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What, If Anything, Is Wrong with Academic Philosophy?

A Questionnaire

For this issue, we asked people from inside and outside academia the following question: 'In your mind, what, if anything, is wrong with academic philosophy?'
Their answers, as well as the following essays, attest to a shared discomfort as well as to the lack of a shared diagnosis and remedy. We thank our contributors and document this diversity of views and experiences without subjecting it to further interpretation.

The editors

In 1917, John Dewey wrote, 'Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men'. While I would replace 'men' with 'people', Dewey was right. Academic philosophy has mostly failed to heed his call. Philosophers need to escape the prison of a priori theorizing and engage more with the concerns of diverse people around the world, and enrich their ideas with the contributions of other disciplines.

Elizabeth Anderson (University of Michigan)

♦

I respond with two quotes and a question.
'You make a few distinctions. You clarify a few concepts. It's a living.' (Sidney Morgenbesser on what it is to be a philosopher)

'A professional is someone who can do his best work when he doesn't feel like it.' (Alistair Cooke on professionalism)
My question is: Does being a professional philosopher, i.e., a paid philosopher, make it harder to do philosophy professionally, i.e., with skill and integrity?

Kimberley Brownlee (University of British Columbia)

♦

There have never been so many professional philosophers as today, yet philosophy has never been so irrelevant. Analytic philosophy has special responsibility for this, because it deals with questions that are irrelevant to our understanding of the world. This is due to the fact that analytic philosophy assumes that philosophy does not advance knowledge of the world, it only seeks to improve our understanding of what we already know. Philosophy can escape from irrelevance only by reestablishing the view with which Plato gave birth to philosophy as a discipline, namely, that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge (Euthydemus, 288, d 8).

Carlo Cellucci (Sapienza University of Rome)

♦

Someone living in severe poverty – perhaps the mother of a handicapped child without state support or an illegal immigrant – wanders into a library in search of relief, turns to the philosophy corner, and finds a prestigious philosophy journal. I happen to be there, proudly admiring my newest publication, and the person asks me to explain what on earth the titles mean, and why I think it is good that the state –

the very same one that could have supported them – invests in such research. My pride wanes, but is it my fault?

Stijn Conix (CEFISES, Louvain-la-Neuve)

♦

Institutional affiliation is now systematically used as a distinctive mark of belonging: if you don't work in a university philosophy department, you surely aren't a real philosopher! However, operating with a preformed and fixed idea of who should count as a philosopher and who shouldn't will necessarily lead us to unduly limit our chances to read and experience a variety of ancient and modern texts as occasions to practice philosophy as an exercise of self-transformation, at one and the same time intellectual and ethical.

Arnold I. Davidson (University of Chicago, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and *Daniele Lorenzini (University of Pennsylvania)*
(From the foreword to Pierre Hadot*, Don't Forget to Live: Goethe and the Tradition of Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago, 2023), pp. x–xi)

♦

Academic philosophy forces us into a limited set of literary forms. Collectively, academics have decided that the best way to express your philosophical ideas is through an 8,000-word journal article or an 80,000-word monograph, maybe the occasional op-ed. Thus, we're at odds with how past philosophy was written and the many wondrous forms in which it has appeared: dialogues, poems, letters, autobiographies, demonstrations in geometric order (thanks Spinoza), meditations, inquiries, manifestos, commentaries on classic texts,

orations, guidebooks, sutras, essays, utopias, and postscripts… Is there a way for us to reclaim this plurality?

Helen de Cruz (Saint Louis University)

♦

For today's students, anecdotes from yesterday

Shortly after May 68, I gave a lecture on Machiavelli's *The Prince*. I use an article by Claude Lefort, which is really new. The professor criticizes me: the history of philosophy must require me; far from an article by a philosopher of the day.

Two years later, in preparation for the *agrégation*, I did a presentation known as the 'grand oral'. I read Derrida's *Margins* and found it excellent for structuring my presentation. The teacher was furious and said loud and clear that this philosophy was worthless...

This is academicism: to discover the new would be a beginner's mistake.

So I won't give the names of the two professors here, I prefer to name two thinkers of our time.

Geneviève Fraisse (CNRS)

♦

Academic philosophy is in sad shape, and its current trajectory isn't sustainable. Its crucial error is to accept the regional ontology that characterizes the natural and social sciences. Most of its efforts should consist of fundamental ontology – asking basic epistemic, ethical, metaphysical questions in specific social and political contexts. This implies the importance of doing philosophical field work (rather than the endless production of academic papers) where one works alongside

governments, private firms, and community groups. Finally, philosophy should critique the knowledge industry, questioning the assumption that the endless production of new knowledge remains a personal and social good.

Robert Frodeman

♦

It's ironic to wonder about the current state of academic philosophy because the modern university was founded with philosophy at its base. That was Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea when he launched the University of Berlin in 1810. It originally featured the 'German idealists' Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. They presented themselves as prospectors of endless horizons, not puzzle solvers in already defined problem spaces. They were mappers of the conceptual just as European explorers over the previous three centuries had been mappers of the physical. What was then a radically new vision of academic philosophy needs to be reinvented for our own times.

Steve Fuller (University of Warwick)

♦

As a new philosophy MA student, I was struck by the rifts in my department. These manifested themselves in departmental seminars as dogmatic squabbles. Philosophers did not always engage with work in the spirit in which it was intended. At the same time, I started a placement in a local secondary school. Here, children responded playfully, creatively, and insightfully to philosophical ideas. Academic philosophy at its best maintains this playfulness. When it goes wrong, it

gets bogged down in detail and dogma. Regularly teaching children some philosophy could help philosophers to counter this tendency.

Jane Gatley (Swansea University)

♦

Many things are wrong. For me – I identify with critical thinking – the main problems are self-referentiality (the philosophical discourse is increasingly a discourse for specialists, an end in itself) and standardisation (in both the language and the elaboration of thought). Academic philosophy thus truly reflects the neoliberal mentality that pervades most spheres of global society. A philosophy conflicting with its academic configuration would not only finally recognise itself as fully involved in society and its dynamics (which it often ends up legitimising), but perhaps also recover its long-standing aspiration to have an impact on it.

Dario Gentili (University of Roma Tre)

♦

Today's academia is a bureaucracy that is well integrated into the state and corporate bureaucracy. To do philosophy in the academic framework means to fight for academic positions, salaries, grants, publications, and prestige. Whatever can be said about this fight, it does not allow a philosopher to practice a philosophical life in its more traditional version – as preparation for death.

Boris Groys (KU Leuven)

♦

We at *Against Professional Philosophy* think that professional academic philosophy is seriously fucked up in various ways that, ironically and even tragically, oppose and undermine the ongoing project of real philosophy.

Robert Hanna (againstprofphil.org)

♦

Philosophy is too committed to outdated ideas in planetary ecology, science, technology, and political normativity. Philosophy presumes to lead the progressive development of ideas, beginning with the anthropocentric (and narcissistic) superiority of human rationality. But I believe philosophy is better understood as examining new developments in science and technology, and then reviewing the political-ethical-ecological consequences of these new concepts. It would then be obvious that universalism lends itself to colonialism. That individual rationality alienates human subjectivity from community and the ecosystem. That assumptions of progress underpin the dangerous narrative of exponential economic growth and the consequential growth in climate emissions.

