

## THE RESULTS ARE IN: THE SCOPE AND IMPORT OF HINTIKKA'S PHILOSOPHY

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Jaakko Hintikka is more like a scientist or a mathematician than most philosophers in that his greatest contributions derive less from his views than from his results.<sup>60</sup> Hintikka, probably more than any other major philosopher, works at the intersection of traditional philosophical questions and the technical results of mathematical logic, physics, neuroscience and computer science.<sup>61</sup> In this respect, he is sometimes compared with the great American philosopher W.V. Quine. However, there are many significant differences between the two. While Quine has admitted to regretfully having produced no major contribution to real logical theory, Hintikka brings his mathematical creativity to bear directly on philosophical questions, using logical techniques to reach philosophical results that, once they are understood, are as extraordinary as his technical results are indisputable.

There is another related difference between Hintikka and Quine that helps illuminate Hintikka's unique place in contemporary philosophy. Most readers recognize that Quine's philosophy is shaped by his commitment to the all-encompassing metaphysical framework of philosophical naturalism. By contrast, if there is an all-encompassing framework that future readers will associate with Hintikka's work, they will find it as one of the conclusions, rather than as a premise of his many investigations. Hintikka's philosophy is driven principally by what he can prove. This makes reading Hintikka difficult (if satisfying) work. The lack of any obvious and familiar big-picture assumptions is an obstacle facing many of his readers, but it also makes his philosophy less of a defensive action in support of a particular view and more of a progressive accumulation of insights. Unfortunately, Hintikka has been impatient to explain the philosophical import of technically-driven results to philosophers who may not be able immediately

<sup>60</sup> In saying this, we are to a certain extent modifying Hintikka's own occasional claims to have adopted a kind of Kantianism. While, the question of the relation between Hintikka's and Kant's philosophy is quite fascinating and well worth further attention, we do not believe that much light is shed on Hintikka's work merely by seeing it through the lens of Kant's transcendental philosophy. To the contrary, in our view, such an interpretation may (and indeed, often does) serve to conceal some of the more radical aspects of Hintikka's philosophy. Since arguing this point here would require us to defend a reading of Kant in addition to Hintikka, we leave this matter for another occasion.

<sup>61</sup> Thus as Wiebe van der Hoek notes in the *Knowledge, Rationality & Action* special issue of *Synthese*, "Epistemic logicians in computer science acknowledge Hintikka as their origin," (Volume 139, 2, March 11, 2004, p. v).

to grasp them. (As one of us recently put it: "What the machinery conceals is what the machinery reveals."<sup>62</sup>) Hintikka's reluctance is not due to modesty on Hintikka's part but through the sheer doggedness of his devotion to inquiry. He has rarely engaged in retrospective consideration or explanation of his work as a whole because, as he often says to friends and colleagues, there are too many other interesting things to work on.

Often, Hintikka will end an article or a lecture by introducing a new line of inquiry or a new set of open questions rather than settling on some easily digested philosophical conclusion. Hence, our task in this essay is to make the philosophical import of his work as clear as possible. It is difficult to do justice to Hintikka's results, while at the same time making them accessible. Sometimes we have found that by beginning with some analogy to a point in the history of philosophy, some remark from Aristotle or Leibniz on modality, Peirce on language or quantification, we can see more clearly what Hintikka might be up to. Our strategy in this essay is to begin in the relatively familiar territory of the history of philosophy, mentioning the way some of Hintikka's technical insights figure into his reading of history, before embarking on a more detailed exposition of some of those results.

Section One begins by sketching some of the main features of his approach to the history of philosophy. We can only examine a selection of prominent cases where his technical work is set in dialogue with his interpretation of his predecessors. Hintikka's reading of Aristotle's logic is probably familiar to most philosophers, but we will also discuss some of his less famous studies of Newton, Hume and the Bloomsbury Group. These are likely to surprise readers familiar with Hintikka's work and are, in some ways, more representative of his approach to history than, for example, the more prominent work on Descartes' Cogito argument. The historical topics we discuss in Parts One and Two are (with one exception) those which we can directly connect to our more technical overview of Hintikka's work later in this essay. We hope thereby to reinforce our claim that Hintikka's historical discussions are by and large continuous with his technical work. We hope also to show that his systematic work illuminates, and in turn is illuminated by, his forays into the history of philosophy.

Hintikka's contributions to the philosophy of language have been quite prominent. However, to get a clear sense for the general import of his work in this field, it is useful to see the interplay of historical scholarship and technical investigation. His views on language and ineffability are a clear case where he mixes a reading of the history of early analytic philosophy with a set of theses concerning the nature of logic and semantics. In Section

<sup>62</sup> Daniel Kolak, *On Hintikka* Belmont: Wadsworth.

