

FROM “WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY” TO “THE BEHAVIOR OF PHILOSOPHERS”

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Abstract

Philosophy itself is discussed as a use of language by philosophers and others. The primary discursive strategy for western forms of philosophy has been to argue how saying words or sentences can have the properties of ‘truth’ or ‘certainty,’ and the social and political utility of this western project of establishing words as ‘true’ is discussed. But since they are just behaviors, words and sentences can have neither ‘truth’ nor ‘certainty’ because they are contingent on many historical and contextual conditions. Some more recent versions of western philosophy have indeed moved more towards viewing ‘philosophy’ as something people do. Three final discursive strategies for retaining a form of ‘truth’ in words are discussed and dismissed: those resting on ‘beliefs’ as being true or false, ‘thought’ as what can be true or false (Descartes), and the use of the logical method to establish truth and falsity. It is concluded that the main usefulness of philosophy is finding ways to shape people to talk in new ways that might lead to new ways of behaving, but this does not mean that those new ways of behaving will be good or bad, useful or not useful, or true or false.

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In this paper I wish to discuss a question which will keep changing. It begins with “What is philosophy?” changes to “What does philosophy do?” quickly moves to “What does philosophizing do?” morphs to “What do philosophers do?” and ends up with “What shapes philosophers to do what they do?” I will end up suggesting that western philosophy is merely a specific discursive way of maintaining our social behaviors and social relationships. This can be useful to people in their lives, but it does not solve anything or give any answers, and certainly not true or certain answers.

What is philosophy?

There are many versions of philosophy, not just the western, Anglo-Saxon tradition which is now mainly centered in academia. The questions of the broader idea of ‘philosophy’ revolve around puzzles which, on the face of it, are to do with questions about the nature of the universe and the place of humans in this world. These questions interface religious discourses (Burns, 2005; Deloria, 2012; Fakhry, 2015; Griaule, 1965; Mbiti, 1969) as well as practical life discourses (Addiss, 2008; Brown, 1992; Fairbank, 1957; Hadot, 1995; Haskell, 1984). The latter even involves learning rules and exercises to guide life to be good, and this was called philosophy (Foucault, 1998; Hadot, 1995).

When we approach western philosophy, however, the focus changes somewhat. The western version of ‘philosophy’ also consists of a series of questions that we are told puzzle people (Bruce & Barbone, 2011; Popkin & Stroll, 1969). It is not clear, however, whether these questions are puzzling because of unexplained things about the nature of the universe, or because of the way philosophers and others persuade us that they need puzzling over. The latter has some plausibility since it appears that these questions were not necessarily puzzling before the Enlightenment, and neither do they raise problems for dogs and cats.

The western questions or puzzles supposedly needing answers are labelled as epistemology, ontology, ethics, logic, mind, metaphysics, etc. (Bruce & Barbone, 2011; Popkin & Stroll, 1969). These are not focused on how to live or the broad relationship of people to the rest of the universe, but on *how we should talk or think* about the universe and ourselves:

- how can we know anything and how can we know if this talk is true? (epistemology)
- how can we talk about things which are real, true or exist? (ontology)
- what can we say is the most good or fair ways of behaving? (ethics)
- how can we talk without contradictions? (logic)
- how can we talk about what is mind, soul, or spirit? (mind)
- how can we talk about the fundamental nature of reality? (metaphysics)

So, this western project of philosophy has come to focus on (1) talking and (2) truth or certainty; how we can truthfully *talk* or *think* about the world and ourselves in that world. Some philosophers have already criticized this very project of western philosophy by denying that truth can ever be proved or that words can ever be certain, or by arguing that western philosophy should become subsumed under a sort of applied linguistics (starting with Heidegger, 2003; Nietzsche, 1967).

