Introduction

The writing of these essays was scattered over nearly two decades, and they were addressed to many different sorts of audiences. They exemplify my general preoccupations with three areas of philosophy: philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and what I call the philosophy of society. The first essay, which gives the title to the volume, was written for the American Philosophical Association as part of the centennial issue of the Association's proceedings. It is a revision of an article originally written for the Royal Society[1] in a volume which discussed the future of various scientific and academic subjects in the twenty-first centuty. In a sense, the real introduction to this volume is Chapter 1, because in it I state my general conception of philosophy and its future and the articles which follow exemplify that general conception.

The second essay, "Social ontology: some basic principles," originally appeared in the journal *Anthropological Theory*, in a special issue dedicated to my account of social ontology. Following this lead-off article, there were a series of other articles together with replies by me. My aim in this article, as in earlier and later work, is to give an account of the fundamental structure of social reality. I argue that the basic social mechanism, the glue that holds human society together, is what I call "status functions," functions that can be performed only in virtue of collective acceptance by the community that the object or person that performs the function has a certain status, and with that status a function that can be performed in virtue of that collective acceptance and not in virtue of the physical structure of the object or person alone. The next question then becomes, How are status functions created and maintained? I now believe that there is a simpler account than the one I gave in this chapter, though it is a continuation

[1] John R. Searle, "The future of philosophy," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, Millennium Issue (29 December, 1999).

of the one I gave, and for that reason I have added an addendum to the second chapter.

The third, fourth and fifth chapters are part of my continuing, ongoing investigation of, and indeed controversy with, the computational theory of the mind. Chapter 3, "The Turing Test: fifty-five years later," was originally prepared for a volume dedicated to problems concerning "the thinking computer." The fourth chapter, "Twenty-one years in the Chinese Room," was written for a volume assessing the whole history of the Chinese Room Argument. Chapter 5, "Is the brain a digital computer?", was my presidential address to the American Philosophical Association in 1990 and it criticizes the computational conception of the mind from a different angle from that of the Chinese Room, but one I think is just as important, and perhaps more important, even though it has not received anything like the attention that the Chinese Room Argument received. The Chinese Room demonstrates that the syntax of the implemented program is not sufficient to guarantee the semantics of actual mental contents. Implemented programs are defined syntactically and semantics is not intrinsic to syntax. But this article goes to the next stage and asks the question, What fact about a physical system makes it computational? And I discover what now seems to me obvious: that computation is not intrinsic to the physics of the system, but is a matter of our interpretation. Computation, in short, is not discovered in nature, but is imposed on nature and exists relative to our interpretation. This does not mean that computational interpretations are arbitrary. But it does mean that computation does not name an observer-independent phenomenon like digestion, photosynthesis or oxidization. Just as the Chinese Room argument showed that semantics is not intrinsic to syntax, this argument shows that syntax is not intrinsic to physics.

Chapter 6, "The phenomenological illusion," was originally presented at the annual Kirchberg Wittgenstein conference in 2004. In it I discuss what is for me an unusual area of publication, namely an appraisal of the inadequacies of certain phenomenological authors. The general problem I find with them is that they have a kind of perspectivalism that makes all of reality seem to exist only from a certain perspective. This prevents them from giving an adequate account of the real world and the relationship of our experience to the real world. The result of my assessment is that from my point of view, at least, several of the standard phenomenological authors seem to me not too phenomenological, but rather not nearly phenomenological enough.

Chapter 7, "The self as a problem in philosophy and neurobiology," originally appeared in a neurobiological volume dedicated to problems of

neurobiology and the self. In it I try to show how my general approach to the philosophy of mind deals with the special problems having to do with the self.

The philosophy of mind as a theme continues in Chapter 8, "Why I am not a property dualist." This article originally appeared in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. Because I insist on the *ontological* irreducibility of consciousness while insisting at the same time that consciousness is *causally* reducible to its neuronal base, I am frequently accused of property dualism. In this article I try to answer that charge. The ambiguity of the title is deliberate. It can mean either or both: what grounds have I for rejecting property dualism, and what grounds are there for denying that I am already a property dualist?

