be told. That it is possible to comprehend God in an incomprehensible way, so the main thesis of the work, requires numerous detours and crossings of boundaries. This means: the peak of speculation is indeed free of space, time, limits, conditions and every other conceivable constraint, that is its nature in itself. But it will be reached on a path, on a journey. Thus, Cusanus asks us to retrace the genesis of the coincidence of opposites, so that exactly those opposites are discovered that are nullified. This genesis is structurally similar to a journey. So to think with the head of Cusanus also means “to draw the opposite just when you have found the point of union.” So Giordano Bruno answered Nicholas of Cusa,¹³ and Bruno knew something about traveling. The actual journey, of which Cusanus reminds his readers, was his task of accompanying the Byzantine delegation to Italy to the Council of Ferrara and Florence. It dealt with nothing less than the restoration of the union of the opposing Eastern and Western Christian Churches, the reconciliation of the opposites, the reinsertion of the *filioque* into the general profession of faith. So it is clear to which question Cusanus’s “learned ignorance” was the answer. The nonsense of this ignorance has a concrete as well as an abstract, conceptual history.

3 Philosophy can mean telling stories.

And stories create a framework in which thinking takes place

Since Nietzsche has already been brought up, it no longer needs to be demonstrated at length that philosophy can take place within stories. To this point Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is a massive exemplar of philosophy in the form of a novel. But even in the narrowest sense, just like in the examples of the framing narratives of a thought in Cusanus and Descartes, it is doubtless that the story told points not only to the systematic and historical development of the thought, but also establishes the framework that makes the idea comprehensible.

As an important witness, I would like to call again Immanuel Kant. In the foreword to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, notably only in the second edition, he describes his discovery as a revolution:

¹¹ “Sed quid igitur sum? Res cogitans. Quid est hoc? Nempe dubitans, intelligens, affirmans, negans, volens, nolens, imaginans quoque, et sentiens.” (My translation from René Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, II 8, AT VII 28)

¹² My translation of Friedrich Nietzsche, “Zarathustra’s Vorrede,” *Also sprach Zarathustra* (online), accessed May 16, 2016, <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/Za-I>.

¹³ Paul Richard Blum, “Saper trar il contrario dopo aver trovato il punto de l’unione: Bruno, Cusano e il platonismo,” in *Letture Bruniane I-II*, ed. Eugenio Canone (Pisa-Roma: IEPI, 2002), 33–47.

Reason must approach nature with the view, indeed, of receiving information from it, not, however, in the character of a pupil, who listens to all that his master chooses to tell him, but in that of a judge, who compels the witnesses to reply to those questions which he himself thinks fit to propose. To this single idea must the revolution be ascribed, by which, after groping in the dark for so many centuries, natural science was at length conducted into the path of certain progress (CPR B XV)¹⁴

Whatever a Kant exegete may have to say about it, to me it seems important that Kant characterizes reason as an activity, and that he portrays that specific insight as a revolution in the history of thought. The “critique of pure reason” is a way of thinking that differs as much from its own history as the sure path does from groping around in the dark. Kant’s criticism is in essence not a collection of propositions but rather a path that has an origin. This novelty, hence, comes about by a revolution locatable in history. At this point Kant famously borrows the example of the Copernican Revolution and lapses into narrating:

We here propose to do just what Copernicus did in attempting to explain the celestial movements. When he found that he could make no progress by assuming that all the heavenly bodies revolved round the spectator, he reversed the process, and tried the experiment of assuming that the spectator revolved, while the stars remained at rest. (CPR B XVI)¹⁵

It is irrelevant whether Kant describes the train of thought of Copernicus factually correctly; the fact is that he, by means of Copernicus, characterizes his own theory as the fruit of a historical action, which has a type in history. Revolutions are inherently historical. Or has there ever been a turning point without everything revolving around it? In place and in time. The ebb and flow of events in time are the framework of what stands at the heart of thinking. (It should be noted that here in this term ‘revolution’ the transfer from the orbits of the celestial spheres to the revolution of thinking has already taken place. But that is another topic worth narrating.)

Michael Polanyi chose the Copernican Revolution for the opening of his book on “personal knowledge.” His aim was to show that thought brings with itself a non- thematic, personal framework. Polanyi summarizes the effect of this revolution as follows:

... for those who embraced the Copernican system at an early stage committed themselves thereby to the expectation of an indefinite range of possible future confirmations of the theory, and this expectation was essential to their belief in the superior rationality and objective validity of the system.¹⁶

The rationality of Copernicanism, defended by Polanyi as a scientist of the twentieth century, lies not in crude empiricism – clarifying that is Polanyi’s primary intention – but rather in the potential of intellectual confirmation. At the same time, this potential is extrapolated into the future, such that for him it takes on a temporal dimension. The objectivity of science is its historicity. To further support that, Polanyi then describes the ‘framework’ as constitutive of scientific activity. Scientific controversy accordingly entails simultaneously understanding the intellectual framework of the other and refuting it. Whenever that happens with *ad hominem* arguments, it discredits the opponent but not the structure of the controversies in principle,

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (London: Bohn, 1855), Preface to the Second Edition, xxvii.

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 5.

because controversies necessarily engage in personal frameworks of argumentation.¹⁷ Thomas S. Kuhn famously took up this idea or had a similar insight, and from that was able to describe the ‘structure of scientific revolutions.’¹⁸ Without having to go into it further, it may be said that Kuhn’s main interest lies right in the situation presented here, namely that ideas have a history and that they carry it with them.

Alasdair MacIntyre confirmed what has been said so far, especially regarding the history of science as a parallel to the history of philosophy, when he concluded his discussion of “The relationship of philosophy to its past,” whereby he also referred to Kuhn and Collingwood:

It thus turns out that, just as the achievements of the natural sciences are in the end to be judged in terms of achievements of the history of those sciences, so the achievements of philosophy are in the end to be judged in terms of the achievements of the history of philosophy.¹⁹

To judge the achievements of philosophy in terms of the achievements of the history of philosophy, to me, means to do history of philosophy in order to do philosophy proper and, specifically, to understand achievements of philosophy in the past. Many books and essays that advocate the history of philosophy as philosophy deal with individual cases of indebtedness and appropriation, but they tend to assume a teleological priority of philosophy, which almost always appears to be identical with current philosophy, as though there were such a thing without its history, and, consequently, those discussions do not take seriously the necessity to understand past thinkers as thinkers, and not as just past.²⁰

4 Each act of thinking takes place in a framework that is not itself thematic in the thought

Up until now, I have tried to make plausible that philosophical ideas and scientific theories are locatable in a historical framework. In doing so I have relied mainly on examples in which thinkers have pointed out that their philosophical idea was due to a story, and it was tacitly assumed by me as well as my witnesses that the idea as such has no history. The idea is evidently a *nunc stans*. But following Nietzsche and Polanyi we could read that the idea is but an act of thinking that has an origin and a destination. Polanyi was a chemist, and therefore it was self-evident for him that a scientific experiment only has validity if it can be reproduced. But since reproducing something extends over time, he could say that the historically extended verification constitutes the objectivity of ideas. So here lies a problem: on one hand, an idea is objective, if it is not bound merely to its ‘time’ (as we may assume in the case of witchcraft, which depended on early modern ideology); on the other hand, the idea is only as objective as the supporting ‘framework’ is valid in its time. And within this framework are included scientific hypotheses, perspectives on the

¹⁷ Ibid., 151–52.

¹⁸ Cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) and Martin X. Moleski, “Polanyi vs. Kuhn: Worldviews Apart,” *Tradition & Discovery* 33, no. 2 (2007–2006): 8–24.

¹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, “The relationship of philosophy to its past,” in *Philosophy in History. Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 30–48. Cf. some objections raised by Tad Schmaltz, “What Has History of Science to Do with History of Philosophy?,” in *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Mogens Lærke, Justin E. H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 301–323; 309–315. Schmaltz addresses philosophy as current practice of philosophers but fails to recognize the problem to lie in understanding past thinkers.

²⁰ Cf. the review of the volume edited by Lærke, cited in the previous note: Stefan Heßbrüggen-Walter, review of *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*, by Mogens Lærke, Justin E. H. Smith, Eric Schliesser (eds.), *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 3, no. 1, January 1, 2014, Book Reviews, 143–62, doi:10.7761/JEMS.3.1.143.

object of research, the expectation of confirmation through further research, and thus overall the history of the research that has brought forth the idea. (What I call an idea here shall cover naturally both something like the Copernican system as well as transcendental philosophy.)

I think we can follow Polanyi's lead and talk about non-thematic components of ideas. Kant's thesis that it is human reason that inscribes its laws onto nature is explicitly timeless because otherwise we would indeed have to hope that every morning Mr. Kant or his assistant is cueing the sun to come up. And yet Kant has situated his thesis in a historical context. In this perspective, we could argue that the origin of transcendental philosophy is to transcendental philosophy itself as external as a dog to the moon. But Polanyi has even included in the idea the inward gratification and the inward expectation of historical verification. The non-thematic in a philosophical idea appears inexpressible and solipsistic. But as a framework it is at the same time external to the idea. It is characteristic that the framework, i. e., the assumptions, the horizon of expectation, the personal gratification, the incident by the fireplace and many others, does not itself belong to the theory. Thus it is that one can opine that the history of science is a completely different discipline than the individual science and the laws of nature that are thematic within the discipline. An analogy would be the history of literature. Goethe was not a literary historian, and therefore his *Faust* has nothing to do with Agrippa of Nettesheim. Wrong: Goethe's Dr. Faust is obviously a reincarnation of the Renaissance magician – even if this is not thematic in the play. The fact that the genesis of an idea is not thematic in the mind does not thus contradict that this genesis has produced the idea.

5 That which is external to ideas is what can be captured in stories

In a philosophical answer to a question, the question itself is no longer thematic. We can see this with puns:

When does the twelve-o'clock train leave? Answer: at noon.

Here immanent and external knowledge are reversed. The correct conversation: "At twelve noon" as a meaningful answer does not include – but instead presupposes – the question "When does the train leave?" The question is not thematic in the brief answer. Nevertheless, no one will want to demand that one should understand the answer without the question. Now, I could explain how and where I heard this pun about the twelve-o'clock train for the first time and hope that it makes even more sense why the example fits. But I have already given some examples that show that the philosopher himself had the suspicion that his idea gains its significance by way of context and pre-history.

At this point I should finally mention Aristotle, who has furnished the paradigm of the historicity of ideas in his doxographies.²¹ His analysis of the ways of thinking of the pre-Socratic philosophers explicitly builds its philosophy from the endeavors of his predecessors by converting answers into questions. The triad of principles or the establishment of a science for its own sake, the quartet of causes, and the soul as the principle of life – all this was narrated as the outcome of a history of questions and answers. As soon as the ways of thinking of the pre-Socratics are no longer obvious and thematic in Aristotelian philosophy, they seem extraneous and must be told. That is what Aristotle does in his doxographies. To the extent that those chapters are to be read before the actual treatises, they seem like scholarly preliminaries that can be nonchalantly glossed over. As informs the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, doxographies are defined as "works

²¹ Cf. André Laks, *Histoire, doxographie, vérité: Études sur Aristote, Théophraste et la philosophie présocratique* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters, 2007); particularly "Chapitre II – Histoire critique et doxographie. Pour une histoire de l'historiographie de la philosophie," (Ibid., 13–26.)

(or sections of works), taking as their subject matter the tenets or doctrines of the philosophers, rather than independent works of philosophy in which the author addresses in the first instance issues or topics of philosophy, with ancillary discussion along the way of the opinions of other philosophers.²² The authors consider the doxographies exclusively as positivistic sources for lost ancient writings, in which sense they go no further than Hermann Diels. They completely fail to appreciate that the doxographies of Aristotle are part of philosophy.

But the Book Delta of *Metaphysics* should be a warning to us. It is just not so that many terms that Aristotle elevates to philosophical concepts *pollachos legetai* (are said in various meanings). Aristotle distills philosophical concepts from the way people speak.²³ He shows the unspoken assumptions and cognitive strategies, for instance, when a Greek talks about *physis*, in order to extract from them and show forth the function of the concept in knowledge. This also means that he thematizes what is unthematic in concepts, so that it may be stored in the repository of possible meanings that can be retrieved if necessary. The Aristotelian concept of nature therefore still holds onto the hermeneutic dross that initially had made this concept philosophically operable. Aristotle's philosophical terminology tells the history of its genesis. For present-day philosophical research, this means that Aristotle cannot be mined like a quarry for philosophical terms by way of (in the bad sense) doxographically reporting his opinions, but that one can learn from him certain types of contextualization, of which the most important are based in the Greek history of ideas. It is unavoidable to tell how a philosophical idea came about while thinking the very idea.

The same can be seen with the medieval *quaestio* ("question"). For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. It is evident that the so-called *corpus* of each article is a response to a question, since it starts with "respondeo". The so-called *objectiones* go ahead and present theses that do not represent the opinions of the author and that are dispensed with over the rest of the article. They are dispensed with initially through the "sed contra", which – in the language of Polanyi – establishes the framework that is not discussed further but indicates the leading perspective. Most often it is a quotation from the Bible or a statement of a Church Father – at any rate paradigms from history. The body of the article responds, literally, within the perspective to the question in the title of the *quaestio* with implicit or elaborated consideration of the opinions of others. What follows is a detailed response to the initial divergent opinions. A schoolboyish reading of such a *quaestio* could be content to learn the mere doctrine of the body. But to understand the philosophical idea, one must absolutely think along with the dissenting opinions. When one understands that the individual answers to the objections are only possible because the body has clarified the framework of understanding and in doing so produced the answer, then it also becomes clear that it was the apparently false views that have produced the doctrine.

To call to mind an example: In the third article of the second *quaestio* of the *Summa I*, Thomas proves the existence of God in the famous five ways.²⁴ The first objection deals with the existence of evil, which would be excluded because the goodness of God, being infinite, would absorb all evil. The refutation cites Augustine, who said allowing evil rather confirms the omnipotence of God. Thomas endorses this argument but shifts it and finds that God can make

²² Jaap Mansfeld, "Doxography of Ancient Philosophy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2013, 2013), accessed June 6, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/doxography-ancient/>

²³ Kurt von Fritz, *Philosophie und sprachlicher Ausdruck bei Demokrit, Plato und Aristoteles* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963). Wolfgang Wieland, *Die aristotelische Physik. Untersuchungen über die Grundlegung der Naturwissenschaft und die sprachlichen Bedingungen der Prinzipienforschung bei Aristoteles* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1970).

²⁴ Cf. Paul Richard Blum, "Gottes Plan: Von der Physikotheologie zur Theophysik," in Paul Richard Blum, *Das Wagnis, ein Mensch zu sein: Geschichte – Natur – Religion. Studien zur neuzeitlichen Philosophie, Philosophie: Forschung und Wissenschaft 31* (Münster: Lit, 2010), 281–294.

good even out of evil. If one looks therefore to the body, the general answer, it becomes clear that Thomas has prepared his special response in the body and with it, already in the body, answers the objection. In this interpretation: what is the answer to the objection from evil? The answer is that deficiencies of any possible degree belong to a reality for which it is necessary to assume a highest degree of completeness, a first principle, and a governance. And this we call God. This answer also applies to evil. Aquinas' answer to the question of evil not only solves this problem thanks to his philosophizing with Augustine, it also makes his arguments for the existence of God more intelligible.

6 How can one detect in a philosophical problem its history?

So this is a particularly good example of how we can think with the head of another. Scholasticism of all schools provides us with the paradigm. It is impossible to think an idea (like that of evil) without thinking its history. If we understand a thesis, whether plausible or not, to be the answer to a question, then we understand what the philosopher may have thought, and by doing that, we contextualize the thesis and – most importantly – we understand our problem properly. Cusanus has pointed out for us the world-historical context of his learned ignorance. But even if he may not have thought in historical terms, he nevertheless urged his readers to consider the context. We do not at all need to assume that philosophers like Aristotle had a philosophy of history. But they have time and again pointed emphatically to the contexts of their thinking. History is a context of thinking, and probably the most important of all. To think with the head of another is therefore in philosophy so much as to understand the history of a specific idea and only in this way to understand the idea.

Here is perhaps the opportunity to speak briefly to the idea of progress in the history of philosophy. Kant presenting himself as a revolutionary in the history of thinking of nature could indeed be understood as a *Whig History*, according to which the predecessors are considered from the standpoint of how they were so advanced to have contributed to its own current thinking.²⁵ But neither was it Kant's intention, nor would it be a feat of thinking with the head of another; on the contrary, it would only be a projection of one's own head onto history. When we read the history of philosophy as answers to questions, then we look for our own thinking in those who have come before, but so that they come into their own. Whig History is unilinear in principle, so that the past only points toward the present. To think with the head of the predecessor requires, however, to be able to reverse the direction so that the present leads back to history.

Once it is clear that Mr. Descartes did not really believe he had shaken out of his head everything he learned in school, we can also interpret this gesture as a strong indicator for the necessity to point out in a dialectical way the historicity of thought. Precisely in that the thinker insists that his idea is not conditioned by history he bids to turn back again to the conditions and circumstances, as soon as the intended pure idea, the thesis, is understood, in order to understand the theory as an answer to a question and thus be able to appreciate it even better.

²⁵ Wilfred M. McClay, "Of Ashtrays and Incommensurability: Reflections on Herbert Butterfield and The Whig Interpretation of History," *Fides et Historia* 44, no. 1 (2012): 1–14. There p. 5: "Butterfield defined 'Whig' history as an approach to the past that makes its meaning and its lessons entirely subservient to the demands of the present, and to the present's regnant idea of what constitutes 'progress.' Whig history was history written by and for the winners in historical conflict and change, and as such, it always upheld the present's sense of itself as a great and unmistakable and inevitable advance upon all the things that preceded it." See also Paul Richard Blum, *Studies on Early Modern Aristotelianism, Scientific and Learned Cultures and Their Institutions* 30/7 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), ch. 8: "The Jesuits and the Janus-Faced History of Natural Science," 113. Cf. Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres," in *Philosophy in History. Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 49–75. On this see Laks, *Histoire, doxographie, vérité*, 22–26.

The reference to his own experience and the very peculiar personal situation symbolize this unconditionedness. This is – as already mentioned – the myth about the philosophy of the philosophers, in which the philosopher stands up with his own person for the truth of thought: Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. The paradox of this fireplace-gesture is, yes, that the situation is flagrantly contingent. What if Descartes had frozen that night? We also must not overlook the fact that the story of the fireplace itself is not part of the philosophy. How can a philosopher prove the non-temporality of his thought by narrowing it into a very personal and random moment? It comes to pass that the usual conditionality of thought in history switches places with the interiority of the person – but just as a matter of method, that is, as an appeal to consider the dialectic of historicity and validity. To give a contemporary example, John R. Searle claims in his book *Intentionality*, that he was not at all interested in “all this distinguished past”: my only hope of resolving the worries which led me into the study (...) lay in the relentless pursuit of my own investigation.”²⁶ Since we do not want to insinuate infinite egocentrism to Searle, this thesis can only say: Look at my studies, and then go back into history and see if I have been able to contribute something lasting. So from a non-philosophical gesture we can know that we are called to go after the history of an idea and contextualize it again, after we have understood the intention of the author. Then, however, we will be sure to appreciate the thesis of the thinker as a moment in the history of thought – and can criticize it.

