'(DE)PARTING (FROM) THE WAYS': QUENTIN SKINNER'S LINGUISTIC CONTEXTUALISM AS CHALLENGE TO CONTEMPORARY PHILOPHY'S 'PARTING OF WAYS' CONCEPT

LUÃ N. JUNG, VICTOR B. REBELO

Universidade Estácio de Sá – Unesa, Universidade do Vale do Rio Sinos - Unisinos

lnogueirajung@gmail.com, vbrebelo@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper explores Quentin Skinner's historiographical thesis, named linguistic contextualism, as a potential challenge to the dichotomy in contemporary philosophy between the 'analytical' and 'continental' traditions. This divide, rooted in differing approaches to language and methodology, has led to labeling and categorizing philosophers into these two areas. However, Skinner's work, drawing on the ideas of R.G. Collingwood, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and John L. Austin, presents a nuanced view that defies easy classification. By emphasizing the importance of historical context and the ways language shapes philosophical inquiry, Skinner's thesis blurs the boundaries between analytical and continental philosophy. We examine Skinner's arguments and their implications for the 'parting of ways' concept, suggesting that linguistic contextualism challenges the validity of this dichotomy. Ultimately, it argues for the inclusion of linguistic contextualism as a significant alternative within contemporary philosophical discourse, particularly in discussions about metaphilosophy and the limitations of rigid categorizations.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION[1]

The present paper suggests that Quentin Skinner's historiographical thesis known as linguistic contextualism presents itself as a possible challenge to what mainstream contemporary philosophy calls the "parting of ways" (FRIEDMAN, 2000), that is, a split between two possible ways for doing philosophy: the "analytical", concerned with logical-semantical references that would give philosophy a way to answer its questions from the logical analysis of language, that consists in a linage of thought that goes from the works of Gottlob Frege to the heyday of Oxford and anglophone philosophy in general; and the "continental", where all philosophers whose theories don't fit into the shoes of the analytical method are usually included, approaching themselves, geographical and theoretically, to the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition.

Precisely because of the questions generated by this labelling approach to philosophy produced between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries onwards by these two lineages of thought, made some question if such labels still made sense, even with many philosophers and their works proving to be cases that "challenged" the "analytical" and "continental" labels. On our view, Skinner's work is one of these examples of cases that challenge the "parting of ways" concept in contemporary philosophy, precisely because his linguistic contextualism thesis is founded on the works of philosophers who, each in their own way, were also "challengers" of the same concept. The first section of this paper includes the general presentation of the works that gave the basis of linguistic contextualism and present themselves as challenges to the "analytical" and "continental" labels. That is the case of R. G. Collingwood's philosophy of history, the second moment in Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, and John L. Austin's speech acts theory. Then, we will summarily present Skinner's thesis and show how it is related to the general

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[1] We would like to thank Professor Quentin Skinner for kindly answer some questions that were fruitful for us to write the present paper.

challenge of the "parting of ways" concept. Finally, we will conclude with the argument that linguistic contextualism must be included in the lineage of thought that poses itself as challenge to use of the "parting of ways" expression, proving its limitations in regard to some relevant philosophical topics, such as the "metaphilosophical" debate, whose opponents "contextualists" and "appropriationists" often misreads Skinner's linguistic contextualism.

A MEETING OF WAYS

The twentieth century represented, especially in the 1920 e 1930 decades, a significant turnaround to philosophy. Understanding this shift is a sine qua non condition for understanding what Quentin Skinners and his peers proposed at Cambridge in the late 1960s, how this historiographical and philosophical view relates to the "parting of ways" concept, and how they are attached to the 'linguistic turn' that have changed so many aspects in contemporary philosophy.

The linguistic turn is classified as a "turnaround" to philosophy because it presented a new way in philosophizing, where language stopped being seen as a tool at the disposal of human beings (thinkers) in between their objects of analysis (thought), a philosophical paradigm that reigned Cartesian rationalism, becoming recognized as the condition of possibility for the very constitution of knowledge as such (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 128). That only occurred because something very unusual happened: the emergence of new philosophical possibilities from the ruptures and social dangers faced daily by the people. [2]

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[2] Michael Forster remembers, however, that the theses of what we call the linguistic turn were already present in authors from the continental tradition, mainly from German philosophy: "Assuming, as seems reasonable, that the expressions 'linguistic philosophy' and 'philosophy's linguistic turn' here refer mainly to the two doctrines that (1) thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language, and (2) meaning consists in the use of words, then these historical claims are false. Long before Frege, a series of important German thinkers, including Herder, Hamann, Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Hegel, had already espoused versions of these doctrines. And far from introducing them, Frege actually reacted *against* them, backing off the bold claim that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language and substituting for it the weaker claim that the dependence in question is only a contingent feature of the thought of human beings, as well as rejecting any equation of meaning with the use of words in favor of a Platonism about meaning, or 'sense'". See FORSTER, Michael

The beginning of the twentieth century was taken by the Great War, an event of unprecedented proportions and unimaginable consequences. Terry Eagleton says that in this period "science seemed to be diminished to a sterile positivism", and ideologies and its cultural values that had dominated political and social power were also in "deep turmoil". In sum, Europe layed "in ruins" (EAGLETON, 1996, p. 47). But despite scientific though had fallen in this "sterile positivism", philosophy seemed to be following the same steps and was getting increasingly closer to a servile position to science.

Since the turning of twentieth century, philosophy went through a transition that was deeply contesting metaphysics. The face of this new approach to philosophy was the logical neopositivist movement. The neopositivist's main idea, that came to be heavily associated with Vienna Circle group, was to oppose any "vague" metaphysical argument and to draw philosophical problems mainly from "empirical truths", scientifically supported. This approach became known primarily by the work of Austrian philosopher Rudolf Carnap who afterwords became a renowned professor in the United States, and one of the main voices of the 'analytical' tradition.[3]

If nowadays there is a lot of controversy about the origins of analytical philosophy, and if it is still precise to call for a division between "analytical" and "continental", the development of the analytical itself in the Vienna Circle, from Carnap and his peers onwards, as well as his intellectual intentions, may help one to reflect upon philosophy's later paths, and why, after all, everything that was being discussed in that time could be summed up to one word: language. Everything that came to be discussed in twentieth century philosophy onwards had something to do with philosophy of language. That was the *linguistic turn*. If neopositivists wanted to "abolish metaphysics" from philosophy, it was because they believed that all philosophical problems were, at the end, a "problem of

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N. *German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond*. Oxford University Press, 2011. p. 1.

[3] For details on the Vienna Circle, cf. EDMONDS, David. *The murder of professor Schlick:* the rise and fall of the Vienna Circle. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2020.

language analysis". Neopositivist empiricists, therefore, assumed themselves as they were 'rediscovering' philosophy from a scientific-based theory. As Brazilian philosopher Manfredo Araújo de Oliveira calls the "neopositivist's criteria of truth", the principle of verification starts from the following assumption: "only content sentences can be true or false" (OLIVEIRA, 2006 p. 80; 86). This conclusion, however, could only be reached by the Vienna theorists through the reading of a revolutionary book for the time, which inspired Carnap: *The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951).

Much could be said about a book like the *Tractatus*, going far beyond the scope of this article to debate it in full, but if we dared to summarize all its complexity in one sentence, it would be the following: "what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence" (WITTGENSTEIN, 2001, p. 3). The central aim of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is to linguistically demonstrate that many of the inquiries that persisted for centuries (and millennia) in the history of philosophy often amounted to false puzzles. "Does the world exist?" asks Descartes, based on the assumption of the subjective human sense constitution. Wittgenstein responds: "[F]or an answer which cannot be formulated, the question too cannot be formulated". The puzzle—like so many others in modern philosophy—would therefore be false.

The philosophy behind the *Tractatus* is an attempt to expand (which would later translate into overcoming) logical empiricism, a philosophical argument worked on various parts of Europe in the early 20th century, especially by the theorists in Vienna. In this early phase of Wittgenstein's philosophy, there is a convergence of ideas between what him and his mentor at the time, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), defended, based on the concept of logical atomism. Although Wittgenstein did not expressly use the concept in his first study, his theoretical agreement with Russell is recognized in the literature through the following six presuppositions: (i) every proposition contains a final analysis that reveals a 'truth-function' for all elementary propositions (WITTGENSTEIN, 2001, p. 15 ,§3.25; p. 36, §4.221; p. 43, §4.51; §5); (ii) these elementary propositions affirm

"atomic states of affairs" (WITTGENSTEIN, 2001, p. 15, §3.25; p. 36, §4.21); (iii) elementary propositions are mutually independent—each of them can be true or false, independently of the falsity or truth of the others (WITTGENSTEIN, 2001, p. 36, §4.211; p. 46, §5.134); (iv) elementary propositions are immediate combinations of simple semantic symbols, or "names" (WITTGENSTEIN, 2001, p. 36, §4.221); (v) "names" are referred to as things entirely devoid of complexity, thus called "objects" (WITTGENSTEIN, 2001, p. 7, §2.02; p. 15, §3.22); and (vi) atomic states of affairs are combinations of these objects[4] (WITTGENSTEIN, 2001, p. 5, §2.01).

