

PHILOSOPHIZING: STRIVING FOR RATIONAL ANALYTICAL COHERENCE IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This text elaborates on the essence of philosophy and its usefulness in the field of the human sciences. Philosophy is useful because it allows us to understand better the logic and the reasons behind and within a text. It facilitates our understanding of the work of an individual; he or she could be a “professional” or “simple” thinker or writer. Philosophy sets us on the path of understanding and promoting the idea of evidence-based writings in the human sciences. Moreover, and not to be forgotten, philosophy is also a part of the human sciences, thus a humanity. As well, there is a need to know the intellectual and academic tool that we may use to analyze the written thoughts in the social sciences. Metaphilosophy is the answer to this quest for knowledge on the essence of philosophy. Why should we be preoccupied by these interrogations? As a matter of fact, philosophy has evolved since Antiquity. Therefore, we should expect to transform itself again. To this effect, we shall look for the possible shift of philosophy in the future.

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Introduction

To begin with, it is hard to have a definition of what philosophy is. We shall try to provide a definitive definition, for our needs, of what philosophy is; but we must remind ourselves that our definition will be as any other explanation of philosophy: limited and possibly subjected to better ones. Several philosophers have complained that philosophers do not agree on anything. It seems that what they appreciate a lot is to contradict their fellow philosophers. Also, their jargon that they use in their writings is not always clear. To the point that, one has to ask to who are they writing to? If philosophy has to remain an excellent study for the analysis of anything that pertains to human activities, then we must promote the development of a philosophical written discourse that will help the readers to understand every aspect of the topic that we are writing and talking about. Most philosophical texts are extremely arid since they are complicated to understand. Most likely, the ones who understand those texts are those who obviously write them! Noticeably, the philosophers are often unclear in their writings. Consequently, the interpreters and the analysts will not be clear in their interpretation and their analysis in their intellectual works, if they recourse to the philosophical theories of unclear theorists. Since we are more educated in the world than we used to be, especially in the Western world, we understand clearly that intellectualism is outmoded as a symbol of snobbism. It must be so since more people are cultivated, thanks to democracy. We are “out of the cavern and we see the light”. Nowadays, we know things, we know many things indeed! For this reason, we must deter philosophers to write books that are meaningless since they are not educating the population. Several of the philosophers love to testify of their grandeur, their snobbism. They write for themselves and they are proud of it. They seem to cling to the idea that “only I understand such and such question”. They see the light, while the rest of us remain in the cavern! In our own definition, snobbism is the culture of the snobs. The snob is a person who despises those considered socially and intellectually inferiors. He or she often affects an offensive air of self-satisfied superiority in matters of taste and for intellect. For instance, one of the snobby impacts in philosophical intellection is to write texts that are unreadable for even the educated individuals. Indeed, it is very painful intellectually to spend time to read a work that is hardly readable even by an individual who knows how to read and write very well in his native tongue, and still cannot thoroughly understand these useful intellectual ideas.

Philosophy as an intellectual tool

It is there to help the people to develop their thinking skills. It is not always easy to express ideas and to explain them. That is why, we must define and look for philosophical concepts or words that will help us to understand any phenomenon or concepts. We firmly believe that philosophy is useful and necessary to comprehend, and to make sure that we can intellectually master many topics. With philosophical writing, we can reason on things and subjects; and we can rationalize on what is being said. Now, what do we mean by all this? Simply, we must define what does it mean to reason. Reasoning means to determine or conclude logically, in other words by logical thinking. So, what is “logic”? Logic as such, does not seem to have a precise definition. Nevertheless, we are going to proceed by offering a few elements of several aspects of many definitions. We do not intend to offer a definitive answer; rather we intend to help the readers in understanding the path, the route that we are taking to explain many ideas or concepts with the least ambiguities. Logic is a branch of philosophy which is concerned with analyzing the patterns of reasoning, by which a conclusion is properly drawn from a set of premises. Logic is also the system and principle of reasoning used in a specific field of study. It is known as the science of reasoning. It is the activity of the mind that allows us to understand concepts or phenomenon.

