

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The following group of three essays is assembled around the concept of "reason".

Sujit Debnath writes on the "Epistemological position of G.W.F. Hegel", displaying a systematic ladder where Hegel "discusses four sources of knowledge. They are sense-certainty, perception, understanding and reason."

Richard Schain's essay, "The art form called philosophy" is of a totally different character, claiming that philosophy is an art form and rejecting clearly the idea that philosophy could or should be a form of science.

My own essay concerns the related problems of "Reason, Delusion, and 'The Good'".

Some comments on the essays of Mr. Debnath and Mr. Schain may be helpful.

In his essay on the "Epistemological position of G.W.F. Hegel" Mr. Debnath shows how Hegel steps up systematically from sense-certainty over perception of objects to understanding the context of those objects. Only then can reason begin to argue. By this analytical progression Hegel tries to overcome the Kantian distinction between the "noumenon" (what can be thought) and the phenomenon that can be "seen and felt". According to Kant we cannot know the true nature of things from what we see, and Hegel is not happy with this hiatus between the phenomenon and the "the mysterious unknown and unknowable thing-in-itself behind the veil of appearances." As Mr. Debnath puts it: "In Hegel's philosophy appearance should not be contrasted with reality, ...because in his philosophy he regards the absolute as self-appearance." In this way, Hegel tries to understand episteme as a way of the weltgeist to come to recognize itself. There is but one reality and not one in the mind and a different one "behind the veil of appearances". To overcome this (Kantian) distinction (between 'appearance' and 'reality') Hegel takes the analogy of a 'force' and its expression. Just as a force is manifested in its effect, so reality is revealed in appearance.

Thus Hegel sees the appearance of objects as their revelation, but he admits that our description of those objects must be a process of dialectical approximations. Not the objects are confusing, but our way of describing them is. Like a landscape the ultimate reality is one, but we cannot describe this reality as one, we have to walk around and say in our report that the landscape is this and not this, because it changes its appearance all the time while we go on. Trying to fit our many

piecemeal and contradicting impressions to a meaningful whole that may resemble the unity of the landscape is what reasoning comes to.

Hegel is notoriously difficult to understand, even in its German original, and Mr. Debnath is having his problems struggling with Hegel's confusing language. But he tries to make Hegel's concept of reality understandable.

As I said, the essay by Richard Schain "The art form called philosophy" is of a totally different character. While the Hegelian approach is systematically stepping up from primary sense data to the final activity of reasoning – a movement that could be compared to climbing up a difficult mountain meter by meter to the top and looking out from there unto the horizon – in the approach of Mr. Schain the philosopher is trying to make sense of the world by painting a picture of it. While I share this approach overall, I got the impression that to call philosophy an artform is too restrictive. Aristotle has called Plato a poet, but Aristotle was an artist in a different way, only not as a poet or a painter but as an architect. The architect is an artist too, and philosophers like St. Thomas and Hegel who try to reconstruct the true architecture of the world in their philosophies are still philosophers, even while not being painters or poets. To put it thus: Every work of art is artificial, but not everything artificial – as f.i. a computer or a space-station or a political constitution – is a work of art. Thus I think that the approach of Mr. Schain is an important step in the right direction, but should be relaxed into the thesis that philosophy is artificial and not scientific.

Philosophy may be called scientific in the same sense as any juridical system of laws is trying to be scientific – not by revealing the truth, which is impossible for an artificial work, be it juridical or philosophical – but by trying to be consistent. While "being consistent" is one important aspect of being "reasonable", it can as well be characteristic of utter unreason! The world of the religious sects or of paranoics is very consistent, even pathologically so. And on the other hand the modern "abstract expressionist painter" who apparently does not follow any rule or tradition as f.i. Miró or Tápies or Jack Pollock is not without discipline and is totally different from any painting chimp. In this sense Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein could be called "expressive" or "poetic" philosophers, but very disciplined and sharp thinkers they were.

To speak of "The art form called philosophy" is not wrong, not even misleading, but it requires some careful qualifications. The notion of truth cannot be excluded from the philosophical discourse, but it has to be understood in all its philosophical complexities. We speak of "the truth in a work of art" as different from truth in

logics and physics, and the philosophical equivalent to "the truth in a work of art" may be what Mr.Schain is asking for.

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