From these critiques, other philosophers have now moved western philosophy in several more *active* directions, that philosophy is about *something we do as humans*. Rather than pure

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contemplation of ‘ideas,’ philosophy is now about *doing things with words*. Five ways predominate:

- philosophy is about solving language problems which have created our puzzles in the first place (Hare, 1952; Schwartz, 2012; Wittgenstein, 1961)
- philosophy is about logical methods, and avoiding contradictions in what is said or thought, in order to solve problems
- philosophy is somehow about ‘communication,’ and we need to include human ‘communication’ as another form of rationality in philosophy (Habermas, 1987)
- philosophy is about language games which give meaning and rules to our lives (Wittgenstein, 1958)
- philosophy is about actively creating new ways of thinking and new concepts (new ways of talking, that is), so that people start to say (and hopefully do) new things (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994)

These philosophy approaches are all far more about actively doing something, albeit almost exclusively with words, than about a passive, contemplative inquiry. For the first three of these but not for the last two, there is still present in them the strong western philosophy notion that words (or sentences, Quine, 1968, 1974) can be true or false and we just have to show how this is so. That is, most of western philosophy is still about *how words can be true or false*; it is still about language, whether spoken, thought, or written (Derrida, 1997), and how this can *truthfully reflect* the world (Rorty, 1979). That is, how what we call our beliefs about the world can be ‘true’ (whether knowledge, ethics, metaphysics, etc.).

So, the constant thread through western philosophy (opposed by some; Haskell, 1984; Nietzsche, 1967), is that our beliefs are useless unless they can be certain or true (Wittgenstein, 1969). But as seen above, recent trends have looked more at how philosophers, or anyone for that matter, *use* or *wield* their beliefs to solve problems, correct language faults, communicate better, play around with language, or generate new behaviors by trying new ways of talking. The problem is that these have all made assumptions about how and why people talk, and assumptions that already fit with the philosophy they wish to derive.

What shapes what philosophers do?

After this brief but rapid passage through various forms of ‘philosophy,’ we are in a position to look at a new question, which follows from those more recent positions that suggest in different ways that philosophy is about *something we do as humans*. This means that the question now is: *what shapes philosophers to do these things?* How can we analyze what brings about the enterprise of philosophy at all? Why would anyone begin to philosophize in any of the ways put forward, western or not? I will approach this question from a social contextual perspective, which is broadly compatible with many of the behavior analysis perspectives but emphasizes the integral role of social relationships in all human behaviors (Guerin, 2016b; 2020a, b).

The typical answers as to why people ponder over the ‘big questions’ of life are circular and involve two main and related forms: catharsis and uncertainty reduction (Guerin, 2001). Both argue that people are either anxious about these ‘big questions’ of life or else there are too many unknowns and uncertainty, and that this is anxiety producing. To deal with these forms of anxiety,

humans try to come up with answers that ‘satisfy,’ whether true or not, and this catharsizes the anxiety.

A better answer follows from the nature of language itself (Guerin, 2020a, Skinner, 1957), and is also an original answer to the recent move to view philosophy as *something humans do*: that all and any language use is about *doing our social relationships*. Words cannot have effects on the non-human world; they can only do anything to people (Guerin, 1997). They cannot represent, refer to, express, or communicate anything. This means that when analyzing uses of language (talking or thinking) we must always analyze what is this doing (or what has it done) to people and social relationships. We have learned to talk and write only because of what these do to other people.

There are a variety of ways to observe and analyze how people use language and what shapes their uses of language (Burman & Parker, 1993; Edwards, 1997; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Guerin, 2003; 2016b; Jaworski & Coupland, 2006; Kitzinger, 2000; Potter, 1996; Skinner, 1957; Tracy & Coupland, 1991). One synthesis suggested that two main practical analyses can be made: that the language use either gets people to do something that has consequences from those people (not from the non-social world), or the language use gets people to build, maintain, or break social relationships (Guerin, 2003; 2016b). These are not intrinsically different, just useful differences when analyzing real forms of talk in practice.