Thinking rationally is to think logically. It is the process of reflecting clearly and firmly on something. It is also known as rational thinking. This human action can be defined as “to have or formulate in mind”. Some others might define the verb to think by these verbs: to consider, to judge and to believe. To think rationally means to think with reason. Reason is the basis or motive for an action or thought. It is also an underlying fact or cause that provides a system and principles of reasoning used in a specific field of study. It is also useful beyond the field of studies since we constantly use it in our daily life. It is an underlying fact or cause that provides logical sense for a premise or an occurrence. Reason is after all a gift “of life”, since it is the capacity for logical, rational and analytical thought. It is the manifestation of our “intelligence”. This last word means the capacity to acquire and apply knowledge. Intelligence is somewhat based on the idea of intellect. The word “intellect” means the ability to learn or reason; it implies that the person has the capacity of thinking, reasoning and understanding. It is a psychological

process, in other words a cerebral process, which is very different from feeling and wishing, although they could be related.

Here we can summarize the thinking process by saying that the philosophers what they do is to think intensively; when they do so, they do it methodically because their analysis must be founded on reason and logic. By doing this, the philosophers have the means to understand the phenomenon that they are dealing with. Well beyond the senses and feelings, the theoreticians must intellectualize and submit the subject under sound criteria of analysis, with the objective to comprehend, clarify, and depict unambiguously all the elements of the studied subject. To make sure that the philosophers can explain unceasingly the subject, they must develop an analysis based on several criteria. After gathering all these ideas, they must study them in a way to determine the logic of this information, since they have the duty to find and specify the meanings of all the data; hence, by the end of the analytical process, they may explain it to themselves in a clearer way, and to others as well. Even when they recourse to abstruse, convoluted and complicated concepts, they still have to make the effort to develop an easier way to render the philosophical concepts evident, obvious and comprehensible. We ought to be rational when we explicate the phenomenon, while remaining explainable. There, is one of the main duties of philosophical thought. We believe firmly that we must acknowledge intellectually and socially those who really want to help humanity to go forward and abandon “Plato’s cavern¹”. Knowledge and thought must be given, passed on to humanity. For this “reason”, the philosophers who want to be read and be useful should continue to produce knowledge that will be comprehensible by explaining and defining the main words that they use, or the ones that they believe that we must understand to be able to comprehend their works. Many students, scholars, academicians and all kinds of

¹ This refers to the allegory that is found in the book VII of Plato’s Republic. Plato’s illustration of a cave of chained men in his book entitled “Republic” is meant to depict and provide a philosophical story on the difference between knowledge and illusion, reality and appearance. Men chained in a cavern, facing a black wall, with a fire burning behind them, can see only shadows, which they take for real objects. When one who has been made to leave the cave and see the real world by the light of the sun returns, it is hard for him to adopt to the dim light; he is ridiculed by his former companions and is unable to convince them that what they see are but a vague reflection of reality. This metaphor is a representation by Plato of the philosophically unenlightened; these men were chained from birth in an underground cave, and were able to see nothing but moving shadows, which they take to be the whole of reality. The world outside the cavern represents the “forms” (appearance and reality) and, the escape of the prisoners from the cave the process of philosophical enlightenment. C.C.W. Taylor, “Cave, Analogy of the”, *The Oxford Guide to Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2nd Ed., 2005. “Caverne”, *Les Notions Philosophiques II: Dictionnaire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.

intellectuals have complained about books, and especially the ones from philosophy, for their often arduous, austere and unpleasant textual structure.

