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What Is Philosophy?

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I. Breadth and Depth: Ancient and Modern Examples

Philosophy has been defined by Richard McKeon as the activity of "pushing any question to an extreme." This definition indicates the *breadth* of philosophy, because it is concerned with *any* question, and the *depth* of philosophy, because it pushes question to an *extreme*. Knowledge of what is broadest and deepest has been called "wisdom". Socrates' distinction between human and divine wisdom made it love of wisdom, *philosophia*. Almost any university catalogue lists courses in the philosophy *of* just about every subject matter as well as courses that are *about* every or nearly every subject matter: since they all have subjects, seek knowledge, such as metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and the philosophy of language. But the list of arts and sciences and their organization are not hard, unchanging facts. Since any question leads to philosophy, every subject can be the source of first philosophy, the architectonic art by which other arts are defined. The history of philosophy is a history inspired by new developments in arts and sciences from mathematics to rhetoric that give rise to new philosophical reflection and new answers to fundamental questions. It is a process of renewal and reorganization of the arts and sciences. My samples of breadth and depth will be familiar to many.

Plato's dialogues are often about virtues, but even failure to define them leads to questions of knowledge, as in the *Meno*, where inspiration that achieves true opinions about virtue is related to knowledge of virtue as shadows to reality. His dialectic assimilates opposites and connects diverse subjects. An abrasive dialogue about rhetoric leads to the conclusion that true rhetoric is dialectic; a dialogue on love reveals that all love aims at wisdom; poetry (what we call "literature") achieves the goal of depicting the noble acts of noble persons when it becomes dialectic; a dialogue on physics shows that the motions of the universe follow eternal forms apprehended by philosophy. But even the physical universe is said to be a "thinking animal" and found to have the same virtues as the ideal city. If reflection on the good is ethics, since "the true, the good, and the beautiful are one" all arts and sciences are ethics. How is *depth* achieved, then, in Plato's conclusive dialogues whose *breadth* is all things?

In the *Republic*, Socrates searches for justice by discovering how an ideal city would come into existence. At a crucial stage of its generation, the city needs to know what material goods to produce and, as such, the difference between friend and enemy, i. e. between what must be produced and what must be defended against. Justice is defined, not as a particular function of the ideal city, but (like health for the body) by each function doing its job well. Those functions include *production*, *defense* and the knowledge of what to produce and what resist. That knowledge of what is good guides the city by educating its citizens. As "knowledge of the good", it is wisdom. But this conclusion is a scandal, since philosophers are widely regarded as peculiar and useless at best. To defend his city, Socrates must show philosophy's knowledge is useful. True opinion chooses the good, but cannot be depended upon to remain true in a new situation. A mind with knowledge is to one with true opinion like a person awake is to one dreaming.

But even knowledge is not enough, for knowledge has reasons and reasons have further, deeper reasons and all knowledge of goods depends on knowing the Good. The ideal city was discovered by a process of generation beginning with the goods human beings need in order to survive, including help from others in order to produce and distribute material goods needed to live. Additional goods were discovered that are necessary to insure survival but also make for a good life. Completeness, the ideal, was defined by the city having all the goods for a good human life. From the beginning, the search depended on the idea of good, an idea that goes unexamined until Socrates asks how the philosopher can know that the virtues are good if he does not know what good is. This is pushing the question to an extreme.

However, Socrates denies that *he* knows the Good and implies that it is beyond *human* capacity to know it. I. e., he announces the need for *divine* wisdom. Whereas his search for the ideal city began with human need, the Good itself is so complete that it is the last object of inquiry and for the same reason the first cause of the existence and intelligibility and thus of the goodness of all things. It cannot be grasped because it is the cause of intelligibility, so no idea can explain it; and at the same time every idea is its effect, so that anything a mind thinks is an intimation of the Good and Socrates can talk about it by analogy with the sun. This is an idea of God.

