

Friedrich Seibold

A Fundamental Thinking Error in Philosophy

Abstract

The present essay is a semantic and logical analysis of certain terms which coin decisively our metaphysical picture of the world. In particular they are the central terms of three basic philosophical problems. The basic problems in turn arise from three basic questions: What is objective truth? What is reality 'independent of consciousness'? What is psychic freedom? These three questions appear irresolvably problematic from the divergent and controversial nature of the answers they attract. The terms, in formulating the controversial fundamental problems, show a logical commonality which is identified and analysed here. The logical attribute uniting the notions analysed is a uniform contradiction within the terms, a logical impossibility of thought and therefore a 'fundamental thinking error'. The consequence of this thinking error is of logical necessity not only apodictic, but for the first time a logically conclusive metaphysic and with it a new weltanschauung.

A Fundamental Thinking Error in Philosophy

Do you believe that you are able to consider the meaning of a term which excludes itself from thought? Beware! Each and every term is thinkable otherwise it would not exist. Is for example 'non-thought' thinkable in its meaning? Certainly not, because 'non-thought' negates thought which is itself necessary to think the meaning. So it deprives itself of its own basis. The concept 'non-thought' is unthinkable because it is a contradiction in terms. The general principle of which 'non-thought' is but one example is that notions which have a meaning excluding them from thought are not thinkable; they are simply mentally not seizeable. Consequently that which is meant by such terms self-evidently is also not thinkable as existent. It is without sense to say that it can nevertheless be existent. To manage such terms and their various meanings, I designate there to be a 'fundamental thinking error'. Subsequently it will be shown that this reasoning leads logically to render untenable the established metaphysical picture of the world.

The 'fundamental thinking error' comprises a series of special thinking errors in all of which 'not to think' is implicit. Most immediately it is recognizable in the notions of 'unconscious', 'nothingness' and 'death'.

'Unconscious' accordingly excludes itself from consciousness and with it also from thought because thought - i.e. the whole of all thoughts - is included in consciousness. Therefore it is as impossible to think away consciousness as thought itself. Without consciousness neither is there thought. Consequently 'unconscious' can only mean 'subconscious' which represents a non-differentiable consciousness. In any case one cannot be conscious in having no consciousness about something which means that it is 'unconscious'. This holds good no matter when it will be or will have been 'unconscious' because the thought process happens in the present time.

The noun 'nothingness' which means the absence of everything is obviously so unthinkable in this sense that it is hard to understand that such a paradoxical meaning could be taken seriously in modern philosophy. Any thought about its meaning invalidates it because a thought is something and turns the term into a contradiction in terms. Its meaning contradicts by its very existence its meaning, i.e. it ruins the alleged absence of everything. The meaning of the term 'nothingness' is unthinkable, it leads itself ad absurdum and thus the notion is a thinking error. The reason for this error is the disregard of thought within a nothingness which requires also that there is no thought, but without it the thought 'nothingness' cannot be. In short the thought 'nothingness' requires the thinking away of all thought which is an impossibility.

'Death', the third of the named terms, besides 'unconscious' and 'nothingness', only contravenes the impossibility to think 'non-thought' if one assumes - as is reasonable - that the term 'death' includes 'not to think anymore'. In doing so it is of no matter if the meaning 'not to think' is put in the present time, in the time to come or in the past, in no case can it be thought because one has to think it presently. Embracing the meaning 'not to think anymore' the term death is in this respect a special thinking error too. From this arises the contradiction on the one hand of not being able to think about not being and that which is included in it, not to think; whilst on the other hand thinking that some day one will exist no more and with it not be able to think. This contradiction is irresolvable if one refuses to reach for the logical possibility that consciousness is not ended by death. This assumption is far less speculative if one bears in mind that consciousness is not explicable in principle. Any explanation presupposes thought and with it consciousness so that even starting to explain it leads in a

circle and therefore explains nothing. Indeed the assumption is not speculative at all because this paper will show apodictically that consciousness is not in fact what we are accustomed to call 'consciousness'.

Of particular interest for our metaphysical picture of the world are the terms 'objective', 'independent of consciousness' and 'free' in the sense of psychic freedom, all of which include the 'fundamental thinking error'. They are the central terms of the basic philosophical problems arising from questions about what is truth, what is 'being' and what is psychical freedom.

What is meant by 'objective'?

This term has meaning for two different things. First it relates to the so-called ideal, i.e. inner objects, the objects of thought whose expression are true statements, but true only in the sense of generally accepted and not in the sense of subjectively true. 'Objective' thus means in respect of the ideal, i.e. thought objects objectively true ones. Secondly 'objective' refers to the very existence of so-called real objects, i.e. objects outside of consciousness. Relative to these objects 'objective' is synonymous with the term 'independent of consciousness', which is discussed later. For the present therefore we need discuss only the expression 'objectively true'.

