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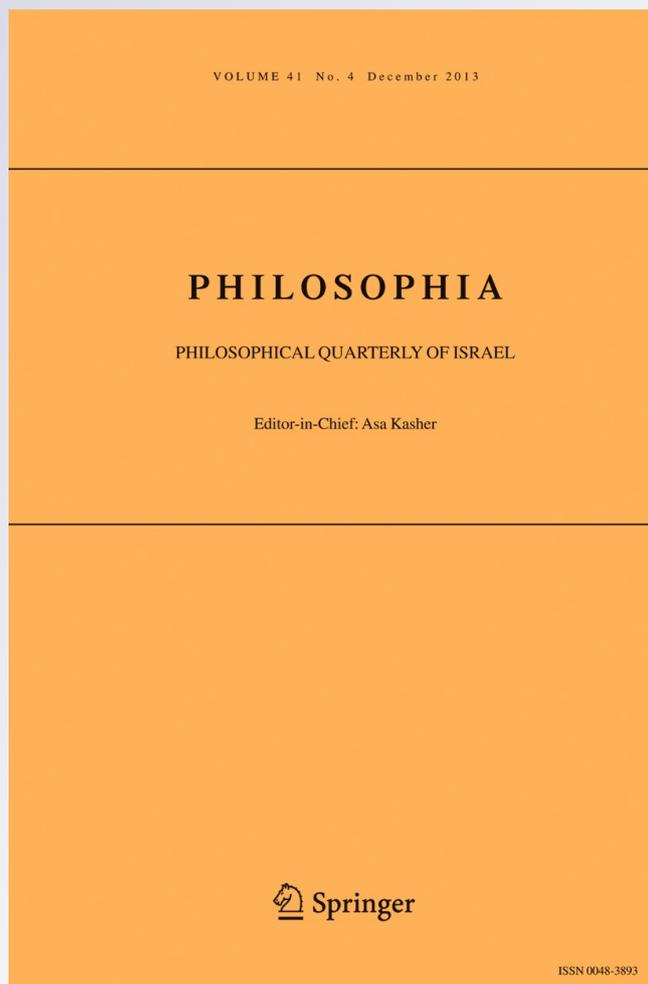
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Abstract Philosophy, as it is understood and practiced in the West, is and has been generally considered to be the search for truth. But even if philosophy is the search for truth, it does not automatically follow that those who are identified as ‘philosophers’ are themselves actually engaged in that search. And indeed, in this paper I argue that many philosophers have in fact not been genuinely engaged in the search for truth (in other words, many philosophers have not been doing philosophy) and as such much of what passes for philosophy is in fact not really philosophy at all.

Keywords Philosophy · Truth · Truth-seeking · Metaphilosophy · Aristotle · Descartes · Nietzsche

The Standard Conception of Philosophy

Philosophy, as it is understood and practiced in the West, is and has been generally considered to be the search for truth. Throughout the long history of the discipline some of its most celebrated practitioners have explicitly described philosophy this way, e.g. Aristotle (1984, II, 1570), Spinoza (2007, 184) and Berkeley (2008, 68), while others have elected to characterize it as the search for knowledge or wisdom, where both ‘knowledge’ and ‘wisdom’ are synonyms for ‘truth,’ or certain kinds of truth at least, e.g. Hobbes (1839, I, 3) and Descartes (1985, I, 186). And although it is

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rare to find in the work of contemporary philosophers explicit assertions that philosophy is the search for truth,¹ this is due more to the fact that today the vast majority of philosophers do not concern themselves with discussing the nature of philosophy than it is because the view has fallen out of favour. In fact quite the opposite; a perusal of contemporary philosophical articles and monographs reveals very clearly that, in their practice of philosophy, the vast majority of philosophers consider themselves to be seeking out and advancing truths.

There have been, of course, other conceptions of philosophy throughout its long history, though arguably most of these amount to little more than variations on the truth-seeking theme. For example:

- Various ancient thinkers such as Plato, the Stoics, and the Epicureans, *inter alia*, saw philosophy as first and foremost a practical discipline, as *a way of life*,² but in doing so all ultimately thought of it as truth-seeking, in that they believed that philosophy discloses the truths by which one should orientate one's life.
- Some early and medieval Christians conceived philosophy as *the handmaiden of theology*,³ in the sense that it enabled the practitioner to understand (or attain a deeper understanding of) the truths already contained—or concealed—in scripture. Under this conception, it seems more correct to say that philosophy *uncovers* truths rather than *discovers* them.
- Similarly, John Locke's notion of philosophy as *the under-labourer to the sciences* (2008, 6) sees philosophy's role as assisting scientists by sweeping away the problematic notions, conceptual confusions and false hypotheses that might otherwise impede their progress in amassing knowledge. A similar view proved popular in the 20th century among analytically-minded philosophers, many of whom held the view that the chief (or even the sole) task of philosophy was to untangle our conceptual scheme(s)⁴; such thinkers conceived philosophy as a kind of 'conceptual plumbing,' to use Mary Midgeley's felicitous phrase (1992, 139).

