

Dieter Henrich and Contemporary Philosophy

The return to subjectivity

Dieter Freundlieb

DIETER HENRICH AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

Dieter Henrich is one of the most respected and frequently cited philosophers in Germany today. His extensive and highly innovative studies of German Idealism and his systematic analyses of subjectivity have significantly impacted on advanced German philosophical and theological debates.

Dieter Henrich and Contemporary Philosophy presents a comprehensive analysis of Henrich's work on subjectivity, evaluating it in the context of contemporary debates in both continental and analytic traditions. Familiarising the non-German reader with an important development in contemporary German philosophy, this book explains the significance of subjectivity for any philosophy that attempts to offer existential orientation and contrasts competing conceptions in analytic philosophy and in the social philosophy of Jürgen Habermas. Presenting Henrich's philosophy of subjectivity as a credible alternative to analytic philosophy of mind and a radical challenge to Heideggerian, Habermasian, neo-pragmatist, and postmodern positions, Freundlieb argues that a philosophy of the kind developed by Henrich can regain the cultural significance philosophical thinking once possessed.

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Preface

In recent decades only a few continental philosophers have succeeded in gaining widespread recognition in the English-speaking world. In part this may simply reflect a certain lack of a sufficient number of prominent philosophers whose work is innovative and challenging. But there are other reasons as well. One of them is that on the whole Anglo-American philosophers tend to rely on translations, which often means that non-English work in philosophy is sometimes only 'discovered' many years after it has been produced. And even in cases where continental philosophers do gain recognition fairly quickly, the reasons do not always lie exclusively in the intellectual quality of their work. The international acclaim some philosophers enjoy often also has to do with the particular area of philosophy they have been working in or, as in the case of Jacques Derrida, the radical nature of their claims. Social and political philosophers, for example, have a distinct advantage over philosophers working in metaphysics or in the philosophy of religion. A case in point here is Jürgen Habermas who is clearly the most widely recognized contemporary German philosopher outside Germany. I mention him in this context not in order to diminish, in any way, his intellectual achievements. But it is doubtful whether he would have gained the status he has if his philosophy was not, at the same time, informed and accompanied by a social and political agenda that appeals to a large international audience within a broad spectrum of liberal democratic thought and politics.

One of my main reasons for writing a book in English on the work of the contemporary German philosopher Dieter Henrich is that I believe there are other areas in philosophy that deserve our attention and that Dieter Henrich's achievements as a philosopher could arguably be ranked above those of internationally more well-known figures in French or German philosophy, including Derrida and Habermas. Of course, Dieter Henrich is by no means unknown in English-speaking countries. In fact, Henrich has done more than most others who could be named here to bring Anglo-American analytic philosophy and so-called continental philosophy together. He spent many years in America as a visiting professor at highly prestigious universities (Harvard and Columbia) and is very well known in the English speaking world by some of the major contemporary philosophers.

Nonetheless, it seems that there has been, and still is, a certain reluctance, on the part of Henrich's Anglo-American colleagues, to delve deeper into, and actually engage with, Henrich's work. A considerable number of his writings have been translated into English (and other languages). But these translations usually focus on aspects of Henrich's more historically oriented work concerned with specific figures within German Idealism. They do not address his more systematic

work on the philosophy of subjectivity and his conception of philosophy in general. There is, of course, a reason for this. While there has always been a systematic dimension to his historical investigations, the bulk of Henrich's work is concerned with the history of German Idealism from Kant to Hegel. He has never written a *magnum opus* that would present, in detail, his systematic views on subjectivity, independent of the historical development of the philosophy of subjectivity. But this does not mean that there is no such systematic position underlying most of his work. It is just a matter of reconstructing it from his various writings.

