

Severin Schroeder

The Philosophy of Mind

Fakultät für
**Kultur- und
Sozialwissen-
schaften**

Das Werk ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Die dadurch begründeten Rechte, insbesondere das Recht der Vervielfältigung und Verbreitung sowie der Übersetzung und des Nachdrucks, bleiben, auch bei nur auszugsweiser Verwertung, vorbehalten. Kein Teil des Werkes darf in irgendeiner Form (Druck, Fotokopie, Mikrofilm oder ein anderes Verfahren) ohne schriftliche Genehmigung der FernUniversität reproduziert oder unter Verwendung elektronischer Systeme verarbeitet, vervielfältigt oder verbreitet werden. Wir weisen darauf hin, dass die vorgenannten Verwertungsalternativen je nach Ausgestaltung der Nutzungsbedingungen bereits durch Einstellen in Cloud-Systeme verwirklicht sein können. Die FernUniversität bedient sich im Falle der Kenntnis von Urheberrechtsverletzungen sowohl zivil- als auch strafrechtlicher Instrumente, um ihre Rechte geltend zu machen.

Der Inhalt dieses Studienbriefs wird gedruckt auf Recyclingpapier (80 g/m², weiß), hergestellt aus 100 % Altpapier.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION OF THE AUTHOR	6
TEACHING GOALS	7
BIBLIOGRAPHY	8
Abbreviations of works by WITTGENSTEIN	8
Works by other authors	10
0 PREFACE	15
1 WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?	16
1.1 HUME and KANT	16
1.2 Philosophy as the quest for definitions	18
1.3 WITTGENSTEIN's conception of philosophy	21
1.4 Examples of philosophical problems	24
1.4.1 How can Socrates become smaller than Theaetetus?	24
1.4.2 How is it possible to measure time?	25
1.4.3 Where is the past?	25
1.4.4 How can one judge what is not the case?	26
1.4.5 How can one mistake one thing for another?	27
1.4.6 Where is the University?	27
1.4.7 Is the floor not solid?	28
1.5 Exercises	30
Exercise 1	30
Exercise 2	31

Diese Seite bleibt aus technischen Gründen frei!

Exercise 3	31	
Exercise 4	31	
2	CARTESIAN DUALISM	33
3	WITTGENSTEIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF MIND	38
3.1	The Inner-Object Model.....	38
3.1.1	Knowledge of other minds	39
3.1.1.1	The Idle-Wheel Argument.....	40
3.1.1.2	The concept of knowledge	42
3.1.1.3	The Ascribability Argument.....	43
3.1.1.4	Behaviour and deception.....	45
3.1.2	A sensation diary	46
3.1.2.1	The No-Criterion Argument	46
3.1.2.2	First-person authority	48
3.1.2.3	The concept of a bodily sensation.....	49
3.1.3	Exercise 5.....	51
3.2	The paradox of the instantaneous experience of complex contents	52
3.2.1	Sudden understanding	55
3.2.2	Meaning and understanding	56
3.2.3	Understanding and interpretation	58
3.2.4	The myth of mental representation.....	59
3.3	Thinking.....	62
3.3.1	Thought and language	63
3.4	Voluntary action.....	66

3.4.1	The inner-object model of voluntary action.....	66
3.4.1.1	First objection	66
3.4.1.2	Second objection	67
3.4.1.3	Third objection	67
3.4.2	The absence of surprise	68
4	CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF MIND	70
4.1	Mind and Brain	70
4.1.1	Is the mind identical with the brain?.....	70
4.1.2	Are mental states identical with brain states? (SMART)	71
4.1.2.1	KRIPKE's Objection.....	71
4.1.2.2	Another objection.....	74
4.1.2.3	Type-type identity and token-token identity.....	78
4.1.3	Supervenience.....	79
4.1.4	Eliminative Materialism (CHURCHLAND)	81
4.1.5	Exercise 6.....	90
4.2	Mind and Behaviour.....	91
4.2.1	Behaviourism.....	91
4.2.2	Functionalism	93
4.2.2.1	Objections to functionalism.....	94
4.2.3	WITTGENSTEIN, behaviourism and functionalism	98
4.2.3.1	PUTNAM's Super-Spartans	102
4.3	The Problem of Consciousness.....	104
4.3.1	Brain and consciousness.....	105