In terms of discovering why philosophers do philosophy, the details are not important for this paper, just the outcomes. Each philosopher will be different, and this will depend on their idiosyncratic contexts of social relationships and resourcing for their life. But all the philosophical talk will involve affecting social relationships. For example, one philosopher might do it for gaining status and supporting a self-image (Guerin, 2020b, Chapter 5), another for the money to support their family. It has also been suggested (supported by social anthropological studies) that those *posing* religious or philosophical puzzles and questions in the first place do so *in order to* puzzle their listeners and *make* them anxious, since this can lead to gaining some forms of social control over those persons which in turn leads to resourcing for themselves and their families (Guerin, 2020b, Chapter 8). In essence, posing unsolvable, abstract puzzles of universal mysteries is a very good discursive strategy for gaining social control over people, and increases their anxiety rather than reducing it. There is no evidence that people ‘naturally’ ponder these questions until someone poses them (Evans-Pritchard, 1965).

For this paper, however, the nitty-gritty life details of individual philosophers for doing their philosophizing is not important. What is important is that we can see the shift in the question “What is philosophy?” to a *new version* of “What shapes philosophers to do what they do?” very different from the five given earlier. Philosophers do not do their philosophizing to produce true knowledge, to sort out language problems, to avoid contradiction in speech, or to play language games for meaning. Philosophers do their philosophizing to do things to people in their social and societal relationships. This comes closest to the previous answers that philosophizing is about the logic of communication (Habermas, 1987, but with more specific details of the discourses), and to get people to do new things through inventing new ways of talking (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

What becomes important for this paper when philosophizing is seen as just another use of language, which means it is purely shaped through social relationships, is that this changes the major foundations upon which western (and other) philosophies have been built. Seeing philosophy as just another form of doing our social relationships through language leads to big changes in how we think about beliefs, thought, knowledge, truth, and logic, which have generally been taken for granted even in the five more recent approaches as well. So, just as I analyzed above

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the social motives of philosophers and others for even *posing* these unsolvable puzzles, we can re-examine the ideas of what beliefs, thought, and logic are really about.

What does this mean for the language activities which philosophers do?

We have seen that philosophy can be better approached in terms of how social and societal relationships shape the talking and thinking about posing unsolvable puzzles. This leads us to a discussion of how the social relationship outcomes for talking lead to what are commonly called thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, truth, and logic, common even in philosophy which should know better. How can we see these as something philosophers (and others) do for social relationship outcomes?

Beliefs, knowledge, certainty, and truth

Beliefs are events in which we say or write something, and doing this is all about doing things to other people. Saying or writing, “Cats make the best pets” has no effects or consequences on anything in this world except on other people who have learned your language. So rather than analyze ‘what this means,’ or ‘whether this is true,’ we can only ever analyze or observe what effects this has on other people.

This means that we need to think of beliefs not as ‘statements,’ ‘propositions,’ or ‘meanings,’ not somehow independent of our social worlds, but rather, *as a way of doing our social behaviors within our social relationships* (Guerin, 2020b). That is, saying ‘your beliefs’ is just a way of impacting your social relationships, whatever the consequences of this are. We can ‘do beliefs’ that: have people like us, have people dislike us, have people cooperate, rile people, humiliate people, have people respect and admire us, have people pay us, excite people, make people miserable, or start people fighting. Beliefs do not exist in some sort of *in aeternae veritates* independent realm of ‘ideas,’ ‘brain processes,’ ‘internal possessions,’ or ‘non-material propositions.’ They exist in the nitty gritty of making things happen in your social relationships.

What this means is that ‘analyzing’ or ‘validating’ our beliefs by philosophizing is really specious. What our beliefs actually do depends upon so very many material contingencies of life: does the listener or reader even speak the language; have they learned to do things the way you have learned when hearing or reading words; are their contexts similar to yours; are they awake; etc. But more importantly, what your belief *does* (i.e., what it means, in philosophical talk), depends so much upon the social relationship you have with the listener or reader. What for one listener or reader will be a funny remark, will be a red flag for others. What effect saying your belief has upon a close friend will be different from the effects of thousands of people reading your book (Guerin, 2020b, Chapter 1).

