

Interview 2: Barbara Cassin

Philosophical Displacements

Contextualization

Barbara Cassin, philologist, philosopher, and specialist in Greek Antiquity, is a Director of Research at *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, Paris. In addition to her translations and many edited anthologies, her books include *L'Effet sophistique* (1995) and *Aristote et le logos* (1997). See the Cumulative Bibliography for more details. At the time of the interview she was working on a dictionary of 'untranslatable' terms in philosophy.

Towards a New Topology of Philosophy

PD In your work, and most particularly in *L'Effet sophistique* [*The Sophistic Effect*] (1995), you have put forward a sophistic history of philosophy. Would you describe this?

BC The sophistic history of philosophy is a history of neglected traditions, a history of alternative paths and a history of repressed traditions. What is essential is to have a plurality, instead of a single path. That single path of ontology, and the dominant path of ontology, for me, goes from Parmenides to Plato, via a certain reading of Aristotle up to Heidegger. I'm interested in showing how it goes even up to Habermas, who might seem to be different, but for me is just the same. The history of philosophy, the royal road, as history of ontology and phenomenology, or as history of communication, takes a path that one can't manage to trace, that one can't identify as a path, unless one looks at what it was not, what was, even materially, left to one side.

The sophistic texts are part of those texts that were concretely left to one side, concretely worked over. Imagine that you were trying to reconstruct a dinosaur from a few small bones—not only that, but that the bones had been chewed up by the dinosaur's foes. It's really a palaeontology of perversion.

To be able to modify the perception that we have of the great conceptual history of philosophy and of the royal road of ontology and phenomenology, we have to look elsewhere.

And to go and look elsewhere, we even have to go and look outside philosophy, because philosophy has organized things so that everything which appears to be a critique of the royal road is rejected as not being philosophy. For the Greeks that is quite characteristic. Alongside sophistic, you have to look at atomism, for example. You have to keep working on things—like Anaximander—which are poorly identified and interpreted in radically opposing ways.

What all these others have in common is that they have another way of speaking, even another conception of the *logos*. I found a very simple model and counter-model, perhaps also very caricaturish, in Parmenides' *Poem*: the model of Parmenidean and Platonico-Aristotelian ontology in this case, and the sophistic counter-model. Parmenidean ontology is the connection or the collusion, or the co-belonging between being and speaking [*dire*] of being. It is committed to that. To be, to think, and to say [*dire*] are the same thing.

That, very precisely, is wonderfully analyzed by Heidegger and leads directly to *Unterwegs zur Sprache* [*On the Way to Language*] and to the way in which man is entrusted with the 'being there' [*Dasein*] which will speak [*dire*] being. In the face of this entrustment, there is what has been cast back into rhetoric and literature, with the accusation of 'pseudos', meaning both 'false', 'lie' and 'fiction'. And as a model of that second type of *logos*, that I no longer call ontologic but logologic—to take up the term Novalis used to refer to discourse insofar as it is primarily concerned with itself—I found sophistic. But one would certainly have to think about the place of atomism.

So, sophistic, for me, is a discourse which is primarily and above all performative. It is not to do with speaking being, but making what one speaks be. When one makes to be what one speaks, one is in a completely different model from that of the physico-ontological model, say, where the concern is with speaking *physis*, or being, whatever name it calls itself by. No, what counts in the first model is the way in which discourse is a 'great tyrant'—to use Gorgias' phrase—and creates as it speaks. Now, the first performance is the *polis*. So one finds the opposition between physics and politics reworked.

With sophistic, one passes from physics to politics, from philosophy to literature. All that against the background of a basic discordance, which is the discordance between ontology and logology. I say all this to explain to you that in my view, one can't work the straight seam without at the same time working on the counter-models, and without working on philosophy's 'others'.

So obviously, I need numerous traditions, a new geography. I need equally the long-term perspective, to see what resurgences of antiquity appear in modernity, for example, to see how the regime of discourse forbidden by Aristotle in Book Gamma of the *Metaphysics* reappears via Freud and Lacan ... via sophistic, that is, via the possibility of homonymy and the signifier.

PD What were the moves in terms of career and intellectual development which led you to the work you have done on the Sophists?

BC I think the decisive encounter was my encounter with Heidegger, whose work I was introduced to by René Char, and my encounter with French Heideggerianism. That made me want to learn Greek, and I realized that Greek philosophy was very entangled and twisted. And not only Greek philosophy, but Greece, the Greek language, everything that was Hellenic,

was twisted in a certain way: a grandiose way, but which was appropriate for only a part of Greece. That really made me want to study the texts again, to understand how the traditions were articulated.