With atomism and logical analysis, the possibility of overcoming metaphysics finds in the early Wittgenstein a definitive milestone. This is why the Vienna Circle had such interest in approaching the one who, in the view of the "disciples", would be their "master". However, Wittgenstein did not seem so enthusiastic about the idea. His personality always seemed, in the eyes of commentators and biographers, difficult to decipher, but there was definitely a "duty" to coherence: after having written a book that, in his opinion, "solved the questions of philosophy", Wittgenstein decided to abandon any academic pretensions and live a simple life as a primary school teacher in rural Austria (MONK, 1991).

His uneased temper, however, prevented him from following such path. A notorious case of aggression towards a student at the school where he taught led him to leave the rural town where he lived and return to Vienna, to be with his family, where curiously he would work on the architectural project of one of his sister's houses (MONK, 1991). It is in this context that one of the leaders of the Circle, Professor Moritz Schlick (1882-1936), from the philosophy faculty of Vienna, decides to try his luck and request an audience with Wittgenstein and his group. The meeting finally takes place in the summer of 1927, but in terms opposite to those envisioned by the disciples. The central message that

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[4] The quotes above are from PROOPS, Ian. Wittgenstein's Logical Atomism. In: ZALTA, Edward N.; NODELMAN, Uri. (ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Wittgenstein conveys to the members of the Circle was: "I have no method. There is no question, much less an answer. If you think you have understood, it only shows that, in fact, you have understood nothing". The moment was one of perplexity. What was expected—the group's encounter with their master—turned out to be a fiasco. Wittgenstein's line of argumentation was "idiosyncratic" and his encounter made it clear that his thought did not align at all with logical empiricism. "I am not your master" (ELEINBERGER, 2020). The message was clear.

Wittgenstein's meeting with the Vienna Circle generated consequences such as interpretive disputes about the *Tractatus*, but it already hinted at what Wittgenstein would be preparing in his next work, *Philosophical Investigations*, which would represent a break from his original thought and would elevate the status of language not as a logical (syntactic or semantic) instrument that would support solvable (empirical) problems of philosophy, but rather as an intersubjective mediation of human existence, proving itself an early example of a challenge to the *parting of ways* concept.

This mediation came into Wittgenstein's mind much because of the dialogues with his peers. One of these interlocutors was Frank Ramsey, one of the translators into English of the *Tractatus*, who ended up becoming friends with Wittgenstein. To the discussions with Ramsey, Wittgenstein attributed a help "to a degree that I can hardly estimate" so that he could notice the "errors" in the *Tractatus*. These errors would initiate the later developments of Wittgenstein's philosophy, culminating in the writing of his second major work, *Philosophical Investigations*, which in turn would only be published posthumously (MONK, 1991, p. 273-274).

Wittgenstein made sure of not keeping in touch with famous academic figures. However, if there was a second exception besides Ramsey, it was undoubtedly the Italian Marxist economist Piero Sraffa. A refugee from Mussolini's regime for being a member of the Communist Party, Sraffa became an unusual but no less important interlocutor for Wittgenstein. In the preface of

the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein even admits that he was indebted to Sraffa for the criticisms that provided the stimulus for writing the book (WITTGENSTEIN, 1967, p. viii). The theoretical turnaround experienced by Wittgenstein can be more easily illustrated from the dialogues between him and Sraffa. At a time when Wittgenstein still believed in his logical assumptions from the *Tractatus*, such as the thesis that a proposition and what it describes should have the same "logical" or grammatical "form", Sraffa, making the typically Italian gesture of scratching his chin with the tips of his fingers, asked: "What is the logical form of that?" From this dialogue, for Wittgenstein, the idea that he had previously developed, that "a proposition must be a description of reality that prescribes" (MONK, 1991, p. 260), began to deconstruct itself. His philosophy was changing.

A possible interpretation of the philosophy of the "second Wittgenstein" is precisely his "anthropological approach". In the Philosophical Investigations, he "emphasizes the importance of the 'stream of life' that gives linguistic discourses their meaning" (MONK, 1991, p. 261). Everyday life, activities, and the way of life of communities give meaning in and through language. To understand this meaning is to understand how a certain community plays with language. Thus arises one of the key terms of this new philosophical moment: language games (MONK, 1991, p. 364-365).

In contrast to what was discussed in philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century, Wittgenstein was moving towards affirming that philosophy could never be a science precisely because there is nothing to be discovered in it. This, for him, would be to penetrate beyond the mystique of philosophy. Understanding philosophy from the perspective of everyday life and linguistic indeterminacy would be essential in this new moment. Responding to the "disciples without a master" from the Vienna Circle, he asserts that "activity" precedes rules and theory [logical]. "This applies as much to language and mathematics as it does to ethics, aesthetics, and religion: '[s]o long as I can play the game, I can play it, and that's all right'" (MONK, 1991, p. 306).

The turn was thus set. If in his early works, Wittgenstein was trying to show how philosophical problems could be semantical contradictions, now he wanted to declare these contradictions as trivial; to declare that, once the fog clears, "it is realized that the real problem was not the contradictions themselves, but the imperfect vision that made them seem interesting and important dilemmas" (MONK, 1991, p. 306).

One of the central keys to understanding *Wittgensteinian* thought is his "total refusal" to present general conclusions. Even for the initiated reader of philosophy, this is not trivial. We are accustomed to reading philosophers who defend a thesis, trying to persuade us that this thesis is correct. Wittgenstein is not concerned with proving a point, but rather with justifying that "proving points" is futile when it comes to philosophy: "what we are destroying is nothing less than houses of cards, we are cleaning the language floor on which they stand" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1967, p. 48 ,§118).

Another way to define the difference between the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and the Wittgenstein of the Investigations and other later works is defined by Monk as the presence of a "solipsism to which he was previously attracted and his late work shows itself against" (MONK, 1991, p. 428). Wittgenstein uses a series of aphorisms in the *Investigations* to illustrate his new approach. One of the most famous would be his aim in his work. According to him, the aim of philosophy was an attempt to "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1967, p. 103, §309).

To "show the fly the way of the bottle" was to give oneself clarity in the philosophical inquiry, and one way to do would be to emphasize the fluidity of the distinction between grammatical and material propositions. In this way, Wittgenstein draws attention to the fact that conceptualizations—and the rules that establish them—are not fixed by any rule or logical form (as he had asserted in the *Tractatus*); in fact, they are linked to custom, to practice. This reasoning helps us understand the argument against any kind of private language, for the concept that manifests and "survives" in language use does so because it is

grounded in practice. It is, therefore, public. Wittgenstein's point of reference "ceases to be ideal [logical] language and becomes the situation in which man uses his language" (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 132); it occurs in the infinite games played by this everyday practice, and it is a public language. Tradition may have a subjective and individualistic (private) conception of language, but its use is intersubjective (WITTGENSTEIN, 1967, p. 80, §§198, 199).

Therefore, Wittgenstein's assertions appear more as warnings than conclusions: "Philosophy must not, under any circumstances, touch upon the actual use of language; ultimately, it can only describe it" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1967, p. 49. §124);

> Philosophy simply puts things, it does not elucidate anything and does not conclude anything. — As everything remains open, there is nothing to elucidate. For what is hidden does not interest us. One can also call 'philosophy' what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions (WITTGENSTEIN, 1967, p. 50, §126).

In short, the 'new' Wittgenstein does not separate language from *praxis*. On the contrary, he warns us against any attempt to deal with language as an object. Wittgenstein, for example, refuses to give a definition of what a language game is, "otherwise, he would be falling into essentialism", which would contradict his "basic intention to eliminate the metaphysical sense given to words", returning to everyday life. Here he also distances himself from any philosophical current that tries to approach the "natural sciences", such as logicism, logical empiricism, or even behaviorism. While the latter sees language as a "natural phenomenon", categorizing language as a stimulus-response sense, Wittgenstein interprets language as a "historical phenomenon, a product of man's creative freedom" (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 142-143).

