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Three theses on the historiography and ontology of Ferrater Mora

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abstract

This paper advances three theses on the link between ontology and history in Ferrater Mora's works: (i) his intellectual history is a second-order semantic history, (ii) his ontology may be defined as a second-order hermeneutics, and (iii) his philosophy (which he called *integrationism*) consists of a second-order dialogue that, despite its limitations, comes to make sense within the latest generation of the Web. The paper also considers the role of computational ontologies in the management and organisation of philosophical contents.

key words

Ferrater Mora, ontology, ontologies, intellectual history, philosophy of history, *integrationism*.

1. Three theses on Ferrater

Let me begin directly by spelling out the three theses that I would like to defend¹:

1. Ferrater's brand of intellectual history — I am referring to the history constructed in his *Dictionary*² and related articles — constitutes a *second-order semantic history*.

1 This paper is a revised version of a text presented at a conference devoted to the philosopher and essayist Josep Ferrater Mora (Barcelona 1912-1991) in commemoration of the centenary of his birth, organised jointly by the IEC and the Ferrater Mora Chair in Barcelona and Girona, respectively, on 7 and 8 November 2012. The reader can find the original and much more extensive essay on these three theses in the *Anuari de la Societat Catalana de Filosofia*, XXIV (2013) (forthcoming), under the title "Josep Ferrater Mora i la història intel·lectual: mètode, ontologia i ontologies". A presentation on Ferrater's intellectual journey was given on 23 August 2012, with videoconferencing available too, at the Catalan Summer School at Prada as part of a course on the philosophies of exile, coordinated by Xavier Serra and Josep Monserrat. I trust that these three theses will not be mistaken for "encyclopaedism", a view of Ferrater's work as a "repository of ideas" that has been argued against by Antoni Mora based on a literary and political reading of Ferrater. Cf. "La ironia i l'apocalipsi", in *La filosofia de Ferrater Mora*, Documenta Universitaria, Ferrater Mora Chair, Girona, 2007.

2. Ferrater's ontology (and epistemology), which is apparently a metaphysics of cognition and language, constitutes in reality a *second-order hermeneutics* corresponding to the history above and to the philosophy of history that guided him in the making of the Dictionary.

3. The elucidation of ontology — of answering the question “what is there?” as Quine put it — led him to engage in a *second-order dialogue*, an “integrationist” *trans-ontology* that seeks to describe problems more than to debate solutions. This approach only comes to make sense with the dramatic change heralded by Internet and the second generation of the Web. The intellectual legacy of this dialogue takes on a dimension that it did not formerly possess, and its impact may be felt in the contemporary philosophical discussion of networks such as the one contained in the Dictionary and the history within it: a vast repository of knowledge produced from guiding principles and ontological suppositions.

I will not here address the three existing computational ontologies for classifying and managing philosophical content (*PhilO*, *Philosurfical*, *InPhO*)³. I mention them at the outset because Ferrater, fifty years ago, had to raise the question that we are now asking ourselves: what is the structure and organisation of philosophy? He responded with the tools at hand: conceptual analysis, history and classical ontology. My intention is to show how they link together.

2. The intellectual journey

Situating a philosopher is always a complex undertaking. Exile was a drama both leaving and coming back⁴. In our case, Ferrater was one of the thinkers of the Spanish Second Republic who went into exile and never returned. Indeed, Antoni Mora has observed that, unlike writers, poets and novelists such

2 The *Diccionario de Filosofía [Dictionary of Philosophy]* ran through six editions, from 1941 to 1979, with revisions and additions made by the author. Starting with the 1994 edition, the Dictionary has been edited by Josep Maria Terricabras. The edition of 1979 contains 3,589 pages in four volumes. The total number of entries is 3,154, broken down as follows: (i) people, 1,756; (ii) concepts, including special terms and locutions, 1,398. The cross-references in alphabetical order total over 2,000 in number.

3 The first, *PhilO*, appeared thanks to Barry Smith and the tradition of classic Austrian phenomenology. The second, *Philosurfical*, is strictly computational and appeared thanks to Michele Passin's work with Enrico Motta at the Knowledge Media Institute (Open University). The third corresponds to Colin Allen's team at the Indiana Philosophy Ontology Project (*InPhO*, with ties to the Stanford Philosophy Encyclopedia), a project updated on a monthly basis to this day.

4 See Julià Guillamon, *Literatures de l'exili*, Diputació de Barcelona, Barcelona, 2005; Jordi Gràcia, “Los avatares de la cordura”, in *Variaciones de un filósofo*, Biblioteca del Exilio, Ed. do Castro, A Coruña, 2005, pp. 7-67.

as Agustí Bartra, Xavier Benguerel, Anna Murià and Pere Quart, not a single philosopher did come back⁵. Perhaps one of the reasons for this lies in the fact that the creativity of the philosopher, especially one with Ferrater's encyclopaedic and encyclopaedist spirit, depends partly on easy access to ideas and books. Libraries and books are crucial, and this raw material could no longer be found in his country of origin.

There was one field, which we might call literary or philosophical Hispanism, that represented a middle way between thought and literature and it could be adopted as a kind of calling card or emergency *laissez-passer*. Manuel Duran explained this very well in an interview given to the journal *Insula* in 1964⁶. We are also indebted to him for an intriguing theory on the diverse sources or original sedimentary foundations of thinkers in exile:

In us, a geological cross-section would reveal several layers, a deep base of Spanish "crystalline rocks" and a series of sediments — French, Mexican; these are perhaps the most discernible: we have lived in Mexico for twelve, thirteen, fifteen years: for us, it is a second country — and above these, there are several layers of US sediment⁷.

