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THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY PART THREE: SCIENCE AND RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

In his *Problems of Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell famously claimed that philosophy consists in the “residue” remaining after science has answered the philosophical questions of the past. By contrast, Franz Brentano claimed that religion is a “surrogate” for philosophy, offering inadequate answers to questions that philosophy answers more completely. I shall argue that neither of these claims is correct. On the one hand, there is more to philosophy than what natural science can provide. And on the other hand, there is something offered by religion that philosophy can assess, perhaps, but not replace. It is true that in ancient times, what was called philosophy included what we would now call natural science as well as what we now call religion; the pre-Socratics raised all kinds of natural science questions and offered answers to them, while the Pythagoreans among them engaged in practices and disciplines that were clearly religious. One of the tasks for the philosophy of the future, it seems to me, is to delimit its scope in such a way that philosophy appears distinct both from natural science and from religion, regarding the former because it raises and answers questions that natural science cannot address, and regarding the latter because, as Brentano himself notes, it leaves us with a further transcendental aim, namely wisdom. There has to be a mean between the humility of a Russell and the audacity of a Brentano.

KEYWORDS

PHILOSOPHY. RELIGION. NATURAL SCIENCE. TRANSCENDENCE. FRANZ BRENTANO. ERNST CASSIRER. SYMBOLIC FORMS.

INTRODUCTION

In his *Problems of Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell famously claimed that philosophy consists in the “residue” remaining after science has answered the philosophical questions of the past (Russell, 1997, p. 155). By contrast, Franz Brentano claimed that religion is a “surrogate” for philosophy, offering answers that many cannot arrive at by philosophical means (Brentano, 1954. p. 38). One of the tasks for the philosophy of the future, it seems to me, is to delimit its scope in such a way that philosophy appears distinct both from natural science and from religion, regarding the former because it raises and answers questions that natural science cannot address, and regarding the latter because it always leaves us with a further transcendental aim, namely wisdom¹. An Aristotelian voice seems to whisper that there has to be a mean between the humility of a Russell and the audacity of a Brentano.

PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

When Russell wrote that philosophy is the “residue” left over for us after the advances of modern science, he had in mind a notion of philosophy according to which the very existence of disagreement among philosophers for some twenty-five hundred years is taken for proof that philosophy itself does not provide answers to its questions. He tells us:

. . . to a great extent, the uncertainty of philosophy is more apparent than real: those questions which are already capable of definite answers are placed in the sciences, while those only to which, at present, no definite answer can be given remain to form the residue which is called philosophy. (Russell, 1997, p. 155)

. . . Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true,

¹ Brentano says as much in Brentano 1954, Book I, Part III, Section 12, pp. 100-103. The terms, ‘philosophy,’ ‘religion,’ and ‘wisdom’ all require clarification because they are taken in various ways. Each of these will be examined below with reference to this difficulty.

but rather for the sake of the questions themselves . . . (Russell, 1997, p. 161)²

Russell published these words in 1912. Nineteen years earlier, Franz Brentano had introduced a lecture entitled, “On the Future of Philosophy,” as follows:

The lecture seeks to show how unfounded is the opinion of those who doubt today that philosophy has a future and who deny it, in particular, the possibility of transferring the natural-scientific manner of research with success to the area of the humanities. (Brentano, 2022b, p. 523)

Indeed, doubts about the future of philosophy, particularly in view of the successes of modern science, were addressed twenty years earlier in Brentano’s so-called Inaugural Lecture at the University of Vienna, in 1873:

[Philosophy’s] chosen goal is quite generally regarded either as a veiled image whose covering no mortal eye can penetrate or as the unravelling of the knot of so many tangled threads that no human hand could sort it out. Most believe that philosophy is therefore not to be counted among the sciences. They prefer to place it on the side of astrology or alchemy . . . Similarly, philosophy is also thought to hunt for the impossible and for frivolous phantoms. (Brentano, 2022c, p. 490)

