

**Working Papers in Philosophy:
Registers of Philosophy**

Szerkesztők: Kovács Gábor
Paár Tamás

2019/4

Unsettling Ideas and the Power of Style

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About the author

Sharon Rider is Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the Department of Philosophy, Uppsala University, where she was Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Arts in Uppsala 2008-2014. She was the first recipient of the national Humtank Prize in Sweden for eminent scholars in the humanities who have brought research beyond the academy. A philosopher by training, with an emphasis on later modern European thought, she has published broadly on issues connecting epistemology to education, including themes such as the relationship between linguistic competence and mathematical reasoning, the idea of a university, and the cultural conditions of rational judgment. She is currently Deputy Director of Engaging Vulnerability, a decade-long interdisciplinary research program hosted by Uppsala University with funding from the Swedish Research Council. The program builds on and extends recent work in philosophy, the humanities and the social sciences, documenting and theorizing vulnerability as a generative site of relations rather than as an inert state or position. Rider's work focuses on the cultural conditions for autonomy, responsibility and knowledge, and how these might be conceptualized in ways that neither reject nor rely on conventional notions of rational agency, nor conceive of the conditions of possibility for thinking, understanding and learning in terms of limitations.

Abstract

Philosophy has since its inception identified itself with the unencumbered quest for truth. At the same time, as a discipline in its own right, it has come to be characterized by a style of writing consisting of the assumption of a given set of propositions, doctrines, systems and problems, largely of a technical nature, arising in and between these: that is, philosophy understood as a body of knowledge. What is lost in the latter conception is the nature of philosophical writing as a particular arrangement of thought that is not a matter of terminology, techniques or procedures, but the ordering of the ongoing activity of reflection. In this paper, I argue that a consideration of the elements of our thinking and what holds them together, their form, is at the same time an examination of the question addressed, i.e. its "content". In particular, I discuss the question of style in philosophical writing as the issue of the form of thinking about thinking, in light of formalist analyses of poetry, the role of criticism and the point of purpose of the humanities. Sources of inspiration for the paper are, among others, Kant and Arendt, but also and especially the philosophical holism of Vincent Descombes and the non-scientistic form of New Criticism articulated by Cleanth Brooks.

Sharon Rider: *Unsettling Ideas and the Power of Style*¹

1. Introduction

What I will have to say here has to do with a certain way of conceiving what philosophy is and has been, in the most general sense, which I hope won't be all too controversial, at least not to begin with. In what follows, I will treat philosophy as discourse about discourse, or thinking about thinking (logos about logos, a rational account of rational accounts, or, as Kant would have it, "reason occupied with nothing but itself").² That is, insofar as we are human, philosophy consists to a very high degree of some kind of self-reflection, since the substance of what we talk or think about in philosophy is inextricably bound up with *forms* of human thought or mentality: concepts, criteria, ideas, methods, theories, and so forth. Now it's true that thinking about thinking can be and has been over the years further specified according to content, say, thinking about moral terms or ideals and their practical application (ethics), but, as a rule, philosophy differs from other disciplines to the extent that the problems it addresses are problems of thought, or the relationship between thought and what the thoughts are about.

Given this very broad approach that I will be taking, I should give the problem more definition by acknowledging my own starting points. When I talk about thinking or the mind, by this I do not assume any distinction between thinking about thinking, doing "philosophy of mind", as it were, and acknowledging the social, economic, historical and cultural factors involved in thinking, knowing or understanding anything at all. The activity of knowing, in particular, assumes a *world*, and this world manifests the exercise of the human mind in distinct human artefacts, institutions and social practices;³ as Hannah Arendt might say, the activity of knowing, especially in modernity, builds the world as much as house construction or farming⁴. And it is within this framework of worldliness that political, ethical and aesthetic

¹ This paper was presented at the conference "Registers of Philosophy V," April 13, 2019, Budapest, organized by the Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. I am grateful to Tamás Paár for his assistance, to Csaba Olay (ELTE) for his most helpful critical reflections on my paper, and to them both and all the conference participants for excellent comments and conversation.

² Immanuel Kant. *Critique of pure reason*, transl. Norman Kemp Smith, New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1965, 556, A 680/B 708.