4.3.2	How does it feel? (NAGEL).....	109
4.3.3	Automata and zombies.....	114
4.3.4	Exercise 7.....	115
4.4	Can computers think?	116
4.4.1	The Chinese Room	117
4.4.2	Thinking and intentional action.....	121
4.5	Mind and Action.....	123
4.5.1	Volitions and trying	123
4.5.1.1	The Argument from Possible Intimidation (O'SHAUGHNESSY).....	123
4.5.1.2	The Argument from Divergent Cognitive Attitudes (HORNSBY)...	125
4.5.1.3	Conversational Implicature (GRICE).....	127
4.5.1.4	The concept of trying	128
4.5.1.5	Trying and succeeding	133
4.5.1.6	Conclusion.....	135
4.5.2	Reasons and causes	136
4.5.2.1	DAVIDSON's theory	136
4.5.3	Exercise 8.....	149

5 NOTES ON THE EXERCISES

150

Introduction of the author

Severin Schroeder teaches philosophy at the universities of Oxford and Reading. His main research interests are the philosophy of Wittgenstein, the philosophy of mind, and aesthetics. He is the author of *Das Privatsprachen-Argument: Wittgenstein über Empfindung und Ausdruck* (Schöningh 1998), *Wittgenstein: The Way Out of the Fly-Bottle* (Polity 2006), and *Wittgenstein lesen: Ein Kommentar zu ausgewählten Passagen der "Philosophischen Untersuchungen"* (Frommann-Holzboog, forthcoming). He is the editor of *Wittgenstein and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind* (Palgrave 2001), and is currently editing a collection of articles on the philosophy of literature (Blackwell).

Teaching goals

After having completed this course, the student

- should have an overview over a British tradition in analytical philosophy;
- gain an insight into some major problems in the philosophy of mind and some solutions proposed for these problems in the context of that tradition;
- be made familiar with Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy as an analytical tool in the philosophy of mind.

Bibliography

Abbreviations of works by WITTGENSTEIN

- AL** *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge, 1932-1935*, ed.: A. Ambrose, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.
- BB** *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1958; German transl. of *The Blue Book: Das Blaue Buch, Werkausgabe*, Bd. 5, Ffm 1989.
- BT** *The Big Typescript*, = TS 213, published as WA vol. 11; ch. 'Philosophie', 405-35 published and tr. in PO, 160-99.
- CE** *Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness*, in PO, 370-426. German ed. in: *Vortrag über Ethik*, Ffm 1989, 101-139.
- CV** *Culture and Value*, rev. ed., ed.: G.H. von Wright; tr.: P. Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- EPB** *Eine philosophische Betrachtung*, in: *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 5, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1989; 117-282.
- LPP** *Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946-47*, Notes by P.T. Geach, K.J. Shah, A.C. Jackson; ed.: P.T. Geach, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988. German ed. as: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Psychologie 1946/47*, Ffm 1991.
- LW** *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, eds.: G.H. von Wright, H. Nyman; tr.: C.V. Luckhardt, M.A.E. Aue, Oxford: Blackwell, 1982. German ed. in: *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 7.
- LW II** *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology. Vol. 2*, eds.: G.H. von Wright, H. Nyman; tr.: C.V. Luckhardt, M.A.E. Aue, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. German ed. as: *Letzte Schriften über die Philosophie der Psychologie. Das Innere und das Äußere. (1949-1951)*, Ffm 1993.
- MS** Unpublished manuscript, numbered in accordance with von Wright's catalogue (1982).
- NfL** *Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense Data"* (1934-36), in PO, 202-88. German ed. in: *Vortrag über Ethik*, Ffm 1989, 101-139.