In contrast with Plato, **Aristotle** distinguishes sciences with respect to their subject matters and methods of inquiry, but he also distinguishes them with respect to their aims, arguing that for ethics and politics it is not enough to know what it is good; the aim is to be and to have the good, which requires action. In a philosophy of plural sciences, *depth* requires going beyond them, since they cannot account for their own principles, in a science of sciences aimed at giving an account of what it is in the nature of things that makes knowledge possible. Aristotle called this science "first philosophy"; it was later named "metaphysics". Ultimately, the discussion there, as in the deepest reaches of Plato's dialogues, is once more God, but it is not an ethical discussion. Metaphysics is one of three theoretical sciences, along with physics and mathematics, while ethics and politics are practical sciences aimed at action.

In this way, the relation of depth of understanding to virtue in Aristotle diverges from Plato's. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* achieves depth by going beyond the discussion of the moral virtues, which are habits, to consider the understanding of virtue, which he called φρονησις and the Romans translated *prudentia*. Prudence is the knowledge of what is good in life and how to get it and, as such, is the highest form of practical knowledge. But the idea of virtues that are additions to human nature without in any way violating the laws of nature, depends on a conception of being, of the nature of things, as rational but not identical with reason. Only on such an assumption can reason make things be of practical significance that neither violate nor are dependent upon the laws of nature. Establishing the nature of being is the task of metaphysics and the distinctive intellectual virtue required for that task is wisdom. It follows that a person

who has wisdom has completed prudence in a way analogous to what prudence does for moral virtue. Such a person would have greater understanding of the good in human life because of greater understanding of what it is to be known and to be true. In this way, the greatest *depth* coincides with the greatest *breadth* because the cause of being and for being knowable is the same for all.

Aristotle described his teacher Plato's philosophy as "making all things thoughts". To another admired predecessor, the atomist, **Democritus**, he applied the opposite criticism, that he "made all thoughts things". Democritus sought to explain all things in terms of indivisible ($\alpha\tau\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$ means "cannot be cut"), invisible, tiny particles that are plural in number, each with extension, figure, density (atoms are "the full", $\pi\lambda\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$), motion, and the emptiness (space is "the empty", $\kappa\eta\nu\omicron\nu$) necessary for there to be motion. This reduces all the sciences to physics, knowledge of necessary relations among the atoms. There is no need for metaphysics since the atoms and their motions explain all things and nothing explains them. What Aristotle called practical and productive sciences are about human feelings and preferences and can achieve only probable beliefs because they are the effects of the impact of atoms on the human body. Since these affects are the effects of the impacts of atoms on the atoms of the human nervous system, knowledge about them depends on physics.

On the other hand, **The Sophists** were regarded as importantly wrong by Plato, but mostly only as fallacious reasoners by Aristotle. They reduced things and thoughts to words, elevating rhetoric and poetic, the arts of words, to the rank of first philosophy, by making the true, beautiful, and good whatever someone says they are, if he can make others agree. This is what Protagoras meant when he said that "Man is the measure of all things" and, in this sense, their maker. Gorgias' book, *On Non-Being or Nature*, defends the extreme skepticism of this philosophy in a series of abstruse arguments in support of three related propositions: that nothing is; if anything exists, we cannot know it; if we can know it, we cannot communicate our knowledge. The *depth* of philosophy here is in the denial of knowledge of the first causes of existence, knowledge, and truth and in that denial showing the *breadth* of a very practical philosophy aimed at using words to persuade that things, such as particles or fields exist or that Helen, though she ran away with Paris, was not disloyal to Menelaus. In the new, democratic city-states, the Sophists were sought-after, well-paid teachers of people who sought political influence through speeches made in the assembly.

Philosophical innovations arise out of changing circumstances, including innovations in arts and sciences, borrowing intellectual devices from other disciplines in the effort to offer solutions to problems that stymie them or to help extend the influence of their successes to other fields of inquiry and endeavor. The ancient philosophers were moved to their reflections by questions arising from the development of mathematics and science as well as the growth of democracy. Science and politics were also crucial influences in the development of modern philosophy. But circumstances only prompt thought, are the occasions not the cause of understanding. Extension of the art of

mechanics to conceptions of the operations of nature had already begun when 17th century thinkers found new ways to extend these practices in their reading of *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things)* by the first century BCE Roman atomist, Lucretius. They developed a method, combining atomism with Euclid in what they called "the geometric method", of combining simple, clear and distinct, ideas, by simple steps, into more complex ones for the explanation of complex things and events in nature. This method for both discovery and proof enabled modern science to replace Aristotelian essences and final causes with mechanical causes, thereby reducing nature to matter and motion and depriving it of inherent ethical meaning and purpose.

