

Methodologies: Introduction and Summary of Session

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Comments on B. Janz's: "What does it mean to do philosophy-in-place?"

Bruce Janz conducts an interesting investigation into the notion of philosophy as lived practice. With this shift towards the 'living' aspect of philosophy comes a shift away from the traditional conduct of philosophy as primarily a hermeneutics of the printed word.

It is arguable that professional philosophers obsess over the printed word and have fixated on the narrow view that philosophy is essentially a colossal collection of particular books and articles. I do applaud our author's desire to return to the pre-Platonic notion of philosophy as activity. Reading this paper reminded me of Pierre Hadot's lovely little book, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*

Overall, Janz discusses four questions:

1. What is a text?
2. What does it mean for a text to migrate?
3. What is it to do philosophy-in-place?
4. What new concepts might become available when texts migrate?

Clearly there is much to examine in this paper, but I have not the time here to comment on all of Janz's discussions. It seems to me that the central question here is the first, 'what is a text?' The reason being is that the other discussions hang to a large extent on the answer to this first question.

In a roundabout fashion traditional philosophers have often asked 'what is a *meaningful* text?' Although Hume did not explicitly tell us what constitutes a philosophical text, he was clear that a text devoid of reasoning about matters of fact and

relations of ideas should be pitched into the flames, for it is meaningless—nothing but sophistry and illusion. Similarly, the logical positivists and Popperians told us that meaningless texts are those containing propositions devoid of possible confirmation or falsification conditions and are therefore indistinguishable from firewood.

Within the world of meaningful texts, what carves out the subset we call philosophical? Janz replies: there is no such thing as a philosophical text. But, Janz later declares, there is such a beast as 'philosophical textuality.' I shall now offer a few comments on the 'non-existence of the philosophical text.'

Janz states that a text, presumably a text *per se*, is a distillation of activity. Indeed, there is much to be said for this. It fits in with the historian's approach that says that practice precedes theory; theory is formalization, an abstraction from practice. Formalization typically removes the dynamic aspect from practice. Janz rightly states that texts are like snapshots of activity. And of course, snapshots always are frozen images of a moving object.

Janz then claims that philosophy is a particular set of practices, not a particular set of texts. History shows us that it is controversial to say what philosophy *is*; for every definition of 'philosophy' one could find several competing ones. But, if one insists that philosophy is a practice or an activity, one is saying that the only object that can be characterized as 'philosophical' will be

a human activity. A text, one would think, is a different kind of object than an activity. A text is a static object. It quickly follows that there are no such things as philosophical texts. As Ryle would say, 'philosophical text' is a category mistake.

As Hume and his empiricist descendents tried to explain why we think meaningless texts are meaningful, Janz offers to explain why we think that philosophical texts exist. Suppose that a particular text, T, is always surrounded by philosophical activity. (People are reading T and scrutinizing T's propositions and responding to them and so on.) T is thought to be an intrinsically philosophical text. Again, it is our constant philosophical activity surrounding the text that makes us think that the text is intrinsically philosophical. But, it is the context, the encompassing activity, that is intrinsically philosophical, not the text itself. If I have properly understood Janz's argument, this philosophical context is what he calls 'philosophical textuality.'

But it would seem that any text, Q, could become a philosophical text, provided that Q were surrounded by or engaged philosophically. This would lead to wide open relativism concerning philosophical texts. Janz resists this move, declaring that not just any text can be engaged philosophically; there are constraints. I am very sympathetic to this notion of what could be called a 'bridled philosophical textuality.'

Still, questions remain. What are the constraints on philosophical textuality and where do they come from? Suppose that we have texts A and B. We all agree that A is 'philosophically engageable' and that B is not. What distinguishes A and B? Is it an internal

difference? If so, then we seem to be at partially back in the land of 'intrinsically philosophical texts.' If not, then the difference really lies only with us. So, does that not somehow lead us into relativism? In other words, I wonder if we are still caught in the dichotomy of the essentialism of the text or the relativism of the context.

What constitutes 'philosophical activity?' Although I like the idea of re-connecting philosophy to activity, I ask what makes practice X a philosophical practice but excludes practice Y from being a philosophical practice? Admittedly, I am asking the same question over and over. As I asked for the constraints on what makes a text 'philosophically engageable,' I am now asking for the constraints on what makes a practice a 'a philosophical practice.' It seems to me that without constraints on texts and practices, we will end up with complete relativism. Any text could become a philosophical text and any practice could become a philosophical practice.

