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CARNAP'S METAPHILOSOPHY

Philosophers' interests in the nature of their investigations go back to Greek philosophy. When Parmenides recommended the Way of Truth and warned against another mode of philosophical proceeding, he spoke about philosophical methodology. The same did Aristotle in his characterization of *prote filosofia* (the first philosophy) as the science of being *qua* being. In fact, it would be quite difficult to find any philosopher who entirely abstained from at least some remarks about his way of doing philosophy. This tendency culminated in the 20th century and became classified under the label "metaphilosophy." The word belongs to the family of terms with the prefix "meta." The noun "metaphysics" is the prototype here. It was Alexander of Aphrodisias, an Aristotelian scholar, who invented this word. According to the most popular explanation, Alexander ordered Aristotle's works in a way that the books devoted to the first philosophy were placed just after *Physics*. Thus, the word "metaphysics" arose as a composition of "meta" (after) and "physics" and originally meant "after physics." However, some historians of ancient philosophy suggest that our word was intentionally introduced in order to point out considerations of a special kind, namely reflection about nature (*physis*) and its theory. Anyway, this more substantial application of the word "metaphysics" very soon became official. Today, metaphysics is considered as the theory of being and very often identified with ontology and has no direct link with metaphilosophy.

The use of words beginning with the prefix "meta" became quite popular in the 20th century. One can mention "metatheory," "metascience," "metaethics," "metamathematics" or "metalogue" as examples. Their intended meaning consists in pointing out some considerations about fields indicated after the prefix "meta." The word "metaphysics" would be a good label for methodology of physics, but it is excluded because of its history mentioned above. The word "metatheory" denotes or perhaps suggests a theory of theories. Metascientific studies in the 20th century used the term "metatheory" to refer to investigations of theories in a variety of disciplines, for example, logic, sociology, psychology, history, etc. Perhaps the word "metamathematics" is the oldest item in the "meta"-family. It was also used before Hilbert, who established metamathematics in its present shape, that is, as covering investigations on mathematics by exact mathematical tools. In the early 19th century, mathematicians, like Gauss, spoke about metamathe-

matics in an explicitly pejorative sense. It was for them a speculative way of looking at mathematics – a sort of metaphysics of mathematics. A negative attitude to metaphysics was at that time inherited from Kant and early positivists. The only serious use of “metamathematics” was restricted to metageometry. This was due to the fact that the invention of different geometries in the 19th century stimulated comparative studies of particular axiomatizations, their mutual relations and models of various geometrical systems. Thus, Hilbert should be credited as someone who made a brave move and broke up with the traditional reserve against metamathematics.

Today, the “meta”-words function in philosophical discourse without special reservations. However, the word “metaphilosophy” is used rather seldom. For example, three leading contemporary philosophical encyclopaedias or dictionaries, namely *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (ed. by P. Edwards, 1974), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (ed. by J. Ritter and K. Gründer, v. 5: L-M, 1980) and *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. by E. Craig, 1998) have no special entry on metaphilosophy. The only two exceptions (according to my knowledge) are *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*¹ and *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*². It is perhaps instructive to quote fragments of the entries (in fact, the first quotation covers the whole text from the German source):

(1) „Metaphilosophy, a term established by analogy to „metamathematics,” „metalogic” and „metaethics.” It denotes, particularly in English-speaking philosophy, philosophical interests regarding special arguments, methods and tasks inside philosophy (as well as its institutional and systematic) place as compared with science. Although such interests were always a part of philosophical reflection their results are not considered as philosophical theories or methods, rather they are treated as ways of providing a better self-understanding and additional clarity. Metaphilosophy is presented either inside or outside philosophy itself and it is considered as an orientation, a disciplinary extension or a method of theory-construction.”³ (p. 870)

(2) Metaphilosophy, the theory of the nature of philosophy, especially, its goals, methods and fundamental assumptions. First-order philosophical inquiry includes such disciplines as epistemology, ontology, ethics, and value theory. [...]. The philosophical study of first-order philosophical inquiry raises philosophical inquiry to higher order. Such higher-order inquiry is metaphilosophy. [...] Typical metaphilosophical topics include (a) the conditions under which a claim is philosophical rather than non-philosophical, and (b) the conditions under which a first-order philosophical claim is either meaningful, true, or warranted. [...] The distinction between philosophy and metaphilosophy has an analogy in the familiar distinction between mathematics and metamathematics.”⁴

Both quotations raise a host of questions. Some of the questions will be touched below. At this place, let me note only two points, namely a difference in the characterization of metaphilosophy in the quotations (1) and (2). As to the first point, (1) treats metaphilosophy more widely than (2). First of all, the German author includes sociological matters (the institutional place of

philosophy) into metaphilosophy, but the English-speaking one (in fact, an American philosopher) regards it as purely philosophical field. This leads to a further difference. Quotation (1) claims that metaphilosophy is located either inside philosophy or outside it, but, according to (2), the higher-order study of the first-order philosophical activity always belongs to philosophy itself. I think that this difference is related to an assumption the German author makes, namely that metaphilosophy is a kind of metascience. This presupposition is absent in (2). My own view is closer to the last position. I can express it in the following way. Philosophy is closed under the answers to metaphilosophical questions, that is, metaphilosophical statements belong to philosophy. Anticipating one of the main conclusions of this paper, we encounter here a deep difference between philosophy and science. Metatheoretical problems of physics, chemistry or sociology do not belong to these disciplines (in the case of sociology or humanities, it can seem dubious, but I will not enter into this problem). Philosophy (metaphilosophy) shares its fate in this respect with mathematics (metamathematics) and it is perhaps the main reason that the analogy between metaphilosophy and metamathematics is used so often. On the other hand, this analogy produces an illusion that everything is sufficiently clear when we speak about metaphilosophy. However, this is not so because although metamathematics is a part of mathematics in the precise methodological sense the situation of metaphilosophy is just contrary.

Metaphilosophical studies are characteristic of analytic philosophy. Hence, at least for this paper, I will identify metaphilosophy with analytic philosophical reflection. Omitting details and various anticipations (for example, on the part of Brentano), analytic metaphilosophy was developed by Moore, Russell and, particularly, by Wittgenstein. Two paradigms of doing analytic philosophy originated from Moore and Russell: informal analysis (descriptivism) and reconstructionism (logicism, formalism, constructionism). The line of division between both camps is marked by the attitude toward formal logical methods as admissible methods in philosophical analysis, which is "positive" in formalism and "negative," or at least partly sceptical, in descriptivism (continued by ordinary language philosophy and the later Wittgenstein). The problem of the relation of philosophy to science, particularly natural science, became another important metaphilosophical issue. It was particularly dramatically stated by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1922). Here is a sample of metaphilosophical statements from this work:⁵

"The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. The whole sense of the book can be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence. [...] the *truth* of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. (Preface, pp. 3–4)

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