Protecting old fashioned normative philosophy involves gatekeeping newer generations of thought from the profession.

Ruth Irwin (RMIT University)

♦

The worst thing about academic philosophy (and it's a tough competition) is how inaccessible it is. This works on many levels. Many spaces in academic philosophy (workplaces, events) are literally inaccessible to many disabled people. More generally, in order to

secure a job post-PhD, people are expected to publish at a rate that may not be possible for those with caring responsibilities or health problems, for example. And securing PhD funding is getting ever harder, shutting out students without access to the kinds of mentoring and cultural capital that help with making applications, or the ability to self-fund. It's deplorable.

Katharine Jenkins (University of Glasgow)

♦

Philosophy as an academic discipline has been insufficiently mindful of the importance of community to research excellence and prosperity, with a few exceptions. Overemphasis of individualism prevents collaboration as well as healthy competition, preferencing egos over ideas. The power of science was built on this insight, and philosophy has much to gain from reflecting on its social basis. Beyond greater exploration of what best enables good philosophy at the social level, I believe the discipline would be improved by a greater commitment to community in our professional profiles and daily interactions.

Carolyn Dicey Jennings (UC Merced)

♦

Philosophy was built by turning its back on the social and vital urgencies of ordinary life. As Foucault argues, it was constituted as a hermeneutic and as a therapy designed to ward off the evil inherent in forms of life. Gradually elaborated into a history of philosophy, it became a language disconnected from the social, political, and anthropological conditions that make and unmake the present. As a result, the teaching of philosophy has gradually solidified into an Academy whose very risk is

to produce and reproduce the ideology of free time already denounced by Pierre Bourdieu. Philosophy urgently needs to return to the social and vital terrain it explores in its own way, by considering concepts in relation to life experiences.

Guillaume Le Blanc (Université Paris Cité)

♦

Philosophy is located in the academy for economic reasons: wage slaves do not have time to produce philosophy, unless that is their job! Salaried academic philosophers in the last 150 years have made progress in logic, in the understanding of the successful empirical sciences, and in scholarship on the history of philosophy. Apart from that, it has produced (contrary to its intention!) a valuable ethnographic document that will assist later scholars in understanding the normative customs (moral and political) of the relatively well-off members of society in the late 20th and early 21st century.

Brian Leiter (University of Chicago)

♦

In all European philosophy institutes, there are people whose basic convictions include, for example, that human beings must be treated as an end in himself, have inviolable dignity, are bearers of inalienable rights, etc. Why do I meet so few of my colleagues at demonstrations or direct actions against deportations, push-backs, and the internment camps at the European borders?

Daniel Loick (University of Amsterdam)

♦

Academic philosophy is subject to significant external threat. It is commonly viewed as a dispensable luxury. Priority is given to disciplines which can plausibly present themselves as forms of engineering. It is therefore counterproductive to add to the chorus of complaint. However, the external threat has three main negative reflexes. First, the discipline is underfunded, and so there are too few academic jobs in philosophy. Second, competition for those jobs leads to too early specialisation, focus on quick wins, and overproduction. Third, there is a tendency to seek protean insulation by seeking to present philosophy as a form of engineering.

Guy Longworth (University of Warwick)

♦

'GESAMTKUNSTWERK PHILOSOPHY DE LARGE'

The 'GESAMTKUNSTWERK PHILOSOPHY' is part of the 'Family' ART. (FAMILIE DER KUNST). Philosophy is a section of Art and 'academic philosophy' and 'non-academic philosophy' need no splitting because these two approaches are in fact the same and should be treated like two sides of one medal. This Total Philosophy is indivisible, Total Philosophy is Love. The Total Freedom of Philosophy means no ideology, no politics and no religion. Philosophy is completely independent and does not seek 'Real-Life-Power'. Total Philosophy is Evolution, Metabolism, Love and Respect… Art is the 'Mother of Philosophy'. If you do what you do with love and heartblood the result is always 'PHILOSOPHY OF ART'.

Jonathan Meese

♦

It wasn't meant to be about real estate. Yet you spend 37% of your time fundraising your job so the CEO can build another campus. You boost customer pupil numbers and fees and call it 'the student experience'. You ban remote, forcing scholars into hour-long commutes, overcrowded corridors, and super-spreader spaces. (Bollocks to accessibility!) You paywall your concoctions, or pay lofty processing charges to subsidise some of the most profitable companies on earth. You long to think critically, but somehow your thought coincides with what pleases existing hierarchies. If that sounds fine, Speusippus, then there's nothing wrong with academic philosophy :)

Chris Meyns (Utrecht University)

♦

Academic philosophy of the analytic tradition is unwarrantedly conservative methodologically. Given its rather poor track-record compared to the successful track-record of science, academic analytic philosophy is in no position to dismiss methods that were not part of philosophical analytic practice traditionally. Unfortunately, however, academic philosophers tend to dismiss such methods, particularly empirical and quantitative methods, as 'not philosophy' or 'not philosophically significant'. But there are no good reasons to think that academic philosophy is, or ought to be, an essentially a priori discipline. There are only appeals to tradition, and tradition is a poor guide to epistemic progress and success.

Moti Mizrahi (Florida Institute of Technology)

