

Metaphysics in the Age of Scientific Hegemony

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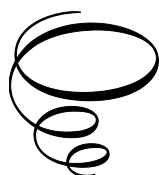
Metaphysics in the Age of Scientific Hegemony:

Essays and Models

By

Jürgen Lawrenz

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The papers comprising Ch. 4-8 are here published for the first time.

NOTE ON QUOTATIONS

Short quotations embodied in the text are usually marked off by quotation marks. Longer direct quotes from the philosophers have been set in italics and indented from the main text. Other lengthy quotations are in normal type, but indented from the main text.

Translations from German are in the main my own work, although quotations from standard editions of the major philosophers have been used and referenced.

Die Metaphysik besteht nicht wesentlich in festen dogmatischen Antworten, sondern eben in Fragen. ... [Sie steht] auf der einen Seite gegen die Theologie, ohne ihr gegenüber allerdings eine absolute Grenze zu haben. ... [Sie] ist die Gestalt des Bewußtseins, in der es versucht, das zu erkennen, was mehr als der Fall ist, oder was nicht bloß der Fall ist und doch gedacht werden muß weil das, was, wie man so sagt, der Fall ist, uns dazu nötigt.

ADORNO, *Philosophische Terminologie II*, 33¹

1) Metaphysics does not essentially consist of dogmatic answers, but chiefly of questions. ... On one side it faces theology, although without an absolute borderline marking this vis-a-vis. ... It is the *Gestalt* of conscious awareness, seeking to bring matters to cognisance that are more than 'the case', or that are not merely 'the case', yet need to be thought out because, as we say, 'that which is the case' exerts such a compulsion on us.

Metaphysics in the Age of Scientific Hegemony

Daß der Geist des Menschen metaphysische Untersuchungen einmal gänzlich aufgeben werde, ist ebenso wenig zu erwarten, als daß wir, um nicht immer unreine Luft zu schöpfen, das Atemholen einmal lieber ganz und gar einstellen würden.

Kant, *Prolegomena*, A193.¹

I

“IT IS NOT EASY TO SAY what metaphysics is,” declare the contributors to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* in their article on Metaphysics.² Indeed the inventor of the genre, Aristotle, did not know the word; and it is surmised that his posthumous editor Andronicus of Rhodes devised the title *Ta meta ta physica* as a helpmate to students, because the book deals with issues belonging to, but left over from, the study of physics. Therefore the congenial rendering *A Supplement to the Physics* offered itself as a non-technical English-language substitute, although (strange to say) it did not occur to any translator to take up this option.

Be that as it may, the topics of this research are enumerated in Aristotle’s ‘Philosophical Lexicon’ (Book Delta), where we find a discussion of terms such as origin, cause, being, substance, identity, potential and others. He was apt to refer to this kind of study as ‘First Philosophy’, because it concerns

¹) “It seems unlikely that the human spirit will eventually abandon metaphysical researches altogether, for it would be tantamount to the decision not to ingest unclean air by simply stopping, once and for all, to breathe.”

²) Entry of Oct 31, 2014.

2 Introduction

the study of fundamentals, such as the underlying conditions of existence. Our senses, he explains, “do not give reasons for anything, e.g. why fire is hot, but only *that* it is hot [981b].” In other words, studying physics is a kind of hit and miss approach to empirical facts that may well impart skills and a bucketful of ‘hard knowledge’; but it is always preferable to understand the ‘why’ as well, so as to delimit the errors of only knowing ‘that’ and ‘how’.¹

When therefore we read in Th. Kuhn’s book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*² that all experiments are ‘theory-laden’, we realise that modern science still honours this Aristotelian precept. Experiments proceed from an agreed paradigm and are expected to yield results that will either confirm or contradict it. But all paradigmata contain a smattering of metaphysical notions, which indeed we cannot dispense with so as to keep our theories watertight as long as possible. It stands to reason, therefore, that a paradigm is not easily dislodged by mere hiccups in empirical studies. We trust them no more than Aristotle did, unless they pollinate our theories and achieve comprehensive peer unanimity. But many of these theories evolve today in an environment of so-called ‘theoretical physics’, a name which anyone should feel free to assign to metaphysics, as it relies on the same species of *speculatio* and the framing of concepts of reason that bore the meaning of ‘pursuit of truth and knowledge by means of thinking’.

Is this the source of the Stanford editors’ coyness? It seems to be the case, although an historically more pressing ambiguity may be found in the change of emphasis and perspective that occurred in the 13th century with the Christianisation of Aristotle in the hands of Thomas Aquinas. It was tantamount to the hijacking of the metaphysical itinerary for theological purposes, so that most of the terms of Aristotle’s *Lexicon* were now made to serve for the conceptualisation of God’s powers.

¹) *Met.* 981b10.

²) University of Chicago Press 1962.

