# Philosophising

## *Why We Do It, and How We Should Proceed*

By

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# CHAPTER 1

# PHILOSOPHY

The word 'philosophy' comes from the Greek word *philosophia* which was used in antiquity for love of knowledge that is more detailed and accurate or more abstruse than is needed for ordinary practical purposes. Ancient Greeks who loved this sort of knowledge set up institutions for pursuing it. In the course of time much of the knowledge they pursued turned out to be of practical use after all. The sciences which now underpin civilised life began with enquiries that had no practical urgency into natural phenomena and human institutions, enquiries that were of interest only to the leisured and curious. Much that was then *philosophia* is not philosophy today but physics, biology, mathematics, history, economics. What is now philosophy is a sort of residue of those enquiries, something like the lees of wine left in the bottle after the drinkable liquid has been decanted.

That being so, it might seem strange that philosophy is still pursued, that universities teach it and publishers sell works of it. A simple reason is that this residue, useless for practical purposes, has had enormous practical significance. All universities in the world today are modelled on the institutions, known as the Academy and the Lyceum, founded in Athens by the philosophers Plato and Aristotle in the fourth century BC. It is to philosophy as they understood it that we owe the concept of an academic discipline[1]. Over and over again, furthermore, philosophical reflection has influenced the course of history. To look back only a little way from the present, it inspired National Socialism, International Communism, wars of independence in America and the French Revolution.

[1] I argue this in 'Greek Philosophy and the concept of an academic discipline', in *Essays presented to G.E.M. de Ste Croix on his 75th birthday* edd. P. Cartledge and F.D. Harvey, Imprint Academic, 1985.

These considerations provide an explanation of the survival of philosophy that is historical in character. This book offers an explanation that is more philosophical. The main topics of philosophy, as the word is understood today, include time, space, change, causation, consciousness, purpose, language, truth and goodness. These topics still have a recurrent fascination for reflective people independently of history. Why is that? I shall try, by examining their role in our thinking, to show why they fascinate, and what is elusive about them.

Practical enquiries fall into two groups: we ask what it is best to do here and now, and we also ask how things we want can be obtained or brought about, and things we fear can be prevented or evaded. What is now called 'moral' philosophy is the residue of enquiries into what is best for us as individuals, and 'political' philosophy is the residue of enquiries into what is best for us as social beings, members of societies. The residue of enquiries into what it is best to do here and now is hard to separate from the practically useful wine. But what is left in the bottle concerns goodness and badness themselves, what they are, and what society is, and the nature of rights, customs, and laws.

The residue of enquiries about how to cause what we want and prevent what we fear concerns causing and preventing themselves, together with change itself, time and space. In the eighteenth-century Hume could say of metaphysics that the word gives 'a strong presumption of falsehood'[2]. The prefix 'meta' entered philosophic discourse as a humble preposition meaning 'after', but now it has grown to be a synonym of the subject itself. Metaethics is the philosophy of ethics, metaphysics is the philosophy of the physical as distinct from mind and language. In 1965 Henri Lefebvre wrote a book entitled *Métaphilosophie* which was about philosophy, and in 1970 the journal *Metaphilosophy* was started with a name suggesting that the philosophy of philosophy is a field distinct from other philosophical fields. Philosophy, however, is a narcissistic discipline, and perhaps all philosophy is philosophising in part about philosophy.

[2] Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1 s. 239.

Changes are caused and prevented by causal action, and causal action explains their occurrence and non-occurrence. But causal action and refraining from causal action can themselves sometimes be explained as rational – living agents sometimes act, and refrain from acting, for reasons - and as purposive; rational agents act in order to cause or prevent, and refrain from acting for fear of preventing or causing, changes they desire and fear. Practical thinkers and also historians, poets and novelists, consider for what reasons and purposes agents act and refrain, but they do not consider what reasons and purposes are. Those residual questions fall to philosophers. A reason is something perceived or believed; a purpose is the occurrence of something desired or the non-occurrence of something feared. Belief, desire and fear are modes of consciousness, and philosophers of mind enquire into the nature of consciousness, into what it is to believe, desire and fear.

Belief, desire and fear are expressed in speech. Belief is expressed in statements; desire and fear or aversion are expressed in commands, counsels, requests and wishes. These kinds of speech exist and play a practical part in all intelligent societies. Statements are true or false, commands and other forms of speech are good or bad, right or wrong. Different societies have different rules for speaking, different languages, and for practical purposes people learn these different languages. There are also academic linguists who look for principles common to different languages and who touch on the theoretical question of what speech is; that, however, is a residual question belonging to philosophy, as are questions about truth and falsity in statements, and about rightness and wrongness in other forms of speech.

We learn well enough for practical purposes what speech is when, as infants, we learn to speak, and we know well enough what thinking and feeling are when as intelligent beings we attribute thoughts and feelings to each other and to other living things. The residual questions which philosophers consider are purely academic. They are elusive partly because thought and speech seem, philosophers sometimes say, ‘transparent’. They are like sheets of glass: we see

other things through them, but they are themselves invisible. The act of speaking resists being put into speech and our consciousness itself somehow eludes our consciousness. This, besides the obvious importance of thought and speech in intelligent life, has attracted philosophers to them from the earliest times.

