

English translation of the Introduction of the book: Carlo Cellucci, *Perché ancora la filosofia* [*Why Still Philosophy*], Laterza, Rome 2008.

Introduction

1. *The Trauma of the Birth of Modern Science*

“If we must philosophize, we must philosophize, and if we must not philosophize, we must philosophize. In any case, therefore, we must philosophize. For, if philosophy exists, we are certainly bound to philosophize since it exists. If instead it does not exist, also in that case we are bound to investigate why philosophy does not exist. But investigating we philosophize, for investigation is the cause of philosophy.”¹

Are still valid these claims, attributed to Aristotle’s *Protrepticus*? The question is justified, because in the seventeenth century philosophy suffered a trauma from which it has not recovered yet: the birth of modern science. The latter has invaded many areas traditionally part of philosophy, thus making the role of philosophy problematic and philosophy itself in need of legitimation.

The need for legitimation has been stressed by several people. For example, Gadamer states that, since the seventeenth century, “what we today call philosophy is found to be in a changed situation. It has come to need legitimation in the face of sciences in a way that had never been true before.”²

In fact, a great deal of philosophy since the seventeenth century has been an answer to the trauma caused by the birth of modern science. The answer, however, has not been unique. There have been radical and moderate answers.

2. *Radical Answers*

A radical answer is that, with the birth of modern science, there is nothing left to speak about for philosophy, because now all questions about which

¹ Elias 1900, p. 3, 19–23.

² Gadamer 1998, p. 6.

one can say something sensible belong to sciences.

For example, Wittgenstein states that “the totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science (or the whole corpus of the natural sciences).”³ Now, “philosophy is not one of the natural sciences.”⁴ Then to philosophy there remains nothing to speak about. Nor philosophy can deal with what we cannot speak about, for “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”⁵ Therefore, “the correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science – i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy.”⁶

This answer, however, is inadequate, because it assumes that the architecture of knowledge works itself out in present sciences. Such assumption is unjustified because, as research proceeds, new questions arise which lead to the creation of new sciences, some of which arise, and have also recently arisen, from philosophy.

Another radical answer, but of a kind opposite to the previous one, is that the insistence of science on the demonstrable prevents it from reaching what-is. Only philosophy permits us to enter an area in which it becomes visible what cannot be proved but can only be pointed to.

For example, Heidegger states that science “does not think.”⁷ It “is the disavowal of all knowledge”, so “no wise man will envy ‘scientists’ – the most miserable slaves of modern times.”⁸ Science aims “at exactness and security.”⁹ But its “insistence on the demonstrable” bars it “the way towards what-is.”¹⁰ Only philosophy permits us to enter “a completely different area” where what “cannot be proved” ultimately “becomes visible to us.”¹¹ To what cannot be proved “we may correspond in turn only if we point in its direction.”¹² This “pointing, that is, drawing the attention on something freeing it for its advent”, is “the way towards what makes man think since always and for ever.”¹³ Thus philosophy escapes from “the unrestrainable spreading of rationalization.”¹⁴

This answer, however, is inadequate because it assumes that philosophy

³ Wittgenstein 1961, 4.11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.111.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.53.

⁷ Heidegger 1975–, VII, p. 133.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XLV, p. 4.

⁹ Heidegger 2000, p. 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹¹ Heidegger 1975–, VII, p. 133.

¹² *Ibid.*, VII, p. 134.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Heidegger 2000, p. 79.

permits us to enter an area where what cannot be proved becomes visible, But philosophy has no special means for doing that. All the more so as Heidegger states that the thought which permits us to enter that area is not man's thought but rather "being's thought", where "the genitive means" that such thought "belongs to being."¹⁵ Not to man. Man can only "keep the truth of being. Man is the shepherd of being."¹⁶ Philosophy does not exist because "there are the philosophers", but only insofar as, and "when, the truth of being takes place, and in the way in which it takes place."¹⁷ But "being, what is being?"¹⁸ To this question Heidegger only gives the disheartening answer: "It is itself."¹⁹

3. Moderate Answers

A moderate answer is that one must admit that philosophy, which from the antiquity has been considered the highest form of knowledge, is not yet a science. While no one would doubt the objective truth or the objectively founded probability of mathematics and natural sciences, the same cannot be said about philosophy. Then a revolution in philosophy is necessary to give it the genuine character of a science.