By the same method, man in the state of nature became an atom in motion. By thinking of the impact of them of the motions of other men, they could be supposed to have discovered the means by which to achieve peace by establishing law and government, orderly systems in nature, like the solar system, replacing chaotic conflict. Different versions of the method were developed in both the philosophy of nature and political philosophy. With nature conceived as monads by Leibniz, extended substance by Descartes, particles by Galileo and Newton, solid bodies by Locke, etc., variations on the idea of government arising out of the state of nature resulted.

So **modern philosophy** produced new forms of depth as it turned the philosophy of nature into natural science. If deeper understanding makes virtue better, so deeper understanding makes belief better in the sense of increasing understanding. Since ancient times, philosophers have been considered peculiar, pondering puzzles with no application, such as the attempts to prove the existence of the world. Nobody in his right mind doubts that the world exists, so whatever reasons there are for doubt are not felt to be useful. Similarly, Zeno's paradoxes, which were meant to show that motion is impossible because it involves infinitely divisible magnitudes, have been solved repeatedly by thinkers from Plato and Aristotle to Galileo, Bertrand Russell and Gilbert Ryle, who have shown that the paradoxes do not prove that motion is impossible. But why do they bother? They bother in order to show *what* motion is, not merely *that* it is—and they continue because there has been no universal and permanent agreement about motion. Similarly, when G. E. Moore *proved* to a lecturer that the world exists, by slapping his face, he was asserting that we *know* that the world exists from the practical standpoint of having to deal with it rather than by means of reasoning, following in Locke's skeptical tradition, based on the idea that the human intellect is fit for understanding what we need in order to live and what we need to do for eternal salvation. Even Moore's slap in the face was based on philosophical principles, albeit skeptical ones that limit knowledge to control of things rather, as in the Sophistic tradition discussed above.

If so, then **Descartes**, who thought the human mind capable of knowledge of the nature of things, sought to prove the existence of the world in order to acquire knowledge of nature. Proof of his own existence provided an instance of certainty by means of clarity and distinctness that enabled him to prove the existence of God as the guarantor of

truth. His proof of the existence of the world, in the last of the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, shows that our mathematical knowledge is true of things that actually exist. That Descartes' physics based on these principles was rejected in favor of Newton's, does not show that his metaphysics, was useless. Indeed his idea of gravity as a vortex of matter, with empty space, is in some ways more like contemporary physics than was Newton's idea of gravity as attraction at a distance. Philosophy is reflection on problems of life and science, like a craftsman thinking about his tools: some redesigned tools turn out to be useful later, sometimes even for unanticipated problems in other subject matters.

The circumstances that gave rise to the scientific revolution in the 16th and 17th centuries include both the intellectual and political upheaval that stimulated philosophy in antiquity. The rejection of the Aristotelianism of the Church and the schoolmen and the effort to develop a new, mechanical philosophy, inspired in part by the ancient atomists, occurred while political upheaval, religious conflict, and discovery of the new world raised fundamental questions about nature and humanity.

The discussion that follows is about a sequence of revolutions in philosophy that turn its attention to the nature of things and then from that to the ways in which the mind comes to know and then from that what it is that we do and say when we think about things. These alternatives, making either things, thoughts, or words and deeds prior, have been taken up repeatedly in philosophy in antiquity and the medieval period, but the more recent ones are more familiar and thus better illustrations of variations on the them of breadth and depth.

II. Revolutions in Philosophy

A. Metaphysical Revolution

Early modern philosophy used mathematics and mechanics to discuss the causes of things, returning to the ancient distinction between φύσις and νόμος, nature and custom, to find the causes of the existence and knowledge of the mind, the world, and God. These were topics, places of discussion, not assumptions. Skeptical philosophers argued that self, mind, is incapable of proving that God or the world exists, or, like **Locke**, they devised proofs of existence that could determine *only* existence and not the nature of things, e. g. whether mind is distinct from matter. Skeptical principles provided a foundation for science, albeit limited in its ambitions. Among those who thought that human intellect could do more, **Descartes** distinguished *extended* from *thinking* substances and both as finite from infinite substance. **Spinoza** proved that there is only one substance, one being that exists in and through itself, but it can be thought in infinitely different ways, e. g., as thought and as extension, and all extended things and all thoughts are modes that exist in and through that one substance. **Leibniz** conceived of the indivisible parts as monads, ideas of the whole universe from each of the points within it, each operating according to its own idea, so that our experience of things affecting each other by mechanical causes is apparent, not real. These metaphysicians argued that knowledge of God proves the existence of the world and