³ A trenchant and subtle argument for this view is elaborated by Vincent Descombes in *The Provisions of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and especially *The Institutions of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture", in *Social Research*, 1971/3, 421. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, chap. 6.

notions such as "universality/particularity", "autonomy/heteronomy", and, importantly for what I want to say here about style, "form/content", are comprehensible. That being said, it is possible to pay attention to the conditions of thinking as such.

2. *Knowledge and Thought*

Arendt makes the observation that Kant fails to recognize his own radicality when he distinguishes between thinking and knowing:

We owe to Kant the distinction between thinking and knowing, between reason, the urge to think and understand, and the intellect, which desires and is capable of certain, verifiable knowledge. Kant himself believed that the need to think beyond the limitations of knowledge was aroused only by the old metaphysical questions of God, freedom, and immortality and that he had "found it necessary to deny knowledge to make room for faith"; by doing so he had thrown the foundations of a future "systematic metaphysics" as a "bequest to posterity". But this shows only that Kant, still bound by the tradition of metaphysics, never became fully aware of what he had done, and his "bequest to posterity" turned out to be the destruction of all possible foundations of metaphysical systems. For the ability and the need to think are by no means restricted to any specific subject matter, such as the questions which reason raises and knows it will never be able to answer. Kant has not "denied knowledge" but separated knowing from thinking, and he has made room not for faith but for thought. He has indeed, as he once suggested, "eliminated the obstacles by which reason hinders itself."⁵

Arendt defines the activity of thinking earlier in the essay cited as "the habit of examining and reflecting upon whatever happens to come to pass, regardless of specific content and quite independently of results"⁶, and describes the "deaths" of God and metaphysics as "thought events" concerning our ways of thinking, and indeed our ability to think. She emphasizes that man has "an inclination and, unless by more urgent needs of living, even a need (Kant's 'reason') to think beyond the limitations of knowledge, to do more with his intellectual abilities, his brain power, than to use them as an instrument for knowing and doing."⁷ And here, as elsewhere, Arendt makes the point that, strictly speaking, when we're thinking, we move outside the world of appearances, even if our thoughts are concerned with the most ordinary objects and not with abstractions such as concepts or ideas, "the old domain

⁵ Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations", 422.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 421.

of metaphysical thought”. To think of someone or something is to “remove ourselves” or step back from whatever it is that we are thinking about.⁸

For Kant and his contemporaries, the conditions, possibilities, and limitations of the paradigmatic forms of *Wissenschaft*, that is, mathematics and the physical sciences, were of foremost concern. Kant’s hesitation regarding the scientific status of metaphysics as it had hitherto been conducted, i.e. his suspicion that metaphysics was not a science at all, was the starting point of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The problem he found was not primarily with the results (doctrines, claims, and teachings) of metaphysics, but with its methods. The methods appropriate to the special sciences, and which serve them well, lead irrevocably to the formulation of basic problems that of necessity result not in true knowledge, but in antinomies of reason. The sciences are defined and delimited by the methods employed to solve distinct and determinate problems. Such methodological predetermined delimitation is useless and potentially harmful to a form of inquiry lacking that kind of object. What remains for rigorous philosophical inquiry is to direct its attentions to its own resources, possibilities, and delimitations, that is, to take itself as its own object. Metaphysics is possible only as thinking about the conditions of thought, or reason’s critique of itself. As Jacques Taminiaux puts it, “works of thought harbor their own evocative power, that they are less vestiges than wellsprings [...] less particular bits of knowledge than the expression of a hold by that which transgresses all particularity.”⁹

What characterizes philosophy, or transcendental reflection, is that it does not result in ‘valid knowledge’ about some (empirical) thing, since it does not concern things in the world to begin with. The activity of reflection as such has no fixed content at all insofar as it is active. When Kant points out that concepts without intuitions are empty, and intuitions without concepts are blind, he is not making an empirical claim about the relation between two things. He is saying that in any case of the phenomenon of Y, for it to be Y, it must be recognizable as such. Otherwise there would be no phenomenon, since to be a phenomenon is to be apprehended. But Y, the form, is a function of thinking, and the distinction between thinking and apprehending is not something that we can arrive at through experience. It cannot be perceived, but only thought. Such a remark itself is not part of knowledge of or about the world; it is not part of science. Rather, this kind of reflection, because it is not

⁸ Arendt works out this conception in great detail in *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harvest, 1978) but also in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1968).