In this volume I want to situate Henrich's philosophy in the current philosophical landscape, provide the reader with an exposition and evaluation of Henrich's work, and show that both Henrich's systematic views on the philosophy of subjectivity and his conception of philosophy in general deserve more attention than they have so far received (chapter 1 and chapter 3). Henrich's philosophy of subjectivity and his conception of philosophy may not be of *immediate* social or political relevance as in the case of Habermas's Critical Theory. And no doubt Henrich's claims are less radical than those of Derrida (though in a *certain* sense they could be considered *more* radical). But his philosophy is nonetheless of great importance. Henrich's renewal of the philosophy of subjectivity - after many decades of almost universal neglect - is highly significant in its own right and has major implications for a number of areas in contemporary philosophy, including Anglo-American philosophy of mind (chapter 2) and continental social philosophy (chapter 4). In fact, I will argue that the Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas and his collaborators is dependent upon, and needs to be modified in the light of, a theory of subjectivity of the kind developed by Henrich. Furthermore, Henrich's philosophy of subjectivity goes beyond the naturalism that dominates most Anglo-American philosophy of mind. I will also make the claim that if Henrich is right - and I believe he is - the so-called linguistic turn needs to be reassessed and the widely shared notion that we live in a postmetaphysical era must be abandoned. Finally, Henrich's philosophy has implications for our whole understanding of the role of philosophy in contemporary culture because it sees the task of philosophy as providing existential orientation. Philosophy is once again seen in a Platonic sense as 'care of the soul'.

Perhaps I should mention, at this point, that I am not, by training, a philosopher. If anything, I could classify myself (or would have done so until the 1980s) as a literary scholar with a strong interest in certain areas of philosophy, especially those concerned with methodological issues pertaining to the *Geisteswissenschaften*. But perhaps it was my literary background that helped me to see and appreciate the merits of a conception of philosophy, such as Dieter Henrich's, that regards philosophy as not just a theoretical enterprise but as a potential source of existential guidance. In any case, my initial interest in Henrich's work, which I began to develop after a lengthy study of hermeneutic philosophy (Heidegger and Gadamer), Critical Theory (Apel, Habermas, Honneth),

and contemporary French thought (Foucault and Derrida), had to do with the response, in German and French philosophy, to the linguistic turn. I had always regarded the so-called linguistic turn with a good deal of suspicion, particularly in its poststructuralist, anti-subjectivist guise. But what also concerned me were the implications it had, in the minds of many, for social philosophy, including the Critical Theory of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. Its focus on language seemed to lead to an exclusion of major aspects of human experience. This is why I regarded Henrich's return to subjectivity and his insistence on the philosophical significance of the pre-linguistic in human experience as a welcome and necessary antidote. In fact, what is needed today, it seems to me, is not just a 'rediscovery of the mind' as John R. Searle has argued, but a rediscovery, from a philosophical perspective, of all those aspects of human experience that are not themselves linguistic in nature. A study of Henrich's philosophy can make us realize that the linguistic turn was only partly the discovery of a new and more fruitful way of dealing with old philosophical problems. It was also a move that gave us the illusion that many of those problems could simply be dissolved or reformulated in a way that made them easier to deal with. I want to suggest that in the light of Henrich's philosophy we can see that the strict separation of language (and thought as determined by language) from non-linguistic Being and the notion that human reason and language are inseparable are misguided.

I want to make it clear, however, that none of what I am saying in this book is to be understood in any way as an argument for the renewal of a kind of 'philosophy of life' (*Lebensphilosophie*). Rather, the aim is to counteract the tendency in much modern philosophy to reduce its subject matter to whatever can be treated by analytical methods and to assess human experience by a standard of rationality that is modeled on the idea that human reason is more or less exclusively the capacity to raise and redeem knowledge claims in accordance with predetermined rules of argumentation. This, at any rate, is what I will argue in the chapter on Habermas. What sets Henrich's philosophy apart not only from radical so-called 'postmodern' philosophy but also from various neo-pragmatisms and Critical Theory is that he makes a strong case for the renewal of a certain kind of metaphysical and speculative thinking without rejecting the demands for clarity, precision, and argumentative rigor taken for granted by analytic philosophy. Even more importantly, if Henrich is right, philosophy should never have abandoned the task of exploring the reasons why, even in secular, post-Enlightenment societies, questions about transcendence are still being asked. To put it in a slightly different way, philosophy should never have stopped asking what it can do to help us see such issues more clearly.

Henrich's philosophy is an attempt to remind us that there may be more to reality than what most contemporary philosophy and the modern sciences consider to be the real. In other words, Henrich seems to suggest that the turn away from the metaphysical tradition from Plato to Leibniz that was brought about by the rise of empiricism and its aftermath has meant the loss of a whole dimension of human

understanding and experience, a dimension that may be worth exploring again, especially in the light of the way in which it was rediscovered and kept alive for some decades by German Idealists from Kant to Hegel.

These, in short, are the reasons for my attempt to alert all those in the English-speaking world to the work of Dieter Henrich who have a serious interest in philosophy and who are less than satisfied with the current state of philosophy.