- OC** *On Certainty*, eds: G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H. von Wright, tr.: D. Paul & G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1961. German ed. as: *Über Gewissheit*, Ffm 1970.
- PG** *Philosophical Grammar*, ed.: R. Rhees, tr.: A.J.P. Kenny, Oxford: Blackwell, 1974. German ed. as: *Philosophische Grammatik* in: *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 4, Ffm 1989.
- PI** *Philosophical Investigations*, ed.: G.E.M. Anscombe & R. Rhees, tr.: G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell: 1953. German ed. as: *Philosophische Untersuchungen* in: *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 1, Ffm 1984.
- PO** *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds: J. Klagge & A. Nordmann, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.
- RFM** *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, eds: G.H. von Wright, R. Rhees, G.E.M. Anscombe; tr.: G.E.M. Anscombe, rev. ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1978. German ed. as: *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik*, in: *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 6, Ffm 1984.
- RPP** *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, 2 vols, eds.: G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright, H. Nyman; tr.: G.E.M. Anscombe, C.V. Luckhardt, M.A.E. Aue, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980. German ed. as: *Bemerkungen über die Philosophie der Psychologie*, Bde 1 und 2, in: *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 7, Ffm 1989.
- TS** Unpublished typescript, numbered in accordance with von Wright's catalogue (1982).
- WA** *Wiener Ausgabe*, ed.: Michael Nedo, Vienna: Springer, 1993ff.
- WVC** *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*. Conversations recorded by Friedrich Waismann, ed.: B. McGuinness, tr.: J. Schulte & B. McGuinness, Oxford: Blackwell 1979. German ed. as: *Ludwig Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis*, in: *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 3, Ffm 1989.
- Z** *Zettel*, eds: G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H. von Wright, tr.: G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967. German ed. as: "Zettel", in: *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 8, Ffm 1989.

Works by other authors

- Anscombe, G.E.M. (1957), *Intention*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1971), 'Causality and Determination', in her *Collected Papers II: Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981.
- Arnold, Wilhelm, Eysenck, Hans Jürgen, Meili, Richard (eds) (1980), *Lexikon der Psychologie*, 3 vols, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder.
- St. Augustine, *Confessions*, tr.: E.B. Pusey, London: Dent, 1907.
- Ayer, A.J. (1936), *Language, Truth and Logic*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.
- (1954), 'Freedom and Necessity', G. Watson (ed.), *Free Will*, 2nd ed., Oxford: OUP, 2002.
- Baier, A.C. (1985), 'Rhyme and Reason: Reflecting on Davidson's Version of Having Reasons', in E. LePore & B.P. McLaughlin (eds), *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Baker, G.P. & Hacker, P.M.S. (1984), *Language, Sense and Nonsense*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bennett, M.R. & Hacker, P.M.S. (2003), *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Blackburn, Simon (1994), *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford: OUP.
- Blackmore, Susan (ed.) (2005), *Conversations on Consciousness*, Oxford: OUP.
- Bradley, F. H. (1893), *Appearance and Reality. A Metaphysical Essay*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- Carnap, Rudolf (1931), 'Psychology in Physical Language', *Erkenntnis*, Vol. 2.
- Chalmers, D.J. (1996), *The Conscious Mind*, Oxford: OUP.
- Child, W. (1994), *Causality, Interpretation and the Mind*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Churchland, Paul (1981), 'Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes', in: W. Lyons (ed.), *Modern Philosophy of Mind*, London:

- Everyman 1995 (first published in: *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, 1981).
- Crane, Tim, *The Mechanical Mind*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995
- Davidson, Donald (1963), 'Actions, Reasons and Causes', in his: *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.
- (1980), *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Davies, S. (2001), 'Definitions of Art', in: B. Gaut & D. McIver Lopes (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, London: Routledge.
- Dennett, Daniel (1991), *Consciousness Explained*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Descartes, René (1641), *Meditations on First Philosophy*, tr. J. Cottingham, Cambridge: CUP, 1986.
- (1637) *Discourse on the Method*, tr. J. Cottingham, Cambridge: CUP, 1985.
- (1644) *Principles of Philosophy*, tr. J. Cottingham, Cambridge: CUP, 1985.
- (1649), *The Passions of the Soul*, tr. J. Cottingham, Cambridge: CUP, 1985.
- Evnine, S. (1991), *Donald Davidson*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Glock, Hans-Johann (1990), 'Stroud's Defence of Cartesian Scepticism — A "Linguistic Response"', *Philosophical Investigations* 13.
- Gordon, Robert (1986), 'Folk Psychology as Simulation', in *Mind & Language* 1.
- Grice, Paul (1967), 'The Causal Theory of Perception', in: G.J. Warnock (ed.), *The Philosophy of Perception*, Oxford: OUP.s
- (1989), *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard UP.
- Hacker, P.M.S. (1990), *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind. Vol. 3 of an Analytical Commentary on the 'Philosophical Investigations'*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1996a) *Wittgenstein: Mind and Will. Vol. 4 of an Analytical Commentary on the 'Philosophical Investigations'*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1996b), *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (2001), 'Eliminative Materialism', in: S. Schroeder (ed.), *Wittgenstein and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