Common to all such conceptions of philosophy is the view that philosophy is ultimately truth-seeking. It is certainly the case that each conception differs in terms of what it holds to be the kind of truths one can attain through philosophy (e.g. truths about how one should live, about God, about our conceptual scheme(s) etc.), but this takes nothing away from the fact that whether philosophy is conceived as handmaiden, under-labourer or plumber, it remains the case that its practitioners hold that it is *through philosophy and by means of philosophy* that truths are sought out (and, it is hoped, ultimately disclosed, uncovered or discovered), and as such each conception takes philosophy to be a truth-seeking discipline. It seems reasonable, then, to conceive philosophy as the search for truth; in fact so popular has this conception

¹ The view is, however, commonly found in the introductory literature; see for instance Cox 2010, 27ff, and Soccio 2010, 10–11.

² See Hadot 1995, 49–70.

³ See for example Clement of Alexandria 1991, 35ff; Damian 1853, 603.

⁴ See for example Broad 1923, 16. The elucidation of concepts has taken many forms; indeed, A. J. Ayer (1970, 113ff) identified no fewer than eight ways in which it can and has been done. It is worth noting that not all analytic philosophers held such a view of philosophy; some (e.g. White 1975, 116) saw themselves as engaged on a process which aims to discover the necessary features of certain of our concepts, which makes philosophy straightforwardly truth-seeking in nature.

been, and so popular is it still, that it might appropriately be termed the Standard Conception of Philosophy.

It goes without saying that the Standard Conception cannot capture everything that philosophy is about, since no discipline is the search for truth *simpliciter*: any truth-seeking discipline searches for the truth *about some feature of reality or other*. For example, anthropology is the search for truths about the origins and social relationships of human beings; organic chemistry is the search for truths about the composition, properties and reactions of organic compounds; physical geography is the search for truths about the features of the earth etc. Every truth-seeking discipline has its own particular domain, a part or aspect of reality which forms its subject matter and whose truths constitute its aim. What, then, is philosophy the search for the truth *of*? This is a question on which there has been (and still is) considerable disagreement, as should be clear enough from our discussion thus far. For while many ancient thinkers believed that philosophy seeks truths about how humans should live, many Scholastic thinkers held that philosophy seeks truths about God, and many contemporary analytic thinkers hold that it seeks truths about our conceptual scheme(s) etc. Moreover, it is sometimes claimed (e.g. by Schaff 1975, 181. Quine 1978, 170–1; Teichman and Evans 1999, 1) that philosophy is the search for general or fundamental truths, such as ‘What kinds of thing exist?’ A related view depicts philosophy as the search for the answers to ‘big questions’ like ‘Does God exist?’, ‘Do we have free will?’, ‘What do we know?’ etc. (see Rescher 2001, 3). Adjudicating between these competing claims is beyond the scope of this paper, as for our purposes it does not matter what philosophy is the search for the truth *of*, only that philosophy is the search for the truth about some part or aspect of reality. Consequently, by the ‘Standard Conception of Philosophy’ I shall continue to understand the view that philosophy is the search for truth, with ‘truth’ being implicitly understood to mean ‘truth about some part or aspect of reality,’ and the particular part or aspect of reality left undetermined as an acknowledgement that the issue is still a matter of professional debate.

I wish now to note two rejoinders to the Standard Conception, the first of which I consider to be insignificant, while the second I deem to be very significant, so much so that I will argue that in light of it we should reconsider our understanding of what it is that many philosophers do. The first rejoinder is the oft-made criticism of philosophy that it has failed in its quest to discover truths, being nothing more than a long history of failed notions, ideas and hypotheses.⁵ In my view this serves as an objection to one who would claim that philosophy is an *effective* truth-seeking discipline (or perhaps that philosophy is a *truth-attaining* discipline), but not to one who would make the lesser claim that it is a *truth-seeking* discipline. And it is this lesser claim that concerns us here.

The second rejoinder to the standard conception of philosophy as truth-seeking is the claim that many philosophers are not in fact genuinely engaged in the search for truth—many philosophers are not doing philosophy, in other words—and as such

⁵ In acknowledging this objection, it's not uncommon to find philosophers (e.g. Russell 1967, 90; Urmsom 1967, 11–12) claiming that philosophy has at least served as midwife to the embryonic sciences of (for example) physics, biology, psychology and linguistics, and that these disciplines have made good headway with those questions that previously had been in the domain of philosophers. It is questionable, however, that this should count as a victory for *philosophy*, for even if the discipline can claim successful offspring this does not prevent philosophy itself being a perennial underachiever!

much of what passes for philosophy is in fact not really philosophy at all. This is the claim I wish to develop and defend in the remainder of this paper. To facilitate this, it would be helpful to first identify a mark (or test) of genuine truth-seeking that will enable us to ascertain whether any given philosopher is truth-seeking or not.

The Mark of Truth-Seeking

At first glance it may seem unlikely that there could be such a mark of truth-seeking, since there are so many variations on the truth-seeking theme; after all, there are different kinds of truth (e.g. scientific, religious, historical, personal, etc.), and different methodologies or practices for seeking them (e.g. observation, revelation, introspection etc.). Moreover, different people can seek the same truth for very different reasons (e.g. personal interest, power, financial gain etc.). Yet in spite of all these differences, all genuine instances of truth-seeking seem to display a common pattern, which is this:

The truth-seeker begins in ignorance with regard to the truth he seeks, and as he considers this to be an undesirable state he makes use of a specific method or procedure of enquiry with the expectation that it will, when concluded, yield up the desired truth.