Two examples from the Renaissance come to mind: Pietro Pomponazzi and Francesco Patrizi. In the opening of their treatises they both tell a story that points to the contingency of life and the randomness of thought. Both authors maintain that they were sick. It is no small matter that one writes on immortality and the other on the essence of history, namely, on one question of eternal truth and another question of contingency of truth. What a coincidence! Pomponazzi is visited during his illness and asked by a good friend, a Dominican friar, to comment on whether the opinion of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas is compatible with that of Aristotle. The particular issue is what Pomponazzi thinks about it – “in the absence of revelation and miracles, but much more for pure persistence within the natural limits” – and also, what is the authentic teaching of Aristotle.²⁷ The explicit comparison of the Aristotelian with Aristotle must have been enough to convince any reader that Pomponazzi’s theory of the soul has a history. By the scene of the sickbed we could be misled to misunderstand Pomponazzi’s teaching as just idiosyncratic brooding. But we may certainly assume that the reference to his sickness is meant to signify that Pomponazzi is not speaking here *ex cathedra* as a professor, despite the fact that the bulk of the essay is written in strict scholastic style. On the other hand, the foreword also mentions that – for whatever reason – many people were present at the conversation. A break with tradition and the opening of a new school of thought? Maybe so. But perhaps also what Polanyi has brought out: the objectivity of philosophy consists in the manner of rationality that finds its place in history and anticipates verification in the future. So how do we recognize the historicity of a philosophical theory? By taking note of the contingent circumstances of philosophizing. In this historical situatedness there is no yes or no, no pure physicalism (as Pomponazzi suggests) and no pure dogmatism of Revelation (as he likewise seems to suggest). Instead, there is thought in its history.

Patrizi uses the same staging in his dialogues about history. In the chapter where Patrizi examines the humanistic question from a Neoplatonic vantage point, he pretends to be sick. He claims to his visitors to be able to read in the book of his soul where everything is written, since

²⁶ John R. Searle, *Intentionality, an Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), ix.

²⁷ Pietro Pomponazzi, “On the Immortality of the Soul,” in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Selections in Translation*, ed. Cassirer, Ernst, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 280–381.

it is written by the hand of God. This is of course a high standard, but Patrizi explains at once that in essence every human soul has such a book and can read it.

Since there is an infinity of people who always look outside and never turn their eyes into themselves, it is impossible for them to know that they have in themselves this divine script written by the hand of God.²⁸

Thus the precondition is given, on the basis of which Patrizi defines, in Platonic tradition, history as memory. Precisely because history appears as something ephemeral and humanly arbitrary, Patrizi presents it as anchored in Neoplatonic epistemology. However, the truth of history does not vanish into any lofty hypostasis; rather, the author stresses that history is virtually within every individual and therefore available to a hermeneutic, which must be carried out by real, actual people who naturally are only interested in the external, that is, in the mere facts that can be narrated. The “Divine Script” is the essence of history. To concern oneself with it appears fairly insane to Patrizi’s visitors, that is, those who erroneously believe history and truth to be two distinct things.

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²⁸ Francesco Patrizi, *Della historia: diece dialoghi – Venetia: Appresso Andrea Arrivabene, 1560*, in *Theoretiker humanistischer Geschichtsschreibung: Nachdruck exemplarischer Texte aus dem 16. Jahrhundert, Humanistische Bibliothek Reihe 2, Bd. 4*, ed. Eckhard Keßler (München: Fink, 1971): 13. “La onde, essendovi infiniti di quegli huomini, che sempre guardano all’infuora, et non mai rivolgono gli occhi in se medesimi, egli è impossibil cosa, che essi pure sappiano di havere in se, questa fatta per la mano di Dio divina scrittura.” On Patrizi’s concept of history see Paul Richard Blum, “Francesco Patrizi in the ‘Time Sack:’ History and Rhetorical Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61 (2000): 59–74.

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Liberty in the Work of Edmund Burke

Abstract | The objective of the article is to explain and substantiate why Burke's concept of liberty is not in contradiction with the philosophical background of a free society even though, according to Berlin's conceptual division, it belongs to the positive notion of liberty, which, however, is the basis of totalitarianism. Burke's concept of liberty is interpreted as the consequence of his antirationalist position and of his view of the relationship between an individual and society. The study formulates two arguments that seek to explain why Burke's concept of liberty does not contradict the theoretical background of a free society. The first argument points out Burke's understanding of order, which is principally different from the rational order of totalitarianism, admitting a certain plurality of values and goals albeit accentuating tradition and continuity. The second argument refers to Burke's paternalism, which is principally different from paternalism bordering on authoritarianism or even totalitarianism.

Keywords | Edmund Burke – Conservatism – Liberty – Paternalism – Totalitarianism

The objective of this study is to substantiate the hypothesis that Burke's concept of liberty is not in contradiction with the philosophical background of a free society even though, according to Berlin's conceptual division, it belongs to the positive concept of liberty, which, however, is the basis of totalitarianism. In the first part, which draws on *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as well as on Burke's letters, we formulate the premise that Burke's concept of liberty is the result of his antirationalist position as well as the consequence of his concept of an individual, society, and order. The second part explains Berlin's conceptual framework that enables an adequate classification of Burke's interpretation of liberty. We first focus on the concept of order and then proceed by describing paternalism. It appears that their different meanings within the context of totalitarianism and the democratic tradition make it possible to explain and substantiate why Burke's concept of liberty is not in contradiction with the theoretical background of a free society. The conclusion summarises the arguments supporting the proposed hypothesis.

I. Burke's concept of liberty

This part seeks to explain Burke's concept of liberty as a consequence of both his antirationalist position and his specific understanding of the individual and society. It is typical of Burke to interpret concepts in response to a specific event rather than on an isolated basis. The interpretation of his concept of liberty therefore requires a certain reconstruction of the events that led him to the relevant statements as well as of the ideas that he responds to. It is of particular importance, however, to explain the underlying philosophical framework from which Burke derives his construction of liberty, i. e. antirationalism, in order to arrive at the philosophical foundations held by Burke despite his fervent opposition to abstract theorising. This is the basis of

a certain paradox in his thinking. While deliberately opposed by him, philosophical abstraction can still be found, described and explained on the background of his critiques and polemics. In addition, it is the philosophical dimension of Burke's political thinking that provides his ideas with an apparent permanent value.

Antirationalism

It appears that the philosophical foundation of Burke's criticism of the French Revolution, which caused him to formulate his key political and philosophical opinions, is essentially his antirationalist position. Antirationalism – in the spirit of Burke's responsive thinking – can be defined as a reaction to rationalism in politics. The fact that it was the centre of attention of Burke's worthy successor Michael Oakeshott in the twentieth century demonstrates that the topic is still very much alive.¹ The methodological approach to the topic should also be in line with the nature of Burke's thinking because it can be characterised by a response and polemics. It is also important from the perspective of our topic that this type of rationalism is also analysed in *Two Concepts of Liberty*.

The role of reason in human affairs is a crucial issue for rationalism in politics. The rationalist position assumes that reason is capable of understanding social relations, explaining what is good and right, and leading society down the right path. The rationalist position is also suspicious of customs and traditions, in particular, because people often fail to grasp why the customs and traditions are kept and followed. Up-to-date rational knowledge can question tradition and indicate a better path. Rationalism relies on science: scientific knowledge is a better guide through life than tradition. Science is valuable for its systematic effort to apply reason to nature and society. Finally, what is typical of rationalism in this sense is a distrust of religion, particularly so when one manifests a preference for faith over reason.

Burke's antirationalist position is the opposite of the characteristics summarised above. As it would probably be impractical to formulate the pendants of the individual characteristics of rationalism, let us focus on several particular aspects that verify the link in an adequate context. Burke expressed his antirationalism, for example, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: "They [the French Assembly] commit the whole to the mercy of untried speculations; they abandon the dearest interest of the public to those loose theories, to which none of them would choose to trust the slightest of his private concerns."² What irritated Burke and compelled him to criticism was the pace and method used by the revolutionaries in their effort to remove the centuries-long traditions and create a new social and political order as well as, and this in particular, the fact that order and traditions were to be replaced by an abstract, philosophical and unverified theory of natural human rights. According to Burke, both of these phenomena are the manifestation of ungrounded faith in the ability of human reason to understand society and its principles, and use this as the foundation for staking out the right direction the recreated society should take.

A positive result of Burke's antirationalism is the recognition of tradition as the embodiment of accumulated knowledge and proven political practice. Unlike liberals, who traditionally formulate abstract theoretical theories of liberty, Burke proposes that fundamental civil liberties are determined and established by political tradition. For that reason, they have a specific form grounded in the body of laws, such as freedom of speech or freedom of assembly. The liberal theory of natural rights, which includes the right to liberty, is criticised by Burke. In response to the abstract liberal concept, he formulates an empirical concept which relies on tradition and

¹ Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 5–42.

² Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 277.

continuity: “You will observe that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right. By this means our constitution preserves a unity in so great a diversity of its parts. We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and a house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors.”³

Burke’s sceptical view of man, which has become a constitutive element of this conservative doctrine, is an important motif in this concept of liberty. Humans are imperfect beings, controlled by their passions, and they are naturally inclined to breaking rules as well as laws. It is therefore the interest of a stable, civilised society to rein individuals with a power out of themselves: “Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done by a *power out of themselves*; and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights. But as the liberties and the restrictions vary with times and circumstances, and admit to infinite modifications, they cannot be settled upon any abstract rule; and nothing is so foolish as to discuss them upon that principle.”⁴

In its philosophical foundations, Burke’s concept of liberty is thus consistently antirationalist. This means that it is impossible to formulate a theoretical concept of liberty and preplan the way to freedom, not even on the assumption that liberty is precisely, yet abstractly specified. According to Burke, freedom is the consequence of historical growth and development. In this context, Gerald Gaus notes that Burke is “resolutely antirationalist, in many ways far more so than even Berlin’s defence of negative liberty.”⁵ Specific freedoms such as that of the press or of religion are therefore the results of the development of the constitutional-law practice. From the conservative perspective, the examination of the individual freedoms, their contents and meaning is thus not a task for philosophers dealing with liberty within the framework of political theory but rather for historians examining the development of legal theory and, especially, legal practice. From this perspective, human rights as such do not exist; there are only “the rights of Englishmen, and as a patrimony derived from their forefathers.”⁶

The individual, society and order

One of the crucial points in Burke’s concept of liberty states that liberty is the consequence of order; more precisely, the individual freedom of a specific individual is the consequence of the social order which enables, guarantees and, in a way, restricts it. The recognition of the system as the prerequisite for personal free space, which is fully in line with what Berlin refers to as the negative concept of liberty, guarantees individuals a place in society, and, consequently a free space. This naturally generates the concept of liberty which relies on the reality being lived in, with real, empirical foundations. This concept of liberty is used by Burke as the criterion for his criticism of liberty in revolutionary France: “It was liberty without property, without honour,

³ Ibid., 119.

⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁵ Gerald F. Gaus, *Political Concepts and Political Theories* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000), 122.

⁶ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 118.

without morals, without order, without government, without security of life. In order to gain liberty they had forfeited order, and had thus forfeited every degree of freedom.”⁷ At the same time, however, he also relies in this criticism on the concept of liberty that he draws from the Glorious Revolution: “The Revolution was made to preserve our *antient* indisputable laws and liberties, and that *antient* constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty.”⁸

The cornerstone of liberty, according to Burke, is its specific restraint both through prescribed rules and, primarily, through the living practice, which is preconditioned by continuity and tradition: “But what is liberty without wisdom, and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint.”⁹ What is required to combine these two seemingly contradictory phenomena, i. e. liberty and order, is wisdom, which cannot be intermediated even by a group of the most knowledgeable wise men, not to mention an individual, but rather by tradition, which carries the experience of generations: “But to form a *free government*; that is, to temper together these opposite elements of liberty and restraint in one consistent work, requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind. This I do not find in those who take the lead in the National Assembly.”¹⁰ Let us note that even though Burke relates freedom to, and demonstrates it with, specific events, he still talks about the very term of liberty, which, in turn, resonates in, and applies to, actual social, political and economic conditions. This distinction is crucial for our further discussion, where the division between liberty as a concept and liberty related to a specific political system plays an important part. This is how Berlin proceeds in his analysis and his approach – it appears – offers a solid starting point for an explanation and understanding of the relationship between a philosophical concept, on the one hand, and its application to politics, on the other hand.

The fact that Burke sometimes writes about liberty that is not related to an actual system and thus formulates what we can refer to as a philosophical concept of liberty – an abstract one, in addition – is confirmed by Frank O’Gorman: “Burke’s liberty has nothing to do with political power or with economic equality. Burke’s ordered liberty is the freedom of every man to enjoy the natural rights of social, civilized life.”¹¹ He demonstrates this with the following quote from a letter of Burke’s: “I certainly think that all Men who desire it, deserve it. It is not the Reward of our Merit or the acquisition of our Industry. It is our Inheritance. It is the birthright of our Species. We cannot forfeit our right to it, but by what forfeits our title to the privileges of our kind; I mean the abuse or oblivion of our rational faculties, and a ferocious indocility.”¹² This, after all, demonstrates the paradox of Burke’s attempts to capture liberty empirically, on the one hand, while naturally gravitating towards abstraction, on the other hand. From the formal perspective, he even seems little different from those he so passionately disputes: “Burke’s assumptions that the life of the individual is rooted in the life of the state and that the life of the state is rooted in its history were just as arbitrary as comparable assumptions made by the “Jacobin” theorists whom he so vehemently denounced.”¹³

Even though Burke’s views of the French Revolution are consistent with his previous thinking, it cannot be rightfully said – as Frank O’Gorman notes¹⁴ – that Burke’s criticism of the French Revolution only stems from, or builds on, his previous ideas. What distinguishes his *Reflections*

⁷ French Laurence and Walker King, eds., *The Works of Edmund Burke* (16 vols.) (London: Rivington, 1815–27), Vol. VIII, 110.

⁸ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 117.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 373.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹¹ Frank O’Gorman, *Edmund Burke. His Political Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), 135.

¹² Alfred Cobban and Robert A. Smith, eds., *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 6: July 1789 – December 1791, (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1967), 41. (Burke to Charles-Jean-François Depont, November 1789.)

¹³ O’Gorman, *Edmund Burke*, 107.

¹⁴ O’Gorman, *Edmund Burke*, 107.

from his previous texts is a new task, i. e. the defence of the old system in France and in Europe in general. In order to for this task to be fulfilled, Burke considered it necessary to explain both why the sudden and radical political change was undesired but also why it was destined to fail. The *Reflections* therefore focus on the description and explanation of the dangers arising from ill-conceived, inadequate and violent innovation as well as from discontinuity, which leads to the destruction of the established social and political structure, the removal of freedom and, finally, the breakdown of the entire society.

Rather than being an abstract concept or idea, liberty is a social reality from Burke's anti-rationalist perspective. Similarly, rather than being a mental construct, private property is the natural protection of social order. At the practical level, Burke's criticism concerns in this instance the National Assembly within this context. He believed that it would be too weak and incapable of fulfilling its part in the system of government. The doubts related to the Revolution as such were extended to include concern about the stability of the new government. Burke was also worried that the bodies of the new revolutionary state would become dependent on mob rule as well as on military dictatorship over the course of time. It therefore means that, under these circumstances, liberty would be compromised or even removed because the conditions that guarantee it would be seriously disturbed, i. e. the social order that guarantees that above-mentioned free space of each individual, as embedded in the system of law, would be violated. And it is only under the conditions which were embodied by the *ancien régime* for Burke that an individual can live freely within the meaning described above: "in a perfect state of legal security, with regard to his life, to his property, to the uncontrolled disposal of his Person, to the free use of his Industry and his faculties."¹⁵

II. Burke's concept of liberty within the context of Berlin's conceptual framework

For the purposes of this part, which seeks to explain Berlin's conceptual framework so as establish favourable conditions for the adequate classification of Burke's concept of liberty, it is important to consider the relationship between the notions of negative and positive liberty. While several variants of this relationship exist, let us focus on two of them for the purposes of our argumentation. The first variant is based on the proposition that each liberty contains a minimum of negative liberty.¹⁶ The second variant understands both of the concepts as two incompatible modes of thinking and conduct: "These are not two different interpretations of a single concept, but two profoundly divergent and irreconcilable attitudes to the ends of life."¹⁷

The fact that each freedom contains a minimum of negative liberty is agreed to by both philosophers who formulate the philosophical starting points of modern democracy, starting with Locke, and those whose work is based on contrary or at least different assumptions. Hobbes can be considered a typical representative of the other camp, including his conservative followers with Edmund Burke. Even though the very requirement for minimum space of personal freedom is shared by both of these positions, there is a difference in its justification as well as in what Berlin refers to as "different catalogues of individual liberties."¹⁸ The common justification used by the first group states that only the assumption of an untouchable space of each individual

¹⁵ Cobban and Smith, *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 43.

¹⁶ Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 161.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

enables social harmony and development. Hobbes, however, argues differently for the benefit of the same minimum space: if we want to avoid a war of all against all, we must create such conditions as will restrain an individual and prevent such a situation. Similar arguments are also proposed by Burke.¹⁹

Both groups thus agree that a certain degree of privacy is required so that people do not live in total despotism. Berlin captured the common argument of the two camps in favour of negative liberty as untouchable privacy: “No society literally suppresses all the liberties of its members; a being who is prevented by others from doing anything at all on his own is not a moral agent at all, and could not either legally or morally be regarded as a human being, even if a physiologist or a biologist, or even a psychologist, felt inclined to classify him as a man.”²⁰ Although the two groups agree on this point, they disagree about both the method of reasoning and about how extensive the area of non-interference, i. e. that of untouchable privacy, should be.

An additional distinction is also important for the purpose of this part of our paper. While the basic polarity between the concepts of liberty continues to apply, we propose distinguishing between two additional variants on the side of positive liberty. The first one corresponds to the concept of liberty as formulated by Edmund Burke and complies with the fundamental principles of a free society. The second variant, which mainly falls under Berlin’s concept of “self-realisation” and is best represented by Fichte’s or Marx’s thinking, is not compatible with modern democracy. The proposed distinction within the positive notion is based on the hypothesis that positive liberty and the totalitarian ideology are not necessarily related. This hypothesis responds to the recent discussion about the two terms of liberty within Republicanism. Pettit and Skinner introduce a certain modification of the negative notion, replacing the sphere of non-interference with that of non-domination, i. e. constitutionally guaranteed rights protecting citizens against arbitrary interference with privacy by the government.²¹ However, the answer to this concept brought by Ian Carter is important with regard to the proposed hypothesis²². It is based on the proposition that while the necessary link between the negative term and democratic government does not exist, as Berlin asserts, there is an empirical correlation. It appears therefore that what modern Republicans strive for can be perhaps explained by empirical means better than by a conceptual analysis.

Similarly – with regard to our proposed distinction – the same could apply to the positive notion: there does not therefore necessarily need to be a link between positive liberty and totalitarianism. This is the line of thinking, for example, of John Christman, who both responds to the prevailing criticism of the proponents of negative liberty and formulates his own concept of positive liberty: “These objections are that the concept of positive liberty is a paradoxical (if not incoherent) notion and that the promotion of positive liberty is inconsistent with the most basic principles of a free (liberal) society. In responding to these worries, ..., I wish to galvanize and clarify a notion of positive liberty that is both faithful to the concerns of the tradition in which it is central and that captures some of the basic ideas of liberal principles of justice.”²³ Generally speaking, if credible arguments are found to substantiate the fact that positive liberty and democracy do not need to deviate in some aspects, Burke’s concept of liberty may also be compatible with the theoretical principles as well as with the practice of modern democracy.

¹⁹ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 151.

²⁰ Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 161.

²¹ Skinner uses the term “neo-Roman” for this concept of liberty, while Pettit refers to the same concept as “republican.” E. g., see Cécile Laborde and John Maynor, ed., *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

²² Ian Carter, *A Measure of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²³ John Christman, “Liberalism and Individual Positive Freedom,” *Ethics* 101, no. 2 (1991): 343–44.

In the text below, positive and negative liberty are understood as two incompatible notions. Berlin distinguishes between two basic forms of positive liberty, which he entitled “self-abnegation” and “self-realisation”. With a view to the objective of this study, we shall focus on the latter. This is because self-realisation manifests features that are important in order to explain the difference between the concept of positive liberty that is in contradiction with free society, and the concept of positive liberty as formulated by Burke, which apparently does not contradict free society. These features are order and paternalism, and the difference we wish to clarify arises from their different interpretations.