My exposition and my appraisal of Henrich will be sympathetic, but not adulatory. There are, I believe, a number of weaknesses in Henrich's position, and I will, where appropriate, identify them and comment on them. But these weaknesses are not insuperable and do not detract, in my view, from Henrich's outstanding achievements. I will also, from time to time, look at ways in which some of Henrich's ideas could be developed further.

I wish to record my sincere gratitude to Dieter Henrich for his encouragement, for making available a number of as yet unpublished writings, and for the fruitful conversations I had with him at an earlier stage of this project. I also wish to thank my long-time friends and colleagues Manfred Frank (Tübingen) and Wayne Hudson (Brisbane) for many helpful discussions and comments.

The section on Thomas Nagel in chapter 2 was previously published in the journal *Philosophical Explorations* 1, 1998, as part of an article by Wayne Hudson and myself titled "Convergence and Its Limits: Relations Between Analytic and Continental Philosophy". I thank the publishers and the journal editor Jan Bransen for permission to incorporate a slightly modified version of this section into this book. I also wish to thank the editor of *Idealistic Studies* for permission to use material published in vol. 32, 2002, of his journal under the title "The Return to Subjectivity as a Challenge to Critical Theory" in chapter 4 of this book.

Wherever possible I have used existing translations for the quotations from Henrich's work. Modifications of translations have been indicated in the endnotes. All other translations are my own.



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Chapter 1

Dieter Henrich and the Contemporary Philosophical Landscape

Introduction

As recently as a decade or two ago a book on a contemporary 'continental' philosopher whose work is dedicated to the revival of the philosophy of the subject would have required special justification. With some relatively minor exceptions all of the then dominant schools of thought in philosophy were united in their hostility, or at least in the reservations they expressed, towards any attempt to restore subjectivity to the center of philosophical analysis and attention. To be sure, in the 1980s so-called poststructuralism, which had proclaimed the 'death of the subject' and which had forecast the 'disappearance of man' (Foucault), was already very much on the wane in France, the country of its origin. But it was still influential in the United States and in England, and it was by no means the only philosophical trend that was characterized by a certain, sometimes even strident, anti-subjectivism. While it was generally acknowledged that subjectivity as a fundamental philosophical principle was intimately linked with the rise of what Jürgen Habermas has called 'the philosophical discourse of modernity',¹ it was felt by many that the philosophy of subjectivity from Descartes to Husserl was part of a foundationalist and 'logocentric' project that had run its course. It had failed because its propagators had not realized the radical historicity and fallibility of all our knowledge. The search for certainty, whether it was seen as a noble dream or a vain attempt to overcome our finiteness, had to be given up once and for all. And the focus on the subjective, whether in the rationalist shape of the *ego cogito* or the certainty of sense data within empiricist doctrines, had to be replaced by a focus on the irreducibly historical and social forces that dominate and control the subject and its thought. This, at least, is how it seemed to many of those who influenced philosophical thinking until well into the 1980s.

There were different views about what exactly the historical and social determinations are that allegedly inhabit and control the human mind, but an assumption shared widely was that many of them come together in language and that it is language that shapes our thinking and that is the medium through which the historical and the social enter our minds. This conception fitted in well with a certain teleological view about the history of philosophy as a whole, a view held by Critical Theorists² rather than poststructuralists. For it was sometimes argued that philosophy has gone through three major paradigms: the ontological, the

subjectivist (or mentalist), and the linguistic. Among those who held, and still hold, this view some believe that by and large the succession of paradigms is irreversible, that we are now well within the linguistic paradigm, and that we cannot return to either of the previous two without giving up important philosophical insights.

The so-called linguistic turn that marks the (continental) beginning of analytic philosophy, is only one example, though no doubt a major one, of the shifts away from subjectivity as a central philosophical theme. Another one is the hermeneutic philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer and their American followers. Not all of those who have abandoned the subjectivist or mentalist paradigm have identified language as that which must replace the subject. But all of them, at least to a certain degree, were or still are convinced that the self is not autonomous but determined by external forces over which it only has very limited control, be they language (hermeneutic philosophy, Lyotard), social and economic forces (Marxisms of various kinds), the unconscious (Freud), or 'discursive formations' (Foucault). Even in the case of the Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas and his collaborators and followers, there is evidence of a strong anti-subjectivist tendency. In some ways this is surprising because it would seem that any social and political philosophy that believes in the possibility of democratic progress and emancipation from unnecessary coercion must attribute a considerable amount of autonomy to individual agents. Nonetheless, second-generation Critical Theorists have been among the most vocal critics of a return to subjectivity as a major philosophical concern because they believe that the focus on subjectivity can and must give way to a focus on language and intersubjectivity.