It would be helpful to expand on this a little.

In every case of truth-seeking it stands to reason that the truth-seeker begins in a state of ignorance with regard to the truth he seeks, since if one is *seeking* a truth it follows that one does not currently possess it, i.e. one does not already know it (for if one did know it, the most one could hope to achieve through enquiry is its confirmation). The truth-seeker may, however, believe that there is a specific method or procedure by which he may attain the truth he currently does not possess, and in order to move beyond the state of ignorance, the truth-seeker makes use of the truth-seeking procedure. This procedure may involve making observations, or introspecting, or undertaking analysis, or constructing an argument, and so on, or perhaps even making use of a combination of such practices. The truth-seeking procedure is then typically followed until it reaches an outcome, successful or otherwise. It is important to note that the truth-seeker, qua truth-seeker, will not know the result or the outcome of that procedure before it is concluded (for if he did, he would not be seeking a truth at all, for the aforementioned reason). He may, of course, have an inkling or a suspicion of what the outcome might be, or perhaps even an expectation, but the genuine truth-seeker is, nevertheless, quite literally open to the outcome,⁶ i.e. he or she follows the process of enquiry wherever it happens to go and doesn't guide it towards any particular result. Consequently, the outcome of the enquiry is, in a very real sense, not predetermined by the truth-seeker.⁷

⁶ This is not to say that the truth-seeker might wish to reserve judgement on an outcome when he has reason to doubt its reliability, e.g. because a mistake was made in the process of enquiry etc.

⁷ This can be seen as a natural consequence of the Socratic exhortation to follow the argument wherever it leads. See Plato's *Euthyphro* 14c, *Phaedo* 107b, and *Republic* 394d. Some philosophers, such as John Stuart Mill (1991, 52), have considered the Socratic injunction to represent the ideal for intellectual endeavours such as philosophy.

We can say, then, that the process of truth-seeking is essentially this:

Ignorance → Instigation of truth-seeking procedure → Conclusion of truth-seeking procedure

This simple schema holds good for all examples of truth-seeking, no matter how mundane, *outré*, or highly specialised they may be. To illustrate:

- A parent who wants to know what his teenage daughter did while he was on holiday will ask his neighbours, his daughter's friends, etc. and from their responses will build up a picture of her activities
- A mystic seeking esoteric knowledge will engage in meditation in the hope of attaining enlightenment
- A cultural anthropologist wishing to know about the structure and workings of a particular culture will interview local peoples and informants such as the elders of a community, consult written records, and engage in participatory observation (i.e. live in the target culture and observe what its people do), and from the results will compile a detailed account of the target culture

In each case, it is an open question whether the truth-seeking procedure will result in the discovery of a truth, or even whether it is capable of doing so,⁸ but for our purposes this does not matter. Our concern is not with the success or failure of the truth-seeking procedure, but rather with the nature of truth-seeking itself. Consequently, all that concerns us here is that any truth-seeking discipline must be practised in the way I have outlined; whether that discipline succeeds in obtaining truths has no bearing on this.

Now we saw in section I that according to the Standard Conception of philosophy, philosophy is the search for truth. As a truth-seeking discipline—perhaps even the original or the quintessential truth-seeking discipline—we can expect its practitioners to follow the simple schema outlined above. A strong *prima facie* case can be made for supposing that they do, since we have already considered (albeit briefly) several examples of philosophy in practice. On the basis of those we might think that the following is a plausible picture of how philosophers work:

1. Philosophers begin in a state of ignorance with regard to certain truths, such as truths about how one should live, about God, about our conceptual schemes etc.
2. The perceived undesirability of this state leads them to instigate an appropriate truth-seeking procedure (or combination of such procedures); common examples of such procedures are analysis, argument, dialectic, intuition, and thought-experiments.
3. Philosophers see the chosen procedure through to its conclusion in the hope it will yield the truth(s) they seek.

This is certainly how philosophers ought to operate if they are genuinely truth-seeking. But is it how they *actually* operate? I suggest that in many cases it is not. And now that we have our test of truth-seeking we are in a position to determine

⁸ For example, because the chosen truth-seeking procedures are themselves inherently flawed, or were not followed correctly, or perhaps because—as some thinkers have argued—truth is itself arbitrary, or relative, or impossible for us to attain etc.

which philosophers pass it, and thus qualify as genuine truth-seekers, and which do not. In the next section I shall argue that many do not.

Philosophers and Truth-Seeking

As we shall see, there are various reasons for making such a suggestion. Nietzsche (2002, 8), for example, famously claimed that philosophers

all act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic ... while what essentially happens is that they take a conjecture, a whim, an 'inspiration' or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract—and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact.