But the fact is that this turning point in British philosophy was peculiar in numerous aspects. Despite his prestige, Wittgenstein had his challengers himself. The rivalry between the Oxford tradition and Wittgenstein's irreverence "without cause" never materialized, but in some way, it was always there. Over

time, the difficulty of contemporaries—even those who admired his work—in receiving such an unusual work, like the Investigations, was noted. The prejudice pointed out by Manfredo Araújo de Oliveira as "Western essentialism" seemed fatal for Wittgenstein's "method" of philosophizing. So, was Wittgenstein an analytical thinker? Some may say 'yes', if the one asking is talking about his early works, and 'no', if it was about his later works. Some, on the other hand, could say this discussion is worthless, because the very philosophy that Wittgenstein advocated for in the *Investigations* goes beyond such label.

But Wittgenstein's work does not stand alone in this debate. Even between the logicism of Cambridge, which Wittgenstein opposed in his later philosophy, and the realism of Oxford, there is a chronological separation that some considered "disastrous" especially because Oxford philosophy had lost R. G. Collingwood much too soon, and some authors even argue that him and Wittgenstein, had they had some substantial contact in life, perhaps they would have found many convergences in their thoughts (MONK, 2019). This we can never know in full, but what we can infer is that Collingwood's philosophy, as well as Wittgenstein's, could be seen as a denial of such labels. Collingwood followed a path similar to that of other philosophers more associated with the linguistic turn, only he did so in different terms, challenging the realists of Oxford and later the analyticals themselves (CONNELY; D'ORO, 2020).

The proposal for which Collingwood is best known is his rapprochement between philosophy and history, and one way he managed to make this rapprochement happen was to develop his thought throughout the narrative of his own life story. The very condition that led him to articulate his theories within an autobiographical exercise already demonstrates his particularity, which attracted many looks from young philosophers later on (TWINING, 1998). Collingwood was indeed a young man interested in history, who ended up finding philosophy as his profession, but had archaeology as a hobby. His personal interest in archaeology revealed something central in his thinking: the idea that there would be no separation between theory and practice, just as

philosophy and history. For Collingwood, his idea of history was practical, and this can be taken into account thanks to his hobby as an archaeologist; philosophy, on the other hand, was his profession. But one thing could not be apart from the other (COLLINGWOOD, 1939, p. 143).

His habits and his philosophy, then, seemed to be in constant conflict. Collingwood lamented that he "lived as if he did not believe in his own philosophy and philosophized as if he were not the professional thinker he was" (COLLINGWOOD, 1939, p. 150-152). This only reveals the degree of ethical commitment between a well-lived life and its coherence with his own philosophical thought. This coherence is key in Collingwood's thought, as it was what led his work to oppose the 'realist' movement that existed in the philosophy of Oxford, his *alma mater*.

The realists were seen by Collingwood as the major current in Oxford philosophy at the time (KRISHNAN, 2023, p. 124-127). In his autobiography, he mentions that his disagreements with this skeptical view, which reduced philosophy to "solving problems and proving whether certain philosophers were right or wrong", began early, before he had become a professor. Furthermore, to him, analytical philosophy was only "the latest manifestation of an old skeptical tendency in philosophy", which was now being "extended to the aspirations of philosophy itself" (COLLINGWOOD, 2005; KRISHNAN, 2023, p. 125). However, Collingwood did not find it productive to argue with such authors, many of whom were more experienced than he was. He decided, then, upon starting his teaching career, to implement a practice with his students in order to understand the text based on the problem the author in question was trying to solve (COLLINGWOOD, 1939, p. 27).

Hence, Collingwood sought to demonstrate his own historiographical methodology that approached what would later be built by his rapprochement between philosophy and history, which he called "questions and answers". [5] For

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[5] In his main work, *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer relates the method of 'questions and answers' to the history of dialectics and his own hermeneutical perspective. See GADAMER,

him, a historian cannot assert what a proposition means unless he knows which question he wants to answer:

> [e]ach question had to 'arise'; there must be that about it whose absence we condemn when we refuse to answer a question on the ground that it 'doesn't arise'. Each answer must be 'the right' answer to the question it professes to answer (COLLINGWOOD, 1939, p. 37).

This attention to the possibility of correct interpretations of history may have been what led many to associate him with a certain "British idealism". But what is truly evident from the reading of his memoirs is much more a dissent from the realists than actually an adherence to any kind of idealism. In the sixth chapter of his autobiography, "The Decay of Realism", this becomes clear. Collingwood criticizes the movement that aims to "the extrusion of ethics from the body of philosophy" (COLLINGWOOD, 1939, p. 47), noting that even in Cambridge, with Bertrand Russell, this tendency seemed to be dominating the field.

In one of his harshest criticisms, Collingwood goes as far as to assert that the realists were gradually destroying everything that had been produced in terms of positive (normative) doctrine up to that point. This problem became, for him, especially problematic in relation to political theory, as the realists, in his view, were "reviving the old positivist attack on metaphysics", leaving a legacy of "general prejudice against philosophy as such". Collingwood does not hide his criticism of the greatest "heirs" of this realist legacy. He is referring to Bertrand Russell and A. N. Whitehead, who, in the words of the rival, were "building card-houses out of a pack of lies" (COLLINGWOOD, 1939, p. 52). For Collingwood, "philosophy from propositional logic" propagated by Russell, Whitehead, and Moore was related to the realism of Oxford, which would be a bad sign, considering the skepticism and the denial of any normativity.

Hans-Georg. *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Mohr Siebeck Tübingen, 2010.

Collingwood, therefore, accuses the realists of being proud as they believe they have transformed the schools of philosophy in the common "oratory which was involved in the bad old theory that moral philosophy is taught with a view to making pupils better man". The skepticism of the realists — which at this point aligns with the intentions of the Vienna Circle — is seen as "frivolous", as it would make philosophy "a philosophy so scientific that no one whose life was not a life of pure research could appreciate it" (COLLINGWOOD, 1939, p. 51).

In a moment of denial of metaphysics by the logicists and realists, who claimed there was no connection between philosophy and history, Collingwood argued that history could not be seen as a "mere instrument" at the disposal of the philosopher, with the history of philosophy being a collection of anecdotes about the philosophers to be studied. He called this "scissors-and-paste history" (COLLINGWOOD, 1939, p. 106; 114; 116), a practice that should be abandoned by any scholar who takes philosophy or history seriously. In one of his most famous works, 'The Idea of History', he emphasizes that interpretation is the factor that differentiates the understanding of historical phenomena from natural phenomena. Historical knowledge consists of rethinking what the studied agent planned to "do and think in past situations in the light of a critical evaluation of the available evidence" (BROWNING, 2016, p. 48; COLLINGWOOD, 1946).

It can be said that Collingwood appreciated some kind of "mundane" philosophy, not distinguishing practice from theory. For him, all philosophy that was not useful in everyday life would not have applicability. It is perceived, therefore, how the philosopher already outlined the foundations of many of the arguments that would be praised by philosophers afterwards, including, of course, the later Wittgenstein and his pragmatic approach. But Collingwood's early death opened the way for a new chapter in Oxford philosophy, one that embraced analysis, giving birth to a new generation of philosophers that developed what is called "ordinary language philosophy" under the umbrella of analysis, moving far away from what Wittgenstein (and one may say Collingwood also) understood philosophy to be all about.

Two of the pioneers that appeared as successors of the Britain philosophical elite were Gilbert Ryle (who had actually succeeded Collingwood as the Chair of Metaphysics at Magdalen College, Oxford) and John L. Austin. Shortly, the "Viennese dichotomy of 'Either Science or Nonsense'" came to be challenged even by some previous "metaphysical skeptics" such as Ryle himself, who came to ponder that the dichotomy had "too few 'ors' in it" (RYLE, 1970). Austin also came to be a prolific contributor to ordinary language philosophy, advancing in the field with what is now called the speech acts theory. In 1955, Austin delivered the William James Lectures at Harvard University. From this series of lectures, as well as from other opportunities, a written version was elaborated, titled *How to do Things with Words*. In this work, Austin ventures into a field dismissed by Wittgenstein, the field of constructing a theory, even though this theory admitted the indeterminacy of language. The *leitmotif* that sustains Austin's theory of speech acts is that, through words, human beings perform acts. In this way, Austin turns, like Wittgenstein, against the traditional theory of language, which asserted (at its peak, with neopositivism) that an unverifiable statement was considered a "linguistic nonsense".

However, what Austin wanted now was to assert that there would not be just one type of statement, but that it was necessary to differentiate them as more than one. This intention assumes that philosophizing about "ordinary and reasonably practical matters" would be to study in detail the use we make of language when we are studying a certain topic (AUSTIN, 1979). The difference between Austin and the neopositivists is that he knew (and in a way endorsed) the subtleties of language pointed out by Wittgenstein, while the neopositivists and logical positivists described them as not being a 'serious form' of philosophizing.