In part, their criticism is based on methodological reasons. As in the case of analytic philosophy and logical empiricism, for Critical Theorists the turn away from subjectivity is justified because a focus on subjectivity appears to jeopardize the objectivity of both philosophical analysis and social research. But Critical Theorists such as Habermas are also opposed to a philosophy of subjectivity for more substantive reasons. They contend, though mistakenly as I will argue later (chapter 4), that the philosophy of subjectivity forces upon us a subject-object model of cognition that does not fit the critical social sciences.

Anti-subjectivism was not just prevalent within the humanities but also within the sciences and the philosophy of science. At the beginning of the 20th century there was an attempt to exclude the subjective from science and the philosophy of science by replacing ordinary sense-data empiricism with the linguistic methods of logical empiricism and logical atomism. When combined with the ontological assumption that the physical world is all there is, it becomes obvious that the subjective simply drops out of the picture. Even Karl Popper, who always saw himself as a critic of logical positivism and who postulated the existence of three ontologically distinct worlds, argued that subjectivity needed to be excluded from the philosophy of science and what was needed was an 'epistemology without a knowing subject'.³ In the second half of the 20th century there were (and to some extent still are today) strong tendencies towards an historicist understanding of the

development of scientific knowledge. Post-empiricist philosophy of science (e.g. Thomas S. Kuhn), influenced by the hermeneutic philosophy of Gadamer, fostered an understanding that tends to minimize the role of the individual subject and its capacity to transcend the historical, cultural, or linguistic context. So in either case, the role of the subject in our understanding of the world is likely to be ignored. But the climate has begun to change. As one of the more astute witnesses of these developments, Thomas Nagel, has observed in his book *The View From Nowhere*:

Historicist interpretation doesn't make philosophical problems go away, any more than the earlier diagnoses of the logical positivists or the linguistic analysts did. To the extent that such no-nonsense theories have an effect, they merely threaten to impoverish the intellectual landscape for a while by inhibiting the serious expression of certain questions. In the name of liberation, these movements have offered us intellectual repression.⁴

In spite of the combined anti-subjectivist trends and forces that dominated philosophical and scientific thinking during the better part of the last century, there have recently been signs of a change in the philosophical climate. It is increasingly realized that the radical historicism of both 'postmodern' thought and Heideggerian/hermeneutic conceptions of the history of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*) can easily lead (and in some cases have led) to a self-destructive, theoretically untenable, and politically questionable relativism.

In analytic philosophy, especially analytic philosophy of mind, there has been what John Searle has aptly described as 'the rediscovery of the mind'.⁵ While still committed to certain principles of analytic philosophy of language, witnessed by their focus on linguistic phenomena such as personal pronouns and deictic expressions, Anglo-American philosophers of mind have made important discoveries about the uniqueness and the epistemic primacy of the 'first-person perspective'.⁶ There are also important arguments being developed which show that in many cases the mental and the subjective just cannot be reduced to the physical, though even in these cases the attempt is made to treat the mental within a broadly defined naturalism.⁷

Furthermore, developments in the neurosciences have led to an increased focus not only on mental phenomena in general but on the phenomena of self-consciousness and their peculiar properties.⁸ At a more profound level philosophers such as Stanley Rosen, who is familiar with the classic philosophical tradition as well as analytic philosophy (and aware of its inherent limitations), have argued for some time that a return to subjectivity is necessary if the hidden assumptions of analytic philosophy are to be understood and their negative consequences brought out in the open.⁹ In fact, until fairly recently most analytic philosophy, with the exception of the philosophy of mind, could be characterized by its 'forgetting' of subjectivity as an inescapable presupposition of analysis.

What even today has not been understood widely and sufficiently, and what seems to prevent a more rapid rediscovery of the philosophical significance of

subjectivity, is that there is no necessary link between a philosophy of subjectivity and a foundationalist program. Historically, of course, the link is there in Descartes, in the German Idealists (though not consistently and in all of their work), and in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. But it is possible to rethink subjectivity fruitfully outside the context of a search for certainty. This, at any rate, is what the work of Dieter Henrich has shown beyond any doubt.