Order

The key feature of self-realisation is the metaphysical assumption that there exists an objective social order that selected individuals are capable of discovering by means of reason. If they recognise, and can identify themselves with, this order, they act rationally and thus freely. Berlin characterises this situation using the following metaphor: “For the musician, after he has assimilated the pattern of the composer’s score, and has made the composer’s ends his own, the playing of the music is not obedience to external laws, a compulsion and a barrier to liberty, but a free, unimpeded exercise.”²⁴ In contrast, if an individual endeavours to achieve what order does not enable, they demonstrate either their ignorance or irrationality, because the irrational here means the desire for something that differs from what is prescribed by order. This idea forms the metaphysical core of rationalism, which implies the very positive notion of liberty.

The assumption that understanding a rational order means achieving freedom was used as the starting point for eighteenth century scientific determinists or Marx. The scientific determinists of the eighteenth century typically believed that it was possible for natural sciences and the emerging social sciences to be derived from the same model that could explain the effect of empirical causes on man and society. The description and explanation of this mechanism could help people understand their abilities and their place in the rational order of the world. The natural and positive consequence of the process would be an elimination from the frustration resulting from the failure to understand one’s predetermined fate. In other words, this type of knowledge could set one free because its side effect would be the elimination of our irrational desires and ideas.

Marx followed a similar line of thinking by formulating the hypothesis that social institutions were a major obstacle on the way to a classless society. People had succumbed to the illusion that the established social order, which pretends to be a natural law in character, is unchangeable and unavoidable. “Not until we had reached a stage at which the spells of these illusions could be broken, that is, until enough men reached a social stage that alone enabled them to understand that these laws and institutions were themselves the work of human minds and hands, historically needed in their day, and later mistaken for inexorable, objective powers, could the old world be destroyed, and more adequate and liberating social machinery substituted.”²⁵ Marx’s thinking represents the very core of the metaphysical assumption of the positive notion, which is in direct contradiction with the philosophical principles of a free society. It rests on the assumed existence of an inevitable order that stands behind the institutions within the context described above. According to its creators or discoverers, such an order is ideal, harmonic, objective and is only waiting to be revealed, described and understood by someone so that others can also identify themselves therewith – first the leaders of society and then society as a whole. Understanding

²⁴ Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 141.

²⁵ Ibid., 143.

amounts to the first step on the way to freedom. If it is completed with one's identification with order, one becomes free.

Burke evidently opposes this concept of order and the derived concept of liberty. Firstly, he is satisfied with the state of affairs in contemporary England. He understands the status quo as the result of the gradual transformation of the political conditions, initiated by the Glorious Revolution, whose principles Burke used as a measure to criticise the situation in France. His political philosophy does not include a predetermined (social) order towards which society should be headed, or even one that society should achieve one day. In contrast, he views society and the state as the result of natural growth, reached on the basis of the conservation and correction principle: "Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but, in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression."²⁶ The fact that Burke believes in the godly foundation of the world and in an order derived from this source does not mean that he would propose an ideal type of society that would be used as the model or even a target that should sooner or later be reached.

Paternalism

A rational order implies an adequate notion of man and, respectively, an adequate notion of the relationship between an individual and society, with the unifying principle being that of paternalism. In the context of self-realisation, Berlin first interprets the mentality and the role of an individual in this order, and continues by characterising its manifestation, i. e. paternalism. Using his conceptual scheme we shall compare the concept of paternalism in Fichte, on the one hand, as he formulates a paternalism that is incompatible with a free society (a modern democracy) and that of J. S. Mill and Burke, for whom paternalism is not in contradiction with a free society.

The concept of man that is part of a rational order can be characterised in contrast with a concept of man that is not compatible with such a rational order. A man who is not part of a rational order is an irrational being. Irrational people have a natural tendency to be unjust, suppress the freedom of others and exploit. Rational people, in contrast, respect the rationality of others, have no such tendencies and honour the rational order. The desire to control others disappears in a society of rational people. How does one argue, however, in favour of this concept of man and how does one make irrational beings rational? How does one recreate people in this image? The argumentation is based on the assumption that the plan is rational and correct and complies with what Berlin classifies as the "true self"²⁷, hence it will enable the development of the true, autonomous selves of other members of society and facilitate the fulfilment of their true human potential to the benefit of the entire society. If the world is managed rationally in this sense, no coercion will be required. This way of recreating human beings in this image naturally follows from this assumption.

Education and coercion are the most crucial means to this end. It is assumed in the context under consideration that uneducated individuals are irrational. If irrational individuals reject education, the educated ones have the right to make the former obtain education. This is primarily because this is the best way to achieve an understanding and recognition of order by

²⁶ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 120.

²⁷ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 131–133.

individuals, who, however, are seen as little more than a material to be reworked, in order to achieve a just society. The mentality of a person who sees little difference between education and coercion is embodied and expressed by Fichte, whose ideas Berlin quotes and paraphrases to capture and clarify this specific mode. The way that education works in this context is that the reasons for the educator's current actions will be revealed to the learners only over time. In addition, those who are to be educated cannot be expected to understand the laws that are soon to make them rational beings. In this case, coercion can be seen as a kind of education. Obedience to superior persons is a necessary component of this concept of education until the learners understand and identify themselves with order.

The irrational, i. e. those in the position of those being educated, cannot be expected to be debated with or even consulted by the educator as to how to accommodate their individual requirements during the education process. "Fichte knows what the uneducated German of his time wishes to be or do better than he can possibly know this for himself. The sage knows you better than you know yourself, for you are the victim of your passions, a slave living a heteronomous life, purblind, unable to understand your true goals. You want to be a human being. It is the aim of the state to satisfy your wish."²⁸ The above-described mode can also be seen as the manifestation of a specific form of paternalism, which, however, borders on authoritarianism and totalitarianism, respectively. In this context, Berlin mentions the well-known example provided by J. S. Mill in his work *On Liberty*, according to which we have the right to prevent a person from crossing a bridge which we know is about to collapse in order to save the person, for we assume that they do not wish to drown.²⁹

According to Berlin, there is no difference between the paternalism professed by Fichte and that formulated by Mill. However, we believe that there is an argument that can distinguish these two attitudes from one another. This distinction will also reveal what type of paternalism Burke advocates, and it will help explain why this type of paternalism is not contrary to the philosophical foundations of a free society.

From the perspective of the relationship between an individual and society, paternalism is based on the attempt to restrict personal freedom, usually by means of laws or principles so that the presumed interests of individuals can be fulfilled. If we wish to define paternalism, there is a need to distinguish it from similar, yet still-different topics and issues such as egalitarianism or the redistribution of wealth in society. The definition of paternalism in this context can be that the principle or the law that manifests paternalism must clearly formulate what the benefit of those whose liberty is restricted is.³⁰ Nevertheless, there is still the not-so-easy question as to how to defend paternalism in a modern democracy. Its intricacy stems from the fact that modern democracy rests on liberal foundations, while paternalism, by nature, swims against the mainstream of liberal thinking, which is based on the conviction that an individual can best conclude what is beneficial for them.

Let us note the fine yet conclusive difference. Individual preferences are not ideal but beneficial. It is this difference between the ideal and the beneficial that explains the difference between the paternalism advocated by Fichte and the paternalism formulated by J. S. Mill. According to Mill, the only justifiable objective of coercion by the state should be to prevent people from derogation. Thus they gain an advantage in comparison with the initial situation. In contrast, Fichte's paternalism revolves around the effort to make irrational individuals understand and identify themselves with the rational order, which will liberate them from the captivity of a heteronomous

²⁸ Ibid., 149–150.

²⁹ John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 106–107.

³⁰ Herbert L. A. Hart, *Law, Liberty, and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4–6.

world. In Fichte's paternalism we find the belief in the existence of an objective social order. In this sense, Fichte represents the value monism, which is typical of the ideology of a totalitarian state (totalitarianism). No such thing can be found in Mill's concept. Mill, in contrast, believes in value pluralism and public debate without any default entitlement to the truth.

In addition, Fichte and Mill begin from different epistemological backgrounds. While Fichte is a typical representative of idealism, Mill's background is consistently empirical. This affects their differing concept of the social order, as mentioned above, as well as the difference in the concept of the subject or the individual who is part of such a social order. Fichte views an individual as a potentially rational being, i. e. one that can understand and identify oneself with the order. If an individual is not willing to recognise the ideal order, however, those who do and are in power have the right to compel such an individual to do so. In Mill's concept, this approach makes no sense. Mill begins from the assumption that people are heteronomous, independently thinking beings who are responsible for their actions and, in most cases, capable of judging what is most beneficial for them.

Burke's concept of paternalism can be derived from the nature of his political thinking, specifically, from his views of society and an individual's role therein. In Burke's view, which has become a natural constituent of the conservative tradition, wisdom and experience are not distributed evenly in society. Those who are predisposed to leading society, and thus have the authority, will always be in the minority. This minority (the ruling elite) is more capable of assessing what is better for society as a whole and its citizens as individuals than the individuals themselves, who would, for example, decide in a referendum. This means that the society is structured vertically and hierarchically, and that it resembles an organism, because if the natural bonds are broken, it will lead to a breakdown and expiry. This is the basis of Burke's moderate yet pronounced paternalism, which aims at a stable, prosperous and free society.

Since paternalism is linked to liberty and equality and to a certain way of restricting the liberty and the corresponding concept of equality, Burke is likely to also express the various aspects of his concept of paternalism where he discusses liberty and equality. Burke's distrust of the ability of most people to handle their freedom without restriction appears to be a significant, perhaps even determining, feature of Burke's paternalism. In his criticism of the abstract concept of liberty, he expressed this as follows: "The effect of liberty to individuals is, that they may do what they please: We ought to see what it will please them to do, before we risque congratulations, which may be soon turned into complaints."³¹ One of the available guarantees of the actual implementation of individual liberty, without the risk of social disruptions or even breakdown, is its link to the institutions and procedures proven by tradition. He formulates his opinion in the *Reflections* as a response to the events in France: "I should therefore suspend my congratulations on the new liberty of France, until I was informed how it had been combined with government; with public force; with the discipline and obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; with morality and religion; with the solidity of property; with peace and order; with civil and social manners. All these (in their way) are good things too; and, without them, liberty is not a benefit whilst it lasts, and is not likely to continue long."³²

What unites Burke's and Mill's paternalism is the character of its basic motivation. In Burke's case, it is the desire to prevent the uncontrolled manifestations of the negative elements of the human nature, thus ensuring the further continuity in the society. In Mill the emphasis is on protection against derogation and the tyranny of the majority, respectively. They both also assume that there is a plurality of values and goals even though Burke's concept does not offer as much

³¹ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 91.

³² Ibid., 90–91.

discretion as Mill's does. As we have seen, Burke accentuates other values – order and continuity, in particular; he understands liberty as their consequence. The two common features mentioned above – defence and plurality – distinguish this type of paternalism from that expressed by Fichte, who represents one of the key theoretical elements of totalitarianism.

Paternalism that is principally not in contradiction with a free society is thus present in the thinking of both Burke and Mill. Even though Burke and Mill hold a similar opinion in this sense, there is an important distinction between their paternalisms, which draws a clear line between the liberal and the conservative concept of the relationship between an individual and society. The basis of this distinction is captured by John Skorupski in his analysis of Mill's paternalism. According to this analysis, we cannot find a credible argument for the absolute ban of paternalism because the autonomy of the human being is not the only value and the only good. A situation may arise when interference with the autonomy may be for the relevant individual's advantage. In this connection, Skorupski asks whether anybody can reliably rule out the existence of such cases.³³

As far as the above is concerned, Burke and Mill would be in agreement. The difference appears if we consider the relationship between the private and the public sphere in this context "A person's close friends or family may often constrain or manipulate him more or less gently for his own good ... But what is acceptable in the sphere of personal relations is one thing, what is acceptable in the public sphere, in the part of a stranger, let alone a public official, is another. The menacing indirect consequences of giving the state or society powers to interfere may indeed justify a ban on paternalistic moral practises or laws which is *in practise* absolute."³⁴ Mill's position is evidently more sceptical of paternalism than Burke's. Mill is also concerned about the tyranny of the majority, which could spread via paternalism to affect the private sphere in an uncontrollable fashion, thus preventing the free development of individuals and thus of all society. Burke, in contrast, views paternalism as a bulwark that can help hold back the natural human tendencies that pose a threat to society and liberty. Burke has much more faith in the people involved in the government structures. He believes that the state is – on the basis of the conservation and correction principle – the result of growth. Therefore, a time-tested tradition, embodied in the authority of the ruling stratum, is a better guarantee of a stable and freely developing society for him than what he sees as an uncontrolled competition of autonomous, free individuals that the state cannot manage.

III. Conclusion

We interpret Burke's concept of liberty as a consequence of, firstly, his antirationalist position and, secondly, his specific concept of the individual, society and order. Burke's antirationalism means that it is impossible to formulate a theoretical concept of liberty and preplan the way to freedom, not even on the assumption that liberty is precisely, yet abstractly specified. In Burke's concept, liberty is the result of historical development. It is therefore incorrect to refer to liberty in general; instead, specific freedoms should be discussed. Specific freedoms, such as those of the press or of religion, are the product of the development of constitutional-law practice. It therefore does not make sense to discuss general human rights, which are the result of rational consideration and have not been tested in practice over the long term.

What is typical of the concept of the individual and society as formulated by Burke is the priority of the whole, i. e. of society, over that of a part, i. e. an individual. From the theoretical

³³ John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 360.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 360.

perspective, an individual and his liberty are the result of the social order, which guarantees and, at the same time, restricts liberty adequately. Such a concept of liberty provides people with their place in society and thus their free space. This naturally produces the concept of liberty that is derived from an empirical basis because society and the state are viewed as specific units with a stabilised structure, procedures, and what Burke refers to as prejudice (manners, customs, rules – expressed and unexpressed).

The objective of the second part of the study was to justify the premise that positive liberty and totalitarianism are not necessarily related. According to Berlin's conceptual framework, there is an inclusive relationship between negative and positive liberty, with the positive notion always including a certain minimum individual space (negative liberty) or the two are seen as two disjunctive modes. It follows from Berlin's explanation of the latter variant that positive liberty should be an integral part of totalitarianism. The argument that seeks to justify the premise that positive liberty and totalitarianism are not necessarily related resumes Christman's argument aimed at providing proof for the premise that positive liberty and a free society (a modern democracy) do not need to contradict one other under certain circumstances. If this argumentation is applied, it would be possible to distinguish, within positive liberty, a variant compliant with totalitarianism, and a variant that substantially differs from totalitarianism, and is compatible with a free society. Burke's concept of liberty should fall into the latter group. In addition, the argumentation regarding this point rests on different concepts of order and paternalism.

The core presumption of the positive term (self-realisation) is the belief in the existence of an objective and ideal social order that is only waiting to be revealed, described and understood by someone so that others can also identify themselves therewith. Understanding, and identifying oneself with, the order enables liberty. However, such a concept of order and liberty is in contradiction with the philosophical background of a free society because the purpose of such a society's order is not to establish an ideal state, but to create conditions for the liberty and equality of individuals within society. Burke opposes rational order in a similar, yet his own way. He understands the *status quo* as the result of progressive change in the political conditions but does not have a prenotation of any given social order towards which society should be headed. He views society and the state, however, as the product of natural development based on the conservation and correction principle. Burke's thinking in this context is therefore the opposite of rationalism because, in particular, his concept of order is empirical within the meaning specified above.

The paternalism that is an important component of totalitarianism, and contradicts the theoretical principles and practice of a free society is represented by Fichte. The paternalism found in J. S. Mill and in Edmund Burke stands in contrast to this concept. For his paternalism, Fichte applies the metaphor of education, which is identical with coercion for him. Uneducated individuals are irrational; if they reject education, the educated ones, who have already identified themselves with the rational order, have the right to make the former obtain education. The belief in the existence of an objective social order forms an integral part of Fichte's paternalism. Fichte thus represents value monism which is typical of the ideology of totalitarianism. According to Mill, the justifiable objective of coercion by the state should be to prevent people from derogation. Thus they gain an advantage in comparison with the initial situation. In addition, Mill believes in value pluralism and public debate without any default entitlement to the truth.

The premise that wisdom and experience are not distributed evenly within a society is the determining feature of Burke's paternalism. Those who are predisposed to leading society, and thus have the natural authority, will always be in the minority. This, in turn, results in Burke's distrust of the ability of most people to handle their freedom without restrictions. Individual liberty is realistically guaranteed by its control performed by means of proven institutions and procedures.

What unifies Burke's and Mill's paternalism, while distinguishing it from Fichte's paternalism, is the initial motivation, i. e. defence and the potential plurality of values and goals, although, in Burke's case, this is significantly more limited. It is these two elements, i. e. defence and plurality, that distinguish the paternalism that is not in contradiction with the free society from Fichte's paternalism, which denies the plurality of values and goals.

The objective of our study was to substantiate the hypothesis that Burke's concept of liberty is not in contradiction with the philosophical background of a free society even though, according to Berlin's conceptual division, it belongs to the positive notion of liberty, which, however, is the basis of totalitarianism. We first explained Burke's concept of liberty, which draws on his anti-rationalism and the interpretation of the relationship between the individual and society/order. His concept of liberty is based empirically – in opposition to the abstract rationalist concept. In order to classify Burke's concept of liberty, Berlin's conceptual scheme was employed; it makes it possible to explain why Burke's interpretation of liberty is not principally incompatible with a free society and how it is different from the concept of liberty that is typical of totalitarianism. In this argumentation, we relied on a different understanding of order and paternalism within the context of totalitarianism, as expressed by Fichte, and within the context of the democratic tradition, as expressed by J. S. Mill and, as a specific variant, by Edmund Burke.

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Anti-Scientism, Conceptual Analysis and High-End Science Journalism¹

Abstract | In Ancient Greece, when philosophy began, it included all theoretical knowledge. Later, however, at the time of Aristotle, specialized sciences began to emerge and the scope of philosophy grew smaller and smaller. The question is what to do when philosophy has lost its ability to deal with any relevant topic. The paper discusses three possible views of the relation between philosophy and science: anti-scientism, conceptual analysis and naturalism. All these approaches have various disadvantages. For anti-scientism it is mainly the inability to explain the unprecedented success of modern science. Proponents of conceptual analysis are confronted with Quine's attack on analytic statements and its consequences for a priori truths. Finally, naturalistic philosophers might be threatened by the hegemony of science and its universal application of the hypothetico-deductive method. The worst scenario for naturalistic philosophers is not as bad as some fear. Philosophers can solve their traditional problems using a knowledge of well-established special sciences, even though they might play the role of high end science journalists.

Keywords | Philosophy – Science – Anti-Scientism – Conceptual Analysis – Naturalism – W. V. O. Quine – Common Sense

Let me begin with a story we all know quite well. In Ancient Greece, when philosophy began, it included all theoretical knowledge. Later, at the time of Aristotle, however, specialized sciences began to emerge and the scope of philosophy grew smaller and smaller. Philosophy lost logic, poetics, rhetoric, history, geography, meteorology, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, zoology, botany, geology, paleontology, etc. The social sciences went overboard in the 19th century: economics, sociology, psychology and political science. The burning question is: what is left for philosophy, if anything at all? As the German philosopher Odo Marquard puts it: what to do when philosophy has lost its ability to deal with any relevant topic?²

There are thinkers who believe that this means the end of philosophy as we know it. Some of them might be considered scientific celebrities, most of them are theoretical physicists. There is a famous quote, for example, usually attributed to Richard Feynman: "Philosophy of science is about as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds."³ Another Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg in his book *Dreams of a Final Theory* distinguished between the unreasonable *effectiveness* of

¹ This study was supported by a grant "The Epistemological Status of Science and the Demarcation Problem of Pseudoscience" (2014–2016, no. 452100761) from the Faculty of Arts, Palacký University in Olomouc. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Ernst Mach Workshop in Prague on May 5, 2014.