Metaphilosophy

What metaphilosophy is? It is a coined word conceived by two words: meta and philosophy. Meta is used as a prefix in English. It implies, philosophically, transcendence or a higher level. Meta has several meanings such as “after”, “beyond”, “between”, over, and “over and above²”. The concept has a condescending aspect since meta means something of a higher or second-order. For instance, when we refer to meta and something, “especially a field of study”, it signifies “the study of the characteristics of whatever it is predicted to”. In this case it is metaphilosophy. For the philosopher Nicholas Rescher, metaphilosophy can be defined as the “project of examining philosophy itself from a philosophical point of view; it is philosophy of philosophy”. The objective of metaphilosophy is to facilitate an understanding of the essence and the methodologies of philosophy³. It is, in effect, a metatheoretical analysis of philosophy. It is fundamentally a philosophical and an analytical discourse on philosophy. It deals with its goals, methodologies and its assumptions. By the goals we are talking about the purposes of philosophy. By methodologies we are speaking about the ways to proceed to question and investigate an intellectual problem. By the assumptions of philosophy, we are somehow referring to the elements that provide the foundations of philosophy. These assumptions are being questioned and challenged by another field of knowledge of philosophy: epistemology. This last word consists of the investigation on the theories of knowledge especially with its regards to methods, validity and scope. Here, we understand that metaphilosophy is de facto an epistemological discourse on philosophy since it promotes a general metatheoretical investigation on the nature, possibility of knowledge and understanding on this intellectual tool of enquiry⁴. Metaphilosophy is an academic expertise that allows the philosophers or other intellectuals to reflect on the

² Peter D. Angeles, “Metaphilosophy”, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, New York, Barnes and Nobles/Harpers and Row Publishers, 1981, 168.

³ Nicholas Rescher, *Metaphilosophy: philosophy in philosophical perspective*. London, Lexington Books, 2014, xi.

⁴ Soren Overgaard, Paul Gilbert, Stephen Burwood, *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy*, Cambridge/New York, Cambridge University Press, Coll. Cambridge Introduction to Philosophy, 2013, 7.

several available philosophical work⁵. It is essential and vital as an analytical mean because it will understandably help to justify the recourse to it by the philosophers, humanists or the social scientists⁶.

If metaphilosophy is philosophy of philosophy, we should then provide a definition of philosophy. There are no definitive definitions of the word philosophy. Nevertheless, although there are several definitions of what philosophy is, we will recourse to one since it will help us to expose our ideas and explain in clearer way on this word. We did a few researches on the definitions; noticeably, even books on philosophy, whatever they are introductory or oriented towards its essence and nature, do not provide any clear definitions of what philosophy is. Most of them are offering long definitions on the topic of philosophy without clearly defining it. The one definition that I accept as a workable definition of philosophy is the one that we find in the “Collins English Dictionary”. Here, philosophy is defined as: *“the academic discipline concerned with making explicit the nature and significance of ordinary and scientific beliefs and investigating the intelligibility of concepts by means of rational argument concerning their presuppositions, implications, and interrelationships; in particular, the rational investigation of the nature and structure of reality (metaphysics), the resources and limits of knowledge (epistemology), the principles and import of moral judgment (ethics), and the relationship between language and reality (semantics)”*⁷.

This definition is helpful because it allows to start with our argumentation on what philosophy is and on what is his usefulness. The one point that the definition is making clear is: philosophy is an academic discipline. To us, this does not mean that philosophy must only be read by a few scholarly trained individuals. No! Philosophy is for everyone; although we ought to have in mind that the technicalities and the specifics of the philosophical language are most of the time uneasy ones to read and understand. Concretely, the uneasiness to read and understand philosophy are often weaknesses since these two factors tend to limit the numbers of possible readers.

⁵ Ibid.13.

⁶ Ibid.4.

⁷ “Philosophy”, *Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, London & Glasgow, Collins, 1986.