What is the meaning of 'objectively true'?

In whatever way a statement is verified the resulting truth is an expression of thought, i.e. truth is subjectively established by thinking operations therefore it cannot be objective. What is meant by a truth which is valid for all rationally thinking individuals is that it is an intersubjective truth. It cannot be objective in principle because 'objective' is subjectively thought, consequently it means a subjective objectivity and is therefore a contradiction in terms. Naturally 'intersubjectively true' does not mean that a so named statement is true for every rational thinking subject. How intersubjective truth can be shown in a rational unquestionable manner is another subject altogether and will not be treated here.

What then does 'objective' mean in general?

The term 'objective' means that something ranks as valid or exists independently of the thinking subject. 'Objective' is thought by a subject but means at the same time that something is or ranks as being valid independent of the subject's thought. The term 'independent of thought' is a thought which excludes itself from thought because what is independent of thought is out of

thought. The meaning 'objective' is therefore a contradiction in terms and with it a further special thinking error. Thus there cannot be anything objective! Consequently this is true also of facts which result from the interaction of several real objects so that for example measured results can only be intersubjectively valid, not 'objectively' valid. Thus, for both real objects and ideal ones, 'objective' can only mean that something is intersubjectively valid. Nevertheless a statement which claims validity for a certain fact can be negated by certain subjects for themselves. As to real objects, 'objective' is, as mentioned earlier, synonymous with 'independent of consciousness' and from this arises the question:

What is meant by 'independent of consciousness'?

For materialists, naturalists and realists in general it is common to consider the final reason in the explanation of all viewable and measurable data of something perceived as real which is independent of consciousness, i.e. it is supposed this something exists in some form even if it is impossible to perceive it. This ranks as self-evident only in science although science believes it simply because its existence cannot be proven.

DESCARTES, the founder of dualism, of the real and of the ideal, began his meditation explicitly with doubt about the existence of a real so-called outer world. With his famous "cogito, ergo sum" he emphasized that first of all we are confined to our consciousness thereby it is the sole certainty in the beginning of philosophizing. With "ergo sum" ("therefore I am") no existence is proved to be in an outer world because out of a single premise ("cogito" = "I think") one cannot draw any conclusion in principle. Furthermore Descartes' sentence is (although unintentional) a presupposition of something unproven (a physical body and with it an outer world) by the "I am". Though unproven and doubted by himself this existence is (because it does not mean the existence of consciousness) tacitly presupposed. It appears only in the conclusion ("I am") but not in any premise. This 'petitio principii' well-known false reasoning by the tacit presupposition of the unproved is typical of the weltanschauung called metaphysical realism. The supposition of reality in that basic notion is inevitable as is shown in the following.

In the time of Descartes doubt about a reality outside of consciousness was new only to European civilization, since the Indian Vedanta philosophy had denied it more than two thousand years ago, as BERKELEY did after Descartes. So there exists sound reason to prove this reality. Terms like "thing-in-itself" [KANT], "outer world", "nature", "matter", "outward objects", "physical things"

presuppose reality and with it exactly that which has to be proved as the essence of the problem in the corresponding epistemic controversies. The use of these or similar terms as if their essential meaning were quite self-evident, even worse appealing to common sense, is a total misunderstanding of the virtual problematic nature of metaphysical realism. In works upholding naturalism the term 'nature' is sometimes even used like a catchword, but what then is 'nature'?

As presupposition of the unproven is characteristic for realism so the logical circle is for naturalism. In naturalism which holds besides the outer world, also consciousness as a real object of natural science, nature is the starting and final point of its argumentation. Nature in the form of human cognition and thought (here the one of the scientist) wants to explain nature also in the form of human cognition and thought. Furthermore it wants to explain consciousness in general and not only in its function but in its essence, because the question to be answered is: "What is consciousness?" Thus according to naturalism nature does its explaining in the form of cognition and thought itself. This is a circular explanation which therefore ultimately cannot explain nature in its essence, which is after all the object of naturalism. The circle always results when consciousness or nature is said to be essentially explained because thus both necessarily explain themselves. This holds true also in non-invasive research into brain processes. It explains phenomena of consciousness by processes of the brain. But to speak about such processes is an expression of thought and with it an expression of the phenomena of consciousness. So the brain researchers explain consciousness by consciousness. And because brain processes are processes of nature, as are processes of consciousness, they explain in accordance with the naturalistic circle, nature by nature. Due to the unavoidable circle in an essential explanation of nature or consciousness, both are inexplicable in principle. Neither can they be questioned because every questioning, even every word, presupposes both.