The aim of this book is not to engage directly with the new developments in Anglo-American philosophy of mind (with two exceptions: Galen Strawson and, more briefly, Thomas Nagel).¹⁰ Instead, its primary focus is on the work of Dieter Henrich as the most vocal and most important continental philosopher advocating a return to subjectivity.¹¹ The rationale for such a return, while not entirely independent of the changes that have taken place in analytic philosophy, is based on much broader considerations. It deliberately seeks to reconnect, though by no means uncritically, with the philosophical tradition, especially the tradition of German Idealism, and it seeks to develop a philosophy of subjectivity that goes far beyond an analysis of self-consciousness in the sense that it tries to draw out the implications of such an analysis for nearly the whole of philosophy and the role it can play in the lives of individuals and in society. This, in very broad terms, and apart from his many historical investigations aiming at a new history of German Idealism from Kant to Hegel, is the main goal pursued by Dieter Henrich.

What I would like to do in this first chapter is fairly limited in scope, and much of it can be skipped by readers already familiar with the history of, as well as contemporary philosophical trends and developments in, continental and analytic philosophy, especially with regard to modern philosophy's relation to questions of subjectivity. My main aim is to introduce Henrich's philosophy to Anglo-American readers and to situate it within the current philosophical terrain because in spite of the indisputable significance of Henrich's work, and in spite of an increasing number of English translations, mainly of essays on Kant and, most recently, Hölderlin,¹² Henrich has not yet gained, in the English-speaking world, the recognition he deserves. Specialists in German Idealism, major analytic and post-analytic philosophers such as Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Rorty, as well as some of the leading analytic philosophers of mind are familiar with specific aspects of his work.¹³ But there still seems to be a certain reluctance to delve deeper into Henrich's multi-faceted *œuvre*.

There are, I believe, a number of reasons for this neglect, but this is not the place to analyze and discuss them. Suffice it to say that Henrich's work and his attempt to make subjectivity once again a major focus of philosophical investigation is arguably one of the most important developments in the history of postwar German philosophy. For this reason alone it should receive more attention outside Germany. It will be claimed here, however, that it is of much wider significance. One of the purposes of this volume is therefore to show that it is possible to reconstruct from Henrich's work a coherent conception of philosophy that poses a serious challenge to all the currently dominant schools of philosophy.

There are two major reasons why Henrich's philosophy is challenging. The main one is, obviously, that it makes a very strong case for a return to subjectivity as a first principle of philosophy that cannot be ignored without risking a serious impoverishment of nearly all philosophizing. Second, it offers a conception of philosophy that is of existential relevance. In both respects it draws on a conception of philosophy that, arguably, formed the common ground of German Idealism - in spite of its inherent diversity.¹⁴ One of the main tasks of philosophy according to the German Idealists from Kant to Hegel was to promote and set in train a process of self-understanding and self-enlightenment that took its point of departure from what could be called our 'natural consciousness', that is to say a deeply ingrained understanding of the world and ourselves that is nonetheless neither naïve nor unaware of the perilous position human beings occupy. It is the role of philosophy, among other things, to explore and analyze this 'natural consciousness' and to alert us to options that may lead well beyond such a consciousness, perhaps even to profound changes in our most firmly held beliefs. It is this conception of philosophy that inspires Henrich's work. So apart from its significance as a renewal of the philosophy of subjectivity, Henrich's philosophy will be interpreted here as an example of a *transformative* philosophy, that is to say, as a philosophy that is both theoretical and practical. It is theoretical as well as practical in the (Platonic) sense that it regards philosophy as 'care of the soul', as something that has the capacity to give guidance and transform our self-understanding as individuals while offering, at the same time, theoretical insight into important philosophical problems. The point that needs to be stressed here, again, is that these problems have their origin not so much in the history of philosophy but in the real life of persons. Henrich's philosophy is not transformative in a more narrowly political sense but in the sense that in order to live a meaningful life, human beings need to have an understanding of their place in the world, even if the understandings offered by philosophy may never be final and closed to new orientations.