♦

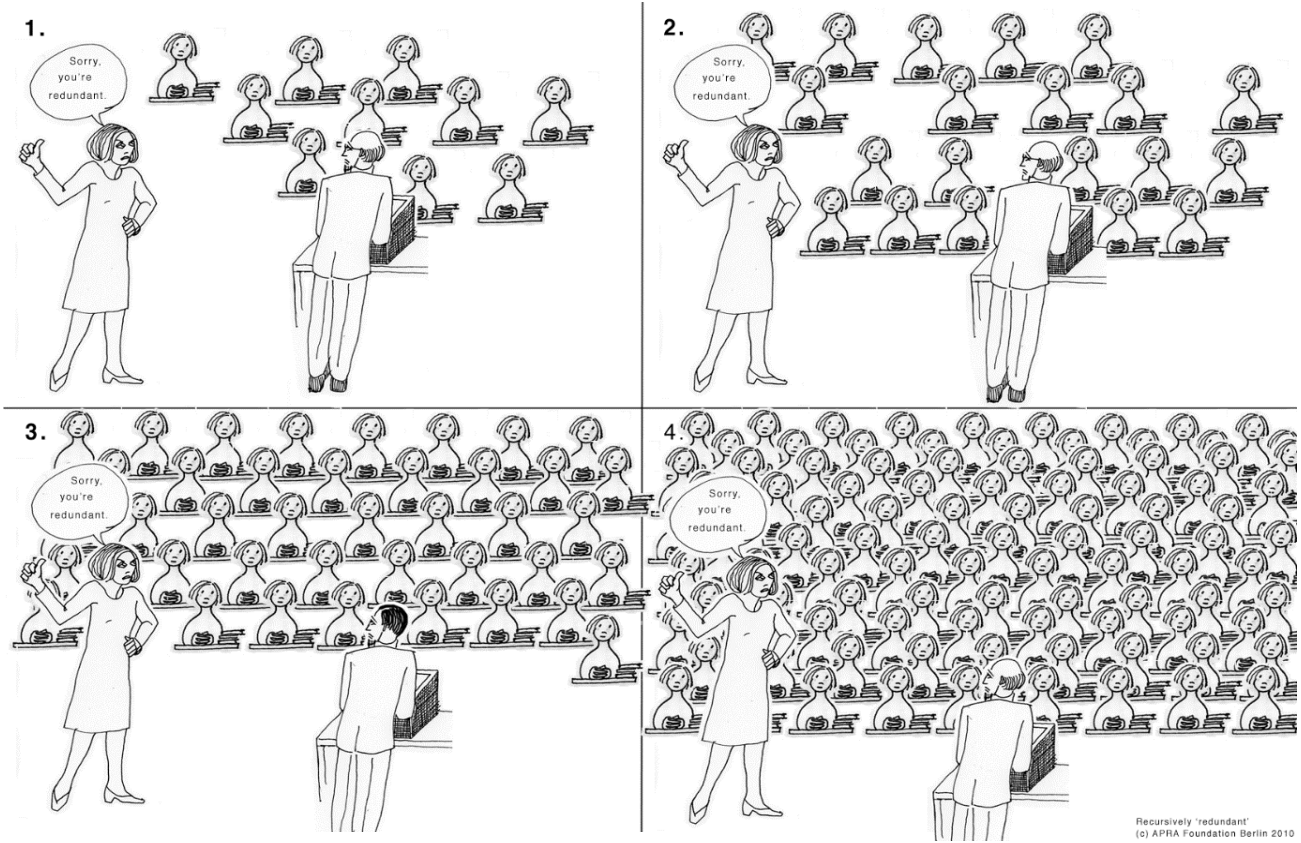

Illustration 1: 'Sorry, you're redundant', by Adrian Piper

It systematically betrays its Socratic calling. Divorcing theory from practice and teaching theory while disregarding practice, it disconnects thought from action and nourishes intellect at the expense of character. This encourages ethically malnourished characters proficient in self-deception to maximize purely intellective production regardless of worth. Advertising academic excellence, the hierarchical institutionalization of intellective production attracts the idealistic. But it actually seeks ethically malnourished characters to perpetuate its ideological conformity through professional self-advancement tactics that subordinate Socratic inquiry to patronage, ingratiation, quid pro quo, in-group collusion, bribery, blackmail, and authoritarian intimidation. Its self-defeating pseudorational apologias instead perpetuate its endemic bureaucratic mediocrity.

Adrian Piper (Adrian Piper Foundation)

♦

Philosophy professors have accepted to dance to the music of others, to embrace the audit culture of current research assessment, and to strive for the 'excellence' of containers rather than the quality of content, at the cost of erasing their role as intellectuals and teachers in the public use of reason. Thus, despite Kant and Wilhelm von Humboldt, most cannot offer an independent perspective on or against the powers that be nor a unifying horizon within university studies, and fail to educate people capable of doing more than integrating into the world as it is.

Maria Chiara Pievatolo (University of Pisa)

♦

Philosophy in the West has always had a kind of agonistic, perhaps even masculinist spirit of competition. Perhaps that made it easier for it to be saturated and suffocated by the neoliberal version of market-like competition. It's a competition not to convince someone else, but to eliminate them in the hunt for jobs and funding, a competition not for public glory, but for private status: the fetishised license to stay 'in academia', i.e., both in a respectably bourgeois profession and yet at a critical distance from all the material circuits of social reproduction.

Eva von Redecker

♦

The problem with academic philosophy is academic philosophy. A philosophical attitude is supposed to constantly question any assumption. The assumption of self-styled academic philosophy is discipline, that is, the enclosure of knowledge enabling the privatisation, commodification, and accumulation of capital by global university – and within it, the hierarchisation of labour force. When the philosopher turns into an academic philosopher, the adjective swallows the noun. They fall in love with their discipline; they give up getting to the bottom of things, where one can criticise, overturn, and overthrow discipline. Like Narcissus, the philosophers look at themselves in the mirror and what they see is the academician. Only the philosopher who comes almost to hate their object of study can become a philosopher.

Gigi Roggero (University of Bologna)

Illustration 2 by Erika Ruonakoski (University of Helsinki)

♦

The nostalgia for authority, cloaked by the performance of disinterestedness.

Alberto Toscano (Goldsmiths, University of London)

♦

Though there is some change, the main problem stemming from the professionalization and institutionalization of philosophy is the pervasive homogeneity in its form and content: in the people doing it, the way they do it, the questions asked, and the kinds of answers given. A discipline that is by nature iconoclastic and subversive became conservative and constricting. This has led to its being exclusionary, to the narrowing of philosophy's scope and, ultimately, to philosophers losing track of the big picture and their ability to make a difference to things that matter to people.

Elly Vintiadis (Deree, the American College of Greece)

♦

The trouble with academic philosophy is a subset of the trouble with philosophy more generally: philosophy ought to have ended over a hundred years ago; the truths proclaimed in theory should have been realized in practice. In the academy things are stuck in an even more miserable state, as academics are forced to recycle old insights as if they were new or invent niche applications of various theories imported from abroad (or other disciplines). Strictly speaking, there are no novel philosophical problems. Those problems which remain, inherited from the past, lie beyond philosophy's ability to resolve. Philosophers spin their wheels.

Ross Wolfe (thecharnelhouse.org)

Normalize and Control: Philosophy in Neoliberalism

JONAS OßWALD

Summary: Academic philosophy has undergone a homogenization since the Second World War that can be understood as a discursive colonization through analytic philosophy. This colonization directly results in the othering of non-analytic discourses as continental philosophy as well as the normalization of the discipline according to the analytic model. While analytic philosophy serves as the model for this continuing normalization, it is also itself the product of a normalization that occurred in the US during McCarthyism, resulting in the adaptation of mainstream analytic philosophy to the ideological needs of the Cold War. As the historical result of this process, mainstream analytic philosophy can be genealogically defined as our current majoritarian philosophy. The principal normalization techniques of contemporary academic philosophy, such as prepublication peer review and quantified research evaluation, can be analyzed as a strategically coherent intensification of disciplinary techniques of power. These techniques primarily aim at reducing intellectual labour costs, controlling intellectual work, increasing quantifiable research performance, and breaking the relative autonomy of academic staff.

