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PHILOSOPHY, LOGIC, SCIENCE, HISTORY

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Philosophy

This essay is an attempt to understand some aspects of the relationship between philosophy and three other broad intellectual endeavours with which is it often associated: logic, science, and history. The tradition of philosophy that currently dominates the United States and much of Europe—so-called analytic philosophy—has often been thought to have especially close relationships with logic and science, and no particularly close relationship with history and the history of philosophy. In what follows, I question whether the links with logic and science are as strong as is sometimes claimed (even for analytic philosophy). And I conclude by suggesting that if philosophy is not going to seem, in Bernard Williams's words, "something quite peculiar," it should pay more attention to its own history (Williams 2000, 496).

It should go without saying that in a short essay like this it is impossible to give a full or proper treatment of this vast subject. Everything I say here is in need of clarification, qualification, and further defence. My excuse for taking on this task is that I think sometimes it can be useful to attempt an overview of one's discipline, inadequate and partial as it may be.

I will not concentrate on a "definition" of philosophy; not because I think one cannot be given but because in understanding any complex phenomena, very little is achieved by giving definitions. In order to have a debate about what philosophy is, or what it should be, or what it can be, we have to agree on what philosophy is—to agree, that is, on the definition. So it is only if one has already agreed on the definition that one can start arguing about philosophy itself. The best definition of philosophy (or rather, of the aim of philosophy) I know comes from Wilfrid Sellars: "The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term

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hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (Sellars 2007, 369). This covers ethics and politics (and other areas) as well as metaphysics. We can intelligibly talk about ethical and political aspects of the world "hanging together" just as we can talk about other general features of the world "hanging together."

But the definition does not tell us very much, not least because it does not tell us what "hanging together" is. Nor should it: different philosophers will have different views about what it is for things to hang together, as they will have different views about what the relevant "things" are.

But despite this (intentional) vagueness, the definition does give us something to go on. First, Sellars's claim mentions *breadth*: by which he does not, I think, mean the word in the sense of "breadth of knowledge" but rather means it in the sense of *generality*. Philosophy is broad because the questions it traditionally asks are about the general features of reality: rather than being concerned with (say) chemical change, it asks about change as such. Rather than being concerned with (say) my specific obligations to look after my parents in their old age, it asks about obligations as such.

Second, Sellars treats philosophy as a form of *understanding*. Of course, understanding comes in many forms—scientific understanding is a different form of understanding from the understanding that old friends have with one another. But understanding is, broadly speaking, a *cognitive* or *epistemic* enterprise. It is not primarily aesthetic, either in the sense of being concerned with edification or in the etymological meaning of being concerned with the sensory. However, the concern with understanding does not rule out a practical role for philosophy, as (for instance) an instrument of human emancipation. Indeed, it is clear that philosophy has often played such a role.

Sellars's definition does not specify a proprietary subject matter for philosophy, apart from "things," and this is another point in its favour. The concerns of philosophy have been as broad as "things" themselves. I was once told of a Renaissance philosopher who thought that the three main problems of philosophy were Time, Love, and the Circle (unfortunately, I do not now remember the name of this philosopher). It is possible, even given this little information, to interpret these three subjects in a way that makes sense in today's philosophy—perhaps the problem of the Circle is the problem of how ideal geometrical forms relate to material reality?—but the interesting thing is the *priority* of these problems or questions. No one now would classify these three as the main problems of philosophy, and he or she would be neither right nor wrong in this. The subject matter of philosophy varies across time, in response to specific intellectual pressures and historical circumstances.

Indeed, the idea that philosophy is about a specific menu of *problems* involves in itself a particular conception of its subject matter, located in a particular epoch (see the classic texts Russell 1912 and Moore 1953). Similarly, the idea, popular in twentieth-century analytic philosophy, that philosophy is primarily or merely an *activity* or a *technique* or a *method*, is something that would not be easily recognisable to the scholars of thirteenth-century Paris or to the nineteenth-century idealists. Yet they are as much philosophers, and obviously so, as those who talked of "philosophical analysis" in the mid-twentieth century.

The truth is that there is no universal philosophical method nor any universal philosophical subject matter other than Sellars's "things in the broadest sense of the term." What there is, uncontroversially, are certain overlapping traditions of thought, a collective conception of which texts are canonical and which inquiries are worth pursuing. What makes these activities philosophical? The two characteristics pointed to in Sellars's definition—generality and the cognitive character of the inquiry—are undoubtedly central to any proper answer to this question. But these two Sellarsian characteristics can hardly count as sufficient conditions for something's being philosophy, since they would not distinguish philosophy from science. In itself this is no bad thing, since science and philosophy were surely born out of the same urge to understand the universe and our place in it; and the two characteristics can at least be necessary conditions for something to be philosophy. But any more detailed (and therefore more interesting) answer to the question would have to refer to specific historical traditions, texts, schools, and doctrines. And then a unified sense of "philosophy" as something that unites these traditions will begin to become somewhat elusive.