The first philosophers were people who loved knowledge that is more detailed and accurate or more abstruse than is needed for ordinary practical purposes. and that is true of philosophers today, though they may not think of themselves in that way. Every adult human being has all the knowledge of time, causation, purpose, consciousness and language that is needed for ordinary, practical purposes, and philosophers seek a further kind of knowledge of these things that is more abstruse than is needed. But precisely what kind of knowledge they seek is unclear and itself a philosophical issue. They may think it is knowledge that is more accurate and detailed, more knowledge than every normal adult possesses, but still knowledge of the same kind, but that is disputable. It is not knowledge that is expressed in journals like *Nature*; philosophers put forward their ideas in journals for philosophy, and their accurate, detailed knowledge is about how other philosophers have treated what they discuss.

As I try to show in Chapter 6, words we use in speaking have meaning in two different ways. Some signify or stand for things that do or might exist or occur in the real, the physical world; others are syntactical, they are like inflections of mood, tense and number, and using them gives a speech its form. When we ask what something is, ask, for example, 'What is thyme?' 'What is gorse?' 'What is it to drink? 'What is it to perspire?' 'What is blueness?' the word we use is usually one that signifies something that does or might exist or occur; but our words for things that puzzle philosophers, though they may seem similar, words like 'time,' 'cause', 'think', 'desire', 'truth', are not words for things that do or might exist or occur. Like the words 'exist' and 'occur' themselves, they are all connected in various ways with ways in which we think and speak about such things; they correspond to forms of thought that are expressed in forms of speech. That is something that brings the topics of philosophy

together into one field; and should warn us against thinking that philosophical knowledge is simply fuller than the knowledge of normal adults.

Philosophy as I shall be discussing it is concerned with the spatiotemporal world in which we live and act. Jews and Christians gradually came to hold that this world is the creation of an intelligent being who is not a part of it. The systematic exposition and defence of this belief is now called 'theology', a word originally used by Aristotle for astronomy and the study of whatever in the spatiotemporal world is superior to life on our planet. Theology in the modern sense is not a branch of philosophy, it is not taught by philosophers, though philosophers can discuss philosophical questions about religion; and although theologians often study philosophy and make borrowings from it, philosophers aren't advised to reciprocate.

In this book I sometimes refer to non-philosophers; who are they? When I use the expression 'non-philosopher' it is usually for people whose spontaneous thinking about philosophical issues has not already been shaped by reading works of philosophy or listening to philosophers. The first people who tackled the residual questions we today count as philosophical were philosophers in the original, broad sense, lovers of knowledge more refined than was needed, of things that exist or occur in the spatiotemporal world; and they wrote for philosophers in that broad sense, people who already had that love, or who could be persuaded to acquire it. But they did not think their residual questions formed a field of study on its own, along with astronomy, botany, zoology or political constitutions. Stars, plants and animals and human history and institutions were the vineyards and orchards from which they sought delicious beverages. The term 'philosopher' today is perhaps chiefly or most strictly applied to people who do think the residues form such a field, and thinking like that is natural for those who teach philosophy in universities and schools.

As soon as institutions arise for the pursuit of specialised academic studies, people working in them tend to specialise, the topics considered by philosophers come to be seen as forming a special field, and there is a risk that they should be studied in ways appropriate to special fields like history, science or medicine. That is positively advocated in Timothy Williamson's *The Philosophy of Philosophy*[3]. 'One main theme of this book,' he says, 'is that the common assumption of philosophical exceptionalism is false.' By 'philosophical exceptionalism' he means the view that philosophy is not like other academic disciplines, that it proceeds in a different way, but he takes this to be the view that whereas scientists study natural phenomena and historians human actions and institutions, philosophers study something different, words and concepts. He does not attack the idea I shall commend, that philosophy is more like an art than like science or history. He thinks that philosophical knowledge can progress in the same way as knowledge of nature and knowledge the past, and that philosophers should aim at making it ever more detailed and accurate. He warns readers at the beginning (p. 7) that progress may be slow: 'ten steps forward, nine steps back', but by the end of the book, pp. 279-80, he is able to report:

> In many areas of philosophy we know much more in 2007 than was known in 1957 . . . we know far more about possibility and necessity than was known before the development of modern modal logic and associated work in philosophy . . . Far more is known about truth than was known in 1957.

Philosophers today certainly know more about what philosophers have said about truth since 1957 than they knew in 1957. Williamson's approach can lead philosophers to give more careful attention to how other philosophers are tackling philosophical problems to than to the problems themselves; and it may result in their writing primarily for one another and in a technical manner that is unresponsive to the interests of non-philosophers and unreadable by them. Readers of

[3] Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

*The Philosophy of Philosophy* who are not professional philosophers may be defeated not only by the symbols of modal logic which Williamson uses in his chapters on metaphysical modality and thought experiments, but also by sentences like this:

> Even without conventional implicatures, once content is individuated by intensional isomorphism, the conception of linguistic meaning as character is already exquisitely fine-grained' (p. 128).

