



CONVERGENCE AMIDST DIFFERENCE

*Philosophical Conversations across
National Boundaries*

CALVIN O. SCHRAG

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SUNY Series in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences

Lenore Langsdorf, editor

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P R E F A C E

THE FIVE ESSAYS that make up the format of the following philosophical explorations provide an account of a philosophical journey along a path from a hermeneutic of sense and reference to a transfigured concept of the subject and a delimited metaphysics to a new notion of rationality. This new notion of rationality has been named *transversal* rationality and is recommended as a reliable resource in defining the task of philosophy for the future. The journey unfolds as a transnational itinerary that moves across the terrain of five different countries on which a thematic development is forged through conversations across national boundaries on the related issues at stake. In its progression, marking out a time period of more than a decade, an effort has been made to work out strategies of transcultural communication, drawing upon the philosophical contributions in each of the represented countries, striving for a mutual understanding that is fashioned both *in spite of* and *because of* differences. As a continuing experiment in communicating across differing perspectives on the topics at issue, the envisioned goal of the project is that of opening up new directions for a possible *post*-national philosophical understanding.

The essay *Traces of Meaning and Reference: From Epistemology to Linguistics to Hermeneutics* has its origins in a presentation and discussion that took place at Druzba, Bulgaria, in September 1988 under the auspices of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. This was at a time when an iron curtain mentality was still prevalent within the Bulgarian academies of higher learning. Dialectical materialism was the dominant philosophical persuasion in many of the universities of the land. However, insofar as the sponsored conference “Models of Meaning” was specifically focused on linguistics and semantic theory an opportunity was opened up to address issues

against the backdrop of a wider perspective of the Eastern European cultural heritage. It was thus that I chose to initiate the conversation by proceeding not from the contributions of a Marx or a Lenin but rather from the legacy of Mikhail M. Bakhtin. More specifically, my intention was to illustrate how meaning and reference live and move about within a Bakhtinian chronotope of assimilated historical time and space. (An earlier draft of the Bulgaria lecture has been published in *Current Advances in Semantic Theory*, edited by Maxim Stamenov, John Benjamins Publishing Company: Philadelphia, 1992, under the title “Traces of Meaning and Reference: Phenomenological and Hermeneutical Explorations”).

The second essay, *The Subject in Question and the Question about the Questioner*, developed out of a symposium presentation and discussion at Oxford University in March 1993. It was during the early part of the decade of the 1990s that talk about the demise of the subject was very much in the philosophical news of the day. My presentation was designed as a response to this philosophical situation of the time. Plainly enough, the news about the passing of the subject in the varied reports about its death/dissolution/deconstruction came principally from across the channel. It was thus that I felt a sense of urgency to remind my British interlocutors about a contribution bearing on the topic by one of their more illustrious twentieth-century philosophers, Gilbert Ryle. I asked them to recall Ryle’s surprisingly favorable comments on Martin Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, even though admittedly he remained quite critical of Heidegger’s conclusions in this work. Ryle’s review of Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* work appeared in 1929 in the philosophy journal *Mind* just two years after the book was published. This was the first major review of the work in the English-speaking world. In his review Ryle extols Heidegger as a philosopher who “shows himself to be a thinker of real importance by the immense subtlety and searchingness of his examination of consciousness,” and then goes on to provide the reader with one of the earliest and most succinct definitions of Heidegger’s project of deconstruction, to wit: the requirement “to think beyond the stock categories of orthodox philosophy and psychology” (*Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, vol. 38, 1929, p. 370). Forty years later Ryle fashioned his own project of deconstruction in *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949) by dismantling the Cartesian invention of the mind as