If Nietzsche is right, the process of philosophizing is something like this:

Identification of a doctrine to be defended → Construction of defence of that doctrine

We might term this the *rationalization schema*, as the process outlined is clearly designed to justify a philosopher's prior acceptance of a doctrine rather than ascertain whether that doctrine is true.⁹ As should be clear enough, this schema bears no relation at all to the truth-seeking schema identified in section II. For one thing, there is no initial state of ignorance in the rationalization schema, as on it the philosopher identifies *at the outset* the position he wishes to endorse. Moreover, on this schema the philosopher is not led to his chosen position by any kind of truth-seeking procedure, but instead reaches it by altogether different methods. Needless to say, any philosopher who followed the approach outlined by Nietzsche would not be a genuine truth-seeker due to its lacking any truth-seeking procedure: the entire approach is designed to rationalize pre-existing beliefs and fancies, not discover truths.

So which philosophers have adopted such an approach? Nietzsche singles out Spinoza and Kant, though in doing so he elects not to support his claims about their insincerity with any evidence. This is perhaps not unsurprising, as neither Spinoza nor Kant publically presented his work as being nothing more than conjectures, whims, or fervent wishes, nor does there appear to be anything in the private writings of either thinker that could support such an interpretation. It is of course perfectly possible that Spinoza and Kant—and other philosophers besides—engaged in the sort of insincere practices that Nietzsche describes, but without some positive evidence of this it seems difficult to accord any plausibility to the suggestion that the driving force behind their work (or any philosopher's work for that matter) was a mere whim or a wish. Nietzsche may have had his suspicions about Spinoza, Kant, and others, but I cannot see that this is enough to ground a claim that many or most philosophers are not truth-seekers.

⁹ Of course the schema is very simplified, and would need to be fleshed out to capture the nuances present in real-life examples of rationalization. One possible way to flesh it out is along the lines of what Gary Gutting (2009, 192) refers to as the 'convictional argumentation' schema, a 5-step process that begins with a philosopher identifying a practice that he endorses 'as unquestionably appropriate,' building a theoretical framework around it, and then applying the theory to other problems.

Yet there are other ways of grounding the claim that a philosopher has engaged in rationalization (i.e. acted according to the rationalization schema) rather than truth-seeking. Suppose, for example, that there are grounds to believe that a certain philosopher has a exoteric philosophy, that is, a set of views that he defends publically and in his published writings, and an esoteric philosophy, that is, a different set of views that he fervently believes to be true but does not reveal to anyone except perhaps an inner circle of initiates or trusted confidantes. If such duplicitousness were to be discovered, there would be every reason to suppose that the philosopher in question was not a full-time truth-seeker on account of the fact that he had not followed the truth-seeking schema in developing his exoteric philosophy (and so his exoteric philosophy had not been shaped by any kind of truth-seeking procedure). Indeed, his exoteric philosophy is more likely to have been shaped by expediency and so consist of views designed to curry favour, perhaps because they are orthodox or popular. For such a philosopher the process of philosophizing would appear to be that described by the rationalization schema, namely:

Identification of a doctrine to be proved or defended → Construction of proof or defence of that doctrine

This time, however, the philosopher is not led to his chosen position by whims or wishes but by expediency. Nevertheless, any philosopher who followed this schema would not be a genuine truth-seeker.

But is it plausible to suppose that any given philosopher has developed a bogus exoteric philosophy in the way described? As it happens, yes. For example, the 13th century philosopher Issac Albalag claimed that Maimonides had publically defended the doctrine of creation while privately endorsing the notion of an eternal world. He did this, Albalag suggested, out of expediency—his audience would not have been sympathetic to the unorthodox theory of the eternity of the world, and if he had defended it in public he would very likely have been construed as denying the whole Torah.¹⁰ To give another example, David Berman claims that there is good reason to suppose that the 18th century freethinker Anthony Collins was an atheist, even though Collins explicitly denied this and attempted in his writings to construct a philosophical defence of natural religion. In an age when atheism was still feared and reviled in equal measure, Berman suggests (1990, 75) that it was ‘for prudential reasons [that] Collins held back from exoterically publishing his atheism,’ in spite of the fact that he had apparently developed a proof of it. It is quite possible, then, that at least some philosophers have resorted to developing an exoteric philosophy, in which case the public work of such philosophers will have been developed according the rationalization schema.

Our search for non-truth-seeking philosophers has thus begun to yield fruit, although the harvest is still quite a poor one. And it is likely to remain this way for as long as our attention is restricted to philosophers who have engaged in the sorts of activities considered thus far, namely developing and promoting an exoteric philosophy, and building philosophical hypotheses on nothing more than a whim or a wish. After all, there is little reason to suspect that more than a handful of philosophers have engaged in either practice, which is perhaps unsurprising since both involve an

¹⁰ See the account related in Sirat 1985, 241 f.

intentional forsaking of truth-seeking for rationalization. In the remainder of this section we shall see that there are many more ways in which philosophers may *unintentionally* rationalize rather than truth-see, and many more instances of them doing so.