These general remarks are intended to apply just as much to "analytic" philosophy as to "continental" philosophy. There are no distinctively analytic questions, there is no analytic style; and there are no analytic doctrines or dogmas. To establish this would be a major task, but I believe it could be done. (Whether it would be *worth* doing is another question.) For the moment, though, I will settle for the more modest claim: for anything that you might count as a classic analytic doctrine, discovery, or achievement, there will be at least one significant and unquestionably analytic philosopher who disputes them or their significance.

It has become a bit of a cliché in some circles to say that there is no real distinction between analytic philosophy and continental philosophy: analytic philosophy can make no unique claim to clarity, rigour, or argument, and the term "continental" can only bring to mind British hotels' classification of breakfasts as "continental" (light, fashionable, and insubstantial) as opposed to "English or Scottish" (heavy, traditional, unhealthy, and indigestible, but somehow *manly*). Using the term "European" rather than "continental" is not much better, and (normatively speaking) it embodies an invidious attitude to those who like to think of Britain and Ireland as part of Europe. Also, it cannot accommodate the fact that much contemporary philosophy in Europe is now "analytic" in character, or the fact that before the twentieth century there was no easy way of dividing the philosophical concerns of Britain and those of the rest of Europe. Nineteenth-century philosophy in Britain contained empiricists and Hegelians; nineteenth-century philosophy in Germany contained materialists, naturalists, and neo-Kantians who emphasised the relations between Kant's thought and science, as well as Hegelian idealists. Classifying a certain stream of twentieth-century French and German thought as "European" is not very, well, *philosophical*.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that there is a difference between trying to read Deleuze and trying to read David Armstrong. The philosophical project of Adorno is a very different kind of thing to that of Quine. It would be simply bone-headed and dogmatic not to recognise differences like these. Of course, post-war French philosophy (for example) has had very different concerns from post-war Anglophone traditions. But it seems to me that the difference consists not in any distinctive essence or *doctrine* that can be labelled "analytic" or "continental." Deleuze and Armstrong are both, after all, materialists in a certain sense (and I don't believe that this is a mere homonym). Rather, the difference between them is a difference in the kinds of questions they start with, a difference in the ways they present their ideas, and crucially, a difference in the kinds of texts they assume to be worth reading or canonical.

It seems to me that it is more fruitful to think of a philosophical tradition as a collection of inter-related texts, rather than a body of doctrines or a distinctive technique. Self-styled continental philosophers often take the works of Freud, Marx, Heidegger, or Nietzsche as starting points, or those who have commented on them: Derrida, Deleuze, Badiou, and so on. Analytic philosophers often take Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Quine, Rawls, or Kripke as presenting the central questions. Or they may start their investigations *in medias res* by asking a question and comparing their answers to other recent answers "in the literature." But this does not distract from the fact that the questions they ask—even if deriving from long-standing philosophical concerns—arise because of the way the "literature" has developed.

Thinking of philosophy as a collection of texts makes it easier to see what the difference between analytic and continental philosophy, as currently conceived, amounts to. Which texts people are taught, and which they take themselves to be responding to, determines which questions they think are the philosophically important ones. To say this is not to take a stand on which questions are worthwhile and which are trivial, superficial, or empty. Some questions are worthwhile, some are trivial or pointless. Different questions are thrown up in different ways, and not just by philosophical texts but also by, *inter alia*, the discoveries of science, the political environment, and developments more broadly in art and culture. Analytic and continental philosophers respond in different ways to the different developments they find pressing. But we need find no one philosophical distinction in doctrine or method between the analytic and the continental.

A distinction it does seem to me to be worth making, though, is between doing philosophy and describing it (as I am doing now). In both analytic and continental traditions there is a kind of writing about philosophy today that takes certain figures as worth writing about and then proceeds to write about their ideas merely by comparing them to others in this pantheon. In this style of writing, which can amount to a kind of high-end journalism, there is no attempt to probe the assumptions of these figures, to interrogate them about their starting points or the moves in their arguments, or to make it clear why *these* people are in the pantheon and others are mere commentators on these figures. Rather, what we get is a comparison between X's reading of Y and Z's reading of Y—but very little direct examination of what it is that Y was writing about in the first place and why it was being written about.