For example, Husserl states that "philosophy, in its historical intention the highest and most rigorous of all sciences, it, which represents the imperishable aspiration of mankind to pure and absolute knowledge", is still "incapable of giving itself the form of a true science."²⁰ Philosophy "is not yet a science, it has not started yet as a science."²¹ Not only it "does not have a doctrinal system even incomplete and imperfect in its details, but it has none. Everything here is brought into question, every position is a matter of individual beliefs, school interpretations, 'viewpoints.'"²² But "the highest interests of human culture require the formation of a rigorously scientific philosophy."²³ Then, "if a philosophical revolution must have legitimacy in our time, it is necessary for it, however, to be animated by the intent of refounding philosophy in the sense of a rigorous science."²⁴

This answer, however, is inadequate because philosophy has no peculiar field of its own to investigate. For that reason all attempts to develop a

¹⁵ Heidegger 1975–, IX, p. 316.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, IX, p. 331.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XLV, p. 120.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, IX, p. 331.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Husserl 1950–, XXV, p. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, XXV, p. 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, XXV, p. 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

philosophy having an authentic character of science have been unsuccessful. Specifically, Husserl tries to develop a philosophy that is “a universal science of the world, a universal, definitive knowledge, a universe of the truth in itself about the world, the world in itself.”²⁵ To that end he starts from the constitutive activity of the self, with the intent of arriving at the “discovery of the concretely necessary way of being of the absolute (and ultimately transcendental) subjectivity in the transcendental life of the constant ‘constitution of the world’”, and from there at the “new discovery of the ‘world which is’, whose sense of being, constituted transcendently, should give a new sense to what, in the lower levels, was called world and truth of the world, knowledge of the world.”²⁶ But, as it was to be expected, starting from the constitutive activity of the self, Husserl does not arrive at the discovery of the ‘being world’ but only at that of the world as a correlative of subjectivity.

Another moderate answer, but opposite in kind to the previous one, is that one must abandon the idea that science is the paradigmatic human activity and hence to philosophy there remains only to try to become a science. In addition to science there are other areas of culture, such as philosophy, religion, art, with respect to which science has no privileged position. The validity of science and other areas of culture cannot be evaluated in terms of their correspondence to reality. It must be evaluated rather in terms of their capability of achieving the aims we propose through them.

For example, Rorty claims that one must abandon the position of those who maintained that “science was the paradigmatic human activity,” and “what little there was to say about other areas of culture amounted to a wistful hope that some of them (e.g., philosophy) might themselves become more ‘scientific’.”²⁷ Science and other areas of culture are “parts of the same Quinean web”, which “will not, *pace* Quine, divide into the bit which limns the true structure of reality and the part which does not.”²⁸ Their validity cannot be assessed in terms “of a relation between beliefs and objects called ‘correspondence’.”²⁹ It must be assessed rather in terms of their capability to achieve the goals we want to reach through them, for “we continue to hold the beliefs which prove to be reliable guides to getting what we want.”³⁰

This answer too, however, is inadequate, because the validity of science and other areas of culture cannot be assessed merely in terms of their

²⁵ Ivi, VI, p. 269.

²⁶ Ivi, VI, p. 275.

²⁷ Rorty 1991, p. 46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁰ Rorty 1999, p. 33.

capability of achieving the goals we want to reach through them, but must be assessed first of all in terms of the hold on reality they have, and not all areas of culture may be said to have the same hold on reality. All the more as Rorty claims that, confronted with the question what purpose we propose with philosophy, the best we can do is “to stammer that we philosophy professors are people who have a certain familiarity with a certain intellectual tradition,” so “we can offer some advice about what will happen when you try to combine or to separate certain ideas, on the basis of our knowledge of the results of past experiments. By doing so, we can be able to help you hold your time in thought.”³¹ But this does not characterize philosophy, for one could say the same about other areas of culture. Moreover, Rorty assigns philosophy a marginal role for he claims that we philosophers, we specialists in ideas, “are not here to provide principles or foundations or deep theoretical diagnoses, or a synoptic vision.”³² Therefore “we are not the people to come to if you want confirmation that the things you love with all your heart are central to the structure of the universe.”³³ That is, we are not the people to come to if you want to have an answer to the questions which interest you more.

4. *Death of Philosophy?*

The inadequacy of these as well as all other answers to the trauma caused by the birth of modern science, make one doubt that trying to legitimate philosophy after the birth of the modern science is a feasible enterprise.

This doubt is strengthened by the fact that many twentieth century philosophers have claimed that philosophy is dead because it has dissolved into the sciences.

For example, as we have seen, Wittgenstein claims that to philosophy there remains nothing to speak about because the totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science.