From the demonstration that linguistic statements do not represent just a mere "description", Austin will make a first distinction: on one hand, (i) constative statements, which do not intend a mere description, considering this to be only one of the functions performed; (ii) performative statements, which

aim at mere affirmation; but also a third group (iii) which do not state facts or actions, but which themselves perform a certain act, becoming part of the action. Some examples of this last group of statements are well-known. Among them, there is the 'yes' that a groom and bride say during the wedding ceremony; the christening of a ship by breaking a bottle on its hull; a bet or a promise. In all these cases, "*saying* something means *doing* something".

But merely assimilating the publicity of language was not enough for Austin, Wittgenstein had already done that. It was necessary to go further. It was necessary to systematize "in order to grasp more clearly the different functions of human language". For this, Austin sought to differentiate what these "speech acts" would be. What would be their difference? In a broader conception, Austin defines as "locutionary act" any and all linguistic action in any dimension. A locutionary speech act corresponds, then, in Austin's approach, to each utterance that says (*of saying*) something.

However, Austin did not believe that only "one thing" was done with words. His lessons pointed to the different senses that performative speech acts could have. In this sense is that he leads to his second definition of speech act: the illocutionary acts. In them, the speaker is doing something *in saying* the word, and thus, a second dimension is reached. In it, to conclude which illocutionary act is in question, it is necessary to determine in what context the act is being used:

> To determine what illocutionary act is so performed we must determine in what way we are using the locution: asking or answering a question, giving some information or an assurance or a warning, announcing a verdict or an intention, pronouncing sentence, making an appointment or a criticism, making an identification or giving a description (AUSTIN, 1962, p. 98).

But distinguishing the illocutionary force (specific) from locutionary acts (general) was still not enough for Austin, because to understand meaning was not sufficient, it was also necessary to understand the role played by language expression. When we understand and perform locutionary and illocutionary

acts, we enter into a third linguistic dimension, called by Austin perlocutionary acts, which would have effects and provoke consequences "in the feelings, thoughts, and actions of others" *by saying* something. About this third dimension and its relationship with the others, Manfredo Araújo de Oliveira offers us a useful illustration, using a fictional character named Peter and an alligator:

> The [perlocutionary] linguistic expression can be uttered with the purpose of producing these effects, that is, exerting influence, in a determined way (convincing, leading to a decision, leading to a protest, etc.), on others. In our case: the alligator is dangerous—the person saying this may do so with the intention of convincing others to stay away from the alligator, that is, the execution of this speech act implies the intention to produce a specific effect on the interlocutor. For Peter to say this phrase—the alligator is dangerous— is a locutionary act; for Peter to succeed in keeping someone away from the alligator, that is the perlocutionary act. The three acts are performed by the same linguistic expression, which shows that they are not three separate matters, but three dimensions of the same speech act. It is not, therefore, different acts, but 'three aspects, dimensions, moments of the same speech act' (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 160).

So, what becomes evident in the reflection on Austin's work is that he intends to shed light on the predominance of the illocutionary act, which, according to him, was ignored for a long time by the philosophical tradition (metaphysical) in favor of the locutionary and perlocutionary acts, including by the philosophy of language, disregarding the difference between the three dimensions (LONGWORTH, 2021). When interpreting Austin's work in light of the history of philosophy, one can perceive his intention to unveil language, to demonstrate that investigating language would mean to thematize the context of sociability, that is, to understand the social and cultural context in which it is embedded.

Observing all of these aspects in each author mentioned, one may feel inclined to say that all of their philosophical works have traits that would seem fit for an analytical or continental, but it would all depend on *what* work are we talking about, from *when* are we referencing, and from *where* do we stand as interpreters. Ignoring the dispute and recognizing the need to look at language,

context, and its socio-cultural element, some historians and scholars at Cambridge, years later, began to question not what was studied, but how political theory, history of ideas, history of philosophy, and epistemologically, the very concepts of history, philosophy, law, and politics were studied. Inspired by the connections between history and philosophy made by Collingwood, the everyday language of Wittgenstein, and the certainty that "things are done with words" as per Austin, those Cambridge scholars noticed more of a "meeting" than a "parting" of ways, and started to question the method of studying these concepts themselves.

SKINNER'S CHALLENGE

The Cambridge movement emerged with works like that of Peter Laslett. Influenced by this, young scholars Quentin Skinner, John Pocock, and John Dunn, colleagues at the same university, published articles challenging the "canonical interpretation of philosophy", where history was often ignored in favor of 'perennial problems' that transcended time. The publication of these articles and the dialogue between Skinner, Dunn and Pocock can be attributed to the first steps of the historiographical movement that would later become known as the "Cambridge School".

The Cambridge School thought can itself be contextualized, as done by Emile Perreau-Saussine. The author does that by mentioning a series of factors, including the decline of the 'national myth' of the British Empire, with the fall of the colonies in the 1960s, and the decline of the Soviet myth, with Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin, once a hope for intellectuals of the British left as a counterpoint to imperialism (PERREAU-SAUSSINE, 2007). This promoted a generation of young people who were more skeptical and critical, less nationalistic, and eager to oppose the preceding generations. Skinner, Dunn, and Pocock were part of this new generation. As soon as the contextualist ideas appeared, they became

"an exhilarating way to articulate the distance they felt from the England of their own parents and grandparents" (PERREAU-SAUSSINE, 2007, p. 108).

In fact, in one Skinner's first methodological papers "The Limits of Historical Explanation", he begins to explore his questioning of the method of interpretation practiced by scholars in the so-called history of ideas. He states that at that point in history (the 1960s), historiography was at an impasse: on one side, there were "idealistic" historians who believed in the historian's power to understand ancient texts that had a "timeless" character, meaning their ideas dealt with "timeless" themes. On the other side, there was a strong positivist trend rejecting this historicization in favor of a historiography that, in summary, he calls "reactionist" (SKINNER, 1966, p. 200-201). The reactionist historiography, according to Skinner, involves work that seeks to direct historiographical efforts towards providing "explanations" for historical acts. In the case of the history of ideas, or the history of thought, the critical and reactionist positivist tendency led historians of ideas to adopt a "causal" form of explanation for the historical origins of the thought of certain authors considered "classics" by the philosophical and political canon.

What really stands out in this early work, however, is his critique of a well-known attitude among philosophers and historians of the time, namely the construction of "traditions" created by historians as a way to explain historical events whose factual basis would be extremely fragile. In this sense, Skinner provides some examples: the identification of a Hobbesian influence on John Locke, or an 'immensely long trajectory' from Aristotle to Hegel, or from Plato to ourselves. Such methodological errors, according to Skinner, were repeated by most philosophers and historians of his time. For him, inferring the influence of one author on another would imply a series of verifications that, taking historicity seriously, would be "risky". There is a tendency in all historical discourse to find "coincidences" in the form of "connections" that are materially difficult to confirm (SKINNER, 1966, p. 208).

Skinner, however, points out that reactionary historians would typically respond to these inquiries in a certain way. When asked about the influence that Hobbes had on Locke, the reactionist historian would try to construct a more detailed thesis, demonstrating that Hobbes' most characteristic doctrines could also be found in Locke's writings. Other commonly raised causal aspects are justified by the possession of works or the record that the supposed influenced individual had read the author claimed to be influential.

Therefore, there would be "a certain metaphysical tendency" in this view of interpreting history with the certainty of the existence of a chronological line of thought that connects one thinker to another within the canon of political ideas. Such a tendency, according to Skinner, overlooks inherent contradictions in the doctrines of the studied authors, asserting that there are no "real contradictions", only apparent ones. It becomes the task of the historian to interpret the text until they "extract" — or even "construct" — doctrines that are more abstract than those the author would have proposed (SKINNER, 1966, p. 210).

Mainstream historiography's "common sense" would then be founded on abstract and ambiguous constructions, with the sole intention of formulating adequate explanations. By assuming that good explanations would be built from the identifications of influences among authors considered "classics", histories of ideas and events are merely based on biographies and the supposed impacts that such authors would have on the canon of historical figures. Skinner warns that from the perspective of exegesis of the text, such a view might make sense, but in strictly historical terms, this approach can be very deceptive (SKINNER, 1966, p. 212). From there, Skinner draws one of the conclusions that will come to mark his entire theoretical trajectory regarding method: if we want to know, for example, what qualities and objects of political thought were predominantly present in the 17th century — the thing we most need to be sure of is that they were not like the works of Locke, they were not like most systematic authors. 'The mistake lies in failing to concede that the qualities of intelligence and

presentation which make a writer the *best* illustration in a philosophical picture will make him in a historical picture the *worst*" (SKINNER, 1966, p. 212). The historian's way out, then, would be to adopt a different strategy: not to begin by describing the most important abstract ideas of the authors or periods studied, but rather to describe as fully as possible the complex and probably contradictory context in which this idea or event to be explained can be located. The goal should not be to exclude categories of historical analysis, but to expand them to the maximum, including various approaches. The aim, in this sense, for Skinner, should not be to *explain*, but first to *describe*.

