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ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE METAPHILOSOPHY

Abstract: The author discusses the role of metaphilosophy, which is primarily concerned with the nature of philosophical thinking. When dealing with this topic, Nicholas Rescher's division of metaphilosophy into descriptive and prescriptive will be important, as it reinforces the self-sufficiency of this discipline's tasks. While descriptive metaphilosophy investigates what (historically) counts as philosophy, prescriptive metaphilosophy asks what valid philosophy should be. Thus, one studies the factual situation (e.g. in history of philosophy) and the other tries to determine the value criteria for specific philosophical positions (in which case a position is valid, what makes an argument better than the other, etc.). I will consider the question of whether it is possible for metaphilosophy to be guided by cognitive values without losing its descriptive character. Perhaps precisely "positional neutrality" (in the sense that the metaphilosopher does not favor a particular philosophical position) is the key value, although its acceptance makes the relationship between philosophy and metaphilosophy even more debatable: Is metaphilosophy just a part of philosophy or a discipline *sui generis* with a distance to philosophy? Is it a useful tool for the philosopher or is it redundant? The author will try to defend the disciplinary autonomy of the metaphilosophical approach.

Keywords: metaphilosophy, descriptive/prescriptive, cognitive values, positional neutrality, Nicholas Rescher.

1. Why Metaphilosophy?

Although the term 'metaphilosophy' has been used for eighty years, it has not yet established itself in contemporary philosophical discourse. What could be the main reason for its non-acceptance by members of

the philosophical community? Maybe the conviction of philosophers that they are capable enough to reflect on their own opinion and that it is not necessary to “delegate” this self-reflection to some artificial “meta-discipline”. This kind of self-thematization found its expression both in the speculative tradition (as “thinking about thinking”) and in the logical one (the use of “object-language” and “meta-language”). What is the point of a discipline solely dealing with philosophy? Is it not enough to rely on the history of philosophy? Does this established discipline not tell us clearly enough what philosophy is and in what forms it appears? The main problem is precisely whether philosophers can be *impartial* enough when speaking about their own theories as well as whether historians of philosophy can convincingly present the *aporetic* character of philosophy and explain the meaning of deep divisions and debates in its field. Perhaps metaphilosophy is still able to reveal some aspects of philosophy that usually escape its self-reflection.

If philosophers would see the essence of their work clearly enough, metaphilosophy would probably not be needed. What is it that prevents philosophers from adequately presenting what qualifies philosophy as a special way of thinking and speaking about the world? I would say that the main barrier is the limitation of their *worldview orientation*, the fact that in discussions they take and defend a specific *position*. Many philosophers are highly convinced of the correctness of their own arguments from the start. Thus, they are so occupied with defending their own position that they are not interested in the potential strengths of opposing positions (in the form of convincing arguments etc.). However, it is precisely this – the course of discussion in case of opposing positions, the way one’s own position is presented and the exchange of arguments – that should be of interest to a discipline such as metaphilosophy. For descriptive metaphilosophy, it is not primarily important which of the positions is “right” but how to properly establish communication between advocates of opposing positions as an issue of its own.¹ Obviously, the problem of differentiating between philosophy and metaphilosophy is quite complicated. At this point, we would already like to

1 However, if we regard metaphilosophy as a prescriptive discipline, it will adhere to the pretension of philosophy to identify the “stronger” argument in the discussion of a problem and offer one of its proposed solutions as “appropriate”. Such a metaphilosophy can “serve” a particular philosophical standpoint. (Exactly this is the case with Nicholas Rescher, who, although advocating the independence of metaphilosophical thinking, prioritizes the position of pragmatic idealism in the philosophical discussion.)

emphasize that no insurmountable gap should be created between the two – it is possible to argue for two completely different interpretations: both that metaphilosophy is part of philosophy and that it takes place on a completely different level of thought.

