

Summaries

ANDREAS BLANK

On Reconstructing Leibniz's Metaphysics

This article discusses some reasons for taking a reconstructive approach to the argumentative structure of Leibniz's metaphysics. One reason is the fragmentary nature of the countless notes and letters that constitute by far the largest part of Leibniz's philosophical output. Another reason is that conjecturing how the many isolated arguments proposed by Leibniz fit into a large-scale argumentative structure could yield insights into how Leibniz made use of the method of intuition – both in his analysis of mind and in his analysis of matter. Contemporary critics have objected that the method of intuition leads to philosophical conservatism, arbitrary choices between conflicting intuitions, and a preoccupation with psychological facts rather than with reality. By contrast, reconstructing the methodology behind Leibniz's metaphysics could indicate how intuitions could be used in a way that sidesteps these problems. Leibniz gives priority to intuitions concerning the structure of mental operations over intuitions concerning the structure of material objects; this is why intuitions concerning the structure of material objects can be replaced by innovative philosophical theories; these theories, however, make use of metaphysical concepts implied by the analysis of mind and, thereby, can capture facts both about psychology and about the structure of extra-mental reality.

Keywords: Leibniz, metaphysics, intuition, structure, reconstructivism

JULIE R. KLEIN

The Past and Future of the Present

In this essay, I consider contextualism, hermeneutics, and genealogy as methodologies for historical research in philosophy and suggest that they can assist us in rethinking philosophy and its histories in an expansive, pluralistic, and decolonial way. Key reference points are Eileen O'Neill's image of "disappearing ink," Walter Benjamin's image of the Angel of History and critique of victors' history, and Michel Foucault's conceptualization of genealogy as the investigation of disqualified and subjugated knowledges. Just as O'Neill's call for "new narratives" has motivated research into the history of women in philosophy and begun to expand the canon and concept of philosophy, and just as the

integration of studies of philosophy in Jewish and Islamic culture has altered our conceptions of medieval philosophy, current inquires into the entanglement of philosophy with race, empire, colonialism, along with efforts to explore neglected and dismissed material, will undoubtedly reshape our thinking. Racist dismissals of the possibility, let alone the intrinsic interest, of Asian, Indian, African, and Indigenous American philosophy are historically embedded in our field and institutions, but our future need not resemble our past. I argue, additionally, that our intellectual efforts must be matched by institutional change: changing the idea of philosophy demands reflection on our professional practices and requires the commitment of material resources.

Keywords: methodology, contextualism, hermeneutics, genealogy, history of philosophy, decolonial thought, canon, tradition

MARTIN LENZ

Did Descartes Read Wittgenstein? A Dialogical Approach to Reading

In methodological debates about the history of philosophy, rational reconstructions and historical reconstructions are commonly considered in opposition. While the former seems to focus on assessing arguments by current standards, the latter seems to attempt to be true to the historically pertinent standards. By contrast, this paper is intended to show that these approaches depend on one another. I will illustrate this by showing that, from a contemporary point of view, Descartes can be taken as having read Wittgenstein. At least the Descartes in our minds. Contrasting philosophical and historical approaches, I argue in favour of a dialogical approach to reading that makes explicit not only assumptions about pertinent objects of study, i.e. historical texts, but also the assumptions salient in the readers of such texts. While the first part spells out the assumptions, the second part zooms in on what we can learn about Descartes, Wittgenstein, and ourselves in a dialogical approach.

Keywords: anachronism, historical reconstruction, rational reconstruction, Descartes, Wittgenstein

TAD M. SCHMALTZ

Getting Things Right in the History of Philosophy

In this brief set of remarks, I explore methodological issues relating to the goal of tolerance in the history of philosophy. My investigation focuses in particular on a principle that Christia Mercer has recently proposed as critical for current work in the history of philosophy, namely, the “Getting Things Right Constraint” (GTRC). Mercer promotes this principle in the context of reflecting on an exchange between Daniel Garber and Michael Della Rocca over the proper methodology for the interpretation of Spinoza. I begin with a preliminary consideration of this exchange. Then I critically examine a narrative that Mercer offers in response to the exchange, according to which there has been a recent revolution in the history of philosophy that involves the victory of a “contextualism” defined in terms of the GTRC over a previously dominant “appropriationism”. Finally, I provide some reasons to think that her insistence on the GTRC as a central

constraint on philosophical inquiry into historical texts unacceptably compromises tolerance in the history of philosophy.

Keywords: appropriationism, contextualism, history of philosophy, methodology, tolerance

JUDIT SZALAI

Transparency and Broad Content in Descartes

The traditional picture of Descartes as championing the complete transparency of the mind has been substantially modified in the past decades by commentators (among them Lilli Alanen, Gary Hatfield, Vili Lähteenmäki, and Alison Simmons). Difficulties of access to the subject's own mental states, thoroughly explored in the literature, do not account for all cases of self-knowledge failure in Descartes, however. I argue that a distinction widely used in contemporary philosophy, that between narrow and broad content, illuminates these tenacious cases.

Keywords: Descartes, externalism, transparency, ideas

OLIVER ISTVAN TOTH

A Defense of Reconstructivism

In this paper, I argue that there is a live and interesting methodological disagreement between contextualists and reconstructivists by proposing an alternative definition of contextualism and reconstructivism relative to Mercer's. According to my proposed definition, these methodologies have different presuppositions about the truth-maker of philosophical interpretations. Contextualism holds that the truth-maker is the concrete particular, the written utterance, of which meaning is determined by its actual causes. Reconstructivism holds that the truth-maker is the abstract particular, the proposition, which has inferential properties independently of the social and historical context. I argue that from these presuppositions different methodologies follow. Contextualism follows a historicist methodology, according to which philosophical concepts are meaningful in their historical context, the aim of the history of philosophy is to capture the actual meaning of philosophical utterances, and philosophical claims can only be true in their historical and social context. Reconstructivism follows a perennialist methodology, according to which philosophical concepts are timeless, the aim of the history of philosophy is to capture the possible meaning of philosophical utterances, and philosophical claims can be true independently of their historical and social context.

Keywords: contextualism, reconstructivism, Skinner principle, Spinoza, methodology, history of philosophy