The seven centuries since then irremediably infected Christian philosophy and science with presuppositions that became part and parcel of our mental furniture and therefore almost invisible. Over this stretch of time, it became common practice at universities to appoint theologians to a chair of philosophy and vice versa. It is due to the persistence of this integrated doctrinal relationship until well into the 20th century (William James, Bergson, Heidegger, Whitehead, Jaspers, Unamuno *et al.*) that the aforesaid uncertainty clings to metaphysics.

Crucially it was Kant—himself a theoretical physicist by profession!¹—who began to undermine the general belief in the fitness of metaphysics to scientific merit. He found himself combating wholly analogous problems, for example the stipulation of a Prize Essay to report on the “actual progress of metaphysics since the times of Leibniz and Wolf.”² In his trenchant riposte to the Academy, we find him claiming point-blank that the Academy’s wish was bound to be disappointed. Metaphysics, he writes,

*“is a boundless sea wherein progress leaves not a trace, while its horizon does not point to any visible goal. . . . [In short] metaphysics is in its own nature as well as in its purposes a comprehensive unity: either nothing or everything; nor is it amenable (as in the case of mathematics or empirical science) to progressive and piecemeal augmentation.”*³

This is Kant is telling his philosophical confraternity that the metaphysics they have been pursuing is not a living body of enquiry, but a corpse awaiting its burial.⁴ The point is, of course,

¹) Co-deviser of the Kant-Laplace hypothesis of the nebular origin of the solar system.

²) This was the topic set for a Prize Essay by the Royal Academy of Sciences of Berlin for the year 1791. Kant’s riposte appears as “Über die Preisfrage” in W. Weischedel (ed.): *Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik*. Insel Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 583ff.

³) Op. cit. 589.

⁴) This is worth quoting for its present-day relevance: “All false arts, all forms of bogus wisdom have their time; but at last they must destroy them-

that this so-called metaphysics of the academies was the ‘God-besotted species’. Pursuant to this I feel obliged to say the same thing, namely that we are still classifying metaphysics as a ‘God-besotted thing’—as a philosophy dressed in a monk’s robes, which can no longer deceive us as to its intrinsic doctrinal saturation.¹

II

It cannot be my purpose to arbitrate on such vexations, taking for granted that the reader is fully cognisant of them. But the reminder is apt that metaphysics gloried for a long time in the overblown appellation “Queen of Sciences” which has throughout the centuries irked its enemies from William of Ockham via Hobbes, Hume and Feuerbach to Santayana, to say nothing of ‘post-modern’ thinkers. Instead, it will be more productive to examine a genuine situation of stand-off where it is not metaphysics, but strict science that is clearly seen to be *out of its depth*.

It is only too familiar a picture nowadays for scientists to promulgate the message that quantitative and operational

selves at the highest peak of their culture, which also marks the moment in time when its sun sets for them. That metaphysics has in fact fallen into such a state as we speak of is shown by its sorry neglect among all learned societies [where other sciences of all kinds are assiduously pursued].” *Op. cit.* 244.

¹) Ortega y Gasset added a remarkable observation to this: “Yet there is perhaps another and deeper motivation for the Thomism of the Church, namely: That a Christian could hardly be interested in philosophy qua philosophy; it is useless to him. It is however of great interest to him to “speak of God”, *theologeïn*. But for the sake of speaking, he needs a language, a system of signs which is common to them all. This is what philosophy provides for him: a way of speaking, a *modus dicendi*, nothing else. Philosophy as a means of acquiring knowledge or the truth is an irrelevant criterion in this. Philosophy is merely a mediator and turned into a resource of terminology. Accordingly it transpired that philosophy was changed into a device that could vouchsafe a mutual understanding when speaking of God. Ortega y Gasset: *Der Prinzipienbegriff bei Leibniz*, Gotthold Müller, Munich 1966, p. 178.

readings are so highly suggestive that it seems rational to accept them as facts, even as truths. And so, we hear many voices proclaiming that the theory of evolution is no longer merely a theory, but a fact.¹ Call it hubris or what you will, but when its basic premises are inspected, we are (or should be) struck by an internal self-contradiction that has been rather thinly papered over and led to a plurality of mutually competing doctrines. In plain language: Evolution is not a neutral process like water tumbling down a mountain side and gouging out a river bed, but is concerned with the origin, adaptation and diversification of animate creatures by way of their *intentional* exploitation and modification of the environment so as to provide themselves with a habitat and survival resources. The environment reacts to this interference with the same passivity as water tumbling down a mountain side. Accordingly the drive motor of evolution is a *quid pro quo* that makes sense only as a development occurring inside the living partition of the planet that can moreover only be identified *post factum*. Lacking the objective testability (not to mention predictability) of genetic theories, evolutionary doctrines must contend with a tracery of zillions of intentional acts that might well tax even the all-knowing God of the scholastics.