This means that there cannot possibly be any *certainty* or independent *truth* in beliefs, since they are just words we say or write (cf. Needham, 1972). With good observations, what they *do* to people can be certain (up to the point of credible observations), but it is specious to think that the words themselves can somehow also have a socially-independent property of being true or certain. And yet, this is the very world of western philosophy: how can we decide whether certain groupings of words are *true* or *certain* independently of the effects they have on any particular occasion? Only by first assuming (falsely) that ‘what is said’ can somehow be independent of the ‘saying’ itself does this even make sense, and this is what a contextual or behavioral analysis denies.

So, the whole philosophical project of trying to ‘substantiate’ or prove beliefs which are called epistemology, ontology, ethics, mind, or metaphysics, is misguided. The project has really been about “*what sentences can we get people to agree with,*’ rather than showing that any statements or beliefs are true, certain, or otherwise independently substantiated for social control purposes. But *convincing* people to agree is, and always has been, it is argued, about social behaviors and the social relationships with listeners or readers.

The significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as *in aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: *he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world.* (Nietzsche, 1878/ 1996, p. 16, my italics)

The final point to make here concerns the place of western philosophy in western thought since the Enlightenment, and the social/governing purposes of permitting words to have truth or certainty (Foucault, 1970; Guerin, 2020b). It has been argued (Guerin, 2020b, Chapter 1) that just as science got rid of social influence on their observations and experiments on the non-social world (correctly), so other domains of human life tried to do the same: law, economics, psychology, ecology, governance, philosophy, bureaucracy. Any *talking* by scientists has still only ever had an effect in the social world, but not their observations. This was part of the role/goal of western philosophy—to mimic science and *talk* about a rationality or truth in words which *appeared* to be independent of any social relationships (Guerin, 2020b, Chapter 1). But while avoiding socially influenced observations was good for a science of the *non-social world*, the same strategy was not good for those domains involved in ‘sciences’ or practices of the *social world*.

However, as I have argued, beliefs are always tied to the outcomes of social relationships by their very nature as language, so this role/ goal turns out to be specious, and it has been for philosophy, law, economics, psychology, ecology, governance, and bureaucracy. Even scientists’ *talking* has always still been tied to the outcomes of social relationships although they pretend it is not (see, for example, Latour & Woolgar, 1986). For scientists this is highlighted through false expressions such as, “This is what the data tell us,” false because only people do the telling, not the (non-social) ‘data’ (Guerin, 2020b). Scientists correctly got rid of social influences on their *observations*, but they could not get rid of social influences on *talking* about their observations, since this is impossible by the very nature of language.

So, philosophy is also part of a bigger western ‘project’ to treat words as coming from the non-social environment rather than as a social act (just as money has wrongly been treated in western economics, Simmel, 1907/1978). But there were two more bulwarks to prop up this western philosophical project: thinking and logic.

Thoughts

René Descartes was the key player in the Enlightenment to argue that beliefs and talking were still non-social because they had a non-material basis in the head or the mind. This was an inventive and strategic argument, since all versions of these ‘internals’ were not even potentially observable (except brain events, but see below). Descartes extended this to each of the western ‘puzzles’: epistemology, ontology, ethics, logic, mind, metaphysics. This was purely a strategy of

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language, that is, getting people to have new words by using language (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994), but it was effective in his day.

To better contextualize what we experience as thoughts and thinking (Ryle, 1949, 1971), I have argued that thoughts are just ‘talking but not said out loud’ (Guerin, 2020a). This counters the ideas that thoughts are individualistic and that they are ‘private’ in any sense (Skinner, 1974): they are no more or less ‘private’ than talking out loud (Guerin, 2020a). Thinking does involve the material brain, of course, but no more so than talking out loud or eating an orange.