Philosophy can fall into an inward-looking kind of scholasticism like that which brought it into disrepute in the later Middle Ages. The principal philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Descartes and Leibniz, Hobbes, Locke and Hume, did not teach the subject in universities, and their writings were addressed not to professionals, but to anyone interested in the questions they discussed. Kant, however, was a university teacher, and in the nineteenth century, Hegel's *Science of Logic* is as inaccessible to non-professionals as a Commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard. Today philosophers, under pressure from the sciences, are expected to engage in research, and to present their findings in journals for fellow-professionals.

Philosophical questions are residual, questions that remain after the methods of specialists have revealed all they can. Though the word 'research' is now used for any kind of academic work preparatory to teaching or publishing, it used to mean the systematic seeking of new knowledge, and the answers to the residual questions of philosophy, questions like 'What is change?' 'What is truth?' 'What is speech?' are before the eyes of all normal adults. They are questions, as I said just now and shall try to show, not about things that exist or occur independently of our thinking, things which can be investigated empirically, but about the forms our thinking about such things takes. As for scholarly research in philosophy, though it may include studying grammar, linguistics and developments in formal logic, it tends to be identified with the systematic study of what various philosophers have said. That is no more itself philosophy than the systematic study of what sculptors have done is sculpture.

Philosophy is a discipline that can make it clear to people interested in the residual questions that they already know the answers. As such it is more like an art than a science, and the philosopher is more like a novelist or landscape painter than a physical scientist or an historian.[4] Milton did not know more about epic poetry than Dante or Dante than Virgil; the medieval architects of Chartres and Salisbury did not know more about architecture than Pheidias. In this book I try to offer a fresh way of thinking about philosophical questions rather as an ambitious novelist might offer readers a new way of thinking about things already known like sexual or parental love, or an ambitious painter might offer beholders a new way of seeing things often seen like woodland or the human figure. I shall avoid, so far as I can, the historical scholarship and the using of formal logical symbols for which professional philosophers might look in work addressed to them. There will be no dodging, however, of genuine difficulties, and readers cannot be promised a smooth passage. Reading philosophy, even when it is written for non-professionals by a writer as good as Plato or Bertrand Russell, requires concentration and patience.

Philosophers who think of their subject as a special field like a natural science or a period of history may divide it into small pieces, put a small piece under a magnifying glass, study it in detail, and compare their results with those of other philosophers who have studied it in the same detail. This procedure, which Iain McGilchrist[5] attributes to the left hemisphere of the brain, can yield delight to professional philosophers - examples are Jane Heal's elegant argument for the existence of indexical predicates,[6] and Timothy Williamson's painstaking rebuttal of successive attempts by philosophers to pin down analyticity, illustrated by sentences like 'Every vixen is a female fox' (pp. 48-133). The piecemeal approach, however, is not adapted to satisfying the curiosity of ordinary thoughtful people about

[4] In 'Is philosophy a form of literature?' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 14. 1 (1974) pp. 3-16 I argued tentatively that it is.

[5] *The Master and his Emissary*, New Haven, Yale University Press, New Expanded Edition, 2019.

[6] Essays in *Mind, Reason and Imagination*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

the residual questions I shall consider and Williamson's positive methodological proposals for how philosophers can 'do better' in 'resolving the hard questions with which most philosophers want to engage' (pp. 278-87) are likely to convince such people that philosophy is not for them.

My approach is more holistic. I present philosophical topics as leading on one from another. More controversially, I trace much of our perplexity about these different topics to a single source. My explanation is that we think, and speak, of whatever in the spatiotemporal world does or might exist or occur, in two different ways. I call these two ways 'thinking and speaking' of things 'as possibilities' and 'as actualities'. The words 'possible' and 'actual' have other uses, mark other contrasts, and I shall try to clarify my use of them in Chapter 2.

We think of the same things in both of these ways, but we cannot think of them in both ways at once; and we are liable to make two mistakes. Either we take our different ways of thinking of the same thing as thinking in the same way of two different things. What these different things might be can then become puzzling, and puzzling over them long and intensely often generates a kind of double vision: what is just an aspect of something appears as a thing with aspects of its own. Or we can fail to distinguish the two ways of thinking, run them together and confuse them; and that confusion too results in puzzlement.

I apply this diagnosis to philosophical puzzlement over all the topics I mentioned just now. I start with time and space. The distinction here is between thinking of a change as something which takes place or goes on, and thinking of it as a taking place of something. The notion of time, I say, is the notion of the going on of change, and the fundamental idea of space, that of distance between things, is the notion of movement or change of place thought of as something that does or might go on.

I proceed to consider causation, and having distinguished causal action (causing and preventing) from causal agents and causal conditions, I identify it with the going on or not going on of the changes caused or prevented. I also distinguish two ways of thinking of physical objects. We think of them as composed of material parts and having powers to change other objects and liabilities to be changed by them; we also think of them as useful or harmful in various ways; I call the first way thinking 'theoretical' and the second 'practical' or 'pragmatic'; and I identify theoretical thinking with thinking of things as possible, and pragmatic thinking with thinking of them as actual.