One obvious way in which this may happen is when a philosopher unwittingly falls victim to the pressures or influence of his social group, class, culture, religion etc., which inculcates him with views that he then seeks to defend philosophically: in doing this, the philosopher unintentionally engages in rationalization at the expense of truth-seeking. For example, the prescription for the good life that Aristotle outlines in the *Nicomachean Ethics* reflects the social values of the class to which he belonged, and is in effect a philosophical validation of the kind of life that someone in that class would expect to live. As Alisdair MacIntyre claims, ‘All Aristotle’s conceptual brilliance in the course of the argument declines at the end to an apology for this extraordinarily parochial form of human existence,’ i.e. that embraced by the ‘small leisured minority’ that constituted Aristotle’s own social group and audience (1966, 83, cf. 67; see also Urmson 1988, 120). Despite the way it is presented, as a carefully-reasoned case built on well-crafted arguments, it is less likely that Aristotle arrived at his prescription for the good life via the arguments he puts forward than that he developed those arguments ‘after the fact’ in order to justify a view that he came to hold for entirely different (non-rational) reasons, i.e. because it was the prevailing view of the social class to which he belonged. A similar charge can and has been made about John Rawls’ seminal *A Theory of Justice* insofar as it is considered to be an apology for prevailing social and political practices (see Wolff 1977).

An even more promising way of defending the claim that philosophers often unintentionally favour rationalization over truth-seeking can be drawn from the observations of William James (1988, 489), who noted that there was ‘a certain insincerity in our philosophic discussions’ because ‘the potentest of all our premises is never mentioned,’ by which James meant the *temperament* of the philosophers involved. According to James, a philosopher cannot leave behind his temperament, no matter how hard he may try, and it has a stronger hold over him than any argument or reason:

Of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries when philosophizing to sink the fact of his temperament. Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so he urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises. It loads the evidence for him one way or the other, making for a more sentimental or a more hard-hearted view of the universe, just as this fact or that principle would. (488–89)

According to James, different philosophers have different sensibilities, dispositions, and moods, and these ultimately serve to make one worldview more attractive to them than any other. James only mentions rationalism and empiricism, but the point could easily be extended to cover other worldviews, such as theism, pantheism, atheism, naturalism, common sense etc.¹¹ Because of what a worldview is, namely a framework for interpreting and interacting with reality, once a philosopher has

¹¹ See also Bartlett 1989, 302.

accepted one it will inevitably orientate his thinking. Moreover, it can do so to the point that the philosopher no longer acts in accordance with the truth-seeking schema. Consider, for example, the theistic worldview, the central tenet of which is (usually) a belief in the existence of God. The adoption of such a worldview, along with the attendant belief in God, is typically determined by the culture in which one lives, the instruction or schooling one has received, one's own psychological disposition etc. and this is just as true for philosophers as it is for non-philosophers. There have, however, been philosophers who have advanced proofs of the existence of God, though invariably they have done so from within the theistic worldview. I take it no one would seriously suggest that Descartes, for instance, arrived at his belief in God by means of the so-called Trademark Argument put forward in *Meditation* III (1985, II, 31–36) or the Ontological Argument offered in *Meditation* V (1985, II, 45–49). Indeed, there is no evidence at all that Descartes was a non-believer prior to his devising those arguments; in fact the evidence points the other way, since Descartes was a lifelong Catholic. It is likewise highly doubtful that any philosopher who has developed an argument for the existence of God has been led to believe in God by that very argument. Wittgenstein (1984, 85) noted as much:

A proof of God's existence ought really to be something by means of which one could convince oneself that God exists. But I think that what *believers* who have furnished such proofs have wanted to do is give their 'belief' an intellectual analysis and foundation, although they themselves would never have come to believe as a result of such proofs.¹²

No doubt much the same can be said of non-theistic philosophers also, or at least those who have attempted to provide rational support for their particular brand of atheism or agnosticism. The upshot is that on the issue of God's existence, philosophers invariably do not follow the truth-seeking schema outlined earlier but rather the rationalization schema. That is, they first identify the doctrine they wish to defend (viz. the existence or non-existence of God) and then construct a rational defence of it.¹³

But the existence of God is by no means the only issue on which philosophers do this. For another example let us return to Descartes again. It is well known that in the *Meditations* Descartes defended the immortality of the human soul. Now if this doctrine was arrived at according to the truth-seeking schema then Descartes would have started out by wondering whether the human soul is mortal or not, and then made use of a truth-seeking procedure which eventually yielded the result that the human soul is immortal. On the face of it this looks to be a reasonably faithful account of how Descartes proceeded in the *Meditations*, not least because the book is written as a first-hand account of a meditator's process of discovery. But did Descartes accept the immortality of the soul on account of the defence he mounted for it in the *Meditations*? No; as a man of faith he would have accepted the immortality

¹² See also Crutcher 2010, 438.

¹³ Bertrand Russell (2004, 427) famously denounced Aquinas for just this very practice. He wrote: 'There is little of the true philosophic spirit in Aquinas. He does not, like the Platonic Socrates, set out to follow wherever the argument may lead. He is not engaged in an inquiry, the result of which it is impossible to know in advance. Before he begins to philosophize, he already knows the truth; it is declared in the Catholic faith. If he can find apparently rational arguments for some parts of the faith, so much the better; if he cannot, he need only fall back on revelation. The finding of arguments for a conclusion given in advance is not philosophy, but special pleading.'

of the soul *before* he had constructed an argument for it,¹⁴ and in all likelihood he would have continued to do so even if he had been unable to construct that argument. In short, on the issue of the immortality of the soul Descartes' approach is best captured not by the truth-seeking schema but by the rationalization schema.