A little more generally, I ask what we would say constitutes the notion of activity. This is an ancient question and the history of answers to it shows that it is a difficult one. Still, could we not say that the act of writing itself an activity? More specifically, a certain kind of act of writing could be classified as a philosophical practice. After all, there is a kind of dynamic that happens when one tries to write philosophy. Moreover, reading, too— isn't that a kind of activity? Ultimately, I am wondering where there is an edge to the text that separates it from the surrounding world.

There is much more in this interesting paper. I have only begun to mine its contents.

Perron, in drawing upon Luc Ferry's work, does a valuable service to us here. Typically, 'transcendence' is thought of as a species, namely, 'that which refers beyond the human condition, specifically to the divine.' This species of transcendence—divine/transcendence—is what could be called a pre-Kantian species. But again, this is only one species of transcendence. Kant, as is well known, did not deny the existence of God, just that God's existence was not theoretically provable. However, God's existence was 'practically' provable, a practical proof that began with the recognition of the moral law. Although one may readily state what the moral law says, to articulate how we recognize this moral law is not altogether straightforward. It is often done so negatively: the moral law is neither something imposed nor chosen. But I shall pass over the thorny issue of the epistemology of the moral law. Let us simply call Kantian transcendence 'immanent/transcendence.'

Now, the exact relation that Ferry's thought bears to Kant's is beyond what I can say here, but as Perron points out, Ferry's thought remains "essentially Kantian." In that I shall take Perron at his word.

I must admit that I have great difficulty understanding this notion of a contemporary transcendence. But, I am not going to go as far as some virtue theorists, such as Anscombe, who more or less, condemned the Kantian ethical project as incoherent. I must admit though, that as I struggled with the notion of immanent-transcendence I was relieved when Perron himself admits that this

transcendence is ultimately indefinable and not a little bit paradoxical. Trivially speaking, my relief was that my difficulty was not merely my own mental deficiencies. Nonetheless, I am sympathetic to the view that at the centre of our lives is something that is deeply paradoxical.

Sympathies aside, I have some concerns. The first is one of terminology and deals with this paradoxical notion of a modern, non-metaphysical notion of transcendence, a transcendence that lies within human subjectivity. Clearly this is neither a Platonic nor a naturalist notion. The third way is indeed difficult to articulate.

Still, we may simply have to tolerate some kind of mystery at the heart of human being. But, I am not entirely convinced that this mystery is uniquely human. Perhaps I am too much of a naturalist to locate all mystery within human being. Maybe this mystery is broader, that is, perhaps not only human beings share in it. We might be unique to the degree in which we share in this transcendence, but not unique in the fact that we share in it. I draw upon some of the thought of Whitehead for instance, who argues that ethical views are not absolutely limited to the possession of human beings. Ethical positions, perhaps in more rudimentary forms, are certainly held by higher primates. Perhaps we have to broaden this notion of transcendence. Clearly there will be limits to this broadening. It would be absurd to speak, for instance, of the 'duties of plants' and even of the 'duties of all animals.'

Comments on E. Deutsch's: "Text, Rationality and Knowledge in Indian Philosophy: Prolegomenon to Cross-Cultural Engagement."

It seems to me that a key theme of Deutsch's paper is to motivate rejecting the "twin independency theses." These are:

1. Culturally independent philosophical problems exist.
2. Culturally independent reasoning exists.

To reject these theses is to begin the process of opening one's self to other traditions: to begin to understand other traditions without imposing one's own logic upon them. In other words, Deutsch proposes that philosophical problems and reasoning about them are both products of a tradition. Hence, to understand a particular philosophical problem and the reasoning about it, one must understand both within the context of the generating tradition. The particular example that Deutsch discusses is within the Indian tradition.