Writing about philosophy in this style *can* be illuminating. But it cannot be what philosophy as a whole consists in, for the obvious reason that if there was no one attempting to answer the questions that originally prompted the inquiry then the tradition would dissolve into a commentary on the previous commentaries. Although perhaps some philosophers who are sceptical about there being any place any longer for a positive enterprise of philosophy may have taken this approach, it has very little to recommend it. But I cannot argue for this here, so I will leave these remarks with this simple assertion of my position.

In what follows I apply this conception of philosophical traditions—as collections of texts—to the frequently proposed claims about the relationship between analytic philosophy and logic, on the one hand, and analytic philosophy and science, on the other.

Logic

Logic and philosophy of language are often claimed to be central to the analytic tradition. Although it is clearly true that some of analytic philosophy's greatest achievements have been in these areas, I don't think it's possible to make any substantial philosophical claims that unify analytic philosophy as a whole by making some general appeal either to logic or to the philosophy of language. Instead, I will claim that it is easier to see why there has been a central role for logic and the philosophy of language if we adopt a text-based, more historicist conception of the analytic tradition.

To begin with logic, it is undeniable of course that logic played a central role in the creation of what we now call analytic philosophy. Any account of the history of this creation must place at the centre Frege and Russell's investigations into the philosophy of mathematics and their logicist programme—their attempt to explain mathematical truths as truths of logic. And indeed, this is an area that has been extensively studied by historians of analytic philosophy—some, if not all, of whom have been analytic philosophers themselves. Indeed, one of the striking features of recent analytic philosophy has been a deep and scholarly concern with its own history. Much of the history that has emerged has been of a nonwhiggish sort, though there are exceptions.[1]

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[1] An example of the whiggish approach is Soames 2005. See Rorty 2005 for a sympathetic but critical treatment of Soames. For a classic non-whiggish approach, see Hylton 1990. For a critical discussion of the role of Frege and Russell in the origins of analytic philosophy, see Potter 2008.

Russell's importance in twentieth-century philosophy, both in his role in breaking from the Hegelianism that dominated universities in England and Scotland at the time and in his substantial achievements within philosophy, can lead us to see the essence of analytic philosophy through Russell's eyes. An example, perhaps, is the tendency to call many philosophical problems "logical"—so philosophers for many decades would talk about the "logic" of our concepts, or of "logical" objections to various views, when in reality it is most obscure what the logic of a concept is, and many of the objections were not logical at all—at least not in the sense in which Russell and Frege had made advances in logic.

Logic in this sense is the study of validity generally, and formal validity in particular. Validity is a feature of arguments: an argument is valid when it is truth-preserving. An argument is formally valid when it is valid in virtue of its form. The idea is intuitive, but what exactly form is has been subject to debate by logicians and philosophers of logic (see Oliver 2010 for an incisive study of the origins of this idea). But what does seem to be uncontroversial is that not *all* phenomena that philosophers have traditionally reasoned about are phenomena that have a "logic" in this formal sense. Sometimes people use the word "logic" to mean something like: *the general principles governing a phenomenon or a concept*. But in the *formal* sense it has to mean something more specific: a formal logic specifies which arguments are valid in virtue of their *form*.

In this sense, it is clear that there is no specific logic for many philosophically interesting phenomena. There is no logic of *consciousness*, for example: there are not general "formal" features of discourse about consciousness that determine when arguments concerning the phenomena of consciousness are formally valid. There may be logical features of the English expression "conscious of," but whatever they are, their examination can hardly amount to dealing with all the philosophical perplexities about consciousness.

There was a period in the history of analytic philosophy when formal logic was distinguished from "philosophical" logic. Philosophical logic was thought of as more than just the philosophy *of* logic—that is, the philosophical examinations of the fundamental logical notions of validity, entailment, and logical form. In an influential anthology edited by P. F. Strawson in 1967, a collection of papers discussed such topics as truth (Dummett), meaning (Grice), names (Searle), the nature of the logical constants (Prior), the nature of the proposition (Frege). Many if not all of the papers are classics and essential reading for any student of analytic philosophy. But the range of the volume covers so much more than logic as we have just characterised it: among the things one learns about in the book are the semantics of natural language and metaphysical questions about truth and reality. And a student could learn a lot of philosophy from this anthology while having a very minimal grasp of formal logic. Nothing wrong with that; but it does raise the question of what this famous anthology has to do with "logic."