Whereas changes that take place are explained causally, causing and preventing, if we can explain them at all, are explained in terms of reasons and purposes. This is to explain the behaviour not as necessary physically, but as useful, advantageous or necessary pragmatically. Reasons are objects of perception or belief, and purposes correspond to objects of desire and fear. Many philosophers today take belief and desire as causes of behaviour, and as phenomena distinct from one another; they have then to struggle with the appearance that they are non-physical, that they are two non-physical kinds of activity or state. I claim they are the same thing, conscious, purposive behaviour, thought of or explained in two ways. The distinction here is between what the agent is conscious of, and the agent's consciousness of this. The idea of belief is the idea of what a purposive agent is conscious of and the ideas of desire and fear are ideas of the agent's consciousness of this, ideas of forms which an agent's awareness of what is perceived or believed can take.

Belief and desire are expressed in language or speech. Belief is expressed in statements; desire is expressed in commands, counsels, requests and wishes. The possibility-actuality distinction which in Chapter 6 I see in language is between what is said or put into words and the saying of what is said. Speeches are constructed out of words, and I distinguish words which signify or stand for real things from words and grammatical constructions which don't, but

which have meaning in that using them determines the form of the speech in which they are used - makes it a statement, for instance, or a command, - and determines also the way in which the things that words signify are signified. This is where I say that philosophers are liable to confuse the two ways of thinking. They do not distinguish the two ways of having meaning, and they take words which are syntactic, which have meaning in the same way as constructions, to signify entities which are problematic, among which I include mental acts, relations and numbers.

Philosophers today tend to think of language chiefly as making statements, and give less attention to commands, counsels, requests and wishes which are not true or false but good or bad, right or wrong, sensible or silly. In discussing truth in Chapter 7 I attribute their trouble over what truth is to attaching truth and falsity to things said instead of to acts of saying. Suggestions that truth is some kind of correspondence with reality prove hard to develop satisfactorily, and when they fail, the notion of truth seems vacuous. This leads philosophers to dismiss it as redundant or say it is useful only for quantification – for saying that some things a speaker says are true and others false. I attach truth not to things said but to indicative forms of speech, and this makes it possible to give a substantive account of it, by going through indicative forms and saying what constitutes truth for each form.

Whereas philosophers have difficulty in giving an account of truth, they give an account of goodness without knowing they do. Having argued that the words ‘good’ and ‘right’ do not signify or stand for anything real, they say that using them is gives a speech the form of a counsel or command; and that is a correct account of their meaning. As I say, however, they give little attention to non-indicative speeches, in which things are expressed as objects of desire or fear; and they do not realise that distinguishing, as I do in Chapter 8, different ways in which things can be objects of desire and fear is a way of saying what goodness and badness are.

Philosophers have traditionally distinguished sentience, which they extend to animals, from intelligence which they confine to human beings, and since the evolution of species has been accepted as a fact, questions have arisen about how sentience and intelligence differ, and about how they are related to language. I do not claim that these questions arise from our thinking of things as possibilities and as actualities; but they present themselves when we consider questions about mind and language which do arise from that, and I consider them in my Chapter 9. I there argue that intelligence, and also consciousness of belief and desire, rather depend upon language than language depends on intelligence. I suggest, in particular, that in the emergence of intelligence, negation has an important role.

The questions that I bring together as philosophical are inherited from Plato and Aristotle, whose grammar was like ours; they might not be puzzling or even intelligible to thinkers with a different grammar, with different moods, for example, tenses and what grammarians call 'aspects'; and even for people with a grammar like ours, I cannot expect my answers to be final. I do, in my last chapter, raise the question why we think of things in the two ways I distinguish. But philosophy, I repeat, though it is an academic pursuit, is an art like architecture or poetry, not a science like physics or biology. There is no final answer to philosophical questions, any more than a final way of treating human love in a novel or of building a place of worship. Another philosopher might answer the same questions differently, just as Gainsborough and Monet would paint the same woodland scene differently. The richness of nature is such that any good depiction can provide pleasure and satisfaction, and the topics of philosophy are so resilient in human thought that any honest and fresh treatment of them can do likewise. Perhaps also, like philosophy in the past, it can affect the course of a society's history.

Pure mathematics too is an art. Mathematicians like Euclid and Cantor are no more in the business of uncovering new facts than are philosophers. Numbers are not spatiotemporal realities, and thought about them, though abstract, is creative. Mathematicians do seek new proofs. But whereas mathematics rejoices in ordered

complexity and gives us transfinite arithmetic and multidimensional geometry, philosophy aspires to simplicity; it tries to show us, in the words of Alexander Pope:

> nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed,
> Something whose truth, convinced at sight, we find,
> That gives us back the image of our mind.[7]

[7] *Essay on Criticism*, lines 297-300.

# CHAPTER 2

# TIME, SPACE AND CHANGE

The world in which we live and act is temporal and spatial. The things in it, including ourselves, extend in three dimensions and are spaced apart; so are the situations, the states of affairs, in which we find ourselves; and they and we exist for stretches of time. It is a world, also, in which changes take place and processes of change go on. These processes of change occur in time and go on for periods of time.