² Odo Marquard, "Inkompetenzkompensationskompetenz? Über Kompetenz Und Inkompetenz Der Philosophie," in *Abschied Vom Prinzipiellen: Philosophische Studien* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 23–38.

³ Feynman's authorship is disputed, it is commonly claimed that he said so in an interview for the documentary television series *Horizon* on BBC.

mathematics and the unreasonable *ineffectiveness* of philosophy.⁴ The British chemist Peter Atkins explained his opinion of philosophy as follows: “It seems to me we’ve got to get rid of philosophy because it is really such a ball and chain on progress... a philosopher is really just a nuisance.”⁵ Probably the most famous contemporary theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking in his book *The Grand Design*, co-authored by Leonard Mlodinow, wrote this harsh remark: “Philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge.”⁶ Lawrence Krauss is less serious when he makes fun of professional philosophers in an interview for *The Atlantic*: “Philosophy is a field that, unfortunately, reminds me of that old Woody Allen joke, ‘those that can’t do, teach, and those that can’t teach, teach gym.’”⁷ Finally, Freeman Dyson, the doyen of quantum electrodynamics, addressed contemporary philosophers with this fierce comment: “Compared with the giants of the past, they are a sorry bunch of dwarfs. They are thinking deep thoughts and giving scholarly lectures to academic audiences, but hardly anybody in the world outside is listening. They are historically insignificant.”⁸

I believe that we should take this criticism seriously. We cannot just say that we are misunderstood and that the ill-informed scientists cannot see the beneficial effect of philosophy on society. We also cannot feel hurt and sorry for ourselves. On the contrary, we have to deal with a serious question: what to do in philosophy after the end of philosophy? As far as I can see, there are three possible views on the relation between philosophy and science, all of them popular in the 20th century: *anti-scientism* claiming that science is partially or wholly mistaken, *conceptual analysis* that considers philosophy a special kind of enterprise unrelated to natural science and *naturalism* thinking highly of science as a model and inspiration for any serious inquiry. In the remainder of my paper I will try to explain all these three positions and demonstrate their possible weaknesses. I shall begin with anti-scientism.

1

The anti-scientific stance is commonly held in so-called continental philosophy. We can identify two versions differing in their intensity. The *moderate* point of view claims that there is *something* wrong with science; this is quite common among phenomenologists stemming from the tradition of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. The *radical* point of view claims there is *everything* wrong with science; supporters of this position are to be found in post-structuralism or postmodernism and among followers of Derrida’s deconstruction.

The basis of moderate anti-scientism dates back to the works of German phenomenologists, for example in Husserl’s *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* from 1936 or Heidegger’s lecture “Science and Reflection” from 1953.⁹ Particular details aside, both thinkers acknowledge that since Galileo modern science has had a long record of success in describing the natural world. Unfortunately, science has failed in a much more important assignment. It is completely inept when dealing with *Lebenswelt*, which is usually translated as

⁴ Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 169.

⁵ Peter Atkins, “Science as Culture” (Beyond Belief: Enlightenment 2.0, University of Oxford, 2007).

⁶ Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 13.

⁷ Lawrence Krauss, interview by Ross Andersen, *Has Physics Made Philosophy and Religion Obsolete?*, *The Atlantic*, April 23, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/print/2012/04/has-physics-made-philosophy-and-religion-obsolete/256203/>.

⁸ Freeman Dyson, “What Can You Really Know?,” *The New York Review of Books* 59, no. 17 (2012), accessed on May 5, 2014, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/nov/08/what-can-you-really-know/>.

⁹ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970); Martin Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 155–82.

Lifeworld. This is the subjective realm of a person's inner experience that is inaccessible by an objective methodology of scientific inquiry. According to Husserl and Heidegger, only philosophy can be of any use here, and by "philosophy" they mean their particular kind of transcendental phenomenology.

A more radical version of anti-scientism can be traced in writings of authors from gender studies, primarily those inspired by postmodern philosophy of science. Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar published an influential book *Laboratory Life* in 1979 in which they denied the possibility of acquiring any scientific truths and declared that "the daily activities of working scientists lead to the construction of scientific facts".¹⁰ Scientific practice frequently serves as an instrument of political oppression, usually aimed against minorities. I will demonstrate this with two examples of this approach: in the first one Sandra Harding criticizes modern physics as anti-feminist; in the second one Fiona Erskine does the same with evolutionary theory. Harding writes:

"A consistent analysis would lead to the conclusion that understanding nature as a woman indifferent to or even welcoming rape was equally fundamental to the interpretations of these new conceptions of nature and inquiry. In that case, why is it not as illuminating and honest to refer to Newton's laws as 'Newton's rape manual' as it is to call them 'Newton's mechanics'?"¹¹

Erskine argues similarly:

"Darwin's theories were conditioned by the patriarchal culture in which they were elaborated: he did not invent the concept of sexual difference... The Origin provided a mechanism for converting culturally entrenched ideas of female hierarchy into permanent, biologically determined, sexual hierarchy."¹²

The anti-scientific stance has a number of problems that I cannot deal with in such a limited space. I will point out only a few, such as: (1) The inability to explain the unprecedented success of modern science; we owe science and technology for living in the happiest era of human history. (2) The inability to offer an alternative to scientific inquiry; phenomenology and postmodernism have not produced anything useful except colorful stories that we can either accept or not. (3) The frequent use of obscurant, incoherent or meaningless language that disqualifies anti-scientific authors from any serious inquiry. The most bizarre, however, is the fact that anti-scientism criticizes modern science because of its alleged political agenda, but is usually connected with a very specific set of social and political aims.¹³

2

The next approach to the relationship between philosophy and science is the conceptual analysis. This stance is as old as analytic philosophy itself, but a particularly well formulated version of it can be found in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by Ludwig Wittgenstein. In a particularly famous passage 4.111–4.112 Wittgenstein explained the role of philosopher as follows:

"Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences... Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. A philosophical work consists

¹⁰ Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979), 40.

¹¹ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 113.

¹² Fiona Erskine, "'The Origin of Species' and the Science of Female Inferiority," in Charles Darwin's *"The Origin of Species": New Interdisciplinary Essay*, ed. David Amigoni and Jeff Wallace (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 118.

¹³ There are many excellent publications on misdemeanors of postmodern theory: Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures* (London: Profile Books, 1998); Noretta Koertge, ed., *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths About Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). I recommend reading them if you are in doubt.

essentially of elucidations. Philosophy does not result in “philosophical propositions”, but rather in the clarification of propositions.”¹⁴

All true sentences are expressed by science which provides a complete picture of everything that can be said about the world. What lies outside the borders of meaningful scientific sentences is nonsense that cannot be communicated by linguistic means. The role of philosophy is quite minimalistic: to determine the border itself, to filter sense from nonsense. To cite the great Wittgensteinian scholar Gordon Park Baker:

“Wittgenstein polices the bounds of sense, sharply reprimanding philosophers who commit offences by uttering nonsense. The activity of clarifying concepts or describing grammar is corrective therapy.”¹⁵

I am afraid that this therapeutical conception of philosophy is too modest and unambitious; most philosophers are not interested in policing the scientific neighborhood, they want to deal with traditional questions of philosophy. Unsurprisingly, there are thinkers who use conceptual analysis for something more. A number of contemporary philosophers describe their philosophical practice as being concerned with the elaboration of conceptual truths. These are: (1) beliefs without empirical content, (2) derived from language by conceptual analysis, (3) usually based on expert philosophical intuitions, (4) often illustrated by elaborate thought experiments. Again, I cannot describe all the problems of conceptual analysis as a method of acquiring philosophical knowledge, but I can emphasize the most important one. This is the emergence of naturalized epistemology in 1951 when W. V. O. Quine first published “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”.¹⁶ The attack on analytic truths has serious consequences for other terms that are vital for conceptual analysis – “a priori” and “necessary”. Quine asserts that all knowledge originates in sensorial experience; there are no analytic, a priori or necessary propositions except for banal tautologies. I love the way David Papineau highlights this fact in his essay “The Poverty of Analysis”:

“First, the claims made by philosophy are synthetic, not analytic: philosophical claims, just like scientific claims, are not guaranteed by the structure of the concepts they involve. Second, philosophical knowledge is a posteriori, not a priori: the claims established by philosophers depend on the same kind of empirical support as scientific theories. And finally, the central questions of philosophy concern actuality rather than necessity: philosophy is primarily aimed at understanding the actual world studied by science, not some further realm of metaphysical modality.”¹⁷

He concludes: “Philosophy investigates reality in the same way as science. Its methods are akin to scientific methods, and the knowledge it yields is akin to scientific knowledge.”¹⁸ This kind of philosophy does not use conceptual analysis at all. It belongs to the third view on the relation between philosophy and science called naturalism.

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness (London: Routledge, 2001), 29–30.

¹⁵ Gordon P. Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 94.

¹⁶ Willard Van Orman Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” *The Philosophical Review* 60, no. 1 (1951): 20–43.

¹⁷ David Papineau, “The Poverty of Analysis,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 83, no. 1 (2009): 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

3

Naturalistic philosophy originates in writings of two great American philosophers – John Dewey and W. V. O. Quine. Since “Naturalized Epistemology”, Quine authored a number of definitions of “naturalism”. I chose the one from the year 1981: “the recognition that it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described”.¹⁹ This, of course, is a direct attack on the Cartesian concept of the first philosophy, *prima philosophia* or *scientia universalis*. If we depend on synthetic *a posteriori* beliefs concerning the actual world, there is no place for any prior philosophical inquiry. Let us have a look at another definition of naturalism, this time from Quine’s late paper from 1995: “naturalism holds that there is no higher access to truth than empirically testable hypotheses”.²⁰

There are a number of arguments in favor of this methodological naturalism, but I believe that there are also good reasons to accept a stronger version of this stance – ontological naturalism. Briefly: methodological naturalists think that the best way of studying natural phenomena is scientific method; perhaps there are more suitable ways of knowing for some unnatural phenomena. Ontological naturalists are more dyed-in-the-wool and claim that everything there belongs to the natural world and therefore can be studied by means of natural science. I think this assumption is quite trivial and that we have long had an overlooked argument dating back to the 17th century to prove it. I will call it “the Elisabethan Argument for Ontological Naturalism”.

When I say “Elisabeth”, I mean Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, the eldest daughter of Frederick V and Elizabeth Stuart, who is most well-known for her extended correspondence with René Descartes. As we all know, Cartesian Dualism postulated the existence of two opposite substances: *res extensa* or corporeal substance and *res cogitans* or mental substance. When Princess Elisabeth finished reading Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, she wrote him a series of letters. In the first one dated 6 May 1643 she asked the most important question: how can an interaction between two completely separated substances be possible? For example, how can an immaterial soul causally affect a material body; or, how can a material sense organ transmit information to an immaterial mind? Verbatim she wrote: “I ask you please to tell me how the soul of a human being (it being only a thinking substance) can determine the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary actions.”²¹ Descartes could not solve the riddle until his death in 1650 and even later no one could. This meant a complete failure for Cartesian Dualism and its early demise in academic philosophy. The lesson taught here is this: the alleged immaterial or transcendent entities are either causally impotent and therefore – in compliance with Occam’s razor – non-existent, or they are in fact material and subject to standard scientific investigation. I concur completely with Alex Rosenberg’s opinion on the matter, which is simple yet elegant: “The basic things everything is made up of are fermions and bosons. That’s it.”²²

If we embrace this strong version of ontological naturalism, then everything there has a physical base and can be studied by science. We should not be concerned about the hegemony of science, because it is just a set of practices that are widespread among all rational beings. Science is based on common sense, even though its everyday activities are controlled meticulously by experimental and quantitative methods. The most popular procedures for controlling a scientific enterprise is double-blind testing and peer review; they are fallible, of course, but this is the case

¹⁹ Willard Van Orman Quine, “Things and Their Place in Theories,” in *Theories and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 21.

²⁰ Willard Van Orman Quine, “Naturalism; Or, Living Within One’s Means,” *Dialectica* 49, no. 2–4 (1995): 251.

²¹ Lisa Shapiro, ed., *The Correspondence Between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 61–62.

²² Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist’s Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 21.

of all kinds of human knowledge. The best formulation of this principle I have found is again in Alex Rosenberg's book *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, where he writes:

"Science is just common sense continually improving itself, rebuilding itself, correcting itself, until it is no longer recognizable as common sense... Science begins as common sense. Each step in the development of science is taken by common sense. The accumulation of those commonsense steps, each of them small, from a commonsense starting place over a 400-year period since Galileo, has produced a body of science that no one any longer recognizes as common sense. But that's what it is. The real common sense is relativity and quantum mechanics, atomic chemistry and natural selection. That's why we should believe it in preference to what ordinary experience suggests."²³

It seems to me that the only way of acquiring knowledge about the world we live in is the hypothetico-deductive method described by Karl Popper and Quine. If we apply this method to philosophical problems, we might finally find some answers to our most prominent questions. Traditional branches of philosophy could be transformed into well-established special sciences: ontology is just physics, epistemology is part of cognitive psychology, philosophy of mind can be understood as a blend of neurology and computer science, philosophy of language has already dissolved in linguistics and the progress of ethical inquiry can be pushed forward using evolutionary biology and game theory.

Are there any real problems for philosophy construed in such a naturalistic or scientific way? Some are afraid so, for example, Tim Lewens, a philosopher of science at Cambridge University. Lewens published an essay entitled "A Surfeit of Naturalism" in 2012 in which he warned against "high end science journalism, where one simply reports the findings of scientists in a form that philosophers find digestible."²⁴ I can honestly not see any problem in this account of philosophy. The questions of philosophy are probably the most interesting and important that humankind has ever come up with. Unfortunately, traditional philosophy does not have any tools for answering them – the answers must be extracted from science. Fortunately for us philosophers, however, scientists themselves are involved in carrying out daily scientific practice and they do not have enough time to think through the philosophical consequences of their findings. I very much sympathize with Hilary Kornblith, who in the recent interview for *3:AM Magazine* argues:

"There is a worry that many have expressed that, on the naturalistic way of approaching philosophical questions, philosophy will somehow be co-opted by science. I'm not much worried about this. For one thing, I think that there are questions which philosophers raise which, although science bears on them, are not typically the central focus of those who work in the sciences."²⁵

I presume that the best demonstration of science solving traditional philosophical problems is Alex Rosenberg's *Guide*. The text is written "in the same empirical spirit that animates natural science"²⁶ and commits strongly to scientism, which is apparent from the following quotes: "Science provides all the significant truths about reality, and knowing such truths is what real understanding is all about."²⁷ Or: "We trust science as the only way to acquire knowledge."²⁸ Rosenberg is in all probability the most vociferous proponent of the naturalized worldview that I myself find utmost fruitful. This is the worldview in which science can answer any question that

²³ Ibid., 167–169.

²⁴ Tim Lewens, "A Surfeit of Naturalism," *Metaphilosophy* 43, no. 1–2 (2012): 52.

²⁵ Hilary Kornblith, interview by Richard Marshall, *On Reflection*, 3:AM Magazine, January 29, 2013, <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/on-reflection/>.

²⁶ Willard Van Orman Quine, "Ontological Relativity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 7 (April 4, 1968): 185.

²⁷ Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

can be answered and in which the main goal of philosophy is to clean up the mess philosophers have made over the last two and a half thousand years.

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The Identity of Philosophy of Psychology. Certain Remarks on the Value of Philosophical Considerations for Psychological Deliberations

Abstract | The identity of philosophy of psychology is undoubtedly rooted in the self-contained identities of both psychology and philosophy. In the present paper I analyse the theoretical reasons for the split of these two sciences in order to answer the question as to which philosophical path could be important for psychological research. The psychology of the nineteenth century is, in fact, philosophy which employs different meanings; it sketches theories of human subjectivity on an empirical basis and aims at fulfilling the conditions of a natural science. Philosophical psychology thus forms its own identity struggles with two types of demands: German idealism, on the one hand, which adamantly defends the logical coherence of deduction and psychological criticism, on the other hand, thanks to which questions of validity appear asked in connection with its occurrence.

Keywords | Psychology – Philosophy – Philosophical Psychology – Heuristics – Kant – Wundt – German Idealism

The identity of philosophy of psychology is undoubtedly rooted in the self-contained identities of both psychology and philosophy. In order to seek for the elements constituting the contemporary character of philosophical psychology, it seems justified to answer the question as to what the philosophy of psychology, which decided to separate from its core, can offer from its creative deliberations. I would also like to return to the sources of the celebrated moment of emancipation and present theoretical reasons for the split of these two sciences in order to answer the question as to which philosophical path could be important for psychological research.

The perspectives of contemporary philosophical research. Additional paths

If philosophy aspires to be an up-to-date commentary on the current human experience it has to continue to focus on deep changes in the structure of this experience and make efforts at reflecting on them. An example of this, close to my scholarly interests, is transcendental philosophy which, from the beginning of its systematic presentation in *Critique of Pure Reason* has experienced a constant progression in its ideas which is truly astounding. The decline of Transcendentalism has often been foretold. It seemed at first that, apart from Hegel's idealism, the idea of transcendentalism was unworkable. The Kantian question concerning the conditions of all possible a priori experience, functions quite well, however, in the new situation.

Neo-Kantianism was a dominant intellectual tendency in German philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century. Husserl's phenomenology with its canonical eidetic reduction analyzing not only seen objects but also acts of consciousness (reduced to salient features and basic structures common to all acts) would not have been possible as transcendental research without relating to Kant. Husserl's phenomenological analysis (and also its Kantian transcendental fundament) served as inspiration for Scheler's aesthetic and ethical concepts¹, Pfänder's psychological concepts² and Reinach's legal ones³. After World War One the significance of Neo-Kantianism began to gradually decrease. Helmuth Plessner in 1918 in his first debate with Kant's critical philosophy *Krisis der transzendentalen Wahrheit im Anfang* wrote about the decline of Neo-Kantianism together with its people and its Latin. Edmund Husserl himself also criticized the views of his teacher Heinrich Rickert, one of the pillars of the Baden theoretical-axiological criticism, as being devoid of content with its pedantic terminological structures and artificiality of construction.

These predictions turned out to be, however, not only premature but completely unjustified. Kantianism was reborn from its own assumptions and flowed, one might argue, from the source of its own manifesto. The project of critical philosophy, based on the thought of the Königsberg Genius, was not supposed to reformulate the fundamental dilemmas providing them with new significance in theoretical discourse but had functional ambitions as well. It presented a universal, critical view, which would be able to exhaust with its solutions all philosophical problems and determine the new paradigm of intellectual reflection. Transcendentalism discovered a new way of articulating basic philosophical problems.

Throughout the entire history of doing philosophy, three modes of philosophizing can be distinguished which contain fundamental questions concerning the reality and structure of inner and outer world surrounding humanity. These are the metaphysical paradigm, which dominated in Classical and Medieval thought, subjectivism, as the distinguishing position for modern thinking and communicative/hermeneutical or interpretational as grounded in the source of transcendental philosophy. Marek Szulakiewicz writes: "Evaluating the contemporary cultural presence of these principles of practicing philosophy – the first two are described as 'exhausted paradigms', i. e. such that are not only unable to create any new opportunities for philosophy but also prevent it from being present and having any role in contemporary culture"⁴. It seems, however, that modern metaphysics would argue with this view, drawing inspiration from the field of theoretical computer sciences and chaos theory, as well as the eternalist and presentist concept of time.

Chaos theory has had the greatest contribution to opening up, before contemporary ontology, the perspective of learning about the whole, the being as such. In exact sciences: physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, economics it has broken away from the scientific selectivity of particular disciplines, universalizing positions and bringing together scientists from different areas of specialization. This is because, the theory, as a theory of relationships in the global structure, reverses the general methodological tendency of reductive analysis which consists in breaking down research subjects into basic components.

