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A history of consciousness: from Kant and Hegel to Derrida and Foucault

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Would a history of the human sciences seem strange if it featured a chapter on the history of consciousness? An argument for including such a chapter could point out that consciousness is often thought to be essential to what it is to be human. Yet the discipline that makes this argument is not a human science, but philosophy, especially modern philosophy, for which consciousness is the privileged subject-matter, and which asserts itself as the privileged way of theorizing about consciousness. Yet in this century, and especially in the last decade, this conception of philosophy (and even of the notion of 'the human sciences') has been called into question by other, 'postmodern' philosophers. These postmodern thinkers are often interpreted as saying that we can now write the history of the human sciences because we no longer believe in the 'sciences of man', and, in particular, we can write the history of consciousness because we can now abandon the concept of consciousness and the conception of philosophy that featured it. To understand how this striking turn is even possible requires us to understand its historical and philosophical background, which includes a history of attempts to rethink the concept of consciousness. In this article, then, I project as a contribution to the history of the human sciences a philosophical history of consciousness, or, more precisely, a history of the disappearance of consciousness.

Of course, some philosophers – call them 'modern' – might think that consciousness could not have a history. On this view, while the contents of consciousness are always different, the structure of consciousness must be invariant for all individuals at all times. A history of cultural changes in how people conceived of themselves could be interesting, but it would not be possible

unless something remained unchanged, forming the lowest common denominator.

Other philosophers – who verge on the 'postmodern' – think that this search for the essence of consciousness is too unhistorical. Whether consciousness changes or remains the same is not the issue, if only because that question itself cannot be formulated clearly enough to be resolvable on either empirical or a priori grounds. They could point out that a history of what philosophers have thought consciousness is can certainly be written, but that writing such a history is unlikely to show us what consciousness really is. On the contrary, such a history may make us wonder instead not only what we mean by consciousness, but whether we mean anything at all by the word. Although consciousness thus seems to some to be the pre-eminent topic of modern philosophy, others have suspected that the history of modern philosophy has disclosed not what consciousness really is, but that it really is not anything at all, or at least not much more than a matter of stipulative definition. On this view, a history of consciousness could only be a postmodern history of 'consciousness', that is, a history not of some real thing but of a technical term. The best way to do philosophy in the future, then, would be to avoid the term.

Of course, what I have been describing is the classic dilemma that philosophy faces in trying to reconcile its own history with its aspiration to finding truths that transcend history. I will call this dilemma the problem of truth and time. The attempt of philosophy to comprehend its own arguments as sound, while showing the unsoundness of its predecessors, can be regarded (from *outside* philosophy) as a literary self-fashioning that is typical of the genre 'philosophy'.

'Modern' philosophers may be upset by this operation because it threatens to turn philosophy into literature, and to deny the truth of their philosophical claims. The analysis of the literary strategies in philosophical texts looks at philosophy from the outside and seems to deny that there is a genuine inside. That is, the *external* perspective on philosophy seems sceptical about the *internal* perspective of philosophers themselves, who believe that they are making true claims about some level of reality. Philosophers must be internal realists about their own discourse, but the external perspective seems to be viewing this discourse as rhetorical and perhaps even as fictional.

What these contrasting perspectives on the status of philosophical discourse are reviving is the ancient conflict between logic and rhetoric. To distinguish logic and rhetoric, as Plato attempted, is already to privilege logic over rhetoric. As the history of philosophy shows, once the distinction is made, rhetoric will be reduced to a minor matter, a side-show that is taken less and less seriously until philosophers no longer understand why anyone would study or practise it. Therefore, for postmodern historians of consciousness to treat philosophy once again as rhetoric seems to deny that there is a genuine distinction between logic and rhetoric. But such a denial seems to claim victory for rhetoric by suggesting that logic is never pure. Philosophy is never really logical if it is always rhetorical.

There are thus at least two traditional philosophical problems that will feature in any study of the history of consciousness. One is the problem of truth and time, which I suggested comes to a head in the way two different attitudes towards philosophy generate conflicting approaches to the question whether consciousness can be described philosophically. The other is the problem of logic versus rhetoric, which arises when any serious attempt to do philosophy finds itself confronted with the possibility of not being taken seriously by those who would treat it as simply another literary discourse, one that may now be already dated historically.

These problems are not new, however. They feature in the history of philosophy from Kant to the present. In what follows I will pick out several such moments, including Kant's critique of Descartes, Hegel's critique of Kant, Heidegger's critique of Husserl, Derrida's critique of Heidegger, and Foucault's critique of Derrida. There are other such moments that I could have chosen (for instance, Roland Barthes's critique of his earlier structuralist self). I focus on the ones that I do, however, because my goal is to show that writing the history of consciousness can itself be a philosophical activity, and that there will still be a place for philosophical reflection in a postmodern era.

KANT'S CRITIQUE OF DESCARTES

My history of consciousness can start with Kant instead of Descartes, because only with Kant has consciousness become problematic enough to make it necessary to search for other terms to take its place. Only with the problematization of the term 'consciousness' itself do we see the possibility emerge of a *history* of 'consciousness'. Even Kant, however, is not self-consciously worried about whether there is such a thing as consciousness. So if the history of consciousness starts with Kant, it could be written only after Hegel. Consciousness can be perceived as a historical phenomenon only when the concept of consciousness becomes problematic enough to cast doubt on the reality of the phenomenon of consciousness itself. Hegel's historicizing of consciousness follows from his critique of the Kantian conception of consciousness, and the Kantian conception follows from a critique of the Cartesian conception. So although I choose to begin with Kant via Hegel's critique, I think that wherever one's study begins, there is not likely to be a first moment of the history of consciousness, for it will have always already begun.