Skinner notes that doing this involves the historian exercising self-restraint, as they would always be inclined to explain rather than simply describe. Another warning made by the author is about the problem of delineating the separation between explaining and describing. "The assumption that the line between describing and explaining is rigid is, in fact, one of the most serious and most criticized forms of positivism". However, this leads Skinner to assert that it would already be commonplace in the "advanced sciences" for explanation to be the result of establishing the most precise correlation between all possible variables. "It is more than likely that a precise and complete historical description can itself be an explanation in a similar way". Thus, Skinner distances himself from the idea that he would be a positivist. The line between explaining and describing was thin, and he knew it, which is why he stated that the historian needed to "take more seriously the need to be able to explain without ambiguity" (SKINNER, 1966, p. 212).

The publication of this text, along with John Dunn's article 'The Identity in the History of Ideas', published shortly after (1968), served as an initial kickstart for the contextualist movement in Cambridge. But there was still a certain apprehension in the proposal that Skinner wants to promote. He asserts that the historian should avoid ambiguity as much as possible, but as a historian who does not believe in positivism, how can he avoid the arbitrariness of "subjectivist explanations" of history? Skinner managed to formulate an answer

to this question in his famous essay "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", which served as "manifesto", with clear polemical goals. His intention was to 'irritate' and 'shock' the Anglophone historiographical canon of the time. The criticisms, which had already appeared in the paper "The Limits of Historical Explanations", became more well-defined in this new article, with Skinner pointing out examples and defining specific concepts of anachronism that these historians of ideas and political theorists often fell into without even noticing.

Skinner compiled a series of criticisms against famous historians and political theorists of the time, most of them professors at major research centers, whom he called "textualists". This definition encompassed any theoretical development that believed there were certain "timeless elements", "universal ideas", and "a timeless wisdom" of "universal application" in political thought. This means that when a particular classical historian attributes a "timeless" element to a certain canon of historical thought, the reader ends up learning much more about the historian than about history itself. This is due to the subjectivity present in these choices of what would be considered "canonical" texts.

Thus, with textualist exegesis, what Skinner calls "mythologies" would be created—not historicity—in the analysis of political thought. The author subdivides four types of mythologies that conventional historians would fall into: (i) the doctrine mythology, where authors would make the mistake of trying to fit thinkers and ideas into supposed doctrines constructed a posteriori, often by the historian himself or other historians who preceded or were contemporaneous with him; (ii) the coherence mythology, where certain historians tend to fix closed logical-formal schemes, in which a particular thought of the studied author is coherently aligned with a stream of ideas, ignoring common contradictions, which are rich historical sources; (iii) the prolepsis mythology: confusion between the meanings of statements. It would be something like the famous (and questionable) adage: "the past is only understood with the historical distance from the present", confusing the meaning

of the statement between the author and the historian; and (iv) the parochialism mythology: historians' custom to "update" the historical universe in which a certain thought or author is inserted in the historians own universe, causing a false resemblance between very distinct cultural universes (SKINNER, 1969).

In the same text, now returning to his criticisms of advocates of a historiography solely concerned with the social context of political events, Skinner argues that the social context is intertwined with historical events, but he criticizes the view that society determines ideas, with language being secondary. For him, sociological contextualism falls into a "conceptual confusion" between two different intellectual acts: the causal determination of an idea and its proper understanding. For Skinner, the correct approach would not be to deny that the economic and social conditions of the societies in which authors produce their texts can be presented as contingently connected causes to the statement contained in the text being sought to understand. The determination of external causes to linguistic action would be a relevant action for the explanation of such an act, but this would avoid the exaggerated presumption that the ideas in the texts should be understood in terms of their social context (SKINNER, 1998).

For Skinner, the determination of causality external to the linguistic action of a particular author and the relevance of causality to attribute meaning and historicity to the studied text were crucial. However, this was fundamentally far from asserting that "the ideas in a text should be understood in terms of its social context". The understanding of the emergence of an idea goes beyond its social causality. Focusing solely on the social context, part of this literature (particularly the Marxist kind) "would reinforce a view in which the role of ideas in society and politics is devoid of autonomy and efficacy". Thus, thought and ideas would be reduced to "epiphenomena, expressions, or reflections of a 'material reality' ontologically prior to—and determinant of—the world of language".This is what Skinner refers to as primarily "metaphysical" character, something that is common to conventional "textualist" historians, but also to Marxists and social

contextualists. Therefore, he asserts that in writing "Meaning and Understanding" and his subsequent methodological essays in the 1970s, he was

> fighting against the tendency of some Marxist scholars to treat political ideas as epiphenomena of political processes, and hence as having no independent significance in relation to the explanation of social action. I was fighting against Leo Strauss and his followers, not just their views about secret writing but also about the idea of a canon in the history of western political theory (SKINNER).

Therefore, for Skinner, the understanding of an idea in the context of political action or text resides in the interpreter's intention to recover the philosophy of history. Thus, a purely causal explanation is not sufficient to understand language, which, according to Wittgenstein, prescribes that "words are also acts". We can already notice the strong influence of Collingwood in Skinner's work, whose interest in the nature of historical knowledge, combined with Wittgenstein's philosophy and the derivations of Austin's theory of speech acts, formed a methodology that, in many cases, criticizes the conventional modes of acting in history and philosophy of the time. But in "Meaning and Understanding", the influences of Collingwood, Wittgenstein, and Austin were not yet fully explicit. It was through the article's reception by his early critics that Skinner began to articulate more clearly the philosophical foundations of his methodological endeavor.

When his peers turned their attention to the essay, however, criticisms and accusations came from all sides. On a later text called "A reply to my critics", Skinner ironically notes that he has "discovered" over the years to be "an idealist, a materialist, a positivist, a relativist, an antiquarian, a historicist, and a methodologist with nothing substantial to say" (SKINNER, 1988). From the 1970s onwards, Skinner responded to these challenges with a series of methodological essays that aimed to address these initial criticisms and refine the program of his own method.

Skinner's central argument in "Meaning and Understanding" was that to understand the meaning of a historical text, it would require a reconstruction of

the author's illocutionary intention. To fully understand a text, including its historical sense, it would be necessary to interpret it to discover what the author was doing when writing it. This would inevitably involve a debate about the author's intentions with that text, which for Skinner would be resolved by understanding how the text fits into the context of shared linguistic conventions in the environment in which it was produced (SKINNER, 1969, p. 49). Skinner detailed his methodological proposal starting from the essays of the 1970s. His first task was to explain to his peers how speech act theory would actually function in his methodological approach. This he dedicated to in his following essay, "Conventions and Understanding of Speech Acts". His main idea for the paper was to clarify that he did not believe in the relations of illocutionary speech acts with the linguistic conventions that he claimed were decisive for interpreting historical texts. Thus, Skinner needed to explicitly explain how much of Austin's theory he adopted for his linguistic contextualism.

By this time, in the mid 1970s, analytical philosophy's "historical turn" had already begun, and Skinner made use of the theories by one of its exponents, P. F. Strawson, to develop his own methodological thought. He starts from Strawson's assertion that Austin's theory of speech acts has two gaps: the first being that the theory does not explain how we could ascertain that the enunciating speaker secures the understanding of his statement by the audience; and the second, the fact that Austin does not satisfactorily distinguish illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts from other "parasitic" manifestations of language, among them non-literal uses (such as humor, irony, etc.) (STRAWSON, 1964). Strawson, Skinner says, asserts that the reception of the utterance occurs through the understanding by the listener of a tacit, but in most cases explicit, complex of the enunciated content. Thus, the author provides a test to distinguish illocutionary acts from other speech acts, such that no illocutionary act can fail to be a completely open, explicit, and confessed communicative act. However, Skinner is not satisfied with Strawson's characterization; he also finds two obstacles to Strawson's argument. The first is the fact that the philosopher

considers only superficially the question of whether a verb needs to be transformable into an explicit performative act to be considered an illocutionary act. According to Skinner, Strawson only states that it seems to be a sufficient condition, although not necessary. The second obstacle is Strawson's division of illocutionary speech acts into only two types: "conventional utterances" (SKINNER, 1970, p. 121), determined by rules; and non-conventional sentences, more common, even though he claims it to be an arbitrary distinction.