In other words, evolution is an *historical* process; its theory comprising a dozen or more incommiscible canons (e.g. phylogeny, cladistics, genetics etc.) which add up to a very inexact and conflict ridden account of speciation and adaptation patterns over more than two billion years. Moreover it should not remain unmentioned that some of these theses (e.g. ‘RNA World’) require more miracles to occur spontaneously than even a hardened roulette player could sustain.²

¹) A trend put forth by Stephen Jay Gould: “Evolution as Fact and Theory”, *Discover* 2, 1981, pp. 34-7 and widely held to be authoritative ever since.

²) Cf. Christian de Duve, *Vital Dust*, New York, Harper Collins 1995, where the author piles up innumerable lucky accidents and fortuitous predispositions in the chemical ‘primal soup’, so that one begins to wonder long before the end why the whole show took as many millions/billions of

Does this spell out as a need for resorting to metaphysics after all? The answer to this question is by no means clear-cut. Metaphysics cannot simply apply its principles and axioms to this congeries. It can only rely on the one dictum that is indubitably clear, namely that the *personae dramatis* of evolution are without exception *entelechies*.¹

However, this is not yet enough to clinch the point. We cannot inspect intentional behaviour directly; and our expectations from it cannot factor-in the mutations of the environment which change the quantity and quality of survival resources. It leaves the original dilemma unresolved except for the curiosity and rational impulses of the human agent seeking to nail down objective phenomena for which non-objective phenomena are responsible. Which is to say that the sources and causes of these trends are *intentional and wholly contingent acts* which comprise an *asymmetrical and monodirectional* incision into mechano-chemical processes which in turn thrust those entelechies into a future that is not written into the neutral fabric of such events.

The reader will be aware that this example can be multiplied a dozen-fold across all sciences which seek to dispense with the category of self-animation. For example, we might recall the embarrassing coinage ‘teleonomy’ (a kind of ‘as-if’ teleology) in Monod’s once celebrated account of biology to savour a locution that looks *afraid* of acknowledging the difference between life and non-life.² Yet this stands in stark contrast with the enquiries of such high-standing cosmologists as Eugene Wigner and John Wheeler, who came to a startled recognition of their own role in the collapse of a wave front in quantum experiments—the latter coining the phrase ‘participatory anthropic

years to settle down (e.g. to cite a startling instance on his p. 31, reporting how Theodor Wieland “simply threw a handful of [amino thioesters] in water . . . and peptides were formed, even though no catalyst was present.”).

¹) This is said with emphasis on the seriously propagated belief, that genes can be held responsible for the creation of entelechies.

²) Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity*, New York, Alfred Knopf 1971.

principle' as an expression of his understanding that enquirers into quantum physics are persistently confronted with resolving binary solutions at their own sweet will, so that the human agent is effectively 'deciding' which of the two to actualise.¹

None of this is said with the purpose of denigrating scientific approaches to the living realm. On the contrary, scientists retrieved respectable results and real knowledge in, e.g., the study of organic chemistry, neurophysiology, genetics, pathology and so on. But none of this lifts the lid on the fundamental issues—it does not divulge the mystery of self-animation, nor the qualia and private thoughts of a person's experience, nor even the way our personal memories are laid down.²

However, yet another caveat is necessary. Most researchers in the neurophysiological field have sought to extract, or at least illuminate, the concept of a conscious 'mind', very sure of themselves that the relevant data will reveal affirmative information. But consider this: As the mutual traffic among neurons comprises nothing other than electrical signals, how can qualia such as the appreciation of the difference between a Mozart and Brahms symphony be 'explained' by its *reduction to the functions of neurons*? The latter (let us not forget) operate with an alphabet of three, 'passing on', 'suppressing' and 'modifying'. Considering the sheer quantity of writing in this genre, this is simply bad form. Nearly 100 years ago, John Dewey formulated an idea that sounds much more plausible:

"Mind is primarily a verb (he writes); "it denotes all the ways

¹) Origin of the 'many worlds', 'multiple universes' and 'anthropic principle' doctrines, the last-named a cousin of the 'designer universe' idea. Cf. Eugene Wigner: *Symmetries and Reflections*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1967, pp. 171-84; John Archibald Wheeler: "It from Bit", in *Information, Physics, Quantum Mechanics: The Search for Links*, Proc. 3rd Int. Symp. Foundations of Quantum Mechanics, Tokyo 1989, pp. 354-68.