The circular explanation of naturalism is the consequence of not separating recognizing consciousness from its recognized objects according to their different essence, though so-called real objects are allegedly something independent of consciousness, i.e. something not conscious in their essence. Considering both as nature the process of knowing logically and inevitably becomes an untenable circle. Furthermore through this circle naturalism includes a contravention of the logic axiom called 'principium contradictionis' which means 'A is not equal to non-A'; comprising under the term 'nature' both consciousness and something independent of it (nature). Thus consciousness and non-consciousness occur in a sole entity which is a contradiction in terms.

Meanwhile even realists (e.g. B. RUSSELL) hold that a proof of the realistic basic view is impossible. On this there can be no doubt because immediately we consider only the contents of consciousness (perceptions, imaginations, thoughts, feelings etc.) there is no way beyond them which leads to an outer world independent of consciousness. On this mental route to a world outside of consciousness one must leave the inner world of consciousness with which all knowing and reasoning has an end. Thus that outer world is not recognizable in principle, i.e. neither as such is it one in itself. So if one is speaking of the perceptible one can only mean the contents of consciousness. When realists talk of nature as if it were something different from the contents of consciousness, this depends upon blind belief since one cannot know about it. Whatever one may say against it to supposedly demonstrate the contrary it is an expression of the contents of consciousness - in this case of thoughts - and therefore it denies itself.

With proof of principle non-perceptibility and the absence of proof of nature's independence of consciousness it has not been proved of course that the real outer world cannot exist. Its non-existence is not provable either, because we cannot know about the essence of being, but only of our thoughts about it. After all we have no access to 'being' in itself, and the non-existence of such 'being' must also remain beyond our knowing. A proof of its existence or a proof to the contrary is not necessary for our knowledge of it because it can be proved that a real world independent of consciousness is a thinking error. The thought 'independent of consciousness' - because thought is included in consciousness - includes the thought 'independent of thought', a thought for which the meaning is mentally not seizeable because there is no thought independent of thought. This meaning would have to be thought with the exclusion of thought! To be going to think the named thoughts in their meaning signifies intending to think the unthinkable. It follows that a real world independent of consciousness is thinkable only as a thinking error and speaking about such a reality or world is meaningless. Thus 'independent of consciousness' is shown to be a further special thinking error.

The impossibility to think a reality independent of consciousness derives from thinkingly intending to know or open up an existence outside of thought which one has first to be able to think free from contradiction. Besides the impossibility to mentally seize the meaning 'independent of thought' or 'independent of consciousness' something which is thought of as real, i.e.

independent of thought, does not necessarily exist. Moreover man is a part, an element of nature, so it is absurd to say nature exists independent of man or man's consciousness. That would mean the whole is independent of one of its parts or there is no connection or interdependence between something (nature) and another thing (man or his consciousness) which has emerged from the former. But it does not follow from the impossibility to think without contradiction of an outer world independent of consciousness that a world which is discernible from single contents of consciousness disappears. A more detailed examination of its true quality follows shortly.

The illusion of reality in the meaning of something independent of consciousness is not directly of practical significance either for natural science or for everyday life. It is not the existence of certain objects or perceptible facts that is logically untenable but their quality as real - that is to say independent of consciousness - objects or facts. In both areas the distinction between an inner and external experience, an inside and outside world, or a world of consciousness and one of action has utility. In experimental science the factual unthinkability of an outer world is as relevant as mesons and quarks are to plumbers. For scientific theory on the other hand terms like 'matter', 'nature' and similar notions which denote something independent of consciousness, become a thinking error and by their diverse meanings render themselves fiction, i.e. suppositions whose logical impossibility one knows but which can nevertheless be useful as subsidiary terms for example in a working hypothesis.

Founded upon an unprovable basic assumption which is into the bargain logically untenable, natural science is not only dogmatic but irrational. This statement is qualified only in that the untenability of an outer world independent of consciousness has been confirmed by the findings of experimental quantum physics. ANTON ZEILINGER (Vienna University) writes in 'Neue Zürcher Zeitung' of 13th December 2000, '100 Jahre Quantentheorie': "To my mind the new experiments underline as untenable the accepted concept of the world with its observable attributes as existing independent of the observation and before the observation. At least in cases of a single measurement in quantum physics, such a position is untenable."