Academia is a sad place to work. Precarious employment and in-work poverty, extreme hierarchies and personal dependencies, a bizarrely competitive culture of careerism and the corresponding psycho-social pathologies (the selective advantages of psychopathic and narcissistic personality traits, the well-known academic sexism, racism, and classism, the tremendous difficulties of reconciling academic work with parenthood and care duties, etc.), mediated through an excessive pressure to publish, hyper-exploitation, and self-exploitation that go far beyond the already habitual unpaid extra hours, virtually no representation in decision-making processes for most of the staff,

personal insults, disrespect, and humiliation on a daily basis, as well as the mental health problems resulting from this whole mess (burnouts, depressions, anxiety disorders, suicides, and so on).[1] A Dantesque nightmare.[2]

And yet, here we are. We, meaning those lucky enough to qualify for the academic 'battle royal' in the first place – be it by chance, money, privilege, nepotism, or a combination thereof – a battle that most of us will lose, as we very well know. A bit drastic, this image, certainly, distasteful even, considering 20 years of dying in the Mediterranean, for

1 See Shihaam Solomon and Marieta du Plessis, 'Experiences of Precarious Work within Higher Education Institutions: A Qualitative Evidence Synthesis', *Frontiers in Education*, 8 (2023); Vita Peacock, 'Academic Precarity as Hierarchical Dependence in the Max Planck Society', *HAU: Journal for Ethnographic Theory*, 6.1 (2016), 95–119; Nick Forster and Daniel W. Lund, 'Identifying and Dealing with Functional Psychopathic Behavior in Higher Education', *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, 38.1 (2018), 22–31; Agnieszka Płonka, 'Narcissistic Abuse in Academia', *EGU Blogs*, 1 June 2021 <https://blogs.egu.eu/divisions/sm/2021/06/01/narcissistic-abuse-in-academia/> [accessed 19 January 2024]; Allison C. Morgan and others, 'The Unequal Impact of Parenthood in Academia', *Science Advances*, 7.9 (2021), eabd1996; Icy Lee, 'Publish or Perish: The Myth and Reality of Academic Publishing', *Language Teaching*, 47.2 (2014), 250–61; Casey Brienza, 'Degrees of (Self)Exploitation: Learning to Labour in the Neoliberal University', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 29.1 (2016); Helene Moran and others, 'Understanding Research Culture: What Researchers Think About the Culture They Work In', *Wellcome Open Research*, 5.201 (2020); Helen Nicholls and others, 'The Impact of Working in Academia on Researchers' Mental Health and Well-Being: A Systematic Review and Qualitative Meta-Synthesis', *PLoS ONE*, 17.5 (2022), e0268890.

2 The titles of recent self-reflections of academia are also rather instructive in this regard, see, for example, Peter Fleming, *Dark Academia: How Universities Die* (London: Pluto Press, 2021); John Smyth, *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rockstars and Neoliberal Ideology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Christopher Newfield, *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018); David F. Labaree, *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Tressie McMillan Cottom, *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy* (New York: New Press, 2017).

example. And while the refugee agony is one of the greatest ignominies of our day, it is clear by now that the current organization of academia can also be potentially life-threatening, as Mark Fisher's death or Anas K.'s self-immolation sadly illustrate.

And yet, here we are. Biting the hand that feeds us. Self-criticizing, with the best of intentions, as it seems. But do we, really? What can we expect from a peer-reviewed journal issue on the critique of academic philosophy? Is it not like playing prosecutor, accused, and judge simultaneously? Although I personally still take pleasure in the grandiose and mostly male drama of publicly denouncing philosophy (academic philosophy for that matter) on philosophical grounds, as done by Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Adorno, Bourdieu, and others, we better not deceive ourselves: the effort of thematizing this problem in the first place while simultaneously trying to open the formal and medial configuration of philosophy is an honourable undertaking, of course, but it is nevertheless quite a soft 'de-academisation' of philosophy as the acceptable forms and styles of thinking are still academic, although marginalized at times. Still excluded are critiques, invectives, approaches, and in general thoughts that precisely do not share a certain academic good will. With Gilles Deleuze, we could say that it is probably not so much about the form or medium of thought but about the 'subjective or implicit presupposition'[3] of a good-willed, good-natured discourse. A sort of *philía* that presumes a pre-philosophical, pre-conceptual community of equals, not as a goal or effect of thought but as its precondition. Not being good-willed and good-natured then amounts to being not equal, meaning not authorized to partake in philosophical discourse proper.

[3] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 129.

What if, for example, I expressed my anger about the status quo – the infamy of our working and living conditions, philosophy's complicity, the increasing poverty of thought, etc. – without the servile and anaemic will to compromise and accept the orthodoxy of academic philosophy? What if I wrote with a bad will, in the name of a general *anti-philía* or 'misosophy'?[4] Is this still acceptable? What if I did not try to reason, to propose arguments, to demonstrate, to explain, to analyze, but to destroy what destroys us?[5] Is this still acceptable? What if I became personal when it comes to critique and also when it comes to experience? What if I name those responsible, plain and simple?[6] Is this still acceptable? What if I fictionalized parts or the entire text to persuade, to confuse, or to take revenge?[7] Is this still acceptable? What if I switched languages and began ranting in German, for example, *schließlich flucht man am besten in seiner Erstsprache? Ist das noch akzeptabel? Grund dazu gäbe es jedenfalls genug. Etwa dass meine Bewerbung um einen Lehrauftrag an meiner Universität durch sechs Expert:innengremien gejagt wurde, eine sagenhafte Perversion der per se schon absurden akademischen Kontrollwut, die obendrein der üblichen List der Macht entspricht, Verantwortlichkeiten zu verschleiern*.

There are good reasons for not accepting these and similar kinds of discourses. But we should be very clear that the intended criticism of academia cannot be other than heavily presuppositional, dependent on historical contingencies, and inevitably exclusive as any respectable cultural expression. This is why it is important that our naval-gazing,

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[4] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 139.
[5] See Ton Steine Scherben, *Macht kaputt, was euch kaputt macht!* (Vinyl, 7", self-released, 1970).
[6] See Edouard Louis, *Who Killed My Father* (London: Harvill Secker, 2019).
[7] See Annie Ernaux, 'Nobel Prize Lecture', *NobelPrize.org*, 7 December 2022 <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2022/ernaux/lecture/> [accessed 19 January 2024].

however urgent, at least aspires to produce a surplus for the non-academic field and situates itself in a broader socio-historical context. A Marxian 'Selbstverständigung', *self-clarification*, rather than a Kantian 'Orientierung' or Nietzschean 'Umwertung'.

♦

It is questionable at best whether we could understand philosophy today other than synonymous with academic philosophy, except in historical terms, for example ancient philosophies. Even non-standard expressions of philosophical thought, like literature, film, art in general, political thought, or speculative self-reflections of scientists, are situated predominantly in academic contexts, discourses, and practices. There are probably quite a few non-academics who would consider themselves philosophers or engaged with philosophical thought, but their impact on what we conceive as philosophy today remains very limited. This is not surprising as philosophy was always an exclusive, elitist enterprise. But it begs the question what we mean when we speak of 'academic philosophy' as if there was an alternative. Rather than being a redundancy, the qualification 'academic' seems to relate to a professionalization of philosophical practice that is dominated by a specific style of doing philosophy, a philosophical orthodoxy or hegemony associated with a certain image of scholasticism, a vague idea of rigor, and a general aura of seriousness.