If the beginning of the history of consciousness is the beginning of the disappearance of consciousness from the philosophical scene, this disappearance will nevertheless take a long time (and is not yet complete). During this long interval consciousness will even become the central theme for continental philosophy, especially during the first half of the twentieth century, the heyday of phenomenology. But if we see phenomenology from the perspective of the

history of consciousness, then we will not see it as the moment when consciousness is most completely described by philosophy. Instead, phenomenology will be the moment when 'consciousness' finally becomes so obviously a technical term that the possibility emerges of abandoning it altogether. Of course, this possibility is a difficult one to begin to act on, and perhaps no one will ever do so successfully. But the history of consciousness can be written as if that disappearing point is, paradoxically, in sight. The story it tells will thus be different in tone from the story that sees philosophy progressing towards the alternative limiting point where consciousness is finally made transparent in a single, comprehensive, phenomenological description.

I emphasize this point to make sure that we read Kant not as a precursor of the phenomenological emergence of consciousness, but as the beginning of the disappearance of consciousness. This reading may lead to a difference only in colouring or tone, not in the detailed interpretation either of Kant's negative critique of Cartesian rational psychology in the 'Paralogisms' of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, or his positive construction of the transcendental unity of apperception in the second edition 'Deduction'. The outcome of the critique of Cartesian rational psychology is roughly that there is no such thing as consciousness. Of course, unlike Nietzsche, Kant still believes there is consciousness. Kant's more limited claim is that there is an invalid inference (which is what a 'paralogism' is) from the existence of consciousness to the existence of the thing that is conscious. Cartesians who know that they think do not thereby know immediately that they are thinking *things*.

The most one can claim to know is that, given any experience that one has, one must be able to recognize that one is having that experience oneself. The 'I think' must be able to accompany any experience that one has as a logical condition of having any experience at all. But we cannot know anything further about the I that thinks, such as that it is a simple, single substance (e.g. a Cartesian soul). As some interpreters like to stress, the mistake is to confuse the unity of experience with the experience of unity. The 'I think' as a logical condition of experience (i.e. the transcendental unity of apperception) is not the same as the I that is actually experienced, since the latter (the empirical ego that we introspect) has constantly changing contents. So the Cartesian makes the mistake of confusing the I that is experienced empirically with the transcendental unity that is the condition of having any experience at all, including the experience of the empirical self.

Pursuing the details of Kant's text would lead to seeing that although the text is apparently making clearer what consciousness really is (as a transcendental condition instead of as an empirical experience), at the same time the text is showing that we cannot really know what consciousness is ultimately. At least, we cannot *know* that there is a simple substance that is conscious, as the Cartesians believed.[1] Kant's claim depends on his distinction between knowing and thinking. We can know only about things of which we could have empirical intuitions or sensory experience. God, freedom and immortality (the standard

topics of rationalist metaphysics) are beyond our knowledge. However, Kant maintains that humans will inevitably need to think about these topics, and 'thinking' here is more than just imagining or fantasizing. To think means to be able to give rational arguments about what we can or must believe.

The critique of Cartesian psychology suggests that we have no direct sensory experience of the transcendental I. Therefore, we cannot claim to know anything about *what* the I really is like, but only *that* it must obtain (as a logical requirement, or condition of the possibility of experience). We believe that it obtains because without this condition we could not be having the very experience that we do have. One cannot deny that one is having some experience, and to have an experience is to have a unified experience. But the unity does not come from the object of experience, since experience is a manifold of data. So the unity must be contributed by us.

This indirect transcendental argument that there is no it without an I moves from the admission that there is some experience to the discovery of the necessary conditions for any such experience at all. So do we know that there really is transcendental ego, or do we only think that there is? Kant's language suggests that we know that the transcendental unity of apperception obtains, but the proof or deduction depends not on a direct experience of the transcendental I (which he denies that we have), but on this indirect, transcendental argumentation. There are limits on what we can know about ourselves through our self-consciousness. We cannot know ourselves through introspection, and we cannot know how the active synthesis that produces our consciousness really takes place. All we can infer are the conditions that must obtain in any such synthesis (where such conditions would include, for instance, that experience consist of causally connected interactions between real objects).

These limits on our knowledge of our own mind, that is to say, of our own apparatus for knowing, entail that there will also be limits on our knowledge of things. We cannot have any knowledge of things-in-themselves, but this limitation on our knowledge is not a result of the things themselves, since the right sort of knower (God, for instance) could have complete knowledge about them. *We* cannot know directly, however, how our cognitive apparatus functions and how it is limited. So the unknowability of the things results not from the things themselves but from the unknowability of our own cognitive apparatus.

HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF KANT

Hegel is not the first to attack Kant's conclusions, but he goes beyond contemporary criticisms of Kant by recasting the whole idea of consciousness. We can think of the move from Descartes to Kant to Hegel as a process of making consciousness less and less of a metaphysical notion. Whereas Kant rejects the

Cartesian inference that the self we introspect must be an eternal soul, Kant himself leaves open the metaphysical possibility that the self is a noumenal and not simply a phenomenal entity. Although we have not knowledge but only necessary belief (on moral grounds), we still must believe that the self is somehow both free and eternal. Hegel continues to discuss the problem of free will and the eternal soul, but commentators have noted that he has little to say that is novel. His critics suggest that he really does not understand the problems as well as Kant did, but I would draw a different conclusion. The traditional problems of rationalist metaphysics begin to lose their grip on thinkers after Kant, perhaps partly because of Kant's critique of metaphysics. Hegel's philosophy may therefore be in the early stages of being cured of the obsessions of rationalist metaphysics.