Most philosophers agree on one thing: there is no definitive answer to what is philosophy? According to the British philosopher Alan Robert Lacey, to keep on searching for the right definition for the word philosophy, it is fundamentally an embarrassment for the professional philosopher since he cannot produce any succinct or agreed definition of the main matter of his profession⁸. Furthermore, the question of what philosophy is? is itself a philosophical question. Without a doubt, by trying to define philosophy, its object and purposes, we acknowledge that there is a controversy surrounding the correct answer to it. The field of study that helps to solve these questions on the essence of philosophy is metaphilosophy. We should keep also in mind that metaphilosophy is a subfield of philosophy and mainly an undeveloped field of study. In agreement with this last statement, the German American philosopher Nicholas Rescher affirms that metaphilosophy is a neglected field of research⁹. As of May 2016, there are not many books on metaphilosophy or as “introductory works on metaphilosophy”! The intellectual, the scholar, the reader and the student must be able to understand most of the aspects of his academic tool. Philosophy must be understood since we should use it, and consequently, something that we use should be clearly understood to be useful for ourselves and our human community. People that recourse to philosophical analysis of some kind, are those who need to reflect about what they do or think. Especially for us, philosophy is somehow at the heart of our knowledge, and several thinkers in the field of social sciences and humanities tend to forget about this fundamental aspect of our academic thinking. To question on the essence of philosophy is fundamental because this intellectual discipline is at the heart of any kind of cultural criticism. As a matter of fact, philosophy is at the origin of several social sciences. It was the starting point of most of the sciences that we study today. We understand that philosophy is regarded as the originator of most the field of knowledge since the pre-Socratic philosophers were the first to try to study systematically the nature of the world. This world equally includes human beings and their societies. In other words, philosophy studies all the aspects of our world; here are a few of the scientific discipline that came out of ancient and modern philosophical intellections: biology, mathematics, physics, ethics, laws, politics,

⁸ Alan Robert Lacey, *Modern Philosophy: Introduction*, Boston/London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, 1-2.

⁹ “While the pursuit of the philosophy of various studies (of science, of art, of politics, etc.) has recently blossomed, the philosophy of philosophy remains a comparatively neglected domain.” Nicholas Rescher, *Philosophical Dialectics: An Essay on Metaphilosophy*, New York, University of New York Press, 2006, vii.

sociology, psychology and language. This succinct explanation on the role of philosophy in the development of academic studies throughout the history civilization is a reminder of the necessity to develop our logic and our capabilities to criticize what we read and understand.

Philosophy's mission

What is the mission of philosophy? For Rescher, we should not talk about the mission of philosophy since there are too many! Now this being said, we could nevertheless mention a few of them that might be important for us right now. A) Philosophy is helpful to explain the human condition in relation to the world and our place in its vast scheme of things. B) Philosophy could help us providing guidance in making assessments of importance, such as worth, justice, and the major dimensions of evaluation. C) Philosophy could enable us to achieve clarity of thought¹⁰. Philosophy is an intellectual process that allows the thinkers to undertake a philosophical investigation on a subject, with the objective to make us understand profoundly and clearly the problems related to a topic. This process is a serious mode for understanding a subject, a phenomenon or a topic. It is a quest for knowledge, and we must say a serious and laborious quest for truth and comprehension: it necessitates a constant tireless search of pertinent and needful information. For N. Rescher, the theoretical or the cognitive benefits for knowledge are the satisfaction of knowing something, which could be an end unto itself, but also it could be a mean to an individual or a collectivity to help themselves to solve their personal or communal existential problems. There, we mean elements such as food and water, shelter, security and all our other needs and wants. To look for crucial information is an imperative activity for the human beings, especially when we think that they must deal with different situations that may cause death. To this effect, Rescher wrote that “*security against natural and human hazards all require information*¹¹”. The rational enquiry which is philosophy is de facto a quest for the valuable information. This expression, “the best valuable information”, signifies the best reasonable estimate of the truth. Intellectually we must gather and analyze all the information that we can, then, from our