provides a foundation for physics. Some, however, were skeptics, who made *self* first and denied knowledge of the world or of God. Others were materialists, who, though denying knowledge of God, found principles in the particles from which all of nature is formed.

The idea of sovereignty corresponds in human affairs to the idea of a first cause of the nature and existence of things. In antiquity, the question was whether man was the measure, determined the law, or whether it depended on reason and knowledge of God. In modern thought, $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ and $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$ were united in the idea of natural law. Government was conceived in terms of the law of nature by which each being seeks to preserve its own nature by forming a more complex nature governed by natural law. Spinoza argued that all virtue derives from self-preservation, since to preserve a mind means for it to know. Other forms of association, from the family as the natural economic association to religion and education were all subordinated to the sovereignty of the state. In revolutions that follow, we shall see the state subordinated to economic and social and then to cultural considerations. **If government as well as first philosophy is reduced to the study of nature, is it any wonder that the natural scientists consider their subject the first among the sciences, first philosophy?**

B. Epistemological Revolution

It was partly awareness of the diversity of profound philosophies, the apparent inability of all to concur in one view, that led to the idea that philosophy ought to examine its instrument, the faculties of the human mind, in order to determine what they can and cannot do, before making any attempt to determine the nature of things. This need was given dramatic force in the 18th century by the arguments of **David Hume**, who described himself as a "moderate skeptic". He denied the possibility of proving, not only the existence of God, but that of the mind of the thinker concocting the proofs and that of the world that seems to present itself to his mind. Only mathematics and reasoning that shared the feature of having an idea contained in another idea could reach conclusions with certainty. That means that no reasoning based on experience can be certain. But this skepticism is moderate because between certainty and doubt there is probability. Although no empirical beliefs are certain, some have more evidence supporting them than others.

The new, revolutionary approach to philosophy was established by the response of **Immanuel Kant**, who credited Hume with awakening him from his dogmatic slumber. As Hume placed probability between certainty and doubt, Kant distinguished critique of the faculties of the mind from skepticism and from dogmatism, which is thinking not preceded by critique. He called this a "second Copernican revolution" because Copernicus arrived at a new system of the world by taking into account the motions of the observer. As physical motions contribute to observed motions, ways of thinking (the forms of reception of information and of thought that are inherent in the mind) contribute to what is learned from experience. Like a skeptic, Kant argued that our senses give us only the appearances of things, not their nature; that our intellect is also

incapable of knowing the nature of things. What thinking makes intelligible is the appearances of things, not things in themselves, but of appearances we do have knowledge since it is the mind that sets the standard for intelligibility.

The human mind, then, is incapable of knowing, the triad of things of concern in metaphysics, self, God, and world. Hume had reached this conclusion in his *Treatise of Human Nature*. But other faculties of mind support belief in them. For Hume belief is a feeling: belief in cause and effect is the feeling of connection between them. For Kant, beliefs in the self as *noumenal*, a spiritual being not subject to the mechanistic laws of nature, and in God as the guarantor of the goodness and justness of the world, are presuppositions made necessary by the recognition of our duty as a categorical imperative. For the one philosopher it is the faculty of sentience, feeling, for the other it is the will that provide the principle that constitutes epistemological depth.

As the effort to base the state on a first cause, the cause of sovereignty, was part of the metaphysical task to know the causes of things, it too is abandoned in the epistemological revolution. The epistemological revolution includes consideration of the human faculties that operate in forming relations with others. In this way, the **precepts** that form human associations are like the **concepts** that are applied to experience of the world.

Kant analyzed the precept of duty as a categorical imperative into three formulations. The first has to do with the precept itself, that it be universal so that it has the form of a law. The second tells us that humanity must always be the matter or interest of the will. (The idea of not treating others as mere means has long since been ubiquitous in our culture.) The third shows that the purpose achieved by following this precept is a "kingdom" or association of human beings in which all rule. This precept of duty identifies will with practical reason and autonomy.