The distinction between philosophy and metaphilosophy seems quite different from the distinction between object-oriented disciplines *within* philosophy, for example ontology and epistemology or ethics and aesthetics. In this case, the difference does not only concern the nature of the subject being investigated, but also the researcher's attitude towards the subject. A philosopher asserts a certain thesis in order to solve a problem and defends it with arguments against the objections of other philosophers or (s)he disputes the thesis of his (her) opponent, again via arguments. On the other hand, the metaphilosopher does not intend to solve philosophical problems;² (s)he rather describes the way in which philosophers present and defend their theses in discussions, without prioritizing one philosophical position over the other – from a structural point of view, all philosophical positions are equal. A philosopher evaluates the answers to philosophical questions, while a metaphilosopher merely states them without evaluation. The key difference between philosophy and metaphilosophy seems to be the involvement of *values* in the theorizing process – philosophers are guided by certain values when researching their subject, which then has an impact on the structure of their theories as well as on their relationship to other positions. Most philosophers would agree with this, and probably consider the pursuit of truth a core value. An idealist and a materialist base their arguments on different evaluative assumptions – that is the reason why their approaches to problems and the theses they represent in discussions differ.³ Therefore, metaphilosophy must devote its attention to the underlying values of philosophical positions, which usually remain unrecognized by philosophers.

2. The Perspective of Orientational Pluralism

When it comes to determining the difference between metaphilosophy and philosophy, Rescher's metaphilosophical studies are useful in many ways. Nicholas Rescher (1928–2024) is known for his numerous

2 At least the one dealing with his/her discipline in a descriptive sense.

3 For Johann Gottlieb Fichte, these differences even depend on the *character* of the thinker. (Cf. Fichte, 1984, p. 17)

works in the fields of logic, philosophy of science, epistemology and history of philosophy. There is almost no area of theoretical philosophy, in which he has not left some (written) mark. However, it seems to me that his works in metaphilosophy are being neglected – but if a history of metaphilosophical thought is ever to be written, I think it would have to mention Rescher's name.⁴

In the context of problematizing the difference between metaphilosophy and philosophy, I believe his “Essay on the Grounds and Implications of Philosophical Diversity”, called *The Strife of Systems* (Rescher, 1985), to be the most significant. In that essay, Rescher deals with the aporetic nature of philosophizing, which means that philosophical problems cannot be solved due to philosophers basing their thought on incommensurable assumptions. Contrary to common opinions, according to which the entanglement of philosophers in insoluble controversies speaks in favor of the infertility of philosophical discourse, Rescher claims exactly the opposite – namely, that insolubility of problems is an eminent feature of philosophy distinguishing it from other forms of rational thought. Far from resorting to some kind of relativism, he believes that the answers to philosophical questions are not given arbitrarily, but according to a certain logic or, more precisely, according to what he calls the “imperative of cognitive rationality”: in accordance with certain theoretical values, philosophers are forced to maintain the consistency of their claims by eliminating conflicting options from the repertoire of possible answers. For this purpose, Rescher draws up a unique methodological operation – the creation of the so-called *aporetic clusters*:

An *aporetic cluster* is a family of philosophically relevant contentions of such a sort that:

- (1) as far as the known facts go, there is good reason for accepting them all; the available evidence speaks well for each and every one of them, but
- (2) taken together, they are mutually incompatible; the entire family is inconsistent.⁵

Thus, it is necessary to omit at least one statement in order to obtain a meaningful whole.

Take the following set of statements as an example of an aporetic cluster:

4 The following are just some of his metaphilosophical books: *Metaphilosophical Inquiries* (Rescher, 1994), *Standardism* (Rescher, 2000), *Philosophical Dialectics* (Rescher, 2006), *Aporetics* (Rescher, 2008), *Philosophical Textuality* (Rescher, 2010), *Metaphilosophy* (Rescher, 2014), *Philosophy Examined* (Rescher, 2021).

5 Rescher, 1985, p. 21.

- (1) Philosophical questions cannot be solved by the mind.
- (2) There is nothing more useful than the mind to help solve philosophical questions.
- (3) Philosophical questions can be satisfactorily answered.