I learnt philology and I realized that viable alternatives existed. They were not always solid enough for my taste, from a philosophical point of view—in other words, I find that Heidegger is, in a certain way, irrefutable. In France, anyway, he has been irrefutable, much more than in Germany, obviously, for a large number of philosophers of the generation preceding mine, but also for my generation and for the one after, even now.

It was Pierre Aubenque who gave me the *Treatise on Non-Being* by Gorgias for my research subject. And from then on, many things crystallized, including the relation between philology and philosophy, between Gorgias and Parmenides. Gorgias put himself forward as a challenger to Parmenides, using other means, and a genuine violence, and above all, a terrifying intelligence which saw right through ontology. That's how I perceived him, understood him, and that is what set in train a reflection on the articulation between ontology and its critique. Can one be pre-Socratic differently? How is there a Greece other than ultra-Heideggerian?

And with those questions, entire sections of Greek culture, not only of philosophy, but also of rhetoric and literature, were opened up to being potentially reworked and perceived otherwise. The relation between philosophy and literature itself needs to be worked on—for example, when one begins to juxtapose and understand together the First and Second Sophistic Movements.

My intellectual career was really determined by that encounter with Heidegger, but subject to René Char. I mean

that it was determined in that way solely because of what the presence of René Char opened up simultaneously—he was sufficiently great and even grandiose, sufficiently celestial and terrestrial at the same time, to allow me to question and to put into perspective, let us say, the extraordinary Heideggerian intelligibility.

PD Do you think that philosophers need to rethink the relation to Heidegger ... ?

BC Nowadays?

PD Yes. Is it still a problem for contemporary French philosophy?

BC I think it is, yes, to a great extent. The only antidote—well there have been several antidotes. First, there has been more work done on Heidegger, by Derrida, for example, extensive work. But in my view, the real antidote is Deleuze, along with Jean-François Lyotard, who occupied a very complicated position. And Foucault, who certainly died a bit too soon, at least as far as his relation to Greek philosophy is concerned. (His last books, which look directly at Greece, are absolutely conventional; I don't think they come off.)

PD Many of your projects provide an occasion for encounters between different domains of philosophy, and the introduction to *Nos Grecs et leurs modernes* [*Our Greeks and Their Moderns*] (1991) explains your interest in getting Anglo-American philosophy and European hermeneutic philosophy to engage in dialogue.

BC For me, the analytic-hermeneutic difference is very important in Greek philosophy, because we are looking at two perceptions of the same texts, which are often difficult to reconcile. But it is not fundamental in philosophy. It gets things out of proportion, and leads to conflicts that are sometimes more irritating than really beneficial. I mean that I could get on as well or as badly with someone from the hermeneutic tradition, as with someone from the analytic tradition, when it

comes to Gorgias' *Treatise on Non-Being*. As it happens, I've been involved in scraps as much with one side as the other.

PD You have managed to establish quite an innovative, or independent, philosophical approach. How do you get on with institutional Classics scholarship?

BC Just at the level of anecdote, if you like, when I wrote *Si Parménide* [*If Parmenides*], a review came out, one of the most vicious I've ever read, extremely violent, explaining that horses from Bollack's stable (Bollack was on my thesis committee) were well-trained, but unfortunately they had never crossed the starting line. That was a discovery for me, to realize that what I was writing could be so violently perceived as wrong, as disconcerting, yes, but also genuinely as wrong, methodologically wrong. And then when I met the author of that review, Jonathan Barnes, and when I realised what a wonderful man he was, and how intelligent and warm our discussion could be ... that made me think.

PD Your work displaces the history of philosophy, in a way, despite depending so much on philology. One would have thought that the capacity of philologist would have been enough to give you legitimacy.

BC No, because it is precisely when one appears the closest that one is likely to be the most irreducibly different. Philology is not an exact science. Two philologists may not share the same perception of language. Nor the same perception of the rights of an interpreter. That is the very point where it becomes interesting to delve, and which led me to work next on what remains of the spirit of languages.

The Spirit of Languages

PD Could you say something about the question of the spirit of languages [*le génie des langues*]? It is connected to your work on untranslatables.