Mill grabbed the stick by the other end, making utility the moral criterion. Utility has to do with the consequences of action rather than the intention. Mill concluded that the utility of freedom is such that individuals ought to be free to do as they wish so long as their actions are not harmful to others who have not willingly entered into agreement with them.

When the precept that determines associations with others is the concern of philosophy, rather than the origin and nature of government, government has one of the several functions of human association and usually not the most important one. Mill thought that government in England was no longer a great threat to freedom of speech, though it might come to use the new real threat. That threat, the tyranny of majority opinion, is exercised in all social relations. Karl Marx, who developed a theory of history in terms of the alienation of human faculties of the mind, famously conceived of economics as the form of association for which all the others, including government, are mere epiphenomena.

Kant made reason first, although its highest form was practical reason, the will, not pure reason. Philosophers of the 19th century who made will first, such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, are among the most widely read and influential. All sciences are subordinate to psychology, in the sense that it is the science of the mind, since philosophy had become examination of human faculties. ***Is it any wonder that the psychologists consider it the most important among the sciences, first philosophy itself?***

C. The Revolution of "Words and Deeds"

The attempts to make epistemology the ruling science ended, toward the end of the 19th century, in a second Copernican revolution in philosophy, the idea that psychologism confuses how the mind works with truth and validity. If we cannot come to agreement about the first causes of things that enable us to know them, and if we cannot agree to the way that human faculties operate in achieving knowledge and making choices, we can turn our attention to concrete experience of things found in what we do and say when we perceive, interpret, inquire and make choices. In epistemology, the starting point is two abstract ideas, mind and world, and the problem is how to make inferences from experience that show us how the one operates in order to know the other and itself. When we start with concrete experience, awareness of what we do when we experience, or how we describe experience, mind and world are merged and made distinct only by distinguishing intention from object of intention (aim from aimed-at), or meaning from reference.

Since every action has a purpose, it has an idea about something that is and the idea gives that thing a certain *whatness* or meaning. Finding meaning in experience is called interpretation, or "hermeneutics", from the Greek term which goes back in philosophy at least to Aristotle's *Περί Ερμηνείας*. The *whatness* of experience can be determined in more than one way because it is a merging of mind, object, and awareness, so each can be thought to determine the *whatness* of the others. Thus the *whatness* of things can be found in experience, so that they are what they seem to be, or in the only partly revealed nature of the object, so the real nature of things differs from what it seems to be and underlies what we experience, or they may be found in the ideas, the intelligible acts that give experience structure and meaning. Different interpretations are developed by means of continuing experience in which meaning is added by the use of ideas that are also changed and deepened in the same process. Focus on the concrete is not myopic because it has a history, is a continuing way of life, which we call tradition.

In a tradition that is alive, and not merely a memory, ideas and theories make experience active and intelligent. Ideas that grow out of experience and are tested in it have their source in things, which is to say that they are not abstractions standing on their own. The idea tested in an action can be a whole, complex of ideas that form a theory or way of life of a community. Observations of Mercury in relation to the Sun distinguished General Relativity from Classical Mechanics and confirmed it as true.

Ghandi's "experiments with truth" used traditional Hindu beliefs to give meaning to acts of protest and resistance that gave birth to a newly independent Indian nation. **Albert Camus' *The Rebel*** was read by SNCC freedom fighters who gave American meaning to Camus' variation on Descartes, "I rebel, ergo we are." As the art of interpretation grammar is the ruling art of words and rhetoric, as the art of invention and persuasion, is the ruling art of action. This new philosophical starting point took three different forms around the turn of the 20th century in England, Continental Europe, and the United States.

In England, **Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, and Ludwig Wittgenstein** replaced the Hegelian encyclopedia of philosophy and other forms of German Idealism with philosophies of language and logic. Aristotle's logic was the *ὄργανον* or instrument of the sciences. In *Περὶ ἑρμηνείας, De Interpretatione*, he analyzed the proposition into noun and verb, i. e., subject and predicate. In **Bertrand Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World*** (Lowell Lectures in Boston' 1914) his title for Lecture II, "Logic as the Essence of Philosophy," announces the view that logic is the *whole* of philosophy.