Each of these statements makes sense in isolation, but when observed jointly, they make an inconsistent whole. Meaning can be restored by discarding one of the statements. If the first statement is rejected, then we are dealing with a *rationalist* point of view; if the second one is removed from the cluster, the result is a *transcendental-philosophical* standpoint, and someone omitting the third statement represents either an *agnostic* variant of *skepticism* accepting the meaningfulness of philosophical questions but considering them unsolvable, or a more radical, *nihilistic* variant of *skepticism* (in this case, the questions are simply regarded as senseless). As the configuration of aporetic clusters may vary, it is clear that in any philosophical discussion multiple positions may be taken by different thinkers, each of which has a certain degree of plausibility. Therefore, Rescher favors the position of orientational pluralism:

Metaphilosophical pluralism maintains that distinct and conflicting positions are always in principle available with respect to philosophical issues. A specifically *orientational* pluralism goes beyond this in holding that there are different cognitive/value schemes, diverse probative perspectives, relative to which discordant alternatives can be validated vis-à-vis their competitors.⁶

It is important to note that this type of pluralism does not equal relativism, because, according to Rescher, it is necessary to *evaluate* positions and, thus, determine their truthfulness. We are only able to evaluate a philosophical position if we ourselves accept some values (e.g. objectivity). We cannot persuade someone to change his or her worldview merely by arguments, no matter how skillfully outlined and logically constructed they may be – a possible change of one's world view is a matter of value re-orientation, when someone literally undergoes a "conversion"⁷ as a result of adopting a different normative perspective. Philosophers do not simply try out which position would suit them better, they rather adjust their choice according to their guiding values. We could say that philosophers do not arbitrarily choose a position, but that some value in the background directs them to their point of view. Rescher sees the advantage of orientational pluralism in the fact that it can shed light on the "anarchy

6 Ibid., p. 123.

7 In Rescher's words: "changes of heart".

of philosophical systems”, the complete disunity in terms of common assumptions and the philosophers’ lack of a readiness for consensus, which, according to many thinkers (such as Immanuel Kant), prevented philosophy from becoming a real science. From the perspective of Rescher’s pluralism, one can understand why a universal consensus is not possible in philosophical discourse. There is no consensus between representatives of philosophical positions precisely because they follow different values and ideals. A positivist starts from completely different values than a metaphysician (perhaps even denies the existence of values as separate entities unlike the latter). However, according to Rescher, the lack of agreement among philosophers is not an argument in favor of disputing philosophy’s scientific character, but to admit that its rationality is different from that of the empirical sciences. Orientational pluralism also has certain interpretive implications. Understanding a position means that we have succeeded in recognizing its normative background, although understanding it does not automatically imply accepting it as correct (Rescher thus distances himself from the quasi-hermeneutic equating of understanding and acceptance, or appropriation of a position). Anyway, what is crucial to Rescher’s concept of philosophy is that philosophical questions are answered on the basis of appropriate cognitive values, and those answers are further elaborated within philosophical systems. One of the main tasks of metatheoretical analysis is then to provide insight into the diversity of evaluative approaches to philosophical problems.

So what is Rescher’s perception of the task of metaphilosophy? Should it reconstruct the normative dimension of philosophizing? Is metaphilosophy also oriented towards some values, when it attempts to show the essence of philosophical thinking? Or does metaphilosophy, on the contrary, need to be value-neutral in order to fulfill its “mission”?

Rescher makes a distinction between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* metaphilosophy: while the former only describes which positions exist in the field of philosophical discourse without striving to determine to what extent they correspond with reality, the latter evaluates philosophical positions based on a certain (normative) assumption on what should be “real” philosophy. In his opinion, descriptive metaphilosophy is not a part of philosophy at all, since it deals exclusively with facts instead of normative criteria. In this respect, this type of metaphilosophy shares a lot of similarities with the *history of philosophy*,⁸ although it might also

8 We mean the kind of history of philosophy that is closer to historical science than the history of philosophy of the Hegelian type, which is guided by teleological and normative presuppositions.

