CASTAÑEDA, Hector-Neri, *On Philosophical Method.* Indiana : NOUS Publications, Number 1, 1980.

Here is a rich *little* book on philosophy: condensed and compact, teasing and dissatisfying, revealing and stimulating – in short, a book for philosophers and students alike. It is a book worth reading and certainly worth thinking about. Castañeda, in a matter of about 120 pages, attempts to reflect systematically upon the nature of philosophical methodology by relating it to certain internal moments in the history of philosophy.

As the title indicates, Castañeda is concerned with the study of philosophical method. This does not mean that there is *the* method, something that either ought to be or is used whenever one does philosophy. What Castañeda wants to do is to study "*one* method of philosophy, one suitable for one type of philosophical program" (p. 13). Such a program is, in his characterisation, a theory which attempts to solve a cluster of philosophical problems in some specific domain incorporating, as it were, those partial theories which were proposed to account for a smaller set of problems in that domain.

There are, broadly speaking, four types of philosophical activities. Of these, the first three correspond to phases or stages of theorizing. It is almost as if these phases denote the maturation or the growth-process of philosophical theories requiring methods appropriate to these phases. The general study of the nature and appropriateness of philosophical methods represents the fourth type of activity – *meta-philosophy* as Castañeda calls it.

What are the first three phases in a theory-growth ? To begin with, there is *proto-philosophical* theorizing. Here, the goal is one of distilling criteria of adequacy – on the basis of collection of data – that theories have to meet. It is obvious that proto-philosophy is dependent upon the domain chosen, the nature and specification of the data, notions about philosophical theory etc.

The second phase is that of *sym-philosophical* theorizing. Here, the task is one of generating systematic theories: "The main desideratum of our time is systematic pluralistic philosophical activity, that is: the construction of many different and very comprehensive theories." (p. 14)

This takes us to the third phase i.e., to *dia-philosophy*. Here, the "ultimate aim is the comparitive study of maximal theories in order to establish, through isomorphisms among them, a system of invariances" (p. 15)

Castañeda is interested in the method adequate for studying "both the most general structures of the world one finds oneself in and the most pervasive patterns of one's experience and thinking of that world" (p. 13). This is, as he calls it, *primary ontology* or *phenomenological ontology*. The *status* of these patterns of experience i.e., whether or not there is correspondence between the patterns of experience and the structures of the world is a question that Castañeda does not consider. For, that would take one into *metaphysical ontology;* primary ontology could be considered in relative independence from the former.

The basic 'data' for primary ontology is of two types. Firstly, it is empirical: "philosophical data... are provided by each of the entities we find in the universe and each of their properties and relations. Ordinary facts of experience, general facts discovered by observation, and more general facts postulated by science, are all philosophical" (p. 32).

Secondly, the data is *also* linguistic because of the relationship that exists between one's language and one's experience of the world. Though language *moulds* one's experience it does not, claims Castañeda, *limit* one's experience. In this context, there is a brief discussion of the "private language" arguments of Wittgenstein and his followers (p. 38–47).

Castañeda baptises his methodological proposal as "empirical semantico-syntactical structuralism". He develops his view by contrasting it with the views that prevailed in the earlier periods of classical analytical philosophy: the "definitional methodology" of Moore and Frege (p. 58–75); the "methodology of syntactic atomism" of Austin and Wittgenstein (p. 87–99). Here, as elsewhere, Castañeda's discussion and criticism of other views remain, for understandable reasons, teasingly brief.

Against this historical background follows a sketch of some of the features of Castañeda's empirical semantico-syntactical structuralism (quite a mouthful !). The methodological characteristics are not formulated so as to enable one to develop an algorithm for philosophising; they are heuristics, purely regulative in nature.

These features are further elucidated by means of discussing some actual philosophical problems. The book concludes with a discussion about mathematisation of philosophical theories with a warning about premature attempts at mathematising. The role of set-theory in modelling ontology is discussed within this context.