Even without consulting sociological studies, it is probably fair to say that most active philosophers consider analytic philosophy the dominant discourse of academic philosophy today. That this intuition is not unfounded is illustrated by a poll conducted by Brian Leiter of the infamous 'Leiter Report' in 2018, which asked to identify the most important journals in moral and political philosophy. The five top-tier journals in this field are 'methodologically' predominantly committed

to analytic philosophy, meaning accepting also 'marginal' topics like feminism if the 'analytic method', as vague and inconsistent as this term is, is adopted.[8] The consequences of this are clear: if the condition of surviving in academic philosophy is determined by publishing in 'top-tier' journals, and if these journals are committed to analytic philosophy, then surviving in academic philosophy means doing analytic philosophy, by and large. Anybody not working in the analytic tradition is excluded by default and thus effectively prevented from getting jobs by default. The supposed pinnacle of academic philosophy today subsists on an artificial scarcity of the discourse and a narrowing of the discipline that is grotesque given its innate temporal, spatial, and stylistic diversity. At large, the 'analytization' of philosophy resembles a form of discursive colonization.

This pertains not only to the stylistic or methodological hegemony of analytic philosophy. The group around Eric Schwitzgebel surveyed articles in top anglophone journals, designated as such by the Leiter Report in 2013, and found that 97% of the citations therein were of works originally written in English.[9] 96% of the members of editorial boards lived in anglophone countries, and only one of the 100 top-cited authors in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* wrote predominantly in a language other than English. Analytic philosophy is

[8] See Brian Leiter, 'The best journals specializing in moral and/or political philosophy', *Leiter Report*, November 2018 <https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2018/11/the-best-journals-specializing-in-moral-andor-political-philosophy.html> [accessed 19 January 2024]. See Maeve McKeown, 'The View from Below: How the Neoliberal Academy Is Shaping Contemporary Political Theory', *Society*, 59 (2022), 99–109, for a discussion of this poll. For similar results, see Brian Leiter, 'Best "general" journals of philosophy, 2022, via the Condorcet method and via an average of both methods', *Leiter Report*, August 2022 <https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2022/08/best-general-journals-of-philosophy-2022-via-the-condorcet-method.html> [accessed 19 January 2024].

[9] See Eric Schwitzgebel and others, 'The Insularity of Anglophone Philosophy: Quantitative Analyses', *Philosophical Papers*, 47 (2018), 21–48.

thus associated with a linguistic homogenization that leads to an almost exclusively Anglocentric discourse. These extreme stylistic and linguistic restrictions indicate not only a self-referentiality, as Schwitzgebel and colleagues assert, but also a provinciality of analytic philosophy – and here we need not even consider postcolonial and decolonial critiques of the Eurocentrism of academic philosophy.

The pretensions of analytic philosophy are not without reason, of course. The asymmetrical influence of analytic philosophy on the philosophical discourse reflects the factual power relations of the discipline. Analytic philosophy is not predominant due to epistemic advantages. Rather, it is the institutional predominance of analytic philosophy that sanctions the epistemic marginalization of virtually any other philosophical tradition and the analytic self-proclamation as the norm or standard variety of philosophy.[10] The 'analytization' of philosophy resembles not only its discursive colonization but also its 'disciplinary normalization',[11] that is to say the positing of a norm to which a multitude is made to conform. To be sure, normalization is not an intrinsic feature of analytic philosophy per se but rather a general technology of power that predates the consolidation of the analytic discourse and also affects analytic philosophy itself. But analytic philosophy benefits from this normalization and actively promotes it for

[10] See Joel Katzav, 'To What Extent Can Institutional Control Explain the Dominance of Analytic Philosophy?', *Asian Journal of Philosophy*, 2 (2023), no. 45; Jonathan Strassfeld, 'American Divide: The Making of "Continental" Philosophy', *Modern Intellectual History*, 17.3 (2020), 833–66, for quantitative analyses of job hires and PhD completions in philosophy departments in the US that show how the institutional control by analytic philosophers and the systematic exclusion of non-analytic traditions explain the dominance of analytic philosophy since the Second World War.

[11] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 56. See also Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (New York: Random House, 1978), pp. 139–44; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 183.

the most part, thereby effectively becoming a legitimizing discourse of power. Hence, analytic philosophy both purports to be an ideal model of philosophical practice and represents itself as that variety of contemporary philosophy that comes closest to it. Analytic philosophy basically models the ideal of philosophy on itself.[12]

A characteristic aspect of this normalization that constitutes a power-technological continuity with colonialism is the othering of the abnormal, where the abnormal refers to philosophical discourses that do not meet the analytic norm.[13] These abnormal, non-analytic philosophies encompass the vast majority of philosophical traditions, spatially and temporally, thus representing an immense heterogeneity. This heterogeneity does not prevent analytic philosophy from subsuming a considerable portion of these abnormal philosophies under the label 'continental philosophy', reminding us once more of the blithe Anglocentrism of this discourse. It is well known that the designation 'continental philosophy' does not make much sense as there is no geographical, methodical, thematical, historical, or stylistic consistency to it.

So rather than a purely descriptive designation of what anglophone philosophers usually *do not* do, 'continental philosophy' is rather a prescriptive term for what *ought not to be done* if one wants to be taken seriously in philosophy.[14] As with every practice of othering, the reductive homogenization and unification of the heterogenous majority of the discourses in European philosophy as 'continental philosophy' is

[12] Structurally, this equals a duplication or tracing of the empirical in the transcendental, as described by Michel Foucault for the modern episteme, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 347–51.

[13] See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, 24.3 (1985), 247–72.

[14] See Simon Glendinning, *The Idea of Continental Philosophy: A Philosophical Chronicle* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 11.

accompanied by a devaluation and marginalization of the subaltern other. Therefore, 'continental philosophy' functions above all as a regulative term within the analytic discourse: it is 'part of the mythological history'[15] of analytic philosophy, the name of its other as self-delimitation as well as a condition of self-assertion. Just like madness for reason, or race for colonialism, 'continental philosophy' simultaneously exists and does not exist.[16] It is irreal as a substantial, homogenous, positively given thing in itself; it is real inasmuch as the othering as 'continental' has real effects of exclusion, devaluation, and marginalization, which in turn have real effects on the production of academic philosophy, primarily concerning job and funding opportunities.

♦

But not only the essence of 'continental philosophy' is in question. Even the consistency of 'analytic philosophy' is highly dubious. Analytic philosophy is typically understood as the historical combination of different approaches, such as Bertrand Russell's import of formal logic into philosophy, G. E. Moore's common-sense analysis, the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, or American pragmatism in explicit rejection of neo-Hegelian British idealism. But as Christoph Schuringa shows, this idea about the origin of analytic philosophy is an *ex post* perspective on the intellectual history of the 20th century that was established in clear neglect of the differences and animosities of the supposed precursors, insinuating a homogeneity and commonality where historically there was none.[17] This deliberate *ex post* construction

[15] Glendinning, *The Idea of Continental Philosophy*, p. 12.
[16] See Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[17] Christoph Schuringa, 'The never-ending death of analytic philosophy', *Medium,* 28 May 2020 <https://christophschuringa.medium.com/the-never-

took place in the US after the Second World War. Especially Herbert Feigl's and Wilfrid Sellars's *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* and Arthur Pap's *Elements of Analytic Philosophy*, both from 1949, played a decisive role in the invention of an analytic philosophy that did not exist prior to that, at least in its present-day sense. The birth of analytic philosophy was immediately followed by a series of requiems starting with J. O. Urmson's *Philosophical Analysis* from 1958 up to Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* from 1979 and the following talk about 'post-analytic philosophy'. Also, the 'linguistic turn' and the importance of Frege is a development of the 1950s that considerably intensified with the 'Davidsonic boom' in the 1970s. Prior to 1945, the question of meaning was insignificant for analytic philosophy.[18]

In the 1960s and 1970s, a sort of opening of analytic philosophy took place, which correlated with a loss of methodological self-awareness and scrutiny: 'analytic metaphysics' was possible now, as was political philosophy with John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* from 1971, since analytic philosophy became a specific stylistic and sociological type of doing philosophy, as Rorty notes, a set of do's and don'ts, well-known procedures, and formulations that did not need to explain itself anymore.[19] This methodological carelessness is less a phenomenon of decadence than an indication or a symptom of the increasing expansion of analytic philosophy and the colonization of the discourse: there is no need for justification of or reflection on your approach if it represents

ending-death-of-analytic-philosophy-1507c4207f93> [accessed 19 January 2024].

