

# The Relevance of Philosophy



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By

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## PREFACE

This book represents the culmination of a protracted struggle to achieve some sort of overall philosophical coherence. I began my philosophical education as a Thomist, believing that a critical updating of Thomism had the potential to supply a framework in which philosophy, science, and theology could receive a coherent integration. The urge to integrate waned after spending some years studying physics, theology, and modern philosophy. Then Lonergan's *Insight* was published. The neo-Thomistic position he developed seemed to present the type of integration that I, and many others, desired. A detailed critical analysis of Lonergan's work convinced me that this unification rested on a faulty foundation. The metaphysical system he developed did not supply a depth explanation of reality, with science filling in the details. Nor did any other metaphysical system. There is no philosophical version of a Grand Unified Theory.

During my teaching career at Boston College and California State University East Bay I focused on specialized studies in the philosophy and history of science with a concentration on the development and interpretation of quantum physics. This contributed to a growing realization that philosophy functioning as a collection of specialized sub-disciplines had lost the relevance it formerly had. Is there any way this relevance can be restored? A long retirement provided the opportunity to explore this question in detail and produce the present book.

I am grateful to my wife and fellow philosopher, Barbara, and to the Ockegham Circle Discussion Group for presenting varying interpretations on many of the issues treated here. I also thank William Langan and A.J. MacKinnon for reading and criticizing the first drafts of the material presented here.





# INTRODUCTION

Alfred North Whitehead, who will be treated later, claimed that a proper philosophical career develops in three stages: romance, precision, and generality. The romance commences in a juvenile infatuation with the great ideas philosophers through the ages have advanced to answer fundamental questions about reality, knowledge, truth, appearances, God, man, society, and morality. Precision characterizes the work of the professional philosopher focusing on specialized problems amenable to treatment by accepted philosophical methods and offering promises of publications. Generality should characterize the work of senior philosophers who return to the great ideas and can now treat them with technical precision and with an informed awareness of alternative treatments and their consequences. Whitehead's own career manifested, and was undoubtedly the source for, this three-stage progression.

Contemporary philosophy has largely morphed into a diverse collection of specialized studies. The goal of a transition from precision to generality may linger on, but is increasingly difficult to implement. This combination of specialized studies that only professional philosophers can understand and a systematic neglect of the depth issues traditionally regarded as basic philosophical issues has contributed to the widespread conviction that philosophy is no longer relevant. Scientists and humanists, treating the issues they consider fundamental need not, and generally do not, advert to philosophical treatments of these issues. How did this neglect develop and what can be done to change it?

In medieval times philosophy reigned as queen of the sciences. Subsequently, the sciences, starting with physics, gradually withdrew from the reign of philosophy and became autonomous disciplines. In the Enlightenment era, a new sort of philosophy emerged. It centered on public dialog among 'philosophers', people, often not professional philosophers, who were interested in philosophical issues. Philosophy assumed the status of a constitutional monarch, reigning but not ruling. Immanuel Kant fashioned a new architectonic, relating philosophy to science, ethics, art, and government.

The nineteenth century featured different developments that altered the role of philosophy. Hegel dominated the effort to go beyond Kant and develop philosophy as an idealistic system. Subsequent trends were

generally characterized as post- or anti-Hegelian. Psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics emerged as empirical disciplines, rather than as branches stemming from the tree of philosophy. Even when philosophy abdicated her throne and attempted to serve as an usherette, assigning the new disciplines to their proper seats, her guidance was generally rejected or ignored.

The twentieth century produced some ambitious philosophical syntheses, which will be treated in Chapter 3. The major effort, however, involved a critical rethinking of what philosophy should be. Two trends achieved dominance. Phenomenology, developed primarily in Continental Europe, featured a first-person approach, focusing on analyzing and reconstructing individual subjective experiences. The empirical tradition came to feature two loosely related branches. Analytic philosophy, stemming from Cambridge and Oxford, focused on a third-person analysis of linguistic usage. Philosophy of science, stimulated by and later reacting against Logical Positivism, focused on issues generated by scientific theory and practice.

Many people working in science, literature, business, or politics are confronted by issues traditionally treated by philosophy. Do they find these specialized philosophical traditions relevant? My answer to this question is based on reading, discussions, and many years of participating in the enterprise of philosophy. Some outsiders find contemporary phenomenological philosophy marginally relevant. A generation ago, Foucault and Derrida influenced literary critics. A few theologians draw on the work of Heidegger and Ricoeur. The analytic tradition has had much less general influence. To outsiders, analysis looks like epistemological parlor games played by institutional insiders.

The relation between philosophers of science and practicing scientists is more complex. In the mid-1920s and later the founders of quantum mechanics, Planck, Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Pauli, de Broglie, and Schrödinger, engaged in philosophical debates among themselves and sometimes with philosophers. Today, as will be shown in Chapter 4, physicists concerned with fundamental issues traditionally treated as philosophical problems systematically ignore philosophers of science. In biology there is some cooperation when philosophers and biologists join forces to counter a shared problem, attempts to replace evolutionary theory by pseudo-science. In psychology, there is a shared perplexity. Neurophysiologists cannot agree on an acceptable answer to the hard question: How does the brain produce consciousness? Some interested philosophers argue that this way of formulating the problem reflects

dubious presuppositions. However, they have yet to develop a generally acceptable alternative.

The Enlightenment era witnessed informed discussions on philosophical issues between philosophers and non-philosophers. Today many scientists and others are concerned with fundamental philosophical issues. What is the fundamental stuff of physical reality? What are the limits of human knowledge? What is life? Is human life essentially superior to non-human life? Do we have an obligation to future generations to safeguard the environment? Does evolution have a goal? What is truth? Philosophy should play a distinctive role in attempts to answer such questions. But, what is this role and how should it be acted out?