Hegel thus treats Kant's distinction between the phenomenal world of human experience and an other-worldly, noumenal realm as unnecessarily mystifying. He classifies Kant with the empiricists because he sees Kant's talk about the limits of knowledge as a further form of Humean and Berkeleyan scepticism, which Kant intended to overcome. Hegel probed the metaphors used by Kantians to describe how knowledge can be had, exposing in these metaphors senses in which they made knowledge seem impossible. He was not the first to suggest that the Kantian image of the limits of our knowledge as a curtain or boundary is self-defeating. For if we cannot know what lies beyond the boundary, then we cannot say there is a boundary. Any thought that the thing-in-itself is ineffable leads to a problem explaining how we know that our sensory apparatus could be registering the thing as it really is at all. Hegel caricatured the Kantian conception of the constituting consciousness by suggesting that Kantians think of consciousness as an instrument that grasps or captures the thing. He points out that although a forked twig could be used to capture a bird, little could be inferred about the bird from observations about the twig.

I prefer to illustrate the point in more up-to-date terms by suggesting that we imagine a being capable of perception in only two dimensions (for instance, in a computer model). Where such a being could see only a point growing to a certain length and then shrinking to a point again, we three-dimensional beings would perceive a sphere passing through the other being's perceptual plane. This thought experiment suggests further that if there were other mathematically possible dimensions than those we perceive spatially and temporally, for us the world would inevitably remain unknowable.

I will turn shortly to how later Kantians (from Husserl to Hintikka) respond to this objection, but first I want to suggest how it leads Hegel to rethink the Kantian conception of consciousness. Although Kant rejects the Cartesian appeal to the data of introspection for knowledge of the self, the Kantian philosophy is in many respects still committed to what I shall call the primacy of the first person singular. Kant continues to describe individual consciousness, with the goal of discovering in one consciousness the universal features of all

human consciousness. The self's relation to itself is thus the paradigmatic locus of philosophical investigation. The theoretical philosopher can investigate the relation of the empirical to the transcendental ego, and the practical philosopher can go on to consider the moral and metaphysical connections between the phenomenal and the noumenal self.

Since for Hegel the phenomenal perspective is all we have, and all we need, he can give up the noumenal–phenomenal contrast and replace it with the self as seen not from the noumenal or eternal perspective, but from the social and historical perspective. Although Hegel himself does not say so, I would suggest that he has extended Kant's 'Refutation of Idealism' (in the *Critique of Pure Reason*), which is a critique of sceptics who doubt or deny the existence of external objects. Whereas Kant is making a point mainly about our knowledge of objects, Hegel spells out the implications for consciousness. Kant's refutation works by showing sceptics who think that they can be certain of their inner experience of consciousness but not of their outer experience of objects that thinking of experience as 'inside' presupposes that there is experience of the outer world. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel accepts the Kantian argument that there is no I without an It, but tries to show that the experience of an It (or of an external world) would not by itself suffice to generate the idea that there is an inner I to be experienced in addition to external objects. So if consciousness of objects alone would not produce consciousness of self, what dimension is missing from Kant's analysis? Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness is constructed to show that consciousness of self presupposes recognition of other selves, so that there could not be an I unless there were a We (or at least another I than one's own).

The dialectic of self-consciousness is not intended to solve the Cartesian problem of other minds, which starts from the inner and then doubts the existence of external other minds. What Hegel's account is intended to solve is what I would call the problem of one's own mind, i.e. of how it is possible that one experiences oneself as having a mind or a self at all. Hegel's account is not a psychological one, and not genetic, but logical (or transcendental). It shows not whether self-consciousness or the consciousness of others comes first in time (they could both emerge gradually in conjunction with each other), but that the former presupposes the latter, contrary to the Cartesian supposition. Hegel is not correcting Kant so much as adding to Kant a further dimension that he thinks is implied by Kant's critique of the Cartesian rational psychologist. Kant's philosophy can be construed as replacing the metaphysical solipsism of Cartesian rationalism with *methodological* solipsism. Hegel's addition turns Kant's attack on solipsism against vestiges remaining in Kant of the Cartesian conception of the task of philosophy. These vestiges are apparent in Kant's need to start from sensory experience and deduce the objectivity of the external world. Hegel's critique may well be justified if these vestiges are what cause Kant to think of the phenomenal world as in some sense only an apparent one in contrast to an ultimate, noumenal reality beyond space and time.

Instead of starting with sensory experience and deducing objectivity, in the *Phenomenology* Hegel starts by showing the incoherence of any conception of experience presupposing the veracity of recognizably distinct, purely sensory components (which Kant might have called 'intuitions' as opposed to concepts). Hegel then goes on not to ground experience in perception but to show that there is no such thing as pure perception, or at least that the conception of passive perception used by the tradition to ground knowledge serves instead to make knowledge seem impossible. Perception would not be possible without an I, but consciousness of the I is not possible without the experience of another consciousness.

An early title, later dropped, for the *Phenomenology* was *Science of the Experience of Consciousness*. This title suggests that the phenomenological description of the ways consciousness experiences itself can be given a 'scientific' or systematic explanation such as Hegel develops later in the *Science of Logic*. Hegel thereby offers the first statement of the problems of the history of consciousness I described at the outset, and the first solution to them. The historical, changing character of consciousness is admitted, and described at length. Yet the systematic philosopher steps back from this phenomenological description and explains why the changes take place (using arguments that are in many respects much like Kant's transcendental arguments).

So Hegel goes beyond Kant in recognizing that consciousness is historical, that it changes, and that in the act of appearing to itself it disappears. The *Phenomenology* is the story of the disappearance (or *Aufhebung*) of what Hegel calls 'natural' consciousness. A transformation of consciousness from one shape into another takes place when consciousness becomes self-aware, for what it becomes aware of when it becomes self-aware is not a fully constituted, indubitable self. On the contrary, what it experiences is its inadequacy, its failure to have knowledge or experience of the sort it thinks it is having. Instead of the object of knowledge being fully present to the conscious subject, what consciousness experiences when it reflects on itself is the gap that still persists between subject and object. The solution is to do away with the subject–object distinction (as is supposed to happen when we leave the *Phenomenology* behind and move to the *Logic*). But to do away with the subject–object distinction is to do away with natural consciousness, since this consciousness is defined in terms of the subject–object relation.