BC The big project that I have on the go is a dictionary of untranslatable terms in philosophy. Obviously it's a put-up job to call it that, because it's not a dictionary: it won't cover all the terms; secondly, because obviously the untranslatables are translated, and it is their translation that the debates are all about. This is a way of resolving finally, but certainly not once and for all, my differences with Heidegger. It's a way of giving another version of the great conceptual tradition which takes us from Greek to German, as though there were only one philosophical language worthy of the name, that of the Greeks and of those who are more Greek than the Greeks, namely the Germans, via, occasionally, a momentary and semi-accidental incursion into a language that one may consider, in a certain period, as interesting; for example, Italian during the Renaissance, or Spanish at the moment of mysticism.

What I'm trying to do in contrast is to understand how each language constitutes an autonomous geography, a net for understanding the world in its own way, a net to catch a world, create its world (something like ontology again). The only real help in thinking a conception of language which is not magnetized by the *logos* is probably Karl Wilhem von Humboldt (1767–1835): a model other than the universality of the *logos* has to be found.

The dictionary of untranslatables tries, for example, to reflect on the difference between the English word 'mind', *Geist* and *esprit*. And at the same time, between *logos*, *ratio*, *oratio*. How, when one says 'mind', one enters a different universe from the one entered when one says '*Geist*', and how one universe can't necessarily be subordinated to the other, is not necessarily inferior, but what allows it to coexist? Then one has to go into enormous detail. One has to see at what point the terms were translated, at what point the bifurcations took

place, at what point the superimpositions began to exist. And each time, what sort of genealogical arborescence, but also what sort of rhizomatic spreading out, is at stake.

At the same time as one is interested in discordances between the networks, one is also interested in discontinuities. For example, the term *leggadria*, at a certain point during the Italian Renaissance, was invented for the Mona Lisa's smile, a woman's doe-like beauty, that beauty of a wild thing tamed. The term is not well translated by 'grace', because 'grace' also has a religious meaning that is not truly part of the meaning of *leggadria*. So each dimension of language has to be perceived in its singularity. So that examples can only be symptoms ... for example, what's going on when *Istina* and *Pravda* both lay claim to be translated by 'truth', since you absolutely have to refer *Pravda* at least to the domain of justice as well?

PD Philosophy tends to deny the spirit of languages?

BC I think that philosophy tends to turn the spirit of languages into something horrible. I think that the spirit of languages is an absolutely terrifying concept, which leads in a straight line to the worst kind of Heideggerianism, that is Hellenico-Nazism, quite easily identified; although I don't want to caricature too quickly, the caricatures are there.

We have to rethink, set about reconsidering, the possibility that the spirit of languages need not be horrifying. To reflect, for example, what, at a certain point in Russian history, diglossia can impose as the difference between the world above and the world below, and wonder how it opens on to spiritualism. That sort of phenomenon is on the frontier between linguistics and philosophy.

One gets too quickly into horror when one thinks a language [*langue*] *qua* language [*langue*], just as when one thinks a nation *qua* nation. Is there a way of doing it without arousing

anxiety [*angoisse*]? The problem has to be rethought, but we have very few instruments at our disposal, because, as it happens, the most powerful instruments were or are Graeco-German. So, to find a way of thinking the problem differently, and to find counter-models, real counter-models, that gets very difficult. And those are the difficulties I try to confront.

PD Why did you use the word 'anxiety'?

BC It creates anxiety to think about the superiority of one language, *qua* language, in its relation to philosophy. It creates anxiety to think that Greek, then German, are the languages of being.

To resolve that anxiety requires, on the one hand, rethinking the relation between philosophy as ontology, and what is not philosophy as ontology, that's the reason for the sophistic lever, if you like.

That means having to rethink the relation—but all in one go—the relation between literature and philosophy, and poetry a little differently, in order to desacralize all that.

This leads us to ask: what remains of the spirit of languages? That means having to rethink plurality through other means. For example, one often says that philosophical English is linked to ordinary language (following the arguments of Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell). This is an example of the singularity of language. And when I begin to interpret the analytic/hermeneutic antagonism against that background, it becomes an interesting question for me.

Philosophy and Its Others

PD There are also, in your work, reflections on the relation between women and philosophy. In one issue of the *Cahiers du GRIF*, 'Women-Philosophy', Françoise Collin asks: 'From where does one think when one thinks? What are the sources of thought?' (Collin 1992). I think I know that you are wary of

the idea that a thought can be masculine or feminine. Having said that, in your article in the 'Women-Philosophy' issue of the *Cahiers*, you say that a woman 'makes do with the leftovers, she knows how to make a ragout'. Apparently for you there is a relation between the fact of being a man or a woman in contemporary philosophy, and the question of how one works as a philosopher, what methodology one chooses, what one's philosophical gestures are. How do you think this relation, if one does not accept the idea of a masculine or feminine thought?