- Hanfling, Oswald (1987), 'How is Scepticism Possible?', *Philosophy* 62.
- (2000), *Philosophy and Ordinary Language*, London: Routledge.
- Hornsby, Jennifer (1980), *Actions*, London: Routledge.
- (1997), *Simple Mindedness*, Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard UP.
- Hume, David (1739), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed.: L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: OUP, 1888.
- (1748), *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, eds: L.A. Selby-Bigge & P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: OUP, 1975.
- Hyman, John (1991), 'Introduction', in his (ed.): *Investigating Psychology: Sciences of the Mind after Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge.
- James, William (1890), *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols, New York: Dover, 1950.
- Kant, Immanuel (1781), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hg.: W. Weischedel, Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag, 1956.
- Kenny, Anthony (1971), 'The Verification Principle and the private language argument (ii)', in: O.R. Jones (ed.): *The Private Language Argument*, London: Macmillan.
- (1975), *Will, Freedom and Power*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1984), *The Legacy of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1989), *The Metaphysics of Mind*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kripke, Saul A. (1972), *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard UP.
- (1982), *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard UP.
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1713), *Monadologie*, Reclam: Ditzingen, 1998.
- Locke, John (1689), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: OUP, 1975.
- Malcolm, Norman (1971), *Problems of Mind: Descartes to Wittgenstein*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- McGinn, Colin (1991), *The Problem of Consciousness*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Melden, A.I. (1961), *Free Action*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Mill, J.S. (1861), *Utilitarianism*, ed.: R. Crisp, Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- Morton, Adam, *Frames of Mind*, Oxford: OUP, 1980

- Moya, C.J. (1990), *The Philosophy of Action: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Nagel, Thomas (1970), 'Physicalism', in C.V. Borst (ed.), *The Mind/Brain Identity Theory*, London: Macmillan.
- (1974), 'What is it like to be a bat?', in his *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge: CUP. 1979.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1892), *Also sprach Zarathustra*, in: G. Colli & M. Montinari (eds), *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, München: dtv, 1988; Bd. 4.
- O'Shaughnessy, Brian (1973), 'Trying (as the Mental "Pineal Gland")', in A. Mele (ed.), *The Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: OUP, 1997.
- (1980), *The Will. Vol. 2*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Pietroski, P.M. (1998), 'Actions, Adjuncts and Agency', in *Mind* 107.
- Plato, *Cratylus*, in: *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. III, tr. B. Jowett, Oxford: OUP, 1953; 41-106.
- *Theaetetus*, tr.: J. McDowell, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.
- Putnam, Hilary (1965), 'Brains and Behaviour', in *Analytical Philosophy*, 2nd Series, ed. R.J. Butler, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1973), 'Meaning and Reference', in *The Journal of Philosophy* LXX; reprinted in: S.P. Schwartz (ed.), *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Rundle, B. (1997), *Mind in Action*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Russell, Bertrand (1921), *The Analysis of Mind*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Ryle, Gilbert (1949), *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson's University Press.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur (1859), *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 2 Bde, Hg.: A. Hübscher, Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1949.
- Schroeder, Severin (2001a), 'Private Language and Private Experience', in H.-J. Glock (ed.), *Wittgenstein: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- (2001b), 'The Concept of Trying', in *Philosophical Investigations*, 24:3.
- (2001c), 'Are Reasons Causes? A Wittgensteinian Response to Davidson', in: S. Schroeder (ed.), *Wittgenstein and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Schulte, Joachim (1987), *Erlebnis und Ausdruck: Wittgensteins Philosophie der Psychologie*, München: Philosophia.