⁹ Jacques Taminiaux, “Dialectic and Difference”, in *Dialectic and Difference. Finitude in Modern Thought*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1985.

reliant on special techniques, must admit of “popularization”, since it consists in nothing more than the exercise of the spontaneous human capacity for self-examination. To assume a certain set of established concepts or procedures that have to be learnt, is to confine and corrupt philosophy, and to impede and impair thinking.

3. *Philosophy and Poetry*

Now if we take this to be right, one might take the further step of asking where we are when we are thinking. Arendt claims that, strictly speaking, we are nowhere. I would prefer to put it another way, and say that thinking, insofar as it is a stepping back from the world, has to do with a temporal rather than a spatial positioning toward something, a vantage point, stance, or *attitude* of thoughts in movement in relation to one another.

This last observation leads me away from what I have taken to be relatively anodyne description of philosophy to what I suppose will be a much more tendentious claim about the relationship between form and content in writing. I want to say that the formalist analysis of poetry, which is explicitly intended to distinguish it from, say, historical, scientific or philosophical prose, actually has a bearing on philosophy in the sense of thinking about thinking. I think that there is much to be learned about how to read a philosophical text by following the method of close reading, insofar as it has just to do with patient attention to the thoughts as they are articulated, rather than foisting a set of unexamined conventional categories, concepts and definitions onto the text to extract “an argument” that either meets with the expectations arising out of those assumptions, or fails to do so.

I will follow one of the leading lights of New Criticism, the American formalist critic Cleanth Brooks, as my source of inspiration, due to his clarity and humility and as well as his aesthetic vision, the latter of which is commonly recognized as neo-Kantian and therefore most apposite for my purposes. But related ideas can be found in the writings of the so-called Russian Formalists such as Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, as well as in certain corners of philosophy, say in Merleau-Ponty, Ortega y Gasset and R.G. Collingwood, or in the dramatic readings of Plato in the Straussian school.

In his most influential book, *The Well Wrought Urn*, Brooks makes the following reflection on the reading of a poem in terms of what it “says”:

The conventional terms are much worse than inadequate: they are positively misleading in their implication that the poem constitutes a “statement” of some

sort, the statement being true or false, and expressed more or less clearly [...] The formula begins by introducing a dualism which thenceforward is rarely overcome, and which at best can be overcome only by the most elaborate and clumsy qualifications.¹⁰

I would say that this is an accurate description of the inclination to read works of art (badly), but also the tendency to read works of thought (badly). If we replace in the following quote the word “criticism” with the word “philosophy”, the word “poetry” with the word “thought”, the word “poem” with the word “text”, and the word “beautified” with the word “theoretical” or “technical” in the quote below, we find an interesting parallel. Brooks writes:

The dualism of form and content [...] puts a stop to criticism by compelling us to locate the poetry in the truth of the statement made by the poem or contained in the poem (actually the paraphrase of the poem, not the poem itself); or to locate the poetry in the “form” conceived as a kind of container, a sort of beautified envelope.¹¹

The problem with tearing up the envelope to get at the message is that there is a reason why the material is ordered as it is and not some other way. What is being “said” cannot be separated from how it is said and remain poetry; and being a poem is integral to what the poem “says”, or, as Brooks put it: “The nature of the material sets the problem to be solved, and the solution is the ordering of the material”. Similarly, unless we assert the primacy of how thoughts are intrinsically related to one another in a work of philosophy, the “pattern of thinking”, if you would like, we haven’t understood the thinking displayed in the article or essay at all, but are left with an abstract compositional structure in which statements or “thought items” are contained. The “structure of the argument” is external to the examples, analyses, references, formulations, distinctions, allusions and associations that inevitably abound in works of philosophy.

Brooks says of poetical structure that it is one of “meanings, evaluations, and interpretations; and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes and meanings [...] The unity is not a unity of the sort to be achieved by the reduction and simplification appropriate to an algebraic formula.”¹² For at least some kinds of philosophy, many of which are canonical for the discipline, this strikes me as entirely adequate advice as to how to go about reading to understand what the text is about, even when, as in the case of, let’s say, Descartes, Spinoza or even Kant, the explicit model

¹⁰ Cleanth Brooks, “The Heresy of Paraphrase”, in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*, New York, NY: Harvest, 1975, 196.