Skinner, then, challenges Strawson's thesis with a new definition of situations in which speech acts would have the force of utterances, but no way to abstract an explicit illocutionary force, and another situation where, in principle, it would be an act called illocutionary, but the "illocutionary verb" does not exert any illocutionary force in that specific situation. Therefore, Skinner agrees with Strawson that Austin was not successful in explaining to his readers the difference between illocutionary acts (those in which the speaker does something *in* proffering the utterance) and perlocutionary acts (those in which the speaker does something *by* proffering the utterance). Skinner states that Austin's theory

> does not provide a test for distinguishing illocutionary from perlocutionary acts. And it does not provide a test at all for distinguishing acts which are genuinely illocutionary from what Austin perceived to be 'another whole range' of things […] which we might be doing in using words (SKINNER, 1970, p. 118).

However, Skinner goes beyond what the philosopher proposes because he sheds light on this "gray area" of "intermediate" illocutionary acts not addressed by Strawson in his criticism, which can be explained by social conventions. The example used by Skinner is of a guard warning a skater with the statement "the ice is very thin".

> For it can be said, for example, that an apparent enquiry may in appropriate circumstances and by social convention be correctly taken as an order, it might equally be said that it must be in virtue of some convention that an intended act of warning (as in the case of the skater) can be understood as

the communication of a warning, and not as some other (perhaps oblique) illocutionary act (SKINNER, 1970, p. 131).

As a result, Skinner asserts that the question remains, in the case of this dialogue, as to whether there exists some mutually recognized convention that prompts the guard to give the warning and the receiver (skater) to accept this form of warning and be able to interpret it as a danger alert. The historian now infers that such situations are possible and everyday — precisely — due to the existence of social conventions and their being "reasonably clear" to speakers, which would exclude any possible "perlocutionary" effect of the guard's speech. The success of the guard's communication with his interlocutor is essentially a matter of roles interpreted within the social convention. From this, it follows that one of the necessary conditions to understand what a speaker intends with a statement and how their interlocutor is understanding it must be the same way people in general understand that same statement when they are behaving conventionally, as societies typically behave when making such statements (SKINNER, 1970, p. 133).

On other essays such as "On Performing and Explaining Linguistic Actions" and "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretations of Texts", Skinner continues to fill a gap in the understanding of his own theory. Despite listing linguistic conventions as paramount to understanding his idea of recovering "what authors were doing" with their speech acts — their texts —, numerous peers of his remained skeptical about the difference between what Skinner called the authors' *motives* in uttering their speech acts and their *intentions*, which in the opinion of these same peers would be impossible for the historian to recover in their investigation due to a series of factors. The historian assumes that there is a metaphor commonly used when talking about interpreting texts, which is the need to "go beyond [its] simple literal meaning" (SKINNER, 1972, p. 394). However, to do so, to speak of meaning was to speak of significance, a profound philosophical discussion. How to explain the attribution of meaning by the historian, how to reconstruct this 'original' meaning, and recover the historicity

of the speech act? It was thinking about this question that Skinner made a first caveat or adjustment in his approach laid out in "Meaning and Understanding". The author concedes to the argument of some commentators and critics of his work who claimed that he attributed to the concept of meaning an excessively "narrow" and "reductionist" sense.

His solution, therefore, would be to differentiate possible types of meanings. For him, there would be three types of meanings: the first, *meaning1*, would be a simpler type, those that can be referred to when asking: "what do the words, or specific words or sentences, mean in this work" (SKINNER, 1972, p. 396). This meaning is obtained through the semantics and syntax of the text, through the speaker's knowledge of the conventionality of the language encoded in grammar and dictionaries. The second, which Skinner calls *meaning2*, would be associated with the reader's subjective interpretation, where one asks: "what does this mean to me?" At this point, it is about understanding the subjective effect of the text on the reader's experience that will attribute a special and unique meaning to it. This is the case with the study of the reception of ancient works and their contemporary readings, which can transcend the context of their original emergence. Finally, Skinner asserts that there is a third meaning, *meaning3*, which significance would be the one he wanted to emphasize from the beginning, where the key question would be: "what did the author mean by what he said in this work?" (SKINNER, 1972, p. 397).

Hence, Skinner warns that discussing the intentions of certain intellectuals embodied in their work and the circumstances in which the work was created is one thing. Another quite different thing would be to consider the "motives" that led a certain author to write their text. Motives, according to Skinner, are "external factors" to the linguistic statement enshrined in the text. They would therefore be contingencies of the statement. On the other hand, the author's intention in writing the text—incorporated by the linguistic action itself and not external to it— "must be treated as a necessary condition of being able to interpret *meaning3* of his works" (SKINNER, 1972, p. 406). So, Skinner presents us some

heuristics for historical interpretation: the first "rule" would be to "focus not just on the text to be interpreted, but on the prevailing conventions governing the treatment of the issues or themes with which that text is concern". From this first rule, it follows that to understand what any author might be doing (doing in) using a particular concept or argument, "we need first of all to grasp the nature and range of things that could recognizably have been done by using that particular concept, in the treatment of that particular theme, at that particular time". The second rule, which follows from the first, prescribes that the student of historical texts should "focus on the writer's mental world, the world of his empirical beliefs studied, on the world of their empirical beliefs" (SKINNER, 1972, p. 406).

In "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts" Skinner's arguments are aimed against literary critics who, in the 1960s and 1970s, were gaining academic prominence by advocating for a "closed reading" of texts, a "textualist approach", in Skinner's terms. This school of literary criticism was known as the New Critics. The historian uses some literary and theoretical examples to finally explain that, in his methodological approach, motives are not the same as intentions. This caveat highlighted by us in this section emphasizes the anti-subjectivist nature of Skinner's proposal. The British author seeks, based on the concept developed by Austin and reformulated as *meaning3*, to dismiss any accusation that his linguistic contextualism advocates for a subjectivist hermeneutics, which tries to access the thoughts "inside the mind" of authors from the past to retrieve their meaning. Skinner argues that his theory would not be, therefore, hermeneutically "romantic". So, it was not about seeking the *mens auctoris* from the past, but rather about recovering intentions, where there would be a necessity

> to surround the given text with an appropriate context of assumptions and conventions from which the author's exact intended meaning can then be decoded. This yields the crucial conclusion that knowledge of these

assumptions and conventions must be essential to understand the meaning of the text (SKINNER, 1975, p. 216).

Skinner, therefore, dismisses the so-called "intentional fallacy", so prevalent in the literary theoretical circles of the 1960s and 1970s, which prescribes that understanding the authors' intentions is irrelevant for the comprehension of the studied works. For him, this would be a conceptual confusion, where the distinction between motives and intentions safeguards the explanatory power of the illocutionary dimension (intentions) of action, without falling into the attempt to recover the agent's cognitive and affective states — an attempt considered not only irrelevant but also impossible by Collingwood's theory of re-enactment. Intentions, in Skinner's theory, are *conventionally established*, and in this sense, we can attribute meaning to them by recovering them.

A second caveat followed in other essay by him, called "Hermeneutics and the Role of History". The paper was also written to confront literary theorists of the New Criticism, but it also served as a way to further detail an important point in the difference between what Skinner understood and advocated as his theory of conventionality. The difference that Skinner advocates is because different texts should be interpreted differently. His idea is that there are "strongly autonomous" and "strongly heteronomous" texts. The theorist argues that differentiation is necessary because some texts have a greater degree of autonomy than others. Skinner uses two literary examples to illustrate his argument. The first is a heteronomous text, which would be Miguel de Cervantes' work *Don Quixote*. The second, a more autonomous work, is Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*. Skinner argues that Cervantes' masterpiece is a heteronomous text because the work is a caricature, and an "incorrect" interpretation would compromise understanding the text. In this sense, the more heteronomous a text is, the more a "good reading that it should also be a correct one, is needed, 'in the sense that it begins by correctly identifying the polemical purposes of the work,

pivoting the rest of its analysis around that central point" (SKINNER, 1975, p. 224).

On the other hand, Shakespeare's play would be a more autonomous text because it describes a tragedy with more traditional and direct elements of dramaturgy, where figures of speech such as parody and irony are not present. Therefore, even if a critic was mistaken about Shakespeare's intentions in writing the play, he might still be able to forge a convincing illustration of the characters simply "with clues from what Shakespeare was doing with the text itself". This explains, for Skinner, that the interpretation of strongly heteronomous texts requires a different approach from that of strongly autonomous texts. The former demands a careful reading that stays close to the author's intentions, while the latter allows for more flexibility in interpretation, focusing on what the text itself reveals: "It seems in particular much less obvious that the best reading must in this case be the same as the one which is historically the most correct" (SKINNER, 1975, p. 226).

