

Doing Philosophy in Times of Globalisation

NEVIA DOLCINI*

ABSTRACT: The increased speed of communication, spatial compression, and the growing possibilities of new high-speed technologies, are among the major features of rapid changes leading the present-day highly interconnected and ‘shrinking’ world. In this context, social practices can benefit from newly emerged spaces of social interaction, which deeply modified the contours of social space, cultural communities, and — last but not least — scholarly activities. In this paper, I engage in a reflection on some of the shifts and innovations brought about by the process globalisation in philosophical practices. Doing philosophy in times of globalisation comes with a plethora of new opportunities, yet it also gives rise to novel issues which call for further assessment. More specifically, I will focus on two features of current philosophical practices, namely, collaboration and pluralism: while doing philosophy has always involved forms of collaboration and pluralism, the process of globalisation widely contributed an unprecedented increase in collaborative research works, as well as a dramatic increase of philosophical pluralism. Lastly, I will suggest that the current status of philosophical practices, characterised with high degrees of diversity and increased levels of both intra-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration, encourages and urges metaphilosophical reflection: questions about the disciplinary identity, as well as about the philosophical method, have now become more salient than ever.

KEYWORDS: Philosophical pluralism; Collaboration; Globalization; Philosophical method.

1. Introduction

The start of the third millennium has been accompanied by the challenges and opportunities of globalisation, broadly intended as a complex value-free and multidimensional process of economic, ecological,

social, cultural and political transformation transcending nation-state borders, and pertaining to the world as a whole. Globalisation, either understood as an all-embracing process of transformation or as a process of transition to global society, has triggered a great variety of responses ranging from utter enthusiasm to fierce resistance. Besides being a politically contrasted phenomenon largely discussed in contemporary social theory,¹ the impact of globalisation on human existence and activity strictly relates to many basic philosophical questions. Associated features of globalisation, and especially deterritorialisation,² which refers to events and various social activities taking place irrespective of the geographical location of individuals, and the increased possibilities of networking among people notwithstanding

*She is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies and Primary Faculty of the Centre for Cognitive and Brain Science (Institute of Collaborative Innovation) at the University of Macau. Her research interests lie at the intersection of philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and cognition. In her works, she addresses issues broadly related to language, perception and imagination, including topics such as the use of indexicals in communication, the metaphysics of fiction, the epistemic status of irrational beliefs, and self-deception.

Professora Associada de Filosofia do Departamento de Filosofia e Estudos da Religião e investigadora do Centro de Ciências Cognitivas e Cerebrais (Instituto de Inovação Colaborativa) da Universidade de Macau. Os seus interesses de pesquisa centram-se na intersecção da filosofia da linguagem, filosofia da mente e cognição e epistemologia. Nas suas obras aborda questões amplamente ligadas à linguagem, percepção e imaginação, incluindo tópicos como o uso de indexicais na comunicação, a metafísica da ficção, o estatuto epistémico de crenças irracionais e a decepção.

geographical distance, have contributed to the reshaping of human habits. The increased speed of communication, spatial compression, and the growing possibilities of new high-speed technologies, are among the major features of rapid changes leading the present-day highly interconnected and ‘shrinking’ world. In this context, social practices can benefit from newly emerged spaces of social interaction, which have deeply modified the contours of social space, cultural communities, and — last but not least — scholarly activities.

In this paper, I engage in a reflection on some of the shifts and innovations brought about by the process of globalisation in philosophical practices. Doing philosophy in times of globalization comes with a plethora of new opportunities, yet it also gives rise to novel issues which need to be further assessed. More specifically, I will focus on two features of current philosophical practices, namely *collaboration* and *pluralism*: doing philosophy has always involved collaboration and pluralism, yet the process of globalisation has widely contributed an unprecedented increase in collaborative research works, as well as a dramatic enhancement of philosophical pluralism.