Traditional philosophy relied on a top-down approach to such questions. A philosophical synthesis could provide a framework in which these diverse questions and elements could be interrelated. The great syntheses of the past, Thomism, Cartesianism, Lockean empiricism, Kantianism, and Hegelianism, are not adequate to the current problematic. In chapter 3 we summarize and evaluate three influential attempts to fashion new syntheses. None are judged to be adequate.

A different approach begins *in medias res* rather than from the top down. The issue of how these diverse questions and the answers they generate can be interrelated with some sort of overall coherence is treated as a problem to be explored. Here philosophers should be able to make a significant contribution. Where scientists and others laboring in the fields of knowledge concentrate on details, philosophers are trained to focus on basic concepts and underlying presuppositions. Shared concepts supply a basis for interrelating different fields. A critical analysis of implicit presuppositions is a tool for treating incoherence. These are some of the things philosophers should be doing to make philosophy relevant.

How should such general guidelines be implemented? Chapters 4 and 5 propose one possible path to progress in making philosophy relevant. Philosophers should acquire a general understanding of science as it actually functions. The idealized reconstructions of scientific theories developed by philosophers can provide tools useful in appraising the standing of functioning theories. However, they are no substitute for understanding the practice of science. Chapter 4 focuses on one conceptual thread, reductionism, that links together physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology. There are others worth exploring.

The social sciences and humanistic disciplines reflect a similar problematic. A philosophical analysis of basic concepts and implicit presuppositions can contribute to fashioning a coherent overall view. They

also introduce a novel feature, the centrality of the human situation. Philosophers traditionally treated this in one of two ways. The first, embodied in the Aristotelian-Scholastic and Natural Law traditions, is based on the assumption that there is an objective human nature, the same for all times and places, that supplies a basis for understanding the human situation and developing ethics. Descartes initiated a switch from this ontological foundation to an epistemological foundation, a switch that was further developed by Kant, Hegel, and Husserl. The transcendental ego, the 'I think', was assumed to set a standard for all persons.

I favor replacing these atemporal views by an evolutionary perspective. Humans are evolved primates. The institutions that structure and control human societies are byproducts of biological and cultural evolution. The bulk of Chapter 5 is concerned with the temporal and social factors that shape the human situation. This approach does not supply the fixed basis for analysis that an invariant human nature or a transcendental ego does. It does supply a pragmatic basis.

Two other aspects of this book deserve comment. First, the intended audience for this book is primarily, but not exclusively, philosophers and philosophy students. It is also aimed at non-philosophers concerned with issues traditionally considered philosophical. Young reformers trying to replace accepted moral standards, physicists discussing fundamental reality, biologists probing the origins of life, psychologists analyzing the conditions of conscious awareness, anthropologists comparing human and non-human societies, and economists speculating on ethical issues often view these issues in a limited perspective. Their analyses frequently manifest a philosophical naiveté. The hope is that this book might raise awareness of shared basic concepts, shape a search for greater coherence, and ameliorate the excesses of amateur philosophizing.

Second, this book, especially the final chapter, is more personal than is customary in philosophy, and more personal than anything I have published in philosophy. There are two reasons for this. The first is that I am writing this as an old man trying to find coherence in philosophical labors stretching over more than fifty years. This book represents my attempt to advance from precision to generality. The second is that this book concludes with discussions of some basic ethical issues and suggestions for solutions. This is not done from some atemporal or outsider's view of the human situation. It is offered by one temporarily and socially situated individual. Personal factors conditioning such judgments should be noted so that their influence can be properly evaluated.

# CHAPTER ONE

## EARLY PHILOSOPHY

### 1.1 The Enlightenment: The Triumph of Reason

One of Wilfrid Sellars's most influential articles begins with the claim: "The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term." (Sellars 1963, p. 1) Without some coherent idea of how things hang together an individual or a society experiences cognitive dissonance that can have disastrous consequences. Plato and Aristotle set the philosophical precedent for interrelating the individual knower, the physical and social order, morality and government. Throughout this book, we will be concerned with a coherent interrelation of five foundational concepts: **the self, the physical order, the social order, morality, government**. Philosophy can no longer impose an overall coherence. However, it should clarify foundational concepts in a way that exposes radical incoherencies and suggest means of overcoming them. Contemporary philosophy does not do this for the **foundational five** concepts. This book will be defending the position that philosophy still has a role in analyzing and articulating the inner coherence of accounts of being and knowing, and of moral and social action, of art and science. To understand the problem, it helps to begin with a simpler time where there was an overall conceptual coherence, at least on a superficial level.

ΦΒΚ stands for Φιλοσοφία Βίου Κυβερνήτησ, Philosophy the Guide of Life. When the society was founded in 1776 by students at the college of William and Mary in Virginia philosophy did serve as a guide for life in a way it never had before or has since. In ancient Greece and Rome philosophy was cultivated by an elite minority. It had a public influence only through a few rulers, like the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who were guided by Stoic principles. Rhetoric, rather than philosophy, was regarded as the integrating discipline. Later Christian, Arabic, and Jewish theologians incorporated aspects of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic philosophy. In all three traditions, however, religion, not philosophy, was the guide to life.

