

Austrian Economics Newsletter

Summer 1987 • The Ludwig von Mises Institute

Nicolaas G. Pierson and Socialism

by

Johannes Overbeek

University of the Virgin Islands

Pierson's work "is the first important contribution to the modern discussion of the economic aspects of Socialism." —F.A. Hayek

Life and Work

Nicolaas Gerard Pierson, born in Amsterdam in 1839, was the foremost Dutch economist of the 19th century. During his primary and secondary school years he attended both French and English speaking schools. Pierson never attended any formal university or earned any formal degrees, preferring rather the discipline of self-study. Following this desire for self-study he visited England and then the United States in order to learn more first hand about the cotton trade and the banking crisis that was taking place in Louisiana. His analysis of the 1857 banking crisis was later published (in Dutch) under the title of *Trade and Banking in Louisiana*. Pierson was married in 1862 at the age of 23 and spent the next several years working in the cotton industry, banking and from 1864-1868 teaching economics to high school students; all the while constantly writing and researching areas of intense personal interest.

In 1868 the president of the Dutch Central Bank wanted to appoint the young Pierson to a management position. This appointment met with objections from some members who thought that Pierson was too young and too radical. In some of his earlier writings, Pierson had been critical of the Dutch government's "exploitation of the soil" policy in the Indonesian colony; emphasizing instead of "exploitation" the economic and social merits of private landownership and the need for personal initiative in colonial agriculture. Despite these objections he was appointed by a large majority. This appointment stood for 19 years, until 1885 when he was elected as a president of the Dutch Central Bank (1885-1891).

Between 1891 and 1894 Pierson was the Minister of Finance in the newly formed government. This office gave him the opportunity to realize his ambition of making the Dutch tax code fairer and simpler. Many of the antiquated indirect taxes, such as the salt tax and the soap tax, were eliminated and replaced by a modest tax on the income from property and corporate tax. His main purpose was not to increase state revenues but to disperse the burden of taxation.

In 1898 Pierson was elected Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1898-1901), this office was in addition to



Dr. Johannes Overbeek

being the Minister of Finance. Pierson's emphasis widened and now included social legislation. New laws regarding elementary education, child labor, housing and health were adopted. Pierson's principal aim was to alleviate some of the evils associated with industrialization and urbanization. (Between 1905 and 1909 he was an elected member of the Dutch House of Commons.)

In 1875 he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree by the University of Leiden, and this made him a recognized part of the academic establishment. Between the years 1877 and 1885 he taught economics at the University of Amsterdam. Both of these honors were bestowed despite the fact he never attended any university. In 1889 he published his two-volume treatise, *Principles of Economics*.

INSIDE

Hermeneutical Integrity 5

**Review of *The Gold Standard*
An Austrian Perspective** 9

In 1904 Cambridge University awarded him his second doctoral degree (honoris cause). During this same period the prestigious American Economic Association also made him an honorary member. Pierson died in 1909 at the age of 70.

Pierson defined economics as the "science of exchange" and was one of the very first Dutch economists to embrace marginalism. In his textbook *Principles of Economics*, Pierson tried to reconcile marginalism with the teachings of the classicals. Pierson's five main areas of focus were: methodology, taxation, the international monetary system, socialism and social issues.

At the age 22, Pierson presented a paper on "The Logic of Economics" to a group of economists in Amsterdam where he defended the deductive method. Throughout his life he would remain faithful to this approach although he recognized that factual evidence had to be systematically examined. In fact, as a prime minister he helped set up the Dutch "Central Bureau of Statistics" (1899) still the main fact-gathering agency.

Pierson rejected the "exclusive" use (but not the use itself) of the inductive method as advocated by the German Historical School. He criticized their fondness for the omnipotent state, their protectionist preferences and their cloudy thinking. He believed that a mere jumble of facts without theory was useless. Partially due to Pierson's criticism, the German Historical School never quite made headway in Dutch economics. It was because of Pierson's influence and his criticism of the German Historical School that encouraged the adoption of the ideas of the Austrian School in the Netherlands.

During his entire life-time Pierson defended the idea of a simple and equitable tax code and as Minister of Finance he implemented some of his ideas. He was, in his treatise, one of the first economists to present a comprehensive treatment of the incidence of taxation. During these years he wrote many essays on the silver and gold standards; first defending bimetallism only to abandon it later.