Non-philosophers know, or if they don't they can ask, where things are, in what respects things change, when things happen, how long processes of change take, and how long states of affairs exist. Such matters are often of practical importance. Non-philosophers rarely ask what time, space or change is, and if they do, they are philosophising. They know well enough for practical purposes what time, space and change are, but they may not be able to say what they are; that is something philosophers try to do, and have tried to do at least since the time of Aristotle, who discusses them in his *Physics* 3 and 4. The Greeks did not have a word corresponding exactly to our 'space', but Aristotle uses the word 'void' or 'emptiness' [*to kenon*] to cover what we call 'empty space', and reports debates on whether it is something real.

In this spatiotemporal world we cause changes, we bring them about and prevent them. We do not cause all the changes that take place, but we cause or prevent some of them, and we do so sometimes on purpose. When not philosophising we know, or if we don't we can try to find out, how to cause and prevent various changes; we also consider whether it would be good or bad to cause or prevent particular changes. We know well enough for practical purposes what causing and preventing are and what purpose is; we do not ask, and may not be able to say, what these things are; these are philosophical questions.

In this chapter I shall take it as unproblematic what change is, and offer my own opinion of what time and space are, contrasting this with other philosophical views. In Chapter 3 I shall discuss causation in the same way, and only after that, and after considering purpose and consciousness, get back in Chapter 5 to what change is. The notion of change, I shall suggest, is dependent on that of purpose: it depends not only upon our having purposes – sentient beings generally have purposes – but on our being conscious of them. Goodness and badness I defer to Chapter 8.

Time is the going on of change. It is not the same as change – I don't know what it could mean to say that time and change are the same thing – but it is an aspect of change, change thought of in a particular way.

There are various kinds of change: things change in size, shape, colour, odour, temperature and texture; they also move from one place to another, and rotate in the same place. These are kinds of physical change. There are also moral, intellectual, and political changes. All, however, occur *in* time, they are processes that *take* time and go on *for* stretches of time; and all can be considered in two ways. We can consider how much time they take. In that case we measure their extent in units of time, in years, hours, minutes or seconds. These units are the same for processes of every kind. We can also consider what they are changes from and to, and in that case, if we wish to specify their extent, we must use different units for the different kinds of change, units like a yard, an acre, a gallon for changes in size, units like degrees Fahrenheit or Centigrade for changes in temperature, units of distance like a mile or a kilometre for changes from one place to another, units like degrees of arc for rotation, and also for changes in shape. We can introduce further kinds of unit for further physical kinds of change, changes in colour, sound, flavour and so on, though non-physical changes resist precise quantification.

Viewed in one way, changes of every kind are measured in the same units, units of time; viewed in another, changes of different kinds are measured in different units. If we can characterise these aspects, say what they are and how they differ, we are half way to saying what time is.

When we think of a change as a change from one thing to another, which is when we think of it as measurable in non-temporal units, we think of it as something that does or might take place. When we think of it as something measurable in time-units, we think of it as an actual taking place of something, an occurring of something that can occur.

Let me illustrate this from a particular kind of change, movement from place to place. Suppose I go from London to Oxford. The distance from London to Oxford is about 60 miles, and in my experience, the journey takes about two hours. I make a movement of 60 miles *in* two hours, and I am moving between London and Oxford *for* two hours. As a journey of 60 miles, it is a movement I make; and as journey of two hours, it is a two-hour making of the 60-mile movement. We cannot reverse this. We cannot say it is a 60-mile making of the two-hour journey or that I am 60 miles in travelling two hours.

It is the same with other kinds of change. The water in the kettle undergoes a 60 degree rise in temperature in five minutes; it does not undergo a five-minute rise in temperature in 60 degrees. The Earth turns through 90 degrees relative to the Sun in six hours; that is a six-hour turning through 90 degrees, (much longer than my turnings through the same angle relatively to my study,) not a 90-degree turning through six hours. The six-hour rotation is a making of a 90-degree turn, not the other way round.

If a change appears in our thinking as measurable in time units when it is considered as the going on of some process, not as something that goes on, a philosopher may suggest that a stretch of time is simply the actual going on of some change, and time generally is

change considered not as something that goes on but as the going on of something.

These two ways of thinking of something are the subject of this book. The difference between them runs through the whole of intelligent thought. The difference between thinking of a change as something that takes place and thinking of it as a taking place of something is the same as, or at least analogous to, the difference between thinking of something as something done and thinking of it as a doing of something. The notion of doing something can be extended, as I say in Chapter 3, to cover both causing and preventing, and we can distinguish between thinking of something as something caused or prevented from occurring and thinking of it as a causing or preventing.

These differences in our thinking about the physical world are paralleled in our thinking about thought and speech. In chapter 5 I associate the difference between belief and desire or fear with the difference between something we think and our thinking this.