Nonetheless, my previous remarks must be taken with caution since they summarize a version of cultural relativism—which Deutsch states that he does not embrace. (I will return to this issue presently.) Within the context of the Indian tradition, Deutsch is correct to say that to understand particular problems one must have a solid grasp on those aspects of the tradition that led to them. Deutsch's discussion of the formation of a 'tradition-text' was most interesting. Still, I would argue that very much the same case could be made for works that belong to the western philosophical tradition. For instance, to grasp what Descartes is after in his *Meditations* requires a solid background in medieval and the roots of early modern philosophy. (And this background, I would also argue, is merely necessary—more in going on in the *Meditations* than simply a reaction to scholastic thought.) Most likely some texts could be argued as 'less a product of their times' than others. This would be part of the story as to why Plato's *Republic* is more widely read than Heidegger's

Being and Time. But I admit that I am only pressing claims here, not providing arguments. My point is simply that the texts of the two traditions are not shaped as differently as Deutsch seems to suggest.

Staying within the context of Indian philosophy, I wonder whether some blurring has occurred. I am by no means a scholar of Indian thought, but, based on my limited reading, it strikes me that these various streams collectively form the Indian tradition in virtue of a Wittgensteinian 'family resemblance' relation rather than a single universal property. I shall give an example.

Deutsch points out that the Indian tradition does not accept the distinction between matter and form. In other words, there is no notion of formal reasoning in Indian thought. I suggest that the orthodox Nyaya system had at least the understanding of formal validity. Admittedly, they may not have developed it nor held it to the same level of importance as did the likes of western philosophers, but Indian thinkers were not completely opposed to, or oblivious of, the possibility of formal reasoning. Nonetheless, I could be wrong on this. In any case, some further discussion would be interesting.

But, suppose that I am incorrect concerning Indian thought and formal reasoning. I worry about Deutsch's strong link between the Indian notion of truth and that of Indian culture. Now, I could be wrong in that Deutsch is not making this link and that Indian philosophy does hold truth to be culturally coloured. Still, it has always struck me that, according to at least some philosophers belonging to the Indian tradition, it was possible to grasp or somehow possess non-culturally bound truth. To attain such a truth was to overcome *moksha*. I would like to be clear on this. It might be the case

that were one to examine the Indian tradition as a critical object, one would find that all truth claims within it were tinged with cultural values. My point is that philosophers within the Indian tradition would not have accepted that everything they claimed to be true was ultimately culturally coloured. I think that it is important to look at Indian culture, or any culture, from the inside, from the perspective that a member of that culture would take. I would be interested in some discussion of this, especially since the description of the coming to self-knowledge at the end of the paper reminded me of Plato's Allegory of the Cave.

It seemed to me that at the end of the paper, Deutsch admits that within the Indian tradition there is a non-cultural notion of truth. When he discusses the Indian notion of epistemology, he states that it distinguishes, like classical Western epistemology, the knower and the known. But Indian thought stresses that values intrude in that they determine what is worth knowing. What is worth knowing? Self knowledge. Now, what is self-knowledge? It is NOT finding one's real self. Instead, it is finding out that which is truly objective. In Deutsch's own words, it is 'removing ignorance' (as Plato might say, 'unchaining yourself'), removing sources of bewilderment (as Plato might say, not becoming a moth fluttering about the cave's central fire) and finally, accepting recognition of the timeless ground of being (as Plato might say, staring into the face of *The Good*.)

I now return to what I think is the bigger issue of this paper, namely, the rejection of a universal human reasoning. Our author offers some good points for those in favour of universal human reasoning to ponder. This touches on a very deep and difficult issue, in my view, concerning realism and logic. Ultimately, is logic reducible to a cultural expression? I don't propose to go into this topic here. But I close my comments here with one reflection on an inference that our

author makes, an inference that I think is critical to the cause for rejecting universal human reasoning.

Deutsch rightly points out that cultural values are not isolated entities; they are not cognitively inert. I fully agree with this. There is no question that many judgments that we make are heavily coloured by cultural values. However, he infers that cultural values colour *all* of our judgments. I suggest that the conclusion be 'some of our judgements.' To say 'all' is, at least to me, too strong of an inference. I would like to see some discussion as to how certain propositions, for instance elementary arithmetic propositions, contain or express cultural values. I do not think that one must be a Platonist in order to maintain that arithmetic is not a cultural endeavour. For instance, one could embrace a type of Kantian style constructivism to do it.

My quibbles notwithstanding, Deutsch provides us with a most stimulating paper, full of solid reflections and is indeed, a pleasant read.