One should not suppose, however, that it is only the theistic worldview that has induced philosophers to shun truth-seeking in favour of rationalization, for other worldviews have done precisely the same. For another example, consider G. E. Moore's belief in the external world, which he held prior to the 'proofs' he developed of it (1993, 147–170, especially 165–167), on account of his acceptance of the common sense worldview. The point to be stressed here is not the trite one that philosophers cannot escape their influences (for who can?), but that very often, on account of their influences, *they cease to be truth-seekers*.¹⁵

It should not be thought that the picture being painted here captures only the approach of classical or canonical philosophers, as it does so that of many contemporary philosophers as well. For even in the work of contemporary philosophers what we often find are attempts to rationalize pre-existing beliefs and opinions rather than activities that accord with the truth-seeking schema outlined in section II.^{16 17} To illustrate, let us first consider a paper by John Searle on the subject of animal minds. In his paper Searle argues (1994, 217) that we know some animals to be conscious on the basis of the observation that they have 'a certain inner causal structure that is relevantly similar to [our] own,' namely sense organs, nervous system etc., and the principle 'that if the animal has a causally relevant structure similar to [our] own, then it is likely to produce the similar mental states in response to similar stimuli,' i.e. be conscious. Searle's argument can be viewed as a straightforward example of a *modus ponens* deductive argument, i.e. If P then Q, P, Therefore Q:

If an animal has a causally relevant structure similar to humans, then it is likely to produce the similar mental states in response to similar stimuli

This animal has a certain inner causal structure that is relevantly similar to our own

Therefore this structure is likely to produce in the animal similar mental states in response to similar stimuli

Searle's approach might at first seem to satisfy the truth-seeking schema, in that he identifies an issue or question (whether animals have minds) then instigates a truth-

¹⁴ For details of Descartes' faith, early years, and education, see Gaukroger 1995, 15–67.

¹⁵ Russell (2004, 84) once claimed that this was true of 'all philosophers' in the field of ethics: 'One of the defects of all philosophers since Plato is that their inquiries into ethics proceed on the assumption that they already know the conclusions to be reached.' However Russell offered no evidence for this assertion.

¹⁶ Amongst 'pre-existing beliefs and opinions' we ought to include personal biases and prejudices. According to Karl Popper (1975, 48), 'All men and all women...have...philosophical prejudices. Most of these are theories which they unconsciously take for granted, or which they have absorbed from their intellectual environment or from tradition.'

¹⁷ An anonymous referee makes the following point: 'Philosophical papers in journals are not stretches of doing philosophy, they are reports of the *results* of doing philosophy.' Although intended as an objection, I am not convinced that it can be, because it is precisely the point in question. In the two examples that follow, that of Searle and Waller, the reader should judge for himself/herself whether the practices described are indeed the results of doing philosophy (understood as truth-seeking), or rather, as I contend, mere attempts to rationalize pre-existing beliefs.

seeking procedure (the argument detailed above, which utilises a principle and an observation) which ultimately yields an answer (animals do have minds) which he takes to be true. But in spite of initial appearances, Searle's approach is much better represented by the rationalization schema, and is so *by his own admission*. For he goes on to say that

it does not matter really *how* I know whether my dog is conscious, or even *whether* or not I do 'know' that he is conscious. The fact is, he is conscious and epistemology in this area has to *start* with this fact. (218)

And Searle does indeed start with the view that his dog is conscious (has a mind), stating—without justification—that 'any other possibility is out of the question' and 'there is not really any possibility of doubt' (207).¹⁸ Although Searle does proceed to put forward the argument for animal minds that we considered above, he makes it clear that he is not overly concerned with whether it succeeds or not, noting his discomfort at having produced such an argument in the first place. This discomfort stems from his view that any such argument is, strictly speaking, unnecessary, since in ordinary life we do not doubt that animals have minds or seek justification for it. Clearly, then, Searle's approach to the issue of animal minds begins with his (apparently non-negotiable and not-justified) belief that animals do have minds, and he then attempts to make this belief rationally respectable by producing an argument for it. But such an argument cannot possibly be part of any truth-seeking procedure, simply because Searle had already identified the doctrine he wants to confirm *before* the argument is used, and he indicates that he will accept this doctrine even if the argument does not succeed. Searle's argument for animal minds is therefore designed to rationally justify his pre-existing belief in animal minds, and as such is an after-the-fact rationalization,

Searle's approach to the issue of animal minds is by no means isolated or even unusual, but is rather a typical example of how philosophers tend to practise philosophy. As we have seen, it is common for a philosopher to know at the outset the doctrine that he wishes to confirm, which means that when a philosopher starts to practise philosophy quite often *he will already know what the outcome of his philosophizing will be*. His activity is thus not truth-seeking at all, but instead follows the rationalization schema.