Doubtless, Ferrater's "crystalline rock" was his Catalan cultural or educational grounding, which he not only never denied but took care to reaffirm time and again, sometimes quite forcefully⁸. There are many indications of this, such as in the frequent expressions and turns of phrase that seep through his writing in Spanish and that he left uncorrected, I suspect deliberately so. For example, "hilar delgado" instead of "hilar fino" [to "split hairs" in English], or in his use of "si más no", or in the examples in Catalan alongside French,

- 5 Antoni Mora, "La filosofia catalana a l'exili. Notes per a un estudi", *Enrahonar*, 10 (2005), pp. 17-28.
- 6 José-Ramón Marra López, "Entrevista con Manuel Durán", *Insula*, 252 (November 1967), pp. 6-7, interview with Marra-López, cit. in Marta Noguer, Carlos Guzmán, 2005, p. 121.
- 7 Marta Noguer, Carlos Guzmán, "La obra crítica de Manuel Durán", *Escritos*. Revista del Centro de Ciencias del Lenguaje, 32 (July-December 2005), Autonomous University of Puebla, pp. 109-130.
- 8 E.g. in an interview for *El Basilisco*, Gustavo Bueno's journal, Ferrater was asked the following question: "One of the acute problems facing Spain today is the question of autonomous regions, the rising tide of nationalism, regionalism and even cantonalism. Does your being Catalan by birth put you in the middle of this issue, does it somehow commit you to Catalanism, or can you keep a critical distance from that 'seny' of the Catalan bourgeoisie?" Ferrater's written response was unusually direct: "A Catalan cannot stop being a Catalanist, if only in reaction against the hurdles that have been put in the way of Catalan life and culture. If being a Catalanist in this sense is equivalent to being a nationalist, then so be it ..." adding, "I would merely point out that — as far as 'the rising tide of nationalism' goes — there is a solution that is very sensible in principle, yet as almost nobody believes in it, it cannot be politically sensible: the federalist solution. Perhaps one day it will be thought of again, but without the bitter aftertaste of the nineteenth century that almost always comes with it" (p. 58). Elena Ronzón, Alberto Hidalgo, Manuel F. Lorenzo, "Entrevista a José Ferrater Mora", *El Basilisco*, 12 (January-October 1981), pp. 52-58.

English and German ones. Or by the inclusion of Catalan philosophers in his *Dictionary*, such as Father Xiberta, Joaquim Xirau and Serra Hunter (which he could perfectly well have left out), thus implicitly acknowledging the existence of the School of Barcelona⁹. Or by his attention to the character of Catalan life in perhaps his most popular essay outside the circle of specialists, which he wrote in Chile in 1944 and reprised in his acceptance of an honorary doctorate from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, in 1979¹⁰. Later, he was to make further remarks on the subject, adding nuance to his interpretation¹¹.

It seems to me that this primary sediment did not furnish Ferrater with a philosophy or a set of specific theses, but rather a way of going about it, a “frame of mind” as J. L. L. Aranguren put it, with which he seriously and professionally confronted the contexts and environments in which and with which he had to live, dealing faithfully with lived experience. This includes a host of things that are not merely intellectual: poor health, experiences of death (the dead of the Civil War)¹², the gruelling experience of “earning a living” in trade before the war to pay for his studies in Barcelona¹³. Also present, undeniably, was the analytical and methodical passion of the philosopher, but always grounded in concrete, practical experience, which we shall see served

- 9 Eduard Nicol, “L’École de Barcelona”, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 69:3 (July–September 1964), pp. 258–275.
- 10 The tendencies indicated by Ferrater in 1944 are: continuity, common sense, measure and irony. When he received his honorary doctorate from the UAB, he gave an address entitled “Reflections on Philosophy in Catalonia” (1979) in which he distinguished between “tendencies” and “attitudes”, which were loosely constant and could be combined into “elements”: “Of what elements do I speak? I see four that seem important to me: faithfulness to reality; a predisposition to form contracts, i.e., a pactism that does not reject compromise as long as no essential value must be given up; professionalism, and the desire for clarity”. See *Les formes de la vida catalana i altres assaigs*, Ed. 62/la Caixa, Barcelona (1980) 1991, p. 127.
- 11 “The colleagues who have reproached me for an excessive idealisation are more than justified.” See the conversation published by Salvador Giner, “Josep Ferrater Mora. Una entrevista”, in *Enrahonar. Quaderns de Filosofia*, 10, Catalan Philosophers in Exile, pp. 173–178. See also the foreword written by Giner himself, “Meditació sobre Catalunya. A guisa de proemi per a *Les formes de la vida catalana*”, in the new publication of this text.
- 12 Biruté Ciplijauskaitė, a Hispanist and former student at Bryn Mawr whose doctoral theses had been supervised by Ferrater, recalls some verses of Rilke that Ferrater often quoted: “O Herr, gib jedem seinen eignen Tod” (“Oh Lord, award to each his fitting death”). Cf. “‘Sacar de ti tu mejor tú’: un escorzo de José Ferrater Mora”, *Hispania*, 80:2 (May 1997), pp. 280–282. A fascinating view of this essential aspect of Ferrater’s thought can be gained from a look at the unpublished notes of Manuel Sacristán that Salvador López Arnal has recently brought to light in *Cinco historias lógicas y un cuento breve*, <http://www.rebellion.org/docs/104376.pdf>, 2010, pp. 14ff.
- 13 See Antoni Mora, *Ferrater Mora*, Gent nostra, 73, Edicions de Nou Art Thor, Barcelona, 1989. Recently, Xavier Serra has re-examined a number of the biographical portraits of Ferrater, such as the one written by Pla in *Homenots*, in order to separate the wheat from the chaff in light of the available documents. *Història social de la filosofia catalana. La lògica (1900-1980)*, Afers, Barcelona–Catarroja, 2010, pp. 131–170.

him throughout his philosophical inquiry as a guiding light and a spur. “Ferrater is an action verb” — in the words of Bunge¹⁴.

As early as *Cóctel de Verdad [A True Cocktail]* (1935), Ferrater began to deal with Spanish philosophy from Unamuno to Ortega. His growing interest in Spanish philosophy appears to me to continue at the same time as he was drafting his Dictionary, in exile in Cuba (1939-1941) and Chile (1941-1947). The first version appeared in 1941¹⁵. Later he was to justify the existence of a Spanish philosophy¹⁶. It is difficult to distinguish here between strategy, vocation and professionalism. Ferrater made a virtue of necessity. His practice of preparing dictionaries — for example, as Conrad Vilanou reminds us, the dictionary of pedagogy published by Editorial Labor¹⁷ — predates his departure into exile. In light of the letters preserved in the archives in Girona, Ferrater had earlier begun to write and request information from Spanish philosophers (such as García Morente and José Gaos), with the purpose of rounding out the Spanish edition of Heinrich Schmidt’s philosophical dictionary *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* by adding the names of Spanish philosophers, although in the end, the project was thwarted by the war. Ferrater explained the work simply, without dressing it up in intellectual trappings¹⁸. The Dictionary was a commissioned work. It was a useful, professional project that might eventually be used as a calling card, too. This is how Joaquim Xirau put it to him when encouraging him to persevere with the project after receiving the first version:

