

Introduction

PHILOSOPHERS usually think of their discipline as one which discusses perennial, eternal problems—problems which arise as soon as one reflects. Some of these concern the difference between human beings and other beings, and are crystallized in questions concerning the relation between the mind and the body. Other problems concern the legitimation of claims to know, and are crystallized in questions concerning the “foundations” of knowledge. To discover these foundations is to discover something about the mind, and conversely. Philosophy as a discipline thus sees itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion. It purports to do this on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind. Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of culture because culture is the assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims. It can do so because it understands the foundations of knowledge, and it finds these foundations in a study of man-as-knower, of the “mental processes” or the “activity of representation” which make knowledge possible. To know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations. Philosophy’s central concern is to be a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so).

We owe the notion of a “theory of knowledge” based on an understanding of “mental processes” to the seventeenth century, and especially to Locke. We owe the notion of

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“the mind” as a separate entity in which “processes” occur to the same period, and especially to Descartes. We owe the notion of philosophy as a tribunal of pure reason, upholding or denying the claims of the rest of culture, to the eighteenth century and especially to Kant, but this Kantian notion presupposed general assent to Lockean notions of mental processes and Cartesian notions of mental substance. In the nineteenth century, the notion of philosophy as a foundational discipline which “grounds” knowledge-claims was consolidated in the writings of the neo-Kantians. Occasional protests against this conception of culture as in need of “grounding” and against the pretensions of a theory of knowledge to perform this task (in, for example, Nietzsche and William James) went largely unheard. “Philosophy” became, for the intellectuals, a substitute for religion. It was the area of culture where one touched bottom, where one found the vocabulary and the convictions which permitted one to explain and justify one’s activity *as* an intellectual, and thus to discover the significance of one’s life.

At the beginning of our century, this claim was reaffirmed by philosophers (notably Russell and Husserl) who were concerned to keep philosophy “rigorous” and “scientific.” But there was a note of desperation in their voices, for by this time the triumph of the secular over the claims of religion was almost complete. Thus the philosopher could no longer see himself as in the intellectual avant-garde, or as protecting men against the forces of superstition.¹ Further, in the course of the nineteenth century, a new form of culture had arisen—the culture of the man of letters, the intellectual who wrote poems and novels and political treatises, and criticisms of other people’s poems and novels and treatises. Descartes, Locke, and Kant had written in a

¹ Terms such as “himself” and “men” should, throughout this book, be taken as abbreviations for “himself or herself,” “men and women,” and so on.

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period in which the secularization of culture was being made possible by the success of natural science. But by the early twentieth century the scientists had become as remote from most intellectuals as had the theologians. Poets and novelists had taken the place of both preachers and philosophers as the moral teachers of the youth. The result was that the more “scientific” and “rigorous” philosophy became, the less it had to do with the rest of culture and the more absurd its traditional pretensions seemed. The attempts of both analytic philosophers and phenomenologists to “ground” this and “criticize” that were shrugged off by those whose activities were purportedly being grounded or criticized. Philosophy as a whole was shrugged off by those who wanted an ideology or a self-image.

It is against this background that we should see the work of the three most important philosophers of our century—Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey. Each tried, in his early years, to find a new way of making philosophy “foundational”—a new way of formulating an ultimate context for thought. Wittgenstein tried to construct a new theory of representation which would have nothing to do with mentalism, Heidegger to construct a new set of philosophical categories which would have nothing to do with science, epistemology, or the Cartesian quest for certainty, and Dewey to construct a naturalized version of Hegel’s vision of history. Each of the three came to see his earlier effort as self-deceptive, as an attempt to retain a certain conception of philosophy after the notions needed to flesh out that conception (the seventeenth-century notions of knowledge and mind) had been discarded. Each of the three, in his later work, broke free of the Kantian conception of philosophy as foundational, and spent his time warning us against those very temptations to which he himself had once succumbed. Thus their later work is therapeutic rather than constructive, edifying rather than systematic, designed to make the reader question his own motives for philosophiz-

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ing rather than to supply him with a new philosophical program.

Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey are in agreement that the notion of knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes, and intelligible through a general theory of representation, needs to be abandoned. For all three, the notions of “foundations of knowledge” and of philosophy as revolving around the Cartesian attempt to answer the epistemological skeptic are set aside. Further, they set aside the notion of “the mind” common to Descartes, Locke, and Kant—as a special subject of study, located in inner space, containing elements or processes which make knowledge possible. This is not to say that they have *alternative* “theories of knowledge” or “philosophies of mind.” They set aside epistemology and metaphysics as possible disciplines. I say “set aside” rather than “argue against” because their attitude toward the traditional problematic is like the attitude of seventeenth-century philosophers toward the scholastic problematic. They do not devote themselves to discovering false propositions or bad arguments in the works of their predecessors (though they occasionally do that too). Rather, they glimpse the possibility of a form of intellectual life in which the vocabulary of philosophical reflection inherited from the seventeenth century would seem as pointless as the thirteenth-century philosophical vocabulary had seemed to the Enlightenment. To assert the possibility of a post-Kantian culture, one in which there is no all-encompassing discipline which legitimizes or grounds the others, is not necessarily to argue against any particular Kantian doctrine, any more than to glimpse the possibility of a culture in which religion either did not exist, or had no connection with science or politics, was necessarily to argue against Aquinas’s claim that God’s existence can be proved by natural reason. Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey have brought us into a period of “revolutionary” philosophy (in the sense of Kuhn’s “revolutionary” science) by introducing

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new maps of the terrain (viz., of the whole panorama of human activities) which simply do not include those features which previously seemed to dominate.

This book is a survey of some recent developments in philosophy, especially analytic philosophy, from the point of view of the anti-Cartesian and anti-Kantian revolution which I have just described. The aim of the book is to undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a "philosophical" view, in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be a "theory" and which has "foundations," and in "philosophy" as it has been conceived since Kant. Thus the reader in search of a new theory on any of the subjects discussed will be disappointed. Although I discuss "solutions to the mind-body problem" this is not in order to propose one but to illustrate why I do not think there is a problem. Again, although I discuss "theories of reference" I do not offer one, but offer only suggestions about why the search for such a theory is misguided. The book, like the writings of the philosophers I most admire, is therapeutic rather than constructive. The therapy offered is, nevertheless, parasitic upon the constructive efforts of the very analytic philosophers whose frame of reference I am trying to put in question. Thus most of the particular criticisms of the tradition which I offer are borrowed from such systematic philosophers as Sellars, Quine, Davidson, Ryle, Malcolm, Kuhn, and Putnam.

I am as much indebted to these philosophers for the means I employ as I am to Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey for the ends to which these means are put. I hope to convince the reader that the dialectic within analytic philosophy, which has carried philosophy of mind from Broad to Smart, philosophy of language from Frege to Davidson, epistemology from Russell to Sellars, and philosophy of science from Carnap to Kuhn, needs to be carried a few steps further. These additional steps will, I think,

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put us in a position to criticize the very notion of “analytic philosophy,” and indeed of “philosophy” itself as it has been understood since the time of Kant.

From the standpoint I am adopting, indeed, the difference between “analytic” and other sorts of philosophy is relatively unimportant—a matter of style and tradition rather than a difference of “method” or of first principles. The reason why the book is largely written in the vocabulary of contemporary analytic philosophers, and with reference to problems discussed in the analytic literature, is merely autobiographical. They are the vocabulary and the literature with which I am most familiar, and to which I owe what grasp I have of philosophical issues. Had I been equally familiar with other contemporary modes of writing philosophy, this would have been a better and more useful book, although an even longer one. As I see it, the kind of philosophy which stems from Russell and Frege is, like classical Husserlian phenomenology, simply one more attempt to put philosophy in the position which Kant wished it to have—that of judging other areas of culture on the basis of its special knowledge of the “foundations” of these areas. “Analytic” philosophy is one more variant of Kantian philosophy, a variant marked principally by thinking of representation as linguistic rather than mental, and of philosophy of language rather than “transcendental critique,” or psychology, as the discipline which exhibits the “foundations of knowledge.” This emphasis on language, I shall be arguing in chapters four and six, does not essentially change the Cartesian-Kantian problematic, and thus does not really give philosophy a new self-image. For analytic philosophy is still committed to the construction of a permanent, neutral framework for inquiry, and thus for all of culture.