- Searle, John (1969), *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: CUP.
- (1984), *Minds, Brains & Science*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- (1992), *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press.
- Shanker, Stuart G. (2004), 'A picture held me captive', in E. Ammereller & E. Fischer (eds), *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the 'Philosophical Investigations'*, London: Routledge.
- Shoemaker, Sydney (1984), 'The inverted spectrum', in his: *Identity, Cause and Mind: Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Smart, J.J.C. (1959). 'Sensations and Brain Processes', in: W. Lyons (ed.), *Modern Philosophy of Mind*, London: Everyman, 1995.
- Stegmüller, Wolfgang (1979), *Hauptströmungen der Gegenwartsphilosophie. Eine kritische Einführung. Band II*, 6. Auflage, Stuttgart: Kröner.
- Stoutland, F. (1985), 'Davidson on Intentional Behaviour', in E. LePore & B.P. McLaughlin (eds), *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Strawson, P.F. (1959), *Individuals*, London: Methuen.
- (1962), 'Freedom and Resentment', in his *Freedom and Resentment and other essays*, London: Methuen, 1974.
- (1974), 'Self, Mind and Body' , in his *Freedom and Resentment and other essays*, London: Methuen, 1974.
- Turing, Alan (1950), 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence', in Alan Ross Anderson (ed.), *Minds and Machines*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964.
- White, A.R. (1967), *The Philosophy of Mind*, New York, Random House.
- von Wright, Georg Henrik (1982), 'The Wittgenstein Papers', in his: *Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell.

0 Preface

In 1984 ANTHONY KENNY warned that ‘some of the philosophical gains we owe to Wittgenstein seem in danger of being lost’.

This is not because his work has been superseded or put in the shade by the light of some succeeding philosophical genius. Rather, his contribution has been neglected because more and more philosophers, especially in the United States, have attempted to model their studies on the pattern of a rigorously scientific discipline, mimicking the type of precision characteristic of mathematics, and holding up [...] an abstract system for artificial intelligence as the goal of philosophy of mind. [Kenny 1984, vii-viii]

KENNY’s admonition reads as apt and urgent today as it did 20 years ago. Ignorance or confusion about the peculiarity of philosophy vis-à-vis the empirical sciences and a striving for pseudo-scientific theory construction are still the order of the day, uncritically accepted by most contemporary introductions to the philosophy of mind. This course has been designed to offer to students a different approach to the subject, very much against the grain of current academic fashions. WITTGENSTEIN’s profound insights, which have lost nothing of their relevance to philosophical debates over the last sixty years, are taken as a starting point.

In order to avoid confusion in this area it is extremely important to have a clear grasp of the nature of a philosophical problem, as opposed to a scientific problem. This, therefore, is the topic of Chapter 1, which as a foundation to the rest of the course presents WITTGENSTEIN’s philosophical methodology, and, by demonstrating its application in a number of simple cases, affords the student some practical training in philosophical problem solving.

Chapter 2 contains a brief sketch of Cartesian Dualism, as a necessary background to WITTGENSTEIN’s own philosophy of mind, which is the topic of Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 then, by far the longest part of the course, examines major issues and positions in today’s philosophy of mind.

1 What is Philosophy?

1.1 HUME and KANT

Until not so long ago the word ‘philosophy’ meant simply: systematic research. There was no distinction between philosophy and natural science. NEWTON’s main work, for instance, was published under the title: *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), that is, ‘Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy’, although according to our use of the word it is clearly not a philosophical book, but a classical example of a scientific treatise. Today, however, we have a rigorous division of labour: Philosophy has been separated from all other academic disciplines, from mathematics, the sciences, history and psychology. So the question arises what philosophy is and what subject matter it can have that does not already belong to another discipline. In a polemical way this question was raised by DAVID HUME (1711-76), at the end of his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748):

If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. [Hume 1748, 165]

For HUME, serious research or scholarship is either mathematics or empirical science; as philosophy is neither, it can only be worthless speculation and deceitful rhetoric. This view is not unpersuasive. How, indeed, should it be possible to acquire any knowledge — to learn anything about the world — without investigating the world? For that is surely the most remarkable feature of philosophy: that it is not a form of *empirical* research. Philosophers do not carry out any field studies or experiments; they use neither archives nor laboratories. Their empirical knowledge is roughly the same as everybody else’s: the trivialities of everyday life and a smattering of popular science. What then can be the contents of a philosophical theory? Will it not inevitably be mere speculation? How, for example, can the *philosophy* of mind be a respectable discipline? Is it not obvious that in order to learn something new and reliable about the human mind one needs to turn to the latest research in neuroscience and psychology? Is it not ludicrous hubris for philosophers, without any proper scientific training, to compete with these sciences by some armchair theorising about the workings of the mind? And similarly with any other phenomena that philosophers may feel called upon to contemplate that fall into the ambit of some scientific discipline. Given that philosophers, unlike scientists, do not appear to have their feet on the ground of empirical research, and that, unlike mathematicians, they do not seem to have

any reliable methods of proof and calculation — it is indeed not unreasonable to expect their heads to be in the clouds of ‘sophistry and illusion’.