In his treatise, written in the latter part of the 19th century, Pierson rejected the notion that the free market economy promoted injustice and poverty. He observed that no matter what test was applied, the average worker in Europe enjoyed a higher standard of living than ever before. Although he sympathized with some of the concerns of socialists, he took the view that their policy proposals were usually confused and failed to address the key problem: how best to use limited resources to meet the endless wants of individuals and societies.

Pierson was also preoccupied with social issues, such as: rapid population growth, unemployment, distressing housing conditions etc. As he saw it, both private initiative and government had a role to play in coping with these problems. Yet government "involvement", which he did not oppose on principle, should not be allowed to interfere with the production of goods and services.

Pierson, throughout his active career, continuously confronted burning issues and this brought him praiseworthy recognition from foreign economists. Carl Menger stated that Pierson's work was important and that because of him, German speaking economists were interested in Dutch economic literature. In 1909, when Pierson was severely ill, Alfred Marshall wrote him a letter in which he said that the world would class him with Adam Smith, the thinker, the patriot and the cosmopolitan, and with Turgot the statesman-economist.

Socialism

In a short article written in 1904, Pierson explained the basic difference between socialists and non-socialists. Socialists, he said, believe that poverty and hardship will disappear if only people wish it; they see indigence as a consequence of the way society is organized. Change the social organization and destitution will go away. The non-socialists, however, believed that poverty is due to more fundamental causes, such as: rapid population growth or slow capital formation. They do not believe in the reforms socialists propose because such revisions only amplify those basic determinants of destitution.¹

In his textbook Pierson notices with some surprise the apparent drift of opinion towards socialism in the 1870s, the very moment that living standards are higher than ever before.² Socialist criticism, he observed, is usually not directed against some particular aspect of the free enterprise order but against the very foundations of the system itself. At the same time, very few if any, concrete and realistic counter proposals have come forth to replace the market economy. This is especially true of the supporters of the "socialism of hope" or "poetical socialism."³ Adherents to this kind of socialism believe that the future moral standards will improve considerably and that a radically different-socialist-economic system is therefore bound to emerge. Pierson replies that the two propositions were not necessarily related. It was because people link them without further thought that the socialism of hope arises. Thus it is vaguely felt that the present social order cannot endure and that somehow a "higher" level of social organization will take its place. This new society must be socialist. If, however, one asks how could the new order solve certain concrete problems one is left without an answer.

The more radical socialist writings often consist of condemnations and criticism. Frequently, feelings of hostility are obviously the true foundation of all this faultfinding. Moreover, says Pierson, there is little evidence of genuine scientific thinking in the socialist writings. Works by such authors as Ferdinand Lassalle, Henry George and Karl Marx are full of blunders and errors. "Let us not look for science among these men" notes Pierson, "but rather for expression of feeling of which the predominant tone varying with the speaker is either that of enthusiasm for a dimly conceived ideal or of compassion for the lower classes; or that of intense hatred of existing conditions."⁴

Socialist writers, such as Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864), advocated the establishment of publicly financed workers cooperatives operating their own means of production. It is argued that this would eliminate the exploitation inherent in the capitalist wage system once and for all. Pierson retorts that this is simply not the case. Competition among cooperatives would still prevail. Some associations would do better than others, while some would not prosper at all and would end up by being dissolved. Moreover, a member of the cooperative who has two sons would not permit a father with ten male descendants to introduce all of them into the association on terms of parity and equal profit sharing. As a result, a growing body of non-members would be formed and these individuals would consider themselves lucky if they could simply be employed (by the association) as wage earners. Thus we return to the wage system so much despised by the socialists. Within the cooperatives, a new class of leaders—hardly distinguishable from the old employers—would probably emerge.

Another important socialist proposal consists in the nationalization of the means of production. If the state intends to nationalize the nation's productive resources it would have to choose between a quick seizure or a gradual one. A rapid take-over seemed improbable to Pierson because the state would not know how to operate such firms and would first have to learn. But a gradual nationalization, supposedly accompanied by some measure of compensation, would lead to the following undesirable results. Resource owners, seeing the day of confiscation come nearer, would stop saving and start neglecting their property. Thus, whatever the state finally confiscated would probably be impaired if not in a state of advanced dilapidation. The smaller the indemnity, the greater the neglect of property would be. No matter what promises state officials could make, some people would have their doubts about the state's willingness and ultimate capacity to fulfill its financial obligations.