Belief and desire are expressed in speech, belief in indicative speech, desire in commands, advice, requests and wishes. In Chapter 6 I shall associate the difference between what we say and our saying of what is said with the difference between the meaning of the words out of which we construct speeches and the meaning of our constructions. In Chapter 7 I attach truth not to things we say but to our saying of what we say in indicative speech, and in Chapter 8 I attach goodness or rightness not to things we counsel or command but to our acts of saying of what we say in non-indicative speech.

How do these ways of thinking of changes, of action, of thought, and of speech differ, and how are they related?

It might be said that thinking of a change as something that does or might take place is thinking of it as something of which there are or might be instances and thinking of it a taking place of something is thinking of it as an *instance* of something. If you and I move the same distance, say a mile, or the mile between your house and the inn, your moving the distance and mine are two instances of the same

change of place. A twenty-minute movement is a twenty-minute instance of a certain change of place. But the distinction between a thing instantiated and an instance of it is itself problematic. It applies not only to changes that take place but to things that exist, to natural objects like planets and whales, to artifacts like bridges and axes, and to things we attribute to such things or predicate of them, like the colour yellow, the shape spherical, the movement swimming. Medieval philosophers identified it with the distinction between a universal and a particular. But they took universals and particulars to be different things. Following Aristotle, they thought that systematic knowledge is general, of universals, whereas only what is particular exists.[8] And this seemed to make it a problem how knowledge can be objective and useful. The problem seemed particularly pressing in the Middle Ages because the logic on which their systematic knowledge depended was a logic of terms, terms were things signified by words, and words that signify things (other than proper names like 'Socrates'), words like 'horse', 'swim', 'black' and 'mortal', signify universals. To meet this difficulty they distinguished signifying things from standing for them, which they called 'supposition' [*suppositio*], and developed complicated theories of supposition[9] That would have been unnecessary, their worry would have vanished, if they had recognised that a universal and a particular instance that falls under it are the same thing thought of in different ways, in my terms, as a possibility and an actuality. I shall offer this solution when I discuss language in Chapter 6, but it involves explaining the distinction between things instantiated and instances in terms of two ways of thinking of the same thing, rather than the other way round.

Instead of universals and particulars, philosophers today sometimes speak of types and tokens. (These terms were first applied to linguistic items themselves, to words and letters.) They can say that your one-mile (or house-to-inn) movement and mine are two tokens of the same type. But are type and tokens different things, both existing (or

[8] See Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1938, Ch.3.

[9] See P. Boehner, *Ockham, Philosophical Writings,* London: Nelson, 1957, pp. xxxiv-xxxvi

perhaps only tokens existing) in the spatiotemporal world? Or is the relation of type to token itself to be understood as a relation between two ways of thinking of the same thing?

Philosophers distinguish form and content. Just now I associated the distinction between the two ways of thinking of a change with the distinction between thinking of something as something said or thought and thinking of it as a saying or thinking of something. This may be identified with the distinction between the content of a speech or thought and the form, and we may say that thinking of a change as something that takes place is thinking of the content of the change and thinking of it as a taking place of something is thinking of the form. Changes differ in what it is that changes, whether it is something's distance or direction or temperature or colour, but they are all the same in their taking place, in that they all take place in time. We might therefor say that they differ in content but are the same in form; our idea of the distance from one place to another, or of the extent of a change from one temperature to another, is the idea of the content of a change, while the idea of time is the idea of the form of change.

I think that is correct; but the distinction between content and form both in thought and in speech is problematic. It is not immediately clear that they are the same thing, thought of in different ways, and, and (as I shall say in Chapters 6 and 7) we are tempted to treat content and form, both in thought and in speech, as two components of what we think and say.

Since the philosopher, I claim, is more like a poet or a landscape painter than a scientist or an historian, and since detective stories like, according to Ernest Bramah, the *Father Brown* stories, and perhaps the novels of Henry Wade, can be reckoned as literature, this book might have been called *The Clue of the Cognate Accusative*. The cognate accusative is a clue that can lead us through the labyrinth of philosophy. In fact, however, I borrow words from Aristotle, and my two ways of thinking of things I label as thinking of them as 'possibilities' and as 'actualities'. These words are used to translate

Aristotle's *dunamis* and *energeia* or *entelekheia*; but he himself uses them to draw more distinctions than one[10], and our English 'possible' and 'actual' too have several uses; let me try to distinguish my use of them from others.

Possibility is contrasted not only with actuality but with certainty. Travellers might say 'It is possible that we were travelling for eight hours yesterday' Here the word 'possibility' is used just make an estimate cautious; the estimate is of the travelling considered as an actuality. Possibility is also contrasted with necessity and impossibility, which in turn may be either physical or pragmatic. Physical possibility, impossibility and necessity have to do simply with causation. We may say 'It is possible (or necessary) for skin to change colour when exposed to the sun,' 'It is impossible to cut cloth without scissors.' Pragmatic possibility, impossibility and necessity have to do with achieving what is good and preventing what is bad. Someone might say 'You can (or can't, or must) avoid being arrested by going to the police-station.' Thinking of a change in any of these ways is what I call thinking of it as a possibility, not an actuality.