And this suspicion is further supported by the melancholy state of inconclusive discord in which philosophy has been for these two thousand years. Philosophers invariably quarrel and disagree among each other. For each philosophical position put forward you can find an eloquent faction holding exactly the opposite view. And such notorious disagreement seems absolutely incurable, as philosophers are equally in disagreement — if not simply unclear — about the way to dissolve their differences. Hence, while the sciences are characterised by constant progress — impressively demonstrated by the consequent technological progress, especially over the last two hundred years — philosophers over the centuries seem to go round in circles, rather than make any progress. This embarrassing contrast is neatly manifest in our attitudes towards the achievements of ARISTOTLE (384-322 BC), who was both a natural scientist and a philosopher. His scientific writings are only of historical interest today; no student of physics or astronomy would be expected to read them. His philosophy, by contrast, is still carefully studied, not only by historians of the subject, and his philosophical positions are still generally considered as live options in the relevant debates and have many staunch defenders (cf. CV 22).

HUME was happy to commit all non-empirical philosophy to the flames because he regarded his own work as empirical psychology. The first philosopher to become alive to the problem of finding a legitimate rôle for philosophy (or metaphysics) as a subject that is neither empirical nor mathematical — taking up HUME’s challenge — was IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804). Philosophical judgements must be *a priori*, that is, verifiable without any recourse to experience. At the same time philosophical judgements must be *synthetic*, that is, increasing one’s knowledge (*erkenntnisweiternd*), as opposed to analytic judgements, which merely spell out what is already implicit in the meanings of the words (e.g., ‘Bachelors are unmarried’). Hence KANT’s fundamental question was: ‘How are synthetic judgements *a priori* possible?’¹ His answer was mainly negative: the great metaphysical aspirations, *a priori* theories about God or the immortality of the soul had to be abandoned. Philosophy as systematic knowledge of answers to the Big Questions was impossible. Instead KANT propounded the doctrine of *transcendental idealism*: It is possible to know *a priori* certain general features of the world (e.g., that it must appear in space and time, and be subject to the law of causality), because those features are the product of our own minds. Thus, KANT insisted against

Kant: a role for philosophy

¹ Kant 1781, B19.

HUME, some *a priori* knowledge of the world — philosophical knowledge — is indeed possible. However, it is highly doubtful whether KANT has succeeded in presenting any genuine examples of synthetic *a priori* judgements: some of his examples can be shown to be analytic, and some may not even be true. Today transcendental idealism has few followers.

1.2 Philosophy as the quest for definitions

If no synthetic *a priori* judgements can be found, philosophy as a non-empirical discipline must be analytic. And it is indeed widely thought that philosophy should provide definitions, analysing important concepts into their constituent elements. Thus Socrates in PLATO's dialogues tries to find definitions of the concepts of courage, piety, justice, virtue, or knowledge. When his interlocutors suggest explanations of such a word in terms of examples Socrates dismisses them as unsatisfactory, on the grounds that unless you can define X you don't really know what X is.²

More recently A.J. AYER has put forward the programmatic claim that the object of philosophy is to provide definitions.³ And indeed, definitions appear to be one of the main concerns in many branches of analytic philosophy today. The central question in epistemology is 'What is knowledge?', and the answer one would like to give is a definition. Again, philosophers from HUME to the present day have been trying hard to find a tenable definition of the concept of a cause. And at the core of contemporary philosophical aesthetics lies the quest for an acceptable definition of art.

However, such a conception of philosophy is open to two serious objections. First, it is doubtful whether many interesting concepts are susceptible of a precise definition. And, secondly, even if they are, it is far from clear why we should be much interested in their definition. I shall explain each objection in turn:

Are general concepts definable?

First Objection: In a radical critique of his own earlier philosophical views LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN (1889-1951) challenged the prejudice that whenever things fall under the same concept X, they must do so in virtue of some common feature Y that serves to define X. He illustrated this with the example of the word 'game':

² E.g., Plato, *Laches* 192b; *Theaitetos* 146d-e.

³ Ayer 1936, 80-95.