The many sixteenth and seventeenth century wars, in which religion played a role, eventually led to practical compromises and edicts of toleration. The 1713 Treaty of Utrecht marked the end of religious wars and the beginning of a widespread practice of limited tolerance. Though it rarely extended to Jews, Muslims, or atheists, it did allow European Christians to live and work together. Tolerance proved more conducive to peace and prosperity than the zeal of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation eras. A reaction against authoritarian religion, coupled to an increasing awareness of the significance of the burgeoning scientific revolution, led to a reliance on reason, rather than established authority, as the court of last appeal in settling intellectual issues.

*Les Philosophes* were the spokesmen for the age of reason. Though the French term, 'philosoph' included professional philosophers, it had a broader and looser denotation. Participants in the popular salon debates, the emerging journalists, pamphleteers, enlightened members of the clergy, and even a few enlightened kings were considered philosophes. They shared the conviction that philosophical arguments should play a basic role in settling disputed issues and in guiding people to the good life. At the level of enlightened discourse the philosophes could interrelate the foundational five in a more or less coherent way. The widely-shared assumption was that the methods that Newton had used to order the natural world could be extended to order civil society, the economy, morality, and health. This assumption suffered from a double superficiality. Very few of the philosophs could read and understand Newton's *Principia*. The ways in which Newtonian methodology could be extended to other fields had not been developed. Yet, Newton functioned as a symbolic leader in the triumphal advance of reason over superstition and authoritarianism.

To illustrate this, we begin with the pivotal issue of enlightened discussions, the rights of man. In this context, we will retain the sexist terminology. Women's rights were at best a secondary concern. The basic right stressed was freedom: of worship, of speech, of assembly, and of the press. These rights were regarded as attributive, rather than relational as in many modern accounts. One simply has them by virtue of being human. In this context, the way the foundational five interrelated was understood by contrast with the accounts they wished to replace. In medieval philosophy and theology, the understanding of the individual was ontological. He was a special type of being who differed from animals by virtue of possessing an immortal soul and the attributes of understanding and free will. Descartes spearheaded a switch from an ontological to an epistemological perspective. The subject is understood as a knower. In the older perspective, the order of nature is something imposed by God. Humans

begin to understand it by studying the two books God has prepared, the Bible and the book of nature.

Society was also understood in a new fashion. In the old view the chain of being concept carried over from nature to society, an order epitomized in Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*. The application of the chain of being concept to society supported Pope's contention: Whatever is is right. Both civil and ecclesiastical society involved hierarchical systems. A man recognized himself as having a place in society depending on where he fit into the rankings of: peasant, vassal, lord, baron, and king; or parishioner, priest, bishop, archbishop, and pope. A woman's place was subordinate to the male head of the household. The essential structure of society was understood as a realization of a divine plan.

The new understanding of society stemmed from social contract theories developed by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau and from Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* (1748). The underlying assumption of the social contract theories was that in the state of nature all men are equal. However, to escape a life that was ugly, brutish, and short, people entered into a contract, abandoning some rights to secure the protection of a government. The various contract theories differed sharply on the proper distribution of power between kings, aristocracy, and ordinary people. However, they shared the position that structures in society were not part of a divine order, but human institutions that were open to change, and that the basic rights of individuals were innate, not something given by the state.

The new concept of society was allied with the spread of deism.<sup>1</sup> This is essentially a residue of the Christian tradition that retained the idea of God as creator and architect of a physical order that contributed to human flourishing, but deemphasized the controverted issues of the Reformation era, original sin, grace, human depravity, salvation, heaven and hell. A tolerant non-combative deism served as a common denominator for people who publicly professed adherence to sectarian creeds. Thus, Alexander Pope, a Catholic, presented a deistic position in his *Essay on Man*. This more tolerant atmosphere allowed for the public expression of doubts about accepted truths concerning God, man, morality, and the knowability of the world. Michael Montaigne (1533-92) argued that no system of ideas could resist doubt. Descartes (1596-1650) tried to beat the skeptics at their own game by doubting everything that could be doubted. His methodic doubts concerning our knowledge of the external world were as influential

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<sup>1</sup> Two recent studies, Taylor (2007) and Gillespie (2008) have argued persuasively that the Enlightenment should be understood as a transformation of traditional Christian themes as well as a repudiation of ecclesiastical authority.

as his certitude concerning the inner world. At the dawn of the eighteenth century, Pierre Bayle published his highly influential *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, in which he attacked all theories, whether theological, philosophical, or scientific. In the middle of the century David Hume's criticisms of metaphysical systems and theological arguments supported the position that morality could not be based on reason. (Hume 1961 [1739], Book III, Part I).

In this changing intellectual climate, the general understanding of the basis of morality changed, first among the Philosophes, and later on a more general scale. When humans were understood ontologically in terms of their place in the general scheme of things, morality was essentially a matter of following rules. The Bible and religious traditions gave rules of conduct. Natural law, as it was understood in medieval times, supported rules based on man's place in nature. This minimal level was complemented by a higher level, a striving for sanctity. In the new morality that was emerging, the individual subject was somehow the source of morality. A Deistic perspective replaced the idea that God is operative in both the physical and social order with a detached distant creator and an impersonal universe. Individuals had to create a moral order. Rousseau's General Will, Hume's moral sense, and Kant's Categorical Imperative struggled with the idea that rules of morality that an enlightened individual set, or recognized, could be projected on humans in general.

The extension of enlightenment ideals to government climaxed in the American and then the French revolutions. The American Declaration of Independence famously declared: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed. . ." Thirteen years later the French Declaration of the Rights of Man asserted that: "men are born free and remain free and equal in rights". These two historic declarations embody Enlightenment ideals. They also reflect the conceptually superficial level at which these ideals functioned.