In the introduction to this anthology, Strawson ingeniously defines logic as "the general theory of the proposition," and then goes on to say that logic has a "formal part" and a "philosophical part" (1967, 2). Since arguments are sometimes said to relate propositions, and arguments are the subject matter of logic, there is some initial plausibility in that. But the plausibility fades somewhat when we ask ourselves what "formal" features of *propositions* are. The distinction between form and content which is relevant for logic involves identifying some *expressions* as logical constants and others as variables and schematic letters, and identifying validity in virtue of form in relation to this distinction. Can the distinction be made for propositions? Do propositions contain anything like "expressions"? Is there such a thing as the logical constant in a proposition? These are the questions with which Russell and his contemporaries struggled in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Even apart from this difficulty with identifying logic as the "general theory of the proposition," there are other anomalies in thinking of things in this way. What has the study of the proposition got to do with the theory of meaning in general? If Grice's famous essay on meaning is a piece of "philosophical logic," how about its application by Schiffer (1972), and the development of Grice's ideas about non-natural meaning in informational theories of meaning (e.g., Dretske 1981)? It's easy to see all of these things as related, but rather forced to see them all as "philosophical logic" or as aspects of the general theory of the proposition.

Russell has sometimes been given the credit for this more widespread application of the idea of logic to philosophy as a whole. Indeed, according to Mark Sainsbury, this is the origin of the phrase "philosophical logic": "Russell coined the phrase 'philosophical logic' to describe a programme in philosophy: that of tackling philosophical problems by formalising problematic sentences in what appeared to Russell to be *the* language of logic: the formal language of *Principia Mathematica*" (Sainsbury 1991, 2). It's very hard to find many examples of how such a programme has been applied successfully, or even plausibly, in twentieth-century philosophy. The treatment of "exists" as analysed in context as a quantifier expression is sometimes given as a clear example of this kind of thing. By showing how the logical form of "exists" differs from its "grammatical form" we are supposed to be able to solve all sorts of problems to which the notion of existence gives rise. The kinds of problems that are illuminated by a proper interpretation of existence and quantification are, for example, the treatment of negative existentials, the mistakes that might occur if you treat certain terms ("nothing," "nobody," and so on) as names, and the ontological argument for the existence of God.

This illumination is to a large extent illusory. As Alex Oliver has shown, it is a myth that it was only Russell's discoveries which showed that "nothing" and "nobody" are names, and that no one was aware of this before Russell (Oliver 1999). Treating "exists" as a quantifier rather than a predicate tackles few of the problems of existence—for example, the problem of negative existentials really has little to do with this issue (see Crane 2011). And the ontological argument does not rest on the idea of "exists" as a predicate; rather, it rests on the coherence of the idea of a being whose existence in some way is contained within its very conception. This idea, if coherent at all, cannot be undermined by any claim about the logic of "exists."

This is only to mention a few examples, of course: but they are the standard familiar examples. Other examples of translating problematic sentences into the language of *Principia Mathematica* are more controversial, and it has to be admitted even by the defenders of such an approach that very little progress has been made by thinking about philosophy in this way. Russell's programme of "philosophical logic" did not really take off, and it's not hard to understand why. Many of the most difficult problems of philosophy involve ideas that are themselves deeply problematic—like freedom, obligation, and consciousness—and translating talk about these ideas into a certain kind of symbolism will preserve these problematic aspects *or* the symbolism will be—unlike natural language—inadequate to express the essence of these ideas.

Russell's "philosophical logic" project should be distinguished from a tendency of analytic philosophers to strew their work with formulae of the predicate calculus, or with sentences made up partly of such formulae and partly of English words, whether or not this is really necessary. Sometimes it is: some ambiguity is revealed more clearly by showing its logical structure; this can be useful. Or sometimes a philosophical programme essentially involves an appeal to something like the "logical form" of certain kinds of sentence (consider, for example, Davidson's 1970 claim that action sentences contain an implicit quantification over events). But it is also true that this technique is part of the rhetoric of philosophy, to show that the authors are at home with what many of their colleagues take to be its fundamental tools.

None of this should be taken to imply that philosophers should not try to make their arguments logically sound (or at least valid), and should avoid uncontroversial logical fallacies. Of course. But all philosophers should do this: it is not, nor should it be, the province of analytic philosophy alone.[2]

This brings me to the question of what kind of role the philosophy of language in particular has (or should have) within analytic philosophy as a whole. Again, it is obvious that philosophical reflection on language has been responsible for some of analytic philosophy's great growth periods. But some philosophers go further and see the philosophy of language as *the defining discipline* of analytic philosophy. Michael Dummett, for example, claims: "What distinguishes analytic philosophy, in its diverse manifestations, from other schools is the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained" (Dummett 1993, 1). Certainly

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[2] I should say in addition that my remarks are intended to have nothing to do with logic as an autonomous discipline, or as an important part of philosophy or mathematics. My concern is with the relationship between logic and philosophy as a whole.

