Original Paper

Philosophy's 25-Years Principle: Philosophy between Intuitive Understanding and Discursive Reasoning

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Abstract

The present paper has two objectives. First, it explicates the story, initially portrayed by Eckart Förster, that philosophy allegedly started with publishing of Kant's CPR and ended a quarter century later when Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind appeared. We address the questions in what sense this happened and how is this development to be interpreted? Secondly, we demonstrate that similar radical transition from new, "true" beginning of philosophy to its apparent finishing took place in two other, high profile occasions in the history of Western philosophy, in two key points of its development: in the years 390-365 BC, between the early and the late Plato, and between 1898 and 1922, between Russell and Wittgenstein's Tractatus. These three short-lived, spectacular transitions from philosophy's alleged start to its alleged ultimate accomplishment give us good reason to speak about a specific 25-years principle in philosophy. In a peculiar way, this principle reveals philosophy's true nature.

Keywords

Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Plato, Russell, Wittgenstein

1. Introduction

The present paper has two objectives. First, it explicates the story, initially portrayed by Eckart Förster (2012a, 2012b), that philosophy started for real with publishing of Kant's *CPR* and ended a quarter century later when Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* appeared. I shall address the questions in what sense that happened and how is this development to be interpreted? Secondly, I'll demonstrate that similar radical transition from new, "true" beginning of philosophy to its apparent finishing, took place (at least) in two other high profile occasions in the history of Western philosophy, in two key points of its development: in the years between 390 and 365 BC, by the introduction of the dialectic of the early Plato, and of the theory of forms by the late Plato, a development that found its final expression in

Aristotle's syllogistic, and between 1898 and 1922, between Russell's project for logical atomism and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, a development that found its final expression in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. These three short-lived, spectacular transitions from philosophy's alleged start to its alleged ultimate end give us good reason to speak about a specific 25-years principle in philosophy. Significantly, this principle reveals, in a peculiar way, philosophy's true nature.

2. Critical Remarks on Kant's "Revolution in Philosophy"

In 1781 Kant famously stated that there was no philosophy before transcendental philosophy—not really. Until that point in time, philosophy was built on feet of clay. The thing is that, as Kant saw it, one can "scientifically" philosophize only if one can effectively discriminate between appearances and things in themselves and noumena. The dogmatic reason cannot make this discrimination. It thus mixes up the conditioned, causal world with the unconditioned, free world of soul and God. In fact, we cannot have knowledge of the unconditioned.

Main implication of Kant's insight was that when we leave the realm of experience and try to judge things in themselves and noumena, we get involved with necessity in antinomies. Exact philosophy is philosophy of appearance. And whereas the reason assumes that appearances are reality, they are not. There is a radical difference between appearance and reality.

Significantly, Kant's new approach in philosophy put in the center of its interest the examination of human cognitive abilities. The task of the transcendental philosophy is *critical*. It is not to advance theories (Note 1) but to examine (to criticize) the theories as to the sources and character of the knowledge with the help of which they were set out. Philosophy is to rely on appearances, on objects known by experience, astray from philosophical speculations about the things in themselves.

Kant further claimed that the introduction of this approach is a "Copernican revolution" in philosophy. It is radically new and can make philosophy turn truly scientific—something the traditional philosophy was not. Kant made this claim following the assumption that the true philosophy is only possible as *science* and that it can become a science only this way (Note 2, Note 3).

3. How Did Kant Made His "Revolution in Philosophy"?

In truth, Kant came to the idea of "revolution in philosophy" since he was impressed by the fact that, as Newton had demonstrated (Note 4), one can build, referring to space and time, a science that can help to make reliable predictions. To be more explicit, the lighter of Kant's "revolution in philosophy" was his insight from 1769 that space and time are not real but are a priori forms of intuition. Later he added to them also 36 categories that he deduced in a most laborious work. The a priori forms of intuition are quasi the "glasses" through which human reason sees the "things in themselves" as "things for us" (Note 5).