Metaphysical problems occur at present in the shape of completely different questions than 25 centuries ago and are developed with the use of a theoretical apparatus which has improved

¹ Max Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik; Neuer Versuch d. Grundlegung ethischen Personalismus* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1921²), 600.

² Alexander Pfänder, *Phänomenologie des Wollens: eine psychologische Analyse* (Leipzig: Barth, 1900), 132.

³ Adolf Reinach, "Kants Auffassung des Hummeschen Problems," *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 141 (1910): 176–209.

⁴ Marek Szulakiewicz, *Obecność filozofii transcendentalnej* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 2002), 55.

and adjusted to modern standards of philosophizing. Contemporary metaphysics takes up the problem of describing the subject in relation to the time variable. It considers two competitive views. One is called endurantism which claims that objects are beings existing wholly in every moment of their existence. Endurance is existing in time in such a way that objects as a whole exist in different moments of time. In contrast, supporters of perdurantism propose to perceive objects as consisting of temporal parts. Objects are not understood here as three- but four-dimensional, stretched out not only in space but also in time. Perduring objects consist of all the spatial-temporal positions occupied by its structure. Enduring objects last in time while perduring stretch in time.

With the appearance of the problem of describing an object in relation to the time variable, additional research problems become apparent. They are connected with the identity of the lasting and the changing object in time (the so-called genidentity relation) and kinds of relationships concerning it: logical identicalness, temporal separation, spatial separation and casual connection.

Contemporary metaphysical problems, similarly to the times of the late Enlightenment, are linked to the problem of experience, which, in turn, allows me to return back to Kant in my deliberations. In the first sentence of the Introduction to his *Critique of Pure Reason* he writes: "That all our cognition begins with experience about which there can be no doubt."⁵ The question of experience thematizes in a deductive way the *a priori* conditions of any possible experience, but also establishes the direction in which transcendental philosophy should go. Hence, as Kant claims, the transcendental method is, on the one hand, the introduction to future metaphysics but also a meta-theory of experience, whose exceptionality consists in not universalizing any given framework of experience. This meta-theory will be referred by Wilhelm Wundt. The transcendental discovery of the validity of theoretical experience and of what legitimizes it also made it possible today to frequently revise the Kantian notion of experience and modify the starting point of critical philosophy.

There have been numerous attempts to revise Kant's assumptions through linking them to the newest theories devised by epistemology, cognitivism, hermeneutics or extra-philosophical explorations such as neurolinguistics, evolutionary psychology, psychiatry or sociology. Three names of contemporary transcendentalists, whose creative thoughts are opening up new perspectives for critical transcendental philosophy, are worth mentioning.

The first of them is Wolfgang Röd in *Erfahrung und Reflexion. Theorien der Erfahrung in transzendentalphilosophischer Sicht*, who dismisses the Kantian postulate of the precedence of experience. Röd argues that the Kantian conditions of experience are not purely theoretical structures that are given to us as assumptionless and ahistorical (as Edmund Husserl would claim). Thus the assumed pure character of an absolutely *a priori* transcendental subject is groundless. It turns out that all notions which transcendentalism uses can only secondarily become questions in a critical discussion about any possible experience. Even the notions fundamental to the transcendentalist programme are introduced in connection with a given theory of experience (and there can be many such, as we know) and they are only valid within the framework of their proper justifying argumentation. For example, the concept "I", the object of the world and experience appear in the transcendentalist theory as *a priori* defined, so they inevitably include an interpretation. Thus, while Kant's metaphysics works out its position from the object to the subject forming the object with *I priori* conditions, contemporary transcendental thought does not assign all that much importance to the subject-object relation but to their secondary,

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), B1.

interpreted character which inevitably leads to abolishing the Kantian dogma of the directness of cognition⁶.

This argument is treated somewhat differently by Hans Lenk in *Philosophy of Pragmatic Interpretationism*. According to Lenk, the greatest achievement of interpretationism is such a re-interpretation of the fundamentals of Kant's philosophy that it fits conveniently with contemporary sciences dealing with the structure of the mind: cognitivism, neurology and psychology. Interpreting is viewed as something necessary and fundamental by Lenk, not only to every possible cognition but also to human existence. Recognizing not only thinking but also interpreting as a process of active construing of the world by the acting subject leads to a number of questions and ambiguities which have to be solved if Lenk's concept is to remain coherent. One should, for example, ask the question about the origins of interpretation and its forming process. After all, it is not a stiff cognitivist structure⁷.

A new look at the problem of the possibility of experience directs the deliberations of transcendental philosophy toward the development of reflection on the nature of today's experience. The development of both science and culture opens and penetrates with its research tools the fields of reality which manifest themselves in an increasing variety. Their multitude and variety can make one doubt the universality of experience "opening the world", as Schaeffler writes, which we could see established a priori. In *Erfahrung als Dialog mit der Wirklichkeit. Eine Untersuchung zur Logik der Erfahrung* Schaeffler argues that the scientific theory of experience has broken down, since we are faced with a multitude of experiences, often absolutized, each of which seems to be the only way of presenting the world. It is consequently clear that, while in Kant's times the value of transcendentalism came directly from the statement that the conditions for subjective experience are not the objects themselves but what makes these objects possible, contemporary transcendentalism struggles with mutual relationships of different experiences determining one another in the research field. Aesthetic, religious, axiological and, above all, virtual reality experience leads to the creation of uniquely articulated theories within which they present themselves as autonomous⁸.

Although the aesthetic, religious or axiological experience was present in Kant's deliberations, virtual reality was not of course, for obvious reasons, and it is currently one of the crucial factors of current civilization which cannot be neglected by thorough philosophical analysis. As sociology demonstrates, virtual reality models the way of people's everyday functioning. The strength with which virtual reality implants itself in human consciousness has become apparent in the generation which grew up alongside the development of the Internet at the turn of the 1990s. Recent research on social communication has led to incredible conclusions: the revolutionary significance of the *Net* does not consist in traditional transfer of content (*nota bene*, the amount of available knowledge greatly exceeds the cognitive absorption of the human mind which stimulates different perceptive abilities). Not everything in virtual reality has to necessarily take place in a linear order. A linear order is characteristic of the traditional ways of conveying knowledge. Virtual information resources, being a selection of fragments or even shreds of knowledge, make cognition selective or even atomized. Cognition does not have a linear value but is fragmentary. Virtual reality is, after all, a set of parallel fragments of words, quotes and links that are often similar in terms of meaning and informational strength. Learning at present does not require the concentrated effort of studying a subject in the privacy of one's own room and forming one's

⁶ Wolfgang Röd, *Erfahrung und Reflexion. Theorien der Erfahrung in transzendentalphilosophischer Sicht* (München: C. H. Beck, 1991), 51.

⁷ Hans Lenk, *Pragmatische Vernunft, Philosophie zwischen Wissenschaft und Praxis* (Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1979), 57.

⁸ Richard Schaeffler, *Erfahrung als Dialog mit der Wirklichkeit. Eine Untersuchung zur Logik der Erfahrung* (Freiburg im Br.: Alber, 1995), 190.

own meta-theoretical stance. It does not even require copying selected fragments of scholarly dissertations. The intermediality of any information and, consequently, of cognition makes it possible to expand one's knowledge chaotically and thus knowledge becomes an incoherent structure gained in cognition. It undoubtedly stimulates contemporary philosophy to present "amended" conditions of any possible experience, enriched with a new virtual perspective. There are a number of fields where contemporary Polish philosophy should look for research subjects in order to be able to gain a significant voice in various philosophical discussions.

Wundt's separation of psychology and philosophy

In order to answer the question as to which philosophical current might be important for psychological sciences, I would like to come back to the sources of the famous emancipation moment and present certain theoretical reasons for the separation of these sciences, since it seems to me that it was Wilhelm Wundt himself who built the fundamentals of the identity of philosophy of psychology.

According to Klaus Sachs-Hombach, psychology already behaves philosophically if and when it accepts the speculative notion of the soul and the unique conception of science⁹. However, Ryszard Stachowski concludes: "today, after almost twenty-four centuries, not only this Aristotelian scientific subject of the soul but also the name »psychology« itself have become anachronisms, since progress was supposed to mean establishing psychology without a substantial soul and, subsequently, without a soul at all"¹⁰. Hence, with the emancipation of psychology, the paradigmatic understanding of *the psyche* becomes suspended and replaced by the inductive and experimental process. Critics have pointed out that the relations of mutual references between psychology and philosophy are subject to constant transformations and redefinitions. Experimental psychology was preceded by various intellectual phenomena aimed at taking a coherent stance on the claims of mathematics, metaphysics and empirical experience. The attempts at creating different connections between these elements resulted in, for example, psychogenetic assumptions by Herbert which showed inner experience as temporal observation (*zeitliche Wahrnehmung*); Carus's *Organon of cognition* (*Das Organon der Erkenntnis*) and his programme of psychological morphology; or the theory of cognition of Jakob Friedrich Fries and Friedrich Eduard Beneke, who later initiated the dispute over psychologism.

Klaus Sachs-Hombach pointed out that we already find philosophical aspects in the attitudes of nineteenth century psychology when it comes to the treatment of speculative-theoretical knowledge in connection with the process of consciousness building. This science, attempting to maintain the unity of the psychological paradigm, struggles, on the one hand with metaphysical justifications, and on the other hand, with the requirements of scientific experiment. In order to finally solve the problems of experimental-mechanistic explanations, without going back to the forms of logical assumptions, it revives, as Hombach writes, the programme of philosophical psychology in which basic abilities and structures of consciousness should be reflected. Occupying the middle ground it attempts to work out theories of subjectivity which could avoid the aporia of both positions¹¹.

In the works of Herbert, Caruse, Beneke and Schopenhauer the explanation of subjectivity is linked metaphysically, whereas in Wundt's and Lotze's, the anthropological, theoretical and

⁹ Klaus Sachs-Hombach, *Philosophische Psychologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Entstehung und Problemgeschichte* (Freiburg and München: Alber, 1993), 314.

¹⁰ Ryszard Stachowski, *Historia współczesnej myśli psychologicznej. Od Wundta do czasów najnowszych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, 2000), 290.

¹¹ Sachs-Hombach, *Philosophische Psychologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, 314.

cognitive deliberations dominate. In their unity they deliver philosophical guidelines applicable to establishing the methodological standards and scientific rules of psychological subjects. However, the theory of cognition is, as Dithley noticed, “psychology in motion”¹². The crisis of psychology, which has been looming since Wundt established the first psychological institute in Leipzig in 1879, has its source specifically here, although it seems that certain philosophical premises are a steady element of psychological science. As Wilhelm Arnold writes it is impossible to understand theoretical-conceptual questions of Wundt’s psychology and the certain psychical character (*Wesensbestimmung des Psychischen*) or determine the subject of psychology to theoretical justifications of methodical proceeding without a parallel analysis of the basic philosophical views. Wundt not only admitted that psychology had to separate from speculative philosophy but also that it needed new philosophical fundamentals¹³.

Wundt often emphasises the tangled connection between psychology and philosophy. He wrote at the inaugural lecture at the University of Zurich in 1874 that psychology should scientifically work out questions of philosophy and provide philosophy with proper analyses¹⁴. However, while it is only philosophy which can competently ask questions, only psychology is able to competently answer them. Without philosophy, Wundt argued, psychology is naïve and is merely a trade. Without psychology, philosophy loses its right to hold lasting scientific claims. Philosophy, according to Wundt, objectivizes historical self-understandings of science and metaphysics each time. Wundt also emphasises that “the claim for the unity of sciences has collapsed: apart from an objectivizing scientific outlook, time does not leave philosophy any problem to tackle. The whole is constituted by human knowledge forming the unity of the worldview”¹⁵.

Scientific philosophy processing the results of scientific research does not, after all, act apriorically. As metaphysics, it should generalize by the way of abstraction single scientific results and as logic, determine the conditions, fundamentals and borders of knowledge. The significance of philosophy for his psychological research is mentioned once again by Wundt in his inaugural lecture in Leipzig in 1874. Paradoxically, the autonomy of psychology originally emerges here from Kantian theoretical-cognitive reflection. Although Wundt rejects psychology in the Kantian formulation and his category deduction with a metaphysical justification of science, he values Kant’s general view of subjective cognition. It is, on the one hand, the product of experience, and on the other, an element which exists in our consciousness before experience and which forms and orders all experience. Wundt emphasises that purposeful thinking arises from logical rules. Hence, the task of the philosophical theory of cognition is the determination of where the border lies and on which side the logical description of cognition theory becomes lost. That which is real is not only, however, that which is logical. In demonstrating the subjective sources of logical influences and describing objective aspects, philosophy not only sustains its own principles but also provides limitations and corrections for empirical sciences. Placing an emphasis on the close relationship between empirical scientific unity and philosophy, Wundt distinguishes psychology as a separate science. Providing basic results, it refers to humanistic and philosophical rationality because it describes the structure of consciousness dependent on cognitive formulation.

In his article *Psychologism and Logicism* Wundt describes in details the attitude of logic to the theory of cognition and psychology and sees in them limiting positions of scientific observations which have their source in a combination of rationalist and empirical axioms. The aim of

¹² Wilhelm Dithley, “Ideen der einen beschreibende und vergleichenden Psychologie,” in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 5 (Leipzig: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924), 140.

¹³ Wilhelm Arnold, *Angewandte Psychologie* (Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1970), 130.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Wundt, *Über die Aufgabe der Philosophie der Gegenwart. Rede gehalten zum Antritt des öffentlichen Lehramtes* (Leipzig: Engelmann 1874), 5.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Wundt, “Psychologismus und Logizismus,” in *Kleinere Schriften*, Bd. 1, (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1910), 600.

both positions is to evaluate each time what is different as secondary and creating irreconcilable contradictions. Being a radical and consistent continuation of empirism, psychologism only acknowledges principles of consciousness. Within its framework, general philosophy becomes psychology. Logicism, on the other hand, insists on common and necessary principles that are assumed in formal logic and mathematics in order to transform psychology into logic. Wundt criticizes both these positions. Psychological statements of logicism instead provide theory for the empirical theory, establishing the confirmation of universal logicality, although they actually use an absolutely aprioristic model/theory of unconscious inference so as to explain what is the psychological by means of what is logical. Wundt rejects logicism in this form and demands a question of the sole inborn consciousness rather than the one ordered by logical forms. Through this, in his opinion, one should obtain some form of the primeval world of experience and its objectivization in language and, in such a way, demonstrate the genuine development of human thinking¹⁶. Thus, in Wundt's view, psychology is antilogistic. Wundt wants to limit the tendencies of psychologistic justification of logic because logic should retain its own field and not develop into psychology. Psychology deals with nothing but research of actual behavior of consciousness content regardless of its cognitive value.

The notion which unambiguously explicates the limitations of both psychologism and logicism is the notion of obviousness. Wundt believes it to be the key notion in the theory of cognition. Psychology discredits describing obviousness as a feeling and, moreover, undermines objectivity as a criterion of certainty. Wundt calls for "reaching" an obvious judgment. This judgment shows the fact and examination connected with it. They are, moreover, connected by a synthetic and spontaneous correlate. In order to state whether a judgment is obvious it is not enough to refer to examination but a referring and comparing thinking should also be applied – the thinking brought out from the thing examined, which should be noted as obvious¹⁷. The logical obviousness appears here rather as a result; as a collaboration of what is formally assumed with the metatheoretical plane of meanings. For Wundt, therefore, cognition is a formative and comparative reworking of experience content. The form of reality does not, however, come into contact with the form of thinking. Just as being and thinking are separate, what is psychological cannot be directly identified with logical laws.

Wundt's theory of cognition stresses the necessary participation of what is logical in the process of cognition and creating representations. This structure, however, does not result in the constitutive power of a Kantian synthesis of subjective representation with an objective content, Wundt points out. The synthesis acts more like a pure addition of impressions. What gives the representation its significance is a product coming from the syntheses of impressions. Creative synthesis acts in this and its rule does not, after all, act predictably. The product comes from separate impressions and representations, without it being, after all, included in them. According to Wundt, all cognitive processes assume logical rules, which do not actually describe sensory reality in an exhaustive way. Their construction comes from psychological principles of consciousness which have to be distinguished from mechanistic and logical rules¹⁸.

Wundt illustrates his research, which separates logic from psychology through theoretical-cognitive reflection, using the problem of the outer world. He presents it as a purely psychological problem, as long as it forms the objective representation. Regardless of the explanation of empirical genesis, one must answer a theoretical-cognitive question: On what terms does he acknowledge the content of cognition as real? It is a meta-theoretical formulation of the

¹⁶ Ibid., 512.

¹⁷ Ibid., 626.

¹⁸ Ibid., 518.

problem. It takes up the intentions of philosophical psychology by deliberating on the theory of consciousness and asking about its immanent logical assumptions from the meta-level and, in this way, constitutes philosophical psychology as a metatheory of psychology.

As Klaus Sachs-Hombach writes, research and forming the theory of psychology during its processing shows the historical roots of one's own analytical proceeding. This is why the applied research claim describes its own history as philosophical psychology. It requires from the theory, however, that its contradictory intuitions can be comprehensibly explained thus approaching transcendental explanations¹⁹. Its programme is first made concrete in the outline of phenomenological structural science which attempts to transform the state of consciousness into rationality and historically constant structures. The ideological fundaments of these models will later be transformed into Schopenhauer's voluntarism and will determine, as anthropological interpretations, the further development of the later Romantic theory of consciousness. For the time being Sachs-Hombach finds the programme ending with Dilthey who works out the notion of structure as a transcendental notion. "Verstehende" ("Understanding") psychology by Dilthey further argues that structural science contains a content model situated independently on two different planes: the plane of explanation and the plane of interpretation²⁰. Acknowledging the differences leads to the necessity of distinguishing methodologically the "understanding" of psychology from the content plane.

The advance of scientific psychology at the beginning of the nineteenth century and its ultimate spectacular emancipation occurred, within speculative-theoretical deliberation, in connection with the criticism of natural psychology aiming at excluding the notion of consciousness and the German idealism which caused the process of scientification of philosophy. The errors of idealism include: 1) destruction of the natural unity of the senses and reason in their cognitive functions; 2) ascribing cognitive functions to non-cognitive actions and experiences; using the extra-rational criteria of cognition. The tradition of German idealism of G.W.F. Hegel and his disciples, quantitatively dominated the achievements of philosophy, which caused entanglement in pseudo-problems. In Wundt's times it manifested itself in constant sublation, that is overcoming continuously noticed reductionisms which caused successive systemic proposals to be out of touch with reality²¹. The above-mentioned sublation was accompanied by successive "Copernican revolutions" which invariably ended in successive crises. This became the reason for blaming not even the idealistic tradition itself but all of philosophy which was accused of futility, cognitive illusiveness and even said to be redundant in culture. In the face of the internal crisis, psychology was initially understood as an empirical direction in philosophy²².

Psychology of the nineteenth century is, in fact, philosophy which uses different means; it sketches theories of human subjectivity on an empirical basis and wants to fulfill the conditions of a natural science. Thus philosophical psychology forming its own identity struggles with two types of demands: on the one hand German idealism which adamantly defends the logical coherence of deduction and on the other, psychological criticism, thanks to which questions of validity asked in connection with its occurrence appear. The decisive fact here is, as Sachs-Hombach writes, that together with the second position, which initially succeeds in terms of historical effectiveness, the theory of empirical consciousness is also promoted to the fundaments of the problem of cognition. The notion of cognitive theory itself sustains in the end the sense of analysis of the actual structure of human knowledge. If this analysis remains consistently on the empirical ground then it becomes entangled in the aporia of the naturalization of consciousness

¹⁹ Sachs-Hombach, *Philosophische Psychologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, 329.