Dummett's characterisation of analytic philosophy fits the idea of a "linguistic turn" that helped to form the self-image of some parts of postwar philosophy (see Rorty 1967). What Dummett's proposal means in detail will, of course, depend on what a philosophical account of thought is supposed to be. But even taking the idea of an "account of thought" very broadly, it is hard to see how the proposal can account for much of what counted as analytic philosophy in the twentieth century.

It is impossible to see, for example, how Dummett's characterisation can even apply to the beginnings of analytic philosophy, in particular to the ideas of Russell and Moore. Russell and Moore's rejection of idealism was, in its initial revolutionary moment at least, attempting neither a philosophical account of thought nor an account of language. Their interest was in truth, and in the idea that a proposition could be absolutely true, not true to some degree as the idealists had thought. Because of this, they needed an account of what kinds of things were true—the proposition—and what it was to take something to be absolutely true—the act of judgement. But propositions are not pieces of language, and judgement is not understood in linguistic terms. Later on, it is true, Russell came to see the importance of the analysis of language—but only as a way of getting straight to the heart of the nature of judgement and the proposition.[3]

Perhaps more obviously, it is hard to know how one might apply Dummett's description to those areas of philosophy that have even less to do with giving an account of thought: ethics, political philosophy, applied philosophy, and central areas of metaphysics. An account of language has very little to say here.

My aim here is not to downplay the importance of logic or the philosophy of language. Some of analytic philosophy's greatest achievements, as I have said, are in these areas. And it is clearly a significant fact that these achievements cluster around a collection of formal techniques that are part of the normal skill set of academic philosophers. My claim is only that concentrating on these achievements as somehow of the essence of analytic philosophy can give no overall satisfying account of this tradition. It ignores so much work that is recognisably analytic—in ethics, metaphysics, political philosophy, epistemology—but that has little to do with philosophy of language and even less to do with logic.

What explains the centrality of logic in the analytic tradition is rather that many of the canonical figures in the tradition—including Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Quine, Putnam, and Kripke—themselves made significant contributions either to mathematical logic itself or to the philosophy of logic. These contributions have advanced the debate in these areas, in the sense that no one can do serious work in these areas without taking account of them. And partly because of these achievements, logic and its philosophy have found their way into the core of the syllabus in the philosophy departments of universities: "On Denoting," the *Tractatus*, "On What There Is," and *Naming and Necessity* are among the canonical texts of analytic philosophy. Understanding these texts properly requires knowledge of elementary logic: that logic is central to analytic philosophy in this sense is not to be questioned. My point is only that this centrality presupposes no substantial conception of philosophy itself, or of the relationship between philosophy and logic.

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[3] My brief account of these issues follows Hylton 1990. For an illuminating review of Dummett's views, see Hylton 1995.

Science

My topic now is science, and the relationship between analytic philosophy and science, especially the philosophy of science. Once again, I must emphasise that I am not trying to minimise the importance of scientific knowledge or the philosophy of science. What I am interested in is whether analytic philosophy in particular has some special relationship with science, a relationship that helps define its nature.

We do not find much of an interest in science in the early pioneers of analytic philosophy. Russell and Moore's interest in sense-data was not inspired by philosophical reflection on the discoveries of the psychologists about the mechanisms of perception. Their arguments were purely philosophical and *a priori*, and it is hard to square their belief in sense-data with what science discovered about perception and the physical world. (Russell's famous essay "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics" cannot be regarded as a very successful attempt to do this.)

But analytic philosophy also has a strong naturalistic strain, and in this the link with science becomes more explicit. Naturalism is not unique to analytic philosophy, of course. If naturalism is the view that philosophy must be prepared to learn as much from scientific investigation as it learns from its own techniques, then Descartes was a naturalist, as were the Cartesians who followed him (for example, the materialist La Mettrie). It is also worth noting that naturalism was a powerful force in German thought in the nineteenth century. These facts are well known, but it is worth noting them here just to remind ourselves that naturalism is not an invention of the mid-twentieth century.