Russell argues that science and philosophy have been held back and misled by adherence to the Aristotelian idea of the form of proposition as subject and predicate and of inference as syllogistic. Francis Bacon and Galileo widened the scope of logic to include induction in the 17th century. Hegel widened it so that it was "practically identical with metaphysics", but for Russell this as an example of the "logic of mysticism" practiced by philosophers like Plato, Spinoza, and Hegel, who regard experience as unintelligible and illusory and are interested only in the super-sensible. (This is a fine example of a polemical formulation of one of the kinds of interpretation referred to above.) The first real advance in logic since the Greeks, according to Russell, was made by mathematicians in fulfillment of Leibniz's hope for a mathematical logic that would guide research in every field. This hope was frustrated by Leibniz's reluctance to acknowledge contradictions of Aristotle's traditional doctrine of the syllogism.

Russell thinks that the belief that all propositions are of the subject-predicate form, "that every fact consists in some thing having some quality," has rendered philosophers incapable of giving any account of the world of science and daily life. Asymmetrical relations, such as *father, before, after, greater, above*, etc., cannot be explained in terms of subject and predicate, so philosophers, "unable to admit the reality of relations", drew the conclusion that the world of experience is an illusion. Instead, Russell shows how the world can be accounted for in terms of atomic propositions of relations between sense data that form single facts, molecular propositions of conjunctions between propositions, such as *or, and if, then*, that enable us to make inferences, "so that from the truth or falsehood of the one something follows as to the truth or falsehood of the other. All truths would be known if we knew all the atomic facts, but we would have to know that they were *all*, that our inventory was complete. So he concludes that "general truths cannot be inferred from particular truths alone", must be

self-evident or inferred from self-evident premises. Some knowledge must not depend on the data of sense if there is to be general knowledge and "such general knowledge is to be found in logic". Propositions about inference in pure logic are absolutely general and self-evident. For Russell, meaning is in experience itself, not in underlying atoms, but is found in its organization of simple data into atomic facts and those into molecular facts. Knowledge of universals, such as a universal law of gravity, depends not only on experience, but on logic, which depends on self-evident truths.

This is a view of philosophy that reduces it to empirical science except for the a priori knowledge in logic. By contrast, the phenomenology of **Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers** and **Sartre** is almost entirely a priori. Paying homage to Descartes and Kant, it is not a priori in the metaphysical sense, reasoning from cause to effect, nor in the epistemological sense of what the mind knows prior to any experience of the world. Phenomenology is a priori in its description of what experience is that enables it to be an awareness of something. The Greek word φαίνω means to bring to light, make appear or to come to light, be seen, appear, thus phenomena (in English) are events that appear to us. As an act of bringing something to light, an event is not something in the mind that came from and is about the world; it is both, a coming to light or appearing *in the doing and saying*.

Martin Heidegger's influence persists in American culture despite the well-known ridicule of his writing by some language philosophers and despite his association with the Nazis. Heidegger's starting point avoids the mind/world distinction with the idea of being-in-the world. That means that mind and world come to light in the act, so awareness of them is concrete and particular and is not abstract ideas of two distinct entities. Our first awareness of things is as *equipment*, things we use, so our awareness is a *doing* and not a mere observing. And yet in order to act, to use things, we must find ourselves, so to speak, *thrown* among them, have some possibility of *projecting* ourselves in them, and losing ourselves in them, in by taking those possibilities as given to us by what others say and do. Terms like "thrown", "projecting", and "fallen" are literally about physical events. Here they serve to depict a being that is *in* in the sense of among other things, but *in* also in the sense of being involved with them. The human being is the being for whom his own being is an issue. This means that in its use of other things, including its ways of being with other human beings, it chooses its life.

The freedom suggested by the idea of choice means that actions are determined by the person, but choice is made in consideration of things to be chosen and these considerations can come from things as they are considered to be by others. This idea of *fallenness* suggests the literal idea of a body falling down among things and also the ethical and religious idea of having lost value and distinction. This is how Heidegger depicts a person whose being is inauthentic in that he has given over his power of choice to others. But this very inauthenticity is an *a priori* possibility for a being that is open to being and makes itself be in the way in which it is open to it.