Another title for the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, or at least a subtitle for it, could thus have been *The History of Consciousness*. Hegel himself says that 'the sequence of Shapes through which consciousness passes on this road is the detailed history of consciousness' own education to the level of science'.[2] To do the history of consciousness is thus to describe various shapes of consciousness both from the inside and in the past tense. For to be able to talk about a 'shape' of consciousness is to be beyond it, and no longer sharing in its way of envisioning either the world or itself. Historians of consciousness will therefore not to be able

to describe their own 'shape of consciousness', and in general will act as if they did not have a shape that could be included in future histories of consciousness. They can do this either as Hegel did, by assuming that their own standpoint represents superior knowledge that cannot be further transcended, or by 'disappearing' into a supposedly neutral, timeless observational stance (perhaps by such simple devices as using the passive voice or avoiding the first person).

Obviously, however, exempting one's own stance from the history of consciousness would be rhetorical self-deception. In the twentieth century philosophers therefore wrestle with the problem of their own historicity, that is, of how to make their own desire to do philosophy, and thus to utter truths about what it is to be a human being, consistent with their recognition of the possibility of radical change in consciousness and in what human beings are. In the light of Hegel's rhetorical failure, one line of solution would be dissolution, that is, changing the meaning of the problematic terms 'consciousness' and 'philosophy', even to the point of trying to abandon them altogether.

HEIDEGGER'S CRITIQUE OF HUSSERL

Hegel's conception of phenomenology could thus have led to giving up the notion of the transcendental ego, and of the ineffability of things-in-themselves in some hidden noumenal realm. Nietzsche states most radically the conclusions that seem to follow from the paradoxes of Kant's position. Not only does Nietzsche debunk the two-world view he sees as the essence of the history of metaphysics, he also attacks the notion of mind as the inner consciousness of an outer world of things. To block the Cartesian inference from the supposed fact that I am thinking to the assumption that I am most essentially a thing that thinks, Nietzsche argues more radically than Kant not only that the inference is invalid, but that the initial premiss is unsound. There is no thinking in the Cartesian sense, says Nietzsche in unpublished notes from 1887–8:

> 'Thinking,' as epistemologists conceive it, simply does not occur: it is a quite arbitrary fiction, arrived at by selecting one element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement for the purpose of intelligibility –
>
> The 'spirit,' something that thinks: where possible even 'absolute, pure spirit' – this conception is a second derivative of that false introspection which believes in 'thinking': first an act is imagined which simply does not occur, 'thinking,' and secondly a subject-substratum in which every act of thinking, and nothing else, has its origin: that is to say, both the deed and the doer are fictions. (Nietzsche, 1967)

The idea of consciousness as that which I most essentially am, and which I control, is suspicious, on Nietzsche's account, both because it misdescribes the

way ideas spring up independently of one's volition, and because it privileges inner contemplation over external action. Nietzsche has little use not only for the idea of the transcendental ego, but for that of the introspected empirical ego as well. For at least one philosopher, then, 'consciousness' has completely disappeared as the subject-matter of philosophy by the end of the nineteenth century.

The twentieth century, however, starts with the return of the transcendental ego in Husserl's phenomenology. Unlike Hegel's conception of phenomenology, which describes the history of the appearance and disappearance of totally different shapes of consciousness, Husserl's programme is unhistorical. Husserl proposes to describe the invariant and universal structures of consciousness persisting throughout the constant change in the contents of consciousness. Consciousness is construed as an infinite series of profiles (*Abschattungen*) of things. A particular thing is never perceived in itself, but only in a series of these profiles, no two of which are exactly alike. The series is infinite because no subset of the profiles of a thing completely exhausts all the possible perceptions of that thing.

This model of consciousness yields a different result from Kant's. For Kant (at least, as Hegel interprets him) things are, in themselves, ineffable. For Husserl things are not ineffable, but instead are inexhaustible. There is no feature of a thing which could not in principle be revealed in a profile, even if there are always further profiles that are possible in the series. So there is nothing that is impenetrable to consciousness. In taking up the Enlightenment notion of the infinite task that continuously progresses towards an asymptote, Husserl sees himself as the defender of reason against the dangers of relativism, psychologism and particularly, historicism. He can face these dangers because although the profiles are constantly changing, the mental schema or noema contains a central core of invariables. Since these are articulatable, there is no reason to think that the unarticulated aspects of things are inarticulatable in principle. The invariables of consciousness guarantee the commensurability of our mental and linguistic representations of the world.

Heidegger's response is to challenge the very idea of mental representation, on which the foundationalist ambitions of Husserlian phenomenology rest. Husserl inherits from both Descartes and Kant the thought that philosophy should put knowledge on secure foundations. Although Heidegger uses the term 'hermeneutic phenomenology' to describe his own project in such a way as not to offend Husserl, the term is misleading in that Heidegger criticizes the foundationalist goals of phenomenology and replaces phenomenology with hermeneutics, which is a non-foundationalist approach to philosophy. According to hermeneutics, philosophy is itself always interpretative, and there is no presuppositionless starting-point that undergirds the rest of our knowledge. Phenomenology is mistaken in believing that by accurately representing the representational process, it will ensure the certainty of the representational

process and get back the world it bracketed. At some point, furthermore, phenomenology runs up against the problem that there must be more to consciousness than the structures and contents of consciousness. If consciousness is itself being represented, there must be something doing the representing. Yet consciousness can only be consciousness of what is represented, not of the representing as such.