²) Movie aficionados will recall *Blade Runner* (and its sequel), where it is taken for granted that memories are pictures and movies stored 'somewhere' in the neurophysiological system and therefore portable into another person's mind. Metaphysical thinkers might tap their temples in response to this phantasmagorical proposition.

in which we deal consciously and expressly with the situations in which we find ourselves. Unfortunately an influential manner of thinking has changed modes of action into an underlying substance that performs the activities in question. It has treated mind as an independent entity which attends, purposes, cares and remembers.”¹

Extrapolating from neurophysiological ‘data’ upon human thinking and behaviour is therefore parlous, to say the least. We do not know and cannot ascertain that they are latent with information, for data are not information carriers: they must be ‘translated’ (decrypted, assessed, evaluated and indeed *constructed*) to emerge as information that makes sense to an enquirer. Moreover, the temptation is always at hand, and rarely admitted, that the use of words like ‘function’ in relation to neurons (as well as cells and organs) is tantamount to equating them with plastic parts. But two words serve to encapsulate the difference: material things *function*; organic things *work*.

We cannot afford to ignore this crucial difference. In the last resort, we have to acknowledge that a ‘theory of everything’ is a pipe dream and that we are limited by the kind of organism we are, which impacts upon our capacity for acquiring knowledge. We do not have access to God’s mind, nor to the infinite reaches of ‘space’ and ‘time’, whatever those words may be held to denote. The best we can do, and need not be ashamed of, is the *mythos eikos* of which Plato speaks—the ‘likely story’.

Nor are we bereft of resources in this department. The patterns of human and creature intentionality altogether are hardly so obscure that we couldn’t recognise most of them, although we must bear in mind that variety is intrinsic to them. The fact that intentionality in humans is overwhelmingly engendered tacitly should not pose an insurmountable barrier, for we understand these indirect behaviours well enough in our daily intercourse. For our purposes in the essays of this

¹) John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York, Perigee Books 1980, p. 263.

book, this is the domain appropriate to metaphysics—things and events with sole relevance *ad hominem* that nature does not offer up in pre-packaged form. Moreover it does not look strange in the context of Aristotelian metaphysics; comprising as it were a new wing to the mansion of his principles. They become problematic only when we try to quantify and tabulate them, as if they were neutral data.

In sum: the range of metaphysical thinking has shrunk in its scope from what it formerly encompassed, at the beginning of the Christian era; but this is not to say that it has become obsolete. As an author, I take the liberty of assuming that the reader is familiar with the scope of discussion on these issues in present day philosophy. The important remaining issue is, how to justify metaphysical speculation in the face of the scantiness of ‘hard knowledge’ emerging from its researches.

III

One provisional answer would be, that although most of our metaphysical preoccupations do not touch on facts in the world, they embrace facts in the *human world*. And whatever pertains to these facts is *ipso facto* deeply entangled in the skeins of our intellectual, psychological and emotional grasp of this world. Accordingly it is mistaken to seek answers pertaining to questions we put to this world by scientific means—as if stepping outside of the human being and gazing at this phenomenon objectively could impart knowledge of how the parts confer knowledge about the whole.

It is rather obvious that nothing of the kind pertains. Whence the other provisional answer, that philosophy is only incidentally concerned with facts of the kind that serve the acquisition of knowledge. After all, if that were the case, philosophy would sooner or later become starved of issues to resolve (which is precisely the situation that led to the pronouncement of ‘the death of philosophy’). For its emphasis lies with *wis* rather than *ken*, whence ‘wisdom’—in short, with tacit, implied, in-

sinuated, intimated, alluded, indirect, ineffable clues and illumination by means of sensing, rapport, affinity, empathy, hunches and instinct.

The dislodgement of gods, angels and spirits from metaphysics therefore cleared the way, on one side for ‘natural philosophy’ to mutate into science; on the other, for metaphysical philosophy to wave good-bye to the futile ontologies that had begun to cling to it like brambles to breeches.¹ As Heribert Boeder writes on the presumption of lending existence to the Almighty by simply arguing the case: “If this is the first question, then it is also the last; and so we must not be surprised that this persistent and irremovable question kept metaphysics going and determined its entire history.”² In short, the office of metaphysics may well include the provision of logically well-entailed evidence for the necessity of a *kinoumenon kinei*; but having done so, then to retire and refrain from prompting illicit figments of being to the stage.³ In any ultimate sense we can be sure of only one thing; that we desperately need to refocus our attention on the one instance of life in the cosmos that is definitely known to *embody* rational consciousness and awareness.⁴

This, accordingly, is presently to be taken as the demesne of metaphysics—a discipline shorn of its theocratic imperatives, its delusion of final answers; but returning to its authentic mis-

¹) Ontology served the mistaken and wholly superfluous notion that a ‘science of being’ ought to accompany the philosophy of being. But this is merely an attempt to smuggle a necessary being into the argument, which of necessity cannot be caught in the net of ontology without exhibiting predicates or qualities.

²) Boeder, Heribert: *Topologie der Metaphysik*, Karl Alber, Freiburg 1980, p. 40.

³) Substance embodied is the crux of the matter. Whether unembodied substance can be conceived was left unresolved by Aristotle. The difference is that Aristotle seems not to have been significantly perturbed; whereas an ontological doctrine has obligations!