The authentic being of the being open to being has implications not only for that being, for human life, but for being itself. Regional ontologies are about kinds of beings, such as living things. For each such kind of being, the ontology is the *a priori* part of science, the assumptions made about the nature of the things being studied and the means for learning about them. If there are kinds of beings, and regional ontologies, then there is "the Being of beings", the fundamental ontology that is about the meaning of being and is thus true of all beings. But just as inauthenticity is an inherent possibility for *Dasein* (human being, *being-there*), so is oblivion of being.

The history of philosophy for Heidegger is a history of eras in which being is both manifest and obscured and forgotten. The tradition that has variously conceived being as a particular thing, conceived as *idea, energeia, substance, monad*, etc., from Plato to Nietzsche, reduces being to thought and, ultimately, to power, what can be controlled by thought, i. e. technology. His idea of the meaning of being is the opposite of Russell's collection of simple facts. It is integral, material formed by a *logos* that develops in temporally yet is always the same. He expresses these four aspects poetically as earth, heavens, mortals and immortals because art is a work in which matter is formed, not a universal thought or a particular event, as Aristotle points out in his *Poetics*.

The possibility of authentic human being comes from understanding of human being because it is the place in which being appears. All human being arises from an awareness of Being; authentic human being arises out of the experience of Being and not from turning away from it in abstract thought. This is his critique of our technological age as in oblivion of Being. It is a philosophy that distinguishes the meaning of being as such, fundamental ontology, from the sciences, which are about particular kinds of beings that *are* in distinctive ways. It is like Aristotle's distinction between first philosophy and the sciences and quite unlike Russell's naturalism.

In America, the pragmatism of **William James, John Dewey, and C. S. Peirce** echoed Husserl's call to return to the facts. The word *πραγμα* means "that which has been done" (L. *facinus*), but as "facts" it also means "*a thing, matter, affair*" (L. *res*), drawing our attention to the fact that facts are *made*, not given (data), and that philosophy starts with analysis of concrete experience. Like Heidegger, **Dewey** criticizes traditional philosophy as theoretical, i. e. contemplative and aesthetic in the sense of observing for its own sake. He explains this socially in terms of a split between means or facts, produced by workers, and ends or values, traditions contemplated and communicated by a leisure class. The trouble with work devoid of thought is that it lacks the power to control things that comes only with understanding; the trouble with thought devoid of work is that its insularity lacks the power to acquire knowledge that comes from what Francis Bacon called "tutelage to nature".

When people began to explore the world, to go new places and do new things, their new experiences led them to reflect on experience as active and not merely as the reception of information from the world. Tutelage to nature requires active

intervention in nature. Dewey's distinction between the traditional, *spectator* theory of knowledge and the new way of thinking, the *participant* theory of knowledge led to his adaptation of the experimental method of science to what is distinctively human, the problem of the relation of facts to values. As the problem of philosophy, it is a third alternative to Russell's virtual reduction of philosophy to science and Heidegger's inquiry into the Being of being as fundamental ontology. The task of relating facts to values leaves the determination of fact to the science and the adoption of values to human communities. The task of philosophy arises from a deep and broad rift between facts and values, requiring an analysis of them to show how to think of the relation between them so that values can be realized, i. e. made facts.

To be experimental, moral and social thought must include the art of interpretation to understand the facts of science and the values of communities, and the art of invention in order to discover what can be done to change facts so that they come to embody values. Concrete experiences occur in time, so philosophies which describe experience are therefore histories. As they use arts of interpretation and invention to uncover the meanings of experience, they are about what could be and have the generality of literature and art. As they reflect on their methods as philosophy they achieve the universality of what action and facts must be. **Is it any wonder that poets, rhetoricians, linguists, and historians consider their creations and studies the basis for all education and thus the first philosophy of human growth by experience?**

Polemical communication is war-like and rejecting. Rudolf Carnap's dismissal of Heidegger's *What is Metaphysics?* as nonsense is famous. Consider also what Russell said about Hegel in a footnote in the chapter "Logic is the Essence of Philosophy" from *Our Knowledge of the External World*:

"This is an example of how, for want of care at the start, vast and imposing systems of philosophy are built upon stupid stupid and trivial confusions, which, but for the almost incredible fact that they are unintentional, one would be tempted to characterize as puns." [italics added]

The irenic alternative is to practice the hermeneutic art by recognizing the ambiguity of experience and the plausibility of alternative interpretations of it. It is plausible that this would enable philosophers, and all of us, to learn more from each other, as Mill and Whewell testified that they learned from their debate as to whether a logic of discovery is possible. And if this happened, it would mean that they had learned more about the concrete from which their interpretations arose. This is an idea of philosophy as communication.