So, thinking is a social behavior just like talking, and by the same arguments given earlier cannot have properties of truth, falsity, certainty, etc. But with this conception of thinking as ‘talking but not out loud’, there are now further contextual conditions we can analyze to see why thinking appears different from talking. Such conditions that make thinking seem different from talking are what allowed Descartes to gain acceptance of his ideas. But the difference lies mainly in: *what contexts shape that some talking is **not** said out loud?* Some of these have been suggested (Guerin, 2020a):

- If there are too many learned verbal responses for the context you are in to ‘say’ them all; you can only say one thing at a time, even if you have a lot of possible responses in that context.
- If there is not enough time (if there is a busy conversation and you cannot “get a word in edgewise”). This is one reason thoughts *appear* to occur more when you are alone, *even though they occur whether or not you get to blurt them out loud*. You can just observe them better if alone.
- If a verbal response has been learned in a very specific context, I do not say it out loud because it will be punished. But I ‘think’ of it still (it has been shaped) and could report this afterwards if asked whether I was thinking of that story during the conversation.
- If there are no audiences present for the verbal responses (if I am alone perhaps). In such situations it can be suggested that the verbal responses *which normally occur across a large range of my audiences* will be the ones reported if you are suddenly asked “What are you thinking about?” I can also, of course, talk out loud without an audience present if this has not been punished, as sometimes occurs.
- If the verbal response has been punished in the immediate social context before (but might be said out loud in another social context). ‘I bit my tongue,’ in common English slang.
- If the verbal response has been punished in most life contexts (“repressed”) so that I might need special forms of questioning to remember afterwards that I was even thinking it (that it was afforded in that context); or people who are typically silenced such as women in general and oppressed groups.
- If saying out loud will be punished (so they remain only as thoughts) because different audiences in your life have shaped *contradictory* verbal responses, which you can only safely say out loud in one group or the other but not at the same time
- If the verbal responses or discourses have been shaped by very generalized contexts so that when I would respond there is no clear or concrete audiences for this (shaping by ‘sociological’ discursive communities: media, patriarchal, economic, colonizing, bureaucratic). “*I am so angry at this whole social system but who do I yell at?*”

So, thinking cannot rescue philosophy and allow beliefs (now hidden as internal thoughts or cognition) to be true or false. Thinking also differs from talking in other ways but is fundamentally the same. In particular, thinking (more than talking) lacks consequence and so loses grammar and other features of talking out loud (Guerin, 2020a).

In these ways I therefore argue that the project of philosophy is not rescued by claiming that we can have beliefs independently of the social behavior of talking because there are thoughts in our brains or minds which provide a new basis for this. We do not exist because we think. Thinking is just the same as talking except for the particular contexts which make it not said out loud.

Logic and being rid of contradictions

The final way that western philosophers have tried to rescue their project is through proposing that the methods of *non-contradiction* and *logic* are non-social ways to establish truth and certainty in words. I will show these are both mistaken.

Re-conceptualizing contradictions as opposing forces in material action and real life

There are several ways that we can talk about ‘contradictions’ and how to avoid them, and these have typically been confused in the philosophical literature. First, and most common in western philosophy, there is the pure sense of logical method, that we cannot have (believe, think) both *a* and *not-a* at the same time. And nothing social is assumed to be going on with such logical methods. This will be dealt with below.

Second, there is a material sense of ‘contradiction’ that we cannot observe or touch both a vase and not-a-vase at the same time in the same place. This second sense of ‘contradiction’ features in Marx and Engel’s refutation of the German philosophies of their time (Marx & Engels, 1846; Vološinov, 1973). Their use of ‘contradiction’ is an ‘in-the-world’ contradiction (Marx, Lenin) but it is more like ‘*opposing or opposite forces*,’ which are acting on people than any logical contradiction. This is very materialist and grounded in real things; it is like a field (physics) or context idea really. For example, they argue that capitalism creates opposing forces on people and the environment; by raising the price of watermelons, I provide an opposing force to your wanting to eat a lot of watermelons. This can *look like* a contradiction, but it is nothing like a logical contradiction. It is really tracing the social and economic contexts and how they produce opposing forces acting on people through social relationships and resources being manipulated. This is much more like the newer ideas of philosophy as *doing something*, mentioned earlier.