Socialism also pretends to be capable of reducing economic inequality substantially. Would it be possible, asked Pierson? The Dutch economist stressed the point that when the means of production was collectivized the former owners would be compensated; there would still be a propertied class but this time the wealth would consist of government bonds. Second, bitter experience would teach socialist governments that saving and capital formation must be encouraged in all types of economic systems, especially if population keeps growing. In order to generate such savings, government banks would be obliged to pay substantial interest rates on savings deposits while the institution of inheritance, which is known to enhance saving, would have to be maintained. Therefore, Pierson concluded, economic inequality would survive. Moreover, as interest rates would probably vary over time, the market value of government bonds would fluctuate as well and speculation, so much loathed by socialists, would still prevail.

There are also some positive aspects of socialism according to Pierson. By eliminating competition and organizing production in fewer units, some resources would be liberated and reallocated. Total production would then increase. Moreover, entrepreneurial profits would cease to exist because they were a reward for risks which no longer exist in the socialist community. Profits could be redistributed to the rest of the population. The burden of misallocation of resources and overproduction, in particular branches of industry, would be spread more evenly as the government compensated the unemployed with funds taken from those lucky enough to keep their jobs. Finally, in a socialist society, the economically weak and vulnerable would be better cared for than in a more laissez-faire economy.*

These advantages, Pierson noted, would be outstripped by some severe drawbacks. Economic progress—without competition—would be much slower than in a free enterprise society. The bureaucratic world of socialism consists of the controllers and the controlled; an environment where individual initiative would be stifled as it always is in bureaucratic organizations.

In order to foster creativeness, a considerable amount of freedom of action could be left to the managers of government enterprises. Partaking in the firm's profit might also be permitted; however, to avoid abuse of freedom, managers would have to share in the losses, too. This situation would probably lead to a "safety first" policy resulting in little or no inventiveness in the final product. In addition, after a relatively short period of socialism it would become increasingly more difficult to find anyone from the old entrepreneurial class who once had managed their own firm. Thus all enterprises would be conducted by bureaucrats and government officials and it is well known that government offices are not fertile grounds for creative ideas.

Another problem socialism would have to face is that of capital formation. In a free enterprise society large profits and high rents are usually invested and thus converted into productive equipment. This capital formation makes large scale production, low prices and rising wages possible. Even if a socialist state rewarded savings, profits and rents as sources of capital formation would disappear and it would, according to Pierson, remain to be seen whether individual savings would permit the steady increase in living standards witnessed in market economies. In order to speed up capital formation socialist governments might find themselves obliged to set a wide margin between wages paid and the prices of products posted in government stores. In other words, socialist governments would pay workers wages which are less than the value of their product, which amounts to the very essence of "capitalist exploitation" in socialist criticism. Finally, (here Pierson is a predecessor of Lionel Robbins) patterns of international trade and finance would degenerate into international rivalry.⁵

Academic Socialism

Before we enter into Pierson's views on "academic" or state socialism a few words of introduction are in order.⁶ Between 1843 and 1883, the so-called "Historical School" was the most influential circle of economic thought in Germany. This school assigned overwhelming importance to historical studies in the examination of economic processes while neglecting the deductive method. Analytical economic theory was virtually ignored in Germany between 1870 and the early 1920s, so that most German economists were unable to understand the great inflation of the 1920s and the depression of the 1930s. This influence was due to Gustav Schmoller (1838-1917) and other members of the later period of the Historical School.

The older "Historical School" had been influenced by the so called "Romantic Movement" and characterized by strong anti-individualistic intellectual tendencies. Thus, the Historical School had accustomed men's minds to the idea that the analytical apparatus of classical economists was of minor importance. They also prepared people for state intervention in the economy.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century there arose in Germany a reformist movement known as "Socialism of the Chair," "State Socialism" or "Academic Socialism" (Kathedersozialismus) because of the large number of university professors supporting its views. One reason for this new interest was Gustav Schmoller, a member of the Historical School. Schmoller was an academic socialist and an all-powerful figure in the social sciences in Germany, had become so influential that for decades hardly any chair of economics was filled without his approval. His endorsement of a candidate required commitment to his approach to economics; German adherents of the Austrian marginalist school were systematically excluded from university positions.

