

of this term). It is well known that the method Kant is envisaging here, and will present in detail in the whole of his first *Critique*, is the *transcendental method* that determines the “conditions of possibility” of any proper knowledge. Certain conditions are not satisfied by traditional metaphysics (that had the pretension of knowing meta-empirical or supra-sensible realities), whereas they can be met by a metaphysics understood in a new sense (that is, precisely as a doctrine of the *general* conditions for the possibility of knowledge); this metaphysics is possible “as a science” (as it is stated in the title of the *Prolegomena*). Therefore, one is entitled to say that Kant’s first *Critique*, which is rightly considered as the most important work of modern philosophy, is a gigantic methodological investigation and, without reducing the whole of philosophy to methodology, certainly promotes methodological investigation to the role of a preliminary discourse with respect to further philosophical inquiry.

Kant’s perspective, however, was no sudden appearance in Western philosophy, but rather the culmination of a concern for method that we can consider as a typical mark of *modern* philosophy, with very clear manifestations before him and impressive developments up to contemporary philosophy (and, significantly, with a similar connection with the notion of knowledge and of science).

Just to give a few examples, let us mention—within the “rationalist” school—Descartes’ *Discourse on method* (1637) that had been preceded by the *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (composed in 1628 and published posthumously), or Spinoza’s *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* (1677), or the Leibnizian project of a *characteristica universalis* and *mathesis universalis* that should allow philosophers to solve their controversies by means of a pure “calculation.” As to the “empiricist” school, it is well known that Bacon’s *Novum Organum Scientiarum* (1620) contains the first systematic presentation of the inductive method. In these works the method is envisaged as a tool, a way, a path for acquiring sound knowledge in general, and when it is spoken of science, the concept is still understood in its general classical sense. One cannot underestimate, however, that in the same decades clear methodological reflections and prescriptions were elaborated by the founding fathers of the new *natural science*, namely by Galileo and Newton, who devoted explicit treatments to the experimental method and to the scientific method in general at several points of their major works and correspondence. This fact not only contributed to the refinement of scientific methodology and of the idea of method as such, but also prepared that paradigmatic status of the scientific method that we have found in Kant.

Coming closer to our time, we undoubtedly recognize the importance that methodological reflections have played in the special sciences, where the axiomatic method was not simply *used* (as had been done for centuries), but also explicitly *investigated*, starting with Peano’s work *Arithmetices principia nova methodo exposita* (1889), that paved the way to the “axiomatic revolution” in mathematics that was promoted especially by Hilbert and his followers. As to the methodology of the empirical sciences one could simply mention Carnap’s work *The Continuum of Inductive Methods* (1952), whose simple title contains an allusion to the amplitude of this field. Perhaps more interesting, however, is that a proliferation of methods

has also characterized philosophy during the twentieth century. Let us only mention the method of phenomenological reduction elaborated by Husserl and combined by him with the transcendental perspective in his transcendental phenomenology, a method that he considered as the ground for constructing a “philosophy as rigorous science” according to the general classical notion of science (1911). As another example of proposal of a new method one can consider the “hermeneutic” school, whose founding text is Gadamer’s book *Truth and Method* (1960).

The amplitude and depth of the concern for method, and the intense work devoted to the presentation of new methods of which we have given only a few scattered examples, justifies one’s speaking of a “methodological turn” as a characteristic feature of modern philosophy. Today the expression “linguistic turn” is accepted by certain philosophers as a suitable way of characterizing contemporary philosophy. Under a closer scrutiny, however, this “turn” appears as the proposal of a new *method* of philosophizing that consists in reducing the philosophical treatment of a problem to the *analysis of the language* through which the problem is formulated and debated. An analysis that can present itself equipped with the most advanced, powerful and sophisticated tools of semiotics and formal logic, and that can be applied in principle in *every* domain of philosophical inquiry, from philosophy of science to ontology, metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of law and so on. Yet the pretension that this method is sufficient to exhaust the *philosophical* sense of the issue under investigation can be challenged not only in principle, but by the very fact that other *philosophical* approaches have been put forth and seriously developed regarding the same domain and kind of issue. Just to give one example, Kant’s ethics (that is certainly one of the most important ethical doctrines in the whole history of philosophy), centered on the autonomy of individual free will and on the “formal” character of the categorical imperative, was challenged already by Hegel on the ground of his “historicist” approach, that amounted to a reformulation of Kant’s transcendental method such that in particular the dignity of the individual was dissolved. But later another attack on Kantian ethics came from Max Scheler, who denounced the inadequacy of Kant’s “formalistic” ethics and advocated a “material” ethics (that is, one in which “contents” of actions could be judged as right or wrong), and based his claims on an “intuition of values” that was not a simple commonsensical appreciation, but a doctrine based on the application of the phenomenological method (though in a form rather different from Husserl’s). In all these approaches the concern for the objective character of the moral imperatives, norms and obligations was present and defended (that is, ethics must prescribe what is “truly” dutiful to do or to avoid). In the work of an analytic philosopher of ethics such as Uberto Scarpelli, however, a wide and rigorous analysis of various methods of moral reasoning is performed, with a skillful use of semiotic and logical tools, but explicitly discarding the goal of deciding, among different ethical doctrines or norms, which is right and which is wrong, presenting in such a way (to quote the title of a book by him) an “Ethics without truth” (1982).