Brentano argued strenuously against this denigrating view on the grounds that it holds neither of the metaphysical nor of the very important ethical dimension of philosophy; nevertheless, the view has persisted through the work of Russell and remains popular today. To be sure, Russell insists on the redeeming value of questioning, even waxing rhapsodic when he says, “. . . through the infinity of the universe, the mind which contemplates it achieves some share in infinity” (Russell, 1997, p. 159). His aim appears to be to maintain the value of philosophy in the face of its having been eclipsed by science. Brentano, by contrast, seeks to restore philosophy to her rightful dignity by claiming that she actually *is* a science. My aim is rather to show that

² Incidentally, my own mother told me repeatedly, that “there are no answers.” This is a common view, it seems to me, held by many even well-educated people today.

philosophy, while it should be scientific in the sense of being systematic, yet is not one of the natural sciences but rather provides, on the one hand, the foundation upon which natural science necessarily rests and, on the other, a logical assessment of the implications of its results as well as an ethical critique of the uses to which those results may be put.

To begin with, the natural sciences make assumptions that cannot be proved by the methods of natural science. For instance, they generally assume that every effect has a cause in nature (setting aside such exceptions as may occur at the quantum level – more about this shortly), and they assume that human beings are equipped to understand nature, at least in part. These claims hark back to the ancient Greek term for the universe, ‘cosmos,’ which indicates an ordered, and thus intelligible, whole. And both of these claims are in their universality philosophical and not per se scientific in the inductive sense; they cannot be proved by observations or experiments; rather the reliance on observational and experimental evidence presupposes them. Consider a classical problem in philosophy, the problem of free will. The solution to this problem is not a matter of observation or experimentation, rather both of these presuppose that the observer and experimenter are free to do otherwise, that is, are not causally predetermined to draw specific conclusions. It is the philosopher who raises the questions, for instance, whether the cosmos is such that free agency is possible and if so what are the values that ought to be promoted. Observation and experiment do not answer these questions, rather they must be addressed by conceptual analysis.

As an example of philosophy’s role in providing logical and ethical considerations of scientific results and applications, consider the science behind vaccines, now somewhat contested. If someone claims that vaccines are useless against childhood diseases, for instance, the biologist can reply with an account of the germ theory of disease and the successful record of vaccines in preventing disease. But the scientist relies on philosophy to evaluate the role and significance of empirical evidence, to distinguish between a cause and a

correlation, and on the basis of this to determine whether the evidence in favor of vaccines is superior to the evidence against. Likewise, if someone says that only the parents should be able to decide whether a child is to be vaccinated, while the biologist can recommend vaccination based on evidence, only philosophy can really explore the question whether it is morally (and should thus be legally) permissible for parents to prevent their children from receiving a benefit such as that provided by vaccination against childhood diseases. This does not mean that only qualified, recognized, academic philosophers can pronounce on the quality of evidence or on the ethicality of law; rather it means that whoever does so is then functioning philosophically, not scientifically.

The relation between philosophy and science, then, is one of dependency; scientific knowledge depends upon certain philosophical propositions, not the other way around. Granted, philosophy does well to take into account the established conclusions of science; there is no philosophical reason to deny it when scientists tell us that the Earth's climate is changing or that the Earth is moving faster around the sun now, thus shortening the day. But science is tentative in many cases and revisable as history shows, such that besides requiring philosophical presuppositions it also relies upon the critical examination that philosophy as well as further scientific inquiry can provide. As Russell says, "Philosophy may claim justly that it diminishes the risk of error" (Russell, 1997, p. 151). And such errors in scientific matters may be logical (regarding the adequacy of evidence) or ethical (regarding the applications of scientific findings), as we have seen. In its conceptual and critical functions, philosophy is indispensable to science.