The challenge posed by Henrich's conception of philosophy is particularly welcome at the present time because there is a general recognition, at least in some parts of the world, that philosophy has reached a certain state of exhaustion and needs to be renewed.¹⁵ In the Anglo-American world the possibility of a renewal of philosophy from within the analytic and the pragmatist traditions is being explored. But doubts remain as to the prospects of such a renewal. A number of areas of concern can be named: Many have begun to realize that large sections of analytic philosophy will wither away, unless it continues, on a much broader front than it has in the past, to rediscover and address the more substantive questions of the Western philosophical tradition and becomes more aware of the limits of analytical methods.¹⁶ It is also being recognized that the deflationary philosophy of neo-pragmatism will not withstand serious scrutiny, especially from an ethical and a political perspective, and does not offer a way out of a largely moribund analytic scholasticism. Similarly, it can be argued that the prevailing naturalism and reductionism of various areas in the philosophy of mind leave important aspects of

human experience out of consideration. Furthermore, the postmodern radicalism of much French thought that had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and is still dominating many fields in the humanities, especially the new cultural studies, has begun to lose its appeal because its argumentative (and political) weaknesses are becoming increasingly obvious. Finally, it could be said that hermeneutic philosophy, whether in its Heideggerian/Gadamerian guise or in the form of contemporary Critical Theory, relies too exclusively and uncritically on the alleged primacy of language.

There is, then, a certain intellectual vacuum that calls for a major rethinking of the nature and function of philosophy. The need for intellectual and ethical, perhaps even 'cosmological' orientation is clearly there, not least because the pathologies of modernity and global modernization are being felt by more and more people around the world. To be sure, whether philosophy can play a major role in providing such comprehensive orientation is an open question. But the challenge posed by Henrich's work can make us aware that the options are not exhausted by the currently dominant schools of thought. I hope, in any case, that an investigation of Henrich's philosophy can stimulate debate, and I suggest that a reorientation along the lines laid down by his work might be an important step in the right direction, in spite of certain weaknesses in his arguments.¹⁷

First, though, I would like to do some further stage setting so that the reader not yet familiar with Henrich can see more clearly how his work relates to both the recent history of philosophy and to the contemporary philosophical landscape. This stage setting will be somewhat broad-brush, but for the moment no more than a preliminary orientation is necessary.

Situating Henrich's Philosophy

Philosophy today speaks with many voices. Even if one disregards non-Western traditions and concentrates on the major strands that dominate the philosophical departments of the universities of the Western world, one is confronted with a bewildering plurality of philosophical schools. Not only do these schools often specialize in fairly narrowly circumscribed areas of philosophy, they also lack a binding consensus about what the role of philosophy, as a whole, should be, what kinds of insights it might offer the philosophically untrained public, what solutions to the many problems of modern cultures it might suggest, and how its results fit in with the rest of what is now sometimes called 'the knowledge industry', especially the natural and the social sciences. There seems to be an increasing need for intellectual and moral guidance and orientation in a world that is becoming more complex every day and whose potential for conflict is continuously on the rise.¹⁸ Yet by and large, the philosophical profession, especially in the English-speaking world, tends to remain silent on many of the issues that trouble the general public. There is very little philosophical investigation or analysis occurring outside the

universities, but neither does the philosophy that is done within universities still claim to somehow hold together or unify what goes on in what used to be called - and in some places still *is* called - the Philosophical Faculty.

Immanuel Kant's Enlightenment idea that the philosophical faculty has the right to reflect critically on any conceivable form of the production of knowledge, including, of course, the right and the duty to reflect on its own claims to knowledge, is no longer accepted by everyone.¹⁹ Some scholars in the sociology of knowledge, for example, attempt to treat all knowledge claims on a par, regardless of whether they are made within philosophy, the sciences, or in everyday contexts.²⁰ Nor is there a general acceptance of Kant's idea that the attempt to clarify and, if possible, answer fundamental metaphysical questions is a basic need of the human soul, in spite of our awareness of the limits of human reason. The proliferation of disciplines in the last three decades in American universities, as elsewhere, together with the relativizing tendencies that came to dominate the humanities and the social sciences from the 1970s onward, fostered a climate of non-interference that quickly blunted the critical fervor of the late 1960s. There was still much verbal radicalism, of course, but it was largely confined to the non-philosophical sections of the humanities. Some of these, especially in the fields of literary and cultural studies, increasingly tried to include and treat philosophical issues within their own domains, but to many philosophers these attempts appeared to be rather weak, one-sided, and historically and theoretically ill-informed.²¹