Jefferson's original wording was: "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable". He submitted the text to John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Franklin crossed out 'sacred and undeniable' and substituted 'self-evident'. Isaacson (2003, p. 312) The term 'sacred' and the reference to a Creator assumed a theological justification for the assertion of rights. Franklin's 'self-evident' and the French proclamation of freedom as a self-



evident right presupposes a philosophical justification. Neither assumption stands up to scrutiny.

The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Koran sanctioned slavery, an accepted institution of the ancient world. The Roman legal code embodied the shared 'intuition' that to treat a slave as if he or she had any entitlements would be a gross violation of the basic principles of justice. Instead of proclaiming freedom of speech the religious patriarchs decreed execution for blasphemy. The Old Testament (Leviticus 24:13) decrees stoning blasphemers, something Islamic Fundamentalists still sanction. The most interesting example in the Christian tradition is Thomas More (aka Saint Thomas More). In his humanistic tract, *Utopia*, he cites the fictional King and founder of Utopia, Utopus, as declaring: “. . . that each man might follow whatever religion he wished and might try to persuade others to join it amicably and temperately and without bitterness towards others.” (More 1949 [1516], pp. 71-72) After Henry VIII appointed him Lord Chancellor, More sought out people preaching the new heresy of Lutheranism and had them burned at the stake. Christian tradition did not tolerate preaching heresy<sup>2</sup>. The Catholic Index of Prohibited Books, established during the Counter Reformation period (1559) was not abolished until 1966. It included works by such philosophers as Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Pascal, Sartre, and de Beauvoir. The most interesting example is the prohibition of the mystical writings of Mary Faustina Kowalski, a Polish nun who was later canonized by a Polish Pope, John Paul II, as the first Catholic saint of the twenty first century.

The religious traditions stressed duties and were clear on only one basic right, the right of men to dominate the women in their families. The Old Testament precedent is clear. On entering Egypt Abram (aka Abraham) tells his wife to pose as his sister so that leaders wishing to rape her would not kill him (Genesis 12:11). Isaac repeats this precedent. (Genesis 27:7). Lot offers his two daughters to would-be rapists to protect his male visitors (Genesis 19:7). There is no indication that the women were consulted. When women are praised, as in Proverbs 31, it is chiefly for supporting their men. St Paul counseled: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord”. (Colossians 2: 18). In the strict Islamic

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<sup>2</sup> The Catholic church officially revised its old tradition in the *Declaration of Religious Freedom in the Second Vatican Council*: “This Vatican Synod declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that in matters religious no one is forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs.” (Abbott, 1966, p. 678)

tradition, a woman is subject to her father till she marries, to her husband till he dies, and then to her eldest son. The surprising exception to this trend is Jesus, whose openness to women and acceptance of women followers scandalized even his disciples.

The dominant theological traditions did not support the claims for innate human rights. Nor did the accepted philosophical traditions. The older natural law theory, epitomized by Thomas Aquinas, stressed the obligations consequent upon man's place in the order of things. Franklin declared, and the French proclamation assumed, that the possession of natural rights is a self-evident truth. When Franklin visited Scotland, he stayed with his friend, David Hume. He was undoubtedly familiar with Hume's distinctions between impressions and ideas, and the consequent distinction between matters of fact and relations of ideas. Only the latter admitted of self-evident truths, aka analytic truths. "All circles are round" illustrates a truth that is self-evident because the subject entails the predicate. Does 'human being' entail 'possessor of natural rights'?

There was a fuzzy precedent for such claims. Thomas Aquinas distinguished speculative and practical reasoning and claimed that truths in each sphere could be deduced from self-evident principles. (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q. 94, a. 2). The paired principles were: the speculative principle of non-contradiction; and the practical principle that good is to be done and evil avoided. This did not supply a deductive basis for the declaration of human rights. The critical philosophical reaction to such declarations is epitomized by Jeremy Bentham's 1791 criticism of the French declaration of human rights as. "Natural rights is simple nonsense, and imprescriptible rights rhetorical nonsense, nonsense upon stilts"<sup>3</sup>

The reign of terror following the execution of Louis XVI and the Napoleonic era destroyed the culture of the philosophers. The Scottish enlightenment continued and anticipated both the benefits and the shortcomings of a capitalist economy. (See Herman, 2001, chap. 8). These issues will be treated in a different context. The proclamation of rights received a legal foundation in the first, and other amendments to the American Constitution. These declarations did not appeal to any philosophical or theological principle. The struggle for equality continued. Ten of the original thirteen states restricted voting to property owners. English voting rights were long denied to Catholics, Jews, and non-conforming Protestants. The emancipation of women remains a struggle. The enlargement of voting and other rights was more a result of local agitation than an implementation of shared philosophical principles. The

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<sup>3</sup> Citation from Sen (2009, p. 356).

torch lit in the Enlightenment era flickered on, but without the fuel an adequate philosophical foundation could supply.

## 1.2 The Kantian Synthesis

To see the role of purported foundations we turn from the popular, but relatively shallow waters of the philosophers to the deep and often opaque writings of the greatest philosopher of that era, Immanuel Kant. I will not summarize Kant's philosophy but merely indicate how he came to interrelate the five foundational concepts we are considering. We will treat these concepts in the order in which they developed in Kant's writings.