To deal with this problem Husserl is thrown back to a solution like Kant's, and he posits a transcendental ego. Sartre then comes along and denies that there is something doing the representing, or that consciousness is anything at all. He prefers to think of consciousness as 'nothingness'. But Sartre's approach still thinks of consciousness as a phenomenon that can be described, and Sartre falls into the trap of taking particular kinds of experience and generalizing them into universal features of human reality. Sartre thus shares Husserl's conception of phenomenology as description, not interpretation. If Sartre had thought of himself as interpreting rather than describing experiences, however, he might not have asserted their universality so hastily.

Sartre does not really grasp how much more radical Heidegger's approach is. Instead of either affirming or denying consciousness, Heidegger stops using the term, with the intention of generating an entirely different vocabulary from that of the tradition. Hence, he uses the term *Dasein*, and argues that doing so allows him to avoid the traditional dichotomy between subject and object. Heidegger hopes that this strategy will avoid the controversy between idealism and realism. This debate plagues the Cartesian tradition and is not solved by Kant's claim that one can be both an empirical realist and a transcendental idealist. Going beyond Husserl's rationalism, Heidegger abandons the search for the invariable, atemporal essences of consciousness, maintaining instead that contexts can be varied as well as contents. Most significantly, philosophy becomes not a phenomenology of the self-evident, but a hermeneutics of the hidden.

Unlike Kant or Husserl, Heidegger would not describe the hidden as either ineffable or inexhaustible. With the hermeneutical insistence on the connection of contents to their interpretative context, neither term is appropriate. While contexts are hidden, they are not ineffable. Heidegger speaks of what I am calling a context as a *Lichtung* (like a clearing in the forest). The clearing or context is not seen or thought, not because it is indefinitely far away from us, but only because it is so close to us. We can and do become aware of contexts, for instance, when we have moved beyond the limits of particular contexts and seen them as inadequate. We are explicitly aware of contexts applied in the past and now no longer used. We are not explicitly aware of our present contexts, however, since we focus instead on the particular contents. But these contents would not seem significant to us in the way they do unless there were a context in the background against which they figure. Particular contents always presuppose a background context that allows them to stand out as important.

However, we can never fully articulate this background to ourselves, and it is

not merely inexhaustible. A context is not completely articulatable in the same sense that its contents are. If the Husserlian were to object that an ideal observer could articulate all the possible contents of the context such that there was nothing more left over, the Heideggerian could challenge the very idea of specifying all the features of anything. With this challenge the model of consciousness as an infinite series of profiles on things no longer appears adequate.

DERRIDA'S CRITIQUE OF HEIDEGGER

Heidegger's substitution of the term *Dasein* for consciousness does not eliminate from itself, however, all the connotations attached to the traditional notion of subjectivity. Heidegger himself comes to realize this, and his later work criticizes the vestiges of the preoccupation with human subjectivity that can be found in *Being and Time*, an unfinished and perhaps unfinishable work. Criticisms of Heidegger by later philosophers like Jacques Derrida are thus often anticipated in Heidegger's own later writings themselves. These writings try to avoid the privilege given to subjectivity, and he opposes the persistence, despite Kant's original criticism, of the belief that we know our own subjectivity better than we know the objective world. At the same time Heidegger maintains that the world is not merely 'objective', that is, it does not consist exclusively of separate (*vorhanden*) objects with precisely articulatable properties. As agents moving about and transforming the world, we experience the world through contexts in which these objects have a use, and what sorts of objects they are depends on these various contexts of use. Understanding of things in the world presupposes a background of shared purposes and interests, which are constantly subject to reinterpretation.

As Derrida and other commentators show, however, these hermeneutic theses are difficult to maintain when Heidegger turns to justify his own project in *Being and Time*. Despite Heidegger's desire to avoid making consciousness the central focus of philosophical investigation, he does start with *Dasein*. Since we are ourselves the clearest cases we know of *Dasein*, the investigation of *Dasein* often resembles an examination of human consciousness. The purpose of starting with *Dasein* is, for Heidegger, not to posit man as the measure of all things, but instead to undermine the modern preoccupation with self and to shift philosophy back towards a concern with Being (with *Sein* instead of merely with *Dasein*). Heidegger's abandonment of the project of *Being and Time* thus results in part from the problem Derrida (1982) notes in Heidegger's act of choosing *Dasein* as the key to raising the question of the meaning of Being:

> It is this self-presence . . . this familiarity with itself of the being ready to understand Being . . . which motivates the choice of the exemplary being, of the text, the good text for the hermeneutic of the meaning of Being. It is

> the proximity to itself of the questioning being which leads it to be chosen as the privileged interrogated being. . . . We can see then that Dasein, though *not* man, is nevertheless *nothing other* than man.

Derrida thinks that Heidegger is thus equivocating. This equivocation is responsible for misleading Sartre and others who misread *Being and Time* as a continuation of the phenomenological project of describing human consciousness.

Derrida believes that Heidegger's move in *Being and Time* from phenomenology to hermeneutics is not sufficiently radical. Heidegger's hermeneutics may not use the word 'consciousness', but Derrida thinks that hermeneutics still privileges self-presence. Heidegger perpetuates the history of metaphysics, despite his intention to overcome metaphysics, in thinking that the place to start philosophy is from a paradigm case where the interrogator and the interrogated are fully present to each other. This presence is assured in that *Dasein* is both the interrogator and the interrogated. Derrida suggests that this vestige of the metaphysics of presence is then coupled to a conception of hermeneutics that perpetuates the theological origins of hermeneutics as used for the reading of the Bible. Heidegger's concern with the *meaning* of Being leads Heidegger to think of *Dasein* as a text that can be read. Derrida believes that Heidegger's style of reading carries over the theological model of making the implicit explicit, of bringing something hidden to light. That is, Heidegger will read our being-in-the-world in a way that will bring to consciousness features that prior theories (or theologies) had overlooked or obscured. This style of reading perpetuates the 'onto-theological' tradition Heidegger hopes to escape in that it approaches the text (here, *Dasein*) as if it were sacred (and the *only* genuinely sacred text). The interpretation of such a text draws its authority and pre-eminence from the exclusive authority of the text, and the interpretation brings out the deep truths the text wishes us to heed.