BC Perhaps I can begin with the relation between, let us say, the great ontological or phenomenological tradition and its 'others'. The great ontological or phenomenological tradition is at one and the same time a tradition of submission and a tradition of mastery. It is certainly a submission to being, to the world, to the real. But it is also an absolute mastery, in several senses. Firstly because it defines a straight line, an orthodoxy. And everything which is not within this orthodoxy—either for it or even against it, but in a relation which is acceptable because it confirms the rules of the game—is expelled, and in a certain way reduced to silence.

All the same, up till now, philosophy has essentially been carried out by men. It is quite natural to assimilate, or to be tempted to assimilate, this philosophical power to power of a masculine kind. So I would say (perhaps one can speak like that without being too simplistic), that the first women I came across in philosophy were the Sophists. They constitute for the Platonic-Aristotelian orthodoxy an unassimilable heterodoxy.

That does not prevent them in other respects, returning in force, just as women come back to overthrow the power of men. The Sophists returned in force, to the point where Hegel called them 'the masters of Greece'. They returned in force with rhetoric and the Second Sophistic Movement, and they

were already there in force in the linguistic constitution of the *polis*. But philosophy as such marginalized them completely.

The philosopher who was mostly responsible for marginalizing them, in this instance, was not so much Plato as Aristotle. Plato fought the Sophists every inch of the way—using, whether he liked it or not, his resemblance to them, or the resemblance of Socrates to a Sophist. It was Aristotle who truly classified them as 'other', put them in the index as 'other' (in the sense, too, of putting them *on* the Index), when he demonstrated that their discursive regime, their way of speaking, was not human. They fell outside the principle of non-contradiction, and that made them immediately '*homoioi phutōi*', 'like plants'.

Women did not speak much either, did they? Nor children, nor animals, nor slaves. All of them, they were all a bit on the plant side. In short, I think that philosophy has never been able to prevent itself from being Aristotelian on that level. So—I'm going very quickly—but there is a persistent position of the 'other' which could be thought of as being somewhat feminine. And to hold that position is, shall we say, all of a sudden 'to philosophize'—Novalis used to say, even, 'philosophistize'—that feminine. To go on holding the position, and, not claiming it, I don't mean that, but showing its effects, showing how it is produced, its genealogy and its effects—that is what is somewhat new, relative to the great orthodoxy.

There is a grand tradition and there is a great orthodoxy, and then there are all the 'others'. There is philosophical language, and then there are the rest—that is, precisely, rhetoric, literature, a certain type of poetry which is not the great ontological poetry or which is not considered as such, etc. All these different registers, for me, are analogous, assimilable, adoptable and adaptable.

That's what I mean by making a ragout.

These registers are not accepted as such, and in any case, the passage from one to another is impossible to accept today—at least, impossible to accept in the grand tradition of editorial mastery which succeeds philosophical mastery.

When I wanted to publish at the same time *The Sophistic Effect* and a collection of short stories, *On the Clinamen*, it proved impossible. I was told that if I wanted to keep my scholarly reputation, I should not publish the collection of short stories. As far as I was concerned, I thought my reputation would benefit from it. In the event, I published the stories in literary journals. I consider that the stories came out of the same type of work on language, and the same type of work on the dominant, orthodox, or again ontological, phenomenological tradition. It is exactly the same type of philosophical work—and I would have been really excited if they could have been accepted at the same time. But as it turned out, they couldn't.

It makes me feel absolutely speechless, and I don't feel I can swim against the current, it is too much for me. It is too difficult to swallow. And besides—one final point to explain my relation to, let us say, 'masculine' philosophy—of course I have always encountered a lot of good will towards my stories or my poems from male philosophers who thought that what I wrote in philosophy was worthless. They have always said to me: 'Well, of course, yes, it's brilliant, your writing, when you write stories or poems, it's fantastic.' But you see, for me, there is a kind of social resistance there. It is much easier for a woman to be a novelist than a philosopher. And as soon as she is recognized as a philosopher, she must not be a novelist.

PD

How would you describe your relation to the academy, to institutionalized philosophy? You've already touched on that

issue quite a few times when you mentioned the reception of both your philological and your philosophical work, and the reception of your literary work.