The idea of responsibility arose in the context of the discussion of self-governing states. In his notes on the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Madison refers to the fact that the president must answer to the citizens who, however indirectly, elected him. The constitution embodies the **civil or political rights** of a citizen. This Convention occurred at the same time that Kant was writing his critiques. There was also a demand, met later in the first amendments to the Constitution, for a "bill of rights" that committed

government to protect rights of minorities and of the individual that are not limited to the relation between government and citizen but extend to other forms of association. To these **social and economic rights**, the philosophies of words and deeds have added discussion of **cultural rights**. Cultural rights have to do with participation in the accomplishments of humanity, the arts and sciences, so they put *education* at the center of the discussion of human rights. Just as there are different philosophies of words and deeds, so there are different cultures. If *participation* in culture means the opportunity to learn what others have said and done as the true, good, and beautiful, it is not full participation, since it does not yet include participating in saying and doing. As with theories of the concrete, cultural rights involve ambiguity and measuring what is true and good in terms of different meanings.

Richard McKeon showed how responsibility expanded the role of communication to include reason, rather than being merely the external manifestation of thought. Persons are responsible for their actions, when they are their free causes, by knowing choice, and this free and knowing causality means that whatever praise or blame attaches to the acts are rightly ascribed to those who have done them. But responsibility means more than that. To be responsible for having done something means that you have decided what to do and that means that you have applied ideas about what is good to do. The fact that someone disagrees does not mean that you were wrong. Even agreement will not persuade you that you are right, if it is, in your judgment, agreement for the wrong reasons. Responsibility is about learning from experience, so it cannot mean making up your mind based simply on what other people say, but it cannot mean making up your mind without considering what they say. You must act according to your own ideas *and* take into account those of others. This is the conundrum that the idea of responsibility is meant to solve.

Responsibility is a way of acting in order to learn. It is like "Writing Across the Curriculum", which is about writing to learn and not merely to make public what has already been learned. This reversal is due to thinking about thinking in terms of what is public, i. e. doing and saying. With the concept of responsibility, one learns by putting ideas into action. The responsible person is one who makes his own judgments, but does so with consideration of what has *actually happened* and what others think about it. Although we cannot get to the facts without ideas, the facts are richer than any of our ideas about them, so ideas contrary to our own may need to be adapted to ours to afford more penetrating insight into the facts. Among the facts that must be considered is the fact that most of what we do and want to do depends in some way on the concurrence and cooperation of others. To make up one's own mind freely includes persuading others. The task of responsibility is to develop individuality and community. Both grow out of common actions, often undertaken for different reasons, that support the development of free individuals.

The history of philosophy is rich in resources for future innovations in thought and must be preserved much as biodiversity must be preserved for future understanding and

benefits for our biological existence. Nor is it enough for philosophy to be preserved only for the esoteric purposes of a few scholars at fabulously endowed institutions. It must be preserved at York College too so that our faculty and students will be scholars in the fullest sense. Responsibility, as the exercise of reciprocal respect, is the advocacy of tradition as well as innovation. Philosophy helps us to see how our traditions can be put to use for future benefit. York College is a college because it is a collection of schools, of arts and sciences and health and business professions. Nowhere is the close connection between thought and action more evident. The contenders among the disciplines for first among equals, for first philosophy, are even more numerous than the ones I have exclaimed in wonder, including those who know that the *applied* sciences, so far from being intellectually inferior to the pure ones, include them and can be their life-blood and cutting edge. Amidst so many contenders for the title "first philosophy", it is a wonder that there is so little talk about philosophy. If Moliere's would-be gentleman learned to his surprise that he had been speaking prose all his life, he needed to learn next that while prose is a common art, it can be a very demanding and exquisite one as well.