Similarly, Heidegger, rather inconsistently with his above mentioned assertions, claims that “the sciences are now taking over as their own task what philosophy in the course of its history had sometimes tried to represent, and even then only inadequately, that is, the ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art).”³⁴ Thus “philosophy ends in our present age. It has found its place in scientificity.”³⁵ The “end of philosophy means the completion” of philosophy, where “however, completion does not mean perfection,” that is, it does not mean that “philosophy would have attained

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁴ Heidegger 2000, pp. 64–65.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

the highest perfection at its end.”³⁶ The completion of philosophy rather means “its dissolving into the sciences.”³⁷

But, if philosophy is dead, if it has dissolved into the sciences, then trying to relegitimate it is an impossible task.

5. *Criticisms by Scientists*

That philosophy is dead, that it has dissolved into the sciences, is also the opinion of several scientists.

For example, Hawking states that “the people whose business it is to ask why, the philosophers, have not been able to keep up with the advance of scientific theories,” and while in the eighteenth century philosophers “considered the whole of human knowledge, including science, to be their field,” in the twentieth century they have “reduced the scope of their inquiries so much that Wittgenstein, the most famous philosopher of this century, said, ‘The sole remaining task for philosophy is the analysis of language’. What a comedown from the great tradition of philosophy from Aristotle to Kant!”³⁸

Similarly, Mullis states that “chemists always believe they’re smarter than biochemists. Of course, physicists think they’re smarter than chemists, mathematicians think they’re smarter than physicists, and, for a while, philosophers thought they were smarter than mathematicians, until they found out in this century that they really didn’t have anything much to talk about.”³⁹

6. *Why Still Philosophy?*

One must then ask: Why still philosophy? Did philosophy dissolve itself into the sciences and is now a purely ornamental discipline? Or can it still be fruitful, and what kind of philosophy can be such?

To ask this question is nothing new, for to a certain extent philosophical reflection has always been a discourse on philosophy, having from its very origin called into question all human knowledge, including itself. But, with the birth of modern science, such question has become more urgent, in addition to being as more difficult and embarrassing.

To ask whether philosophy can still be fruitful, and what kind of philosophy can be such, is the starting point of this book. In it I claim that philosophy can still be fruitful only if it is an inquiry into the world.

This claim, apparently trivial, has an important consequence. It entails that philosophy is an activity which aims first of all at knowledge – a knowledge that differs from scientific knowledge in no essential respect, and

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁸ Hawking 1988, p. 185.

³⁹ Mullis 1998, p. 38.

is not restricted to any area. As Descartes says, philosophy aims at the knowledge “of all things that mankind is capable of knowing.”⁴⁰ Thus the object of philosophy is not essentially different from those of the sciences, and philosophy is an activity which is not essentially different from the sciences.

The only difference between philosophy and the sciences is that philosophy deals with questions which are beyond the present sciences – that is, questions the latter are unable to handle – and deals with them trying unexplored routes. By so doing, when successful, it may give rise to new sciences.

7 . Other Views About Philosophy

My viewpoint on philosophy differs from several ways in which philosophy has been conceived in the modern and contemporary age.

For example, it differs from Kant’s, according to whom philosophy must assume sciences as a matter of fact and ask how they are possible, as a preliminary step towards the question: “How is metaphysics in general possible? How is metaphysics as science possible?”⁴¹ That is, how is it possible philosophy as a discipline separated from the sciences, on whose results, however, as in the sciences, a universal and lasting agreement could be reached?

It differs from Husserl’s, according to whom philosophy must start “from the self, which produces all its validities,” and build up “an autonomous science of the spirit, in the form of a self-understanding and an understanding of the world as an operation of the spirit,” since “the true nature” is “a product of the spirit,” so “it presupposes the science of the spirit.”⁴²

It differs from Wittgenstein’s, according to whom philosophy has no effect on the growth of knowledge, “it leaves everything as it is.”⁴³ Philosophy “simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.”⁴⁴ We “do not seek to learn anything new by it”, but only “to understand something that is already in plain view.”⁴⁵ In philosophy, “it is not that a new building has to be erected, or that a new bridge has to be built, but that the geography, as it now is, has to be judged.”⁴⁶

It differs from Quine’s, according to whom philosophy “is contained in

⁴⁰ Descartes 1996, IX–2, p. 2.

⁴¹ Kant 1900–, IV, p. 280.

⁴² Husserl 1950–, VI, pp. 345–346.

⁴³ Wittgenstein 1958, I, § 124.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, § 126.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, § 89.