I shall try to better elucidate Kant's transformation of philosophy, starting with the remark that elements of Kant's transcendental philosophy were already there. One such an element was the

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discipline of "ontology", introduced at the beginning of the 17th century (Note 6). Ontology does not explore reality, what exists here and now, but all that is intelligible, i.e. what human reason can comprehend in principle, in all possible worlds. Years later Kant realized, following this position, that one can postulate a whole realm of the world that is not intelligible. In this way the ontology opened the niche in which Kant later put in the unintelligible things in themselves and noumena.

As a matter of fact, already Plato and Aristotle underlined that there are both intelligible objects, but also objects that are not intelligible (Note 7). Metaphysics investigates what is intelligible, or the being *qua* being, not the being *qua* this particular (real) world. It was this form of metaphysics which centuries later was called "ontology". In contrast, the real world is explored by what was centuries later called "rational cosmology".

What was new in Kant, when compared with Plato and Aristoteles, and to the ontologists of his time, was that he put space and time (which, as Newton has shown, can be explored in exact terms and so pertained to the resources of the exact natural science) into ontology. According to Kant, space and time are not real—they are ideal. They are only necessary in order to make our thinking, but also our perception, possible and understandable. Kant also insisted that the unintelligible lies beyond the experience and so beyond exactness. Unfortunately, human reason has the natural inclination to trespass its boundaries, following specific regulative ideas.

4. Hegel's Answer to Kant

In the winter term 1805/6 Hegel finished his lectures on the history of philosophy, which ended the exposition of the philosophy of Kant, Fichte and Schelling, with the words: "In this way the history of philosophy was finished" (Hegel, 1896). How is this claim of Hegel to be understood? How philosophy was finished a quarter of century after Kant declared that the real philosophy, armed with his critical method, has just started?

Important asset of Hegel's critique of Kant's new approach in philosophy that he adopted was Goethe's method of "intuitive understanding", or "intuitive intellect". Goethe himself developed it in his study of the forms and metamorphoses of animals and plants. As Hegel put it, Goethe's morphology was a kind of "thinking with eyes". Goethe connected it with Spinoza's concept of *scientia intuitiva*, or the intuitive capacity to judge. In contrast to Spinoza, however, Goethe opened it for studying human beings, not only for contemplating *deus sive natura*. He also maintained that the quality of the intuitive understanding is of higher order when compared to the quality of the discursive reason. This claim was supported by the fact that whereas the intuitive understanding is free, spontaneous, the perceptive and discursive reason is passive, receptive. Moreover, according to Goethe, only *scientia intuitiva* can help us to grasp the real *essence* of an object or phenomenon or state of affairs under consideration. In fact, this conception was intended to supplement the schematic approach of the mainstream science of Galilei and Newton which introduced formalized structures that can be treated with the help of

mathematics in order to present the objects, the phenomena and the states of affairs under scrutiny in good order.

Significantly, the introduction of Hegel's approach was underpinned by Kant's discussion in *Critique of Judgment* (1790) of the objective purposiveness of nature. To be sure, in *CPR* Kant accepted as valid only discursive knowledge. In that work he maintained that one cannot *know* (understand) objects that are not given in sense (*übersinnliche Gegenstände*). In §§ 76-7 of the *Critic of Judgment*, however, following the requirements of his philosophical system (Note 8), Kant defended the unity of empirical and intuitive intellect but only in biology and when cognizing aesthetic objects: "The natural beauty [in particular] gave us the indeterminate concept of supersensible substance of both nature and freedom." (Pinkard, 2012) His conclusion was that there is no sharp boundary between noumena and phenomena. In fact, exactly Kant's *Critic of Judgment* motivated Goethe to develop his conception of intuitive intellect.

In the *Jena System-Drafts II* (1805/6) and in *Phenomenology of Mind* (1806), Hegel simply put *scientia intuitiva* of Spinoza–Goethe into the language of logic. To be more explicit, he adopted in them the method of setting out logical forms and of the transition from one form into another. This made Hegel's philosophy radically dynamic and processual—it was substantially interested in changes. Key point in it was the intuitively grasped (morphological) transition of forms. It studied the development of concepts that is ultimately explored in the form of conceptual analyses.