[18] See Greg Frost-Arnold, 'The Rise of "Analytic Philosophy": When and How Did People Begin Calling Themselves "Analytic Philosophers"?', in *Innovations in the History of Analytical Philosophy*, ed. by Sandra Lapointe and Christopher Pincock (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 27–67.

[19] See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 172.

the ideal or norm anyway. This results in the situation where analytic philosophy today has virtually no concise and homogeneous methodological foundation: suggestions range from 'conceptual analysis', logical analysis, and formal semantics to the method of cases and beyond, none of which represents the universal methodological foundation of analytic philosophy.[20] Obviously, this makes a critique of analytic philosophy a lot harder, as there is always the possibility to say that there is no analytic philosophy as such, which is neither wrong nor true. Analytic philosophy has found an ingenious way of immunizing itself against foundational, methodological, or meta-philosophical criticism without forfeiting its institutional, ideological, and discursive coherence and predominance.[21]

By adopting a genealogical perspective, we can give a fuller picture of the *ex post* invention of analytic philosophy and its colonization of the philosophical discourse after the Second World War. As Schuringa shows in a second piece, the invention of analytic philosophy in the 1950s goes hand in hand with the authoritarian liberalism that results from the combination of McCarthyism with the beginning of American neoliberalism.[22] Analytic philosophy is directly related to the ideological needs of the Cold War, especially in the US, although the precursors in Europe often positioned themselves as socialists or

[20] See Alexander A. Jeuk, 'Ideology Critique, Representational Pluralism, and the Abolition of Peer Review: A Marxist Addendum to McKeown's Criticism of Analytic Philosophy', *OSF Preprints* (2022) <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/x4b2e> [accessed 19 January 2024].

[21] See also Avner Baz, 'Recent attempts to defend the philosophical method of cases and the linguistic (re)turn', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 92.1 (2014), 105–30.

[22] See Christoph Schuringa, 'The Birth of Analytic Philosophy Out of the Spirit of McCarthyism', *Jacobin*, 1 September 2023 <https://jacobin.com/2023/01/analytic-philosophy-mccarthyism-postwar-communism> [accessed 19 January 2024]; John McCumber, *The Philosophy Scare: The Politics of Reason in the Early Cold War* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2016).

communists prior to 1945. The emigration of the Vienna Circle and associated intellectuals during the rise of fascism in Europe is particularly important here, as it initiated an increased surveillance and persecution of the academic field due to figures like Rudolf Carnap or Hans Reichenbach, who, because of their Socialist views, were kept under surveillance and subjected to harassment by the FBI. What was more important than direct effects of repression was the climate of fear created by these examples and the disastrous consequences that the simple suspicion of being a communist had, since it led to self-censorship and anticipatory obedience even long after McCarthy's death, as the firing of Angela Davis from UCLA in 1969 demonstrates.[23] The immediate result was a depoliticization of the philosophical discourse in the US that to a great extent still haunts analytic philosophy. This depoliticization, however, was an illusion since it resulted from the ideological pressure of the authoritarian liberalism of the 1950s, to which analytic philosophy conformed politically. Rather than a depoliticization, this process implanted liberalism in mainstream philosophy. Rawls's apology of liberalism in 1971 is thus no coincidence but a self-confident gesture of dominance towards his peers.[24]

[23] Davis was fired by UCLA's Board of Regents, the university's governing board, in 1969 due to her membership in the *Communist Party USA* (CPUSA) following considerable pressure from Ronald Reagan, the Governor of California at the time. Though Davis took the case to the California Supreme Court, where it was overturned and Davis consequently reemployed, the Board of Regents eventually fired Davis in 1970 due to the use of 'inflammatory language'. See Angela Davis and Tony Platt, 'Interview with Angela Davis', *Social Justice*, 40.1/2 (2013), 37–53; Daniel Gordon, 'The Firing of Angela Davis at UCLA, 1969–1970: Communism, Academic Freedom, and Freedom of Speech', *Society*, 57 (2020), 596–613.

[24] Certainly, there were also non-Rawlsian approaches in analytic political philosophy, like game theory or analytical Marxism. These, however, proved to be either marginal in comparison to liberal approaches or, as in the case of analytical Marxism, doomed to failure. Eventually, they were abandoned.

As a result, we can observe a discursive and epistemic cleansing of the formerly relatively pluralistic American universities, due to the homogenization of diverse traditions as 'analytic philosophy' and the ideological adaption of this invention to the authoritarian liberalism of the McCarthy era that was subsequently exported as a new philosophical orthodoxy to 'Western' countries (especially the UK and Scandinavia) during the Cold War and its ideological battles. Hence, the question whether analytic philosophy was ideologically prone to authoritarian liberalism due to the philosophical and political views of its precursors is pointless, because analytic philosophy was the de facto product of disciplining technologies of power during the authoritarian liberalism of the McCarthy era, to which it conformed politically. As such, it also forms the basis for the continuing normalization of the philosophical discourse and projects a zealous liberalism that pretends to be the outcome of a supposed 'marketplace of ideas' which is in itself a liberal ideologeme.[25]

♦

[25] Although often ascribed to John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, the conception of a marketplace of ideas as the method best suited for the discovery of truth is more likely a discursive phenomenon of the jurisprudence of the US Supreme Court in the context of decisions on the freedom of speech since the early 20th century. Generally, the marketplace of ideas suggests an analogy between the distribution and evaluation (not production) of ideas and the (ideal) functioning of free markets so that ideas will be assessed by their quality alone if the condition of competition is met. Non-epistemic and non-economic factors like power relations or ideology are usually neglected. See Gregory Brazeal, 'How Much Does a Belief Cost? Revisiting the Marketplace of Ideas', *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal*, 21 (2011), 1–46; Vincent Blasi, 'Holmes and the Marketplace of Ideas', *The Supreme Court Review*, 2004 (2005), 1–46; Jill Gordon, 'John Stuart Mill and the "Marketplace of Ideas"', *Social Theory and Practice*, 23.2 (1997), 235–49. See also McKeown, 'The View from Below', p. 104.