We begin with his thoughts on the physical order. The young Kant thought of himself as a natural philosopher (or physicist in later terms) trying to imbue Newtonian physics with Leibnizian intelligibility, chiefly by supplementing the Newtonian idea of matter and motion subject to quantitative laws with Leibniz's stress on inner vital forces. His first contribution to physics was an argument that the earth's rotation is slowing down due to tidal friction. On the basis of one of his rare attempts to do, rather than simply discuss, mathematics he concluded that in a period of two thousand years the earth's rotation should slow by about eight and a half hours. Precise calculations, also based on Newtonian physics, lead to a result of 0.032 seconds. Subsequently, he introduced the hypothesis, independently introduced by Laplace, that the solar system evolved from a rotating cloud of gas. He tried to explain fire in terms of an atomic composition of solids, fluids, and the ether. He was the first to explain prevailing wind currents through the new physics. If the atmosphere is regarded as a sea of air in basic equilibrium then excess local heating or cooling would cause a wind flow, while the rotation of the earth should explain the overall pattern of westerly winds gradually flowing from the equator towards the poles.<sup>4</sup>

The Critique of Pure Reason is Kant's most influential work. Our immediate concern is with the role physics plays in setting up the problematic status of the basic question the first Critique treated: Is metaphysics as a science possible. Kant accepted physics and mathematics as established, analyzed the conditions that made these sciences possible, and then attempted to determine whether metaphysics could meet these conditions. His attempt to explain science in terms of the necessary role of synthetic a priori principles tends to obscure his basic methodology. He

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<sup>4</sup> The role of physics in Kant's thought is treated in more detail in MacKinnon 1982, chap. 2.

accepted physics and mathematics of the scientists on the basis of their success and then, in a Leibnitzian spirit, tried to determine the enabling conditions of this success. These sciences succeeded only when their developers learned how to compel nature to answer questions they imposed. The sciences, accordingly, have an a priori aspect supplied by the mind itself. This realization initiated his Copernican revolution. Instead of asking how our knowledge conforms to objects, we should enquire how objects of human knowledge conform to our way of knowing. This leads to the conclusion that we cannot have a science, traditional metaphysics, concerned with objects, notably God, the world as a whole, or the soul as immortal, which lie beyond actual or possible human experience. However, he allows for a metaphysics of nature and a metaphysics of morals. Each is concerned with the a priori aspects of the science or system.

The status of the self plays a crucial role in Kant's three critiques. In the first Critique, he develops an account of the knowing process in terms of the successive imposition of forms on a sensory given: the forms of sensibility, the schematism of the imagination, the imposition of categories of understanding, the regulative role of reason, and the unification through the transcendental unity of apperception, the 'I think' unifying these diverse components. The knower in question is not a historically situated individual. It is a person as such. All humans are presumed to have the same cognitive apparatus and follow the same processes. In this perspective, the success of physics receives a novel justification. The imposition of cognitive forms on a sensory given leads to the production of *phenomena*. *Noumena*, the reality initiating the process are not known. The world of phenomena is governed by rigid causal determinism, because we come to understand it by the imposition of causal notions and quantitative laws. Self knowledge is not obtained through the imposition of categories. The noumenal subject of these processes is a thinker, which Kant refers to as: "this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks" (Kant 1963, A346, B404). The wavering reference reflects the contention that the noumenal subject is not known through the imposition of familiar categories. This supplies a basis for reconciling the determinism of the natural order with freedom of the will. The determinism refers to phenomena. Freedom is a property of a noumenal being, a person as a rational agent.

In his second critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant developed *The Categorical Imperative*. His best-known formulation of this is: *Act only on that maxim that you can will as a universal law*. An alternative formulation insists that other persons should never be treated

merely as a means, but always an end.<sup>5</sup> This is intended as a replacement for theories that derive ethical norms either from a conjunction of divine and natural law, or from the from the anticipated consequences of an action. It relies on rational self-consistency. To use Kant's example, would it be moral to make promises I do not intend to keep? If I willed this as a universal maxim for everyone to follow, then my maxim would be self-contradictory. If everyone knows promises need not be kept, then the practice of making promises has no significance. This basis of morality presupposes the essential equality of all persons. Any rational agent is in effect the representative of all. It also presupposes that reason has limits, something he treated in the resolution of antinomies of reason in the first Critique. In moral matters, practical reason can go beyond the limits of pure reason, because practical reason is grounded in the noumenal person, not the construct that is the phenomenal person.

In his *Scienza Nuova* (1725) Giambattista Vico had developed the idea that societies develop in three stages which have a cyclic order: the divine, where the iconic figures are superhuman; the heroic, and the human. Man, as an isolated individual, has no nature. As man makes society, society makes man. The idea that different societies shape different human natures conditioned the rise of anthropology in the nineteenth century. The idea is not reflected in Kant's writings. He interpreted human development in terms of a rise from barbarism to a culture that produced art and science and lamented the fact that only a small minority participated in this culture.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the person that was central to his three critiques was the autonomous man, presumed to be the same in all times and cultures. In his treatment of society, he utilized an idea developed more formally in his *Critique of Judgment* that we understand the development of society by imposing a priori principles on social and historical facts. The a priori principle here is teleological, to understand Nature's purpose in the development of society.

Kant's "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (Beck, pp. 11-26) can be interpreted as a creative fusion of ideas stemming from St. Augustine with anticipation of Darwin and Adam Smith. First, it should be noted that Kant is using 'idea' in the Platonic sense of an ideal that can supply a goal for human history and offer guidance towards achieving that goal. The secret purposefulness of nature extends to human instincts and the place of humans in nature. Modern

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<sup>5</sup> A brief clarification of this doctrine plus the pertinent text is given in MacKinnon, B and Fiala, Chap. 5.