²⁰ Dilthey, "Ideen der einen beschreibende und vergleichenden Psychologie," 189.

²¹ A. Maryniarczyk et al., ed., *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii* (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2003), 725.

²² Karl Bühler, *Die Krise der Psychologie* (Stuttgart: Velbrück Wissenschaft Verlag, 1926, repr. 1965), 10.

which Husserl convincingly criticized as psychologism. Philosophical psychology can only be fruitful when asking psychological questions which will explain the particular conditions of the possibility of human knowledge and a broad interpretation of subjectivity.

On the one hand, it is the very philosophy of psychology which should demand of psychology that it exceeds the empirical point of view. It cannot be limited to what is objective or to a consciousness existing purely logically because subjectivity will then lose its full content. Logic receives its theoretical – cognitive fundamental significance only in connection with factual states and events. On the other hand, the content of psychology is valuable for the theory of cognition because it tries, through explaining subjectivity, to gain an objective view of reality which is experienced constructively by human rationality and for this reason formulated in the inner perspective, and which, in turn, is not fully exhausted by logical and formal categories.

In the experienced reality it primarily comes down to the “building” structures out of which the subject “constructs” its single representations through a comparative procedure. This state of reality requires a criticism of both psychologism and logicism which was already attempted by Wundt. The connection between psychology and logic should be explained by cognitive theories. In order to be able to formulate pre-notional deep structures of human subjectivity, psychological conclusions have to refer to theoretical background. It was already Wundt who does not agree to describe consciousness only logically and logic only psychologically. The theoretical – cognitive explanation of their connection leads to a fundamental interpretation of subjectivity. Under these auspices, according to Sachs–Hombach, philosophical psychology attempts to gain influence over the concrete form of psychology. The systematic question of the attitude of theoretical psychology towards empirical psychology leads to an attempt at creating a philosophical notion of cognition in the meta-field of psychological research. The reflections of the proposed meta-field find the proper fundament in philosophical anthropology. Through the demand of justification they gain the status of orientating models which can use the regulative criteria of the historical analysis of existing theories²³.

Conclusion: The question of perspective

The main effort of psychology in its beginnings was the separation of purely theoretical-conceptual dilemmas and the claims of philosophy. Psychology should not totally forget itself in the attempt at emancipation from philosophy because, as Wundt himself pointed out, it needs new philosophical fundaments. From this point of view philosophical psychology can be seen as a meta-theory of psychology.

Historical reconstruction of scientific psychology presents explicit claims of the introspective psychology for universal validity (this can be seen in the psychophysics of Gustav Fechner, experimentally verified introspection in Titchener’s version, Franz Brentano’s deliberations and others). This reconstruction demonstrates that philosophy is later present in the changes in the paradigm of scientific proceeding in psychology. This is visible in the transition from typically metaphysical to anthropological and, in the end, an interpretational formulation of scientific fundaments. This transformation process seems to take place in connection with the demand for scientification of psychological research. It occurs as a result of reservations about the reliability and accuracy of the nineteenth century method of introspection (it concerns, above all, John Watson’s programme of 1913). In this context philosophy as a meta-theory of psychology determines the objective domain of interpretation and does not formulate normative statements in a way that is not empirically validated, or wholly *a priori* but performs a regulative function.

²³ Sachs-Hombach, *Philosophische Psychologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, 315.

In this way philosophical psychology is interpreted as meta-theory. Meta-theory examines here the formal properties of psychology as knowledge. On the basis of contemporary research, it carries out its determination of the critical perspective and testing theoretical designs, the coherence/incoherence of hypotheses, the deficit of explanation and, in the end, a comparison of alternative theoretical traditions.

From this point of view for philosophical psychology, the most knowledge-creating role is performed by philosophical heuristics in Jan Hartman's formulation.

What is philosophical heuristics as meta-theory?

When speaking of heuristics, Hartman thinks especially about its methodological understanding in which the cognition of the heuristic should serve as a means of perfecting the objective cognition of a given science. The aspiration to cross the borders of methodological thinking towards some greater generality has determined that (at least from Bolzano's times) the term heuristics has been used to distinguish it from simple methodology. Heuristics is not supposed to serve some other cognitive process or discourse but is supposed to become one with it. In this context the idea of science itself constitutes a heuristic project based on the conviction that the unity of subject, method and criteria of result acceptance ensures the matter-of-factness of effectiveness and the reliability of research.

Heuristics is interested in any factors of theoretical thinking and hence it is driven by the idea of versatility – overcoming limitations and particularities. Only the opening to a meta-philosophical, heuristic way of expression and, particularly, to identifying all notions, purposes, unity principles and sense principles existing in various projects of establishing reality results in uncovering mutual references thanks to which we learn something very basic about calling something as “this very it”²⁴.

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²⁴ Jan Hartman, *Heurystyka filozoficzna* (Wrocław: Monografie FNP, 1997), 76.

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Darwin's Genuine Heir: An Appraisal of Alex Rosenberg's Contribution to the Philosophy of Biology

Abstract | This paper is an appraisal of Alex Rosenberg's take on the ongoing debates about philosophical reflections on evolutionary theory and biology based on his monographs and articles: from *Sociobiology and the Preemption of Social Science*,¹ *The Structure of Biological Science*² and *Instrumental Biology, or the Disunity of Science*³ over to *Darwinian Reductionism*⁴ and *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions*.⁵ With a focus on the development of his thoughts, merits to the debates in philosophy of biology and the main ideas of the aforementioned field of philosophical inquiry, the proposed paper attempts to concentrate on Rosenberg's major and influential thoughts. This is the case with naturalism, reductionism and the relationship between philosophy and biological science. One of the main characteristics of Rosenberg's works on various topics in philosophy of biology is his compact programme asserting a scientific approach to reality and disenchanting false beliefs. That is carried out by thoroughly emphasizing a naturalistic approach with biology being no exception.

Keywords | Charles Darwin – Alex Rosenberg – Philosophy of Biology – Naturalism – Physicalism – Reductionism

We are all Darwin's heirs

If philosophy of biology represents a philosophical reflection on Darwin's thinking and evolutionary theory, then Alex Rosenberg is currently considered one of the most thought-provoking philosophers of biology. If taking Darwin seriously entails adopting a naturalistic approach to philosophical inquiry, then Rosenberg represents one of Darwin's genuine heirs both in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of biology respectively.

Influenced by the works of Michael Ruse and Willard Van Orman Quine, Alex Rosenberg is acknowledged today as one of the most important proponents of evolutionary thinking in the

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¹ Alex Rosenberg, *Sociobiology and the Preemption of Social Science* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

² Alex Rosenberg, *The Structure of Biological Science* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³ Alex Rosenberg, *Instrumental Biology, or The Disunity of Science* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁴ Alex Rosenberg, *Darwinian Reductionism: Or, How to Stop Worrying and Love Molecular Biology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁵ Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (WW Norton, 2011).

philosophy of science. As a member of the so-called third generation of philosophers of biology, together with Elliott Sober and Philip Kitcher, Alex Rosenberg has taken Darwin's influence on philosophy and science seriously. This is apparent from his regular contributions spanning from the 1980s up until the present.

The title of this paper might seem problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is currently a vastly acknowledged and predominant part of both the scientific and philosophical community which has already stressed the influence of the works and thoughts of Charles Darwin on both science and philosophy.⁶ From this point of view, all those antidarwinists, charlatans and other imposters omitted, we are all Darwin's heirs and have no choice but to be ones. Secondly, and this point seems more striking than the previous one, if, as Elliott Sober has somewhat succinctly but concisely pointed out, philosophy of biology "concentrates on philosophical problems raised by the theory of evolution"⁷, then all those working in the field of philosophy of biology are Darwin's heirs.

We are living in the so-called "post-darwinian intellectual landscape"⁸ and all those various topics from philosophy of biology emphasize this statement. A brief look at various anthologies and texts from the field can provide us in outline with a solid notion about several firm pillars constituting the aforementioned "post-darwinian intellectual landscape" that we are living in. Topics such as the scientific status of evolutionary theory, problems of fitness and adaptation, units and levels of selection, biological function and teleology, evolved morality and reductionism speak for themselves. It is arguably also the impact of Darwin's works on our thinking about life and human life especially, its presumed meaning, the status of mind and man's place in nature. The same may be said about the naturalistic approach in arguments about several problems and questions linked to traditional philosophical themes and topics such as free will or consciousness.

In the case of morality and altruism, for example, the naturalistic explanation is at our disposal. Thanks to Darwin's intellectual legacy, the origins of morality have no need for supernatural agents or causes. Darwin has demonstrated, and all the following decades of research and experiments have proved, that there is no sensible reason to view man as a somewhat special entity among all other entities and more precisely among species. In light of the fact that all humans have an inclination for triadicty, I am going to provide just one example of Darwin's influence. It is an example that is just as typical as principal and illustrative. I mean the long-lasting problem of adaptation that has been haunting natural philosophers for a long period of time with Darwin being initially no exception. As is well known, until Darwin the traditional solution or explanation of the problem of adaptation was teleological, theistic and based on belief instead of evidence. In summary, it was a supernatural explanation. According to the view of William Paley in his *Natural Theology*, to explain adaptation and complexity of an entity, one has to fall back on divinity. After contemplating a found stone and a found watch, Paley reasons that the watch found on the heath leads us to one and only one conclusion, i. e.:

...the inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker – that there must have existed, at some time and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it

⁶ Bana Bashour and Hans D. Muller, eds., *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications*, (New York: Routledge, 2013); Tim Lewens, *Darwin* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Elliott Sober, *Philosophy of Biology* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000); Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998).

⁷ Elliott Sober, *Philosophy of Biology* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), xv.

⁸ Bashour and Muller, *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications*, 1–14.

*for the purpose which we find it actually to answer, who comprehended its construction and designed its use.*⁹

The argument Paley presents has a long tradition and voices several things encapsulated in one proposition: complex entities, in this case the watch found on the heath as an exemplum, must have been created by an intelligent being, God most likely, because its design and purpose calls for it. It serves a purpose, it can be handled well and it is so complex that only an intelligent being is capable of creating it. Divine power was consequently a way of explaining everything in such a manner. Darwin came up, however, with a strong and elegant alternative explanation. Organisms vary and through reproduction and heredity natural selection leads to differences among organisms in the traits they have at disposal. Particular combinations of traits enabling survival and mating differ in the rate of contribution to secure resources and survive in a particular environment thus finding a mate to reproduce progeny varying in the traits they have at disposal. This is a simple and parsimonious solution at the same time.

Darwin's theory of natural selection explains which organisms survive, how and why they adapt, no supernatural explanation needed. Darwin has thus naturalized the epistemological puzzle about adaptation and apparent design. There was a rather immense amount of problems, questions and puzzles falling into the domain of philosophy and theology. The recalled problem of adaptation of organisms is an epistemological one in that it calls for an explanation of seemingly designed entities and a purported intelligent designer or vice versa. If Darwin's explanation was provoked by that of Paley, however, that is a supernatural explanation of adaptation invoked a natural explanation, it can now be easily seen, that at least in this case of adaption Darwin could be viewed as a naturalist. As for example Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick have stated, Darwin can be viewed as a philosophical naturalist because:

*Darwin's theories, most obviously his theory of descent with modification by means of natural selection, made no such overt references to the supernatural. In that sense, his theories, like others of the day, were naturalistic rather than supernaturalistic. Today's philosophical naturalism continues and extends such subsumings of phenomena within nature – for example, by attempting to trace human ethical values, not to a Divine Will, but to human evolution.*¹⁰

Tim Lewens in his article “The Origin and Philosophy” has also demonstrated that¹¹, we do have several good reasons to consider Charles Darwin if not a philosophical naturalist, at least an extremely talented amateur in this approach.¹² The current intellectual milieu has thus far been stressed as a post-darwinian intellectual landscape. Along with the two lines of Darwin's heritage to the current scientific and philosophical endeavor with an accent on his naturalistic approach and specifically a naturalistic explanation of the epistemological problem of adaptation which replaced the traditional argument or solution of the problem from design.

⁹ William Paley, “Natural Theology,” in *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 41–42.

¹⁰ Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14.

¹¹ Tim Lewens, “The Origin and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the “Origin of Species,”* ed. Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 315.

¹² As a matter of interest, it seems highly probable that Darwin viewed himself as a philosophical naturalist: *The law of the succession of types, although subject to some remarkable exceptions, must possess the highest interest to every philosophical naturalist.* Charles Darwin, “January 9th 1834,” in *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of HMS Beagle Round the World, under the Command ... Collection – Darwin, Evolution and Genetics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 210.

It would be fair at this point to emphasize several things. Together with the evolutionary theory formulated by Charles Darwin, his naturalistic approach for solving various problems goes hand in hand with it in the descent of man, artificial selection being part of natural selection, disclosing apparent design in nature or at least justified sketches in the case of the nature of morality. Ariadne's thread of a naturalistic approach based on observation, evidence and experiments is leading or to put it firmly committing us to naturalism being the core of Darwin's legacy to both philosophy and science. One thing might remain unclear, however, and calls for an explanation.

It seems more than obvious, at present, that natural selection and Darwin's evolutionary theory not only has a great deal to do with philosophy, but any philosophy being in contradiction with evolution and evidence having been piled up since Darwin, is nothing but hot air. At the same time the actuality that natural sciences are a still growing fountainhead for philosophy as a whole – be it neuroscience, cognitive psychology or modern physics is obvious. After Darwin, everyone willing to become involved in serious research has to come to terms with the fact, that rejecting natural selection leads sooner or later to disaster. Pondering over it is a waste of time since support for Darwin's theory of evolution is huge and simple – an abundant amount of evidence supporting it is available and is growing every single day. These include the fossil record, common descent visible through analysis of DNA, morphological similarity and homology, embryology, biogeography, etc.¹³ After Darwin proposed a naturalized explication of the problem of adaptation, speciation or common descent, he established new standards for future research and helped convince several figures to lean toward naturalism. As a matter of interest, Charles Darwin called himself a philosophical naturalist¹⁴ and by providing humankind with the evolutionary theory he clearly proposed seeking out an explanation to various problems in science and evidence and to give up mere speculations. If it was possible to come up with a simple, elegant and first of all a functional theory in the realm of biology, why not apply a naturalized stance to other areas of human interest?

In August of 1838, after hitting upon a mechanism for evolution, Charles Darwin confided to his notebook: "Origin of man now proved. – Metaphysics must flourish. – He who understands baboon would do more towards metaphysics than Locke."¹⁵

So much for philosophy and Darwin's influence that consisted in an already sketched conviction – if philosophy wants to strive for an explanation about human nature, language, morality and the world as a whole, it must look not only for a backup but also for a point of departure in science:

What morals can we draw for how to do philosophy from the success and fertility of Darwin's work? Many philosophers have argued that they must become more engaged with natural science if their subject is to make advances.¹⁶

They were quite right since all theories based on nothing but speculation cannot withstand the weight of evidence collected by science and thus lacking any support turn into blind paths. In

¹³ For more details see Ernst Mayr, *What Evolution Is* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2010); Jerry A. Coyne, *Why Evolution Is True* (Penguin Books, 2010); Donald R. Prothero, *Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why It Matters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Phillip R. Sloan, "The Making of a Philosophical Naturalist," in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21.

¹⁵ Alex Rosenberg, "Biology and Its Philosophy," in *Philosophy of Science: Contemporary Readings*, ed. Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg (London and New York: Psychology Press, 2002), 22.

¹⁶ Lewens, *Darwin*, 258.

contrast, those philosophers that look to science for support and inspiration invoke Darwin's legacy, to the importance of reversal in thinking and research that Charles Darwin came up with.

Alex Rosenberg refers to such a return consisting in a shift towards natural sciences in searching for answers with support from philosophy as to the naturalization (of philosophy) and the standpoints containing natural selection as a fact and as a starting point for any research such as naturalism:

*Naturalism, as we have come to call the willingness to appeal to biological, and especially Darwinian considerations in social science and philosophy for that matter, is now a very widespread view. Naturalism has come increasingly to be accepted in large measure I think because our understanding of biological findings, theory, and methods has improved substantially.*¹⁷

Endeavors without evidence and backing from science are mere speculation after Darwin and after the naturalization of thinking. This holds true for philosophy far back into its history and this both at present and most likely in the future. Philosophy strengthened, however, by evidence and working on the assumptions and findings of science claims an allegiance to naturalism.¹⁸ It is also worth underlining that the so-called post-Darwinian intellectual landscape stands for one of the strongest, innovative and thought-provoking trends in philosophy ever.¹⁹

Talking about naturalism and the given example about naturalizing the epistemological problem of adaptation, we are ready to move to the case or thesis of Alex Rosenberg being the genuine heir to Charles Darwin.

The genuine heir

When attempting to explain why Alex Rosenberg should be viewed as Darwin's genuine heir, it is vital to engage oneself. First and foremost, there is a need to provide at least a brief sketch about the contribution of Alex Rosenberg to philosophy of biology based on his works devoted to this philosophical field. This should be followed by the proposal of an explanation about the anticipated two main periods of his biological thinking according to their central ideas with the second lasting up until the present. One should then summarize the current views which he stands for in the area of philosophy of biology and finally ending with the implications of the opinions and views which Rosenberg holds. The main point is to demonstrate that all these things fit in with the naturalistic approach and to state rather boldly that Rosenberg in certain way thinks Darwin's heritage out to the end. I hope to specifically be able to deliver this at the end of this paper.

If we take David Hull's text "The History of the Philosophy of Biology" as meeting the criteria about philosophy of biology and those being active in that field, Alex Rosenberg could be according to Hull's perspective classified as a member of the so-called third generation of philosophers of biology together with Elliott Sober and Philip Kitcher. Hull's description goes as follows:

¹⁷ Alex Rosenberg, "Lessons from Biology for Philosophy of the Human Sciences," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 35, no. 1 (2005): 39.

¹⁸ For different types of naturalistic views see Paul Horwich, "Naturalism and the Linguistic Turn," in *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications*, ed. Bana Bashour Hans Muller (Routledge, 2013), 13–37. Horwich discriminates between five types of naturalism in all: anti-supernaturalism, metaphysical naturalism, epistemological naturalism, reductive naturalism and physicalist naturalism. Rosenberg is bounded by specifically physicalist naturalism stating that there are none but a relatively small number of physical objects.

¹⁹ See David Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 1993); collection of essays in Bashour and Muller, *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications* or those in Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, eds., *Naturalism and Normativity (Columbia Themes in Philosophy)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

*Between 1976 and 1985, Rosenberg published four books. One was designed to show the implications of sociobiology for the social sciences (Rosenberg 1980). Another was an updated text in the philosophy of biology that emphasized molecular biology (1985). In 1982, Rosenberg actually had gone so far as to return to graduate school to catch up on all of the work being done in molecular biology at the time. The resulting text clearly benefited from these two years of hands-on study.*²⁰

It would seem that Alex Rosenberg took Darwin's influence on philosophy and science seriously. This is apparent from his regular contributions spanning from the 1980s up until the present because those monographs which David Hull had on his mind were subsequent:²¹ *Sociobiology and the Preemption of Science* in 1980, *The Structure of Biological Science* five years later in 1985, a collection of essays in the year 2000 under the title *Darwinism in Philosophy, Social Science and Policy, Instrumental Biology, or the Disunity of Science* from 1994, *Darwinian Reductionism Or, How to Stop Worrying and Love Molecular Biology* and finally *The Atheist's Guide to Reality* with the subtitle *Enjoying Life without Illusions* from 2011. *Philosophy of Biology: A Contemporary Introduction* coauthored with Daniel McShea in 2008 and very important indeed in the case of *Philosophy of Biology: An Anthology* with Robert Arp. These were only the monographs, for mentioning the dozens of articles related to philosophy of biology with mere clipped characteristics would take several hours to do so. It instead seems more important and also useful to characterize Alex Rosenberg's approach to philosophical reflection on Darwin's evolutionary theory, i. e. to philosophy of biology. In order to do this we are faced with one particular problem regarding a somewhat important change in his thoughts, a change very difficult to detect but highly important.

