

PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT: INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL R. HERBERT

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Abstract

The following interview touches the interaction of philosophy and its canonical history from the work and experience of Dr. Daniel R. Herbert, he generously connects the dots of the theoretical and practical philosophy as well as the strands of the

history of philosophy and the importance of the tradition in the understanding of ourselves and our society.

Keywords: History of philosophy, philosophical inquiry, practical philosophy, theoretical philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Daniel R. Herbert is Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Sheffield, UK. He has lectured in Kings College, London and participated in a significant number of publications related to modern philosophy and history of philosophy, though he is also interested in Pragmatism and the development of American Philosophy both in the US and Latin-America. He was in 2018-2019 Humanist Visiting Professor Fellow at UPAEP University, Puebla, Mexico.

Reyes-Cárdenas: Dan, let me cut to the chase and directly ask you: how did you come across philosophy and how did you become interested on it?

Herbert: It's a bit of a long story but hopefully not too boring... I started my interest as a History student at the University of Sheffield, having done my A-levels particularly focusing in Modern European History. I understood history very well, but then I realised that the period that was confusing me was the passing from the pre-enlightenment to the enlightenment, and I started figuring out that this had to deal more deeply with politics and history but most of all with philosophical issues. I became aware that people like Kant, Hegel, Marx or Hume were all too relevant, and so I realised that a good understanding of this period will make necessary an understanding of the philosophy behind it. And that is how I decided to pursue a better understanding of those philosophers. So in brief, it was originally from my interest in history and the intelligent grasp of the Modern period is what made me love to philosophy.

Reyes-Cárdenas: Lovely stuff! Now that we have come down to philosophy: would you mind to give us your own definition of philosophy or maybe provide us of a general idea so as to understand what the field of philosophy deals with?

Herbert: That is a very, very good question and I mean, very often when a philosopher asks what is philosophy they give an answer that itself is a philosophical question...

Reyes-Cárdenas: Indeed!

Herbert: I suppose what I might say in reply to that is that different philosophers have different views about what philosophy is, and what its relationship is to mathematics, to science, or to sociology for example, and all other branches of study. But one thing I would like to say about it is that normally philosophers have a particular relationship with their own history. So for instance, you won't find it being as common that scientists and mathematicians will study their canonical

texts as much as philosophers will return back to them. It will be a bit odd, I suppose, for contemporary scientists to study the working period of Plato or Aristotle, but of course, those works for contemporary philosophers are just as important as, you know, work made in the last fifty years or so, if not more important! So I think philosophy it centres around entrenched problems that had been discussed since Plato and Aristotle. Themes concerning justice, the good of the soul, God, the nature of being, the nature of knowledge. Those have been addressed in different ways by different people throughout generations of philosophy. But one thing they all have in common is that they keep returning back to these old texts and seek what new they can get out, and hopefully contribute to that tradition themselves.

Reyes-Cárdenas: So according to what you've just said philosophers take on account these so-called big questions, they also have a specific way of doing it. So what would you say a philosopher does as her normal activity? How would you characterise a philosopher's work as opposed to other lines of research and study?

Herbert: Well, I suppose one thing that differentiates philosophy from say, natural science or the like is that you won't find philosophers doing to the Large Hadron Collider or something like that to find their answers... I still hope there are some philosophers out there! but then they would not be performing a hands-on experiment or that sort of thing. So philosophy tends to involve more with the conceptual analysis and investigation of what's involved in the concepts in question. Thus for instance I mentioned above the idea of 'justice' when we were talking about the trouble of Plato and Socrates discussing a great deal and trying to understand what is the nature of justice and that been a concept that has been with us throughout the history of philosophy. There we are trying to understand, consider, ruminate upon this concept of justice: different people had made different contributions and different arguments about it. Very crucially philosophy depends and thrives upon arguments with their premises and reasons for reaching certain conclusions and what have you... And so it's more about the understanding and analysis

of arguments and the analysis of concepts that it is to do with actually going out into the world measuring things, weighing things, taking surveys or what have you...

Reyes-Cárdenas: So, even though philosophical ideas and inquiry seem quite far from our practical life, they seem to have -from what you've said- a very important bearing and impact in our practical lives and in the functioning of the full of society, right?

Herbert: I quite agree, I mean, it's perhaps all the more of a reason developed in academic history that philosophy is quite distant, like a separated notation... and we realise that when we talk about and stick to, like we were, mentioning earlier the concept of 'justice', and we realise that includes relations to 'freedom' and what have you... and especially the times we are living at the moment demand an understanding of these concepts and that's very very important indeed... I mean, we know that Marx of course famously said: "philosophers interpret the world, but the important thing is to change it" ... well, Marx might have a point there but, the proof against is that we need to interpret and understand the world if we aim to change it at all properly...

Reyes-Cárdenas: Absolutely, you need philosophy to make sense of where do you want to direct towards your practical life...

Herbert: Indeed, philosophers make important contributions and have done try this for a long time and in consequence we have images to understand and organise our world.