It is noted, therefore, that Skinner makes a caveat in his thesis that the correct interpretation of historical texts would inevitably imply the reading of illocutionary acts that reveal the authors' intentions. In the case of "autonomous" texts, the greater their autonomy, the more the interpreter would have a guarantee of correct reading from the text itself. However, Skinner does not fail to emphasize the example of Quixote, which serves to illustrate that strongly heteronomous texts (whether literary or political) depend on a correct reading, as they serve as figures of speech such as parody — as in the case of Machiavelli's own *Il Principe* — whose content (often of a moral nature) requires a thorough investigation of intentionality, based on what the *Skinnerian* theory itself suggests through linguistic contextualism and its use of speech act theory.[6]

Since these essays, Skinner has changed his position quite a lot. From the next methodological essay until his general methodological revision more than

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[6] Skinner even mentions the case of Machiavelli and *Il Principe* as an example of a text that is strongly heteronomous (SKINNER, 1975, p. 222).

thirty years after the publication of "Meaning and Understanding", as almost every philosopher, he improved his ideas, and defended his general methodological thesis, although since the late 1970s he is been turning to the use of rhetoric and how it applies to political and theoretical discourse throughout history (SKINNER, 1974; SKINNER, 2002). Nevertheless, by now it should be clear how his work transcends common analytical and continental trends, presenting itself as a "challenge" to the "parting of ways" concept, a trend that is becoming more and more common between contemporary philosophers who approach historiography as a mainly philosophical question (WILLIAMSON, 2007).

A DEPARTURE FROM THE WAYS

As far as the "parting of ways" concept has been used, Skinner's methodological endeavor makes a case to challenge such concept. Even though it may have been useful to understand some differences in the later fields of philosophy, "analytical philosophy" so called "historical turn" (RECK, 2013), credited to authors like Strawson but also to Wilfrid Sellars, and more recently to Robert Brandon, shows that the relevance of history of philosophy (as called "metaphilosophy") has become a significant topic in analytic philosophy for the past four decades (BRANDOM, 2002; SELLARS, 1975; STRAWSON, 1966). But when the topic is philosophy of history—a field usually considered as one of the "continental" kinds—the names of Collingwood and Skinner are frequently remembered, but the question that remains is that if linguistic contextualism, as it was developed by Skinner and his Collingwoodian approaches, could not fit into the "metaphilosophical debate", and by that intertwin the "ways" that were diverged into the analytics and the hermeneutic-phenomenological fields.

Although this trend in contemporary philosophy shows historiography as a major topic of debate in recent years, it is becoming quite clear that a specific quarrel has been standing out from the debate. That is the "appropriationism-

contextualism" debate. One could think having "contextualism" as one side of the quarrel means that Skinner's theory would be on the forefront of this debate—and it actually is—but not quite properly put. As we can see in publications dedicated to discuss it (MERCER, 2019), the debate within contextualism in metaphilosophy is being limited to Skinner's early works, disregarding the development of his later thought. The most trivial evidence of this is that whenever Skinner is cited by authors (as Mercer does) he is remembered by the "classical formula" of his "Meaning and Understanding" essay, which has gained its own "metaphilosophical" jargon, called the "Getting Things Right Constrain – GTRC". Skinner's theory is, on this metaphilosophical context, reduced to a formula, which would be "[h]istorians of philosophy should not attribute claims or ideas to historical figures without concern for whether or not they are ones the figures would recognize as their own" (MERCER, 2019, p. 530). This is what contemporary philosophers describe one of the sides of the quarrel, and what we will be calling metaphilosophy's contextualism. But that is not quite *linguistic* contextualism as it was—and it still is—described by Quentin Skinner.

On the other side of the quarrel, there is the appropriationists who see the history of philosophy as a "virtual storehouse for our current philosophical" problems. They take interest in the philosophical past as not being independent of our philosophical present, "but the other way round, they are there to be *appropriated*, having in mind what concerns us in the present" (SILVA, 2022). In regards to the appropriationists, the debate becomes even more odd. When we see it taking place (in the year of 2015), as it was between Daniel Garber (2015a; 2015b) and Martin Della Rocca (2008; 2015), it is remarkable how it resembles the same debates Skinner has had in the last thirty years, since the publication of "Meaning and Understanding". When reading Garber and Della Rocca interaction on how to interpret Spinoza, one wonders "where philosophers were all this time" that made them lose all of the intellectual history debates that took place between Skinner and his critics in the 1970s onwards (TULLY, 1988).

That is why we argue that there is a significant gap between intellectual historians and historians of philosophy when the subject is the hermeneutics of the past. This exposes the fragility of the "parting of ways" and how it affected philosopher's (specially the analytics) view of history. It took more than forty years less than the philosophers for political scientists and literary critics associated with the *New Critics movement* (usually presentists) and intellectual historians (usually contextualists) to clash on how to interpret past authors. That is a lot for a discipline that had R. G. Collingwood as a forefronter. One might say that the "parting of ways", and the exclusion of "everything that dealt with metaphysics" had something to do with it. But even so, analytical philosophy could not stand so long ignoring the importance of history. Eventually, the "historical turn" came to analysis as well, and with it the quarrel we are seeing today. It is not on our intentions to deny history of philosophy's so called "philosophical statute". Quite the opposite: in this section we want to show how Skinner's theory presents a challenge to the "parting of ways" concept, and why this concept itself poses a threat to philosophy's understanding of its own history.

To accomplish our goal, we need first to mention that the GTRC concept does not represent an accurate portrait of Skinner's linguistic contextualism. At least not in its most recent form. Since the publication of "Meaning and Understanding", Skinner has taken a series of caveats. As we mentioned in the previous section, the author experienced a mitigating theoretical process until he abandoned his claim to recover the meaning of historical texts, admitting the existence of more or less autonomous texts and the difference in meaning in each of them in works such as "Hermeneutics and the Role of History". Moving through the more advanced stages of his career, we can identify a progressively clearer turn by Skinner, moving away from any categorical classification regarding a "correct answer" for interpreting historical texts, or that his methodology would lead to a "truly historical interpretation", in favor of a more "softened" proposal to study the illocutionary force of texts and authors studied, in order to reveal a history more consistent with the understanding that each

author is also an actor and that all authors are playing the same game, which, in the end, is what there is to be played (SKINNER, 2002, p. 7). To this new phase, a series of readings were presented, some authors calling Skinner's phases rhetorical, genealogical, and archaeological. From our perspective, we decided to refer to this entire new moment as a rhetorical turn, where the author's methodology navigates the borders of philosophy and history, contributing both to the epistemological statutes of the history of philosophy and to the philosophy of history, which in the end is indeed the "dwelling place of being" of the history of thought as a discipline.

With that in mind, we are left to speculate that metaphilosophy's contextualists *chose* to use this early and more radical version of Skinner's work, even though there were better ways to describe linguistic contextualism. We may, then, conclude that Skinner's more recent *linguistic contextualism* is not the *metaphilosophical contextualism*, and the GTRC cannot be reduced or even compared to some sort of "Skinner's formula". There is not such a formula, and linguistic contextualism, as its latest version shows, presents itself as a much more complex theory, with discussions about what it actually is, a methodology or even a heuristic for the historian to follow (LANE, 2012). We need, therefore, to warn contemporary philosopher's that Skinner's "principle" cannot be understood as GTRC, as Gabriel Ferreira da Silva suggested in his essay (SILVA, 2022, p. 574). Skinner has affirmed later on *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*, a book that appeared in 2002 dedicated to revise and republish a series of his methodological essays, that historians "need to recapture what past writers were doing", but he marks "a strong distinction between two dimensions of language": one would be conventionally described as the dimension of meaning, 'the study of the sense and reference, allegedly attaching to words and sentences.' The other, would be described in Austin's terms as the dimension of linguistic action, the study of the range of things that speakers are capable of doing in (and by) the use of words and sentences. "Seeing things their way" for Skinner is to "concentrate" on the second dimension (SKINNER, 2002, p. 3).

By pointing the difference between these two dimensions of language, Skinner points to the question of "facts". In addition to facing scrutiny from epistemologists, the realm of facts has encountered challenges in recent years due to advancements in the theory of meaning. Positivistic philosophies of language once affirmed that all meaningful statements must correspond to facts, thereby suggesting that the meanings of sentences could be determined by verifying the assertions within them. However, Quine and Wittgenstein introduced doubts about this perspective. Quine (1961) argued against the existence of straightforward, uninterpreted facts to report, while Wittgenstein emphasized the diverse ways in which languages are used and proposed a shift from inquiries into the "meanings" of words to an exploration of their various functions in different language games (SKINNER, 2002, p. 2).[7] These compelling critiques sparked further exploration in two interconnected directions. J. L. Austin, John Searle, and others delved into the investigation of the uses of words rather than their meanings, dissecting the concept of a speech act and exploring how language serves not only to convey information but also to perform actions. Simultaneously, H. P. Grice and several theoretical linguists reexamined the notion of meaning, particularly concerning what someone intended by their words or actions (GRICE, 1957; GRICE, 1969). This parallel inquiry redirected focus from "meanings" towards considerations of agency, usage, and most importantly, intentionality (SKINNER, 2002, p. 2).