Chapter 9, "Fact and value, 'is' and 'ought,' and reasons for action" was originally published in the twenty-fifth anniversary commemoration volume of the great legal theorist Hans Kelsen. I resume in this article a discussion that I first began in 1964 with an article in the *Philosophical Review*: "How to derive 'ought' from 'is'". But in this article, as well as in my book *Rationality*, I situate this whole discussion within the theory of speech acts, the theory of rationality, and the theory of reasons for action. I think that if you are clear about the basic philosophical issues, then the answer to the question, Can you derive 'ought' from 'is'? will seem fairly obvious, indeed, almost trivial.

The last chapter, Chapter 10, "The unity of the proposition," is previously unpublished. I wrote it some years ago and have never previously prepared it for publication. One of the many marks of a philosophical sensibility is an obsession with problems which most sane people regard as not worth bothering about. Here is a typical philosopher's question: How do the words in a sentence hang together to make a sentence and not just a word jumble? How do the elements of a proposition hang together to make a proposition and not just a soup of concepts? In this article I offer answers to these questions.

In addition to the gratitude expressed in the individual essays, I would like to thank Jennifer Hudin for preparing the index, Asya Passinsky for assistance in the preparation of the volume, and especially my wife, Dagmar Searle, for her constant help and inspiration. This book is dedicated to her.

CHAPTER 1

Philosophy in a new century

General ruminations on the state and future of philosophy often produce superficiality and intellectual self-indulgence. Furthermore, an arbitrary blip on the calendar, the beginning of a new century, would not seem sufficient, by itself, to override a general presumption against engaging in such ruminations. However, I am going to take the risk of saying some things about the current and future state of philosophy, even though I think it is a serious risk. A number of important overall changes in the subject have occurred in my lifetime and I want to discuss their significance and the possibilities they raise for the future of the subject.

1. PHILOSOPHY AND KNOWLEDGE

The central intellectual fact of the present era is that knowledge grows. It grows daily and cumulatively. We know more than our grandparents did; our children will know more than we do.

We now have a huge accumulation of knowledge which is *certain, objective, and universal*, in a sense of these words that I will shortly explain. This growth of knowledge is quietly producing a transformation of philosophy.

The modern era in philosophy, begun by Descartes, Bacon, and others in the seventeenth century, was based on a premise which has now become obsolete. The premise was that the very existence of knowledge was in question and that therefore the main task of the philosopher was to cope with the problem of skepticism. Descartes saw his task as providing a secure foundation for knowledge, and Locke, in a similar vein, thought of his *Essay* as an investigation into the nature and extent of human knowledge. It seems reasonable that in the seventeenth century those philosophers took epistemology as the central element of the entire philosophical enterprise, because while they were in the midst of a scientific revolution, at the same time the possibility of certain, objective, universal knowledge seemed problematic. It was not at all clear how their various beliefs could be

established with certainty, and it was not even clear how they could be made consistent. In particular there was a nagging and pervasive conflict between religious faith and the new scientific discoveries. The result was that we had three and a half centuries in which epistemology was at the center of philosophy.

During much of this period the skeptical paradoxes seemed to lie at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. Unless we can answer the skeptic, it seemed we cannot proceed further in philosophy or, for that matter, in science. For this reason epistemology became the base of any number of philosophical disciplines where it would seem that the epistemological questions are really peripheral. So, for example, in ethics the central question became, "Can there be an objective foundation for our ethical beliefs?" And even in the philosophy of language, many philosophers thought, and some still do, that epistemic questions were central. They take the central question in the philosophy of language to be, "How do we know what another person means when he says something?"