Alongside its naturalism, analytic philosophy has tended to be empiricist. And it was, of course, with logical empiricism (or logical positivism) in the 1920s and 1930s that science started to play its central ideological role in drawing the limits of what philosophy can and cannot do. I will not give a description of logical positivism here (those interested in it should consult the excellent survey in Uebel 2006). Logical positivism is dead, and scarcely any central figure in contemporary analytic philosophy defends any of its extreme doctrines. So, given that almost no one is a logical positivist anymore, is there an equally specific conception of science and its relationship to philosophy to which analytic philosophy can appeal?

Because a central concern of philosophy is to discover the general features of reality, it is natural that contemporary philosophers have shown an interest in science, and in integrating scientific discovery into their accounts (whether in ethics or metaphysics or other areas). Analytic philosophy has tended not to be so self-reflexive and "critical" in its outlook, and has been dominated by realistic assumptions about truth and reality. It should not be controversial, I think, that these are among the broad reasons that analytic philosophers have seen science as having a special bearing on their ideas.

It is one thing to say that science has a bearing, of course, and another to say that science is the only way in which we can investigate truth and reality, or that there is nothing for philosophy to do apart from philosophise about science—the attitude embodied in Quine's famous remark that "philosophy of science is philosophy enough" (1977, 149). The reason the discoveries of science are relevant to analytic philosophy is because many central areas of analytic philosophy take themselves to be presenting general, theoretical accounts of reality, and so obviously it is important to consider, absorb, or learn from other general, theoretical accounts of reality. The only reason for ignoring science would be if the reality investigated by science was of a kind different from the reality investigated by philosophy. And this is something that is typically rejected by analytic philosophers.

The idea that philosophy aims at a general account of reality is related to the idea that truth is univocal, that there are not different types of truth for different subject matters. Even those analytic philosophers (e.g., Wright [1992]) who have departed somewhat from the realist norms of the twentieth-century tradition have tended to identify a central notion of truth, perhaps characterised on minimalist lines. This is something that is rejected by Husserl, for example:

> The trader in the market has his market-truth. In the relationship in which it stands, is his truth not a good one, and the best that a trader can use? Is it a pseudo-truth, merely because the scientist, involved in a different relativity and judging with other aims and ideas, looks for other truths—with which a great many things can be done, but not the one thing that has to be done in the market? It is high time people got over being dazzled, particularly in philosophy and logic, by the idea and regulative ideas and methods of the "exact" sciences—as though the In-itself of such sciences were actually the absolute norm for the being of objects and for truth. (Husserl 1969, 245)

The idea that truth is univocal need not, however, appeal to the idea that science provides the "absolute norm" for truth, as Husserl claims. It would be more normal to appeal to some kind of minimalist or deflationary conception of truth in the style of Horwich (1998). The nature of truth, on such a conception, is given by platitudes of the form "The proposition that *p* is true iff *p*." This does not privilege scientific truths over other truths; indeed, scientific, commonsense, and ethical propositions can all be substituted for the schematic *p*.

The doctrine Husserl rejects is a distinct view—that science is the only *epistemic* norm, that it provides the only way of acquiring knowledge. Although there are significant analytic philosophers who have held this view, there are many equally significant representatives who either do not hold it or explicitly reject it. (A few twentieth-century examples: Davidson, Dummett, Kripke, McDowell, Mellor, Strawson.) The idea that such "scientism" is essential to analytic philosophy is not defensible.

The close relationship between some parts of analytic philosophy and science comes not from the acceptance of science as providing the only epistemic norms but rather from the "realistic" ambition of analytic philosophy to provide a general account of the world and our place in it ("things, in the broadest sense of that term"). But although philosophy and science pursue such accounts, there are some significant differences in the way they do. One striking such difference is the way in which disagreement about fundamental questions is regarded. This has been well described by Peter Hylton:

> What should not be controversial is that philosophy is not progressive in the way that the natural sciences often are. One basis for this claim is the undeniable fact that philosophers disagree with one other, not occasionally, or when one party is incompetent, or when the discipline is at crisis point, but routinely. These disagreements, moreover, are not merely about the truth of a given question but also about such things as how the question is to be stated, what would count as a satisfactory answer, which questions are basic and which may comfortably be left unanswered and so on. This disagreement . . . exists because we continue to tolerate such divergent views in graduate students whom we train, and the colleagues whom we hire. This tolerance is presumably not an adventitious fact, but stems from some recognition that a reasonable and well-trained philosopher may disagree with us over fundamental philosophical questions (whereas a reasonable and well-trained scientist may not disagree with his or her colleagues over the existence of crystalline spheres). (Hylton 1990, 12)

The role of such fundamental disagreement in formulating philosophical debates is, I hope, an obvious feature of the philosophical scene. It is also absent from science, except at its most wild frontiers (the interpretation of quantum theory, the study of consciousness, and so on). What explains it?