An issue worth considering is that Alex Rosenberg's philosophical approach to biology could be according to his books and to the development of his views stated as two-pronged. These two views have several factors in common but also diverge at certain points and it is vital to acknowledge this for both views imply different impacts. It is also important to acknowledge this because when trying to take hold of the reason for this difference, as it is going to be argued, it is not possible without realizing but perhaps trivial but crucial aspect of his approach. At this point I intend to map out both views, characterize their elements and explain motivation for them. We will consequently be ready to understand at first hand all the implications of Rosenberg's current philosophical position for biology and science in general.

Let us move to the above-mentioned views. The first, the older one, dating from the beginning of the 1980s to roughly the first half of the first decade of the 21st century could be called the *instrumental approach*. The second one, which is current and up to date and dates back to approximately the second half of the first decade of the 21st century might be called the *realistic approach*. The main difference between *instrumentalism* and *realism* in philosophy of biology revolves around a twofold problem. Firstly, it is a question about law or laws in biology and its implications for the status of this science. Secondly, and following this question, it is the issue of the possibility of reduction or reductionism in biology.

The instrumental view holds that biology as a science can be only a discipline with proximity at its core, serving for practical purposes and saturating needs stemming from our natural

²⁰ David L. Hull, "The History of the Philosophy of Biology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Biology*, ed. Michael Ruse (Oxford University Press, 2008), 25–26. In contrast, in an interview with David Hull, Michael Ruse and Alex Rosenberg, Werner Callebaut called Rosenberg a member of the second generation of philosophers of biology. Cf. Werner Callebaut, ed., *Taking the Naturalistic Turn, Or How Real Philosophy of Science Is Done*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1993), 241.

²¹ It is fair to mention that this paper only pays attention to those that are relevant for the field of philosophy of biology, Rosenberg's economic books and papers are not mentioned for obvious reasons. For a brief overview of the development of Rosenberg's views and interests, see Callebaut's interview with Rosenberg in Callebaut, *Taking the Naturalistic Turn*, 84–92.

inclination to know, describe, use and find out how to apply our biological findings or knowledge. This biological knowledge serves as a battery of heuristics in our everyday life in the case of health care and medicine along with nutrition, breeding, disease prevention, vaccination, agriculture, reclamation, etc. This conclusion and assessment came from the consideration that there are no laws in biology. If there are any laws in biology, their nature is at least not the same as those in physics and chemistry, which we could recover and thus:

*Biologists seek and should seek theories that are heuristically valuable because the nomological truths about biological phenomena are too complicated for our weak brains to carry around and make use of.*²²

More precisely, Alex Rosenberg asserted his position at the end of *Instrumental Biology*:

*Biology is an instrumental science conditioned as much by its usefulness to us as by the way the world is arranged. Probably our practical concerns and interests in dealing with people are sufficiently different from our interests in other fauna and all flora, that results of the sort biology can offer are not reliable for practical intervention in this area. [...] Given our cognitive and computational limits, and our interests as biological and social creatures, biology turns out to be a very useful tool, so useful that we are inclined to mistake it for a science true about the world and independent of us.*²³

The twofold problem from this point of view goes as follows: because we cannot fathom biological processes in total due to our cognitive limitations and thus cannot find out about laws in biology and in natural selection concretely that we could in principle reduce to solely physical processes, biology as a science is at best a useful instrument meeting our practical needs but nothing more. Thus for biology and philosophy of biology follows instrumentalism instead of realism. Reductionism can only be a metaphysical one because instrumentalism still does not go for nonphysical events, processes or conditions, but we are not well equipped due to our evolutionary history to uncover laws in biology reducible to physical processes. It also holds for naturalism since no other than a scientific explanation holds water. Arguably, Rosenberg's approach is naturalistic all the time and the explanation for the impossibility makes no exception from the naturalistic view. Let us consider his proclamation about biology and reduction using this case:

*Evolutionary biology is both predictively weak and theoretically autonomous because the type identities between its variables and those of other theories are too complex to permit anything like the reduction of this theory to nonevolutionary ones. Variation and selection are frequent and stable enough phenomena for "interesting" evolutionary generalizations to have been uncovered. Heredity too has revealed the operation of "laws" simple enough and precise enough to enable cognitive agents like us to explain and predict a variety of genetic phenomena. But we know why the generalizations of evolutionary biology have remained unimprovably imprecise: the kinds of entities and processes these statements mention are not identical to small and manageable classes of kinds described in the generalizations of nonbiological theories. The type to which they are identical are complex, disjunctive, and still largely undiscovered.*²⁴

²² Rosenberg, *Instrumental Biology*, 104.

²³ *Ibid.*, 180–181.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 169–170.

With no law or causal link between the sciences discovered, instrumentalism remained but with the footnote that until science provides us with a better and deeper understanding of biological processes, epistemological or methodological reductionisms are vindicated.

Also one thing resulting from this view should not be omitted and that is the implications for psychology and social sciences as a whole. Since psychological phenomena supervene on biological ones and biology is "on the border" with physical sciences, psychology as a science is in an even more instrumental and desperate situation:

*If psychological properties irreducibly supervene on biological ones, and biological ones irreducibly supervene on physical ones, then neither will figure as natural kinds in laws of nature, and psychological concepts and regularities must perforce be even more conditioned by human cognitive limitations than those of biology.*²⁵

To put it more thoroughly, all fields of inquiry which lack any kind of law or laws (i. e. which are above the level of biology) are instrumental in principle. These fields can serve as means of practical needs, they can saturate our practical aims.

Here it seems to be fair to conclude and point out an important finding for currently still lively debates concerning the mind and such things as intuitions, memory or perception and identity. Only sufficient findings and perhaps findings in biology and other life sciences as well as in neuroscience can shed light on the problem of mental states and their connection to our brain. Putting it simply: until biology is finished as a science there will not be a safe place for reductionism of both metaphysical and epistemological in psychology and this counts uniformly and subsequently for other social sciences as well. It is consequently the same for instrumentalism as for the older phase of Rosenberg's philosophy of biology.

Reductionism

At present, however, with the publication of *Darwinian Reductionism*, Rosenberg is for a realistic approach in biology with the instrumental part not necessarily excluded. A conviction concerning the reducibility of biological processes, mainly natural selection of physical processes, is emphasized, however. This approach proceeds from naturalism and thus a conviction about science discovering new facts about the world, and goes along with metaphysical reductionism. This is the conviction,

*that all facts, including all biological facts, are fixed by the physical and chemical facts; there are no non-physical events, states, or processes, and so biological events, states and processes are 'nothing but' physical ones.*²⁶

It advocates realism about biology as well and implies epistemological reductionism in the case of biology. This is because there is at least one biological law that is reducible to this in physics or chemistry. In order to be able to purport this, Alex Rosenberg invokes both terminologically and philosophically important clarifications that are momentous for elucidating his own position. Naturalism is mostly unproblematic.²⁷ Physicalism is seemingly the same case because "most

²⁵ Ibid., 141.

²⁶ Alex Rosenberg, "Reductionism in a Historical Science," *Philosophy of Science* 68, no. 2 (2001): 135.

²⁷ See Callebaut, *Taking the Naturalistic Turn*; Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism*; Bashour and Muller, *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications*; Caro and Macarthur, *Naturalism and Normativity*.

philosophers of biology are physicalists.” In the case of reductionism, things become somewhat problematic since the question of identity comes in to play. Reductionism, and in the case of Rosenberg, physicalist reductionism states that physical facts apart from fixing all the facts, “the physical facts explain all the facts in some suitably non-erotic of explanation.”²⁸ This means that physicalist reductionism has to explain how its metaphysical claim about explaining biological phenomena and the process of natural selection is explicable solely through physics, or to be more precise through physical processes. This involves demonstrating that both physicalism, the assertion that physical facts fix all the facts, and reductionism, in this case epistemological reductionism as a metaphysical claim, are vindicated. The first part is simple, but the second one seems a great deal more difficult. To quote Alex Rosenberg:

*Reductionism needs to show how the process of natural selection is in fact the result of the operation of physical law alone. That is, it needs to show that physical law is sufficient for the emergence of adaptation by natural selection.*²⁹

Before reconstructing the argument for epistemological reductionism in biology, it needs to be recalled that the reason for holding instrumentalism was the conviction that there were no laws in biology or at least no laws discoverable by human agents and thus no laws to be reducible to those physical ones.³⁰ There is only one in the end. Following Dobzhansky’s dictum “nothing makes sense in biology except in the light of evolution”³¹, Rosenberg moved towards an epistemological reductionism in *Darwinian Reductionism* and has been refining this position up to the present. To represent this approach let us have a look at several points. At the start there is a need to discriminate between the traditional debate about reductionism from the current discussions. Briefly, according to logical empiricists, successful reduction meets three conditions: deduction of the laws of the reduced theory from the laws of the reducing theory, the terms in both theories must remain the same on the level of meaning and the third:

*the most difficult and creative part of a reduction is establishing these connections of meaning, that is, formulating ‘bridge principles’, ‘bilateral reduction sentences’, ‘coordinating definitions’ that link the concepts of the two theories.*³²

Under the influence of David Hull’s first chapter in one of the first course books of philosophy of biology, entitled *Philosophy of Biological Science*, Alex Rosenberg refuted this concept of reductionism in biology. He refuted it in the sense, that to come up with an unproblematically shared definition of a biological kind (a gene in his example) among functional biology, evolutionary biology or population biology is a fairly complicated task. The intricacy resides in that one cannot avoid simplification or emptying of its meaning, if it is possible in general at all. Hull’s conclusion in relation to Mendelian genetics and molecular genetics led him to vindicate the unsustainability of logical empiricist’s concept of reduction:

²⁸ Alex Rosenberg, “How Physics Fakes Design,” in *Evolutionary Biology: Conceptual, Ethical, and Religious Issues*, ed. R. Paul Thompson and Denis Walsh (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 217.

²⁹ Rosenberg, “How Physics Fakes Design,” 218.

³⁰ According to Prof. Rosenberg himself, this was precisely the reason why he stood up for instrumentalism in biology so long: “I was an instrumentalist, because biology seemed to be useful only for our daily agenda and practical needs.” Personal discussion at Ernst March Workshop with Alex Rosenberg, Prague, May 6, 2014.

³¹ Theodosius Dobzhansky, “Nothing Makes Sense except in the Light of Evolution,” *The American Biology Teacher* 35, no. 3 (1973): 125.

³² Rosenberg, *Darwinian Reductionism*, 27.

*...if biologists are in the process of reducing Mendelian genetics to molecular genetics and the logical empiricist analysis or reduction is inapplicable to this case, the logical empiricist analysis of reduction is inadequate. [...] The crucial observation is that no geneticists to my knowledge are attempting to derive the principles of transmission genetics from those of molecular genetics. But according to the logical empiricist analysis of reduction, this is precisely what they should be doing.*³³

This means in the end that no “bridge principles” are possible. To come up with such principles demands not only having a group of terms used in the same way based on their meaning, but also agreement on their definitions. At a minimum, an application of these words identically in the process of experiments and formulating of hypotheses is indispensable. There are no laws, no shared meaning among used terms and therefore no reduction in biology to physics or chemistry. According to Alex Rosenberg, however, this was a traditional dispute that no longer has any use in current debates among reductionists and anti-reductionists in philosophy of biology. One should recall that physicalism is a widely accepted claim about physical facts fixing all facts and physicalist reductionism stating moreover that physical facts can also be suitable for explaining all facts. This does not work that way, however, from the anti-reductionists perspective, as it seems the majority of philosophers of biology stands for anti-reductionism³⁴ because they are suspicious that they would be bound to lose certain crucial facts about evolution both as a process and as events taking place during this process. Therefore:

*time and time again, anti-reductionists have invoked evolutionary facts explainable by natural selection and not explainable by physical law as the fundamental barrier to metaphysical reduction. It is evolutionary facts and regularities we would miss were we to adopt the point of view of the physicist.*³⁵

The commitment of physicalist reductionist is to explain all the parts and conditions which its conviction is based upon. Physicalist reductionists have to namely demonstrate how from all those conditions follows the possibility or to be more accurate, show the necessity of explaining evolutionary facts purely on a physical basis. To put it as clearly as possible, let us sketch all these conditions in several points.

1. We do not have, and hardly are ever going to have due to various sorts of evidence, a better biological theory than Darwinism. In fact, it is the only scientific theory worth of that name.
2. An acknowledgement of crucial importance: the biological domain that we have experience with concerns the Earth and thus we need to approach it as a sum of historical contingent processes based on natural selection.
3. The main output of natural selection is adaptation as a biological fact or a fact vindicating evolution, and reductionism needs to show that adaptation results from a purely physical process and that it is the only possible way adaption comes into existence.
4. If physicalist reductionism is correct and if it is dealing with a historical, contingent process, the emergence of adaptation must be the result of an initially zero degree of adaptation.

³³ Hull, “The History of the Philosophy of Biology,” 44.

³⁴ As Rosenberg puts it, the same situation is also outside of biology: “To begin with, almost all naturalists adopt a variety of physicalist antireductionism: about biology, about psychology, about social, political and economic processes.” See Alexander Rosenberg, “Disenchanted Naturalism,” in *Contemporary Philosophical Naturalism and Its Implications*, ed. Bana Bashour and Hans D. Muller (London: Routledge, 2014), 34.

³⁵ Rosenberg, “How Physics Fakes Design,” 218.

In Rosenberg's own words, the goal of physicalist reductionist is:

*to show that physics is necessary and sufficient for all adaptations, and that the only way they can emerge consistently with physics is by natural selection.*³⁶

The key to this problem is the second law of thermodynamics simply stating that entropy increases over time with a strictly high probability. Quite interestingly, the only entities resisting this physical law are organisms and organisms are the results of an evolutionary process. Natural selection's needs for reproduction, variation and inheritance and according to physicalist reductionism advocated by Rosenberg, could be easily provided by purely physical processes, precisely by the replication of molecules abiding the rules of chemical bonds leading to stable molecules and also to template building just as in the case of crystals or those experiments carried out by Martin Hanczyc mapping the path from non-life to life showing it is a continuum.³⁷ The template building stands for variation because of the different closeness of different chemicals in the period table documenting an unequal chance of bonding with diverse chemicals during template building. Replication and variation fitness also differs again because of the second law which comes into play repeatedly. The stability of molecules depending on the atoms forming them is also derived from interaction with the environment consisting of other molecules and differences in stability make up for differences in fitness measured not only by the length of its duration before breaking up, but also by its replicability or rate of replication influenced by the environment. This view, summarized by Alex Rosenberg, goes as follows:

*In other words, a purely physical process has produced molecular adaptation: the appearance, persistence, and enhancement of molecules with chemical and physical properties that enable them to persist and/or replicate or both. Then, at some point, the chemical environment changes, slightly or greatly: temperatures rise or fall, new and different molecules diffuse through region, the magnetic field strengthens or weakens. The process of adaptational evolution starts again, thermodynamically filtering for new stable, replicating molecules adapted to the new conditions.*³⁸

Bearing witness to this sort of proposition are, for example, conclusions reached by Addy Pross and his celebrated comparison between chemistry and biology. Pross perceives parallel processes occurring on both the chemical, or biological level respectively comparing natural selection to kinetic selection:

*When several replicating molecules are mixed with their component molecular building blocks, [...], they compete with one another, in much the same way as biological entities compete for a limited supply of food. But as explained above we shouldn't discuss that competitive process as natural selection at the molecular level. Such reactions are dealt with by a specific branch of chemistry that deals with the rates of chemical reactions called chemical kinetics.*³⁹

³⁶ Rosenberg, "How Physics Fakes Design," 218.

³⁷ See Martin M. Hanczyc, "Structure and the Synthesis of Life," *Architectural Design* 81, no. 2 (2011): 26–33.

³⁸ Rosenberg, "How Physics Fakes Design," 224.

³⁹ Addy Pross, *What Is Life?: How Chemistry Becomes Biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 138.

The same works for fitness and dynamic kinetic stability, i. e. “the ability of a replicating system to maintain itself over time”⁴⁰ and maximizing dynamic kinetic stability being reflected in “survival of the fittest”.

Tab. 1: Comparison of chemical and biological processes⁴¹

CHEMISTRY	BIOLOGY
kinetic selection	natural selection
dynamic kinetic stability (DKS)	fitness
tendency to maximizing DKS	“survival of the fittest”

We seemingly now have all we need for the vindication of physicalist reductionism in biology. Arguably the crucial part, involving again the second thermodynamic law, needs to be stressed here as the one and only process accountable for natural selection with its reproduction, variation and heredity. Recall that in the case of evolution and natural selection we are dealing with a strictly historical process and so as being one, this process is historically time-asymmetrical. One might recall Stephen J. Gould's example with the so-called Burgess Shale, located in Yoho and Kootenay National Parks.⁴² This example demonstrates that in this case we would have a sort of time machine and could “turn back time” to the beginning of the formation of this part of the fossil record that we have at present, the evolutionary process would have gone fairly differently with almost hundred percent certainty. This is because natural selection is time-asymmetrical, i. e. It is not physically reversible as with any other historical phenomena or event. All physical processes are time symmetrical, but there is one which is not and that is the process governed by the second law of thermodynamics.

*The second law creates all asymmetrical processes and gives them their direction in time. Now, the evolution of adaptations is a thoroughly asymmetrical process. Take a time-lapse film of a standard natural-selection experiment. Grow bacteria in a Petri dish. Drop some antibiotic material into the dish. Watch the bacterial slime shrink until a certain point, when it starts growing again as the antibiotic-resistant strains of the bacteria are selected for.*⁴³

It would seem valid at this point to state that the physicalist reductionism is a justified claim in the field of philosophy of biology. Physicalism being generally accepted, receives an important link with reductionism due to the possibility of reducing the evolutionary process to a physical process. If Darwinism is the only scientific theory in biology, one should recall Dobzhansky's dictum, postulating natural selection as a historical process, a process directed in time and thus asymmetrical. The only way which could govern this process is the second law of thermodynamics to which natural selection and adaptation in principle are reducible.

⁴⁰ Pross, *What Is Life?*, 144.

⁴¹ I am grateful to Dr. Filip Tvrdý for this table, see Filip Tvrdý, June, 29, 2012, comment on Addy Pross, “Toward a General Theory of Evolution: Extending Darwinian Theory to Inanimate Matter,” *Journal of Systems Chemistry* 2, no. 1 (2011): 1–14.

⁴² Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (Norton, 1990), chapter 1 and 3.

⁴³ Rosenberg, “How Physics Fakes Design,” 233.