Academic socialists supported the following agenda which was characterized by a far reaching extension of government action: (1) redistribution of income through a progressive income tax and inheritance taxes; (2) encouragement of trade unions and workers' cooperatives; (3) extension of social insurance programs and minimum wage legislation; (4) extension of public ownership of industry; and (5) protective tariffs.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century a number of university professorships in the United States were filled by young scholars who had studied economics in Germany and had come under the influence both of the Historical School and State Socialism. The American version of the Historical School came to be known as "Institutional Economics." Actually many of the founders of the American Economic Association, such as historicist Richard T. Ely, were familiar with and sympathetic to this historical approach.⁷

Pierson emphasized that the scientific quality of the publications by the "socialists of the academic chair" left much to be desired. Some works merely justified

the ideas of earlier schools of thought. Others attempted to discredit scientific economics in order to facilitate vindication of prejudices and erroneous policies being advocated by representatives of the working class. Pierson added, that such writings always end up glorifying the laboring class. Comprehensive criticism of State Socialism could, according to Pierson, be summarized in six points:

1) State Socialists return to an old-fashioned simple-minded distinction which divides economists into two categories, those who live in darkness—those who adhere to the teachings of the classical school—and economists who have been "enlightened" by prophets of the Historical School and Academic Socialism. These socialists of the chair, says Pierson, completely ignore the evolution of classical economic theory as witnessed in the writings of such authors as John Stuart Mill, John E. Cairnes and even Johann H. von Thunen. They merely confront simplified versions of the ideas of classicals such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus which are supposedly "outdated" compared with those of the "modern" writers like Schmoller and Wagner. They keep arguing that science should be on the move. Pierson retorts that this is a fine idea as long as science moves forwards. Judging from the writings of the academic socialists, which are full of the most elementary errors, economic science seems to be moving backwards. Examples of basic mistakes quoted by Pierson are: a) low wages only exist because collective bargaining is lacking; b) when two countries exchange goods and services one of them can increase its demand and/or supply without causing a change in the terms of trade; c) David Ricardo was the only source of Karl Marx's ideas.

2) Pierson admits that the existing body of economic theory has sometimes been used to rationalize and defend the existing status quo as some academic socialists claim. However, some of these armchair socialists go to the other extreme and employ economic concepts to rationalize and to justify their own prejudices; one being that trade union activity always benefits the factory workers. Another one consists of claiming that the economic conditions of the working class can easily be improved by more state intervention. Such assertions show that among academic socialists independent scientific research has ceased to exist. According to Pierson such writing merely demonstrates the misuse and even the "prostitution" of science. These state socialists do not help the working class, but merely raise unrealistic expectations which cannot be fulfilled and end in frustration and unhappiness. Pierson cites other examples of wrong ideas, such as the claim that the middle classes are disappearing, the notion that social mobility is becoming increasingly difficult for factory workers. These are intentional distortions of fact.

3) The socialists of the chair equated the economic laws of the classicals with physical laws which cannot be altered or influenced. But as the academic socialists say, "man" has a free will and has the ability to modify his environment. Therefore, he is not subject to economic laws.⁸ Pierson insists that this distinction is misleading. Physical laws, he says, describe natural phenomena, "man" does not participate in the outcome. With economic laws one economic magnitude

(continued on page 8)

Hermeneutical Integrity

by
Jonathan Barnes
Balliol College, Oxford University

Review of Gadamer's *Philosophical Apprenticeships* and *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*

Hans-Georg Gadamer ranks as one of Germany's foremost philosophers. He occupied a chair at Heidelberg for a quarter of a century, during which time his lecturing skills and steady flow of publications brought him a reputation and a following second to none. Since his retirement he has divided his time between Germany and North America. Many of his writings have been translated, and the English version of his major work on *Truth and Method* has helped to extend his fame. His thought now enjoys a considerable vogue in the English-speaking world.