Let us return briefly to the issues raised by quantum mechanics; while the topic cannot be dealt with adequately here, two points are well worth raising in this connection.³ First, quantum theory relies heavily upon mathematics, a conceptual rather than empirical study. However, the practical results of quantum theory, for instance, in quantum computing, certainly can be

³ For information on quantum mechanics, I rely upon Michio Kaku, 2023.

empirically verified. This seems to me to indicate that quantum phenomena at the so-called micro-level of matter do indeed take place according to regularities of nature, it's just that these are not the same, familiar regularities encountered at the macro-level. Sometimes it is claimed that discoveries in quantum mechanics have "unraveled" Newtonian physics, but this is at the very least an exaggeration. The truth is rather that "Newtonian mechanics was incomplete," (Kaku, 2023, pp. 39-40)⁴ and while there is ample empirical evidence for Newtonian physics at the macro-level, there is also ample empirical evidence of quantum phenomena at the micro-level, for instance, in such natural processes as photosynthesis:

When light hits a leaf, you would expect it to be scattered in all directions and lost forever. But here is where quantum magic occurs. The photon of light impacts chlorophyll, and this creates energy vibrations on the leaf, called excitons . . . According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, when energy is transformed from one form to another, much of that energy is lost . . . Instead, miraculously, the energy of the exciton is carried to the collection center [in the leaf] with almost no energy lost at all. . . This should not be happening, but it can actually be measured in the laboratory. (Kaku, 2023, pp. 119-120)

Not only that, but photosynthesis takes place at normal temperatures, while artificially produced quantum effects, such as quantum computing, require temperatures near absolute zero.⁵

Second, the place of random structures or occurrences was noted in ancient times by Democritus with his notion of the atoms' "swerve," and by Aristotle with his notion of "prime matter," that is, matter unformed. In sum, I believe we can safely say that quantum physics, although a conceptual discovery and study, is also reliant on philosophical principles governing empirical evidence, *including observed regularities*, just as natural science in

⁴ Kaku makes both claims within the confines of these two pages.

⁵ See Kaku, 2023, p. 120: "The process of photosynthesis happens at room temperature, where random motions of the atoms in the environment should destroy any coherence among the excitons. Normally, quantum computers have to be cooled down to near absolute zero in order to minimize these chaotic motions, yet plants function perfectly well at normal temperatures."

general is. The understanding of indeterminacy, for instance, is conceptually dependent not only upon an understanding of determinacy but also upon the observable effects of inherently unobservable quantum phenomena. Similarly, the Aristotelian meditation upon the notion of “matter,” of stuff that is not but can be formed, was arrived at based on a lifetime of studying the various forms that matter in fact does take.

In this connection it is worth mentioning that communicating about the study of the indeterminate or the random requires a kind of clarity of thinking and communicability that both scientific and philosophical writing often lack. It seems, however, that those who work in the natural sciences are rather far ahead of the philosophers in terms of communicating with the average educated reader. Authors such as Antonio Damasio, Stephen Jay Gould, Michio Kaku and others contribute significantly to human civilization by sharing their interests and discoveries in accessible terms. Philosophers, by contrast, seem to be stunted in this regard, perhaps by a need to prove themselves to other philosophers by showing wide familiarity with the relevant literature and by adopting modes of expression common in that literature but obscure beyond its bounds. The average educated reader who picks up a volume by an analytic philosopher or by a Continental philosopher will either put it down or find herself involved in a linguistic world that defies translation into ordinary language. The few exceptions – Thomas Nagel, perhaps, or Peter Singer – are committed to a philosophical school of thought that excludes the others, whereas scientists are able to express their commitments while also acknowledging disagreements. Think, for instance, of the dispute in quantum mechanics between Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr (Kaku, 2023, p. 49). For philosophy to be strong in the future, it must become far more accessible than it currently is and part of what this requires is better communication within philosophy regarding various schools of thought.