14 Letter written by M. Bunge to J. Ferrater Mora, from McGill University (Canada), 20-IX-1976.

15 Cf. Julio Ortega Villalobos, “José Ferrater Mora en Chile”, *El Basilisco*, 21 (1996), pp. 86-89.

16 “I have the impression that expressions such as ‘Spanish Philosophy’ or any other ‘national philosophy’ can be explained only from this point of view, that is to say, assuming as true one of the two possible concepts of philosophy. I have the impression also that all confusions which have arisen in this field are due to the fact that philosophy as a propositional system has not been distinguished from philosophy as a mode of human being. In other words, as a propositional system we cannot say that there is a Spanish philosophy. But as a mode of human being, and with the restrictions we have introduced, we can say, not only that the expression ‘Spanish Philosophy’ has a sense, but even that Spanish philosophy is one of the philosophical systems of thought in which the condition of being a function of our existence is fully, and wonderfully, realized”, p. 9, Ferrater Mora, “Is There a Spanish Philosophy?”, *Hispanic Review*, 19:1 (January 1951), pp. 1-10. Nearly forty years later, a more analytical Ferrater rejected the use of national qualifiers for ways of doing philosophy. Thus, in “Reflexions sobre la filosofia a Catalunya” (UAB, 1979), he wrote: “I say ‘the philosophy in Catalonia’ and not ‘Catalan philosophy’, because my philosophical preferences lean toward the idea that philosophy — like science — has no nationality. Speaking of ‘Catalan philosophy’ is only slightly less absurd than speaking of ‘Catalan chemistry’ or ‘Catalan mathematics’. I think that Catalans, insofar as they do philosophy, must (or should) do so as everyone everywhere does it: without much concern about whether or not it expresses the national spirit” (p. 119), in *Les formes de la vida catalana i altres assaigs*, Ed. 62, La Caixa, Barcelona, 1980, pp. 119-132.

17 Conrad Vilanou, “Josep Ferrater Mora i la pedagogia: recuperació d’un text oblidat”, *Educació i Història: Revista d’Història de l’Educació*, 4 (2001), pp. 134-141.

18 Cf. Assumpció Maresme, “Entrevista a Ferrater Mora”, *Catalònia*, 1990, pp. 32-36.

It would be worthwhile not to abandon the endeavour half done. There is no classic, authorised dictionary in Spanish. This is a work of many years. You can do it. It would be worthwhile for you to spend a good portion of your life on it. Based on what you have finished and by seeking out the collaboration of everyone of good will, you could produce a classic work. I think you must not give up. It is a thing of many years that you should keep doing with persistence and without impatience as you pursue your activities. If you are willing to do so, do not doubt that you will have a collaborator in me. It is a highly ambitious undertaking. But I think that you have demonstrated the personal qualities needed to pull it off. Be so good as to tell me if the idea strikes you as interesting. I think that the mere fact of my saying this to you is an illustration of the lively interest that your work has aroused in me¹⁹.

In effect, the *Dictionary* gave Ferrater a way to make contacts with the representatives of logic and analytic philosophy in the United States starting with the appearance of the third edition, which unlike the second edition was accepted for critical review by Alonzo Church, the editor of *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, the publication of W.V. Quine. It was Quine himself who penned the review, which was not exactly glowing: “As may well be expected in a single-handed work of such scope, the shortcomings on logical topics are numerous”.²⁰ I think, however, that this worked rather as an incentive for Ferrater to write his handbook on logic and select the contents²¹. The *Journal* gave him the task of reviewing works written in Spanish, which led to an exchange of letters with Church in the late nineteen-fifties and early nineteen-sixties²². In addition, European logicians, such as Bochenski, helped him to better under-

19 Joaquim Xirau, letter to J. F. M, Mexico (17-VI-1941).

20 W.V. Quine, “Diccionario de Filosofía by José Ferrater Mora”, *The Journal of Symbolic Logic*, 17:2 (June 1952), pp. 129-130. In that same year, Quine wrote to him, saying: “I am flattered that you plan an article on me, but I assure you that this was by no means amongst the omissions that I had felt to be regrettable. I am glad you will include Hilbert, Frege and Peano”, letter dated 26 September 1952, from the Harvard University Department of Philosophy.

21 The manual was written in Spanish in collaboration with the logician Hugues Leblanc — *Lógica matemática*, FCE, Mexico, 1955 — and it was certainly important for more than a generation of students in Spain and Latin America, who found their introduction to the discipline in its rigorous material. See, for example, Jesús Mosterín, “José Ferrater Mora”, in P. Casanovas (ed.), *Filosofía del siglo XX a Catalunya: mirada retrospectiva*, IV Cicle Aranguren, Fundació Caixa Sabadell, 2010, pp. 199-210. Salvador López Arnal has demonstrated through correspondence between Ferrater and Manuel Sacristán that the latter preferred Ferrater’s manual for his first-year students over and above his own introduction to logic. *Op. cit.*, pp. 14ff.

22 Looking again at Ferrater’s reviews in *Journal*, one realises that what he set out to do was to adopt a “normal” scientific attitude, making judgments based on the state of the art in the subject regardless of the language in which a text was expressed. Cf, e.g., the rigorous critique of *Lógica del Juicio Jurídico* (1955) by García Máynez in what was his first review, *The Journal of Symbolic Logic*, 23:1 (March 1958), p. 74. Cf. the initial letter of Alonzo Church sent from Princeton, 24 February 1958. The offer to review works written in Spanish came from Ferrater himself, as can be read in Church’s letter of 10 June that year, acknowledging receipt of Ferrater’s first review.

stand Slavic philosophy — Russian and Polish, particularly the formal tradition of the latter — and they drew his attention to the importance of Scandinavian philosophy.

Xavier Serra has shown Ferrater's publishing history in some detail, particularly in relation to his impact on and entry into the analytic mainstream beginning with his article on Wittgenstein in 1949, at a time when the work of the Viennese philosopher was not well-known outside the circles of specialists and Wittgenstein himself was still alive²⁴ (he died in 1952). From this point onwards, Ferrater was never to abandon a logical, scientific and rationalist orientation. In my view, though, his contributions do not reflect the ideas of a "strict" analytic philosopher. From extant letters, his relationship with Nicholas Rescher and the *American Philosophical Quarterly* is rather that of an outside collaborator who was highly knowledgeable about the main currents of thought, but without abandoning other more historical or existential trenches. In the journal's pages, he published only "On Practice" (1976)²⁵, while other pieces on Ortega, for example, were politely redirected to *History of Philosophy Quarterly*²⁶ or they were rejected outright²⁷. By contrast, his articles were well received at *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, edited by Marvin Farber until 1980, and afterwards by Roderick Chisholm and Ernesto Sosa²⁸. In the 21st century, the University at Buffalo (SUNY) and the University of Rhode Island have continued to be leading centres for phenomenology and ontology, with a special emphasis on European philosophy.