Collaboration is traditionally intrinsic to philosophical practices, and evidence of the beneficial effects of philosophers’ discussions with their peers and students are ubiquitous. For example, as an undergraduate student in philosophy I learned with amazement of the fruitful intellectual exchanges via cards and letters between early analytic philosophers. Some of these letters have contributed to the most revolutionary developments in the field, as in the case of Bertrand Russell’s letters to Alexius Meinong,³ the exchange between Gottlob Frege and the young Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the letter by which, in 1902, Russell delivered to Frege the bad news of the discovery of the set-theoretical paradox (the so-called ‘Russell paradox’ or ‘Zermelo-Russell paradox’) in Frege’s logical work.⁴ Yet, in the course of the last few decades, collaborative activities in philosophy have undergone some major changes, including the philosophers’ exploration of

new forms of collaboration across disciplines. Another significant change that has occurred in recent decades is the ongoing phenomenon of increased philosophical pluralism: many new subfields and directions of research in philosophy have emerged, and this process of intra-disciplinary diversification is also contributing to the reshaping of current practices in philosophy.

Lastly, I will suggest that the current status of philosophical practices, characterised with high degrees of diversity and increased levels of both intra-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration, encourages and urges metaphilosophical reflection: questions about the disciplinary identity, as well as about the philosophical method, have now become more salient than ever.

2. (Increased) Collaboration

Practices and research activities in philosophy appear to be far more diversified than only a few years ago: current methodologies vary through philosophical traditions and subfields, and brand-new directions of investigation (e.g., experimental philosophy) have either introduced novel strategies of inquiry, or have implemented in philosophical practices research paradigms typical of other disciplines, and especially of the social sciences. Moreover, the attitude of interdisciplinarity and research networking distinctive of the natural and social sciences, is becoming a rising trend in the humanities as well. Intra-disciplinary collaborations occur not only among scholars from within the same research area, but also across different ones. For instance, it is not uncommon for analytic philosophers to collaborate with phenomenologists: perhaps as a natural consequence of philosophical pluralism, progressively more research work is conducted with the joint effort of philosophers possessing dramatically different background and training. Other times, philosophers engage in forms of cross-disciplinary collaboration, where researchers with the same goal bring together very different knowledge and skills. Cross-disciplinary collaboration is especially fruitful for naturalistic philosophy,

FILOSOFIA E ESTUDOS RELIGIOSOS

and some regard it as highly beneficial to the enhancement of explanatory frameworks and of their internal coherence. A couple of decades ago, and somehow ahead of his times, Paul Thagard argued in his 'Collaborative Knowledge' that philosophy *should* become more collaborative, adding that especially naturalistic philosophy could benefit from increased collaboration, because '[...] serious naturalistic philosophy requires knowledge of work in cognate fields, and since acquiring deep knowledge of fields such as psychology is a difficult and time-consuming task, philosophers can greatly benefit from collaboration with experts in those fields' (Thagard, 1997, p. 258).

Philosophers' cross-disciplinary collaboration is also ideal in cognitive science, which is *per se* an interdisciplinary area, yet it should not be understood as limited to it. Evidence of increasing levels of both intra-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration in philosophy also include the growing percentage of multi-authored papers. While the majority of the philosophy papers published in recent years are (still) single authored, works with two or more authors have become much more the norm than the exception: undeniably, collaboration in the humanities is still far less common than in the sciences, yet doing philosophy — an activity traditionally regarded as solitary by nature — is slowly but steadily turning into a collaborative enterprise.

By taking into consideration the different backgrounds and roles of collaborators, Thagard (Ibid., pp. 245–246) suggests the distinction of at least four kinds of collaboration: i) employer/employee collaboration (the weakest form of collaboration that does not lead to co-authorship of the employee); ii) teacher/apprentice collaboration (the kind of collaboration, asymmetric for knowledge and status, that occurs between professors/researchers and graduate students); iii) peer-similar collaboration; and (iv) peer-different collaboration. Kind (iv) refers to what I here call 'cross-disciplinary collaboration', whereas kind (iii) refers to the collaboration oc-

curing among '[...] researchers of similar knowledge, interests, and status. [...] Of course, "similar" does not mean "identical": any two researchers even in the same field will have somewhat different knowledge and skills to bring to a collaboration. But we can place in this category collaborations that involve people whose training has been substantially alike.' (Ibid., p. 246)

Given the rapidly increasing levels of pluralism characterising the disciplinary area of philosophy, a further distinction in the forms of collaboration is needed. In fact, it is crucial to note that often philosophers working in different subfields have very little in common with respect to knowledge, training, expertise, research interests, and methodology. In other words, peer collaboration within the same discipline (i.e., philosophy) does not necessarily entail 'similarity' of background knowledge, research interest, and expertise. In fact, it is not uncommon to find that a specific subfield in philosophy is closer to one or more extra-philosophical disciplines than to other philosophical subfields. Thus, as puzzling as it is, in some cases cross-disciplinary collaborations may turn out to be less demanding and complicated than intra-disciplinary ones.