For Derrida, even Heidegger's later turn (or *Kehre*) from the overly anthropological concern with *Dasein* in *Being and Time* to a supposedly more radical focus on Being will merely accentuate Heidegger's inability to break with the traditional philosophical preoccupation with self-presence. Heidegger's preoccupation with the 'master word' Being suggests a nostalgia for a time when philosophy had a single concern. Derrida points ahead to a different time for philosophy, when there will be no unique name, not even that of 'Being', for what philosophy is about. This new time has been called 'postmodern' by some, thereby suggesting that philosophy gets liberated from the rational dilemmas of modern philosophy, which begins with Descartes and seems to end with Nietzsche. However, the label of postmodernity obscures Derrida's point. While we should not experience the disappearance from philosophy of the focus on man or on Being as a loss, we also should not experience it as complete liberation. Derrida does not think we can ever entirely escape the problems of metaphysics or the antinomy of subject and object.

The effect of Derrida's critique of Heidegger is not, therefore, to replace Heidegger's theory with a better theory. Instead, Derrida could himself be described as forcing philosophers to focus on what was previously ignored, namely, how the *writing* of philosophy conditions what philosophy is, even though philosophy has failed to ask the question about what writing is. Philosophy has explored the nature of language, Derrida thinks, but has generally taken speech as the paradigm case of what language most essentially is. Speech is paradigmatic, furthermore, because in speech speakers are assumed to be fully present to one another, and to the truths that speech attempts to articulate. The interpretation of written texts requires different assumptions since the author is absent and the text is capable of being brought into different contexts whose appropriateness or inappropriateness is not immediately self-evident. Writing has been treated as a marginal phenomenon, a by-product of conscious intention. Derrida challenges the traditional assumption that the author's intention determines the meaning of the written text, and more generally that truth is revealed undistorted only in direct, fully self-conscious, perceptual awareness. There is no such thing as perception in this sense, says Derrida (1981) (much like Hegel), and subjectivity can be seen as an effect of the structure of writing (broadly conceived as *différance*), rather than writing as an effect of subjectivity.

By shifting philosophical attention from the paradigm of consciousness to that of writing and textuality, Derrida displaces the traditional understanding of what philosophy is and forces an examination of the traditional assumptions about the genre. Thinking of philosophy as a genre instead of as the only true way to grasp what really is may seem like the triumph of rhetoric over logic. But Derrida can also be interpreted as trying to discover what writing really is, or as discovering the conditions of the possibility of textuality. So he can still be called a philosopher. He is a critical philosopher in that he calls into question the assumptions of the preceding paradigm of philosophy, which in France was phenomenology. In the phenomenologists' attempt to write about consciousness they neglect to examine writing itself and to ask how a critical analysis of the conditions of the possibility of writing affects the phenomenological programme. Derrida's exposé of the metaphors of light, presence and voice in Husserl's and Heidegger's writings thus is not simply an analysis of their rhetoric instead of their arguments, but it leads to a displacement of philosophical attention from consciousness to writing or textuality. This shift of attention need not be thought of as finally getting down to the most fundamental level of reality, and is not philosophy in that foundationalist sense. But it is still philosophy in the sense of the investigation of the background that conditions the possibility of understanding and interpreting anything.

This background is not ineffable. Previous philosophers may have ignored the textuality of their own efforts by virtue of their concentration on what they were trying to write about. But many philosophers from Plato on do seem aware of

the textual conditions of their writing, even if they do not make these conditions the object of investigation. So textuality can be investigated and is not mysterious.

Furthermore, while the background may be so complex as to be inexhaustible, that does not mean that it is inaccessible to philosophical examination and articulation of its more interesting features. Thus the resources of textuality, like those of language in general, may be inexhaustible, since new texts can always be generated by new devices. So a 'theory of textuality' that would describe and explain all possible textual devices and structures is not to be expected, either from Derrida or from anyone else. But scepticism about the possibility of philosophical clarification of textuality and the interpretation of texts does not follow. I think the poststructuralist tendency (for which Derrida is partly responsible) to stress the infinite number of possible interpretations of texts, and to conclude that the meaning of any given text is 'undecidable', is based on the mistaken assumption that an interpretation must aspire to a complete account of all the features of what it interprets. But I doubt that the idea of describing 'all the features' of anything really makes sense. Certainly to impose that goal on interpretation would entail in effect that no interpretation could ever succeed.

Since many interpretations are successful, and since success comes in degrees, a different account of interpretation is required. Derrida's own interpretations of 'undecidable' structures in particular texts may provide us with some examples of successful interpretation both of those particular texts, and of more general features of textuality as such. But these interpretations do not establish the general thesis that all texts are undecidable, or that their meanings are never determinate. Nor should such pronouncements be expected from Derrida. Universal statements with 'all' or 'never' in them would be generated only in philosophy conceived as foundationalist (or 'logocentric'), not in Derrida's alternative approach to philosophy.