¹¹ Ibid., “Criticism, History and Critical Relativism”, 226.

¹² Ibid., 195.

may be that of a geometric proof. Laying bare the “poetry” behind the rhetoric of demonstration was something of a cottage industry in the heydays of Derrida and de Man, and it is not my intention to defend or castigate such work. I simply want to say that one need not take a stated ideal, especially one manifesting what we might call the spirit of an age in which the work is produced, at face value. The work speaks for itself, even, or perhaps especially, when it involves contradictions, paradoxes and intricate complexes of attitudes. Indeed, as in poetry, one might think that such features display the real character of human thought, its rough ground.

4. *Form and Content*

Brooks repeats often the general qualification that he is not rejecting all attempts at paraphrase out of hand. To the contrary, he thinks that it can be useful for convenient shorthand references to parts of the poem and so forth. Nonetheless, he always adds a proviso, something to the effect: “But such formulations are scaffoldings which we may properly for certain purposes throw about the building: we must not mistake them for the internal and essential structure of the building itself”¹³; or “But it is highly important that we know what we are doing and that we see plainly that the paraphrase is not the real core of meaning which constitutes the essence of the poem.”¹⁴

The point of all this is, of course, that form and content are inseparable in poetical works and, I have argued, in philosophy, or “works of thought” as well. I want to emphasize, however, another aspect of this insight, namely, the one I made earlier about thinking as a relation or positioning of thoughts toward one another, what I have, following Brooks, called “attitudes”. Brooks says of the characteristic unity of poems, disregarding whatever logical unity they may or may not possess, that it “lies in the unification of attitudes into a hierarchy subordinated to a total and governing attitude.”¹⁵ Now Brooks himself thinks that this distinguishes poetry from philosophy, science or history, or rather, he is too modest to make any claims whatsoever about the latter. Be that as it may, the notion that it is possible to seek and find a unifying “governing attitude” is one that makes sense when considering a work of philosophy. The “governing attitude” of a work of philosophy is whatever it is that the

¹³ Ibid., 199.

¹⁴ Ibid., 197.

¹⁵ Ibid., 207

philosopher in question “has on his mind”: his doubts, reservations, hesitations, uncertainty, confusions, concerns, perplexities and ways of dealing with these are all part of this, and their relation to one another is not that of a standard formula. The solution to his problem is inseparable from his formulation of it, which is not reducible to conventional textbook accounts of varieties of “mind-body dualism” or “physicalism”, for instance. One might call this governing attitude with regard to works of thought, what Brooks calls with respect to poetry “the unity of style”, the “transcendental unity of the work of philosophy”; it has no existence apart from a critical reflection on the activity of thought manifested in the work in all its parts, the sequence of words and ideas, and in the movements from one thought to the next and back again.

The presupposition that there is a correct procedure for philosophy and some kind of language that, because it operates with standard definitions and entrenched techniques, is more “transparent” than everyday words used in an everyday way using everyday practices from everyday life is thought to guarantee the universality of rigorous scientific procedure, the notion being that a scientific proposition can stand alone. The proposition stating the inference from an argument is true, if the argument is valid and sound. While on the other hand, “the experience of an attitude, apart from the occasion which generates it and the situation which it encompasses, is meaningless.”¹⁶ Again, Brooks intended this reflection to set poetry apart from science and philosophy. But the idea that philosophy is science in this respect robs it of its unique force, if philosophy is, as I have suggested, thinking about thinking insofar as it is thinking, and not something else.