be seen as closely related to *sociology* or *psychology*. (Let us leave aside the complex question, whether the history of philosophy is guided by implicit value judgments and assumptions when studying its subject.) The key here is to study something as it *is*, not as it should be. Keeping to the facts, Rescher believes that all philosophers could agree on what history is telling us about the development of philosophical thought from antiquity to modern times. This does not mean that descriptive philosophers agree on every issue, but rather that they respect the historical development, as history⁹ still provides the possibility to present a philosophical position without strictly determining its truth. On the other hand, prescriptive metaphilosophy remains a part of philosophy as it functions in the same manner as philosophical thinking – by distinguishing adequate (successful, effective, superior etc.) positions, theses and arguments from inadequate (unsuccessful, ineffective, inferior etc.) ones. While descriptive metaphilosophers share the same historical presuppositions,¹⁰ prescriptive ones differ in their assessment of certain philosophical theories as they follow different normative directives – thus, orientational pluralism is based on different values than absolutism, skepticism, syncretism¹¹. There can be no consensus between these forms of thought on a metaphilosophical level, just as there can be no consensus on a philosophical level.

Considering that he prefers a normative approach, it comes as little surprise that Rescher attempts to justify the standpoint of orientational pluralism based on advantages it allegedly has over other standpoints. This type of pluralism itself has a double meaning: (1) in a descriptive sense, orientational pluralism describes which criteria of cognitive evaluation are applied by representatives of philosophical positions, and (2) in a prescriptive sense it gives a judgment concerning the value orientation of philosophers by claiming that the stated value criteria are applied correctly, although they only have limited validity (in this context, there are no universal values shared by all contributors to the discourse). Rescher sees the main advantage of orientational pluralism in the fact that it allows us to recognize philosophy as a significant cognitive activity that is also compatible with the orientation towards humanistically relevant values. At the same time, this pluralism makes it possible to maintain the strictly scientific status of philosophizing, regardless of the fact that the pretensions to reaching an “absolute truth” are given up.

9 At least in the sense that is closer to scientific historiography.

10 Which does not mean that they represent the same point of view when dealing with content-related issues.

11 Rescher uses the term ‘conjunctionism’.

According to Rescher, what gives orientational pluralism an additional advantage over other positions is the complexity of its use – it can be used both at the level of philosophical (“doctrinal”) and metaphilosophical (“metadoctrinal”) thinking. As a philosophical standpoint, it incorporates the rather “dogmatic” attitude that from one perspective it is possible to accept only one “correct” position when solving philosophical problems; as a metaphilosophical approach it allows and acknowledges the existence of multiple plausible perspectives and these can be taken by other thinkers, although the adherent of orientational pluralism does not agree with them on a doctrinal-philosophical level.

If this interpretation of Rescher is accepted, then the challenging question is how these two seemingly contradictory functions of the named pluralism may be reconciled. Almost in a phenomenological manner, Rescher assumes the possibility of changing one’s attitude by distancing oneself from substantially dealing with philosophical questions, literally: “taking a step back”, by which we “parenthesize” our doctrinal convictions; then “from a distance” we can see all possible perspectives on these issues. In other words, by suspending the philosophical attitude, we arrive at the level of a metaphilosophical consideration of facts in the field of philosophy. This brings to mind Husserl’s suspension of the “natural attitude”, thus opening up the possibility of transcendental reduction as a precondition for the eidetic investigation of phenomena. Taking into account the postulation of the dual use of pluralism (as a philosophical view on the issue itself and a metaphilosophical overview of possible perspectives), we could say that Rescher clearly separates factual inquiry from the axiological approach. He transfers that difference to metaphilosophy itself, thus distinguishing its descriptive and prescriptive (normative) variant. Can we, however, offer an alternative interpretation of metaphilosophy, its purpose and nature?