The consideration of this example invites us to a reflection. Kant’s aim was that of proposing a method capable of putting an end to the endless inconclusive disputes among philosophers, and this had been, and to a certain extent continued to be,

the illusion of many thinkers who proposed new methods of philosophizing. This was an illusion because the multiplication of new methods produced in philosophy an even more acute and radical situation of incompatibility and controversy: the struggle of the methods. The reason why this struggle was more intolerant than the old struggles among doctrines is that, since each method pretended to be *the method* (that is, the only genuine one) of philosophizing, the consequence was that the use of other methods could only produce spurious philosophy or no philosophy at all. This could even entail the expulsion from philosophy of whole branches of it that had centuries of history behind them.

The most famous example is probably the “elimination of metaphysics” maintained by logical empiricism, which did not consist in a refutation of single claims or arguments of traditional metaphysics, but in rejecting it as a whole because its discourse was “meaningless” according to the verificationist semantics imposed by the logical-empiricist methodology. Carnap’s article of 1932, “Elimination of metaphysics through logical analysis language” contains a concrete application of this methodology regarding a text of Heidegger and can be seen as a paradigmatic example of that irreconcilable discord that opposed for decades analytic philosophy, phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, not because of disagreements on well determined contents or doctrines, but for fundamental methodological discrepancies.

Our remarks should not be taken as a negative appraisal of methodology. Quite the contrary, one must recognize that methodology has known in the space of one century an attention and development much greater than in whatever past time, and this is already of *direct interest* for philosophy. Indeed, if the distinctive mark of philosophy is *thinking* (and this is why we often call philosophers “thinkers”), and one of its primordial aims consists in distinguishing the correct and incorrect “ways of thinking,” it is already clear that we are envisaging an internal articulation of thinking. This articulation, however, does not coincide with the dichotomy right-wrong, because this dichotomy appears to take place within each one of different “forms of thinking,” that constitute the real “articulation” of thinking. For each of these forms we can try to determine what is the right or the correct way of proceeding and we can call it the *method* of this form, that is, a particular *thinking method*. If we now consider the collection of all these particular thinking methods and make of them the subject matter of a special study, we determine the domain of *methodology* that, in such a way, appears to be the investigation of the different methods of thinking. Recognizing that this enterprise is of primary interest for philosophy is simply a matter of course.

After this vindication of the full relevance of methodology for philosophy (that in particular explains the “methodological turn” of modern philosophy of which we have spoken), one must point out that there are not only methods of thinking, but also, for instance, methods of doing whose wide spectrum we can keep out of consideration in a (strictly understood) methodology but whose existence we cannot ignore in other contexts, including philosophical contexts. This amounts to saying that the specific “interest” of methodology is *cognition*, is knowledge, and we have seen that its strict relation with *science* is by no means accidental and has accompanied the evolution of the notion of science itself. This is the reason why

the spectacular growth of methodology during the last century, has been fed by the introduction and development of new methods in philosophy as well as in certain scientific disciplines, according to a very fruitful feedback loop. For example, the typically philosophical notion of definition has been significantly enriched by the introduction of recursive definition and definition through axioms (or axiomatic definition) that occurred in the methodology of mathematics and mathematical logic. The second, in particular, has had a direct influence on semiotics and philosophy of language, as a prefiguration of the concept of syntactic meaning and of the doctrine of semantic holism. An example in the opposite direction could be the fact that evolution theory and scientific cosmology can be logically justified only by introducing criteria taken from the historical method, besides the usual criteria of the physical sciences. In brief, the rich harvest of results attained within the single thinking methods (which we could conventionally and roughly summarize under the headings of phenomenological, semiotic, axiomatic, deductive, reductive, hermeneutic, transcendental, historical) constitutes a genuine body of philosophical knowledge that we can oppose as an evidence against the often repeated complaint that we live in a poor season of philosophy because we do not have “great thinkers” capable of creating “great systems” of thought.

Nevertheless we must remain aware that the attention paid to the *methods* of thinking must not distract our attention from the *contents* of thinking, from the subject matter, from the problems that have captured the interest of philosophers in the different epochs and continue to be of concern for us today, though under different forms. This happens because the motivation of philosophizing flows from the desire of rationally understanding the world, ourselves, our social and physical environment, from the search for a sense of our existence and, accordingly, for an orientation of our life. Philosophy—understood in this broad sense—is a search for *wisdom*, and this is a way of conceiving it that has never been dismissed in its history and that certainly oversteps the pure horizon of methodology. This, however, is not a discourse that we can tackle here.

The introduction and development of so many new methods, which characterizes the flourishing of methodology, is the natural consequence of the *complexity* of the task of describing reality and knowledge, a complexity that could not be mastered through the adoption of a few fixed methods of alleged universal purport. Sticking *dogmatically* to these methods only (be they classical and old, or very modern), would open the way to *skepticism*, in front of the limitations that every one of them has shown under a careful critical scrutiny, whereas the acceptance of the plurality of these methods entails the recognition of the *analogical* nature of many fundamental concepts that do not lose a certain core of their original meaning, but are made capable of opening new vistas on hitherto not investigated domains. This, in the last analysis, amounts to a progressive clarification of *rationality*, which is one of the fundamental aims of philosophy, a clarification in which the different methods appear as *complementary* and not as *opposite*, with the awareness, in addition, that even the discovery of these new methods did not solve all the problems. On the contrary, along with the solution of many problems, new open questions have surfaced (e.g., the meaning and measurement of the probability of hypotheses), not to speak