Should further support for this contention be required, one need only consider the philosophical activity of those who seek to develop a model of free will that will bear the weight of grounding our everyday beliefs and practices regarding moral responsibility. Among philosophers and non-philosophers alike there is (and historically has been) a fervent and unquestioned belief in the correctness of moral responsibility, and as Bruce Waller has rightly noted, there is (and historically has been) a 'deeply embedded philosophical assumption' that free will is a precondition of moral responsibility, and this has led various philosophers to develop models of free will that will serve as its foundation. But as Waller has rightly observed (2003, 535),

If we start our investigation with the assumption that our concept of free will must justify moral responsibility, then any attempt to empirically investigate free will is tightly constrained by this moral requirement.

¹⁸ It is worth noting that this view is much more contentious than Searle seems to think. To the claim that animal consciousness is obvious, Susan Blackmore (2003, 168) retorts 'This is not obvious.'

Waller continues to show just how tight that constraint is, by demonstrating just how empirically implausible the various models of free will actually are.¹⁹ Libertarian philosophers, he observes, devise theories that are either ‘overtly miraculous and mysterious’ or ‘include mysterious elements at crucial points,’ while compatibilists produce ‘severely misshapen accounts of free will that are neither empirically plausible nor philosophically adequate’ (536–7). According to Waller, the various weaknesses and implausibilities in various libertarian and compatibilist accounts of free will can be traced back to the initial desire of the authors of these accounts to construct a model of free will that will ground moral responsibility (indeed, Waller claims that one account of free will—that of Robert Kane—is so implausible that ‘No one would propose such a model without the driving desire to accommodate moral responsibility’ (536)). Interestingly, Waller suggests that philosophers who operate this way have got things back to front,

The appropriate way to proceed is to investigate the phenomenon of free will and then allow the moral chips to fall where they may. Once we understand the nature of free will, that will be time enough to inquire whether free will actually provides a basis for moral responsibility and not before. (535)

By ‘appropriate way to proceed’ Waller does not mean ‘morally appropriate’ but rather (if I may so put it) ‘occupationally appropriate.’ In other words, he is not here reminding philosophers of some moral duty or other that they have overlooked, but rather of their duty *as philosophers*; that is, he is outlining how philosophers *qua* truth-seekers ought to be conducting themselves. So although he does not say so explicitly, Waller is appealing here for philosophers to operate according to the truth-seeking schema instead of the rationalization schema. For as things stand, many libertarian and compatibilist philosophers are clearly acting in accordance with the latter—they begin their philosophizing having identified the doctrine they wish to defend (namely the reality of human free will) and then construct a defence of it. While these philosophers may have praiseworthy motives—indeed, they are trying to construct rational grounds for moral responsibility—the fact remains that in so acting they are not truth-seeking.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Proposed Hypothesis

There are, then, numerous examples of philosophers not engaging in truth-seeking at all. In this final section I will consider some advantages and disadvantages of the hypothesis that many philosophers are not truth-seekers.

To my mind, one obvious advantage of the hypothesis is that it renders salient the notorious lack of progress made by philosophy. That philosophy has made no (or very little) progress is an oft-made complaint against the discipline,²⁰ the nub of which is that philosophy has not amassed a definite body of truth, and there is little sign of its doing so even though it has had a very long history, and benefited from the

¹⁹ He mentions in this regard (536) accounts developed by Robert Kane, Roderick Chisholm, Daniel Dennett, and Harry Frankfurt, amongst others.

²⁰ See for example Descartes 1984, I: 114–15; Dummett 1978, 455; Edidin 1985, 546; Rohatyn 1976, 24 ff.

labours of some very industrious and intelligent men and women. If one considers philosophers to be genuine seekers after truth then this lack of achievement or progress is unquestionably an embarrassment. Certainly it calls for explanation.²¹ But the lack of progress in the discipline ceases to be much of a surprise if one accepts that many philosophers have not been engaged in genuine truth-seeking at all. Indeed, the noted lack of attainment is only to be expected from a discipline whose protagonists were (and are) for the most part not engaged in truth-seeking, but rather in the business of rationalizing the views they already hold. Consequently, aside from the not insubstantial evidence in its favour, the hypothesis put forward in this paper also has the advantage of explanatory power, which is widely considered to be a hallmark of a successful hypothesis.²²

Yet it may be thought that the advantage of this explanatory power may be offset by the concern that the hypothesis has the unfortunate disadvantage of devaluing philosophy. From its earliest beginnings philosophy has often been considered a noble pursuit, largely on account of its portrayal as the search for truth. If it turns out that many philosophers are not for the most part truth-seekers at all, but professional rationalizers, then this might be thought to devalue the profession as a whole.

As stated, such an objection clearly has no force. In drawing and defending my hypothesis I have explicitly distinguished the discipline of philosophy from the practices of philosophers and made it plain that the hypothesis concerns the latter, not the former. Consequently, if philosophy is indeed a noble pursuit, and is so because it is the search for truth, then this remains the case even if many philosophers have not engaged in truth-seeking. All that follows from this is that such philosophers have not been doing philosophy!

Now our objector may respond by claiming that if many philosophers have not in fact been doing philosophy then it follows that the work of those philosophers is thereby devalued even if the profession as a whole is not. Taken to its extreme, the objection would urge that, because it is not the product of truth-seeking, the work of many philosophers in fact has no value at all.