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

We turn now to the relation between philosophy and religion. I shall use the term ‘religion’ in an inclusive way to include theology which takes sacred writings as foundational. Natural theology, by contrast, is part of philosophy since it relies on experience and reason alone. When Brentano develops his claim that religion is a surrogate for philosophy, in the essays published collectively under the title, *Religion und Philosophie*, he points specifically to natural theology. As he tells us:

Philosophy answers the need for an explanation of the ultimate cause and reason for all things. It does this by proving the existence of a personal being, necessary and infinitely perfect, who is the creator and designer of the whole world. And behold, that typical set of religions [i.e., Judaism, Christianity, Islam] occupies itself above all with this question and indeed offers the same answer (Brentano, 1954, p. 36) . . . Now such a belief system which provides people with a substitute for philosophical knowledge and acquires influence in people’s lives, is [what we mean by] a religion. (Brentano, 1954, p. 78)

Unfortunately, this claim presupposes that religion has nothing to offer beyond what philosophy offers, simply because it fails to offer something that philosophy does.

However, religion in fact does offer several things that philosophy considered in itself does not. Here is a provisional list of ten key features of religion⁶:

1. Belief in the transcendent
2. Community of believers
3. Figurative or poetic language
4. Holy writings
5. Moral principles
6. Contemplation
7. Ritual

⁶ While I have used a similar list elsewhere (Gabriel 2024, p. 81), I have not seen such a list used by other authors. I think of it as a way of getting at some perhaps necessary conditions (that a definition of religion would have to take account of) without claiming that the list is sufficient.

8. Sacred objects, spaces, and times
9. Theology⁷
10. Worship⁸

Philosophy by itself offers no. 5 and some version of nos. 1 and 6, but no. 2 is questionable (one hopes for such a community),⁹ no. 9 avoids revelation and thus has a more generic character in philosophy than it does in religion, and philosophy really does not provide nos. 3,¹⁰ 4, 7, 8, or 10. Arguably, however, these in their own way provide for human needs, especially the need for meaning, as witness their presence in religious communities around the world. It's possible that religion should be construed as a subset of spirituality,¹¹ and no doubt, 'religion' may well designate an open concept, as Morris Weitz says about 'art' (Weitz, 1956, 1993). So there may indeed be religions that do not touch all these bases; still, one recognizes a distinct difference between religion and philosophy, largely in terms of considerations such as these.

In a way, the idea that philosophy could substitute for religion actually does some harm to philosophy's task. Not on the list above is *faith*; both philosophy and religion require it, but philosophy narrows its object to faith in reason, including reason's capacity to transcend human finitude. A philosopher, as a philosopher, has faith in reason and experience, and it is this

⁷ This term is ambiguous. In the so-called revealed religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – theology is based on revelation. In philosophy, so-called natural theology is based on reason and experience alone.

⁸ Composer Barbara Koenen Holm notes, in correspondence, that these ten features can also be construed as possessed by a symphony orchestra! In the context of Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, noted below, it is perhaps not surprising that art and religion would have much in common from a human standpoint.

⁹ But see Brentano, 1954m pp. 68-72, "*Vom Verhalten des Weisen in Rücksicht auf die Volksreligion*." There he expresses the hope that a genuinely philosophical community could arise from philosophical influence on popular religion.

¹⁰ Figurative or poetic language is not properly philosophical, although sometimes used by philosophers, such as Nietzsche.

¹¹ Suggestion thanks to Rev. Katherine B.L. Day, from her experience as a hospital chaplain. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, (2024, p. 292) holds that religion is, "humans' efforts to make themselves right with God." Vanhoozer's interpretation of Scripture is a magnificent achievement, but I just doubt whether this definition would include all religions.

faith which leads to knowledge. By contrast, a religious person, as religious, claims to have faith in a variety of transcendent things and superhuman persons such as God, Jesus, Mohammed, the Buddha, eternal life, a final judgment, heaven and hell, perhaps the saints, and so forth. On the one hand, philosophy is missing Aristotle's elements of drama – plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle – which religion can supply (Aristotle, 1989, pp. 12-15; *Poetics*, 1450a-b). On the other hand, philosophy sustains the hope of arriving at rational knowledge, intellectual insight, certainty in a word about first principles.