<sup>6</sup> His writings on history are collected in Beck, L. W., Ed. (1963). Kant on History. The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

biologists still rely on purposes in nature, e.g., in understanding why some organs survive or are modified. However, they interpret this talk of purposes as a shorthand way of speaking of the outcome of evolutionary competition. Kant rejected the idea of evolution of species, which was being discussed, because there was no evidence supporting it. However, he thought that the purposefulness of nature, effected through secret mechanisms, included the status of humans in the overall order. Human freedom escapes the determinism of nature but not its purposefulness. Human freedom leads to antagonism between individuals and states. It is only through such antagonism that the capacities of humans are developed. "Each, according to his own inclination, follows his own purpose, often in opposition to others; yet each individual and people, as if following some guiding thread, go toward a natural but to each of them unknown goal; all work together furthering it, even if they would set little score by it if they did know it." (Beck, p. 11)

Reason, especially practical reason, is the capacity whose collective development leads to culture and life in a society governed by reasonable laws. A stable society requires strong leaders who enforce obedience to the laws of the land. This can shift from tyranny to a reasonable government if the enlightened citizens participate in the formation of reasonable laws. "The touchstone of everything that can be concluded as a law lies in the question whether the people could have imposed such a law on itself." (Kant, 1963 (1784), p. 7). This collective categorical imperative represented the legislation of an ideal society. Kant judged his era as an age of enlightenment, but not yet enlightened. Yet, even an enlightened society would not suffice to produce a moral society. Morality is the product of freedom, not nature.

These ideals for society shaped Kant's appraisal of the role of government. Originally, he supported the idea of an enlightened constitutional monarch following the standards set by Frederick the Great who, in Kant's interpretation, was the only prince who told his citizens: "Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, only obey."<sup>7</sup> When Frederick's precedent was not followed by other princes, Kant swung over to republican forms of government. He strongly supported the American and French revolutions and the ideals of liberty and equality. His reservations about fraternity stemmed from his appraisal of the low level of culture and enlightenment characterizing most individuals and nations. In Kant's appraisal, though individuals had emerged from a Hobbesian state of nature, where conflicts are settled by brute force, nations had not.

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<sup>7</sup> This is from his "What is Enlightenment?" (Beck, p. 5).

They still settle disputes by waging wars. The only reasonable solution to this lamentable state of affairs is to work for the establishment of a league of nations. “The greatest problem for the human race, to the solution of which nature drives man, is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers laws among men.” (Beck, p. 16) This would be a federation of free states promoting universal peace and guaranteeing that visitors to a foreign nation be treated as guests, rather than enemies.<sup>8</sup> Kant saw this as a European union that other states could join when they accepted the combination of enlightened freedom and rule by reasonable laws.

Kant did not interrelate the five fundamental five in a grand theory. His work can be interpreted as a sustained attempt to answer two basic questions. How does man come to know a world in which he is a part, a knower, and a moral agent? How should individuals and nations behave? Kant’s critical method effectively introduced a basic difference between the path of progress in science and in philosophy. A scientist advances his discipline by building on the work of his predecessors. A critical philosopher advances his discipline by critically examining, and when necessary undercutting, the presuppositions of his predecessors. Thus, Kant undercut the foundational role traditionally accorded metaphysics and made a critique of knowledge a new foundation.

### 1.3 Post-Kantian Philosophy

We will treat post-Kantian philosophy in this critical spirit. Thus, we will not consider Hegel’s system building, but merely his implicit metacritique of the Kantian Critique. The First Critique presupposes that the data of immediate experience are processed by the faculties of sensibility, imagination, understanding, and reason. Valid knowledge involves imposing reason on the data of immediate experience. Reason, for Kant, is regulative, not constitutive. These presuppositions are preconditions of the critique of knowledge, but are not themselves subject to critical analysis. This, as Hegel saw it, exempts the knowing subject from the probe of criticism.<sup>9</sup> “In my view—view which the developed exposition of the system itself can alone justify—everything depends on grasping and expressing the ultimate truth not as substance but as subject as well.” (Hegel 1967 [1807], p. 80). Hegel understood the individual

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<sup>8</sup> Kant developed these ideas in his “Perpetual Peace” (Beck, pp. 85-135)

<sup>9</sup> Habermas (1971, chap. 1) details the way in which Hegel’s Phenomenology exposed and criticized the presuppositions of the critical epistemology.

subject, and any philosophy he develops, as historically conditioned. The ultimate truth concerned the Absolute, whose process of self-actuation is achieved through human consciousness and reflection. Nature is the objective manifestation of this spirit. Philosophy reflects this process of self-actuation through the development of a system. The intricate system, developed dialectically, was epitomized in the slogan: The real is rational and the rational is real. Reason, for Hegel, is constitutive of reality as a whole. Both physical and social reality, as they actually exist, have structures that manifest an inner rationality. In our twilight context what counts is not Hegel's system (See Kaufmann 1965) , but his bringing to light the implicit presuppositions in the critique of knowledge. Hegel, following Fichte and Schelling, achieved a coherent integration of the fundamental five concepts by subsuming the physical under the organic. Matter and motion are understood in depth only through the extension of categories proper to living and especially thinking beings. This did not prove to be a viable integration.