These efforts deserve credit, because Ferrater started out as a complete unknown. Let me offer a curious remark from a review of *El hombre*

- 23 For more information on all of these, see the letter written by Josef Bochenski from the Europa-Institut of Freiburg, dated 30 July 1960.
- 24 See Xavier Serra, op. cit., pp. 131-170. Ferrater's paper entitled "Wittgenstein o la destrucción" was published in *Realidad*, V:14 (March-April 1949), pp. 129-140, and appeared in Spain in the journal *Theoria* in 1954, under the title "Wittgenstein, símbolo de una época angustiada". Translations appeared in various languages: Polish (1951), German (1952), English (1953) and French (1959). See Serra, op. cit., p. 152.
- 25 J. Ferrater Mora, "On Practice", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 13:(1) (1976), pp. 49-55.
- 26 Rescher, as editor, wrote to him on 21 September 1983: "Your paper on Ortega y Gasset is too *ad hominem* for the *American Philosophical Quarterly*, but it would do well for the new *History of Philosophy Quarterly*". Cf. "On Knowing One's Way About", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 1:(2) (1984), pp. 213-221.
- 27 Letter from N. Rescher dated 1 March 1966, rejecting publication of "On taking things for granted"; it provoked an immediate response from Ferrater on 5 March. In the end, the essay appeared in an anthology compiled and introduced by A. R. Caponegri entitled *Spanish Contemporary Philosophy: An Anthology*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1967.
- 28 For correspondence on the articles published by Farber and Chisholm, see the letters in the library of the University of Girona (Ferrater Mora Chair). From 1959 onwards, everything seems to indicate that the Catalan philosopher took advantage of the door opened by Farber, because it better suited the historical and occasionally speculative nature of his contributions.

en la encrucijada [Man at a Crossroads] (Buenos Aires, 1952) published by the Stanford professor Kurt F. Reinhart: “In this fascinating and provocative work, the South American thinker presents a philosophy of Christian Personalism”²⁹.

This might sound absurd and, indeed, it is. The truth is, though, that in Ferrater we do not find only one author: there is also the essayist, the historicist, the writer who takes an external view of the *meaning* of history and integrates it into the (more abstract) cultural behaviour of the elite in order to make broader generalisations encompassing the masses, as Ortega does. Ferrater searches for the *grail* of social cohesion in the *integration* of culture, values and the organisation of the state, like Dilthey, Heller, Smend, Schmitt, Binder and many other Germanic authors rooted in European neo-Hegelian historicism. *Integration, Einbindung*: the family resemblance among Ortega, Julián Marías, Laín Entralgo and Ferrater is too striking to be ignored. And *Hombre en la encrucijada* (1952; *Man at the Crossroads*, 1957) is proof enough. Still a work of the interwar period, it asks how great the mental distance is between the intellectual and society. The initial question was hard for US professors to fathom: “Is it possible to *integrate* our increasingly broader societies in the higher forms of material and spiritual life? [*italics added by author*]”. Reinhart’s confusion is revealing. In his original work, Ferrater formulated this question from two perspectives, the first from phenomenology and vitalism and the second based on historiography, which he had just discovered in the US and which drew not only on the scientific outlook, but also on the outcomes of the recent global conflagration³⁰.

The early 1950’s appear crucial to me as a turning point in the philosopher’s subsequent development. In December 1951, he organised the 48th APA Conference at Bryn Mawr and was one of the *discussants* of Maurice Mandelbaum’s paper on the scientific value of history³¹.

The symposium palpably vibrated with the climate of the post-war period, the Holocaust, the crisis of European culture and the onset of the Cold War, but also with the new role of ethics and science. I cannot stop here

29 Reinhart, *Books Abroad*, 27:3 (Summer 1953), p. 297.

30 “Can so-called ‘material progress’ be accompanied by spiritual or, as is sometimes said, moral progress? Should materially and spiritually higher ways of living be introduced into societies that are increasingly vast and, ultimately, to society as a whole?” I quote from the second edition of *El hombre en la encrucijada*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1965.

31 The symposium “What is Philosophy of History?” took place on 28 December 1951 from 2–4 pm as part of the 48th Annual Meeting of The American Philosophical Association (APA), Eastern Division, held at Bryn Mawr on 27–29 December that year. The speakers were Maurice Mandelbaum, Lewis S. Feuer and Horace L. Friess. Responding were the discussants S. P. Lamprecht and Josep Ferrater Mora. You can find the programme of the conference in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 48:23 (8–XI–1951), p. 738. The discussion was published in “Comments on the Symposium *What is Philosophy of History?*”, Sterling P. Lamprecht, José Ferrater-Mora and Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 49:10 (8–V–1952), pp. 350–362.

to delve into Ferrater's relationships with US philosophers of history — e.g., Richard McKeon, Lewis S. Feuer, Horace L. Friess and so forth. I mention only the result: *the philosophy of history can take issue with history — the explanations of history — in the same way that the philosophy of science can do so with the hypotheses of science*. As Ferrater asserted in his remarks, this was about achieving a perspective built on the explicitness of the language used to formulate historical explanations. Here, “language” was still set against “ontology”, but it would not be long before Mandelbaum's suggestion was taken on board: “One cannot discuss problems in the philosophy of science without dealing with fundamental ontological problems”³².

All the elements that appeared in the later thinking of the Catalan philosopher — the notions of conceptual tension, core, dialogue, agreement/disagreement, emergence of collective properties, rejection of dichotomies, ontology, semantic fluctuations of concepts, etc. — are present in the intellectual backdrop from 1948 to 1955. The linguistic and logic-oriented drift of those years, and the effort of assimilation that this represented for Ferrater, is incomplete if we do not add this aspect of the philosophy of science that covers history and, with it, the social sciences. I must say that his ontological position, his metaphysics, appear marked by his historiographical development (more so than the other way round).

3. Second-order historiography

What is Ferrater's method of doing intellectual history from at least the third edition of the *Dictionary* onwards?

He was familiar with and normally cited the histories of philosophy that appeared in Spanish, English, French, Italian and German, as well as experts in ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary philosophy, and also histories of science. However, his way of writing the *Dictionary*, which observes the necessary concision, makes use of name-based entries and selected terms in such a way as to turn the work into a vast mosaic, in which each piece individually had to be cut, fit and polished to give shape to the entirety. For this reason, I prefer the term “intellectual history” for his work as a whole. This is also the term used by a colleague from his early years at Bryn Mawr, Juan Marichal, who later moved on to Harvard³³.