Skinner then admits that "Meaning and Understanding" was "mainly polemical", and what remains from that essay (revised and republished on *Regarding Method*) is that if the historian wants to write "in a genuinely historical spirit", he needs to make it one of his principal tasks to situate the texts he studies within such intellectual contexts as enable him to "make sense of what their authors were doing in writing them". His "aspirations should not be", therefore, to enter into the heads "of long-dead thinkers; it is simply to use the ordinary

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[7] See also the first section of this paper.

techniques of historical enquiry to grasp their concepts, to follow their distinctions, to appreciate their beliefs and, so far as possible, to *see things their way*" (SKINNER, 2002, p. 3, our emphasis).

Drawing on Wittgenstein's motto that "words are also deeds" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1967, p. 146, §546), Skinner reflects that speech is also action. He then comes to the conclusion "that the theory of speech acts might have something to tell us about the philosophy of action more generally, and in particular about the role of causality in the explanation of behaviour". He already had stressed this on "Meaning and Understanding", but admits he came to see his argument as "seriously confused" (SKINNER, 2002, p. 4). On *Regarding Method* he tried again, and the outcome was the essay "'Social meaning' and the explanation of social action". In this later essay, he argues that "even if we agree that motives function as causes, there can nevertheless be non-causal explanations of action" (SKINNER, 2002, p. 4).

Having stumbled into studying the philosophy of action, Skinner seems to found himself "confronting yet further questions that seemed to me of great importance for practicing historians". His questions are: "What exact role is played by our beliefs in explaining our behaviour? What does it mean to speak of our beliefs as rationally held? What role should be assigned to assessments of rationality in the explanation of beliefs and behaviour?" (SKINNER, 2002, p. 4), and he tries to answer them with the philosophical holism of the later Wittgenstein, Quine, and also Donald Davidson (1984). He says one of his biggest aspirations is "to point to the relevance and importance of this movement in postanalytical philosophy for the interpretation of texts and the study of conceptual change". That means aiming to clarify concepts not by fixating on the purported "meanings" of the terms we use, but rather by exploring their functionalities and analyzing their connections to each other and to larger webs of beliefs. Skinner states, in turn, that the rationality of our beliefs is heavily influenced by the nature of our other beliefs. His approach involves interpreting individual beliefs by situating them within the context of other beliefs,

understanding systems of beliefs by situating them within broader intellectual contexts, and grasping these broader frameworks by examining them in the context of historical continuity (*longue durée*).[8]

Instead of using the "analytic" label, Skinner seems to prefer using the term "positivistic", saying how "post-empiricist" theories as those he ascribes had a role in "'destabilizing' the positivists' 'world of facts'" (SKINNER, 2002, p. 5). In the remainder essays of *Regarding Method* Skinner considers a third perspective through which our conventional understanding of language as a tool primarily for expressing and conveying our thoughts has recently been expanded and made more intricate. For him, a significant contribution of postmodern cultural criticism has been to enhance our recognition of the inherently rhetorical aspects of both writing and speech, thereby intensifying our awareness of the intricate relationship between language and power dynamics. Increasingly, we come to realize that we utilize language not only to convey information but simultaneously to assert authority in our statements, to evoke emotions in our audience, to delineate boundaries of belonging and exclusion, and to partake in various other forms of social influence and manipulation. He addresses "some questions about these textual strategies" although his "contribution is confined to the study of one particular range of rhetorical techniques, those concerned with exploiting the power of words to underpin or undermine the construction of our social world". He attempts "to illustrate the dependence of social action on the normative descriptions available to us for legitimating our behaviour". This comes through "typology of the strategies available for redescribing our social world in such a way as to re-evaluate it at the same time". Skinner explains this process in greater detail based on "specific rhetorical techniques by means of which these ideological tasks are capable of being performed" (SKINNER, 2002, p. 5)

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[8] By this his work have been compared to historian Reinhart Koselleck. See KOSELLECK, Reinhart. Linguistic Change and the History of Events. *Journal of Modern History*, n. 61, p. 649-666, 1989.

The main goal of Skinner's later work is therefore, to show his critics that he is not trying to "reinvent the wheel", but he is interested in showing a suspicion in all those moral and political philosophers that of our own day who offer us grand visions of justice, freedom, and other esteemed ideals often do so in a manner reminiscent of impartial analysts who stand aloof from the "battle". However, the historical evidence strongly indicates that no one truly stands outside this battle, for the "battle is all there is" (SKINNER, 2002, p. 7).

Since the publication of *Regarding Method* Skinner continues to lament the "philistine objection" that his work would only serve the "dustiest antiquarian interest" (SKINNER, 2002, p. 7), but recent debates might prove that his responses were not enough, and his linguistic contextualism continues to have a shallow reading, as the metaphilosophical one show, with the appropriationists and "metaphilosophical" contextualists clashing into what seems to be an oddly outdated debate with no "shades of gray" (SILVA, 2022, p. 564). Even when authors like Mercer and Silva seem to be taken the debate further, their limited Skinner reading makes the history of philosophy debate look like déjà vu to intellectual historians who have witnessed the debates that have occurred between historians of ideas, political scientists, literary theorists, but also the so called "continental" philosophers, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Michel Foucault, and Friedrich Nietzsche (LANE, 2012; SKINNER, 2002). All of the later are thinkers that discussed, directly or indirectly, the same topics Skinner was interested in, some of them whose works even came before Skinner's. This also shows not just how isolated from the historical debate "analytical" philosophy became—but how "continental" philosophers were pioneers on the same debate, inspiring a generation of anglophone historians (known as Cambridge School) whose works are now being "discovered" by philosophers from a tradition that had previously denied historicity's value to philosophical problems, so that this "metaphilosophical version" of contextualism could, "while no one was looking", become the "dominant methodology among English-speaking early modern historians of philosophy"

(MERCER, 2019, p. 1). With that being said, we claim that it is fair to call for a "'departure' from the 'ways'" that narrowed the history of philosophy's study so much in the last decades.

FINAL REMARKS

Skinner's work stands in the borders of philosophy and history, and by that he suffers sometimes of not being correctly understood by none of the fields. Nevertheless, we argue his linguistic contextualism should be taken seriously by historians and philosophers, because it appeared as a critique of general "history of ideas", and its disregard to *history* in favor of *ideas*, as they were always there, something Sellars called the "myth of the given", a vice older than philosophy itself. [9] Contextualism, in this Skinnerian strictum sense, has even been regarded as a "vindicator" of German romantic philosopher J. G. Herder's concept of *Einfühlung* ("feeling one's way in"), which played an essential role in early hermeneutics (FORSTER, 2011, p. 314-315). We wouldn't go that far, risking to fall into the trap Skinner himself warned us against—the coherence mythology—as the romantic notion of Herder were coherent to Skinner's thought.[10] Even so, Skinner's influence in historiography's recent developments is quite unmatched, especially in the anglophone world, having its own normative repercussions as well for political and legal theory, and the social sciences as a whole (PALONEN, 2002).

By now it should be clear that our conclusion is that Skinner's methodological thesis "challenges" not only the concept of "parting of ways", exposing how philosopher's works who have inspired him (Collingwood's, Wittgenstein's, and Austin's) are also in conflict with this "philosophical segregation", but also how the use and the ultimate acceptance of "parting of

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[9] One might say that what distinguish a philosophical proposition from a non-philosophical one is the denial (or acceptance) of this very myth. See SELLARS, Wilfrid. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. With an introduction by Richard Rorty and study guide by Robert Brandon. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1956].

[10] See the discussion about Skinner's mythologies in the previous section.

ways" as a philosophical "fact", especially with the success of analysis, has "cursed" anglophone philosophy's "fate". Of course, the 'analytical historical turn' is helping to 'break the curse', but there is still a lot of work to be done. One suggestion would be to stop limiting the boundaries of the discipline with concepts as "parting of ways". There is by now enough historical evidence that the distinction between "analytical" and "continental" was more of an academical (and perhaps political) agenda than a proper philosophical enterprise.[11] Another suggestion would be to broad the limits of the metaphilosophical debate between contextualists and appropriationists. There is, indeed, some authors who are already doing this (Brandom, Mercer, Silva, as we have mentioned, and others), but still there will always be room for advance. In this paper we are suggesting that philosophers put the transdisciplinary discourse to test, and really dig into what historians have discussed in the past decades. By that, the so-called philosophy of history of philosophy (metaphilosophy) can really do justice to being one of the main trends in contemporary philosophy. Skinner and his contextualism — the *linguistic one* — could be helpful allies in this quest.

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[11] See KRISHNAN, Nikhil. A Terribly Serious Adventure. *op. cit., passim.*

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