The development of philosophy cannot be understood in terms of a closed circle of philosophers speaking to and commenting on other philosophers. The two dominant intellectual currents in the nineteenth century were the expansion of science, which will be considered later, and the emergence of Romanticism. Here we simply indicate how the Romantic Movement put man and nature, morals and politics in a new interpretative perspective that influenced philosophers. In the Enlightenment perspective, the traditional view of a human as a soul inhabiting a body was receding in favor a materialistic conception that saw humans as part of the natural order. The natural order was being clarified by experimental investigations and theoretical systematizing with the goal of extending the Newtonian system to more and more branches of science. The Romantics, drawing on elements from Rousseau, Goethe's novels, and Fichte's philosophy focused on the individual coming to know, and even create, himself. (Berlin and Hardy 1999, Berlin, Hardy et al. 2000). Where Kant sought the limits of reason, the Romantics tried to use intuition, imagination, and the force of the human will to transcend such limits. Nature is only understood in its purity through a return to the innocence, empathy, and even magical thinking characterizing infants, primitives, and legendary heroes of earlier days.

The American and French revolutions not only overthrew established governments. They also showed that the old order of society, where authority and privileges trickle down from the aristocrats, could be replaced by an order in which authority wells up from the will of the people. Persons displaying a similar will and imagination should be able to



overthrow traditional authoritarian morality and established conventions to bring about true freedom for all persons. Even when the early exuberance faded, and radical changes were institutionalized, a residue remained in terms of a tension between a humanistic and a scientific perspective. This had more influence on the subsequent development of philosophy than the older faith/reason tension.

There were three nineteenth-century reactions against Hegelian idealism, that were more influential in the twentieth century than in their own time. Hegel interpreted the historical development of philosophy and religion in terms of the gradual realization of the relation between self-consciousness and the Absolute, and later tended to regard the established social order as an embodiment of the Absolute. Nietzsche reinterpreted the development of philosophy as a series of myths and analogies. What now passes for higher truth and Christian morality is the outcome of the paradoxical triumph of the slave mentality over the nobility of the master morality.<sup>10</sup> This is not pure negativity. Nietzsche began his career as an outstanding classical scholar. He championed sixth century Greece, where tragedy was born through a fusion of the Dionysian spirit of revelry, self-indulgence, and excess, and the Apollonian attempt to impose beauty, order, and symmetry on the disorder of human experience. Then the stifling miasma of Socratic questioning led to a switch from the primacy of life as experienced to the fullest to contemplation and the search for the deep truths hidden behind the world of experience.

The philosophical tradition suppressed the Dionysian elements in culture to glorify the Apollonian quest of pure truth. Hegel's assertion of the primacy of the Absolute culminates the Apollonian drive. Nietzsche advocated a return to the Dionysian tradition, centering on the sensual egotistical historically-embodied self. Only the superman, superior in both body and mind, can understand the meaning of beauty and what it takes to create it. Nietzsche is not only opposing Hegel, but all philosophical systematizing. Faust, in Goethe's play, reads the biblical text, "In the beginning was the word" and then replaces it with "In the beginning was the deed". Rousseau, the paradigm of the alienated man, thought that morality, social customs, and established political conventions were all products of a corrupting society. Nietzsche, who valued art and music over philosophy, sought to extend the Goethian switch from contemplation and systematization of eternal truths to action in a messy human environment by men liberated from the chains of a corrupting culture. His new hero was

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<sup>10</sup> "On the Genealogy of Morals" in Kaufmann (1969).

the legendary Zarathustra, who returned from a sojourn in the desert with the liberating message: God is dead.

Nietzsche was anti-Christian (and anti almost everything established). Søren Kierkegaard was profoundly Christian. But, like Nietzsche, he was a deeply troubled man trying to forge an authentic existence. He began as a young Hegelian rebelling against Hegelianism as an established social order. Developing an authentic existence, in Kierkegaard's view, involves three stages. The *aesthetic* focuses on experience, pleasure without conscious control imposing notions of right and wrong. One leaps to the *ethical* stage when moral norms are given priority over pleasure. This stage is characterized by despair, or a subconscious sickness unto death over the difficulties of making authentic choices. In Hegelian terms, if I am at the ethical stage I choose the Absolute that chooses me. But is this Absolute God or Society? The leap to the *religious* stage requires a teleological suspension of the ethical. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son in response to a divine command is a profound violation of ethical norms. Yet it was for Kierkegaard, as for St. Paul, the highest example of true faith. Where Hegel incorporated religious striving into a philosophical system, Kierkegaard insisted that authentic Christianity transcends and even defies rationality. Such views turned Kierkegaard into a fierce critic of established Christian society and the Hegelian justification of the established order. He was a forerunner of existentialism with his insistence that the individual only truly comes to know him or herself in moments of extreme passion or dread. Then both bourgeois concerns and metaphysical systems seem irrelevant.

Karl Marx's intellectual career can also be divided into three stages. The first stage was Germany, where he flourished as a left-wing Hegelian philosopher, accepting Hegel's idea of understanding history as a dialectical development, but rejecting his systematization and his sanctioning of a bourgeois society as an embodiment of the Absolute. Where Hegel interpreted history as the unfolding of the Absolute, Marx insisted that man makes his own history. He sought to stand Hegelianism on its feet rather than leave it anchored in the clouds. As with history, one really comes to know the world by striving to change it. The second stage was Paris, where Marx was strongly influenced by social theorists. Here he criticized Hegel's subordination of matter to mind and stressed the priority of nature, with social labor mediating between mind and matter. (See Habermas 1971 [1968], chap. 2.)

The third stage was London and a hermetical existence in the British Museum trying to master economic theory and planning the overthrow of a Capitalistic society. Our concern is with the dissolution of embodied

Hegelianism, rather than the career of communism. Here one non-philosopher made a decisive contribution. Darwin's influence led to a conception of the development of humans and intelligence in terms of a struggle for survival, an outcome of natural processes, rather than a dialectical manifestation of a universal spirit. This will be treated in the final chapter.