⁴) Cf. Kant’s terminal rebuttal of ‘ontological proofs’ in *CPR*, Book II, Third Antinomy.

sion of helping humans to understand what human beings are and holding fast to a fallible human creature that is already in possession of too much knowledge that cannot be comprehended because the agent of knowledge has been expunged from it.¹

IV

It cannot be my purpose, however, to take responsibility for, or to take down, scholars whose ideas about metaphysical pursuits differ from mine. In fact, the real problem is that Aristotle and all thinkers walking in his footsteps stress the “desire to know”. This notion has been demolished with considerable ferocity for a long time now (even before Hume broke into print); and surely it was not without just cause that metaphysics has been described as the one philosophical discipline that holds no secured findings in its hands at all, once its pretensions and hand-me-downs from religious belief systems collapsed. Metaphysics simply does not add anything to anyone’s knowledge. It has on the contrary been the ‘speculative’ philosophy *par excellence* ever since Anaxagoras set the scene for it and found in Aristotle his most adept protege.

Yet if we accept this, the questions we may put to metaphysics acquire a different complexion. For example, the entire intentional realm comprising the fauna and flora of earth remains *terra incognita* in terms of the ‘what is?’ question clinging to intentionality. In spite of thousands of scientific writings on the origin of life, the jury is still out on the preliminary question of what life actually is. But we talk about it incessantly, because

¹) Hence Adorno’s castigation of Heidegger as the chief culprit of this malaise: “Heidegger of course saw through the illusion that feeds the popular success of ontology: that a consciousness in which nominalism and subjectivism are sedimented ... offers a plain choice of *intentio recta*. He circumvents the alternative with his doctrine of the ‘Sein’ as the chief concept—yet whoever says ‘Sein’, does not speak of Sein, but only of the word.” [Subtext: Kein Sein ohne Seiendes: “No Being without beings”. The word ‘Sein’ is in effect an ontological cupola: “Es ist”; “Sie sind” (plural); “Es kann sein” (conditional). This is Adorno’s gripe. Ed.]. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1966, pp. 74-5.

we wish to engage ourselves with this enigma; and once we begin, it soon becomes evident that metaphysics is the one field that has acquired enough ideas on that subject matter for all of us to simply keep talking. This in turn is highly suggestive of that side of its manifestation which, in Ortega y Gasset's words, "exhibits a most dramatic and pathos-ridden character in its thought combinations . . . which closely resemble the nature of a game."¹

Carving out a special niche in philosophy for a metaphysics of life seems most appropriate for an era that bears the slogan 'globalisation' on its flag. It facilitates at least one supremely important recognition, that all living things share the same condition of existence. Moreover that the variety of survival equipment needs to be assessed in a much deeper way than we have done hitherto. For example, the term 'value' is ubiquitous in all our dealings, without much consensus on its meaning; yet this is an issue deserving of being revisited in its more stringent human context.

It transpires that the term 'human world' requires a definition that specifies *what we are conscious and aware of*. It is after all a mere 200 years ago that scholastic fictions posing as *onta* were ousted in favour of *experience* as our sole access to what is going on in the world-as-such. Kant did not stress, however, that we actually live in five worlds, each corresponding to one of our sensory apparatus and its specific sensitivity. He was content to stipulate that a person is defined by the 'unity of apperceptions', i.e. the consortium of faculties that has charge of coordinating them so that a sense of seamless oneness as well as continuity prevails.

Nonetheless, reality bears a five-fold relation to us, two of them primitive, three of them sophisticated enough to make that world rich in content and meaning. But we tend to forget that for most animal life on earth, other windows open up

¹) Ortega y Gasset, op. cit., p. 349. Philosophy is in essence a game of posing riddles drawn from life and nature and then seeking to solve them.

which reveal a different world—think of bats and bees, fish and foxes. Our recent sciences and technologies have devised instruments to serve as deputies for us in the discernment of these perspectives; but this doesn't mean that we can share the *experience* they convey to the creatures possessing those capacities as their native equipment. In other words, we can conceptualise and utilise such phenomena as sonar or ultraviolet light, but not experience them. Accordingly we take on board their existence as *onta*, even though they do not impinge on our sensorium.

The importance of this quinequivalence turns our mind to the aforementioned criterion of 'value added'. Humans (or perhaps only *Homo sapiens*—we cannot be sure of this) have acquired the knack of saturating the three 'sophisticated' senses of vision, hearing and touching with a considerable freight of connotations, from a simple arrow which indicates a direction, to the vestment of a building, statue, painting, poetic text, dance or musical score with layers of import and significance which do not inhere in them qua objects or acts. We subsume such artefacts under the heading of 'cultic objects' and see in them the 'culture' and 'arts' of that society. As several of our chapters in this volume concern themselves with the arts, I leave this hint standing as a pointer to the natural, indeed unequivocal competence of metaphysics to engage with them.