Thus a new *weltanschauung* emerges as through the 'independent of consciousness' thinking error the outer world becomes a world of consciousness. But because of the threatening circle consciousness is as inexplicable in principle as is nature, each can be equated with the other so that the world of consciousness remains a natural world. That nature and the outer world are identical and that both must be considered as consciousness results

from the fact that 'non-consciousness' is as unthinkable as 'non-thought'. A consequence of the equation of nature and consciousness is that there can be no 'dead matter'. A further consequence is that life has emerged from consciousness, not the reverse, and that nature in the form of tangible physical things is consciousness in a minimum degree. Death of a living thing is therefore the return of that thing from a relatively high degree of consciousness - degree of complexity - to a minimum state, consisting of the basic units of matter. Consciousness itself consisting of a myriad of entities, living individuals down to indivisible finite particles. Thus 'independent of consciousness' can only mean 'independent of the degree of consciousness of any individual or entity' and from it independent other entities each with their degree of consciousness because they all consist of consciousness.

In this new weltanschauung the objects of the world continue to be the usual ones. As items, as individuals, they are on the one hand for other individuals ideal objects, i.e. the contents of consciousness (perceptions, feelings, thoughts etc.); on the other hand these individuals of consciousness have contents of consciousness themselves which manifest its external and internal changes by their interactions. These individuals or entities of consciousness are the corpora and corpuscles of the world. Additionally nothing can be independent of consciousness because all things exist as consciousness in its own right. Thus the world as a world of consciousness does not exist merely of thoughts, which are only a part of the contents of consciousness of a living being, but above all of individual entities. Hence the total of all contents of consciousness of an entity or individual constitute an entity of consciousness, the total of entities of consciousness in the end constitute the whole of consciousness. The latter supposition is as cogent as the one that there is a whole of nature. For the individual or entity of consciousness who experiences himself/itself as a 'subject' separated from the above mentioned totality of consciousness the remaining totality appears to him/it as the outer world. Due to the proven logical untenability of a 'real' outer world, which therefore cannot be a particular entity, the supposed external relationship between an individual and a 'real' outer world can only exist between an individual and the residual whole of consciousness. This new weltanschauung can be summarized in three sentences: (1) Proceeding from an outer world it becomes by the 'independent of consciousness' thinking error, i.e. by the unthinkability of 'non-consciousness' (thinking error!) a world of consciousness which is a world of objects. (2) It consists of individuals or entities of consciousness (the so-called real objects, naturally including living things) and its contents of consciousness (the so-called ideal objects). (3) Both together constitute the whole of consciousness whose

disaggregation into individuals - that is to say individual entities - of consciousness is the seeming outer world.

What does 'free' mean?

As discussed earlier 'free' remains a thinking error if the term means freedom in consciousness. It is especially known in free will, liberty of action and freedom of decision taking. This so-called inner freedom therefore presupposes free contents of consciousness and with it free thought too. When thought shall be free then the thought 'free' also has to be free. But it cannot be free because no thought can be free of the total sum of all other thoughts whose component it is. Thus the meaning 'free' or generally, a free thought, is a contradiction in fact. And because therefore the thought 'free' has to be thought together with the meaning 'not free' it is also a contradiction in terms. Qualifying 'free' to 'conditionally free' or 'restrictively free' does not change the outcome. Both are equivalent to 'not free' because there is – according to the axiom of the excluded third - no third possibility between free and not free. Besides, something which is not thinkable without contradiction cannot be restricted either. Furthermore the thought 'free' expresses freedom of thought doubly; it does it not only by implying to be free of the total sum of all other thoughts but also by intending to be free of everything, otherwise it would not be truly free. In the latter meaning the term 'free' becomes the thinking error under discussion excluding itself as a thought from thought as a whole, or more exactly, from the whole less the thought 'free'.

The common aversion to a lack of inner freedom is entirely irrelevant because practically it comes to the same thing whether someone acts believing himself to be free in his decisions or from having this belief in his decisions because of the unfreedom of thought. The experience of inner freedom which normally ranks as proof of its existence is not a proof because the experience can be and obviously is predetermined, i.e. it is unfree. Finally it must be pointed out that the foregoing logical proof of the untenability of inner freedom is corroborated by science, or rather by the results of non-invasive brain research. The findings of science negate the existence of an inner freedom.

Coincidentally the finding of psychic unfreedom can be to the benefit of mankind if this finding is allowed to impact upon the early learning process. For a person's advantageous behaviour it is more important to optimise the environmental influences on its education than to hope, too often in vain, that it will always follow the preferred action arising from its supposed free will for the greater advantage of itself and society.

All the illustrated special thinking errors are expressions of meanings which exclude themselves from thought and thus they lead themselves ad absurdum. Simply they can be seen as contraventions to the thinking necessity 'one cannot think not to think' because they all include 'non-thought'. Intending to think the cited impossibility, it is of no matter if the meaning 'not to think' is in the present time, in the time to come or in time past, in no case can it be thought because one always has to think it presently. Suffice it to say that if excluding thought one cannot think anything.