Conclusion and further questions

It has been argued that Alex Rosenberg in certain ways thought out Darwin's heritage to the end. This implies him being Darwin's genuine heir and presumably this assertion is for various reasons. Naturalism is the most evident. A conviction about the truthfulness of natural selection is a simple one as well, particularly in the case of reductionism. There is more to it, however. It is also the drive to explain traditional philosophical questions in a naturalistic way, i. e. disenchant the question about God, purpose and design in nature, about intentionality and the purpose of life purely by commitment to natural selection and naturalism being its integral part. It is as close as one gets to Darwin's findings that took the place of supernatural explanations in the case of adaptation and apparent design in nature. All these persistent questions and answers to them provided by Alex Rosenberg in the so frequently mentioned *Atheist's Guide to Reality* may be disturbing, but are strictly in line with Darwin's legacy. Also for that reason they can be counted as inseparable from the inquiry taking place in philosophy of science and philosophy of biology above all. These persistent questions were not mentioned for once in this paper although their relevance comes in to consideration quite easily. In order to back the thesis, however, that Alex Rosenberg consists of Darwin's genuine heir. It was vital to demonstrate and stress his positions and primarily his current approach to understand that without accepting Darwin's legacy in full and advocating a physicalist reductionism all those conclusions dating back no later than to the publication of *Atheist's Guide to Reality* would not be thinkable. This seemingly calls into question all those persistent questions due acceptance and making use of naturalism

A number of issues and questions still remain in connection with all of those topics presented. First of all, there is the assumed gap or unexplored area in the move from instrumentalism to realism in Rosenberg's philosophy of biology. The question remains as to why this shift came about and it looks a great deal like a shift due to new discoveries in science and natural and life sciences especially those which induced Alex Rosenberg to make a shift from instrumentalism to realism. This is perhaps far too easy a proposal and one for discussion. Another issue is obviously the question concerning the relationship between philosophy and science and namely philosophy and biology. According to Alex Rosenberg, philosophy has an indispensable role and position in the manner that it is trying to answer all those questions, and here is the problematic part, that science cannot answer either because of the current state of scientific knowledge or in principle. Should Rosenberg's contribution to philosophy of biology and philosophy of science be taken in the sense of Quine's methodological monism where philosophy is continuous with science and where there is no place for "first philosophy prior to natural science"? With physicalism or ontological monism affirmed, Rosenberg's project could be called "methodological dualism" with philosophy being outside of science forming an outer circle of scientific endeavor. The reason for this relation consists in philosophy attempting to answer questions which science is not capable of answering. At the same time philosophy might be in an ongoing interaction with science in attempting to deal with both its own and common questions. At least this point calls for clarification.

There is more, however. What sort of implications has physicalist reductionism, for example, for other spheres of human life and what are its main obstacles to be accepted as continuous with Darwin's legacy? Does it follow that due to our limited cognitive capacities philosophy is going to stay? Could it be said that based on the conclusion drawn from physicalist reductionism, biology is at the basic level completed because of having one and only one scientific theory reducible to physical theories? Should we treat it as a science on par with chemistry and physics or is it intrinsically bound to be at the border between natural and social sciences because of its character and field of inquiry? Let us wait for Rosenberg's further contributions to the debates

and topics being discussed in philosophy of biology and philosophy of science in general to see what he himself will elaborate.⁴⁴ In Rosenberg's own words: "philosophy of biology has been a subject of excitement and ferment for more than a generation. We anticipate no relief from this state of affairs."⁴⁵

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⁴⁴ Recent papers concerning philosophy of biology aim primarily at two topics: a mechanistic explanation and a debate around the traits of organisms being selected *for* or selected *against*. See Alex Rosenberg, "Making Mechanism Interesting," *Synthese*, (2015): 1–23, accessed April 17th, 2016, doi: 10.1007/s11229-015-0713-5.; Rosenberg & Nanay, Against 'Selection-For' (unpublished), accessed April 17th, 2016, <http://people.duke.edu/~alexrose/NanayRosenberg5.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Robert Brandon and Alex Rosenberg, "Philosophy of Biology," in *Philosophy of Science Today*, ed. Peter Clark and Katherine Hawley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 147.

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The Philosophy of Deception

Abstract | In my essay I will argue that lying and deception are generally treated in isolation, only from the point of view of their moral and ethical dimension. Lying, however, is a part of the life of society, of the community, and it should be judged as such. I will analyse the concepts of lying, deception, spins and half-truths, as defined by Thomas L. Carson. Metaphors will be studied from the point of view of their truth-value. Carson's approach will be compared to that of Friedrich Nietzsche, and further, the moral dimension of lying will also be included in my work.

Keywords | Bald-faced lie – Deception – Half-truth – Language – Lying – Metaphor – Morality – Spin – Truth

1 Introduction

“Most lies are not merely lies but also self-deception and part of a larger matrix of beliefs and emotions that define not only this relationship but a community or a culture.”

– Robert C. Solomon, “Self, Deception, and Self-Deception in Philosophy”¹

The virtue of truthfulness and the theory of moral principles seem to be at times in conflict with the realities of how societies, human relationships and even our own thinking about ourselves work. The polarization of the truth and lies is not as straightforward as it may seem initially, and the antagonism between the truth and lies is not as well founded in practice as it may seem in theory.

When analysing the various mechanisms involved in lying, it soon becomes apparent that the complexity of the matter is far from clear.

Lying may be regarded as one of the most complex philosophical problems, as it involves various moral, pragmatic and psychological questions. Lying also, however, needs to be looked at from the conceptual point of view. What are the internal mechanisms of a lie, how is it defined and what are its basic features? It is also important to try to define the role of the speaker in this discussion, as his or her actions are based heavily not on their morals but sometimes rather on the expectations others have of them. Our society has developed into a complicated network of interpersonal relationships where the truth is only one of the aspects of its functioning.

Lying will thus be studied as a social phenomenon. I will argue that lying as a concept is not always immoral, quite the contrary, sometimes it is necessary for societies to work, for the human race to progress. I would like to discuss the various factors that need to be taken into account before a decision can be made on a lie being moral or immoral. In my essay I will consequently argue that **lying and deception seem to have been treated in isolation, only from the point of view of their moral and ethical dimension. Lying, however, is a part of how society, the**

¹ Robert C. Solomon, “Self, Deception, and Self-Deception in Philosophy,” in *The Philosophy of Deception*, ed. Clancy Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31.

community, is functioning and it should be judged as such. As a result, lying and deception should be viewed as part of complex social networks.

Metaphors will also be analysed from the point of view of their truth-value and their place in the truth versus lies discussion. Two approaches to metaphors will be compared. This will be Thomas R. Carson's approach, on the one hand, based on his recent study *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice*.² Here he brings up several crucial points about the concepts of lying, deception, honesty and the self, and these will be used in this analysis. Friedrich Nietzsche's interpretation of the issue of lying and its place within the area of language will be taken into account, on the other hand, as treated in his essay "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense."³ Another important work for my study will be Robert C. Solomon's "Self, Deception, and Self-Deception in Philosophy," an essay included in the collection edited by Clancy Martin entitled *The Philosophy of Deception*.⁴

2 The truth and the lie

"Why must we have truth at any cost anyway?"

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*⁵

Seeking for the truth has long been one of the main interests of philosophers, but not only them. Humans seem to be attracted to the notion of the "truth" for a number of reasons. It is supposed to represent the reality of the world, the actual state of affairs. Based on this truth, they should be able to make unbiased decisions. However, when the truth that they discover is not as interesting, comforting or satisfying as expected, they may feel upset frustrated or let down. The truth is not always comfortable. Thus lies often work as a mechanism to cope with the uncomfortable nature of the truth. I shall at this point take a look at how lying, deception and their related concepts work.

3 Lying

It is of importance in this discussion to first define the term lying and a "lie." The concept of lying is so broad and vague that we may come up with a number of varying definitions, which only further complicates the matter. A dictionary can serve as a point of departure here. It defines a lie as "*something that you say or write that you know is untrue*" and the act of lying is "*to deliberately tell someone something that is not true*."⁶

These definitions assume that every act of lying is performed by an act of uttering or writing a statement that is not true/untrue. Lying does not, however, always include telling someone something I know is not true as one may be lying even without knowing it. I may be certain of a fact that is in reality not true, and me passing this information on is in fact not lying from the point of view of the above definition. To further obscure things, lying can be done without uttering a single word, by only using facial expressions or other bodily movements; (e.g. shrugging

² Thomas L. Carson, *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³ Noah Brewer, "Nietzsche's Truth and Lying," *Practical Atheist Blog*, September 21, 2010, <https://practicalaesthetics.wordpress.com/2010/09/21/nietzsches-truth-and-lying/>.

⁴ Solomon, "Self, Deception, and Self-Deception in Philosophy."

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, 1966). As quoted in Solomon, "Self, Deception, and Self-Deception in Philosophy," 15.

⁶ Della Summers et al., ed., *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Harlow: Longman, 2003).

one's shoulders as an "I do not know" answer to a Yes/No question whilst knowing the answer. This can also be viewed as an example of a lie).

Here it can already be seen that it is not such an easy matter to define a lie. Many aspects of lying need to be taken into account when attempting to find the right way of describing it, being as accurate as possible and including most, or ideally all, instances of lying. To narrow the issue down, let us concentrate on lying that involves making a statement which the speaker knows is not true. According to Carson's definition of lying, the three following criteria need to be met in order to call a statement a lie:

1. **S makes a statement X to S1.**
2. **S believes that X is false or probably false.**
3. **S intends to warrant the truth of X to S1.**⁷

Carson's first criterion involves making a statement X. As could be seen above from the example of shrugging one's shoulder, lying does not necessarily need to involve explicitly making a statement, but it also involves hinting, pointing or showing implicitly. Secondly, S's belief that X is false can also be placed under scrutiny. If I believe that something is false, do I know it is not true? Is every statement that is not true a lie? In addition, what is the relationship between "believing" and "knowing"? If I believe something, do I know it is true? And vice versa? An extremely complex set of conditions arises here indeed and shall be discussed in more detail when discussing the moral dimension of lying.

Let us finally take a look at the third criterion, i. e. S intends to warrant the truth of X so S1. According to Carson, "[i]f one warrants the truth of a statement, then one promises or guarantees, either explicitly or implicitly, that what one says is true." This is a convention, Carson argues, that "one guarantees the truth of one's statement"⁸ and that "there is a presumption that the warranty of the truth is in force in any situation."⁹ To warrant the truth is one of the primary principles that should underlie all human conversation, suggests the linguist and philosopher Paul Grice.¹⁰ "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, as the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."¹¹ He calls this the Cooperative Principle. He later establishes several principles, or maxims as he calls them, that should be followed to make communication successful, and one of them is a Maxim of Quality. "Try to make your contribution one that is true," he continues, "[...] do not say what you believe is false."¹² Not to follow them is to flout the maxims, and for Grice, this marks an unsuccessful communicative act. It seems that for Grice, then, to flout the Maxim of Quality marks a breakdown of communication and that it is a crucial departure from the purpose of language altogether.

⁷ Carson, *Lying and Deception*, 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹ Thomas L. Carson, "Truth, Lies, and Self-Deception," in *The Philosophy of Deception*, ed. Clancy Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 166.

¹⁰ H. Paul Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*, ed. P. Cole et al. (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 41–58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

4 Deception and other related concepts

Another concept has to be discussed at this place, and that is deception. Deception differs from lying in that it already implies success. Thus it may be said that deception is one step further than a lie. A lie merely expresses an untruthful claim, but deception involves “someone to have false beliefs.”¹³ An important attribute of deception is also the fact that it need not involve a lie, although it often does. We can deceive others only by consciously selecting information we are willing to share or by manipulating the truth in a way it suits us. Thus by lying we can deceive, but by merely misleading, we can also deceive. Our lies can be seen through, however, so can our misleading, and these would then not be successful instances of deception. Interestingly, as Andreas Stokke (2013: 353) points out when talking about perception of deception in law, “lying (perjury) is punishable while merely misleading utterances are not punishable if they are also not lies.”¹⁴

Several other related concepts should also be mentioned here as they may ultimately lead to deception. These are, adopting Carson’s classification, “spins” and “half-truths.” A “spin” is defined by him as “a particular interpretation of an event or a fact” and “half-truths” selectively emphasise facts that tend to support a particular interpretation of an issue and selectively ignore [...] other relevant facts.”¹⁵ In this way, however, the speaker avoids making up a lie and thus the risk of being found out is significantly lower. Thus manipulating the truth or avoiding the disclosure of relevant facts in this manner can be morally just as bad as uttering a false statement.

To illustrate the above, Carson provides an example of a car that has a problem with overheating. The owner wants to sell it and the prospective buyer asks whether the car overheats. The answer “no” would be a lie. By providing, however, a true statement, “I drove this car across the Mojave Desert on a very hot day and had no problems,” the owner does not lie. However, this answer is extremely misleading. This drive “might have been years ago, when the car did not have such an issue.”¹⁶ The car owner is being manipulative in order to reach his or her goal, to sell the car. It is apparent here that it is not merely a matter of the factual value of a statement we make, but also the circumstances, the context, and the relationship between the speaker and the listener, the aim of the conversation, etc. that play a role. In the above example, the buyer has been misled into thinking the car does not overheat and may buy it, which he would not have done had he known the truth.

Carson significantly points out that there are many contexts in which it is not clear whether one does or does not warrant the truth, as these instances are highly context-dependent. “He caught a 6-foot pike the other day” may be intended to be taken seriously at a fishermen’s conference and thus the speaker warrants the truth of the statement, but on the other hand may be taken as an ironic remark aimed at a posh friend having bought expensive fishing gear but who hardly ever uses it.

¹³ Carson, *Lying and Deception*, 3.

¹⁴ Andreas Stokke, “Lying, Deceiving and Misleading,” in *Philosophy Compass* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 353.

¹⁵ Carson, *Lying and Deception*, 57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

5 Bald-faced lies, metaphors and the nature of language

When the falsity of what one says “is obvious and common knowledge,”¹⁷ Carson refers to such lies as bald-faced lies. “People lie when they know that others know that they are lying.”¹⁸ If a child is caught with his or her hand in a cookie jar in front of his or her parent, and lies about the reason why he or she acted in such a manner contrary to a previous prohibition, he or she is certain not to deceive anyone, although he or she still invites the other party to trust them, thus he or she warrants the truth of his or her statement. The reason for such a reaction is an attempt to “save face” in front of the parent, possibly attempting to make the situation more bearable by trying to appear innocent and make the parent sympathetic.

On the other hand, if one clearly indicates that one’s statement is not to be taken seriously, if the circumstances are such that the audience knows that the speaker does not warrant the truth, one cannot speak of lying or an intention to deceive. This is, for example, in special contexts such as literature or film. The audience are well aware that the circumstances are specific, as for example being in a theatre, when they know that each theatre character is merely a fiction, and his or her words are also fictional. There is no truth-value to them.

Figurative statements used in everyday speech such as “it cost me an arm and a leg” cannot be taken literally either. The intention of such a statement is to express the great cost of something, not to deceive the audience. According to Carson’s criteria of lying, neither here is it expected of S to warrant the truth of X. The surface structure is that of a lie, but the utterances are strongly context-dependent. How they should be understood depends on a number of other factors and thus they cannot be taken for a lie. Here again then, one comes to the conclusion that the context is crucial when looking at whether a statement is a lie or not, whether one is to be deceived or merely entertained. There are a number of linguistic means that do not express a certain concept directly or name a particular thing literally but instead use various figures of speech, avoiding naming the thing or the concept itself. The reason is no other but an artistic effect of speech or writing. Examples of such figures of speech would be e. g. a hyperbole, an exaggerated statement, an antiphrasis, a name or a phrase used ironically, a synecdoche, when a part of a thing refers to the whole thing, or vice versa, or a metaphor.

For Nietzsche (1976: 46–47), all human communication and all concepts in general are nothing but a metaphor. In his view, the very construct of language is purely metaphorical; the very essence of language is far from being truthful. “What about these conventions of language?” he asks, “Are they really the products of knowledge, of the sense of truth? (...) Is language an adequate expression of all realities?”¹⁹ By stating this Nietzsche seems to suggest a crucial dimension to lying. Truth is not some kind of a static relation between reality and knowledge but, according to Nietzsche (1976, 46–47):

“[a] mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.”²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁹ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1976) 46–47.

²⁰ Brewer, “Nietzsche’s Truth and Lying.”

He considered nothing as fixed, including the very medium we use to communicate. If the medium itself is imperfect, how can we expect anything expressed with this medium to be perfect? All concepts are human inventions and based on convention, but humans tend to forget that this is the case.

Nietzsche somewhat humorously claims that humanity's obligation to "truth" is no more than "the obligation to lie in accordance with firmly established convention, to lie *en masse* and in a style that is binding for all."²¹ Here he clearly dismisses the notion that humans have "the right" to know the truth, that they may feel somehow privileged to know the truth, since there is none. Everything seen or said or done is part of a world of pre-established conventional symbols and it should be taken as such. The very nature of the world is "fluid and changeable," and so is the nature of the language.

In summary, Carson differentiates between situations in which the speaker either warrants or does not warrant the truth of a statement. This for him is a crucial criterion for assessing a statement as a lie. Metaphors are a specific type of statements, which are marked as not warranting the truth. These are, however, special contexts and the circumstances need to be clear for the listeners to be able to deem them as such. Nietzsche, on the other hand, calls into doubt the very medium of human communication itself, he declines the notion of wrongness and rightness in language altogether and thus refrains from any moral judgement of lying and deception. He simply deconstructs language as a system and as such, it is not capable of mirroring any kind of reality – as reality does not exist in our perception. It is only a metaphor expressed by another set of metaphors.

6 The moral dimensions of lying and deception

What is wrong with lying then if, as has been seen, certain lies are not intended to deceive (e. g. figurative language) and failing to state all the facts can be much worse than providing a false statement (e. g. manipulation of facts)?

If one bases one's moral judgements on the premise that all lying is bad, one needs to inevitably condemn each and every single instance of a false statement irrespective of the circumstances. One of the best-known legislators of the absolute immorality of lying was Immanuel Kant. In his work, *On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropic Concerns*, Kant holds that "to be truthful in all declarations is, therefore, a sacred and unconditionally commanding law of reason which admits of no expediency whatever."²² He provides an extreme example of a decision which one has to make: to lie or to save the life of an innocent person. Even here though, he does not accept a lie. One must stay truthful no matter what, even if putting somebody's life into jeopardy. Even "white lies" are according to Kant still lies and are morally unacceptable.

Moral intuitions about lying can be, according to Carson, "often conflicting even for people who tend to act morally." Importantly, he additionally asks: "Why our intuitions should be more correct than others?"²³ He rejects a unified Kantian set of moral values and clearly places lying in the wider context of individual realities, experiences and priorities. Carson in his definition of lying does not seek answers to the moral dimension of lying, i. e. "is lying *prima facie* wrong"

²¹ Ibid.

²² Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns" in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: with On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 164.

²³ Carson, *Lying and Deception*, 34.

or “is lying always wrong?” but as he puts it, his definition is to “illuminate moral questions by identifying morally salient features of actions.”²⁴

Brutal honesty, on the other hand, can do more harm than good. One need not go far to find a situation when it is better – from the point of view of human traits such as compassion or politeness – to lie rather than to resort to extreme honesty. It would be less than acceptable to call one’s mother-in-law’s Christmas dinner unpalatable to her face or to tell an extremely serious medical diagnosis to a small child or a very poorly patient in all honesty. This would be perceived as cruel or even sadistic. Here again, circumstances should be considered before condemning the lies or half-truths.

7 Conclusion

All our information-providing statements, verbal and even non-verbal, may be judged from the point of view of their truth-value. We may scrutinize all human communication dealing with facts through the lens of this criterion, and find out that to tell the absolute truth is not always possible and sometimes even undesirable as it may cause more harm than good. However, as has been shown, lying cannot be condemned only based on the criterion of its supposed truth-value. Each case should be treated individually, depending on the context and not understood only in isolation. One should also not forget that language is a system based on convention and as any system is imperfect. The meanings of words are not precisely measurable with scientific methods; they are also superficial, conventional and context-dependent.

Still, it is more than clear that we inherently feel that lying is not right, and it should be approached as such. According to Stokke, “the moral wrongness of lies comes from the fact that lies block certain choices that otherwise would have been available.”²⁵ This distorted portrayal of the reality one is offered when being deceived is where the true evil of lying lies. It is on this distorted portrayal that we then build our own perception of reality, of others and of ourselves.

Lying is indeed a complex phenomenon analysable at many levels and requires further studies. An interdisciplinary approach is necessary, using findings from philosophy, linguistics, namely pragmatics and discourse analysis, but also psychology, psychiatry and sociology. Only then the picture can be more complete.

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²⁴ Ibid., 236.

²⁵ Stokke, “Lying, Deceiving and Misleading,” 350.

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