To be sure, the blame for the somewhat diminished status of philosophy with regard to its capacity and willingness to contribute to what in Germany is called *Orientierungswissen* does not exclusively lie outside philosophy. To a considerable extent, philosophy has itself to blame for the reduced status it enjoys in the academy today and for the doubts the general public has about its capacity to make a major contribution to our self-understanding.²² The problems here go back almost a century and a half. The last extended period of grand philosophical system-building, the era of German Idealism, ended in the realization that the ambitions that guided Hegel's philosophy were ultimately a form of intellectual hubris. Today most philosophers would agree, as the Young Hegelians, Karl Marx, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Theodor W. Adorno put it, though from different vantage points, that Being exceeds consciousness or, in other words, that human reason is finite and limited. The late Fichte and the late Schelling as well as the early Romantic thinkers and poets (e.g. Friedrich Hölderlin, Friedrich Schlegel, and Novalis) had already recognized the limits and the finitude of human reason. In a different way, and for mainly religious reasons, this is also true of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and Friedrich Schleiermacher. But it was Hegel who saw himself, and was seen by others, as the culmination of German Idealism. And for a while he dominated German philosophy and set the standard for what was thought to be achievable: human knowledge of the Absolute as a manifestation and an integral part of the world-historical process of the Absolute coming to know itself.

Soon, however, the disappointment with the outcomes of German Idealism, i.e., the inflated claims of Hegel's system and the difficulties and obscurities of the philosophy of the late Fichte and the late Schelling, together with the rapid success of the natural sciences, led to major changes in the intellectual climate that came to prevail in the second half of the 19th century. Philosophy had tried to take the place of theology and religion, but it was unable to keep its promise of a final foundation of knowledge, a comprehensive account of the world, and the reconciliation of what were seen as the divisions within, and contradictions of, modernity. If philosophy was to continue to play a role within culture, it had to climb down from its exalted position as the 'Queen' of the *Wissenschaften* and become 'scientific'.

The other, even more radical option, of course, was to abandon the claim to Reason with a capital R altogether, to acknowledge what Hume had already indicated, namely, that reason is the slave of passion, or to argue, in a similar way, along with the great 'debunkers' of philosophy such as Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, that underlying all pretensions to Reason are the dark, non-rational forces of the will. The philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*) and certain forms of existential philosophy which flourished, in the wake of Nietzsche, in the first half of the 20th century were, among other things, the result of such philosophical and cultural pessimism.

The truly astounding success of the sciences, while continuing even today almost unabated in many areas, did not remain undisputed. It is now universally recognized that the sciences have provided us with an unprecedented amount of technologically useful manipulative power. But it has also become painfully obvious, at the same time, that they leave all the normative questions and most of the questions of existential orientation unanswered. In fact, instead of giving us answers to those questions, they constantly create, and confront us with, *new* questions of precisely this kind. Even their capacity to do what they seemed to do best, that is to make available reliable knowledge about the natural world (together with strategies of how we can master it), began to be questioned more and more during the second half of the 20th century. Science and the idea of scientific progress underwent a phase of radical 'debunking', a process from which the sciences have largely recovered while serious doubts linger about the extent to which they contribute to human flourishing.

In the field of political philosophy the belief in the possibility of social progress that kept Marxism alive among Western philosophers and intellectuals for a long time suffered a similar fate with the collapse of Marxist regimes all over the world in the late 1980s. In its politically divergent but in other respects remarkably similar way, the radical critique of culture expressed in both Heidegger's work and the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno is an early version of the rejection of the exalted claims of Reason to be found in the Enlightenment belief in progress, in Hegel, as well as the social utopianism of orthodox Marxism.

So where does this leave philosophy today? Together with the humanities, which emerged from the historicism of the 19th century, and the social sciences,

which soon had to abandon the positivist hope of copying the success of the natural sciences in their own field, philosophy became increasingly professional and in most cases lost the connection with the fundamental questions of life that had once given rise to it. Edmund Husserl made a last sustained effort to put philosophical thinking on a secure foundation. Philosophy was to become a 'rigorous science'. But he realized, in the end, that this was impossible. A few years before his death he wrote: 'Philosophy as science, as serious, rigorous, indeed apodictically rigorous science - *the dream is over*.'²³ His fierce and tireless battle against the dangers of relativism was fueled by honorable motives, but like all foundationalist philosophers before him, he did not succeed in the end.