It is worth at this moment, however, to look at music as a specimen, to illuminate the paradox. The idea that an ontology of music is possible; that it is an objective phenomenon amenable to comprehensive description without recourse to a human sensibility, is perhaps the most egregious of errors that a thinker could perpetrate. Yet there is an abundant scientific as well as philosophical literature testifying to this supposition; though once again the plaintiffs are out of court, since it is futile to speak of music without there being creatures to make and perceive it. Thus an oscilloscope reveals merely the vibrating molecular streams that we know to be audible as noise, because we apply our prior knowledge to the phenomenon. If

we don't know this beforehand, the stream could represent any vibratory entity whatever.

In other words: Thinkers on nature and human nature cannot legitimately be constrained to work on the quantifiable aspects of their subject matters. We have done it; it is incomplete and remains 'work in progress' with very little chance of 'ultimate secrets' being unveiled. That this has repercussions on empirical philosophy is known, yet rarely acknowledged in its implications. For it raises the question of how much confidence we can repose in our belief that reality must, by and large, correspond to our comprehension of its features—an issue, indeed, fraught with huge ambiguities on account of the vexatious self-contradictions involved to which we have already alluded. Namely that existents to which our sensibility is blind (i.e. lacking a category of apperception) cannot be posited to exist. Accordingly our belief in such pseudo-onta has no leg to stand on. The world we experience does not constitute a parallel existence to 'existence itself'; it is the same world! Meaning: that problems like these, as well as causation, potential, motion, space, time and many others of the items in Aristotle's Book Delta all refer ultimately to the human world too—to their human observer who thinks about them and makes judgements that relate them to the human world.

Let me note in passing that much heavy weather has been stirred up in this context over Kant's *Ding an sich*, what it purports to be.

First, what it is not: the object described as 'such and such colour, weight, density, chemical constitution' (it could in principle be pulverised); second, its concealed aspects (which can often be resolved by the *pars pro toto* rule).

Then, what it is: the thing as it appears to us in our spontaneous grasp before we start thinking of accidents, attributes, predicates etc. It stands to reason then, that we can never account to the full for the haecceity and quiddity (i.e. all the predicates, attributes, properties and accidents) of an object other than what appears to us.

A *Ding an sich* is not therefore ‘a thing’ cloaking itself in impenetrable vestments; it is not a thing at all. Rather it is a *conception* of instantiations of thinghood in a causal mesh that is partially but not absolutely penetrable, and certainly not amenable to any conception that seeks to close the causal mesh with definitions, delimitations, determinants or proofs. This limitation on our capacity for explaining the world in readily intuitive terms is rarely admitted (cf. the ‘quantum world’—what exactly are we to make of fundamental ‘particles’ like quarks, fermions, leptons, bosons et al., that are not particles of anything, but *events*). But the outcome is that in our fondness for epistemological and ontological certainty we fill our theories with abstruse denotations and nomenclatures that often seem to fit sci-fi entertainment better than strict science.

v

More of this discussion seems unwarranted. Metaphysics remains what it was in Aristotle’s hands; what befell this discipline afterwards cannot be laid at his door. On the contrary, metaphysics today can only cover the things we all talk about, experts and novices alike, and with an untarnished sense of mystery clinging to it—namely, issues of the utmost human relevance which we have never truly mastered, even though every person ever born carries them in their baggage till the day they die. These are our instincts, sensibility, intuitions, inquisitiveness, feelings, urges, aptitudes, impulses, pre-dispositions, affections, sentiments, curiosity, knack, rapport, talent and genius. The list could easily be enlarged; but they all have in common their metaphysical predictability. As someone once said, “we know much more than we know,” pointing to how much our adaptability to the animate and inanimate environment over the millennia is an accumulation of real, yet unstateable knowledge.

In a word: the ground covered by metaphysics is in part the same as it was for Aristotle before the church requisitioned his principles for its own purposes; in its other part it covers

intentional being, with a self-evident emphasis on human intentionality.

It is a thought I wish to leave with the reader. There are no ultimate solutions, final insights or eternal truths to be found down that line. We can only think and talk about those aspects and perspectives. But even mere talk, providing it is based on sound and deep thinking might eventually bring a really old-fashioned word back into circulation: ‘wisdom’.

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A brief conspectus of the chapters may serve for orientation.

Ch. I: “Hegel, Recognition and Rights”, brings up a capital metaphysical problem from Hegel’s political philosophy, the so-called *Anerkennung* (‘Recognition’) doctrine, which unaccountably escaped scholarly attention until Axel Honneth alighted on it in 1991. To the best of my knowledge, this paper, published in 2007, was the first exposure of Hegel’s ‘cat and mouse’ game with the recognition doctrine in his major political opus, the *Grundlinien des Rechts*. The point is, that Hegel concealed his use of *Anerkennung* by a proliferation of synonyms (presumably to evade being lumped in one basket with Fichte), so this paper, as it were, puts the signposts back in place which Hegel had assiduously obfuscated.