Analytic philosophy is a sociologically and ideologically relatively consistent but methodologically and historically inconsistent 'thought collective' that represents the orthodoxy of academic philosophy and is constituted by external (McCarthyism and authoritarian liberalism) as well as internal (the analytic colonization of the philosophical discourse) normalization and othering.[26] It is an academic discourse and practice that legitimizes, stabilizes, and perpetuates power, both concerning the academic apparatus, its institutions, processes, norms, structures, and discourses as well as concerning the corresponding types of subjectivations. It is a set of stylistic, sociological, practical, and perspectival features, principles, myths, and dogmas that participates genealogically in the hegemony of authoritarian (neo)liberalism and ensures its enforcement in the disciplinary normalization of the philosophical discourse.

In principle, any other philosophical tradition can serve power and promote its interests as its own – and, following Deleuze, that would generally be Nietzsche's critique of philosophy.[27] But in actual fact, it is

[26] See Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979). See also Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) for an operationalization of Fleck's notion of 'thought collective'. Some commentators describe analytic philosophy straightforwardly as an ideology due to its association with liberalism, its obsession with the individual (individual freedom, equality, action, responsibility, knowledge, etc.), and its general focus on normative approaches as for example McKeown, 'The View from Below', p. 102. While I share McKeown's general intention in doing so, I hesitate to conceive analytic philosophy solely in terms of ideology, notwithstanding the conceptual complexities of the notion, as it tends to underrepresent the more 'material', practical, historical, and institutional reasons for the hegemony of analytic philosophy and its intimate intertwining with power in favour of a purely discursive perspectivation.

[27] See Gilles Deleuze, 'Nomadic Thought', in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, ed. by David Lapoujade (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 252–61.

analytic philosophy that plays this role since more or less the Second World War. From a historical perspective, analytic philosophy is just the most opportunistic philosophy, as it knows how to capitalize on the (neo)liberal hegemony of today, not in the sense of a mischievous Machiavellianism or meticulously planned discursive takeover but as the de facto result of a normalizing intervention in the McCarthy era.

Instead of relying on a list of rather empty dualisms for differentiating 'analytic' and 'continental' philosophy (systematic philosophy vs. history of philosophy, naturalistic vs. culturalist, clarity vs. obscurity, rigorous argumentation vs. literary expression, etc.), it seems more reasonable to draw a genealogical distinction. Mainstream analytic philosophy represents our current majoritarian philosophy, a philosophy that acts in accordance with and in support of the needs of power, adopts its problems, backs and legitimizes its claim, as the historical result of a process of disciplinary normalization in McCarthyism. In contrast to this, there are minoritarian philosophies from various periods and regions that have nothing in common except being the other of analytic philosophy, from the perspective of analytic philosophy of course.[28] The factual hegemony of analytic philosophy is nothing but the contingent becoming-majoritarian of *a* philosophy that colonizes and normalizes the philosophical discourse.

To be clear, this power-theoretical distinction is a rough typology and simply indicates tendencies of the philosophical discourse. Of course, non-analytic philosophies are also permeated by majoritarian aspects, leanings, and becomings. It is probably even the rule if we think of the habitual classism, sexism, and racism of 'Western' philosophy, which are surprisingly conspicuous in comparison to the rest of academia, demonstrating philosophy's inherent elitism and historical

[28] For Deleuze's and Guattari's minor/major distinction, see, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 16–27.

complicity with power.[29] The fact that philosophy was discriminatory, elitist, and marginalizing before the invention of analytic philosophy does not diminish the problem of analytic philosophy now. Rather, we have the additional problem of the colonization and normalization of the discourse through analytic philosophy, including the specific additional types of marginalization that come with it. Analytic philosophy is not primarily a problem against the background of 'epistemic injustice'[30] or philosophical pluralism. Analytic philosophy is a political and power-theoretical problem that intensifies philosophy's traditional complicity with power.

♦

[29] See Eric Schwitzgebel and others, 'The Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Diversity of Philosophy Students and Faculty in the United States: Recent Data from Several Sources', *The Philosopher's Magazine*, 93 (2021), 71–90.

[30] The notion of 'epistemic injustice' was introduced by Miranda Fricker, José Medina, and others to analyze those social situations that restrict the epistemic status of an individual, see Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Ian J. Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (London: Routledge, 2017). While the discourse of epistemic injustice does not concern issues of social justice per se nor a critique or theory of ideology, there are some blind spots that seem to be quite instructive for the problem of analytic philosophy. For example, while epistemic injustice is used to analyze issues related to gender, race, and disability in an analytic framework, there is a quite revealing hesitation regarding issues related to class and classism that are systematically created on the very basis of liberal ideologies, see Thomas J. Spiegel, 'The Epistemic Injustice of Epistemic Injustice', *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 11.9 (2022), 75–90. The problem is that this discourse cannot address discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, etc. other than in terms of 'injustice': it is but unjust not to be epistemically represented, a bug in the system, an epistemic accident. Exclusion and marginalization thus do not appear as systematic stabilizations and perpetuations of the status quo, its power relations, and specific knowledges but as accidental problems that do not call for a fundamental change in knowledge production as they simply amount to normative misconducts in the form of epistemic shortcomings.

While the colonization of the philosophical discourse through analytic philosophy is equivalent to the normalization of philosophy, the crucial techniques that enforce this process (prepublication peer review and the evaluation of knowledge production through the quantification of 'research outputs') are in principle independent of the analytic discourse. Factually, however, analytic philosophy is intimately linked to these technologies of discipline and control by virtue of its genealogical association with the beginnings of neoliberalism and its discursive and institutional hegemony. Just like normalization, these techniques are not intrinsic to analytic philosophy per se. Rather, analytic philosophy manages to benefit from their proliferation due to its own constitution through and adaption to an external disciplinary normalization in the McCarthy era.

In general, we can say that the techniques of peer review and academic quantification implement the normalization of philosophy primarily through individualisation of philosophical thought (the individual researcher as the only point of reference), parcelling and standardization of outcomes (discrete journal articles as the normal product), and the supposed objectification of research performance and quality (impact factors, publication indices, etc.) so that the individual researcher can be evaluated by administrative and managerial staff. Since this objectification primarily amounts to counting approved publications (peer reviewed journal articles with defined authorship), peer review is of particular importance for the specific disciplining and control of academic philosophy. With Mario Biagioli, we can say that peer review is the 'distinctive kind of discipline' of academia: normalizing and, as such, productive, as well as constitutive of the

specific type of academic knowledge, a practice of 'internal disciplining of a text and its author'.[31]

From an epistemic standpoint, however, there is not much that speaks for peer review at all. Usually, it is argued in terms of quality control and detection of misconduct. Although this argument seems intuitive, it lacks empirical evidence. On the contrary, while there is, at best, ambivalent evidence for the advantages of peer review as a means of quality control, there is considerable evidence for its defects.[32] For example, the prestige of a journal is not correlated with the quality of the articles published, and evaluations of reviewers are not particularly reliable, which means that the differences in the evaluation of one and the same manuscript by different reviewers are at times so considerable that they are indistinguishable from chance.[33] There is similar evidence regarding peer review of project proposals in funding applications, which is found to be of low reliability as well as low validity (no or weak correlation between the review score of a project and its bibliometric impact) while incentivizing unimaginative, low-risk, mainstream

[31] Mario Biagioli, 'From Book Censorship to Academic Peer Review', *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures* 12.1 (2002), 11–45 (p. 11).