3. On the Relationship between Philosophy and Metaphilosophy

By separating the field of factual inquiry from the axiological one, Rescher gets a basis for considering the essence of philosophy, but also the relationship between philosophy and metaphilosophy. Philosophy itself is defined as a type of research on problems that is determined by certain values. Facts are secondary here – Rescher says that philosophy is “overcommitted” in the factual sense. This means that the facts must be arranged, placed in a certain conceptual scheme and processed by certain

methods. Rescher describes this process of the philosophical “editing” of facts as follows:

Philosophizing always moves through two stages. At first there is a “pre-systemic” stage, where we confront a group of tentative commitments, all viewed as more or less acceptable, but which are collectively untenable because of their incompatibility. Subsequently there comes a “systematizing” phase of facing up to the inconsistency of the raw material represented by the “data”. And this becomes a matter of eliminative pruning and tidying up where our commitments have been curtailed to the point where consistency has been restored.¹²

Philosophy is not guided by facts like empirical sciences, but by forms and schemes of their arrangement. That is why those determinants leading a philosopher to the solution to a problem are important to make him see the matter from a certain perspective: the materialist assumes the non-existence of a separate mental or spiritual substrate, so in the dispute concerning the immortality of the soul he will take up the position that the soul is perishable (or even that it does not exist at all); an idealist, panpsychist or spiritualist, on the other hand, will claim something completely different as he is guided by a different perspective and other values.

Descriptive metaphilosophy abstracts from the value of adequacy, so it is not interested in which of these positions is “right” but describes their solution to the problem from a methodological point of view and reconstructs the very course and outcome of the debate between representatives of such conflicting positions. Prescriptive metaphilosophy, on the other hand, is not so neutral, but gets involved in the very course of the debate, considering that a certain position is more adequate or closer to reality, i.e. to the solution to the problem – meaning that the metaphilosopher makes decisions (i. e. descriptions imply the possibility of making a value judgement). Rescher solves the question of the relationship between philosophy and metaphilosophy by saying that prescriptive metaphilosophy is part of philosophy, while descriptive metaphilosophy is not. The pure form of descriptive metaphilosophy is the history of philosophy. Metaphilosophy stands, so to speak, with one foot in the field of philosophy, with the other in the field of its history. Does this threaten the independence of metaphilosophy as a separate discipline? Should not metaphilosophy, given its very name, be “above” or at least “next to” philosophy? In Rescher’s opinion, this is only the case with its descriptive variant. Rescher seems to ascribe greater dignity to prescriptive metaphilosophy as it is interested in substantial philosophical

12 Rescher, 1985, p. 20.

questions and debates among philosophers. Descriptive metaphilosophy is predestined for more “modest” tasks, which it shares with the history of philosophy.¹³ Thus, the central problem is the demarcation between philosophy and metaphilosophy: are they strictly separated or do they interact with each other? It seems that Rescher remains undecided, and the reference to values should help him to keep philosophy and metaphilosophy in close contact.

Now, let us try to think more radically and assume some kind of hiatus between philosophy and metaphilosophy. The difference between these forms of thought would be the discrepancy between two levels of thought.¹⁴ If we accept that discrepancy, it seems insurmountable. Philosophy and metaphilosophy would have no points of contact. Rescher suggests one option to maintain such a radical difference: understanding descriptive metaphilosophy as a *historical* discipline. The historian of philosophy should not be interested in which of the philosophical positions correspond to reality, but in pointing out which positions have generally been established over the course of history and how they related to each other (were they in conflict, complemented each other, cooperated, etc.). True, Rescher does not exclude the possibility that a historian of philosophy interprets history in a way supporting his personal philosophical preferences or even teleologically determines his own system as the end point of historical development (the latter was the case with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel). This kind of history of philosophy itself has a philosophical character. And yet, a descriptive philosopher, like a historian of philosophy, should present the course of historical events in the field of philosophy as impartially as possible.

However, the question is whether even the kind of metaphilosophy with systematic interests can fulfill the requirements of an exclusively descriptive approach. Rescher himself cites an example of the so-called *systematology*, a metaphilosophical discipline investigating the structure and forms of systems in philosophy, while relying on the system concept of Franz Kröner, who advocated the thesis of the necessity of pluralism of philosophical systems. Systematology does not deal with the question of which of the systems is the “best” or “most advanced”, but with their de-

13 Can we reverse the perspective and claim that the history of philosophy is a sort of metaphilosophy? A question for discussion would be whether the history of philosophy is a philosophical discipline or a metaphilosophical subdiscipline.