There is, however, a new third sense of ‘contradiction’ which extends the second into language and talking, something not done by Marx and Engels (Guerin, 2020b). This follows from a contextual analysis of language, that people can actually be shaped to *say* both *a* and *not-a* at the same time if they have contradictory audiences or social relationships, or a single very mischievous audience shaping them. That is, there is no logical problem with *saying* one thing to one group of people and *saying* the opposite to another. That is not a contradiction in either of the first two ways, but it is the most common form. Some psychologists have tried to use this as a ‘driver’ of behavior, that people work hard to avoid such contradictory talking or thinking (e.g., ‘cognitive’ dissonance), but I have argued that it is *not* a problem unless the two audiences are brought into contact (Guerin, 2001, 2020c). People can easily be shaped to say opposites, even things opposite to their own other usual ‘beliefs’:

We shall not be far from solving it when we realize that thoughts in the unconscious live very comfortably side by side, and even contraries get on together without disputes—a state of things which persists often enough even in the conscious. (Freud 1905/1977, p. 96)

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In this third version, it is still the case that *logical* contradictions do not exist in the world: there can never be both *a* and *not-a* at the same time. They are only materially real when we have real people who have been persuaded (itself a material social process) to agree on both opposing premises (e. g., you have to socially persuade them to say that there *is* a watermelon and also say that there *is not* a watermelon). But this is all language use and therefore is only really material or concrete depending on the real material outcomes (power) of the social relationships involved in getting them persuaded in the first place. But even if you persuade them to say both, there is still not both a watermelon and not a watermelon in the material world in the same time and space (in the logical sense), that is just words or ideology, but I can certainly talk about this and have effects on my listeners.

But in all this above *there is still a real material conflict or opposing forces in the social relationship* just like the second idea of ‘contradiction but applied now to talking. But the real material conflict going on is in *how someone was able to be persuaded to say or agree with both opposing premises*, and so that there are opposing *social* forces (of persuasion) producing the seemingly logical contradiction (agreement on general premises). As we will see, this is really the major problem for logical methods—that they surreptitiously rely on having people who have been persuaded of premises *before* doing any logical operations.

So, the second and third forms of ‘contradiction’ are really the same but the third spells out more clearly how someone can be materially persuaded (with language) to *say* (or think) both *a* and *not-a* at the same time. There are only opposing forces acting *materially in the world*, but the trick is that this can be analyzed for both doing and talking. In this way the third is subsumed by the second form of ‘contradiction.’ Saying contradictory beliefs is a matter of opposing social forces of two groups or audiences shaping the opposite statements to be said (usually in different contexts). But in all this, there is still no basis for any sort of logical contradiction that is about the non-social world only.

What this means for the western philosophy project therefore is that we cannot claim that philosophy is useful because it exposes and prevents the use of contradictions. This confuses the three ideas of ‘contradiction.’ If someone *states* contradictory beliefs then this *does* need to be exposed and prevented but this will be done through *analyzing their social relationships, which have shaped the opposite talking*, not through any ideas of logic. What sorts of social relationships have shaped opposing social forces on the person who states contradictory beliefs? That is the real answer, not that one belief must be true, and one must be false. As we will see below, this is not a solution to the logical problem of the excluded middle, but a critique of logic itself as ‘representing’ anything. The so-called ‘law’ of the excluded middle is a consequence of a false conception of what logic itself is.

So, what is really wrong with logic?

The above suggests that we need to stop thinking of logic and contradiction as existing as a socially independent form of ‘reasoning,’ thinking, or talking, outside of material social relations, which was Marx and Engel’s point. We have seen one example above, that to get *logical contradiction* in the first place requires materially opposing (social) forces by which you can persuade someone to agree to both opposing premises, but this is a very material (social) process of negotiation involving resources as outcomes for the two discourses.