In light of the previous reflection, I propose a revision of Thagard's distinction of four kinds of collaboration by considering the 'peer-similar' category as twofold: on the one hand there are genuine peer-similar collaborations occurring among peers working in the very same philosophical field and philosophical tradition, and therefore sharing similar expertise, knowledge, and methodology; on the other hand, there are collaborations among philosophers who do *not* share similar expertise, knowledge, and methodology. Different from Thagard, I call the former kind of collaboration 'intra-field collaboration', by which I intend the collaborative work among peers sharing similar expertise and methodology; whereas I refer to the latter by the expression 'intra-disciplinary collaboration': that is, the form of collaborative research among peer philosophers who work and

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

belong to different disciplinary fields, and therefore do not necessarily share the same expertise, knowledge, and methodology.

The proposed distinction between cross-disciplinary, intra-disciplinary, and intra-field collaboration is especially useful for my further reflection on the phenomenon of increased philosophical pluralism. By keeping such distinctions in mind, it will also be easier to identify some distinct features composing the complex problem of the philosophical method in contemporary philosophical practices. Indeed, both intra-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaborations present researchers with equally salient methodological challenges, while urging scholars to invest a great deal of time and effort to understand each other's methodology, as well as field/discipline specific terminology and theoretical frameworks.

3. (Increased) Pluralism

Philosophy departments worldwide are nowadays characterised by an unprecedented level of pluralism. 'Philosophical pluralism' refers to the variety and diversity of philosophical practices. Such an expression, made available to the wider public by Robert Nozick (1981–1989), is also commonly — and controversially — used for denoting philosophy departments that feature scholars working in various traditions (e.g., hermeneutics, phenomenology, analytic philosophy, Chinese philosophy, comparative philosophy, etc.), as opposed to 'mainstream analytic philosophy' departments.⁵ The expression 'philosophical pluralism' was first used in the 1970s to capture the historically unique and fragmented landscape, mirrored in the great part of the philosophy Departments both within and outside the USA. The process of fragmentation of philosophy into several subfields started to gradually emerge in the second half of the last century, and it was destined to quickly increase. The final index of the development of philosophical pluralism is offered by the Macmillan *The Encyclopedia of Phi-*

losophy, a major and comprehensive English-language source for philosophy. The first edition was edited by Paul Edwards and appeared in 1967; only a few decades later, in 2006, the second edition included more than 450 new articles. In the 'Preface' to the second edition, the editor Donald Borchert explains that the new inclusions are a reflection of the changes that happened within the discipline in the course of only four decades:

The presence of all this new material is a clear indication of the vigorous and innovative philosophical activity that has occurred within the discipline since the Encyclopedia made its debut almost four decades ago. Entirely new subfields have appeared such as feminist philosophy, the philosophy of sex and love, and applied ethics. [...] In addition, enhanced cultural diversity is evident in the major space we have provided for topics relating to Buddhist philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Islamic philosophy, and Indian philosophy. [...] Importantly, we have retained and expanded the entries on Japanese philosophy, Latin American philosophy, and Russian philosophy, and have added entries on African philosophy and Korean philosophy. [...] The very large number of new philosophical bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and journals that have been published in a multitude of languages during the last half century testifies not only to the vitality of philosophy but also to the increasing cultural diversity on its landscape. (Borchert, 2006, XIII)

The increasing degree of philosophical pluralism contributed to making the issue of disciplinary identity and boundaries urgent. The discussion of disciplinary boundaries was not only aimed at the definition and defence of the borders between philosophy and neighbouring fields (e.g., history, psychology, sociology, etc.), but also at the identification of the exact domain

FILOSOFIA E ESTUDOS RELIGIOSOS

for each of the newly emerged subfields, research programmes, and areas within philosophy. Pluralism comes with many challenges, including the tendency of newly emerging subfields in philosophy to have to fight against generalised anti-integrative and suspicious attitudes of fellow professionals. Philosophical pluralism has been, and still is, somehow tolerated (at least, abstractly) because of general considerations that, among other aspects, students may benefit from the exposure to different ways of doing philosophy in various places and at different times. While it is easily agreed that pluralism may offer some advantages, labour division and inconsistent methodology lay the field open to heated controversy, and it sometimes leads to attitudes of diffuse suspicion towards fellow practitioners from non-mainstream philosophical traditions. The most extreme expression of such an attitude is the accusation that some philosophers are actually *not doing philosophy*:

As if being overlooked were not enough, thinkers who do not take the starting point or fail to follow the procedures currently in vogue are denounced as not doing philosophy. There is hardly a greater insult to philosophers than to be denied the benefit of standing as a respected colleague. Yet exclusion has become standard in the profession in the Twentieth Century, supported by such movements as logical positivism that declare much of what philosophers say literally nonsensical. Even those who manage to move past juvenile charges are quite prepared to relegate much philosophy to psychology or literature, and to treat colleagues who think in those ways with condescension.

(Lachs, 2004, p. 6)

Suspicion and dismissal, in the form of either intentional ignoring or active oblivion, sometimes turned into derision. For instance, Carnap (1932) would exclude from philosophy all those scholars

not proceeding in accordance with the method of logical analysis, and for decades other philosophers corroborated this attitude out of the belief that to do philosophy without the language of *Principia Mathematica* is totally useless. While the attitude of exclusion seems to have mainly been attributed to philosophers working in the analytic tradition, it is actually pervasive of the discipline and distributed, at different degrees, across all groups (e.g., phenomenologists may believe that only language descriptive of human experience is warranted, and so on). So far, the dispute on pluralism has been mainly conducted within Western philosophy, yet — as suggested a couple of decades ago by Philip Quinn — odds are that we have now entered a new phase, which extends the terms of the discussion as to include philosophical traditions from the East:

The more inclusive pluralism I favour would consist of conversation that contains many more non-Western philosophical voices. We have much to learn about and from philosophical theology of medieval Islam, Indian logic and metaphysics, Buddhist philosophy of mind and language, Confucian and Taoist ethics and social philosophy, Zen spirituality and other non-Western traditions. Changing demographics suggest that our students will increasingly want us to teach them about such traditions. And the waxing economic power of Asia provides argument from prudence for the conclusion that Americans ought to be learning a lot more than they currently are about Asian cultures, including their philosophical traditions.
(Quinn, 1996, p. 171)

Quinn's reflection highlights one of the ways — perhaps the most relevant one as long as the current decade is concerned — in which globalisation has contributed to the enhancement of philosophical pluralism: philosophical practices are now fully displaying an extraordinary multiplication of varieties

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

and traditions that were previously *geographically insulated*. The current *status quo* of the discipline, enriched with the absolute novelty of a multitude of approaches and traditions, can only properly be understood within the context of globalisation. Graham Priest, for example, suggests the idea that the discipline is moving towards a new phase of ‘true globalisation of philosophy’:

I speculate that the 21st Century will see, for the first time, the true globalisation of philosophy. Whether that will exacerbate the fragmentation of philosophy, or whether it will allow the development of exciting new syntheses, or whether something entirely different will emerge, only time will tell.

(Priest, 2003, p. 99)

It is not straightforward to predict whether or not such a process has already reached its peak, and what the future developments within philosophy will be.

4. The Problem of Philosophical Method

Increased levels of collaboration and of pluralism are phenomena that manifest themselves as intertwined in various ways, and they make the reflection about integrated methodological principles compelling. Indeed, cross-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary collaboration both entail non-homogeneous methodology by definition; in addition to that, methodological pluralism seems to be embedded in philosophical pluralism, insofar as each individual subfield in philosophy establishes itself on the basis of specific methodological principles and practices. In sum, the effects of globalisation in philosophy — here defined in terms of increased collaboration and increased pluralism — and the lack of a homogeneous philosophical method are but two sides of the same coin. It is perhaps for such reasons that the discourse about *the* method in philosophy has now become far less central than in past centuries.