14 One will think of the difference between an object-language and a meta-language where the levels of speech are clearly demarcated. By the way, in his *Philosophical Investigations* (§121) Ludwig Wittgenstein denied the existence of such a type of metaphilosophy that would relate to philosophy, for example as grammar according to the ordinary use of the language.

sign, the way in which one system can develop from another or, in turn, lead to the formation of other systems. Of course, when Kröner opposes Hegel's idea of a comprehensive system, he seems to be forcing a philosophical thesis (pluralism versus monism). This is, however, rather the assumption, from which systematology emerges – this sort of metaphilosophy assumes the *fact* of the existence of many systems, which cannot be denied, even by a radical absolutist like Hegel. A philosopher may dispute the existence of multiple systems claiming that only one system is valid, while the rest are apparent forms of knowledge, but a metaphilosopher (systematologist) simply bases his perspective on the fact that there is a multitude of systems and sees nothing problematic in accepting this. On the other hand, when systematology deals with philosophical systems, it abstracts from their doctrinal differences, and sees the systems as components of a wider constellation, in which consideration of assertive claims (germ. *Geltungsansprüche* (J. Habermas)) is not in the foreground. It is more important to consider the complex dynamic of intersystem relations that develops according to a special logic. Therefore, descriptive metaphilosophy is not necessarily historical.

But there is another catch. Namely, Rescher assumes that descriptive metaphilosophy is limited to establishing the factual situation in philosophy without evaluating the content of theories. However, the question is whether it is possible for a metaphilosopher not to be – at least implicitly – guided by some values. Suppose someone is a supporter of Cartesian dualism in the philosophy of mind. If (s)he wants to investigate the development and outcomes of the debate about the nature of the human spirit, as it has been conducted since Descartes outlined his dualistic standpoint, (s)he will ignore his philosophical position (metaphysical dualism) and with equal studiousness approach the analysis of a monistic or pluralistic point of view (e.g. Spinoza's or Leibniz's metaphysics). (S)he will ignore the problematic arguments in support of these theories, and even abstract from them. This is possible because (s)he distances herself/himself from her/his own philosophical claims and research interests in the given context. We can say that (s)he is guided by the values of *cognitive impartiality* and *content disinterestedness*. We could unite these under the term *value neutrality*. Some might claim that value neutrality is self-contradictory: it is obviously a *value* in the back of a metaphilosopher's mind when he (she) wants to describe a position or a discussion, because it *urges* him (her) not to judge what is claimed or discussed there. Thus, one of the main objections to *radical skeptics* was that by allegedly refraining from any position, they were already taking a certain position. Yes, but both the radical skeptic and the metaphilosopher abstracting from his/her dualistic preferences *suspend*

the philosophical position, so that they can move to a *completely different* level of thinking and speaking. After all, when could a certain philosophical problem be solved by abstaining from some doxastic attitude? Descriptive metaphilosophy should refrain from sympathizing with a particular position – this is already an axiological recommendation. But it is needed in order to maintain the difference between the two levels of thematizing things (philosophical speech about objects and metaphilosophical speech about the attitude towards the object). *Positional neutrality* is an important assumption of descriptive metaphilosophy, because without a distance to one's own philosophical "taste" it is not possible to adequately deal with metaphilosophy. Rescher solves the possible self-contradiction by taking a complex position of orientational pluralism, which combines philosophical and metaphilosophical usage. There are other positions that are also capable of dealing with the danger of self-contradiction: *radical skepticism*, *perspectivism*, *syncretism*, etc. Obviously, these are positions that are able to reflect on their own dependence on a certain point of view.