But there are other problems with logic itself, however, which render it useless as a foundation for establishing any truth and certainty of words or sentences. In a similar way to the

above, the whole of logic only works at all in a material sense in the following way: *if* you can get someone to agree with some premises first, then you can *force* them to agree with something else—a so-called logical deduction. But logicians forget or trivialize the first part—how do you get someone to agree with any premises? This makes logic useless for ‘material proof’ since it is all language-based, and it all depends on getting people to agree with some premises. The most difficult part really of logic is in getting premises accepted—but this is then ignored and swept under the carpet, especially in the various logical calculi (propositional, predicate, deviant, modal, Aristotelian, etc.), which disguise this in abstractions and generalities.

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity, and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way. (Marx & Engels, 1846, pp. 36-37)

A connected problem, ironically pointed out by writers as diverse as Plekhanov, Deleuze and Nietzsche, is that for logic to work *at all* you also require identity relations which are *general* and *abstract*, such as ($a=a$), and these therefore make logic useless. Logic is only social/discursive and not materially useful because it relies on abstractions such as identity ($a=a$) and similar rules (*if a then b, therefore if not-b then not-a*). But such abstractions do not exist in the ‘real world,’ only in our discourses. So, in the material (non-discursive) world, such abstract logical formulations and calculi are either useless or nonsense, since the abstract and general ‘*a*’ is *not* always the same as itself (cat = cat is useless, because material cats are all different). So once again, this means that nothing can ever be ‘*established*’ by logic as true or certain since logic (1) incorporates only abstractions and (2) assumes that some premises can be true to begin with (when they are language-based beliefs which are neither true nor false).

In summary, logic cannot be a basis for deducing or establishing truths or certainty as was promised. Here are some of the problems, to summarize:

- as Nietzsche (1967, Section 512), Deleuze (1995), and Plekhanov (1929, p. 112) all wrote, logic is based upon using *premises*, *identity*, and *abstractions* and these have material effects on people only through discourse and hence via social relationship outcomes
- in the real world we cannot assert any premises as true facts, since they are words or uses of language and just function to do things to people (they do not represent or substitute for the world), so the function of pure logic is already not useful; truth and falsity are not properties of words, just of doing things
- logic is therefore also a *social practice*, based on a certain form of language use which *requires prior social persuasion of some premises*; as such, it is fairly useless in the real material world and is only useful in the social world of persuasion (you cannot use logic on your cat)

Is philosophy useful?

My conclusion, therefore, is that philosophy is not really very useful except in the limited sense of trying out new concepts and ideas in language to shape people into saying and doing new things. These might be interesting or useful, but there is no guarantee that they will not be harmful either (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Even if some new words lead to useful or ‘adaptive’ (Skinner,

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1974) outcomes, this does not mean that there is any sort of ‘pragmatic’ truth or certainty on those words, since in any other contexts something different might occur.

Most of what it has been claimed as useful in philosophy (identifying truths and certainty), especially in the western tradition, is misguided because a hidden assumption has been that people’s statements, beliefs, thoughts or logic can be independent of material social forces. I have used arguments from a wide variety of philosophers and others that this is not so (Deleuze, 1995; Foucault, 1970; Guerin, 2020b; Hadot, 1995; Heidegger, 2003; Marx & Engels, 1846; Nietzsche, 1967; Plekhanov, 1929; Quine, 1968; Ryle, 1971; Siedentop, 2014; Skinner, 1957; Vološinov, 1973; Wittgenstein, 1958).

What we are left with is that what philosophers do is to try and place verbal statements into small-sized beliefs, and in this way use social influence to persuade people of premises which can easily be shaped into seemingly contradictory beliefs as well. But the fight amongst different looking ‘cognitive’ or ‘philosophical’ beliefs independently of social forces and persuasion is illusory, I have argued. Differences and changes in beliefs are language phenomena and only occur through social forces. Beliefs and changing beliefs do have a material reality, but these turn out to be only the effects they have on other people.

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