Gadamer was born in Breslau at the turn of the century. His father was a chemist and a philistine who despised the more speculative disciplines. But it was his father's paperback copy of Kant's *Critique* which first introduced the young Gadamer to philosophy, and in 1919 he went to study the subject at Marburg, the centre of the dominant neo-Kantian school. He was taught by Paul Natorp and Nicolai Hartmann. In addition, Stefan George had a hidden importance, Max Scheler was a strong influence, and Paul Friedlaender later supplied a training in Classical scholarship. But the mystagogue of Gadamer's philosophical initiation was Martin Heidegger. He first met Heidegger in 1923 and was captivated: Heidegger's seal—to change the metaphor—was pressed deeply and firmly into the soft wax of Gadamer's mind.

Philosophical Apprenticeships, a book of memoirs interspersed with brief biographical sketches, gives vivid and amiable accounts of those early years and early influences. There are humorous touches. Scheler "was always a lover of beautiful women (but only three times married)." Gerhard Krueger "could say the most amazing things to your face while simultaneously and carefully probing himself." Rudolf Bultmann made scholarly compilations of the jokes his pupils were required to tell him. Heidegger himself was at least once involved in a joke—a joke about herrings which remains, alas, as incomprehensible as the rest of Heidegger's jovial philosophy.

Intellectually, life was intensely stimulating. It was also exacting—the more so in that Heidegger would lecture at seven in the morning, while Hartmann never rose before midday and only flourished after midnight. Moreover, the circumstances of young *Privatdozent* were severe: a meagre salary had to be eked out by tuition money, and tuition money depended wholly on the skill of the tutor in attracting pupils. In any case, the Weimar years in Germany were economically grim.

The Third Reich brought a turn for the better. Although "our circle thinned and our situation became difficult," Gadamer and his friends were determined to survive. "It remained difficult to keep the right balance, not to compromise oneself so far that one would be dismissed and yet still to remain recognisable to colleagues and students. That we somehow found the right balance was confirmed for us one day when it was said of us that we had only 'loose sympathy' with the new awakening." This "loose sympathy" with the Nazi regime amounted, in concrete terms, to this: Gadamer declined to "spout Nazi nonsense from the podium," but he was prepared to give the Hitler salute.

A long-standing friend of Gadamer's, Richard Kroner, taught philosophy at Kiel. In 1934, Gadamer reports, "fate intervened to throw Kroner off track": that is to say, Kroner was sacked because he was a Jew. Gadamer took his job.

Despite this little success, further balancing acts were still required, and in 1936 Gadamer voluntarily registered at a Nazi "rehabilitation camp." Doctrinally, life in the camp was mild and undemanding, and Gadamer satisfied his examiners without difficulty. He was also able to join in the "gymnastics, competitive games, and marches with nationalistic singing," which enriched the emotional life of the inmates. During his training, he was fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of the Fuehrer himself, who impressed him "as being simple, indeed awkward, like a boy playing the soldier."

The rehabilitation paid off. In 1937 Gadamer attained the rank of professor. In 1938 he was called to a chair in philosophy at the University of Leipzig. "The new beginning in Leipzig" happily "pushed the gloominess of the world situation into the background," and Gadamer could concentrate on his philosophy. The war came. The gloom thickened. Leipzig was bombed to rubble. Gadamer lectured on. He survived. And when the Americans occupied Leipzig in 1945 they made Gadamer what in another context would be called a trusty. He was, after all, "uncompromised" (the description is his own), and he came to play a major role in the post-war reorganisation of the university.

But Leipzig was in the Eastern zone, and in the autumn of the year the Russians took over from the Americans. *Plus ca change*. Gadamer soon discovered that he "belonged to the political 'elite' of the Soviet Zone." He was appointed Rector of the university. The position was delicate. He had to be "constantly on his toes"—so much so that "it soon proved necessary to reserve to myself the opening and distribution of incoming mail." But by his deftness and sagacity he won "the special esteem of the Russian cultural authorities": "the Russians could at least be certain that I would carry through their directives exactly, even against my own convictions." Nonetheless, Gadamer wanted to migrate to the West. He received an offer from Frankfurt but feared that he might not be let out: the issue of his departure "was quite possibly a prestige operation for East German

cultural politics." Eventually, in the winter of 1947, he and his books were freighted westward, a prudent supply of alcohol and nicotine ensuring that he had no trouble with the railway authorities or the border guards. A year later he was called to Heidelberg.