It is the notion that human activity (and inquiry, the search for knowledge, in particular) takes place within a framework which can be isolated prior to the conclusion of inquiry—a set of presuppositions discoverable a priori—which links contemporary philosophy to the Descartes-

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Locke-Kant tradition. For the notion that there is such a framework only makes sense if we think of this framework as imposed by the nature of the knowing subject, by the nature of his faculties or by the nature of the medium within which he works. The very idea of “philosophy” as something distinct from “science” would make little sense without the Cartesian claim that by turning inward we could find ineluctable truth, and the Kantian claim that this truth imposes limits on the possible results of empirical inquiry. The notion that there could be such a thing as “foundations of knowledge” (*all* knowledge—in every field, past, present, and future) or a “theory of representation” (*all* representation, in familiar vocabularies and those not yet dreamed of) depends on the assumption that there is some such a priori constraint. If we have a Deweyan conception of knowledge, as what we are justified in believing, then we will not imagine that there are enduring constraints on what can count as knowledge, since we will see “justification” as a social phenomenon rather than a transaction between “the knowing subject” and “reality.” If we have a Wittgensteinian notion of language as tool rather than mirror, we will not look for necessary conditions of the possibility of linguistic representation. If we have a Heideggerian conception of philosophy, we will see the attempt to make the nature of the knowing subject a source of necessary truths as one more self-deceptive attempt to substitute a “technical” and determinate question for that openness to strangeness which initially tempted us to begin thinking.

One way to see how analytic philosophy fits within the traditional Cartesian-Kantian pattern is to see traditional philosophy as an attempt to escape from history—an attempt to find nonhistorical conditions of any possible historical development. From this perspective, the common message of Wittgenstein, Dewey, and Heidegger is a historicist one. Each of the three reminds us that investigations of the foundations of knowledge or morality or language or society

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may be simply apologetics, attempts to eternalize a certain contemporary language-game, social practice, or self-image. The moral of this book is also historicist, and the three parts into which it is divided are intended to put the notions of “mind,” of “knowledge,” and of “philosophy,” respectively, in historical perspective. Part I is concerned with philosophy of mind, and in chapter one I try to show that the so-called intuitions which lie behind Cartesian dualism are ones which have a historical origin. In chapter two, I try to show how these intuitions would be changed if physiological methods of prediction and control took the place of psychological methods.

Part II is concerned with epistemology and with recent attempts to find “successor subjects” to epistemology. Chapter three describes the genesis of the notion of “epistemology” in the seventeenth century, and its connection with the Cartesian notions of “mind” discussed in chapter one. It presents “theory of knowledge” as a notion based upon a confusion between the justification of knowledge-claims and their causal explanation—between, roughly, social practices and postulated psychological processes. Chapter four is the central chapter of the book—the one in which the ideas which led to its being written are presented. These ideas are those of Sellars and of Quine, and in that chapter I interpret Sellars’s attack on “givenness” and Quine’s attack on “necessity” as the crucial steps in undermining the possibility of a “theory of knowledge.” The holism and pragmatism common to both philosophers, and which they share with the later Wittgenstein, are the lines of thought within analytic philosophy which I wish to extend. I argue that when extended in a certain way they let us see truth as, in James’s phrase, “what it is better for us to believe,” rather than as “the accurate representation of reality.” Or, to put the point less provocatively, they show us that the notion of “accurate representation” is simply an automatic and empty compliment which we pay to those beliefs which are successful in helping us do what we want to do. In chapters