Brooks uses the term “irony” to indicate the specific power of poetry to work with contradiction; “the thrusts and pressures exerted by the various symbols [...] are not avoided by the poet: they are taken into account and played one against the other”. Whereas, on the other hand, the terms of science “do not change under the pressure of the context. They are pure (or aspire to be pure) denotations; they are defined in advance.”¹⁷ Now philosophy has for a long time attempted to emulate this procedure of science, and there are certainly cases when it is appropriate. The idea that philosophy is, can or should be a special science is not proven on conceptual grounds, however, and it is difficult to see how it could be. Thus common claims as to the “clarity”, “cogency” or “precision” of a given ensconced terminology and modus operandi, as if it had to do with the “state of the art” of a field of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 210

technical expertise, must be explained historically and sociologically rather than conceptually. It is one thing to aspire to an ideal language in which the relation of term and meaning were constant. It is quite another for it to be the case. Brooks asserts that the poet uses a word, “not as a discrete particle of meaning, but as a potential of meaning, a nexus or cluster of meanings”, the aim of which is to dislocate meaning in the sense of breaking us out of convention, reminding us or making us aware of the experience buried beneath it: “the poem, if it be a true poem, is a simulacrum of reality [...] by *being* an experience, rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience.”¹⁸ So too, I want to say, the true work of thought is actually thinking put on paper, rather than “any mere statement about thinking, or any mere abstraction from thinking.”

Similarly, Brooks says of poems that they do not *state* ideas, but *test* them:

Or, to put it in other terms, a poem does not deal primarily with ideas and events, but rather with the way in which a human being may come to terms with ideas and events. All poems, therefore, including the most objective poems, turn out on careful inspection to be poems really “about” man himself. A poem then, to sum up, is to be judged, not by the truth or falsity as such of the idea which it incorporates, but [...] by its coherence, sensitivity, depth, richness, and tough-mindedness.¹⁹

This is arguably how we should see philosophy, understood as taking a step back and thinking about thinking. The thoughts emerging therein are not a part of science proper and not distinct propositions to be tested for factual accuracy, for the simple reason that there is no fact of the matter. What criteria remain are those for independent, enlarged and consistent thought as elucidated, famously, in § 40 of Kant’s third critique.²⁰

Indeed, Brooks’ account of his method of reading would seem to be taken directly from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. Brooks admits that his starting point is that there *is* such a thing as poetry, difficult as it may be to define, and that there are general criteria which can be used to assess a poem. He states:

If there is any absolutism implied, I prefer not to conceal it, but to bring it out in the open. The foregoing discussions of poetry may, indeed, be hopelessly subjective. But, for better or for worse, the judgments are rendered, not merely in terms of some former historical period and not merely in terms of our own: the judgments are very frankly treated as if they were universal judgments. But if I

¹⁸ Ibid., 213

¹⁹ Ibid., “The Problem of Belief and the Problem of Cognition”, 256.

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard, New York, NY: Hafner Publishing, 1951, 136. See also his “*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*” (7:200), trans. Robert Louden in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, eds. Günther Zöllner & Robert Louden, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 307-308.

am willing to expose the assumptions on which my own judgments rest, I am equally desirous of exposing the assumptions which underlie the typical varieties of attack on such judgments.²¹

I have asked you earlier to consider Brooks' discussion of the nature of literary criticism as one equally valid for philosophy by exchanging for the former term with the latter. I ask you to perform this substitution one last time. The context in which Brooks makes the remark that I want you to consider is one where he is reflecting on why so many at the time found his approach troublesome. The situation to which he is referring is one that he characterizes as an intellectual environment that cannot or will not abide an attitude (in the sense discussed above) that places demands on our capacity for discretion, deliberation and judgment; the characterization he offers is strikingly familiar, although perhaps the predicament has deepened. So again, trade the words "literary criticism" for "philosophy" in the following passage, and contemplate the consequences:

I believe that the typical attacks fall into a pattern – a pattern which will help us explain their state into which literary criticism, and ultimately the Humanities in general, have fallen in our day. I want to point out, therefore, that the notes which follow are concerned with something more than the defense of a particular critical method. They have to do [...] with the whole question of whether we can have literary criticism at all.²²

We began by saying that philosophy is the activity of thinking about thinking. Thinking has to do, among other things, with wanting and meaning. Ethical truth, in this regard, has to do with what we really want; philosophical truth has to do with what we really mean. Often enough we are not quite certain about what we really want or what we really mean. This hesitancy is what precipitates thinking and keeps it moving along. But the "truths" of morality and philosophy are not statements of fact in the scientific sense. I think that we can have both literary criticism and philosophy today, but under certain conditions, namely, that we limit our claims for what they can do and achieve. At best, they can be reminders of actual human experience, but then they must leave the work of systematic demonstration and meeting strict evidentiary demands to the special sciences. The way out of the doubts raised about the value of the humanities can be addressed through a reconsideration of everyday human experience and therewith the starting points of philosophical investigation. Human thinking ordinarily involves judgment, discrimination and discernment, that is, distinguishing between right and

²¹ Brooks, "Criticism, History and Critical Relativism", 217.