Heidegger, in a very different way, developed a new philosophy *qua* fundamental ontology. It started out, in his *Being and Time*, as a new philosophy of subjectivity, a philosophy of subjectivity that went beyond the transcendental idealism of Kant and the post-Kantians in the sense that it offered a comprehensive 'existential' interpretation of *Dasein*, replacing the transcendental subject with a subject that is 'always already' within the world. Increasingly, however, Heidegger moved away from his early interest in subjectivity and interpreted the whole of Western philosophy since Socrates as a history of the forgetting of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*). Heidegger's philosophy was meant as a critique of scientism as well as the philosophy of subjectivity, both of which he considered to be modern forms of a metaphysics of self-empowerment. And while his philosophy was aiming at a comprehensive analysis of modernity, its capacity to provide us with an understanding of our situation in the world was rather limited. Not only did it lack an ethical dimension of a kind that could feed into responsible human action and moral orientation, it actually failed to provide any intelligible account of subjectivity because it saw all philosophy of subjectivity as little more than a symptom of *Seinsvergessenheit* and self-empowerment (*Selbstermächtigung*). It was Heidegger's critique of the philosophy of subjectivity, as he understood it, together with earlier strands of anti-subjectivist philosophies ranging from Hume's skepticism about the unity of the self to Nietzsche's views about the self as a 'fiction' and to Ernst Mach's dictum that the 'I' cannot be salvaged or Rudolf Carnap's claim that the *Ich* is not an 'originary act' (an *Ur-Sachverhalt*), which eventually led to the postulation of the 'death of the subject' that informed much poststructuralist French theory during the sixties and seventies of the 20th century. The most remarkable feature of the historical development of philosophy since the middle of the 19th century is the near unanimity of its anti-subjectivism amidst a whole variety of otherwise disparate ideas and aims.

Apart from influential individual figures such as Husserl and Heidegger, whose names stand for a whole philosophical school or at least, as in the case of Heidegger, for a new approach to traditional philosophical problems, there were, of course, different developments in different parts of the twentieth-century Western world. In particular, there was the development of analytic philosophy (including analytic philosophy of science) whose roots lie mainly in the work of German and

Austrian philosophers (e.g. Bolzano, Frege, Wittgenstein, the members of the Vienna Circle, and the group around Hans Reichenbach in Berlin). Within a relatively short period of time analytic philosophy came to dominate Anglo-American as well as Australian and much Scandinavian philosophy in the later parts of the last century.

It is the development of analytic philosophy and its astounding institutional success that led to the less than helpful but nonetheless difficult-to-abolish distinction between analytic and continental philosophy. The difficulty of this distinction becomes obvious when one looks at the third of the major twentieth-century philosophers: Ludwig Wittgenstein. For it is clear that neither the early nor the late Wittgenstein can easily be identified with the help of these categories. Nonetheless, we need to distinguish, at least in a rough and ready fashion, between several major kinds of contemporary Western philosophy. Such distinctions, in spite of their disadvantages and their inevitable crudeness, are necessary and useful. They are particularly useful in the present context, because in order to give readers not yet familiar with Dieter Henrich a better sense of the nature and significance of his work, we need to situate this work in the current philosophical topography. For then we can see more easily where it differs from existing strands of philosophy and how it might impact on current and future ways of philosophical thinking and debate.

What then are the main strands of contemporary philosophy and how can Henrich's work be situated within this terrain? Without trying to be exhaustive²⁴ and overly precise we can say that the following three main areas can be distinguished: (1) analytic philosophy, including analytic philosophy of mind, analytic philosophy of language, and analytic philosophy of science; (2) a variety of, and by no means unified, neo-pragmatisms (e.g. Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, Nicholas Rescher, Joseph Margolis, and Robert B. Brandom) which not only try to revive a native American pragmatism but often attempt to combine analytic styles of thinking with ideas derived from continental philosophy;²⁵ and (3) continental philosophy, which in turn can be divided into hermeneutic philosophy, phenomenology, and so-called 'postmodern' philosophy.

The earlier tradition of existential philosophy going back to Kierkegaard and developed further by Sartre is no longer a major player in the contemporary arena and will therefore be left out of consideration. Within hermeneutic philosophy one should distinguish, of course, between a Heideggerian/Gadamerian strand, on the one hand, and the political, social and, more recently, legal philosophy of Critical Theory, on the other. In addition, there is a German group of philosophers pursuing what they call *Interpretationsphilosophie*. They do not form a homogeneous school but are united in the view that all epistemology must recognize what they take to be our irreducibly interpretive access to the world.²⁶ In this sense they can be seen as part of hermeneutic philosophy. So far, however, they have not managed to establish themselves as a major school of hermeneutic thought.