Castañeda ends his work on the following thought: "Philosophy just is different things to different persons. Philosophy is diaphilosophical all the way through" (p. 133). Perhaps, this message is the best starting point to make an observation or two about the book.

The first observation will be about the relationship between sym-philosophy and dia-philosophy. The pluralism of Castañeda, advocating as it does the creation of different sym-philosophies, does not just countenance people disagreeing with each other. It is not a mere recognition that human beings have a "right" to think, to borrow Russell's example, that they are not people but are merely poached eggs. In other words, it is not just the Carnapian principle of

tolerance that Castañeda is canvassing for. (p. 20, 127). Rather, he makes this 'principle of tolerance' a necessary precondition for dia-philosophy. In order to compare theories one *needs* different theories to compare.

That is not all. Emphasis is placed upon building systematic theories: "... philosophical exercises of analysis that focus on small issues are not very valuable by themselves... Each small exercise of philosophical analysis has to make a great number of assumptions which must perforce remain implicit. They are important steps in the developing of a major philosophical system only if they are connected to other similar exercises. In short, every piecemeal analysis and every theory must be expanded into larger and larger theories" (p. 20). This development of theories into larger ones, which allows of distinct degrees of growth, would ultimately culminate in a unified system of philosophical theory which is rich and comprehensive: "comprehensiveness is required to approximate a worthwhile vision of the most pervasive patterns of the world we seek to understand" (p. 103).

Creation of different theories presupposes pluralism at the level of sub-theories: pluralism encourages a further creation of systematic, or 'totalistic', theories. Once they are formulated, however, the task becomes one of drawing invariances (or creating a dia-philosophy) across different sym-philosophies. And this is where my problem begins !

My problem can be formulated simply thus: Is pluralism an attitude that one assumes during all the stages of a theory-growth ? Or, does it have a more restricted scope ? If the former, what are the consequences ? In order to explain my problem, let me begin with a pluralistic situation, which is a description from a philosophical meta-perspective, where two groups (to keep it simple) are working towards building up two maximal systems, two sym-philosophies. How, at their object-level, *do they relate to each other* across their 'intended' systems ?

Case 1: They do not communicate at all: when they do, their respective research proceeds as if they are oblivious to each other. They "agree to disagree" – Carnapian principle of tolerance *at its best* – and pursue their respective research. How do they appear to each other and to those outside of it ? Or, how do they characterize each other from the meta-level *specific* to their object-levels ? An example, or two, would help us appreciate the point.

The Marxist critics of political economy and the neo-classical economists – how do they characterize each other ? How do the mainstream anglo-saxon philosophers look at the phenomenologists and Heideggerians ? Or, what did the medical world say of the Chinese when the latter turned their back to "scientific medicine" and took to acupuncture seriously ? What do behaviourists say of Freudians ?

In each of these cases there is but one epithet to describe the attitude of adverseries: *dogmatism*. They are unable to discuss with each other, unable to criticize each other and change each others' ideas as a result of such a discussion. Hence, they are dogmatists, irrationalists, un-enlightened or what-have-you. (These adjectives are used by the protagonists to describe the 'other'). In other words, pluralism at a meta-level must necessarily engender (or is created by) dogmatism – a refusal to change ideas as a result of criticisms – at the object-level.

If we want this, our suggestion to philosophers, scientists would have to

be this: *be dogmatic !* Do not change your ideas or theories, no matter what the criticisms are. It is best if you do not discuss at all: if you do, ignore the criticisms your adversaries give of your theories. If pluralism is rational and if it entails dogmatism then being rational entails being dogmatic. The prospect of a dia-philosophy must be contingent upon dogmatism, if we want many sym-philosophies without which there can be no dia-philosophy.

Case 2: How is the situation when the groups do communicate ? They criticize each others' theories – before they "grow up" to yield us different sym-philosophies – and change their beliefs as a result. The consequence is clear: there will be no dia-philosophy. Once again, some examples might be illustrative.