So much for the man, as he has portrayed himself. What of the philosophy? "Hermeneutics" is its name. It was not invented by Gadamer himself—on the contrary, Gadamer stands at the end of a long German tradition which goes back at least as far as Schleiermacher at the beginning of the 19th century. Gadamer's own version of hermeneutics is closely connected to the later thought of Heidegger. But what, precisely, is the hermeneutical tradition?

The word "hermeneutic" is a posh term meaning "to do with interpretation," while "interpretation" is a vogue term meaning everything and nothing. Appended to *Philosophical Apprenticeships* is an essay "On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics," which allegedly gives a "succinct and comprehensive" account of Gadamer's thought. For example:

The hermeneutic task of integrating the monologic of the sciences into the communicative consciousness includes the task of exercising practical, social and political reasonability.

More elaborately:

The model of practical philosophy must take the place of a *theoria* whose ontological legitimation may be found only in an *intellectus infinitus* that is unknown to an existential experience unsupported by revelation. This model must also be held out as a contrast to all those who bend human reasonableness to the methodical thinking of "anonymous" science. In opposition to the perfecting of the logical selfunderstanding of science, this seems to me to be the authentic task of philosophy and is so precisely in the face of the practical meaning of science for our life and survival.

I do not myself understand much of this, and so it may be appropriate to apply here what Gadamer calls "the hermeneutical principle that understanding must be a translation into one's own language if it is to be real understanding." Here, then, is an English translation. The hermeneutical philosophy, I guess, has four chief and interconnected characteristics. It holds, first, that philosophy is essentially practical: philosophy is, or should be, primarily and intimately concerned with moral, social, and political issues; the idea of the Good is the highest object of philosophical contemplation, and practical reason is the model for philosophical method. Secondly, philosophy is essentially humanistic: it rejects the aspirations of the natural sciences, regarding their search for objective, impersonal and anonymous truth as the vain pursuit of an *ignis fatuus*; and it subscribes instead to anthropocentric notions of value and truth. Thirdly, philosophy is necessarily historicist: we are all determined, intellectually, by our historical circumstan-

ces and are bound by the "prejudices" of our age; as philosophers, we must start from these prejudices (we could start nowhere else), and although we may examine them, we should not suppose that we can step beyond them and reach some timeless and objective truth. Fourthly, philosophy is linguistic: the ideas it advances and the prejudices it examines are inseparable from their linguistic form—thought and language are one, and all understanding is linguistic understanding.

The hermeneutic programme thus appears to demand a scholarly approach to philosophical questions: hermeneutics is interpretation, and, in particular, interpretation of the philosophical texts of the past. All this will remind English philosophers of the ideas of R. G. Collingwood, who believed that philosophy was a branch of history—the history of the prejudices and presuppositions of the human mind. It will remind Classicists of Seneca's sarcastic quip: *quae philoiphia fuit facta philologia est*. And Gadamer's own practice appears to fit this picture: most of his early writings were, in fact, of a scholarly and exegetical nature—they were mostly concerned with elucidating aspects of thought of Plato and Aristotle. And Gadamer's own conception of practical philosophy derives from Aristotle, while of Plato he says that "insofar as they are my constant companions, I have been formed more by the Platonic dialogues than by the great thinkers of German Idealism."

Many philosophers will be unhappy with this state of affairs: can they, or should they, really do no more than interpret the past and examine the standing prejudices? Is there no room for pure thought or for free speculation? Indeed, is there not a whiff of self-contradictoriness in the notion that philosophy is merely the study of its own history? Students of the history of ancient philosophy may add a further complaint; for the scholarly studies of Gadamer and his disciples have received only sporadic acclaim outside the hermeneutical school itself. Gadamer's reflections on *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* seem—to me at least—flat and unprofitable. As an essay in interpretation the book says little, and it says it at length.

Yet in a sense these doubts are misconceived: for Gadamer does not in truth stand in the tradition of philological philosophy. He is not an historian of thought, and he is not an exegete. In what may be seen as a criticism of the Anglo-American approach to ancient philosophy, he writes:

One can win a certain clarity by analysing the argumentation of a Platonic dialogue with logical means, showing up incoherence, filling in jumps in logic, unmasking false conclusions, and so forth. But is this the way to read Plato, to make his questions' one's own? Can one learn from him in this way, or does one simply confirm one's own superiority? What holds for Plato hold *mutatis mutandis* for all philosophy.