32 M. Mandelbaum, “Comments on the Symposium *What is Philosophy of History?*”, 1951, op. cit., p. 360.

33 Marichal taught courses on intellectual history at Harvard, cf. Letter to Ferrater, from Cambridge, Mass., dated 21 September 1958.

It is not merely a history of thought or even a history of ideas or history of philosophy. In my view, it is a conceptual history done from the inside out, taking care always to distinguish between methodology, ontology, epistemology and practical philosophy (ethics and politics) while focusing on the core meanings of authors. It does not dwell on social history or on contextual or historical connections, but rather delves into the genesis of ideas and their connections within and across different periods of time.

Ferrater's style of writing intellectual history in the *Dictionary* and related articles is concise. His concern is with precision and, above all, with the veracity of underlying data. Although it may seem straightforward, Ferrater as a good historian double-checked his facts and, it must be noted, read the books of authors that he featured. This enabled him to correct any errors and, even more than that, to reconstruct analytically the basic concepts in order to carry out the task of comparison that enabled him to discern competing and contrasting positions.

In the end, I believe he moved from the philosophy of language and logic to a separate tracing of the history of terms, concepts and conceptual schema and discourses, distinguishing between levels of language, conceptual objects or constructs, works and philosophical movements. This is no longer historicism, but another type of philosophy of history.

Let me offer an example. The article on the origin of ontology is a classic. It corresponds to research that he undertook to understand the return to metaphysics (vs. theology) and the general structure of philosophy as a method marked by the rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Suárez and Fonseca to Baumgarten, Wolff and Leibniz, to the attack of Kant.³⁴ The term "ontology", explains Ferrater, is first used in 1613 in the philosophical terminology of Rudolf Göckel [Goclenius] (1547-1628), in the Low Countries, not in the works of the second scholasticism, which did not consider necessary the use of new terms to address being and the types of being.³⁵ The term, though, did not yet carry the sense of a rational organisation of knowledge and the various branches of knowledge — "what there is" — that it acquired after the works of Juan Caramuel de Lobkowitz.

34 Ferrater Mora, "On the Early History of 'Ontology'", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 24:1 (September 1963), pp. 36-47.

35 Ibid. op. cit., p. 38. "A number of historians (R. Eucken, E. Gilson, Hans Pichler, Max Wundt, Heinz Heimsoeth) mention Johann Clauberg as the first philosopher who used the new term we are looking for: the term 'ontology'. This is not the case. The first instance occurs in Rudolf Goclenius (*Lexicon philosophicum, quo tanquam clave philosophies fores aperiuntur, Informatum opera studio Rodolphi Goclenii*, Francoforti, 1613). (...). The word 'ontology' occurs in Goclenius' Lexicon on page 16 as follows: 'ontologia, philosophia de ente'. This is all."

Ferrater is painstaking as he traces the different meanings of the term and how, over time, it distinguishes itself semantically from the classic terms of “metaphysics” and “first philosophy” at the same time that it competes with other equivalent terms, such as “ontosology” (Clauberg), “gnostology” (Caramuel) and “noology” (Calovius). The term receives its definitive push from Wolff, whose work is entitled *Philosophia prima sive ontologia methodo scientifica pertractata, qua omnes cognitionis humanae principia continentur* (1730). In Wolff’s work, “ontologia seu philosophia prima” is defined as a “scientia entis in genere, quatenus ens est”, which uses the “demonstration method” and investigates the most general predicates of being as such.

This is as far as Ferrater went. Renewed interest in ontology has permitted later emendation of his reading of the first twenty years of the seventeenth century at Protestant universities in the German-speaking lands, including his misattribution of the first use of the term to Göckel³⁶. In 1607, Göckel was teaching logic, ethics and mathematics at Marburg, where he coincided with Jakob Lorhard (1561-1609), who received an invitation to teach theology there that very year from Moritz, Landgrave of Hesse. The year before, in 1606, Lorhard had written a book for his students entitled *Ogdoas scholastica*, which addressed the subjects of Latin, Greek, grammar, logic, rhetoric, astronomy, ethics, physics and metaphysics. The eighth and last volume carried the title *Metaphysica seu Ontologia*. Thus, “ontology” is a word featuring prominently in the frontispiece of Lorhard’s work.

Nor does the story end there. Lorhard had based his volume on the contents of a book by Clemens Timpler (1563-1624), entitled *Metaphysicae Systema Methodicum*. Published in Seifurt (1604) and Hanau (1606), Timpler’s work offered diagrams drawn from the teachings of Pierre de la Ramée [Ramus] (1515-1572) to present the new “ontology” as a science of the intelligible.

The recent attention given to this Calvinist line of thinking by the logician Peter Øhrstrøm and his team has made it possible to establish more

36 “Ferrater Mora cita anche un’altra opera del filosofo di Marburg, la *Isagoge in peripateticorum et scholasticorum primam philosophiam* (1612), di poco precedente al *Lexicon*. In quest’opera secondo Ferrater Mora oltre a non utilizzare il termine, Göckel avrebbe posto come sinonimi *prima philosophia* e *metaphysica* di fatto escludendo ogni tipo di frattura epistemologica in seno alla scienza dell’ente. Probabilmente Ferrater Mora doveva ignorare che l’edizione della *Isagoge* del 1612 era una ristampa rispetto alla prima edizione del testo (Frankfurt, 1598). La critica successiva (Rompe, Courtine, Moreau) ha peraltro letto proprio in quel lavoro una delle più significative e radicali distinzioni in senso *ontologico* della metafisica. Il fatto poi che la scelta di Göckel — letta da Ferrater Mora come puramente accidentale (*afterthought*) — fosse rimasta priva di conseguenze rilevanti è smentito storicamente. Basti riferirsi alla scelta di Alsted che nella sua opera *Cursus Philosophici Encyclopaedia* (1620) riporta il nuovo nome di *ontologia* proprio di rimando all’autorità di Goclenius e all’occorrenza del *Lexicon* del 1613.” Lamanna, op. cit., p. 565.

precise relationships between Timpler, Lorhard and Göckel, noting how they differ from Suárez's *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (Mainz, 1506) (which is the text against which Timpler's theses are directly aimed) and establishing the epistemic variations in meaning and method represented by the initial use of the diagrams in the seventeenth century³⁷. To Suárez's mind, metaphysics refers classically to being. By contrast, in Timpler's view, "metaphysica est ars contemplatiua, quae tractat de omni intelligibili, uatenus ab homine naturali rationis lumine sine ullo materiae conceptu est intelligibile"³⁸.

