

Philosophy

Since I am a fiction writer, let us start with a short short story . Whoe~r chooses philosophy as a profession today must first reject the illusion that earlier philosophical enterprises began with: that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real. No justifying n~ason could rediscover itself in a reality whose order and form suppresses every claim to feason; only polemically does reason present itself to the knower 35 toul reality, while only in traces and ruiN is it prepared to hope that it will ever come across correct and just reality. P liti I philosophy is not a historical discipline. The philosoP~c o ~a re of olitical things and of the best, or t e

~stlO:~it~:at~r~;;Uare f~ndamentallyY differe~t ~r?m historical J 'p hi h always concern individuals: mdividual groups, ~ue.s~ons, ;um~n beings individual achievements, individual "civi-

mdividual . d' 'd I «process» of human civilization from li. «theonemIVIua ..I .zation~,. to the resent, and so on. Abstract There are not only true or false solutions, there are also false questions. Philosophy which presents reality as such today only veils reality and eternalizes its present condition. Prior to every answer,

such a function is already implicit in the question- that question which today it called radical and which ia really the least radical of all: the question of being (*Sein*) itself. as expressly formulated by the new ontological blueprinu.' and as. despite all contradictions. fundamental to the idealist systems. now allegedly overcome. Suppose that you are an astronaut whose spaceship gets out of control and crashes on an unknown planet. In particular, po-t-ca

:hil~::~;~~~fundame~tally different from the hi:tor~::~fro::~;! hil h itself The question of the nature o po I ca .

p osop yswer ~o it cannot possibly be mistaken for the question

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. answered the philosophic questIO n mentlOne . The task of philosophy is not to provide answers or solutions, but to submit to critical analysis the questions themselves, to make us see how the very way we perceive a problem is an obstacle to its solution. When you regain consciousness and find that you are not hurt badly, the first three questions in your mind would be: Where am I? This question assumes as the po~ibility of iu answer that being itself is appropriate to t~ou~ht. and available to it. that the idea of existing being (*des Seienden*) can be exammed. The adequacy of thinking about being as a totality, however. has degenerated and consequently the idea of existing being has itself become impervious to questioning. for the idea

could stand only over a round and closed reality as a star in clear transparency. and has now perhaps faded from view for all time. ever since the images of our life are guaranteed through history alone.

Discussed or that political philosophy is absolutely independent does not mean that a . . . f olitical

. Without the experience of the vanety 0 ~ ?f ~st?ry. d convictions in different countries and at dlfferent l~StitUtions a:estions of the nature of political things a~d of the times, the q. Political order could never have been raised. This holds especially for today's public debates on ecological threats, on lack of faith, on democracy and the "war on terror", in which the "unknown knows", the silent presuppositions we are not aware of, determine our acts. How can I discover it? The idea of being has become powerless in philosophy; it is nothing more than an empty form-principle whose archaic dignity helps to cover any content whauoever. The fullness of the real. as totality. does not let itself be subsumed under the idea of being which might allocate meaning to it; nor ~an the idea o f e x i s t i n g b e i n g b e b u i l t u p o u t o f e l e m e n t s o f r e a l i t y . A n d

best, or the Just'b . d only historical knowledge can prevent after they have een raise ,

one from mistaking the specific features of the political life of one's time and one's country for the

nature of political things. In March 2003, Donald Rumsfeld engaged in a little bit of amateur philosophizing about the relationship between the known and the unknown: "There are known knowns. What should I do? I t [ t h e i d e a o f b e i n g ] is lost for philosophy. and thereby iu claim to the totality of the real is struck at its source.

The history of philosophy itself bears witness to this. Similar considerations apply to the history of political thought and the history of political philosophy. But however important historical knowledge may be for political philosophy, it is only preliminary and auxiliary to political philosophy; it does not form an integral part of it. These are things we know that we know. Y ou see unfamiliar vegetation outside , and there is air to breathe; the sunlight seems paler than you remember it and colder. The crisis of idealism comes at the same- time as a crisis in philosophy's pretensions to totality...the *autonome ratio* [autonomous reason]- .this was the thesis of every idealistic system - was supposed to be capable of developing the concept of reality. and

This view of the relation of political philosophy to history was

unquestionably predominant at least up to the end of the eighteenth century. In our time it is frequently rejected in favor of "his- toricism," *i.e.*, of the assertion that the fundamental distinction between philosophic and historical questions cannot in the last analysis be

maintained. There are known unknowns. You turn to look at the sky, but stop. Historicism may therefore be said to question the possibility of political philosophy. At any rate it challenges a premise that was common to the whole tradition of political philosophy and apparently never doubted by it. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. You are struck by a sudden feeling: if you don't look, you won't have to know that you are, perhaps, too far from the earth and no return is possible; so long as you don't know it, you are free to believe what you wish-and you experience a foggy, pleasant, but somehow guilty, kind of hope. It thus seems to go deeper to the roots, or to be more philosophic, than the political philosophy of the past. It certainly casts a doubt on the very questions of the nature of political things and of the best, or the just, political order. But there are also unknown unknowns.