Finally, the normative background of the relationship between philosophy and metaphilosophy remains to be considered. Assuming that values are equally important for both philosophers and metaphilosophers, the question is who, in particular, should investigate the issue. In philosophy, a separate discipline – *axiology* – is responsible for dealing with values. We have seen that prescriptive metaphilosophy is in charge of issues of normative determinism of philosophy. Who, then, investigates the values guiding metaphilosophers? If it is an axiologist, does philosophy still take primacy over metaphilosophy and even make it obsolete? If the metaphilosopher himself/herself is able to see the values influencing his/her approach to philosophy, how does he/she overcome the evaluative limitations of his/her view? Might someone with a broader perspective on these values understand them better? Are we then dealing with a "super-theory" that is able to encompass both philosophy and metaphilosophy? In order to avoid the "third man" problem, I would suggest that we "leave the ball" in the "court of philosophy" and simply assign that task to axiology. It should be noted that – similar to orientational pluralism – axiology can have two applications: both philosophical and metaphilosophical. The *taxonomy* of values and perspectives associated with them should be left to that discipline. Then one can enumerate and describe purely cognitive¹⁵, practical, aesthetic, culturally accepted, and other values. Thus, a new field of research for philosophy opens up here, especially as one gets the impression that axiology has been somewhat neglected since the days when the neo-Kantians dealt with it.

15 Cognitive values are especially important for metaphilosophers.

4. Plea for Philosophical Diversity

We should summarize the previous considerations on the relationship between philosophy and metaphilosophy. According to Rescher, metaphilosophy is a part of philosophy if it deals with the validity of philosophical theories from an axiological point of view; if it considers them from a purely historical point of view, then it occupies a place outside of philosophy. I have tried to revise that insight, which is itself metaphilosophical in nature: metaphilosophy can be positioned outside of philosophy if it accepts positional neutrality as the main guiding thread of its reasoning, and at the same time it can also have the character of systematic research and not be purely historically accentuated. In other words, metaphilosophy is a discipline dealing with philosophy, so *in that sense* it depends on the latter, but its approaches are independent and enrich our view of philosophy in any case.¹⁶

The point of metaphilosophy is not to overcome or even eliminate philosophy, but to *understand* it *better*. Therefore, metaphilosophy is not some kind of competitor to philosophy, but literally its assistant. However, even as such, it has its independence and it makes sense to deal with it. (I suppose Rescher would agree with this opinion.) Metaphilosophy gives expression to the desire for overcoming the limitation of the cognitive horizon when we reflect on our own position. After all, it has become clear that the position of the most comprehensive thinker is inserted into constellations that can only be seen if the multi-perspective character of philosophical thinking is taken into account. Philosophy necessarily has such a character and it is illusory to hope for the establishment of a comprehensive theory providing a satisfactory answer to the main philosophical problems at any time during its historical development. Should philosophers forget this, metaphilosophy is there to remind them that we benefit more from the debate of many different opinions than the domination of only one (dogmatic) opinion. In Rescher's words:

16 Examples of such metaphilosophical approaches can be found in the following publications: Karl Groos, *The Structure of Systems: A Formal Introduction to Philosophy* (Groos, 1924), Franz Kröner, *The Anarchy of Philosophical Systems* (Kröner, 1929), Eberhard Rogge, *Axiomatics of All Possible Philosophizing: The Fundamental Discourse of Logistics, Language Criticism and Metaphysics of Life* (Rogge, 1950), Hans Leisegang, *Forms of Thought* (Leisegang, 1951), and in recent times: Dimitrios Markis, *Protophilosophy: On the Reconstruction of Philosophical Language* (Markis, 1980), (of course) Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems: An Essay on the Grounds and Implications of Philosophical Diversity* (Rescher, 1985), finally two books with the same title: Richard Raatzsch, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Raatzsch, 2000), Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Williamson, 2021).

What counts as crucial from this overarching metaphilosophical standpoint is not the matter of 'getting at the absolute truth', but rather of enhancing the quality of the argumentation and gaining a deepened understanding of the structure of alternative positions.¹⁷

Therefore, the "anarchy of systems" is inevitable, but there is nothing wrong with that, on the contrary:

For centuries, most philosophers who have reflected on the matter have been intimidated by the strife of systems. But the time has come to put this behind us – not the strife, that is, which is ineliminable, but the felt need to somehow end it rather than simply to accept it and take it in stride. To reemphasize the salient point: it would be bizarre to think that philosophy is not of value because philosophical positions are bound to reflect the particular values we hold.¹⁸

In this sense: Let's continue to fight for our values and enrich the philosophical discussion!

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17 Rescher, 1985, p. 273/274.

18 Ibid., p. 277.

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