Lorhard's diagrams show relationships among the conceptual dichotomies that appear in his work, allowing *Ogdoas scholastica* to be read as a hypertext in which the transversal relationships and internal references (as well as the iterations, inverted parentheses and other symbolic mechanisms) enable us to pull out its foundational ontology. Peter Øhrstrøm has produced a graph depicting the structure of the basic ontological distinctions in Lorhard's work. The graph is a reconstruction based on the arrangement of the diagrams appearing in chapter 8, presenting Lorhard's metaphysics as a drop-down menu of the properties of the intelligible. In addition, Sarah L. Uckelman has transcribed the original diagrams³⁹. It should be noted that the successive explanatory notes and internal references do not correspond to a dichotomous hierarchy or distribution, but rather add explanatory or clarifying content — in hypertext — to the successive branchings in the analysis. It is, therefore, a method of semantic enrichment that allows for navigation within the text.

To what extent has Ferrater's interpretation of Göckel been "historically disproved" in light of the new research on the subject — as, for example, Lamanna has stated?

Ferrater's article was published fifty years ago and he would be delighted that his synthesis had been taken into account by researchers in their later work on the subject. That was the crux of the matter: clearly formulating the state of the question and lending a hand to later advances. This is

37 See, among other publications, Peter Øhrstrøm, Jan Andersen, Henrik Schärfe, "What has Happened to Ontology", Dau, F., Mugnier, M.-L., Stumme, G. (eds.), ICCS 2005. LNAI, vol. 3.596, pp. 425-438. Springer, Heidelberg (2005); Peter Øhrstrøm, Sara L. Uckelman, and Henrik Schärfe, "Historical and Conceptual Foundation of Diagrammatical Ontology", U. Priss, S. Polovina, and R. Hill (eds.): ICCS 2007, LNAI 4604, 2007, Springer Verlag, Berlín, Heidelberg, pp. 374-386; Peter Øhrstrøm, Henrik Schärfe, Sara L. Uckelman, "Jacob Lorhard's Ontology: A 17th Century Hypertext on the Reality and Temporality of the World of Intelligibles", P. Eklund and O. Haemmerlé (eds.): ICCS 2008, LNAI 5113, pp. 74-87, Springer Verlag, Berlín, Heidelberg, 2008, pp. 74-887.

38 Lorhard, *Metaphysicae Systema Methodicum*, Vol. 1, ch. 1, cf. Øhrstrøm et al. op. cit. 2008, p. 76.

39 The diagrams contained in Lorhard's eighth book have been transcribed and translated by Sara L. Uckelman, *Diagraph of Metaphysic or Ontology*, Institute for Logic, Language, and Computation, UVA, Amsterdam, <http://www.illc.uva.nl/Research/Reports/X-2008-04.text.pdf>.

the dynamic of communication, clarification and reworking of historiography that goes on through the centuries. Hence, Ferrater's dating and interpretation have been revised in light of fresh discoveries and increased knowledge of the internal struggles in the Calvinist ranks. Although Ferrater could not have known, he did nevertheless see the importance of the introduction of the new term against the scholasticism of the Counter-Reformation, and he drew attention to the subject.

In logic, *prolepsis* (πρόσληψις), or prolepsis, which is a figure of speech described by Aristotle, is a type of proposition in which the middle term of a syllogism is implied. It was crucial for dialectics and rhetoric. Using prolepsis, one imagines the objections to or refutations of an argument. Through *procatalepsis* (πρόκαταληψις), one anticipates how to respond to potential objections aimed at an argument in order to strengthen that argument. The shift is toward social science as a way of "making present" subsequent accomplishments, providing an anticipatory glimpse of potential developments. If this is the case, there is no doubt that Ferrater possessed this art.

From this viewpoint, Eric van de Luft's description of the Catalan philosopher as an "ironic Aristotelian", bearing in the mind how the Stagirite revered the middle term, seems fitting to me⁴⁰. He did not believe wholeheartedly in his conclusions: he left open the possibility that later information would change his premises and conclusions. I think we need to read this and every other article in the *Dictionary* in just such a way, and not as the striking of a single, repetitive note.

In intellectual history, the construction of general interpretative frameworks depends on the relationship that one can establish among all the well-founded facts from which one starts. This basic task is precisely what defines first-order historiography. It is attentive to the reworking of the sources and the indispensable effort of constructing and analysing primary data. Unavoidable in this effort is the archival (or ethnographic) work of organising data and later reorganising and using the data, as well as transcribing and transforming information.

By contrast, Ferrater practiced a second-order historiography that operates on the meaning of the interpretative hypotheses and on their semantic elements, particularly the consistency of hypotheses and the consistency between the known facts and the models that account for them. In short, it is the work of a philosopher of history labouring over the theoretical models, more than the work of a historian addressing the underlying elements and materials.

40 Eric v. de Luft, "Ferrater Mora, José María (1912-91)", in *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers*, edited by John R. Shook, New York; Thoemmes Continuum, 2005, pp. 766-768.

I would not regard this as a limitation or a failure, but rather the contrary. Ferrater was a mediator, stirring up mischief, acting the part of the *meddler* as he liked to say, whose job it was to pose questions or blow on the spoon to cool down the soup. But he was a *proleptic* cook who tasted and adjusted the soup as necessary, after putting in all the best ingredients.

When, in 1982, Ferrater proposes a weak recursion standard for historiography in contrast to the standards of positivism and hermeneutics, he was simply offering a partial, ex-post description of the perspective he himself had adopted in the preparation of the Dictionary⁴¹. It was not a faithful depiction of his working method, but rather an epistemological reflection on the conceptual order by which he had tried to guide himself since the nineteen-fifties.

I will try to show how this order eventually produced the ontology contained in *Fundamentos de Filosofía* (1985) [Fundamentals of Philosophy].

4. Second-order hermeneutics

This book was a long time in the making. Originally published as *El ser y el sentido* (1967) [Being and Meaning] and partly growing out of *El ser y la muerte* (1962) [Being and Death], it was refined and reworked until it assumed a final form and content in *Fundamentos de Filosofía* (1985). I think that it was in the nineteen-sixties that Ferrater set out to do a synthesis of the fundamentals. *El ser y el sentido* was conceived to be the first volume in a three-part series that also included *El ser y el hacer* [Being and Doing] and *El ser y el deber ser* [Being and Duty]⁴². This phenomenological approach, however, was to be replaced by the synthesis of semantic and historiographical perspectives that would appear in *Fundamentos*.

I want to single out three ideas of ontology: (i) “integrationism”: “a method for integrating concepts by means of an analysis of their functions”⁴³ using “boundary concepts”; (ii) “concern”, and (iii) “structural traits”.