Is it therefore legitimate to conclude that doing philosophy in times of globalisation entails an unreluctantly embraced methodological pluralism? On the one side, the promotion of methodological pluralism goes hand in hand with inclusive and supportive attitudes towards philosophical pluralism. On the other side, the possibility of engaging in collaborative research of either cross-disciplinary or intra-disciplinary kind is often dependent upon the homogeneity of research methodologies, or at least it depends on existing conditions for methodological commensurability. There also are practical obstacles to the plain endorsement of methodological pluralism: quality guardianship criteria are fundamental to the well-being of the academic community, and standards for academic work — theoretically and pragmatically — depend upon clearly established methodological principles and practices. Such standards are set by the academic community as to measure and evaluate the quality of research projects and outputs, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of students and peers. Since standards are approach-specific, in order to accommodate diversity different quality standards are needed. Yet, there is disagreement about what features should count as evidence of academic quality, and such disagreement is a reflection of deeper problems stemming from the persistent division in perspectives about *how* philosophy *ought* to be done.

Note that the consideration that methodological pluralism is theoretically and pragmatically problematic should not encourage us to regard philosophical pluralism as intrinsically troublesome, and should not lead us to conclude that it is just an obstacle to be removed out of methodological concerns. Yet, the methodological problems surrounding philosophical pluralism provide us with compelling reasons to resurrect the metaphilosophical reflection on the method by addressing questions — somewhat marginalised in contemporary

FILOSOFIA E ESTUDOS RELIGIOSOS

philosophical discussions — such as: What is the (or ‘the best’) method in philosophy? What kind of data should philosophy be concerned with? How to compare multiple philosophical theories? How should one understand philosophical disagreement? What are the most general methodological criteria for setting quality standards in philosophy?

The regained saliency of metaphilosophical questions concerning philosophical method, rather than being an unwelcome disturbance resulting from the jointly occurring phenomena of increased pluralism and cross/intra-disciplinary collaboration, is perhaps the most fertile side-effect of doing philosophy in times of globalisation. **RC**

Note: A previous version of this paper was presented at the 1st Lisbon–Macao Philosophy Symposium held in December 2019 at the University of Lisbon. I am grateful to all the symposiasts for the insightful exchange of ideas and their feedback on my work. This paper is my first work about the impact of globalisation on philosophical practices, and it was puzzling to write it during my long period of self-isolation and quarantine in Italy, at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic seems to relegate the phenomenon of globalisation to the past.

NOTES

- 1 The most relevant works shaping the debate in contemporary social theory include Harvey (1989; 1996), Giddens (1990), Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton (1999).
- 2 Globalisation is often associated with the notion of ‘deteritorialization’: the ‘territory’ in which human activities take place is not a geographically identifiable location, but rather a ‘social space’ in which forms of non-territorial activities occur (see, Scholte, 1996). Yet, theorists also analyse the multifaceted process of globalisation in terms of ‘social interconnectedness’, of ‘speed’, and of the overall ‘pace’ of social activities.
- 3 The intellectual exchange between Russell and Meinong

concerns some of the most fundamental philosophical topics in early analytic philosophy, such as reference, non-existing objects, and intentionality. On the so-called ‘Russell-Meinong debate’, and the role of letters in framing the terms of the debate, see Farrell Smith (1985).

- 4 The relevant correspondence between Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege is collected in van Heijenoort (1967).
- 5 The objection might be raised that even mainstream philosophy is intrinsically pluralistic, given that there is no limit to the conclusions that may be possibly defended, and that there is no agreement on the most fundamental metaphysical or methodological assumptions.

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Borchert, Donald, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Macmillan, 2006.
- Carnap, Rudolf. 'On the Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language.' In *Logical Positivism*, edited by Ayer I. J. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1932.
- Farrell Smith, Janet. 'The Russell-Meinong Debate'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3, 305–350. 1985.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Harvey, David. *Justice, Nature, & the Geography of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- . *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- Held, David, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton. *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Lachs, John. 'The Future of Philosophy.' *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 2, 5–14, 78. 2004.
- Nozick, Robert. *Philosophical Explanations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Nozick, Robert. *The Examined Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989.
- Priest, Graham. 'Where Is Philosophy at the Start of the Twenty-First Century?'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 85–99, 103. 2003.
- Quinn, Phillip L. 'Pluralism in Philosophy Departments.' *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 2, 70, 168–172. 1996.
- Scholte, Jan Aart. 'Beyond the Buzzword: Towards a Critical Theory of Globalization.' In *Globalization: Theory and Practice*, edited by Eleonore Koman and Gillians Young. London: Pinter, 1996.
- Thagard, Paul. 'Collaborative Knowledge.' *NOÛS*, 31:2, 242–261. 1997.
- Van Heijenoort, Jean, ed. *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879–1931*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1967.