Reyes-Cárdenas: Now, you've mentioned that you're having a number of projects involving the history of philosophy and, as you know, our faculty here gives a prominent place to that activity here... but contrary to what we do, it seems to be a rather forgotten activity in other philosophy departments no matter if they're considered continental or analytic... therefore... I would like to hear what would you say is a good reason to focus in this activity?

Herbert: Well, to speak personally, before I came to UPAEP I haven't had done a great deal in the medieval philosophy or in the ancient philosophy areas; as I was saying my main area was the modern period and to the enlightenment starting from Descartes... But since I attended some lectures here I can tell that my understanding of the importance of these period to understand the world has grown enormously, I can use this as an example of a good reason to approach history: one can piece together the different ingredients of an intellectual context, and from there cast clarity on the important ideas that are at play.

Reyes-Cárdenas: Dan what was the topic of your PhD thesis? Could you tell us an abstract of the work you endeavoured there?

Herbert: Of Course, the abstract of my thesis concentrated my work like this: The thesis examines and compares the philosophies of Immanuel Kant and Charles Sanders Peirce in terms of their differing positions on the justificatory grounds of the classification of sensible phenomena according to a list of irreducibly general concepts, or 'categories'. Here it is argued that, contrary to 'transcendentalist' interpretations of his position (the most compelling of which is advocated by Karl-Otto Apel), Peirce does not attempt to ground the reality of his categories in a counterpart to Kant's Transcendental Deduction. Instead, Peirce is shown to maintain that the objective

validity of the categories can only possibly be justified *a posteriori*, by appeal to the results of our efforts at achieving lasting consensus by means of scientific inquiry.

As such, Peirce is held to depart from Kant by refusing to endorse the use of transcendental arguments to explain our entitlement to assert the reality of the categories. However, the Kantian ancestry of his philosophical outlook is nonetheless claimed to be evident in Peirce's aspiration to construct an architectonic system of philosophy organised in terms of a set of categories originally identified by means of logical analysis. Further Kantian influences in his position are also remarked upon in discussion of Peirce's appropriation and development of ideas concerning 'schemata' and 'regulative norms'.

Throughout the thesis it is argued that Peirce makes a number of departures from the Critical philosophy which relieve him of any demand to give a counterpart to Kant's Transcendental Deduction. By denying that there is any cognitively significant function for those representations which Kant describes as 'sensible intuitions', Peirce is able to circumvent any requirement to explain the possibility of co-operative interaction between sensible and conceptual form. Moreover, since Peirce denies that there are any synthetic a priori judgements, he is not required to explain how they are possible (Herbert 2013).

Reyes-Cárdenas: Dan could you tell us a bit more about your present projects, and doing so, how your connection with UPAEP has been fertile and helpful?

Herbert: From October 2018 to April 2019 it was my privilege to be affiliated with UPAEP during a Visiting Humanities Fellowship hosted by the Faculty of Philosophy. Upon my arrival in Puebla I was welcomed into a lively and supportive community of teachers and researchers, where conferences and other research activities were frequent, well-organised and stimulating. Throughout the duration of my fellowship I found staff keen to discuss common areas of research and was provided with opportunities to teach and guest lecture on modules with the Departments of Philosophy, Psychology and Education. I was especially impressed by the culture of cross-

departmental activity at UPAEP, and it was a pleasure to discover points of common interest with researcher in other departments and to participate in events hosted by the Departments of Design and Education.

Reyes-Cárdenas: and if you do not mind me asking more specifically, how was your interaction with the philosophers?

Herbert: The Department of Philosophy proved a highly active and invigorating research environment while I was in Puebla, and I was extremely impressed by the numerous workshops, conferences and talks, connecting researchers from institutions across the world. The founding conference of the Sociedad Latinoamericana Peirce in March 2019 was a particular highlight, further establishing an international network of pragmatism scholarship and admirably exemplifying the Peircean ideal of a generous community of inquiry, examining questions from a variety of perspectives and in a spirit of mutual support. I have benefitted enormously from my affiliation with UPAEP, and am extremely grateful for the warm reception which I met with at this institution, and for the endless opportunities which it provided, not only to discuss my existing research interests with fellow enthusiasts of American pragmatism and classical German philosophy, but also to broaden my academic horizons in interdisciplinary directions and to include medieval and ancient philosophy.

Reyes-Cárdenas: Dan that is very helpful, thanks indeed... Now, you have been very generous with your time but I would like to still push you a little bit more to tell us something about your forthcoming projects, could please expand on your plans?

Herbert: As a result of my fellowship at UPAEP, I am currently developing my research interests to include topics in philosophical anthropology and philosophical theology, particularly from an

Aristotelian and Thomistic perspective, following an especially fascinating event on the divine attributes, involving an international panel of speakers. I am now especially keen to improve my knowledge of ancient Greek, Latin and Spanish in order to better access philosophical texts in these languages and to participate further in a global research community.

Reyes-Cárdenas: Dan you have been very generous with your time and conversation, thank you for your enthusiastic response to our interview request.

Herbert: my pleasure, I look forward for more opportunities of such interaction.

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