⁴⁶ Wittgenstein 1983, V, § 52.

natural science, as a chapter of psychology.”⁴⁷ It studies “how we, physical denizens of the physical world, can have projected our scientific theory of that whole world from our meager contacts with it: from the mere impacts of rays and particles on our surfaces and a few odds and ends such as the strain of walking uphill.”⁴⁸

Apparently, however, my viewpoint does not differ from Russell’s, according to whom philosophy “aims primarily at knowledge.”⁴⁹ At a knowledge which “does not differ essentially from scientific knowledge,” for “there is no special source of wisdom which is open to philosophy but not to science, and the results obtained by philosophy are not radically different from those obtained from science.”⁵⁰

But that there is no difference is only apparent. Indeed, for Russell philosophy “is a study apart from the other sciences: its results cannot be established by the other sciences, and conversely must not be such as some other science might conceivably contradict.”⁵¹ The knowledge philosophy aims at is the kind of knowledge “which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs.”⁵² Philosophy “searches out any inconsistencies there may be” in “the principles employed in science and in daily life, and it only accepts them when, as the result of a critical inquiry, no reason for rejecting them has appeared.”⁵³

From this it is clear that my viewpoint is different also from Russell’s.

8. *Priority of Questions Concerning Knowledge*

Once the questions whether philosophy can still be fruitful, and what kind of philosophy could be such, have been answered in the affirmative, the task arises to develop it.

This task, however, can be undertaken only after dealing with some preliminary questions.

These are questions concerning knowledge. That questions concerning knowledge can be preliminary to the development of a fruitful philosophy, depends on the fact that the philosophy is an inquiry into the world, and the world is the primary datum. So questions concerning knowledge have priority over all other philosophical questions.

A great part of this book is devoted to them. Therefore the book is a sort of preliminary discourse on a fruitful philosophy.

⁴⁷ Quine 1969, p. 83.

⁴⁸ Quine 1995, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Russell 1997, p. 154.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵¹ Russell 1996, p. 240.

⁵² Russell 1997, p. 154.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 149–150.

The questions concerning knowledge considered in this book are: the chimeras of knowledge, the statute of knowledge, the means of knowledge, the fine texture of knowledge.

9. The Chimeras of Knowledge

The first question concerning knowledge considered in this book is the chimeras of knowledge. In it I claim that, in its long history, philosophy has obstinately though fruitlessly chased some chimeras – that is, fantasies or illusions – concerning knowledge, which have diverted philosophy into directions that have prevented it from adequately understanding the character of knowledge. Such chimeras must be disposed of if one wants to develop a fruitful philosophy.

The chimeras of knowledge considered in this book are: truth, objectivity, certainty, intuition, deduction, rigor, mind.

My viewpoint is opposed to a whole tradition of modern philosophy, from Kant to Husserl and analytic philosophy, according to which such chimeras are the main object of philosophy. This tradition views truth, objectivity and certainty as the purpose of philosophy, intuition and deduction as the means to achieve that purpose, rigor as a requirement to reach it, and mind as the theatre where that purpose is to be pursued.

The main reason why philosophy has obstinately chased such chimeras is the precariousness of human life, which generates anguish. Philosophers try to escape from it looking for an absolutely safe handhold, and believe to have found it in those chimeras. But an absolutely safe handhold does not exist, one must resign to the fact that human life is subject to precariousness, all human constructions can be destroyed at once like children's sand castles. Truth, objectivity, certainty, intuition, deduction, rigor, mind are mere chimeras, and the confidence in them is no more solid than those sand castles.

10. The Statute of Knowledge

The second question concerning knowledge considered in this book is the statute of knowledge. In it I claim that the main question concerning knowledge is: What is the role of knowledge in nature? That is, what is the role of knowledge in human life, and generally in the life of all organisms? What is required is a precise analysis of that role. Such analysis cannot have a normative statute, that is, it cannot establish once forever what the role of knowledge in nature must be. It can only clarify what its role has been so far.

My viewpoint is opposed to that of analytic philosophy, for which the main question concerning knowledge is: What is knowledge? According to analytic philosophy, what is required is a precise explication or analysis of the concept of knowledge. Such analysis must have a normative statute, that is, it must establish once forever what must be the characters of knowledge.

Philosophers are anxious to assign a normative value to their solutions.

They do not admit that their solutions are contingent, pretend that they are necessary. This is an expression of their anguish in front of the brevity of human life, which prevents them from recognizing that their solutions are mere hypothesis and, like all hypotheses, are destined to be replaced soon or later by others.

That the main question concerning knowledge is ‘What is the role of knowledge in nature?’, does not mean and the question ‘What is knowledge?’ cannot be posed, but only that it is subordinate to the question ‘What is the role of knowledge in nature?’. In any case, it remains understood that an answer to the question cannot have a normative statute.