Besides physical and pragmatic possibility we speak of logical possibility. Logical or conceptual possibility, impossibility and necessity are the concern of philosophers, but what I call thinking of something as a possibility is not, in general, thinking of it as a logical possibility.

The word 'actual' too has a number of uses. The adverb 'actually' often expresses truth or emphasis, 'He actually did that!', and so can the adjective – 'an actual change of colour' 'an actual rise in temperature'. A change which has ('actually' or 'truly') taken place may be called 'actual'. But our idea of a change as something that has taken place is still, in my terms, an idea of it as a possibility, something measurable in non-temporal units; it is not an idea of it as what I call 'an actuality'; to be that, it would have to be an idea of a taking place of something.

[10] See my 'Aristotle and the Uses of Actuality', in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy,* Vol. 5, edd. John J. Cleary and Daniel C. Shartin, University Press of America, Lanham, 1991, pp.1-22.

I said a change is in one aspect something that takes place, and in another, a taking place of something. The word 'aspect' is here borrowed from vision, it signifies what is seen from a place, a physical standpoint. The southern aspect of a house is what we see of it from the south. There is no physical standpoint from which a change is seen either as something that takes place or as a taking place of something. The word is extended to cover the appearance of something when we think of it in connection with a role or function. We can a think of a man as a husband or a doctor, a horse as a swimmer or a jumper, of wood as a material for furniture or as fuel for fires. Possibility and actuality, however are not different roles or functions of things that we think of as possible or actual, though signifying things as possible and as actual may be different roles of words for things we think of in these different ways.

So much for nomenclature and terminology; I return to my account of time. If it is correct, it follows that there can be no time without change. That may seem untrue. Surely there can be an hour in which nothing whatever takes place. My account allows that there may be an hour in which nothing takes place in some particular place, my study, perhaps. But perfect peace reigns in my study for an hour, only if change is going on for an hour elsewhere, my kitchen perhaps. The hour for which my study is changeless will then be the hour for which my leg of lamb is cooking, becoming better to eat. It starts with the beginning of the change in the meat, and ends with the end.

We might think, however, that if the world as we know it came into existence only a finite time ago, there must have been time, perhaps infinite time, before anything happened. My account does rule that; but does that show it is wrong?

When we start to consider what time and space are, we may think, not that time is an aspect of change, but that it is a particular process in itself that goes on independently of anything else. Newton philosophises about time and space at the beginning of his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. He wrote in Latin but

his words are well enough translated into English in J.J.C. Smart's Problems of Space and Time, and I quote from that:

> Absolute, true and mathematical time of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration.

We talk of time passing quickly or slowly but we know that that is just a figure of speech. The dreary days that pass slowly are not really any longer than the happy days that race past. Newton, however, conceived time as itself a process, something that goes on, and says it goes on always at the same speed, 'equably'. He thinks of it as something like the movement of the hands of a perfect clock, an invisible clock that exists independently of everything else and could not possibly break down. Its hands always move at the same speed; they always pass through the same angle in the same time. But there is no such clock in reality, and Newton has no suggestions as to what the process might be that goes on 'equably' without relation to anything else. (A modern physicist might suggest the decay of caesium atoms.) Besides, if it flows 'equably', every hour of it must flow past in the same number of units of some super-time, measured by a second invisible clock.

Along with absolute time Newton postulates absolute space: 'Absolute space, in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable.' He conceived absolute space as something real like an ocean without shores, extending infinitely in all directions but invisible, incapable of being acted upon or moved, and incapable of acting upon anything else or, for example, resisting anything that moves through it. We must suppose that there is such a substance, he thought, to distinguish absolute from relative movement, and we must suppose there is absolute motion if we are to have scientific physics. He was born in 1642, the year Galileo died, and unlike some admirers of Galileo today, who imagine that our sunrise and sunset are caused by the Earth's going round the Sun, he understood that relatively to the Earth the Sun revolves through 360 degrees a day, and relatively to

the Sun, the Earth revolves through less than 1 degree but rotates on its axis through 360. Postulating absolute space enabled Newton to say that the Earth's movement relatively to the Sun is real, and the Sun's movement relatively to the Earth merely apparent. The philosopher Kant accepted Newton's ideas of time and space, but thought that they are somehow innate and imposed by us in a chaotic welter [mannigfaltig] of subjective sensations. Newton obviously derived them from experience: absolute time is like a clock accurate enough to enable sailors to fix their longitude, and absolute space is like air only thinner.

The notion of a real substance with no causal powers is in fact vacuous, though mathematicians, of course, can make use of the notion of extension in three or more dimensions. I shall claim later that the notions of matter and causal power coincide. Meanwhile here is an account of space which deprives it of actual physical reality.

Movement from place to place is a kind of change. It can be reckoned, like every kind of change, in units of time like hours and minutes, but unlike other kinds of change it can be reckoned in units of distance like miles and yards. The words we use for units of distance are also used for units of length, extension in one dimension, and we can speak of a yard of string. But moving from one place to another sixty miles distant is moving a distance of sixty miles, not moving sixty miles of string or even of tarmac. A distance of sixty miles is simply a possible movement of sixty miles: not sixty miles of any actual substance, but sixty miles of possible travel, something analogous to sixty degrees of possible change in temperature. Units of distance measure changes of place considered, in my terminology, as possible, considered as changes that that can and sometimes do take place, whereas hours and minutes measure changes of place as actual, as goings on of movements and other kinds of change.