If we think of a philosophical tradition primarily as a historically constructed collection of texts that set the menu of questions and of the canonical texts to be read, we can begin to make sense of this. In analytic philosophy, students are typically introduced to philosophical questions by considering very unusual views of reality and being asked what is wrong with them: Berkeley's idealism, fatalism, Cartesian dualism, amoralism, and so on. Students are encouraged to engage with these texts by criticising them and thinking up their own alternative pictures of reality. In a standard philosophical education these days, there is no requirement that you get students to read only texts that you think are true—it's easy to imagine what a peculiar and dull philosophical syllabus would result.

So even though a lot of the views considered are impossible to believe, they are introduced partly to encourage students to think precisely about the fundamental notions and assumptions that underlie these views. To the best of my knowledge, there is nothing like this in a scientific education or scientific investigation.

It has always been one of the central tasks of philosophy to critically examine fundamental assumptions; but it is a consequence of this that there cannot be widespread agreement in philosophy. It is a further consequence of this disagreement that philosophy differs in quite a fundamental way from science. I do not regard this as a bad thing.

History

As I have just noted, a distinctive difference between science and philosophy is that scientists do not typically question the fundamental assumptions of their discipline. Another difference is that philosophers generally conceive of the history of their subject to be a part of the subject, whereas scientists do not. This reveals itself not just in the standard university syllabus in philosophy, which invariably includes the history of philosophy, but also in the fact that philosophers often pursue the investigation of their subject by comparing their views with those of philosophers in the distant past, thinkers whose views often cannot have any contemporary credibility or plausibility.

Why do philosophers do this? It may be hard to give a general answer to the question. Sometimes it is said that we should study the history of philosophy in order to avoid the errors of thinkers of the past. Others say that we read the greatest thinkers of the past in order to learn, not from their errors, but from their insights. Still others are sceptical of any substantive progress in philosophy and think that reflection on history is all that we can achieve. (Burton Dreben's "Garbage is garbage, but the history of garbage is scholarship" is possibly the most famous and most concise expression of that view.) And of course, there are those who kick against the weight of the facts and tradition, and insist that the history of philosophy is no more part of philosophy than the history of science is part of science. Unfortunately, the syllabuses of most analytic philosophy degrees seem to disagree with them.

The view of philosophy suggested here—that traditions in philosophy are characterised by collections of texts held together by common readings of the canonical figures and a concern with the same questions—helps to show why history is philosophically relevant, even to analytic philosophy.

Two questions should be distinguished. First, why is it that philosophers take the history of philosophy to be relevant to the practice of philosophy? Second, how should the history of philosophy be pursued, given that it is thus relevant? One answer to the first question, for example, is that history is relevant because the great philosophers of the past were precisely that, *great*. So they are our best sources of insight into how our questions can be answered.

As C. D. Broad once put it, “It appears to me that the best preparation for original work on any philosophic problem is to study the solutions which have been proposed for it by men of genius whose views differ from each other as much as possible. The clash of their opinions may strike a light which will enable us to avoid the mistakes into which they have fallen; and by noticing the strong and weak points of each theory we may discover the direction in which further progress can be made” (Broad 1930, 1–2). There is a lot to be said for Broad’s view. But applied across the board in the history of philosophy, it cannot really account for why we read philosophers whose views are so remote from anything we could possibly believe—like Plato, Spinoza, Plotinus, Schopenhauer, and Berkeley (everyone will have their favourite examples; these are some of mine).

Some will respond to this by arguing that Broad’s view is hopelessly naïve from an historical point of view. They say that we should not treat the philosophers of the past as if they were contemporary academic colleagues—similarity in vocabulary might hide very different conceptual schemes and different fundamental assumptions (see Skinner et al. 1984). The influential works of Jonathan Bennett (e.g., 2003) are often taken as the target of such attacks by historians. To understand a thinker’s ideas it is important to place them in their historical contexts, and it will often be the case that it is their differences from our concerns, rather than their similarities to them, which then emerges. Note, however, that this is an answer to our second question above, not to the first one. Philosophers are interested in *why* they should read the philosophers of the past; they are less interested in *how* they should read them.