I believe the era of skeptical epistemology is now over. Because of the sheer growth of certain, objective, and universal knowledge, the possibility of knowledge is no longer a central question in philosophy. At present it is psychologically impossible for us to take Descartes's project seriously in the way that he took it: We know too much. This is not to say that there is no room for the traditional epistemic paradoxes, it simply means they no longer lie at the heart of the subject. The question, "How do I know that I am not a brain in a vat, not deceived by an evil demon, not dreaming, hallucinating," etc.? – or, in a more specifically Humean vein, "How do I know I am the same person today that I was yesterday?" "How do I know that the sun will rise in the East tomorrow?" "How do I know that there really are such things as causal relations in the world?" – I regard as like Zeno's paradoxes about the reality of space and time. It is an interesting paradox how I can cross the room if first I have to cross half of the room, but before that, half of the half, and yet before that, half of that half, etc. It seems I would have to traverse an infinite number of spaces before I can even get started and thus it looks like movement is impossible. That is an interesting paradox, and it is a nice exercise for philosophers to resolve the paradox, but no one seriously doubts the existence of space or the possibility of crossing the room because of Zeno's paradoxes. Analogously, I should like to say, no one should doubt the existence of knowledge because of the skeptical paradoxes. These are nice exercises for philosophers, but they do not challenge the existence of objective, universal, and certain knowledge.

I realize that there is still a thriving industry of work on traditional skepticism. I am suggesting, however, that the traditional forms of skepticism cannot have the meaning for us that they had for Descartes and his successors. Whether we like it or not, the sheer weight of accumulated knowledge is now so great that we cannot take seriously arguments that attempt to prove that it doesn't exist at all.

One clarification I need to make immediately. When I say that philosophy is no longer about epistemology I mean that the professional paradoxes of epistemology, the skeptical paradoxes, are no longer central to the philosophical enterprise. But in addition to epistemology in this specialized professional sense, there is, so to speak, "real-life" epistemology. How do you know that the claims you make are really true? What sorts of evidence, support, argument, and verification can you offer for the various claims you make? Real-life epistemology continues as before, indeed, it is as important as ever, because, for example, in the face of competing real-life claims about the cause and cure of AIDS, or the rival claims of monetary policy and fiscal policy in managing the economy, it is as important as ever that we insist on adequate tests and verification. So when I say that we are in a post-epistemic era, I mean we are in a post-skeptical era. Traditional philosophical skepticism I regard as now obsolete. But that does not mean we should abandon rational standards for assessing truth claims. On the contrary.

I just said that we have a large and growing body of knowledge which is *certain, objective, and universal.* I emphasize these three traits because they are precisely what is challenged by a certain contemporary form of extreme skepticism sometimes called "post-modernism," with such subsidiary branches as "deconstruction," "post-structuralism," and even some versions of pragmatism. According to this skeptical challenge, it is at best a mistake, and at worst a kind of totalitarian impulse, that leads us to say that we can have certainty, objectivity, and universality. According to this view, we never attain certain, objective, and universal knowledge at all. This is supposedly shown by certain investigations of science, such as those conducted by Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend that emphasize the irrational elements in the development of scientific theories. On this view, scientists do not attain truth; rather, they rush irrationally from one paradigm to another. Furthermore, the story goes, it is impossible to have objectivity, because all claims to knowledge are always perspectival; they are always made from a certain subjective point of view. And finally, it is impossible to have universality, because all science is produced in local, historical circumstances and is subject to all of the constraints imposed by

those circumstances. I believe that these challenges are without merit, and I want to briefly say why. The main point I want to make is that what is true in the skeptical challenges is in no way inconsistent with certainty, objectivity, and universality.