11. *The Means of Knowledge*

The third question concerning knowledge considered in this book is the means of knowledge. In it I claim that there is a rational way to the acquisition of knowledge, which is given by the analytic method.

The analytic method is the method by which, to solve a problem, starting from the problem, by means of a non-deductive inference, one formulates a hypothesis that is a sufficient condition for its solution, and checks if the hypothesis is plausible, that is, compatible with the existing data. The hypothesis is in turn a problem which must be solved, and is to be solved in the same way. That is, starting from the hypothesis, by means of a non-deductive inference, one formulates another hypothesis that is a sufficient condition for the solution of the problem posed by the previous hypothesis, and checks if it is plausible. And so on. Thus solving a problem is a potentially infinite process.

My viewpoint is opposed to a ‘romantic’ tradition of modern philosophy, from Kant to Frege and analytic philosophy, according to which there exists no rational way to the acquisition of knowledge. The latter is the product of an irrational faculty which is summarized by the word ‘genius’.

In particular, within that tradition, my viewpoint is opposed to Popper’s, according to whom the hypothesis for the solution of a problem cannot be obtained from the problem by a non-deductive inference since, while deductive inferences can be justified, non-deductive inferences cannot be justified. As we will see, however, contrary to Popper’s claims, deductive inferences can be justified only in the same sense in which non-deductive inferences can be justified .

12. *The Fine Texture of Knowledge*

The fourth question concerning knowledge considered in this book is the fine texture of knowledge. Within the approach to knowledge presented in it several problems concerning special aspects of knowledge arise. Such problems are too numerous to be all dealt with in the book. We will deal with only two of them that, by their importance, seem to deserve special attention: explanation and universal generalization.

As to explanation, in this book I maintain that explanatory reasoning is given by the analytic method because this, being the method by which one finds a solution of a problem, shows the reason of the solution.

My viewpoint is opposed to the views about explanation developed in twentieth century, which take no account of the relation between explanation and the process through which problems are solved. In particular, it is opposed to Popper's, according to whom explanatory reasoning is given by the axiomatic method.

As to universal generalization – that is, the question what entitles one to conclude, from the fact that a property has been shown to hold for an individual object, that it holds for all objects of the same kind – in this book I maintain that this depends essentially on the fact that demonstrations are argument schemata and hence are repeatable.

My viewpoint is opposed to the solutions of the universal generalization problem which have been put forward in the modern and contemporary age by several people, from Locke and Berkeley to Kant and Gentzen.

13. *Coda*

This book ends considering a further question concerning knowledge, but of a kind essentially different from the previous ones: the relationships between knowledge and the meaning of human life.

In this book I claim that human life has no purpose or meaning from an outside or higher viewpoint, but only from an internal viewpoint. Its purpose and meaning is, as Aristotle claims, happiness, which however, unlike Aristotle's claims, does not consist in knowledge. This, however, does not mean the knowledge is irrelevant for happiness. On the contrary, in a sense it is a precondition for it.

14. *About This Book*

That in this book I consider questions concerning knowledge does not mean that in it I present a theory of knowledge. Simply, I put forward a viewpoint on knowledge.

This depends on the very nature of philosophy. In the latter, when someone says that he wants to present a theory – of knowledge, truth, mind, etc. – one should be alarmed because this means that he is about to propose something very pretentious and utterly poor in content. Since philosophy tries unexplored avenues, it moves on a magmatic ground, thus it can offer no theories but only viewpoints. The proper place for theories are the new sciences to which philosophy may possibly give rise.

The questions concerning knowledge considered in this book do not exhaust all questions concerning knowledge. No book can be complete since every investigation is a potentially infinite task, and this book is no exception. However, the questions concerning knowledge considered in this book are essential for the development of a fruitful philosophy.

In dealing with them I have tried to be as clear as possible. To be obscure is not to be profound. On the contrary, one is obscure when he is confused, or has nothing to say, or what he has to say is so little tenable that he tries to hide it by means of obscurity.

Writing a book is not a pleasure, the pleasure lays rather in the preliminary study for it. As Descartes wrote to Mersenne, "I take much more pleasure in instructing myself than in putting into writing the little that I know," and "I pass the time so contentedly instructing myself that I never settle down to write my treatise except under duress."⁵⁴ Writing a book is justified only if the book is of some use to the reader. I hope this book will suggest the reader fresh thoughts concerning the nature of philosophy and knowledge, or at least will offer him an opportunity to reconsider his ideas concerning them.

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⁵⁴ Descartes 1996, I, p. 137.

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