BC I have been extremely lucky, in that the university philosophers gave me the chance to work at the CNRS [National Centre for Scientific Research]. So I am not answerable to anyone, so long as I produce reports explaining, in an acceptable way, how I am working, and so long as I actually *am* working. I am just incredibly happy and fortunate to have this position. It was simply rather unlikely that I would get it. But at the end of the day, it is probably a generous institution, and as it happened, at a certain point, the people who were involved in the decision were generous too. I hope we continue to be generous now I belong to the people who decide.

But in the normal course of events, I think that anyone in my position would have given up philosophy. Because after my first doctorate, for *Si Parménide* [*If Parmenides*] (already something very weighty), I simply couldn't find a job at all, ever. It was quite understandable, because I didn't have the *agrégation* [the highest level competitive examination]. Now the *agrégation* is something which I couldn't prepare, I wasn't capable of it, I didn't want to, all of those things, but certainly too, I wasn't capable of it. It was an obstacle, an *agrégation* which I couldn't get through, especially after 1968. For me, it was the opposite of what could be expected of me, and of what I was equipped to do, or of what I was capable of wanting to do, especially after I'd encountered Heidegger and Char. So I had to stick it out for a very long time, *financially* as well.

I took photographs, I was able to sell some canvases, and I did some painting. When I didn't have any money, I was also able to write for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, and that way I had enough to live on. I led quite a strange life; some of the time I

taught psychotic adolescents in day hospitals, sometimes I taught at the Post Office, sometimes even at the ENA [the elite university that trains future public administrators]. I was able to get by without having to become a philosophy teacher in a provincial *lycée*¹, at a time when I already had a child with someone who worked in Paris. A truly impossible life when one doesn't have friends, or relations, or a husband to keep you, or when one doesn't have real enthusiasm for what one is doing.

All this meant that I worked in my own way, according to my own rhythm. I think that teaching psychotic adolescents was the experience from which I learnt the most. I did philosophy with them, but obviously not the sort of philosophy that I would teach today to university students. I did early philosophy with them, I worked on language in its early stages. I read *Cratylus* with them, to show them that they had a more maternal language than other people, with an alphabet more familiar than Greek, and that they could play with their language as Plato did with his. They would invent etymologies, we did astonishing, brilliant things. That taught me a lot.

So I was fortunate that I didn't have to deal with institutions until I could do so effectively. That is, until I'd done enough work to ask for it to be legitimated. And at that point, there were people who were so good as to do that. But it was really luck, enormous luck. Then things sorted themselves out without trouble, I mean that I really worked hard, at the same time trying not to become too narrow as a result, which is not easy, and now I feel—and that surprises me a lot—that I have a sort of power.

PD Yes, institutional power, you might say, which is quite rare for a woman philosopher.

BC Indeed. I think that I've always had a lot of luck, and I've also

worked hard—both. The luck is that I was as interested in drama, painting, writing, short stories or poems, as I was in being a philosopher. So in the end, that's a ragout as well—having children, having lovers, living, travelling. It is in doing all that that I felt I could do philosophy a little bit differently.

PD If, over the course of history, there have been few women philosophers, and some whose style of writing philosophy was, one might say, sometimes a bit awkward, now in the 1990s, there suddenly seem to be women philosophers whose writing, or prose, has a new quality ...

BC Their prose, yes.

PD ... where there isn't that feeling of struggle, it is as though there are now women's voices which are more at ease, at ease with philosophy. I think that's new.

BC Yes, one is at ease with philosophy, with language. For me, in any case, what is very important is to have the right to play on all the registers of language. I don't want to be obliged to write like the contributors to *The Classical Review*. I don't want to have to write like that, and, in any case, I can't do that kind of—let us say—dreary specialist work. Light-heartedness comes from complicity with all the strings of the language, and that constitutes at the same time a real ironising of all mastery of the object.

That's why I had such fun with the Second Sophistic Movement, I really loved it. It is a sort of layered palimpsest of the whole of Greek culture, with all the arts thrown in. It is a kind of writing that is only possible if the culture is there in the background, but at the same time the take on tradition is ironic. So I'm talking about stirring up the tradition, making holes in it, through the sheer weight of the details.

PD How do you situate your work relative to other directions in contemporary French philosophy? Is there other work being

done which seems connected to yours? Is the work that inspires you part of your support network of philosophers, and/or also of women-philosophers in particular? Are there women philosophers who are producing work that seems to some extent linked with yours?