One of the problems that we have, in coming to terms with the huge growth of knowledge, is to see how all of these features can exist simultaneously. How can knowledge be at the one and the same time *certain* and yet *tentative* and *corrigible*, how can it be totally *objective* and yet always from one *subjective* perspective or another, how can it be absolutely *universal*, and yet the product of *local* circumstances and conditions? Let us go through these in order. The certainty in question derives from the fact that the evidence for the claims in question is so overwhelming, and the claims themselves are so well embedded in a systematic set of interrelated claims, that are all equally well supported by overwhelming evidence, that it is simply irrational to doubt these truths. At present it is irrational to doubt that the heart pumps blood, that the earth is a satellite of the sun, or that water is made of hydrogen and oxygen. Furthermore, all of these items of knowledge are embedded in very powerful theories, the theories of human and animal physiology, the heliocentric theory of our planetary system and the atomic theory of matter. But at the same time it is always possible that there could be a scientific revolution that will overthrow these whole ways of thinking about things, that we might have a revolution comparable to the way in which the Einsteinian Revolution assimilated Newtonian mechanics as a special case. Nothing in any state of knowledge, however certain, can preclude the possibility of future scientific revolutions. This tentativeness and corrigibility is not a challenge to certainty. On the contrary, at one and the same time, we have to recognize certainty, and yet acknowledge the possibility of future major changes in our theories.

I want to emphasize this point: There is a very large body of knowledge that is known with certainty. You will find it in the university bookstore, in, for example, textbooks on engineering or biology. The sense in which we know with certainty that the heart pumps blood, for example, or that the earth is a satellite of the sun is that, given the overwhelming weight of reasons that support these claims, it is irrational to doubt them. *But certainty does not imply incorrigibility.* It does not imply that we could not conceive of circumstances in which we would be led to abandon these claims. It is a traditional mistake, one I am now trying to overcome, to suppose that certainty implies incorrigibility by any future discovery. We are all brought up to believe that certainty is impossible because claims to knowledge are always tentative and subject to further correction. But this is

a mistake. Certainty is not inconsistent with tentativeness and corrigibility. There is no question that we know a great many things with certainty, and yet those things are revisable by future discoveries.

That leads to the second combination of features: how can knowledge at one and the same time be completely objective and yet perspectival, always stated and assessed from one perspective or another? To say that a knowledge claim is epistemically objective is to say that its truth or falsity can be established independently of the feelings, attitudes, prejudices, preferences, and commitments, of investigators. Thus, when I say that "Water is composed of H_2O molecules," that claim is completely objective. If I say, "Water tastes better that wine" – well, that claim is subjective. It is a matter of opinion. It is characteristic of knowledge claims, of the sort that I have been discussing, that when I say that such knowledge grows cumulatively, the knowledge in question is, in this sense, epistemically objective. But such objectivity does not preclude perspectivality. Knowledge claims are perspectival in the obvious and trivial sense that all claims are perspectival. All representations are from a perspective, from a point of view. So when I say, "Water consists of H_2O molecules," that is a description at the level of atomic structure. At some other level of description, at the level of sub-atomic physics, for example, we might wish to say that water consists of quarks, muons, and other sundry sub-atomic particles. The point for our present discussion is that the fact that all knowledge claims are perspectival does not preclude epistemic objectivity.

I want to state this point emphatically: All representation of reality, human or otherwise, and a fortiori all knowledge of reality, is from a point of view, from a certain perspective. But the perspectival character of representation and knowledge does not imply that the knowledge claims in question are dependent on the preferences, attitudes, prejudices, predilections, of observers. The existence of objectivity is in no way threatened by the perspectival character of knowledge and representation.

Finally, knowledge claims of the sort that I am talking about, where we make claims about how the world works, are universal. What is true in Vladivostok is also true in Pretoria, Paris, and Berkeley. But the fact that we are able to formulate, test, verify, and conclusively establish such claims as certain, universal, and objective, requires a very specific socio-cultural apparatus. It requires an apparatus of trained investigators, and the social cultural conditions necessary for the existence of such training and such investigation. These have developed most strongly in Western Europe and its cultural offshoots in other parts of the world, especially North America, during the past four centuries. There is a trivial and harmless sense in

which all knowledge is socially constructed. In this trivial and harmless sense knowledge is expressed in statements, in claims; and these claims have to be formulated, formalized, tested, verified, checked and rechecked. That we are able to do this requires a very specific sort of socio-cultural structure, and in that sense, our knowledge claims are socially constructed. But social construction in this sense is not in any way in conflict with the fact that knowledge so arrived at is universal, objective, and certain.