A word about the term 'reason' is in order here. To the Greeks, a human being was *zoē logikē*, usually translated "rational animal." The Latin *animal rationale* literally means the same. There is a sense, however, in which 'logical' and 'rational' both originally indicated having the capacity for articulate speech. Aristotle might have said, in English, "man is a talking animal." In other words, nothing about the original expressions indicates any lofty sense of 'reason,' as we implicitly impute to it when we complain that humans are often not rational at all! However, to understand what was meant when humans were designated rational animals by the ancients, we also have to add something about their environment, the cosmos. As mentioned earlier, the cosmos was thought to be an orderly whole, thus intelligible, and so the faith that philosophy places in reason has to be understood as faith in the human capacity for speech while living in the cosmos, i.e., the capacity to understand. So the philosophical faith is most properly understood as a faith in human understanding.

Thus when Russell tells us that, "... through the infinity of the universe, the mind which contemplates it achieves some share in infinity" (Russell, 1997, p. 159), it seems to me he imputes to philosophy a distinctly religious outlook and motivation, emotion, even, that is, something beyond the faith in human understanding. This something is, I think, what the Greeks called *thauma*, wonder. Insofar as we still have deep questions, our attitude toward them is

naturally religious, it is wonder at the transcendent, at what is beyond us. And insofar as wisdom remains beyond us – we philosophers love it, but do not claim to have it, as Socrates had said (Plato, 1981, pp. 26-27, 20d-21e) – then religion goes beyond philosophy, beyond human understanding, and keeps us on Plato’s “upward path” (Plato, 1969, p. 844, 621c). It performs a teleological function that philosophy depends upon and cannot itself substitute for or replace. The aim or goal draws us on.

In this connection, something must be said about the mystical dimension of contemplation, which has been both sought after and deliberately avoided at various times and by various thinkers. Franz Brentano, for example, considered mysticism as a philosophical method to be an indication of the decline of philosophy and imputed it to such thinkers as Schelling and Hegel whom he excoriated (Brentano, 2022d) and who represented, for him, the fourth and most deteriorated phase in his “four phases of philosophy” (Brentano, 1968). Brentano’s reason for taking a dim view of mysticism¹² was that he saw it as cheating, a shortcut to wisdom, and a way of avoiding what Russell later called the “honest toil” required in working through philosophical problems using reason and experience. In other words, for Brentano, philosophy is exactly *not* mysticism.¹³ By contrast, Aldous Huxley identifies mysticism with philosophy in his *The Perennial Philosophy*, where he brings together all the world’s traditions of “spiritual religion.” As Huxley begins this work:

Philosophia Perennis – the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing – the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being – the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the

¹² Again, the mysticism he opposed is mysticism as a philosophical method. Contemplation, however, Brentano thought absolutely essential, as he wrote to Carl Stumpf: “The person who is not contemplative seems to me hardly to be alive, and a philosopher who does not practice contemplation does not deserve the name . . .” See MacAlister, 1976, p. 13.

¹³ For a detailed and enlightening discussion of this issue in Brentano, see Ion Tănăsescu, 2025, especially pp. 140-150.

Perennial Philosophy may be found among the traditionary lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions. (Huxley, 2009, p. vii)

Traditionally, the expression *philosophia perennis* has been applied to the Scholastic tradition harking back to Aristotle and Plato, in particular, to the philosophical underpinnings of Catholic theology. This is a far cry from what Huxley means by the expression as he includes meditations from Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Islam, and yes, Christianity as well as primitive systems of thought. Huxley's is just one example of the many uses of the term 'philosophy' in common and academic parlance. One may have a "philosophy of life," a "philosophy of management," and so on. What is interesting about Huxley's use of '*philosophia perennis*,' however, is that it would blur the distinction between philosophy and religion, whereas my view is that the distinction is important and should be maintained. In the spirit of *philosophia perennis* in the traditional, Scholastic sense, philosophy proceeds on the bases of reason and experience alone, whereas religion makes use of reason, experience (including emotional and spiritual experience), and also sacred writings (such as the Bible, the Koran, the Bhagavad Ghita, and the like). At its best, philosophy operates within those limits, while religion, at its best, provides in one form or another a sense of philosophy's transcendent goal, knowledge of the divine or wisdom. Yet even this term, 'wisdom,' is a bit slippery since not only the philosophers whom Brentano derided, Schelling and Hegel (Brentano, 2022d), but also Huxley and a number of contemporary Christian thinkers such as Cynthia Bourgeault and Richard Rohr take wisdom in a mystical as distinct from philosophical sense.