“Structural trait” is a concept used by Ferrater to refer to the general ability to characterise ontological structures. According to Ferrater, these structures are not inflections of being, modes of being, transcendentals, or ways of speaking, rather, they are semantic characteristics for representing things as objects “of what there is”, of the ontology of what populates knowledge.

41 Ferrater Mora, “The Languages of History”, *Phenomenological Research*, 43:2 (December 1982), pp. 137-150.

42 Ferrater Mora, *El ser y el sentido*, Ediciones de la Revista de Occidente, Madrid, 1962, “Foreword”, p. 15.

43 http://www.ferratermora.org/lang_cambio_section.html.

They are “general characterisations of that which is spoken of”⁴⁴, “traits of all the things there are, and at the same time concepts by which their ontological structure is thrown into relief”, “their object is simply the world, with its various groups and on its various levels”.

The relationship between statements and objects of knowledge is called “concern” and it covers designations, references, meanings, denotations, truths. A statement “concerns” its objects in different ways and is used up in the relation. What is characteristic of Ferrater is that he thinks of this as equivalent to *representation* (which can be structural, global). The world is represented by statements. The representations are grounded in representable or represented objects by virtue of the structural trait that the philosopher calls *presence*: “Realities are permanent possibilities of representation”.

The *Fundamentos* represents a deployment of the fabric of meanings cast by knowledge’s *presence* by means of the cultural density of their appearance over time⁴⁵. As a structural trait, presence is rounded out by *confluence* and *non-significance*. *Confluence* points to “everything that can be situated between two ontological poles”; *non-significance* indicates that there is nothing outside of what there is, and that the world is not only inexhaustible, but goes on being inexhaustible as it develops and becomes better known.

“What I have called ontology, therefore, ultimately becomes an epistemology, or as some prefer to say (...) *a hermeneutics in which the object is what there is* [italics added by author].”⁴⁶

Put differently: this is what the *Dictionary* is, an evolving, latticework structure of philosophical concepts reinterpreted and presented on the basis of the ontological labour of the framework that tethers them, bringing them together, separating them and binding them once again. In short, this is not merely the result of a second-degree historiography, but the result of working out a *second-order hermeneutics*. “Structural traits” operate on the ontological “arrangements” between being and (“intentional”) meaning.

44 All the references correspond to J. Ferrater Mora, *Fundamentos de Filosofía*, Alianza Universidad, Madrid, 1985.

45 “Newton’s second law is not an eternal truth, but a piece of knowledge that has begun to be real since it was formulated. This knowledge has been incorporated into a network of cultural products, such as a tradition or heritage to be maintained, collected, discussed, transformed, etc. If there had been no subjective knower able to perform these and other similar operations, the original piece of knowledge would cease to be such and instead become a system of ‘marks’ or ‘signs’, ‘audio tapes’, etc. Knowledge does not consist solely of cognitive activities, but without such activities, there would be no knowledge nor, strictly speaking, truth.” *Fundamentos*, op. cit. 1985, II, 5, p. 37.

46 Ibid. 1985, X, 3, p. 200.

I would portray the *Dictionary* as a dialogue between tradition and contemporaneity, a dynamic representation between “what there is” and “what there has been said to be”, if we allow for an instance of word play. From this viewpoint, the *Dictionary* is a repository of knowledge, the contents of which form an *organon* of philosophy that has taken the structure given to it by Ferrater’s second-order ontology — a *trans*-ontological structure.

A further aspect of importance remains. To Ferrater’s understanding, the operation of ontological knowledge is dialectic, open, empirical, continuous and unending, and ontology is “pragmatic and rational”⁴⁷. Perhaps it is not out of place here to look more closely at what can be seen at first glance when we examine ontology: dialogues are possible, but not second-order dialogues. As soon as dialectics or dialogues enter into an inductive operation such as Ferrater poses between “people” and “objectivisations” in a self-referential spiralling, a space of indeterminacy opens up, one that is quite favourable for the final result in historiography, but leads to uncertain results in logic and science. In a manner of speaking, the rules of the game are broken. Ferrater is no longer offering solutions to problems that can be debated. Coming up with a third way represents *begging the question*, obviating the issue and changing the rules.

This approach, which has been the subject of discussion and debate, appears to me to be the source of Ferrater’s relative silence in the field of logic and analytical research. Critics have argued that his formulations did not get to grips internally with the problems, but rather reformulated them from the outside, from a linguistic phenomenology that was certainly of interest, but failed to redirect them toward a workable, familiar methodology. I think that at least Héctor Neri Castañeda, Alonzo Church and Nicholas Rescher were of the same mind in levelling this criticism at Ferrater. Castañeda, who was not exactly generous in making concessions in dialogue or argumentation⁴⁸, but formulated a theory of quasi-indexicals and guises in his own work in order to account for the non-directly referential symbolic world, asked Ferrater expressly for clarifications in this regard after he read *The Idea of Man*⁴⁹. To him, Ferrater’s formulation seemed incomprehensible. He warned Ferrater that “you are getting involved in building a complicated technical terminology instead of formulating straightforward, important facts in clear ordinary terms”. And on the budding science of computation:

47 Ibid. 1985, II, p. 39.

48 See the critique of Toulmin’s position around the appearance of *The Uses of Argument* (1959), H. N. Castañeda, “On a Proposed Revolution in Logic”, *Philosophy of Science*, 27:3 (July 1960), pp. 279-292. Castañeda studied under Wilfried Sellars, who had been a student of Marvin Farber at Buffalo. Therefore, Austrian phenomenology and especially the ontology of Meinong were not only familiar to him, but also a source of inspiration.

49 *The Idea of Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*, Lindley Lecture, Lawrence, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Kansas, 1961.