Ch. II: “Confucius, Aristotle and the Golden Mean” is a close examination of the similarities (or better phrased: congruences) of the ethical philosophies of two of the most influential thinkers of all time. The tabulation of their key concepts at the head of this paper confers its agenda on it. In view of their temporal and cultural distance it is certainly astonishing to find these two overtly ‘practical’ doctrines fitting seamlessly into a metaphysics of personal and social relations.

Chapters III to VI form a tetralogy of engagement with aspects of Leibniz’s metaphysics. Particular attention is paid to some of his pioneering ideas that are surprisingly fecund in the context of our own contemporary scientific and cosmological theories.

Ch. III: “Leibniz’s *Kehre*: From Ultradeterminism to the Philosophy of Freedom” details the extraordinary *volte face* of the philosopher from his early thoroughly deterministic standpoint, which rested solidly on God’s omniscience (the doctrine of the ‘complete concept’) and the latter’s replacement by the dynamic ‘law of the series’. This turnabout culminates in the unmasking of determinism as an insupportable, indeed incoherent doctrine with far-reaching ramifications down to our own day.

Ch. IV, “Compossibility and the Adjacent Possible” contrasts a fundamental Leibnizian principle with a number of supposedly logical potentials and their presumed inevitability of actualisation (Huxley, Boltzmann), culminating in a confrontation with the researches of Stuart Kauffman into biological chemistry—specifically the latter’s enquiry into the safeguards against unrestrained synthesis in the earth’s ecosphere. Here metaphysical principles and scientific studies in organic chemistry meet happily on the same ground.

Ch. V, “Metaphysics and Quantum Cosmology in Debate on Possible Worlds” deals with an important issue in current cosmological theory, i.e. speculations on multiple universes. Writing 300 years ago before Einstein, Leibniz geometricised space as well as time, identifying them as relata of human perceptive sensibilities. His foray into dreams, ‘animalcules’ and intercommunications reveals further unexpected correlates to be considered in this context.

Ch. VI, “The Problem of Time, Space and Motion: A Study of Leibniz’s Solution” brings up the ancient Arabic conundrum of the *Rota Algaselis*. Paradoxically it is revealed to be a metaphysical rather than mathematical problem, as it divulged a problem with our conceptions the relationship between finite parts and the infinite continuum. This paper examines how Leibniz grappled with these issues by unleashing a veritable *tour de force* of ingenuity on the solution.

Ch. VII, “Being en rapport with the World”, exhibits an unexpected meeting of minds between Leibniz and Wittgenstein

on the Cartesian *res cogitans*.

Both these thinkers found themselves out of sorts with the claims for an “inner essence”, aka *mind*. Despite the lack of a related platform of presuppositions, these thinkers were united (each from his own point of view). in analysing a deeply flawed Cartesianism that governed intellectual debate over the 300 years that lay between them. It urges a propinquity on us, that has not previously been set in juxtaposition.

Ch. VIII, “Eavesdropping on Wittgenstein” is not a rigorous examination, but a kind of ‘improvisations on a theme’ that runs through the *Philosophical Investigations*. It was tempting to adopt this free-flowing enquiry, in acknowledgement of the similarly non-doctrinaire sequence of Wittgenstein’s thought.

Ch. IX, “Danto and the Pale of Aesthetics” turns the spotlight on the arts. Purportedly a ‘Theory of Art’, Danto’s *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* succeeds in completely obfuscating the notion of art by his ultra-Hegelian confusion over the role of ideas in art. Not realising that his doctrine empowers the whim of any self-appointed judge to treat an object as ‘art’, he effectively nullifies connoisseurship and along with it his own authority to speak.

Ch. X, “Music and the Aesthetic Copernican Revolution of the 18th Century”, deals with the new aesthetic criteria emerging in the age of Haydn and Beethoven that were predominantly oriented on the mystery of *wordless* affective communication. What the experience of music conveys to its subjects, is *mutatis mutandis* applicable to the other arts—a thought first forwarded by Pater’s notion of *Andersstreben*, which polinated a whole range of new philosophical ideas in aesthetic literature.

Ch. XI, “Music, Truth and Profundity”, carries the debate further by an enquiry into the issue of ‘profound experience’ communicated by the arts, though predominantly ‘absolute’ music. The late Peter Kivy wrote voluminously on this topic, seeking to separate music from discursive arts. But he seems never to have realised that his presuppositions on behalf of

literature are not separable into different species of aesthetic experience from those pertaining to music.

Ch. XII, “Deacon’s Map for Climbing Mt. Improbable” finds Deacon on a common trajectory with Richard Dawkins. However, in seeking to explain the “emergence of mind from matter”, Deacon remains throughout oblivious of the innate metaphysical texture of his discourse, subscribing instead to the pseudo- and proto-attributes of a plethora of mechano-chemical devices. His aim was clearly to expunge entelechies and their intentionality from the enquiry. But in the outcome, explanatory closure on either mind or a living cell is never accomplished, leaving us in the lurch with the issue (unresolved since Descartes) of how a *thing* can become a *thinker*.