BC Look, I have friends that I enjoy reading, both men and women. All the same, I think that there are a few of us who are aware that there are women philosophers, something we wouldn't have dared to say to ourselves before. It's more that.

Claude Imbert, Monique David-Ménard, Jacqueline Lichtenstein for example—there is a new generation arriving on the scene who see themselves as women and philosophers at one and the same time, and who feel themselves, let us say, to be both happy and iconoclastic. Fine. But I'm not sure that we are truly iconoclastic. I think we are going very fast, it is even quite astonishing, if you like. Your questions make me realize suddenly that I am old and I am a classic, you see. [Laughter] I say to myself, dammit, if I'm being asked questions like that, how old and traditional I must be.

PD Apparently, you often work in a group or a team, it is something you have done throughout your career. I'm thinking for example of several collections and conferences, such as *Le Plaisir de parler* [*The Pleasure of Speaking*] (1986a), *Nos Grecs et leurs modernes* [*Our Greeks and Their Moderns*] and *Positions de la sophistique* [*Sophistic Positions*] (1986b) among others. What are you currently working on?

BC Firstly on the Dictionary of Untranslatables, and that is a lot of threads to keep hold of. That too is my female side, as you were saying, working in a group and all that. I organize; I arrange; I go to the market; I prepare something to eat; and when I work it is the same. The collaborative works are things that I arrange, that I concoct; that too is a ragout.

It's interesting because each time I begin from scratch. In effect, I begin by going to the market and choosing the raw material before doing the cooking, that is before doing a book. It is a really enjoyable way to work, simply because I don't know where it will end up. I don't know what sort of book will come out of it. But I'm now sure that a book *will* come out of it, and further I'm sure that I'm going to love the book.

PD

You are at the market with the untranslatables?

BC

Yes. In addition, I've just finished retranslating Parmenides' *Poem*; it's not at all intended as a definitive translation, but as the exploration of a real question: Greek, *qua* Greek, is it or is it not the language of being? That's the subtitle, by the way: 'The Language of Being?' with a question mark.

I perceived in, or perhaps projected into Parmenides' *Poem* two main lines of interpretation. The first, suggested to me by Gorgias, is that it is about creating being with language. Parmenides, Parmenides' *Poem*, is first and foremost the story of Greek which, following the path of the 'is', makes language itself into the plot. It deploys syntax and semantics, the whole grammar: starting from the first '*esti*', from the verb conjugated as 'is', it produces the subject, '*to on*', being [*étant*], substantified participle as noun. How, through what linguistic changes, one gets from verb to subject, from being to substance: that's what I call the ontology of grammar.

The second thread that I've identified is the way in which the story—this putting into narrative of the language—is presented as the story of all the grand narratives. This ontology which is so new, is already a palimpsest which in fact weaves and rearticulates all the earlier discourses, from myth to physics via epic. Thus, the moment at which being, *to on*, is indicated as such, takes up term by term the phrases which in Homer's *Odyssey* refer to Ulysses when he sails past the Sirens: 'solidly

rooted there'. In that way one attains an understanding of the fact that all Greek texts possess an extraordinary palimpsestic depth. And from there, the understanding that philosophy and literature are terribly linked.

The Prostitute's History

PD What sort of relation is there between the history of philosophy and the sophistic history of philosophy?

BC The sophistic history of philosophy is obviously a provocation which opposed itself to the philosophical history of philosophy. The philosophical history of philosophy, for me, is the history of philosophy from Parmenides to Heidegger, via Plato and Aristotle—and all the greats up to, and including, Hegel. That is, a history of ontology and phenomenology. And a history for which philosophy becomes confused with its history.

Nowadays, what would a sophistic history of philosophy be? It is a history of what was forbidden by the dominant tradition in its effort to define, and define itself as philosophy. Walter Benjamin used to say: history should be written from the point of view of the prostitute instead of from the point of view of the client. In a certain way, the sophistic history of philosophy writes the history of philosophy from the point of view of the prostitute, that is, from the point of view of the bad 'other'—the one whom one has not only the right, but also the duty to shun. It writes the history of philosophy from the point of view of philosophy's 'others', of the outside of philosophy, and its effect (the sophistic effect) is to show how—why—that exterior is philosophically determined. It's a way of reproblematising the notion of inside and outside, interior and exterior.