“Obviously no electro- or servomechanism is human in the sense that it has awareness or the ability to think. But there is no logical or physical impossibility why a robot, in the sense of being a product of human technology, cannot develop awareness and learn to think propositionally. This is something that does not tally well with your formula “man is his body” or with your confessed affinities with Ryle.”⁵⁰

Castañeda held a rather Platonic position. Later developments in cognitive science appear to support Ferrater as regards the Cartesian problem of mind/body separation. But Castañeda’s insight brings out what I wanted to say in relation to the impossibility of a second-order dialogue. I sense that the Catalan philosopher slides imperceptibly from reference as an objective function belonging to scientific discussion into a “dense” description of the uses of language as a communicative process:

“Could you explain to me in detail what you mean when you say that “*mind*” and “*body*” name “*absolute*” realities, which do not exist as such, but whose concepts we are obliged to use in order to understand one another. Are mind and body boundary concepts?”⁵¹

In effect, I think that this is a blind spot in Ferrater’s pragmatics, which jumps a level without warning, and if I ask myself why, the reply is that the synthesis and description of the uses of concepts corresponds to a second-order historiography, a second-order hermeneutics characteristic of the intellectual history contained in the *Dictionary* and in Ferrater’s scholarly articles. Ferrater describes linguistic frameworks, which define the fields of meaning for concepts. There are not only boundary concepts within the frameworks, however, but also *boundary frameworks*, because Ferrater applies the same technique to the various opposing options and lines of thinking that delimit the frameworks. Ontology is an explicit conceptual embodiment of this transversal technique. And Ferrater uses “concepts” to refer both to frameworks and to the concepts and categories found within them. The result is that he turns categories into concepts as a good practitioner of intellectual history, but this bars him from further discussion of the categories because, quite simply, he has changed the object of his discourse. What is more, he seems to have been aware of this and wanted to do it.

I do not think that my interpretation contradicts the observations formulated by critics in relation to Ferrater’s ontology of boundary concepts. Ulisses Moulines interprets it as “heuristic” to consider conceptual dichotomies as indicative. Carlos Nieto Blanco describes it as an attempt to describe

50 Letter from Héctor N. Castañeda to Ferrater on 14 December 1961.

51 Letter from Héctor N. Castañeda on 15 February 1962.

the world “from within” (taking “the without” into account). Both point to the different levels.

Subsequent to Ferrater’s death, Peter van Inwagen published a seminal paper in *Erkenntnis* entitled “Meta-Ontology”⁵², which poses the question: *what are we asking when we ask, ‘What is there?’* An entire field has been opened up to address this question, which has, in fact, been traced back to Carnap’s formulation in an article published in 1950⁵³. The Indiana taxonomy in the Stanford Encyclopedia directly classifies meta-ontology as a part of metaphysics. Carnap’s position, *ex ante* against Quine, is that questions from “outside” make no sense, as Inwagen’s paper recalls. But if one takes the trouble to look at the final bibliography of *Fundamentos de Filosofía*, one finds that Ferrater not only cited Carnap, but that this was the sole work of Carnap’s that he did cite, in its original appearance in the *Révue Internationale de Philosophie*⁵⁴.

I think that a great deal of the discussion in the volume is, in effect, from the outside. Take, for instance, the section on universals. And this fact and how the discussion is set up reflects Ferrater’s experience as a historian. Questions, and how to pose them, were of keener interest to him than a debate over the answers. Inwagen concludes with a defence of Quine’s existential quantifier, because it captures sufficiently the indistinction between being and existence. Ferrater preferred not to debate the matter. Why? Because, at heart, it was not his problem: the triad of *non-significance*, *presence* and *confluence* belong to meta-ontology, but only in order to point out the multiplicity of answers. All second-order dialogue ends up being a first-order dialogue unless one of the interlocutors prevents it. But the risk is that communication is disrupted. That is, the dialogue ends up being more expressive than epistemic, deliberative or even eristic. There is no dispute, because in reality there is no common problem.

52 Peter van Inwagen, “Meta-Ontology”, *Erkenntnis* 48 (1998), pp. 233–250. “Quine has called the question ‘What is there?’ ‘the ontological question’. But if we call this question by that name, what name shall we use for the question, ‘What are we asking when we ask “What is there?”’ Established usage, or misuse, suggests the name ‘the meta-ontological question’, and this is the name I shall use. I shall call the attempt to answer the meta-ontological question ‘meta-ontology’.”

53 Carnap, Rudolf. 1950. “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology”. Reprinted as a supplement to *Meaning and Necessity: A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956, pp. 205–221.

54 Carnap, Rudolf. 1950. “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology”, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 4 (1950), pp. 20–40.

5. Closing observations

By way of closing, I would like to offer a few final observations.

In the world opening up at the interface between the social sciences and computation, where multi-agent systems (MAS) and virtual institutions are under construction, the conceptual structure is regulatory. That is, it guides the building of programmes. This marks a change from the panorama that we have faced until now: “scientists do science; philosophers do not” — as Merrill so memorably put it⁵⁵. In ontological construction, the philosopher and the scientist can work side by side to build new tools and more precise ontologies, developing methods to evaluate them and to thrash out their fields of application. From this point of view, Ferrater’s semantic ontology seems to me entirely salvageable: it is close to the scientific function of the philosopher, so to speak. This simply means that the conditions for dialogue have shifted and that the discussion that did not happen at the time is now reopening. As I mentioned earlier, we will see the computational ontologies of philosophy proliferating in the near future.

Even so, it must be said that Ferrater did not take much notice of developments in artificial intelligence or in the science of computation. Interestingly, the names of Herbert Simon, Alan Newell, Marvin Minsky, Ed Feigenbaum and John McCarthy did not figure in his dictionary of 1979, perhaps because he did not actually view them as philosophers. Yet this is the line that, following on from the Dartmouth seminar of 1955, laid the foundations for the construction and development of the cognitive revolution, artificial intelligence and, ultimately, the Internet. Nor do the names of Georges Miller, David Rumelhart or James McClelland appear, all strictly contemporaries whose work was too recent.

In knowledge engineering, ontologies are used to reduce the complexity of information management, classify information and facilitate both the connection to the user and the interoperability among languages and knowledge objects (Simple Knowledge Organisation Systems, SKOS). A foundational or upper-level ontology explicitly sets out the “ontological commitment” to a given vocabulary and assigns restrictions to the provided categories by means of axioms⁵⁶. Ferrater’s ontology did not have this purpose. It was neither reducible to rules nor completely automatic.

However, it does constitute a series of quite nuanced guideposts or set of philosophical theses to mark out the initial steps toward a working ontolo-

55 Gary H. Merrill, “Ontology, Ontologies, and Science”, *Topoi*, 30 (2011), pp. 71–83 (p. 74).

56 Robert Hoehndorf (2010), “What is an upper level ontology?”, *Ontogenesis*. <http://ontogenesis.knowledgeblog.org/740>.

gy. Hermeneutics enabled him not to discard anything that had been formulated as philosophy; it operated like a rake to collect the most disparate and dissimilar philosophies, focusing on specific points of philosophical discourse. As a result, it was able to function as the preliminary conceptual schematisation needed for a computational ontology.

Addressing the last point, though, goes beyond the aim of this paper. My purpose here has been to demonstrate why the experience of Ferrater's intellectual history still seems valid to me today and can make a contribution to this effort.

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Translation from Catalan by Joel Graham