And it gets more complicated, however, because it must be admitted that, in addition to its transcendental orientation, religion (not unlike humanity in general) admits of both great good and great evil. Religious belief has prompted people to dedicate their lives to helping those suffering with poverty and illness, but it has also led to burning heretics at the stake as a religious

duty. The reason given for this latter, namely, that wrong ideas have to be stamped out so that souls can be saved from perdition, is also the reason given in defense of lesser evils, such as hasty claims about the origin of human life or about the superiority of one culture over another, which claims may well need to be questioned and their motivations explored rather than being declared as infallible truths. As in the case of science, philosophy can come to the aid of religion. There is a clear difference between good reasons and bad ones, something philosophy – or a person thinking philosophically, rather than religiously -- can sort out. Careful, rational thought is required here, and this is part of what philosophy provides. Thus in some sense philosophy is indeed, as Thomas Aquinas had said, the handmaid of theology (*ancilla theologiae*), at least in the sense that she carries a lantern to guide theology's way.

CONCLUSION

For philosophy to thrive in the future, it must know its place. In terms of the "Great Chain of Being," harking back to St. Augustine and developed in modern times by A.O. Lovejoy, that place is, so to speak, ahead of natural science but behind religion. Philosophy's place might be understood a bit differently today, as providing a foundation in principle and a method of critique for both science and religion, while displacing neither of them. All three of these are human activities, of course, and as such vulnerable to human limitations. And no doubt there are scientists who are wiser than some philosophers, and philosophers who are wiser than some experts in religion. But these three – science, philosophy, religion – are distinct considered in themselves, science being ordered to nature, philosophy to conceptual and empirical reality or to being itself, and religion to the divine or to what transcends both nature and thought.

Setting aside the question of how the divine transcends both nature and some deeper reality, a question which would take us far beyond the present inquiry, I note that Brentano did offer a definition of philosophy intended to

show how philosophy goes beyond science. Toward the end of his, “Introduction to the Concept of the History of Philosophy,” he tells us that,

. . . philosophy is that science among the inductive (and in the broader sense philosophical) sciences which addresses being insofar as it falls under such concepts as are given in inner experience, whether given in inner experience alone or in both inner and outer experience at the same time. (Brentano, 2022a, p. 471)¹⁴

Interestingly, for Brentano human experience itself is what expands upon the world of science and becomes, in addition to the world of science, an object of study for the philosopher. In this light, it is the humanism of philosophy that distinguishes it from both science and religion, the former focused on less and the latter on more than what humanity itself can encompass. Perhaps this constitutes the dignity of philosophy, its thoroughgoing humanity. In the words of Alexander Pope, “the proper study of mankind is man.”

In 1893, Brentano concluded his own study, “On the Future of Philosophy,” with a reference to prophecies regarding the then upcoming 20th Century, adding:

May the prophecy include that, in the 20th Century, philosophy will not only hold the scepter again more forcefully, as queen of theory, but rather also gain a practical dominion that she has never yet seen, even in centuries past. (Brentano, 2022b, p. 550)

Alas, we now know that the “queen of theory” was utterly incapable of preventing or even mitigating the horrors of that century. As Henry Kissinger has convincingly written, the years 1914-1945 became a second Thirty Years’ War from which we have yet to recover.¹⁵ Perhaps this is partly because

¹⁴ Variations of this definition are also to be found in the text and notes to Brentano 2022a..