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five and six I discuss and criticize what I regard as reactionary attempts to treat empirical psychology or philosophy of language as “successor subjects” to epistemology. I argue that only the notion of knowledge as “accuracy of representation” persuades us that the study of psychological processes or of language—qua media of representation—can do what epistemology failed to do. The moral of part II as a whole is that the notion of knowledge as the assemblage of accurate representations is optional—that it may be replaced by a pragmatist conception of knowledge which eliminates the Greek contrast between contemplation and action, between representing the world and coping with it. A historical epoch dominated by Greek ocular metaphors may, I suggest, yield to one in which the philosophical vocabulary incorporating these metaphors seems as quaint as the animistic vocabulary of pre-classical times.

In part III I take up the idea of “philosophy” more explicitly. Chapter seven interprets the traditional distinction between the search for “objective knowledge” and other, less privileged, areas of human activity as merely the distinction between “normal discourse” and “abnormal discourse.” Normal discourse (a generalization of Kuhn’s notion of “normal science”) is any discourse (scientific, political, theological, or whatever) which embodies agreed-upon criteria for reaching agreement; abnormal discourse is any which lacks such criteria. I argue that the attempt (which has defined traditional philosophy) to explicate “rationality” and “objectivity” in terms of conditions of accurate representation is a self-deceptive effort to eternalize the normal discourse of the day, and that, since the Greeks, philosophy’s self-image has been dominated by this attempt. In chapter eight I use some ideas drawn from Gadamer and Sartre to develop a contrast between “systematic” and “edifying” philosophy, and to show how “abnormal” philosophy which does not conform to the traditional Cartesian-Kantian matrix is related to “normal” philosophy. I present Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey as philosophers whose

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aim is to edify—to help their readers, or society as a whole, break free from outworn vocabularies and attitudes, rather than to provide “grounding” for the intuitions and customs of the present.

I hope that what I have been saying has made clear why I chose “Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature” as a title. It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions. The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations—some accurate, some not—and capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant—getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror, so to speak—would not have made sense. Without this strategy in mind, recent claims that philosophy could consist of “conceptual analysis” or “phenomenological analysis” or “explication of meanings” or examination of “the logic of our language” or of “the structure of the constituting activity of consciousness” would not have made sense. It was such claims as these which Wittgenstein mocked in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and it is by following Wittgenstein’s lead that analytic philosophy has progressed toward the “post-positivistic” stance it presently occupies. But Wittgenstein’s flair for deconstructing captivating pictures needs to be supplemented by historical awareness—awareness of the source of all this mirror-imagery—and that seems to me Heidegger’s greatest contribution. Heidegger’s way of recounting history of philosophy lets us see the beginnings of the Cartesian imagery in the Greeks and the metamorphoses of this imagery during the last three centuries. He thus lets us “distance” ourselves from the tradition. Yet neither Heidegger nor Wittgen-

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stein lets us see the historical phenomenon of mirror-imagery, the story of the domination of the mind of the West by ocular metaphors, within a social perspective. Both men are concerned with the rarely favored individual rather than with society—with the chances of keeping oneself apart from the banal self-deception typical of the latter days of a decaying tradition. Dewey, on the other hand, though he had neither Wittgenstein's dialectical acuity nor Heidegger's historical learning, wrote his polemics against traditional mirror-imagery out of a vision of a new kind of society. In his ideal society, culture is no longer dominated by the ideal of objective cognition but by that of aesthetic enhancement. In that culture, as he said, the arts and the sciences would be "the unforced flowers of life." I would hope that we are now in a position to see the charges of "relativism" and "irrationalism" once leveled against Dewey as merely the mindless defensive reflexes of the philosophical tradition which he attacked. Such charges have no weight if one takes seriously the criticisms of mirror-imagery which he, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger make. This book has little to add to these criticisms, but I hope that it presents some of them in a way which will help pierce through that crust of philosophical convention which Dewey vainly hoped to shatter.