Other non-philosophical developments undercut the foundational role traditionally assigned to philosophy. The special sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and linguistics developed by breaking away from the matrix of philosophy. Enlightenment visionaries had anticipated human and social sciences conforming to the Newtonian model of a scientific theory. The founding fathers of some of these new sciences echoed this ideal by beginning with a master theory. Helmholtz and Fechner developed psychology as an extension of physics by focusing on physical measurements, e.g., of reaction time. Wundt, the founding father of an experimental psychology, specified a subject matter, immediate experience, and a method, a structuralist approach to introspective analysis. The breakaway reactions of Gestalt, functionalist, and behaviorist psychology, shattered the idea of a monolithic method.

Comte, the founder of positivism, Spencer, the founder of social Darwinism, and the Nineteenth century founders of anthropology, shared a common theme. Human societies develop in fixed stages. The simplest scheme was savagery, barbarism, and civilization, with each major division admitting of subdivisions. Different cultures could be understood by fitting them into this general scheme and assuming that progress would lead to a European-style culture. This provided a general framework allowing for the collection of data, and orderly classification of information, and comparison of different eras and cultures. This empirical data soon fractured the a priori mold leading to more detailed studies of particular cultures.

The practitioners of the newer more empirical human and social sciences would not accept philosophy as supplying either a metaphysical or an epistemological foundation. Methodological pluralism replaced the ideal of a unified science of reality and a monolithic methodology of science. The philosophers who accepted the autonomy of science had to rethink the goals of philosophy. It still treated the problem of the self and morality. However, systematic treatments of the physical order, the social order, and government were taken over by specialized scientific disciplines.



## CHAPTER TWO

### TWENTIETH CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

Richard Rorty (Rorty 1967; Rorty 1982; Rorty 1988; Rorty 1997) was the original Jeremiah prophesying philosophy's coming doom. He utilized a distinction between PHILOSOPHY and philosophy. In the mainstream, PHILOSOPHY, whether or not practiced by professional philosophers, can be distinguished from philosophy in that the former is concerned with uncovering the foundations behind ordinary knowledge. Physicists investigate and develop theories about space, time, energy, atoms, particles, and fields. PHILOSOPHY attempts to determine where and how the best theories correspond to objective reality. Mathematicians entertain conjectures and prove theorems. PHILOSOPHY speculates on whether the edifice of mathematics rests on a foundation of logic, or rules of formation, or intuition of timeless truths. Ethicians argue about the morality of acts and practices. PHILOSOPHY tries to determine whether the foundation of ethics is set by anticipated consequences of actions, a theory of justice, or of obligation, or natural law. Politics and government are more muddled fields. Now we are experiencing an increasing tension between those who insist that human laws must conform to divine laws, and those who champion secular democratic ideals. PHILOSOPHY seeks to resolve the conflict by uncovering the true foundations of legitimate government. The decline of philosophy, in Rorty's opinion, hinges on the abandonment of PHILOSOPHY as a viable program. A similar theme was developed by others.<sup>1</sup>

I will indicate some significant attempts to redefine the role of philosophy. I will be viewing these traditions from a perverse perspective, focusing on their failure to supply a basis for a coherent intellectual integration, rather than on their specialized accomplishments. The positions treated will be phenomenology, analysis, Thomism, philosophy of science, and three attempts at integration. I will be presenting an appraisal based on sixty years of participation rather than a detailed exposition of these positions. This superficial summary is manifestly unfair. To balance the books, I will attempt to be equally unfair to all the positions treated.

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<sup>1</sup> See the readings in K. Baynes et al. (1987).

## 2.1 Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl, the patriarch of the phenomenological tradition, was originally trained as a mathematician. An abiding concern throughout his career was to make philosophy into a rigorous science like mathematics. Philosophy, as he saw it, can only achieve certitude and rigor by focusing on how the objects of awareness are immanent to consciousness. Frege's criticism made him realize the need to have a philosophical analysis that was distinct from a psychological analysis. To achieve this Husserl made a sharp distinction between the natural standpoint and an ideal order. The natural standpoint accepts the objects of ordinary experience and the objects posited by scientific theories as existing objectively, or independent of our knowledge of them. Theories of knowledge or science that build on this foundation are implicitly psychologistic, since they depend on psychological processing of sensual input.

Husserl brackets, or suspends belief in, the reality of, the natural order and focuses on ideal objects. A phenomenological analysis should uncover the essence of such ideal objects (Husserl 1969). This supports the development of philosophy as a strict science. The empirical sciences implicitly presuppose objects as present in consciousness but fail to acknowledge this significance of this awareness. The clearest example of this failure is an account of testing the truth of theories by comparing the consequences of theories with things or states of affairs as they exist independently. This, Husserl contends, is the root cause of the crisis of European science (Husserl 1970). Though Husserl initiated a redevelopment of philosophy, he was still in the Cartesian tradition of focusing on the transcendental ego and attempting to develop a philosophical system that could supply a foundation for science.

Instead of bracketing the natural order, Martin Heidegger explored it in a novel way. His goal, throughout his career was an understanding of being, something that, in his opinion, had been lost through the imposition of metaphysics and must be retrieved through existential analysis. Metaphysics, following the precedent set by Plato and Aristotle, builds on categories imposed on the beings that are present at hand. The natural sciences implicitly presuppose and rely on such categorization. The questions asked within science and metaphysics presuppose the application of categories both to the beings of ordinary experience and the beings posited by scientific theories.

The way back to the ground of being begins with an analysis of *Dasein*, recognition of how a human being is simply present prior to any imposition of a subject/object distinction and the imposition of categories