It should not be denied that if we want to understand thinkers of the past, we must attempt to see what is central to *their* concerns, and what is peripheral; and we should not assume that their concerns were ours, or attempt to identify our problems hidden in their texts (remember Time, Love, and the Circle). Nonetheless, there is also such a thing as a purely historical understanding of a philosopher, and such an understanding can often leave the text with little of interest to the contemporary philosopher. The non-historicist approach has its flaws, to be sure; but the corresponding flaw is an over-historicisation that can leave the philosopher without any reason to read the texts in that way. Ironically, the extreme historicisation of some of those who follow Skinner can end up in the same place as the view that the history of philosophy is irrelevant to *philosophy*: once one has contextualised the texts to such an extent, one gives no reason why it is relevant to today’s philosophy (except perhaps as an illustration of the impossibility of certain kinds of historical understanding).

From the point of view of a philosopher, extreme historicism and extreme non-historicism in philosophy are extremes that we should reject. If our concern is with getting the philosophy right, whatever that precisely amounts to, then we are not *simply* interested in how people thought in the past. Historicism might be the way to do the history of philosophy (indeed, stated as vaguely as I have here, it is hard to disagree with that), but as philosophers we need more. We need some friction between our ideas and the ideas of the thinkers of the past, of the kind Broad describes and Bennett develops so well in his work.

There are many reasons for this, some of which were mentioned above. But the one I want to focus on is what we might call the "regulative" role of historical thinking. I think it is undeniable that analytic philosophy has often made progress when thinkers agree on certain basic assumptions and work out the consequences of them. But the danger that arises when this model becomes too dominant is that assumptions become treated as established facts, and then it is simply impossible for philosophers working within this framework even to acknowledge that there might be other (equally intelligible and sensible) ways of looking at these problems. I am not saying that all these other ways are of equal ultimate value, only that it is often not obvious that our present assumptions are the best assumptions. One sign of this is that work produced under these assumptions can seem plodding, pedantic, trivial, and detached from what once seemed to be genuine philosophical concerns. This is the risk of scholasticism (in the non-historical sense!) that particularly afflicts a successful intellectual inquiry and an institutional orthodoxy like analytic philosophy.

Another way of putting the point is to say that philosophy can become a bit like "normal science" in Kuhn's sense. I think everyone familiar with contemporary philosophy will recognise examples of this kind of thing. We may disagree about the actual examples—one philosopher's vibrant research area with many "results" being achieved may be another philosopher's tedious normal science. But it is enough for the purposes of this essay that we recognise that there is such a phenomenon.

One reason why philosophers should be aware of their own history, then, is that this awareness enables them to achieve a certain distance from their assumptions, to recognise them *as* assumptions, to make themselves aware that there are genuinely different ways of looking at the questions. These different ways might be completely unacceptable to them, yet they may not be able to argue against them without, as we say, begging the question. They may then realise that their starting points are deeply problematic when viewed from other perspectives. The idea is not that this will undermine their confidence in these starting points, but that it will help them see these starting points more clearly for what they are. As Bernard Williams once put it: "Historical understanding . . . can help with the business, which is quite certainly a philosophical business, of distinguishing between different ways in which various of our ideas and procedures can seem to be such that we cannot get beyond them, that there is no conceivable alternative" (Williams 2000, 496). This is a good statement of what I am calling the "regulative" role that an awareness of history can play in our philosophical investigations. The regulative role does not derive from the fact that we can learn from the philosophers of the past because they were right; or because they were wrong. It is rather something that helps us gain a perspective on our own attempts to answer questions; a perspective that, because it involves questioning the very foundations of the debates in which we are involved, is as philosophical as the attempt to answer the question itself.

Although there is much work in the analytic tradition on the history of philosophy, it remains true that the history of philosophy is a specialist area of philosophy: an "area of specialisation" to put on your CV, rather than something that might permeate your whole conception of the subject. I believe that a wider awareness of the history of the discipline, of the kind I have indicated, within mainstream analytic philosophy might lead to a richer philosophical culture that is more sensitive of the need to avoid the pitfalls of normal science and scholasticism. This is a contingent, historical speculation on my part, rather than a manifesto for change. I therefore propose no new "methodology" except to defend the importance of a genuine historical awareness in dealing with philosophical questions.

One of the great strengths of analytic philosophy, it seems to me, has been its creativity. And in a sense, a lack of serious historical scholarship has been one of the things that has made this creativity possible. Analytic philosophers have conceived of themselves as free from the weight of previous thinkers, free from the mentality that inhibits creative thought in some philosophical cultures (those cultures with "giants standing on their shoulders," as one wit put it). But if deliberate ignorance of the history of philosophy has been one of the things that has resulted in analytic philosophy's strengths, it is important to recognise that this source of strength might also be a major source of weakness.

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