¹⁵ See Henry Kissinger, 2022, pp. xix-xxi, 414: “[The ‘Second Thirty Year’s War’] . . . is the series of destructive conflicts stretching from the beginning of the First World War in August 1914 to the end of the Second World War in September 1945. . . The First World War exhausted treasuries, terminated dynasties and shattered lives. It was a catastrophe from which Europe has never fully recovered. By . . . November 11, 1918, nearly 10 million soldiers and 7 million civilians had been killed. . . The human toll exacted by the Second World War ran to no fewer

philosophy still has never gained “a practical dominion,” a vision of what human reality ought to be. Perhaps, too, we might move in that general direction if we develop a clearer sense of what philosophy is in our day, neither science, nor religion, but a way of living in the world consciously, reflectively, in the spirit of Socrates’ examined life.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, philosophy today is split to a certain extent between the analytic and Continental schools in such a way that I fear we largely miss the promising complementarity between logical rigor and “the claims of the flesh” (Gabriel, 2022). A further split exists between subjectively-oriented methods and objectively-oriented methods, in a word, between Descartes and Aristotle (Gabriel, 2023). Again, I mean to suggest that we need both – regard, that is, for both the inner world and the outer world, and in a way that is neither supplanted by science nor prone to replace religion. What this will involve remains to be seen.

However, at least one philosopher has done work that gives us an indication of what this will look like. As Peter Gordon writes in his introduction to Ernst Cassirer’s *An Essay on Man*:

Can any meaning at all still be found in that old and often battered word *humanism*? Over the course of the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first, so many arrows have pierced this once heroic ideal that it now resembles Saint Sebastian, bound to a tree and always just about to die. . . Perhaps no document of the recent past better exemplifies the improbable persistence of this ever-dying idealism than *An Essay on Man*, a book that Ernst Cassirer completed in 1944, not long before his death the following year. (Cassirer, 2021, p. ix)

Cassirer, a Jew who fled the atrocities of Nazi Germany, developed his “philosophy of symbolic forms” in the spirit of Kant’s critical philosophy but, as Gordon rightly points out, not in a nostalgic or antiquarian way. Gordon even ventures to suggest that Cassirer anticipates and responds to the twentieth

than 60 million lives . . . Of the major European powers, Great Britain alone had preserved its prewar political institutions, but it was effectively bankrupt . . . Lacking a moral and strategic vision, the present age is unmoored.”

century critique of metaphysics and philosophy as being hopelessly human-centered:

Between the lines, *An Essay on Man* might be read not as a belated appeal to the old humanism but as an anticipatory rejoinder to the fashionable anti-humanism [of Foucault and Derrida] that in later years would at times harden into unreflective dogma. (Cassirer, 2021, p. xiii)

Similarly, Cassirer's work may appear to result from what I have elsewhere (Gabriel, 2023) called a subjective methodology (as distinct from the objectivity of an Aristotle, for instance), but this, too, would be a misunderstanding. Again, Gordon correctly notes:

Unlike Heidegger, Cassirer believed that in our symbolic creations humanity breaks through the horizon of its own finitude and gains access to an objective realm, as is evident in both our ethical principles and our scientific knowledge. (Cassirer, p. xii)

Thus, Cassirer's account of five symbolic forms – myth and religion, language, art, history, and science¹⁶ – offers a means of bridging the gaps that characterize philosophy today, between analytic and Continental philosophy, and between subjective and objective methodology. Setting aside the details of his views on religion and science, the spirit of his analysis in terms of the humanity of these endeavors and their ultimately transcendent capacity seems to me to be indispensable today. Here we find hope for the future of philosophy, and possibly even hope for the “practical dominion” that Brentano had mentioned, in view of the fact that every human being is somehow engaged in Cassirer's symbolic forms.¹⁷

¹⁶ Someone might well wonder why philosophy is not on this list. Perhaps philosophy is to be regarded as the symbolic form of symbolic forms, somewhat as Aristotle had said that the intellect is the “form of forms.” See *De Anima*, 432a: “It follows that the soul is analogous to the hand; for as the hand is a tool of tools, so the mind is the form of forms and sense the form of sensible things” (Aristotle, 1970, p. 595).

¹⁷ My heartfelt thanks to Dr. Richard Gabriel and to Dr. Ion Tănăsescu for careful commentary on earlier drafts. Mistakes that remain are mine.

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