I showed this, with reference to a precise but decisive point, in 'The Decision of Meaning', when I analyzed the impossible demonstration given by Aristotle, in Book Gamma of

the *Metaphysics*, of the principle of all principles, the law of non-contradiction. Aristotle finds this first principle, which we all believe and obey, without thinking, on the refutation of sophistics. That is, on the requirement or the decision, that to speak means to say something, that is, to signify something, that is, to signify one and the same thing for oneself and for others. When I say 'Good Day', I am not saying 'Go to the devil', or if I say at the same time 'Go to the devil', then, according to Aristotle, I do not say anything at all, I am not even speaking. Outside of the regime of meaning as univocity, there is only 'what there is in the sounds of the voice and in the words'.

In the course of his demonstration, Aristotle admits that the whole of Greece (Heraclitus and Protagoras, of course, but also Homer and Parmenides himself) is in danger of being left out, outside the regime of univocity. But Aristotle works at recuperating them, and ends up showing that they all speak like him; they all belong to the faithful, they all accept the principle. The only one left outside is the one who insists on making the materiality of the *logos* speak, that is in this case, the Sophist, the one who speaks for 'the pleasure of speaking', the irreparable 'speaking plant'.

So to do a sophistic history of philosophy, is to do a history of those whom philosophy considered not to exist, and to do the history of philosophy from their point of view; and in so doing, indicate the boundaries of philosophy, which philosophy has imposed on itself. So I am trying to identify a series of philosophical gestures. To each gesture corresponds its 'other', what is excluded or sick—and what interests me most is to see how the gestures get reproduced.

I'm very interested to see how Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas reproduce the Aristotelian gesture. How in their

work, it is the consistent sceptic who becomes the Sophist. Using the same type of argument. What strikes me are the points at which philosophy is impelled into violence. It's what I call 'using the stick'. When Aristotle says of those 'people who are puzzled to know whether one ought to honour the gods and love one's parents or not' that they 'need punishment, while those who are puzzled to know whether snow is white or not need perception' (*Topics*, Bk 1, 11: 105a.), I'm very interested to know at what point philosophy feels it has the right to say that people need punishment ...

PD And feels the need to say that people need punishment.

BC ... yes, when does it feel the need to. That comes back to a certain type of problematic that Lyotard had in mind with 'the differend'. At a certain moment, Habermas excludes certain men, excludes certain types of speech that are actually employed, puts them outside the 'communicational community'. That is something that interests me a lot.

PD In *The Sophistic Effect*, you say specifically that it is not an interest 'in the margins'; you are not 'making a plea for *penseurs maudits* [accursed thinkers]² against vetoes and exclusion'. You say also that you are not concerned with 'rehabilitating' sophistic thought.

BC What I'm trying to say is: 'Don't get things mixed up.' I'm not interested in those who are rehabilitating sophistics, because rehabilitating sophistics consists in making Sophists into philosophers after all. They are welcomed back to the flock; they occupy a place, at a certain point, within the philosophical fold.

For example, as we are thinking about the Anglo-Saxon tradition, G. B. Kerford thinks that the Sophists are hyper-rationalists, and congratulates them on it: they want even the formless, even sensation, to be subject to reason. But, strange as it may seem, that is exactly what Plato says about them,

apart from the fact that Plato thinks they would do better to concentrate on ideas than on words and sensations. That type of rehabilitation, which merely reverses the scale of values, while keeping the characteristics and the judgments, doesn't interest me at all.

PD Their rehabilitation *qua* philosophers?

BC *Qua* philosophers. We are told that they are serious thinkers, because they fit perfectly into the traditional schema of Greek philosophy. So no, that does not interest me. One could say the same thing about the Sceptics. There is a big rehabilitation of the Sceptics, according to which they are rigorous philosophers, and there is also a rehabilitation of the Sceptics, according to which they are disturbing philosophers, who disrupt philosophy. Obviously, it's the second kind that I'm interested in. But they can't be separated so easily, and the second kind is continually recuperated by the first. The inside always absorbs the outside—that's how it is.

Don't think that I am going to rehabilitate the Sophists by claiming that they are good philosophers. On the contrary, at a pinch I would say that it is the philosophers, insofar as they have excluded the Sophists, who interest me. At the same time, what interests me is the light which sophistic can shed on philosophy. Anyway, it's not because the Sophists are outside that I'm interested in them.

PD It's because they are excluded?