¹⁰ Rescher, *Metaphilosophy: philosophy in philosophical perspective*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

analysis we can measure the value of our evidence through our logic and our rationale. This quest of the truth should not be seen, perceived as a “Spanish Inquisition” process! This dynamism sustains that the quest for truthfulness on things or objects is a philosophical prospect of assessing the truth, which means philosophically that this claim of truthfulness is nothing but a “presumptive” truth. The claim of truthfulness must constantly be analyzed critically because there is no perfect mode or methodology to assess the truthfulness of a phenomenon or a subject. Our mechanisms of enquiry are essentially imperfect even if they remain often useful philosophically or scientifically. There is no systematic methodology that can provide us with a total secured claim of a definitive truth in matters of philosophical issues, questioning or interests. We must profess with the concept of estimation, which means: a rough calculation of the value, number, quantity, or extent and intent of something. It includes also a judgment of the worth of or character, or someone, or something. To do so is to estimate. Voilà! Hence, Rescher wrote that “philosophy pivots on reasoned inquiry because we are Homo sapiens, a rational animal. We do not want just answers to our questions, but answers that can satisfy our intelligence, answers that we can in good conscience regard as appropriate, as tenable and defensible¹².

Philosophizing means to read, to think and often to write and rethink, reread and rewrite frequently. Grappling with the realities and complexities of our natural and human world, demands that we develop intellectual tools to help us to assess the puzzle of existence. Philosophy has historically provided us with ideas to help us to learn about our world and our lives. These ideas and concepts are there to facilitate our comprehension and intellection of the world. Correspondingly, it could be said that philosophy has two types of questions. One is clarificatory. It means that it must clarify aspects of the subject of enquiry. To clarify means to make statement less confusing and more comprehensible. To clarify means also that we are elucidating. Rescher defines elucidating as to “say systematically what things are and how they are made of”. The second type of questions is the explanatory one. Philosophy will explain why things are the way they are or how they seem to be. In other words, explanatory signifies to explain, and the noun is

¹² Ibid., 5.

“explanation”; this noun means a statement or on account that makes something intelligible¹³.

The discipline of philosophy is an academic field that tries to bring order and intelligibility to the confusing diversity of our cognitive affairs¹⁴. It is a theorizing venture¹⁵. This mental activity consists of striving for rational coherence in providing answers to our subject of reflections¹⁶. Again, according to N. Rescher, philosophy is the policeman of thought; it is instrumental to development of an unambiguous thought. It renders our reasoning cogent and intelligible¹⁷.

Conclusion

For the specialists of human sciences, philosophy will be useful because it helps them to structure their intellection. For instance, this academic discipline will allow the intellectuals to formulate a question on an issue or a problem. This problem or issue could be a new one. As it has been written previously, philosophy could certainly be useful in structuring the questioning on a problem and on how it will be solved intellectually and philosophically. Of course, philosophy could lead towards the propriety of an old or a new doctrine or theory. By doing this the researchers might abandon his first wordings of his questions, or they might partially dissolve some elements of their questions. Throughout the process of solving their interpretations, the humanists or the social scientists might discover new arguments against or for a possible resolution of a philosophical interrogation. In the establishment or the setting of a problematic, philosophy has an epistemic role and value¹⁸. It is there to deepen our comprehension of an issue or problem¹⁹. By essence and by its function, philosophy is concerned with reasoning, understanding and argumentatism. Problems can only be solved by good and sound reasoning²⁰. That is fundamentally why we need rational coherence in providing

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.

¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 177.

²⁰ Ibid., 103.

answers to our questions²¹. Coherence is established by the structuration of our problematic, and, at the same time, by our questioning. The value of philosophy as a tool that conducts the researchers at becoming better scholars is based on what has been already mentioned. By instilling new ideas, forcing the minds to think intensively and constantly, by taking humanity into the path of rationalism, philosophy is testifying of its worth and its capabilities in assisting in the “problem resolution process”. The quality of the questioning and of the answers could attest of the efficiency of philosophy in shaping the mind, the interrogation and problem-solving skills of serious thinkers. Being able to understand the nature of things, which means to grasp the realities of the universe, necessitates, academically, philosophy since it offers ideas, concepts and theories that allow the theorists to realize the essence and elements of a circumspect reality and of reality in general²². In sum, and once again, philosophy is clarificatory and explanatory.

Disclosure statement

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²¹ Ibid., 17.

²² Ibid., 6.