As I suggested that time is simply the going on of change, so I suggest that distance is change of place considered as possible, and that the fundamental notion of space is that of distance. The space between two objects or places is simply the movement between

them, thought of as something possible, whereas the time between starting and finishing such a movement is the movement considered as something actual.

This account of space fits the conception of space current in modern physics. Physicists today reject Newton's notions of absolute space and time, and hold that times and distances can be measured only relatively to things that can move relatively to one another. The notion of relative motion is easy to grasp. Physicists today, however, think not just that bodies can move only relatively to other bodies: because of considerations about simultaneity and the speed of light they hold that both the distance and the time between two events can be measured only in relation to some actual thing which is taken to be at rest, or to what they call 'a frame of reference'.[11]

Whereas Newton held that time is some kind of process that goes on independently of anything else, philosophers more recently have dispensed with the idea of anything going on at all. I have just analysed time in terms of change, as the going on of change. Bertrand Russell did the reverse, analysed change in terms of time and suggested that change is simply being different at different times:

> Motion is the occupation by one entity of a continuous series of places at a continuous series of times.[12]

By 'times' he means what we might call 'instants'. They are not short stretches of time like seconds; they have no duration at all, and stand to stretches of time rather as points stand to lines. Changes start and stop at instants. The existence of an object at a place is a state of affairs. Russell's analysis, therefore, reduces the going on of change, which I identified with time, to a continuous succession of instantaneous states of affairs. Russell was writing in 1903, at about the time when photography was becoming cinematographic, and the cinema exactly illustrates his idea. When we watch a cinema film

[11] Albert Einstein, *Relativity, a popular exposition,* tr. R.W. Lawson, London, Methuen 1957, Chapters 8-10.

[12] *Principles of Mathematics* s. 442.

like *Broken Blossoms* we think we see Lillian Gish move, but we really see only a succession of still shots of her.

We speak and think of time as divisible into present, past and future. The division is relative to the moment at which we think or speak: present time is time contemporaneous with that moment, past time is time before it and future time is time after it. We feel this division is important, but how?

Is it important as a division between what is real and actual and what is unreal and merely possible? Past and present are real, the future is not real. An obvious objection to this is that the past is not real. It was real, but it is real no more. And although the future is not real, it is what will be real in the future. So if we think the division into present past and future is important in this way, we must conclude that only the present instant is real, and time shrinks to that. This difficulty was noted by Aristotle[13]. The importance of the difference between past and future arises from the fact we are purposive agents who cause and prevent changes after but not before our awareness of the reasons.

Russell's analysis of change enables us to see the spatio-temporal world as a single unchanging reality extending in three dimensions in space and one in time. It is different in different places. A road may have puddles in one place and be dry in a second, have potholes in a third and be smooth in a fourth. All these states of affairs are equally real, but exist at different places ordered in a spatial dimension. Equally a road may have puddles at one time and be dry at a second, have potholes at one time and be smooth at a fourth. These states of affairs are equally real, but exist at different times ordered in the temporal dimension. As you travel along the road you see the puddles, the dryness, the potholes at different times. These experiences are all equally real but exist at times ordered in the unique temporal dimension.

[13] *Physics* 4 217b32-218a3

Russell's analysis of change allows us to claim the equal reality of past, present and future but there is a double cost. In the first place if we see reality in this way as a single unchanging reality, time is spatialised; the temporal dimension seems no different in character from the three spatial dimensions, and therefore change through time seems no more real than change through space, like the change of the road from the badly maintained to the well-maintained length, or the change in thickness of a human leg between the ankle and the thigh.

Secondly identity is reduced to similarity. A bicycle moves from one place to another if it occupies a continuous series of intervening places, but what makes it the same body? Might it not be a different body the same size and shape? How do you know that the bicyclist who sees the potholes is not a new person who has the illusion of having seen puddles? You might think: 'At least I, as a conscious being, pass along the time-dimension seeing different states of affairs at different spatial locations, rather as a spotlight shone from a torch travels over a map on the wall picking out different locations on the map.' But why should this movement of yours (for which you can conceive no cause) be different from any other change? No, your consciousness is not like a spotlight that really moves over the map, but like the curling trail left by a snail on the pavement that gleams at different parts of the pavement at different points in its extent. You must think of yourself as a four-dimensional object extending in the time dimension from a baby at one end to (in Russell's own case) a nonagenarian at the other, with different memories at different points along your time-dimension.

Our ordinary thinking about identity, however, assumes the reality of causation. You assume that the bicycle jolting you over the potholes is the same as the bicycle that splashed you through the puddles, because you caused it to move by pressing on its pedals. I think the bicyclist who sees the potholes is the same as the bicyclist who saw the puddles because I know of nothing that could have replaced the puddle-experiencing bicyclist by a look-alike.