It is like post-Copernican science displacing Ptolemian astronomy. Or, post-Vesalian medicine spelling the demise of Galenism. Or, nearer to our own time, pathological anatomy winning out against romantic medicine and homeopathy. Examples like these are a million. But, what is the point ?

The point is that different sym-philosophies do not grow side-by-side as good neighbours are supposed to. As a result there is *no question of pluralism* at the level of sym-philosophies. Even at the level of smaller sub-domains – within one sym-philosophy – pluralism has a very short life. It is one sym-philosophy all the way through: a sym-philosophy of a time claims to be the dia-philosophy as well. It is very, very unlikely that a displaced syn-philosophy (say, Hippocratic medicine) would ever regain its earlier splendour (like, say, replacing "scientific medicine").

In this case, what are we to tell the philosophers, scientists ? *Be intolerant* of dissent and disagreement ! Criticize each others' ideas fiercely until only one is left in the field. There can be but *one* 'dia-philosophy' which is also the sym-philosophy of the time: to the extent that there are other people trying to build up *different* sym-philosophies deny to these people, if you can, access to research funds, brow-beat them, side-line them, etc.

Dia-philosophy, of Castañeda, appears doomed either way. Either dia-philosophy breeds dogmatism or it destroys pluralism thus becoming a mere pipe-dream.

Neither the empirical history of the sciences, nor the empirical history of the philosophies provide a model for the enterprise that Castañeda sketches. There is, however, a model for Castañeda's program of different sym-enterprises and one dia-system. There is *one model* which consists of "maximally consistent" sym-systems, dogmatic and pluralistic from different perspectives, "ripe" for a dia-systemic enterprise: *Religion.*

Philosophies and sciences can meet Castañeda's demand by becoming *'religions'* by acquiring whatever 'property' it is by means of which some thing becomes a religion. The history of religions (*most:* not all !) is also a history of crusades, holy-wars, inquisitions and *jihads.* It is a history also of proselytisation; of whole-sale extermination of people when 'conversions' failed. Only thus have we arrived *unintended,* at a point in time where a dia-enterprise has become possible. May be, Castañeda is saying this. May be he *is* saying that battles in philosophy and sciences, like in religions, are fought in the name of "truth" and that it is time we recognise their essential similarity (if not identity !).

This situation should alert us to the possibility that, perhaps, the problem

has been wrongly posed. It might very well be the case that we will have to recast the problem entirely.

It is perhaps more interesting to speak of maturity of theories much the same way as in speaking about mathematisation of theories. It is very likely that we will have to speak of the stages (or units) in the development of theories: stages where they are not 'ripe' for discussions: stages where they are discussed; stages where they are contrasted and compared; stages where collective work is done; stages where choices are made; etc. (All of this would apply to philosophical theories to the extent there is no difference between them and scientific theories). Pluralism, in this case, would be a *relevant* description of *one stage* or one level only; to apply it to other stages or levels should be viewed as a category-mistake. (The stages or levels should be seen as specific cognitive or epistemic phases). This means that pluralism is not an attitude that one assumes during all the stages of a theory-growth; it has a more restricted scope, it is more definite in nature.

Whatever the proposal that one might eventually choose, any attempt at developing such a 'theory' of the growth of scientific theories has to fulfill two minimum conditions. One: it must help illumine the controversies in *human sciences* by being able to structure the discussion and locate the problems. Our problem today is *not* one of deciding between Einsteinian physics and Aristotelian physics; it is one of not even being *certain whether there are rival theories in human sciences* (whether Freudian theory is a rival to Skinnerian behaviourism or to Piagetian epistemology; whether Marx's theory is an alternative to that of Weber or to those of Jevons, Walras and Menger; and such like); or whether they are different theories talking *about different things.* Any theory, in my opinion, which can not help us here, quite simply, is *worthless.*

Two: It must, necessarily, be done in *intimate contact* with history of sciences and history of philosophies. I can not marshall all my arguments here; so I will mention but one. *History is the richest laboratory we have.* History is, if I am allowed a hyperbole, the most exhaustive collection of *possible worlds* we can conceive of.