To be more explicit, according to Hegel, the philosophically informed scientists, first, make a review of the perceptive data they observe. Next, they move to the objects that are not given in sense (to *übersinnliche Gegenstände*). These, however, are not merely Kantian "things in themselves" but the *essences* (the ideas, or concepts) of the things given in sense. After the scientists grasp them, relying on their intuitive intellect, they can deduce all characteristics of the data perceived. In this way the philosophically informed scientists come back to what is perceived (experienced) through the senses but with its final, comprehensive understanding. Apparently, Hegel's scientists are anti-materialists in the sense that they assume that there are objects that cannot be grasped through senses alone (Note 9). At the same time, however, they feel comfortably also in the realm of matter that they know by experience and observation.

Hegel's conclusion was, first, that exactly and only the *scientia intuitiva* makes the true philosophical study of nature possible. In fact, it does not oppose the science of Galilei and Newton. It simply makes it complete. Secondly, it eliminates the separation between appearance and reality, between objects of experience and objects in themselves, in most radical way. In other words, there is no real difference between belief and knowledge which Kant introduced a quarter a century earlier (Note 10). Hegel was convinced to have thus shown that philosophy was "finished". Philosopher's objective is simply to contemplate the world *sub specie aeternitatis* in order to grasp the *essences* of the nature and of the spirit in acts of *conceptual analysis*. There is no room for further qualitative progress in it.

5. Early Analytic Philosophy

When G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell started the program for analytic philosophy in 1898, they maintained that the philosophy of the past rested on bad mistake. To be more explicit, G. E. Moore claimed that the traditional (speculative) philosophers were convinced that they investigate specific objects, whereas, in fact, they explored their misunderstandings. At the same time, Russell directed his efforts to formulate an ideal language that made problems for the traditional philosophical like "Does Got exist?" nonsensical. The conclusion of Moore and Russell was that there was no real philosophy before analytic philosophy.

Following Russell and Frege, less than 25 years later Wittgenstein suggested a "correct" sign-language (*Zeichensprache*). In contrast to Russell's ideal, or perfect language, however, it had no existential import. It was only constructed in order to *train* our thinking and language in order to improve them (Milkov, 2017). At the same time, similarly to Moore, in his *Tractatus* Wittgenstein maintained that "the purpose of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts" (4.112). It does not produce theories. Wittgenstein achieved this task with the help of his doctrine of showing, referring, similarly to Spinoza and Hegel, to a specific form of intuitive intellect. The latter is applied in the realm of ethics, of the mystical, of aesthetics and also in the realm of logic (Milkov, 1987). Following the Tractarian "intuitive method" (6.1203; Ramsey's translation), Wittgenstein further maintained that "in an appropriate notation we can recognize the formal properties of propositions by merely looking at the propositions." (6.112) Interestingly enough, the term Wittgenstein used for denoting the acts of the intuitive intellect in the first three areas, in the realm of ethics, of the mystical, and of aesthetic, was Spinoza's phrase "contemplating *sub specie aeternitatis*." (Wittgenstein, 1979, p. 83)

However, philosophy was really finished only in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Following its ideas, the skilled philosopher makes conceptual, or, let us use here this expression of Peter Strawson, "connective analyses". Moreover, similarly to Hegel, he charts the "conceptual geography" of human language and thinking and is, in the last resort, engaged in morphological studies. Finally, Wittgenstein also spoke about essences. However, he maintained that "essence is expressed in grammar". (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 371)

6. The Early Plato, vs. the Later Plato

Interestingly enough, in the Antiquity philosophy was "ended" in a similar way but the other way round, from following intuitive understanding to implementing formal/discursive philosophical method. To be sure, Plato's philosophy started as dialectic. In it the skilled philosopher (Socrates) examined, following his intuition, the alleged knowledge of other persons (of his interlocutors) with the objective to come close to the *essence* (to the definition) of the object (of the state of affairs) under scrutiny. Similarly to Hegel later, Plato's Socrates achieved it in a long, dialectical process of conjectures and refutations. Similarly to Hegel, again, Plato believed that dialectic is the final word in science—only it makes science complete (*Rep.*, 535a). Finally, similarly to Kant and Moore–Russell later, Plato

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believed that this was the true beginning of philosophy; that the pre-Socratic philosophers cannot achieve real knowledge in principle.