I want to emphasize this third point just as I did the first two: Knowledge claims are made, tested, and verified by historically situated individuals working against the background of specific cultural practices. In this sense all knowledge claims are socially constructed. But the truth of such claims is not socially constructed. Truth is a matter of objective facts in the world that correspond to our knowledge claims.

So far I have considered three objections to the commonsense view that we have a large body of knowledge that is certain, objective, and universal. First, knowledge is always tentative and corrigible; second, it is always stated from a point of view; and third, it has to be arrived at by cooperative human efforts working in particular historically situated social contexts. The chief point I am making is that there is nothing inconsistent between these theses and the claim that knowledge so arrived at is often *certain, objective, and universal.*

If by "modernism" is meant the period of systematic rationality and intelligence that began in the Renaissance and reached a high point of self-conscious articulation in the European Enlightenment, then we are not in a post-modern era. On the contrary, modernism has just begun. We are, however, I believe, in a post-skeptical or post-epistemic era. You will not understand what is happening in our intellectual life if you do not see the exponential growth of knowledge as the central intellectual fact. There is something absurd about the post-modern thinker who buys an airplane ticket on the internet, gets on an airplane, works on his laptop computer in the course of the airplane flight, gets off of the airplane at his destination, takes a taxicab to a lecture hall, and then gives a lecture claiming that somehow or other there is no certain knowledge, that objectivity is in question, and that all claims to truth and knowledge are really only disguised power grabs.

II. THE POST-SKEPTICAL ERA

Assuming that I am right about these features of knowledge and about the fact that knowledge continues to grow, what are the implications for

philosophy? What does philosophy look like in a post-epistemic, post-skeptical era? It seems to me that it is now possible to do systematic theoretical philosophy in a way that was generally regarded as out of the question a half a century ago. Paradoxically, one of Wittgenstein's great contributions to philosophy is one that he himself would reject. Namely, by taking skepticism seriously and attempting to cope with it, Wittgenstein has helped to pave the way for a type of theoretical and systematic philosophizing that he himself, in his later work, abominated and thought impossible. Precisely because we are no longer worried about the traditional skeptical paradoxes and about their implications for the very existence of language, meaning, truth, knowledge, objectivity, certainty, and universality, we can now get on with the task of general theorizing.

The situation is somewhat analogous to the situation in Greece after the transition from the philosophy of Socrates and Plato to the philosophy of Aristotle. Socrates and Plato took skepticism seriously; Aristotle was a systematic theoretician.

With the possibility of developing general philosophical theories, and the decline of the obsession with skeptical worries, philosophy has eliminated much of its isolation from other disciplines. So, for example, the best philosophers of science are as familiar with the latest research as are specialists in those sciences.

There are a number of topics I could discuss concerning the future of philosophy, but for the sake of brevity, I will confine myself to six subjects.

1. The traditional mind-body problem

I begin with the traditional mind-body problem, because I believe it is the contemporary philosophical problem most amenable to cooperation between scientists and philosophers. There are different versions of the mind-body problem but the one most intensely discussed today is: What exactly are the relations between consciousness and the brain? It seems to me the neurosciences have now progressed to the point that we can address this as a straight neurobiological problem, and indeed several neurobiologists are doing precisely that. In its simplest form, the question is how exactly do neurobiological processes in the brain *cause* conscious states and processes, and how exactly are those conscious states and processes *realized in* the brain? So stated, this looks like an empirical scientific problem. It looks similar to such problems as, "How exactly do biochemical processes at the level of cells cause cancer?" and, "How exactly does the genetic structure of a zygote produce the phenotypical traits of a mature organism?"