This alternative approach is still philosophy, however, even if its focus is on writing, textuality and intertextuality, instead of on consciousness and reality, or man and Being. Furthermore, the dichotomy between rhetoric and logic evaporates. This is not to say that logic disappears and rhetoric triumphs exclusively. Derrida is still interested in making philosophical claims about what he takes to be of philosophical interest. Among the things in which he is interested philosophically, however, are rhetorical structures (such as metaphor) and the ways in which they both enable and limit communication (as in translation). So with Derrida we see a displacement, if not the final disappearance, of philosophical interest in consciousness. But this displacement does not entail a lack of interest in philosophy, and does not signal the final disappearance of philosophy. Instead, philosophy attempts to apply itself to topics like textuality and intertexuality, which were previously either ignored or treated marginally. One effect of this new orientation is that the traditional problem of logic versus rhetoric is dissolved. From this new perspective rhetoric

and logic are not entirely distinct and opposed domains, but are instead found to be always operant together in any text, including the texts of philosophy. These texts, furthermore, will be recognizably philosophical, even if most of their readers do not specialize in the more traditional approaches to philosophy.

FOUCAULT'S CRITIQUE OF DERRIDA

If Derrida's approach to philosophy changes our understanding of the relation of logic and rhetoric, it still leaves us with uncertainty about the other problem I raised in the introduction, namely, the relation of truth and time. Derrida is challenged on precisely this problem by Michel Foucault, and it is Foucault who provides us with the most dramatic reworking of the relationship of truth and time since Hegel. Since Foucault does not offer anything like a system in Hegel's sense, many will deny that he is a philosopher. He writes histories, not philosophical treatises, and most of his philosophical claims are found in occasional essays or interviews. Somehow, though, his histories manage to be philosophically interesting. So just as the usual distinction between literary criticism and philosophical analysis fails to help in classifying Derrida, the distinction between philosophy and historiography fails to help us understand Foucault's effects. In this section I will try to explain these effects with the intention of figuring out why Foucault has come to replace Hegel as the paradigm for anyone working on the history of consciousness today.

Foucault owes the inspiration for his rethinking of the problem of truth and time to Nietzsche, who is also difficult to classify as a philosopher since he rarely states or argues for his theses systematically. The philosophical interest in Foucault and Nietzsche comes as much from the traditional philosophical ideas that they criticize as from their own ideas. Moreover, their own ideas may be less novel and original than their conception and use of a certain philosophical *method*. Foucault borrows the term 'genealogy' from Nietzsche as the label for the method that he practises in his histories. Nietzsche himself calls for genealogical histories (for instance, of morals), but never really does the historiographical work that would substantiate his historical speculations.

Unlike the Hegelian method of dialectic, which posits history as necessarily progressing towards and culminating in the standpoint of the philosopher-historian recounting the story, the Nietzschean method of genealogy sees historical change as a matter of chance instead of necessity, and sees historical development as having both advantages and disadvantages. So the category of universal progress no longer is appropriate. The genealogist will be interested in why we experience the need to apply this category when we could never have enough data to confirm it. Genealogy suspects that the belief in progress serves an ideological purpose, namely, to confirm our complacent assumptions about the superiority of the present. Therefore, genealogical histories are written to

challenge other histories of the same events written with the assumption of progress, precisely to disrupt this complacency about the present.

This contrast between genealogy and dialectics comes to a head in Foucault's career in 1970 when he succeeds Jean Hyppolite to the chair in the history of thought at the Collège de France. Foucault's inaugural address, '*L'ordre du discours*', pays homage to Hyppolite, the noted Hegel scholar, at the same time that it asserts that the age of Hegel is past. To express his own enterprise in contrast to the Hegelian one, Foucault insists on putting the word 'systems' between 'history' and 'thought'. The title for his first course, and similarly for his chair, at the Collège de France in 1970–1 is thus 'History of Systems of Thought'.

I suggest that this label contrasts aptly with Hegel's 'Science of the Experience of Consciousness'. History replaces science as the first term, thus implying a more modest, less overarching conception of what must be done. Writing the histories of various systems of thought need not aspire to unifying them in a single scientific account of how they evolve into one another, telling a single story that guarantees the absolute knowledge of the scientific philosopher.

The second term brings out that there are many systems instead of one single system. There is also no 'system of systems' that will make the different systems commensurable, but only a history of their contingent expansion and contraction. Furthermore, to speak of 'systems' is already to speak of something more impersonal than Hegel's 'experience'. Foucault emphasizes his break with any effort to give phenomenological descriptions of experience. He is interested in other levels than those that could be accessed in self-consciousness. What must be studied is not merely what agents might have said self-consciously about themselves but, more importantly, how their patterns of action reveal more about the implicit background of their beliefs than they could ever introspect.

So instead of studying consciousness, Foucault examines 'discursive practices'. In *Discipline and Punish*, for instance, he studies the history of *practices* of punishment instead of philosophical theories of punishment. Although discursive, and therefore linguistic and communicative, these practices are not to be thought of as being produced first as states of consciousness by speakers with explicit intentions. Hegel starts with consciousness at the level of the individual mind, and then goes on to use a mentalistic vocabulary (invoking *Geist*) to describe social and cultural phenomena as well. In contrast to Hegel, Foucault (1977) thinks that the mentalistic vocabulary oversimplifies the complexity of events. Changes in discursive practices should therefore not be characterized as

> a general change of mentality, collective attitudes, or a state of mind. The transformation of a discursive practice is linked to a whole range of usually complex modifications that can occur outside of its domain (in the

> forms of production, in social relationships, in political institutions), inside it (in its techniques for determining its object, in the adjustment and refinement of its concepts, in its accumulation of facts), or to the side of it (in other discursive practices).

Consciousness disappears because there is no need to explain the discourses by positing *Geist* behind them as the agency producing them.