BC You've got it. It's the gestures and the strategies. And it might also be said, after all, that I am largely rehabilitating the Sophists as philosophers to the extent to which I make of them, roughly speaking, models for the critique of ontology. As Jean Beaufret used to say—and it's a comment with frightening implications—'A destroyer of torpedo boats [*contre-torpilleur*] is first and foremost a torpedo boat [*torpilleur*].' How can you

manage not to get recaptured by the inside? What interests me are the gestures of recapture and the gestures forbidding that recapture.

That's why there is fluctuation, and why it [*ça*] has to be looked at over the long term. There are repetitions, but they are not quite the same. There are returns, but they are not quite identical. I am one of the only ones, in France at any rate, who has really tried to think together the First and the Second Sophistic Movements. There is one Anglo-Saxon tradition, more on the side of analytic philosophers, concerned with the First Sophistic Movement, another Anglo-Saxon tradition, more on the side of the literary classicists, which is concerned with the Second Sophistic Movement. But both together—not really. What interests me is what emerges from all that history. What does Philostratus connect with? [*met en continuité*] What is the new relation between sophistic, rhetoric, literature, philosophy, politics, etc.?

PD Are ways of doing philosophy or poetry that don't give rise to the philosopher's wish to exclude of less interest to you?

BC On the one hand, poetry insofar as it is sacred, or holy, and which has a place inside the quasi-sacred word of philosophy does not interest me as such. On the other hand, perhaps Celan's poetry, insofar as it struggles against a certain sacralization of the word, that might interest me. Having said that, Mallarmé doesn't write a single line that could not be interpreted both ways. Rimbaud doesn't write a single line that could not be interpreted both ways ... so I can't speak like that. If I did, I would be speaking all the time against myself.

PD From what you say, one might say that the position of the 'other' is feminine, or ... ?

BC You mean that I could be summary enough to assimilate the two.

- PD** Yes, that's it. That's what you said at a certain point.
- BC** Yes, that is true. That is, I think that there is a real collusion between orthodoxy and mastery. And there is a real collusion between mastery in philosophy and mastery by men. At any rate, in philosophy the collusion is historical. It's a fact. But that does not mean that those who occupy the position of the 'other' might not also be men. That is why I say, if pushed, that if I've encountered women in philosophy, then the Sophists are the first women I encountered in philosophy.
- PD** Women would be in a better position relative to philosophy if they read your work?
- BC** You mean, would a woman prefer *The Sophistic Effect*? I think it's not out of the question, while emphasizing that it is not a question of sex. Perhaps the feminine side of the mind as eternal irony of the community feels more at home in what I've written. It is certainly true that what I've written is ironic, all the same, relative to the massive lava of orthodoxy. I'd say it was more that.

Barbara Cassin, Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris
 Penelope Deutscher, Australian National University, Canberra
 Paris July 1998

Translator's Notes

- 1 Secondary school preparing 15–18-year olds for the baccalaureate (since 1975). Philosophy is taught at sixth form level.
- 2 A phrase often applied to certain 19th-century French poets such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine, because of their interest in socially marginal elements.

Interview 3: Claude Imbert Philosophical Encounters

Contextualization

Claude Imbert is chair of Philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, in addition to an annual seminar given in the United States (at Johns Hopkins University and the University of California at Davis). Her areas of specialization include classics and mathematics. Her publications include *Phénoménologies et langues formulaires* (1992) and *Pour une histoire de la logique* (1999) as well as the translations of Frege listed in the Bibliography and numerous articles. At the time of the interview she was working on a new book on the 1930s, *Années 30, le point de non retour*.

Logic and its History

- PD** Claude Imbert, you have most recently published *Pour une histoire de la logique* [*Towards A History of Logic*] (1999). I know you want to expand our notion of what logic is.
- CI** I would like to get free of the word 'logic'. *Pour une histoire de la logique* began with a long introduction on Plato. Of course, the word originates with the Greeks. But since then we have been confronted with different syntaxes, and no one logic can claim to be the logic *par excellence*.
- PD** What is a logical system, in your view? What is a logician?
- CI** That is an excellent and difficult question. I am not going to give a direct reply, because I've encountered more than one logician, and it is precisely the necessity of working out what was happening in each instance that has given my work its direction?
- CI** Originally, 'logical' was an adjective, qualifying whatever had to do with the correct use of the *logos*; the *logos* itself was understood in two senses, and unifying them was precisely the point at issue. The point was to inscribe on to the *logos*, in its sense as our articulated language, the objective order of that reason