I

Hegel, Recognition and Rights: '*Anerkennung*' as a Gridline of the Philosophy of Rights¹

*The man accustomed to the ways of society
is always outside himself and knows how to
live only in the opinions of others. And it is,
as it were, from their judgement alone that
he draws the sentiment of his own existence.*

ROUSSEAU

I

The hidden 'Agent Provocateur'

ALTHOUGH THE LOCUS CLASSICUS of the concept of recognition is the master/slave episode of the *Phenomenology*, it would seem readily portable into the *Philosophy of Rights* (PR).² However, the fact that the term occurs only six times in the 370 pages of the PR seems to have obscured its structural role, and accordingly scholarly effort is scant on the concept as it might pertain to this work.³ Yet an argument could be put that, despite its invisibility it governs foreground proceedings as if from behind a curtain, for it cannot be gainsaid that the conceptual founda-

¹) Among several translation options for *Grundlinien*, 'Gridlines' is the most exact, whereas 'elements' is not even listed by Langenscheidt as an alternative. — Translations from German sources, whether Hegel, Fichte or scholarly, are generally my own.

²) In my opinion, this is the correct idiomatic rendering, as German 'das Recht' implies a plurality, as in English *Bill of Rights*.

³) The presence of *Anerkennung* as an underlying principle of the PR has been completely neglected in the enormous bulk of Hegel scholarship until very recently—and even at this moment of writing (2007) only Robert Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, and Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, have touched on the recognition doctrine in the PR.

tion of the Rights presupposes the principle of recognition.

The plausibility of this suggestion is immediately apparent when, as early as the third paragraph of Part I, Abstract Right, we encounter the following passage:

*Das Rechtsgebot ist daher: sei eine Person und respektiere die anderen als Personen (PR § 36)*¹

It is neither difficult nor illegitimate to the context to see in ‘respektiere’ here a synonym for ‘anerkenne’. And this invites us to contemplate a dilemma: for on the one hand, one could quite readily trace out a recognitive structure in the PR—

The role of recognition in its various forms in the constitution of knowing and acting subjects ... [is] developed most fully in the Philosophy of Right[s]. There in his treatment of the social institutions of modern life, the family, civil society and the state, Hegel sketches the sorts of epistemic and ethical competences that are found within these realms.²

On the other hand the suspicion has been voiced that Hegel deliberately suppressed reminders of the presence of *Anerkennung* in this text:

Hegel persists with making claims on the figure of *Anerkennung* which was fundamental to the practical philosophy of the JPG [*Jena Philosophy of Spirit*], while systematically pushing it into the background in the PR. In later portions of the PR we will encounter further intersubjective structures that give evidence of being incompletely derived in this manner.³

A plausible explanation for this state of affairs is offered by the fact that Hegel had long before writing the PR distanced himself from the liabilities of Fichte’s system, which was in many respects his intellectual paternity; and *Anerkennung* was

¹) “The commandment of rights is therefore: be a person and respect others as persons”.

²) Redding, p. 17.

³) Schnädelbach, p. 205.

of course a celebrated Fichtean coinage in the context of his work on *Natural Rights*.¹ However, in Hegel's PR the principle gained a lot of philosophical substance, as he took great care to ameliorate the deficiencies of argument in Fichte's presentation (see *infra*). For reasons best known to himself, however, Hegel chose this way of declining all association and covering up the tracks leading back to his erstwhile mentor.

2

Starting from Fichte

Yet the idea of *Anerkennung* is intrinsic to the concept of 'rights'. The latter find their logical situation in the philosophy of agency in which they are embedded, e.g. '[the PR] is an agent-oriented or self-actualization theory, based on a conception of the human self to be exemplified or instantiated'.² Moreover it makes little difference to this fundamental fact of human relations whether one's orientation is legal or philosophical. A 'right' remains an empty concept unless it is allied with the recognition of a person as the bearer of that right. "The validity and legitimacy of right are fundamentally a matter of the 'We', that is, of objective spirit".³ In other words, it is of some importance to be mindful of the master/slave juxtaposition and distinguish the narrow conception of rights that are its outcome there, from broad base on which Hegel pursues it in the PR. Seen from the opposite angle, one may deny *Anerkennung* to any one as a person or as a legal entity, but in Hegel's context this is tantamount to a diminution of the human spirit. Thus in his introductory remark to the PR he says,

Der Boden des Rechts ist überhaupt das Geistige (at the bottom of all rights we find the human spirit).

This identifies the primary mode of recognition. For although *Anerkennung* represents, in common with many human traits,

¹) Fichte, 1945.

²) Wood, p. 217.

³) Williams, p. 111.