Subjectivity reappears, however, as a factor in the discourses which needs to be taken into account. Instead of subjectivity being that which explains what occurs, it is that which gets explained in so far as it results from social processes. Foucault is not trying to dismiss subjectivity entirely, or to reduce it to objective behaviour. However, he is opposed to the Cartesian and phenomenological primacy standardly given to subjectivity. His late writings on the history of sexuality insist that he is interested in subjectivity, and specifically in how it gets constituted in and through social practices. His history of the prison studies techniques of 'power' whereby institutions socialize people into thinking of themselves in acceptable ways. His history of sexual ethics then describes ways in which individuals subject themselves to norms and come to think of their sexuality in historically distinct ways. The Greek, early Christian and modern sexual self-fashionings could be called 'systems', then, but only if we remember Heidegger's critique of Husserl's assumption that consciousness consists of articulatable rules and beliefs. Foucault is studying not the explicit moral rules of behaviour but the background or 'ethical substance' that gives these abstract rules their interpretation in concrete contexts. Systems do not change all at once, but at different rates on different levels.

So Foucault can study how people experience their sexuality differently at different times. But he is not describing experience as if it were a private, internal domain accessible only through introspection (since this would lead to thinking of experience as unhistorical). Experience is construed instead through the discursive practices to which the historian has perhaps better access than the contemporary agents themselves. The genealogist will study what the moral agents at one time take to be universal norms and show that these norms are temporal and have historical origins. The norms may turn out to be vestiges of an earlier self-understanding and may have subtly changed their significance over time. Genealogy is a form of critical history that shows that beliefs and values that the present takes as eternal and true are instead temporal, historical and subject to reinterpretation.

Foucault thus rethinks the relation of truth and time, treating them not as opposites, but as intertwined. In his study of discipline he thus joins knowledge and power with a slash. Unlike the traditional epistemologist who assumes that true knowledge could be gained only in the absence of power, which distorts, Foucault shows that gathering knowledge often goes hand in hand with administering social institutions. He studies those disciplines where social needs

and power relations condition what makes certain kinds of statement come to be considered as possibly true or false in the first place.

When he turns to the history of sexual ethics, he is similarly interested in how certain moral norms, which seem universal, can be assented to by cultures that are obviously different in what they permit (for instance, homosexuality from the ancient Greeks to the present). While he finds that sexual practices have always been accompanied by an ascetic ethics, he discovers that this asceticism is understood and interpreted differently through the ages. What observing the supposedly universal norms entails thus varies dramatically as the historical background changes.[3]

Critics of the French poststructuralists often accuse them of rejecting truth and of flirting with nihilism. Yet neither Derrida nor Foucault deny that we need to speak of truth. What Derrida criticizes is the way in which the philosophical insistence on truth is often overdone. Although there would be no point to denying truth, one must also recognize that there are more truths than we could ever assert. Many trivial things are true; for example, that the grass is green. So there is no reason to think that finding out what all the true statements are and separating them from all the false ones is the goal of inquiry.

Similarly, Foucault does not deny truth, but, on the contrary, is interested in uncovering the historical conditions that make it seem worthwhile to gather and formulate certain kinds of truths (e.g. data about population). His critique of Derrida is that Derrida's insistence on the plurality of truths is a merely negative point, and does not raise the more interesting question about why specific statements first get uttered, or why they ever 'come up for grabs' (to borrow a phrase from Ian Hacking). Foucault thinks that Derrida's method of deconstruction is incapable of recognizing that texts arise out of social practices where they have a genuine use. As a result, deconstruction is accused of being methodologically deficient since it cannot evaluate itself as a social and political practice.[4]

More recent work by Derrida and other practitioners of deconstruction has been sensitive to this criticism, and has tried to apply deconstruction in social and political contexts. The reason I find Foucault's critique interesting is not because I think it shows a serious deficiency in the deconstructive method. Instead, I prefer to draw from it the broader conclusion that philosophy is now open to a much wider range of questions than philosophers dealt with traditionally. Instead of focusing exclusively on such dualisms as that between consciousness and reality, the work of both Derrida and Foucault shows that philosophy can draw on other disciplines such as history, literary studies, or the social sciences to approach questions about such topics as knowledge, interpretation, morality, or social theory. The disappearance of consciousness as the primary concern of philosophy is thus not the end of philosophy but the beginning of a search for new kinds of questions and tasks for philosophy. These new questions do not preclude, of course, the possibility that subjectivity may become of interest again in a reconfigured way, as it does for Foucault in his last writings. These new tasks,

though, will not be purely theoretical in the Kantian fashion where theoretical philosophy (the epistemology of consciousness has little to do with practical philosophy (moral, social and aesthetic values). Foucault's work in ancient philosophy, before the modern separation of truth, morals and aesthetics, often points up the need to rethink these matters in their interrelations instead of treating them as entirely separate domains.

If the story that I have recounted in this article is correct, philosophy also cannot be disconnected from its history. From Kant to Foucault philosophy has experienced itself as the need to rethink how we can ever understand ourselves if the consciousness that we can introspect is not who we really are. Philosophy continues to try to find ways to talk about who we really are and does not simply evaporate into 'philosophy', that is, into the thought that these texts are merely another fictional genre. The answer to the question about who we have become is conditioned by the history of these philosophical ways of understanding and fashioning ourselves. I conclude that there is no reason to doubt that philosophy will continue to play a central role in the history of where we go from here.

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NOTES

1 There are, of course, other senses of 'knowing what consciousness is' that are not thereby ruled out. Kant's method of transcendental deduction has, for instance, been cited as an influential precursor of recent cognitive psychology. See Flanagan (1984).
2 See Hegel (1970).
3 For a more detailed account of Foucault's history of sexuality see the introduction to Hoy (1986).
4 For more discussion of Foucault's critique of Derrida see Hoy (1985).

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