Under the influence of some scientists Plato came in contact with while in Sicily, however, his philosophy experienced a dramatic turn. He gradually got convinced that it is impossible that such a divine discipline have no specific *objects*; that it is only ability, a *skill*. In consequence, Plato started "to connect the task of dialectic with the tasks of Definition, in particular, of Division, which is the task of articulating higher or more general kinds into lower, more specific kinds." (Ryle, 1966, p. 135) Eventually, Plato replaced them with specific Forms (Ideas). The intuitive understanding was thus replaced by discursive reasoning. This development took no longer than 25 years again—from, approximately, 390 till 365 BC. It received its ultimate shape when Plato's Theory of Forms was reformed by Aristotle in his syllogistic.

7. Epilogue

In the lines above we have seen three related developments in philosophy in three highly profiled periods of its history: from Kant to Hegel, from Russell to Wittgenstein, and from the middle Plato to the later Plato. In the first two of them we found a development from radically new formal philosophy to philosophy based on intuition; in the third one a development from the intuitive method of dialectic to the discursive, exact approach based on the Theory of Forms. Clearly, Plato's metamorphose of philosophy was done in the opposite direction to that of Kant–Hegel and Russell-Wittgenstein. However, it developed in the same track.

My conclusion is that philosophy repeatedly followed, practically, one and the same paradigm of development in its apogees betrays something of fundamental importance in it—philosophy substantially oscillates between formal/discursive studies and intuitive investigations, based on well-trained skills. The implication is that philosophy is better to be developed as a tandem between these two kinds of philosophical exploration. Philosophers are to be trained with the help of the formal/discursive schemes and the products of their explorations are to be verified with formal/exact methods. However, they must make their philosophical investigations free, following the directions suggested by their intuition.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

Note 1. In his *Tractatus* (4.112) Wittgenstein claimed practically the same: "philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity" of verifying the thoughts and language for mistakes. As we are going to see in § 5, the analytic philosophy of Moore and Russell maintained the same from the very beginning.

Note 2. The endeavor to make philosophy science played a lead role in German Idealists. Interestingly enough, it was also the mantra of their alleged antipode, Gottlob Frege. On the connection between the two see Milkov (2015).

Note 3. Be this as it may, Kant's claim that he made a Copernican revolution in philosophy is question begging. A major problem is that Nicolaus Copernicus made his revolution in astronomy and astronomy is a natural science. One can make discoveries in it. In contrast, one cannot make discoveries in philosophy. Indeed, as Kant himself defined it, philosophy is basically a critical enquiry. This explains why Kant's claim that he made a Copernican revolution in philosophy is in conflict with other places in his *CPR*, for example, with A837-8/B 865-6, where we read that one cannot learn

philosophy. We can only learn to philosophize, that is, to find some particular, historical form to present the principles of human reason. In contrast, it is clear in advance that one can learn astronomy. Apparently, philosophy and natural sciences are radically different disciplines.

Note 4. Kant was best acquainted with Newton's cosmology, in particular, with its theory of gravitation.

Note 5. Kant had also another reason to postulate a priori forms of intuition which fuse together with the elements of experience in the organic whole of human knowledge. He hoped that this move will help him to bring to the end the quarrel between empiricists and rationalists in the modern philosophy (Milkov, 2021).

Note 6. The philosopher who introduced the term and conception of "ontology" was Jacob Lorhard (1606).

Note 7. Plato spoke about the world of the intelligible (νοητοῦ) in *Republic* (511b-d, 517b, 532b), and Aristoteles in *Metaphysics* (1072a27—30, 1072b21-24).

Note 8. The leading role of the systematicity and of logical coherence by Kant made him to introduce a number of formal distinctions in his philosophy that were not necessarily based on observation. Kant was severely criticised on this count by many philosophers, including by Franz Brentano, for producing in this way "philosophical monstrosities".

Note 9. Later Frege would adduce a related argument—not all objects are material objects. The earth's axis, for example, and also its equator are real but not material.

Note 10. Later, Russell eliminated it in an alternative way. He adopted the view that there is not only discursive knowledge, or knowledge by description, but also intuitive knowledge, or knowledge by acquaintance.