To my mind such an objection would be ludicrous, not least because it is an unequivocal example of the so-called genetic fallacy, which is committed when one's assessment of a theory is based (irrelevantly) on its origins. In this case, the objection is that the dubious or discreditable origins of philosophical theories ('dubious' and 'discreditable' in the sense that they were fashioned in the cause of rationalization rather than truth-seeking) thereby devalue these theories or even render them worthless.²³ But there is no doubt that such appeal to origins is entirely irrelevant in this case, and can quite easily be shown to be so by recognising that by common consent the value of philosophical theories derives from their *content* rather than their origins. To illustrate, we know as well as his contemporaries that it was not because of the

²¹ And has received it, of course, though the explanations offered vary in quality quite considerably.

²² See for example Rapoport 1972; Boyd 1991; Schupbach and Sprenger 2011.

²³ A variation of this objection would charge that philosophical theories developed by philosophers engaged in rationalizing rather than truth-seeking are worthless *because they must be false*. The obvious retort here is that it does not follow at all that such theories must be false; in fact there is no logical reason why a theory with such origins cannot be true, although we might justifiably be surprised if it *were* true, since its author did not craft it with truth in mind (consequently, then, if it did turn out to be true, this would be more by accident than by design).

arguments he put forward for them that Descartes believed in God, immortal souls and the external world. In other words, these arguments—and the broader philosophical picture in which they appear—are widely recognised to be the product of rationalization rather than truth-seeking. Nevertheless, Descartes' arguments, and the writings in which they are found, were and still are widely regarded as valuable, largely on account of the fact that *they represent a genuine cognitive achievement*.²⁴ The same is true of other works of philosophy, whether they are generally considered to be the fruits of genuine truth-seeking or not. Of course this is not to say that all philosophical works are equal in terms of their cognitive achievement, as clearly this is not the case at all: for every *Meditations on First Philosophy* there are countless books and articles which are less accomplished in terms of cognitive achievement (i.e. in terms of offering a novel or ingenious attempt at rationally justifying one or more belief or opinion). And there is, of course, nothing new at all in this opinion—works of philosophy are routinely celebrated as achievements of human cognitive ingenuity and not as storehouses of truth (or even as heroic efforts to uncover truths). For example, in identifying Spinoza's *Ethics* as a classic philosophical text, philosophers are not dazzled by the correctness of the conclusions within it or the number of truths it contains, but rather by its novelty, its grandeur and its sweep. This is not the case with classic works in other truth-seeking disciplines; Newton's *Principia*, for example, is revered as a great work of natural science not because of its novelty, grandeur and sweep, though these are undeniably impressive, but because of what is *true* in it, or at least because its claims and theories are generally thought to be closer to the truth than those that had come before. So while a scientist is considered great, and his work revered, because of what he got right, or because he had taken greater strides towards the truth than other scientists, the mark of a great philosopher is not that he has discovered a large number of truths, or any truths at all for that matter, rather it is determined by his *vision*, in particular by that vision's coherence, grandeur and novelty.

But here a concession must be made to our detractor, for while it is correct to say that the value of a philosopher's work is not determined either by its origins, or even by its truth, it does seem eminently reasonable to claim that the work of a non-truth-seeking philosopher is not an authentic work of philosophy. For as philosophy is the search for truth, the defining feature of any true philosophical work must be that it was produced in accordance with the truth-seeking schema. Therefore works that were not cannot be truly philosophical, even if they appear to be so, as in fact the vast majority do. Indeed, it is common for philosophers to present their work as being the results of truth-seeking (i.e. as having been arrived at in accordance with the truth-seeking schema) even if it was ultimately a product of rationalization. As a result of this truth-seeking simulation, as we might put it, in some cases it will be difficult if not impossible to determine whether such-and-such an argument or hypothesis of such-and-such a philosopher is the result of truth-seeking or not. In such cases the principle of charity ought to hold sway, and it ought to be presumed, until there is evidence to indicate otherwise, that the argument or hypothesis in question is the product of truth-seeking rather than rationalization. But this does not change the fact

²⁴ See Gutting 1982, 328; Newman 1978, 420.

that a great deal of what passes for philosophy is not really philosophy at all. Such is the stark conclusion of our survey.

Conclusion

I would like to suggest that things are perhaps not as bleak as this conclusion may suggest. The aim of this paper was to bring the truth-seeking schema very much to the foreground and make it explicit, as well as identify and discuss some of the reasons philosophers fail to adhere to it. As a result of this, it should now be easier to detect and gather evidence of rationalization in the work of other philosophers, or at least of their failure to adhere to truth-seeking. It may be difficult to see any of this as positive. Yet our efforts can in fact be construed as promoting the cause of truth (and hence of philosophy), because having put the truth-seeking schema in the spotlight it should now be easier for each philosopher to scrutinise his own practices and so identify when he has and when he has not genuinely sought the truth. There are grounds to hope that the net effect of this will be an increase in genuine truth-seeking among philosophers. In which case, our efforts will not only lead us to see that there was less truth-seeking in the work of past philosophers than we might otherwise have expected, but also lead to there being more truth-seeking by present and future philosophers than might otherwise have been the case.²⁵

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²⁵ I would like to thank P. M. F. Clarke, Raif hār Doremitzwr, and an anonymous *Philosophia* referee for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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