²² Ibid., 217-218.

wrong, better and worse.²³ That academic philosophy can tell us how to think straight and choose well by clarifying the use of terms, regimenting language or working out and applying technical criteria for justification seems highly unlikely. Aesthetic questions are not answered by formalization, and ethical or existential dilemmas are not dissolved through a logical ordering of arguments. The force of logical necessity assumes that we take moral responsibility for our thoughts and decisions if it is to have any purchase, which means that logic in itself lacks force. In this respect, the pseudo-scientific form of certain kinds of philosophy constitutes a kind of coercive rhetoric, but one which seems to have lost its power to convince. The kind of philosophy that appeals to the shared experience of a human being trying to come to terms with the difficulties of thinking coherently and without illusions about difficult matters occupying his mind, the sort of articulations of thought that Brooks identifies as poetic, can offer truths of another kind, ones that are potent because they don't pretend to establish matters of fact. To the contrary, like poetry, they are unsettling of preconceived notions, alive to the actual movement of thought and thus less vulnerable to the genuine skepticism and even cynicism of our day.

Concluding Remarks

As Vincent Descombes has trenchantly argued in *The Institutions of Meaning*, signifying form is not the same thing as mere (physical) configuration, or morphology of a thing.²⁴ According to textbook Aristotelianism, the latter is what makes it what it is: the wood must take some form, a tree or a desk, to be something at all. The form of the tree or the desk, however, is not signifying form, that is, form here is not a matter of arranging elements so as to achieve a certain meaning. To the contrary, the form of the desk inheres in it as a quality that makes it just that desk. In contrast, to provide a meaningful form or order is not to shape a material, but to arrange or organize units that are themselves meaningful, whose meaning is determined by having a certain determinate place with respect to the other units which, taken together, constitute the whole. The importance of the distinction made here is this: the form or “what it is” of the tree or desk can be recognized more or less automatically. The perceptible

²³ Stanley Rosen, “Philosophy and Ordinary Experience”, in *Metaphysics in Ordinary Experience*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

²⁴ Vincent Descombes, *The Institutions of Meaning*, 178.

form can be detected, as it were, mechanically. The order of meaning, i.e. the arrangement of elements into a meaningful whole, however, requires intellectual activity. This is why “criticism”, as Brooks understands it, is necessary for grasping poetry. It is also why the humanities are necessary for understanding other meaningful wholes: languages, religious customs, laws, rituals, dances, films, concertos, scientific practices, etc.

Within an ordered whole, each of the elements take place, not as self-contained units of meaning, but rather as units of connection to the other elements of the whole. Grasping these connections requires a certain focusing of attention because the meaning, which is specified by the order, can’t be simply seen at a glance in the work the way that we just “see” the form of the tree or the desk.

Does this mean that, at least with regard to human practices and artefacts, “everything is interpretation”? No, the formalist thesis, quite to the contrary, is that certain phenomena require “attention to form”, while others do not. Works of poetry belong to the first, desks to the second. The relevance for philosophy is the following. If we are trying to understand an idea, we must pay careful attention to its place in a series of ideas, or, as we say, “a line of reasoning”. But, importantly, succession in human thinking is not mechanical. The form cannot be read out of the text without close attention to the units of connection, which are also the elements; in other words, the “idea” is the meaningful order of the thoughts conveyed. Legal history, sociolinguistics, political theory, musical anthropology, European ethnology, classical rhetoric, etc. are all attempts at better understanding specific kinds of meaningful orders. Philosophy, in turn, is largely thinking about their conditions of possibility from different perspectives. But since, as we noted at the start, there is no condition of possibility for that reflection, it is and must remain, entirely free. It is in the exercise of that freedom that distinctive differences in style emerge and generate further reflection.