What I am saying, in other words, is that Castañeda's proposal – to which I am sympathetic – conceals a host of problems and distasteful similarities. And what is surprising is that Castañeda does not go deeper into the issue by taking up the history of the sciences to see what his proposal amounts to.

And this brings me to what is, perhaps, the most central weakness of the book. The book – not the author I am sure – is *singularly oblivious* to discussions in the philosophies of sciences. On the one hand, Castañeda is loath to distinguish philosophy from the sciences: "Physics, the queen of sciences, studies structural aspects of maximal pervasiveness and generality among the sciences. Characteristically philosophical problems are, on the other hand, of even greater pervasiveness and generality" (p. 26). But, on the other hand, when he speaks about what philosophical (or scientific) theories are, how they are evaluated, how they are compared against each other, he blithely ignores (in this book) the discussions of the last 50 years or so !

Take, for example, his formulation of the "heuristics" or regulative principles which constitute philosophical method:

(1) gather a large collection of data;
(2) make a careful exegesis of the gathered data so as to secure points through

which the pattern sought after must pass; ...
(3) hypothesize the connnections between secured points, ...
(4) test the theorised pattern by deduction of the points distilled from the exegized from the data, ...
(5) test the theorized pattern against new data of different types and sorts,...
(6) .... etc. (p. 102).

Where it concerns the mode of working, these "principles" remind, one of 19th century discussions about scientific method: how does knowledge arise ? Does it arise inductively from a large body of "data" ? Or does it proceed from principles of reasons which structure the "data" ?

And where it is about testing theories, these principles are even vaguer than the discussions of 1920s. What are these 'data' ? To say that they are "both empirical and linguistic" is to say pretty little. What makes something into a 'data' ? What makes one bit of data more relevant than the other ? Are all bits of data equally important ? Is collection of 'data' something like stringing together of cardinal numbers or does something become a 'data' when it is already structured ? If the latter, where does this structuring come from ?

Or, again, what do "accounting for data" or "explaining the data" mean ? What does it mean, today, to say that two theories can be compared when they account for "exactly the same amount of data" and not otherwise ? What kind of a measure is proposed to measure the "amount of data" ? If we assume that two theories, within one sym-philosophy, can *somehow* be subjected to this test, what about two theories from *across* two sym-philosophies ? Could we also propose some kind of measure for this "amount of data" ? If it is possible, does it mean that these data are neutral with respect to theories ? and independent from them ?

Surely, but surely, the *greatest gain* of the last 50 years of so – in the field of philosophy of sciences – has been the realization that all these are extremely complex questions and defy any easy, glib answers ?

It is, of course, possible that philosophical 'data', philosophical 'accounting' etc., *escape* these problems by virtue of being 'philosphical'. It is not Castañeda's position because, he explicitly says that philosophy is continuous with science.

The other possibility is that Castañeda has circumvented these problems, has some kind of an answer. That answer is, in that case, not present in this book and, as a consequence, gives a picture of *happily ignoring* the existence of such problems.

It is ridiculous to ask of a slim volume to have answers to *all* the questions i.e., that it be a sym-philosophy, all on its own. But, it is the *virtue* of Castañeda's book that it raises, directly or indirectly, these kind of problems and many more that I have not been able to raise.

In summary: Castañeda's *On Philosophical Method* is an elegant, beautiful work. It is clear, coherent and rigorous. The style is simple and direct. The criticisms are sharp, without ever becoming nasty or disrespectful. The arguments aim at persuasion, never ceasing to be friendly or gentle. In other words, it shows us a lucid and original philosophical mind at work. Therefore, read it, reflect about it. Whether you agree or disagree with Castañeda, you will only be richer for it. In any case, it is a rewarding experience and you will not regret it.

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