You turn to your instruments: they may be damaged, you don't know how seriously.

in fact, all reality, from out of itself. This thesis has disintegrated. Thus it creates an entirely new situation for political philosophy. The question that it raises is today the most urgent question for political philosophy. There are things we don't know we don't know." But you stop, struck by a sudden fear: how can you trust these instruments? The Neo-Kantianism of the Marburg School, which labored most strenuously to gain the content of reality from logical categories, has indeed preserved

its self-contained form as a system. but has thereby renounced every right over reality and has withdrawn into a formal region in which every determination of content is condemned to virtually the farthest point of an unending process. Within idealism, the position opposed to the Marburg School, Simmers *Leberphilosophie* with its psychologistic and irrationalist orientations. has admittedly maintained contact with the reality with which it deals. but in so doing has lost all claim to make sense out of the empirical world which presses in upon it. and becomes resigned to "the living" as a blind and unenlightened concept of nature- which it vainly attempts to raise the unclear. illusory transcendence of the "more-than-life."

It may well be doubted whether the fusion of philosophy and history, as advocated by historicism, has ever been achieved, or even whether it can be achieved. Nevertheless that fusion appears to be, as it were, the natural goal toward which the victorious trends of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought converge. What he forgot to add was the crucial fourth term: the "unknown knows," things we don't know that we know—which is precisely the Freudian unconscious, the "knowledge which doesn't know itself." How can you be sure that they won't mislead you? The twentieth-century German School of Rickert, finally, which mediates between the extremes, purports that its "values" represent more concrete and applicable- philosophical criteria than the ideas of

the Marburg School. and has developed a method which sets empirical reality in relation. however questionable, to those values. But the locus and source of the values remains undetermined; they lie between logical necessity and psychological multiplicity, not binding within reality, not transparent within the mind, an ontology of appearances which is as little able to be at the question of value-from-whence -- as that of value-for-what. At any rate, historicism is not just one philosophic school

among many, but a most powerful agent that affects more or less all present-day thought. As far as we can speak at all of the spirit of a time, we can assert with confidence that the spirit of our time is historicism. If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq are the "unknown unknowns," the threats from Saddam about which we do not even suspect what they may be, the Abu Ghraib scandal shows where the main dangers are: in the "unknown knowns," the disavowed beliefs, suppositions, and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, although they form the background of our public values. How can you know whether they will work in a different world? Working apart from the attempts at grand reduction of idealist philosophy are the scientific philosophies. which give

up from the beginning the basic idealist question regarding the constitution of reality and. still within the frame of a propaedeutics of the separate. developed disciplines. grant validity only to the- natural science●● and

thereby mean to possess secure ground in the given. be it the unity of consciousness (*Bewußtsein.s.zwammenhang*). or be it the research of the separate disciplines.

Never before has man devoted such an intensive and such a comprehensive interest to his whole past, and to all aspects of his past, as he does today. The number of historical disciplines, the range of each, and the interdependence of them all are increasing

almost constantly. To unearth these "unknown knows" is the task of an intellectual. You turn away from the instruments. Losing contact with the historical problem of philosophy, they forgot that in every assumption their own statements are inextricably bound to historical problems and the history of those problems. and are not to be resolved independent of them.

Inserted into this situation is the loss of the philosophic spirit which is known to us in present day under the name of phenomenology: the effort, following the disintegration of the idealist systems and with the instrument of idealism, the *autonome realia*, to gain a trans-subjective, binding order of being. Nor are these historical studies, carried on by thousands of ever more specialized students, considered merely instrumental, and without value in themselves: we take it for

granted that historical knowledge forms an integral part of the highest kind of learning. To see this fact in the proper perspective, we need only look back to the past. This is why Rumsfeld is NOT a philosopher: the

goal of philosophical reflection is precisely to discern the “unknown knows” of our existence.

Now you begin to wonder why you have no desire to do anything. It is the deepest paradox of all phe-nome-nological intentions that, by means of the same categories produced by subjective, post-Cartesian thought, they strive to gain just that objectivity which these intentions originally opposed. When Plato sketched in his *Republic* a plan of studies he mentioned arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and so on: he did not even allude to history. We cannot recall too often the saying of Aristotle (who was responsible for much of the most outstanding historical research done in classical antiquity) that poetry is more philosophic than history. That is to say, what is the Kantian transcendental a priori if not the network of such “unknown knows,” the horizon of meaning of which we are unaware, but which is always-already here, structuring our approach to reality? It seems so much safer just to wait for something to tum up somehow; it is better, you tell yourself, not to rock the spaceship. It is thus no accident that phenomenology in Husserl took precisely its starting point from transcendental ideaHsm, and the late producu of phenomenology are all the less able to disavow this origin. the more they try to conceal it, It was the- authentically productive and fruitful discovery of Husserl-more important than the externally more effective method of *Wesenschau* [essential intuition]-that he recognized in the meaning of the

to the heaven of ideas that is dark and problematic, and leaves room for only

the weakest trace of hope. This attitude was characteristic of all the classical philosophers and of all the philosophers of the Middle Ages. History was praised most highly not by the philosophers but by the rhetoricians.

Let us take an even more extreme case, that of James Jesus Angleton, the ultimate cold warrior: for almost two decades, till 1973, he was the chief of the counter-intelligence section of the CIA, with the task of unearthing "moles" within the CIA. Far in the distance, you see some sort of living

. creatures approaching; you don't know whether they are human. but they walk on two feet. With Scheler, (phenomenology) but dialectically revoked itself. Only the metaphysics of the impulse is left over from the ontological design; the only remaining eternity over which his philosophy has disposal is that of a boundless and uncontrolled dynamic. The

history of philosophy in particular was not considered a philo- sophic discipline: it was left to antiquarians rather than to phi- losophers.

A fundamental change began to make itself felt only in the sixteenth century. Angleton, a charismatic, highly idiosyncratic figure, literary edu- cated (a personal friend of T. S. Eliot, even physically resembling him), was prone to paranoia. *They*. you decide, will tell you what to do. Viewed