[32] See, Remco Heesen and Liam Kofi Bright, 'Is Peer Review a Good Idea?', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 72.3 (2021), 635–63 (pp. 649–51) and Richard Smith, 'Peer Review: A Flawed Process at the Heart of Science and Journals', *Journal for the Royal Society of Medicine* 99.4 (2006), 178–82 (p. 179), who rather pointedly characterizes peer review as being 'slow, expensive, profligate of academic time, highly subjective, something of a lottery, prone to bias, and easily abused'.

[33] See Björn Brembs, 'Prestigious Science Journals Struggle to Reach Even Average Reliability', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 12.37 (2018); Carole J. Lee and others, 'Bias in Peer Review', *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* 64.1 (2013), 2–17; Lutz Bornmann, 'Scientific Peer Review', *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 45.1 (2011), 197–45; Richard L. Kravitz and others, 'Editorial Peer Reviewers' Recommendations at a General Medical Journal: Are They Reliable and Do Editors Care?', *PLoS ONE* 5.4 (2010), e10072.

research.[34] At the same time, reviewers and editors have to invest enormous quantities of labour instead of doing research.[35] Note, too, the presence of gender bias in peer review,[36] huge journal subscription fees that indirectly depend on peer review,[37] and the power of gatekeepers like editors.[38] Specifically, peer review in philosophy is prone to partisanship in favour of mainstream analytic philosophy, despite the absence of compelling epistemic, moral, or pragmatic reasons for this.[39] In sum, we have a situation with high costs, demonstrable deficits, and

[34] See Stijn Conix, Andreas De Block, and Krist Vaesen, 'Grant Writing and Grant Peer Review as Questionable Research Practices', *F1000Research*, 10.1126 (2021).

[35] Balazs Aczel, Barnabas Szaszi, and Alex O. Holcombe, 'A Billion Dollar Donation: Estimating the Cost of Researchers' Time Spent on Peer Review', *Research Integrity and Peer Review*, 6.1 (2021), conservatively estimates that researchers globally spent 100 million working hours (roughly 15,000 years) on peer reviewing in 2020 alone, which is equivalent to an estimated value of 1.5 billion US-Dollars for US-based reviewers, 600 million US-Dollars for China-based reviewers, and 400 million for UK-based reviewers.

[36] See Lee and others, 'Bias in Peer Review', p. 7.

[37] See Heesen and Bright, 'Is Peer Review a Good Idea?', pp. 644–45.

[38] See Joel Katzav and Krist Vaesen, 'Pluralism and Peer Review in Philosophy', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 17.19 (2017), 1–20, for a study on the journal *Mind*. See Melinda Baldwin, *Making 'Nature': The History of a Scientific Journal* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), for a study on the journal *Nature* and the role of editors.

[39] See Katzav and Vaesen, 'Pluralism and Peer Review in Philosophy', pp. 7–12. In contrast to Katzav and Vaesen, the vast majority of the studies focus on peer review in sciences or on peer review from the perspective of the philosophy, history, or sociology of science. This raises the question of whether or not the identified deficits apply to peer review in philosophy alike. Although there is the need for specific studies on peer review in philosophy for a satisfactory answer, it seems reasonable to assume that most of the points raised apply similarly to philosophy, since there is simply no indication that philosophy would be the exception to the academic rule in this regard. On the contrary, why should the assumption of a philosophical exceptionalism be more plausible than to assume that philosophy behaves like any other academic discipline? In addition, as Katzav and Vaesen show, there are indications that philosophy is even more susceptible to inconsistencies, partisanships, biases, and abuses as there are few disciplines that are so harshly and inimically divided as philosophy.

at best unclear epistemic benefits. Additionally, there are proven alternatives (for example, 'preprint' servers or archives like *arXiv*) that are already the standard form of publication and communication for some parts of the mathematical and physical sciences and that seem to do very well without peer review.

So why is peer review still practiced? For one thing, it is cheap for decision-makers as it is considered a 'service to the community', which means unpaid labour or, at best, a sort of professional custom implicitly compensated by the researcher's salary, if there is any. Despite the proven ineffectiveness of peer review, there is no inherent incentive to abolish or reform this practice from the point of view of publishers, editors and editorial boards, funding organisations, and university managements as the associated costs are negligible in comparison to the benefits provided by peer review as a means of quantification, objectification, and ranking of knowledge that is, oddly enough, also widely accepted and even affirmed by academics themselves. In addition, this practice has a measurable effect of control: far from being a simple inventory of what researchers do, peer review and research quantification actively change the production of knowledge while simultaneously creating the illusion of a self-organized, autonomous 'policing' of the scientific community according to its own standards.

As Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra shows in a study on how the British RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) and REF (Research Excellence Framework) have affected knowledge production in the social sciences, this control takes place on two levels.[40] On the one hand, it intervenes indirectly on the level of the labour market, by changing individual careers in a way that leads to more homogenous institutions and research outputs. This means that it functions like a filter that favours

[40] See Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra, *The Quantified Scholar: How Research Evaluations Transformed the British Social Sciences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), pp. 5, 25.

mainstream research as job offers are dependent on an applicant's publication record. But on the other hand, it also directly changes the way academics evaluate their own works, since they adopt and affirm the implied hierarchies and valuation standards. A striking example of this more or less deliberate affirmation of one's own subjection to this regime is the h-index that was invented and adopted by scientists, not in rejection or subversion of research quantification but in explicit acceptance: it was praised as a metric to even better judge the individual 'research performance'.[41] This phenomenon of individual complicity is typical of regimes of discipline and control. And so in a sense, the idea of that the scientific community is policing itself is not wrong, although this act of policing is anything but autonomous.

The results of these practices are quite unambiguous across disciplines: peer review and research quantification produce the homogenization, mainstreaming, and elimination of risky, long-term, and inventive or 'disruptive' research, not by accident but by design.[42] There is a clear incentive to identify, fill, and more often than not artificially create gaps in the hegemonic discourse – mainstream analytic philosophy in our case – since this is the best strategy for publication. It is a technology of discipline and control that leads to a very effective suppression of dissent and intellectual diversity, an inflation of publications by slicing up papers, and mediocre and dull research. It is repressive towards heterodoxies and productive towards

[41] See Pardo-Guerra, *The Quantified Scholar*, pp. 19–20.

[42] See Michael Park, Erin Leahey, and Russell J. Funk, 'Papers and Patents are Becoming Less Disruptive Over Time', *Nature*, 613 (2023), 138–44; Susan Guthrie and others, 'Measuring Bias, Burden and Conservatism in Research Funding Processes', *F1000Research*, 8.851 (2019); Kevin J. Boudreau and others, 'Looking Across and Looking Beyond the Knowledge Frontier: Intellectual Distance, Novelty, and Resource Allocation in Science', *Management Science*, 61.10 (2016), 2765–83; Joshua M. Nicholson and John P.A. Ioannidis, 'Conform and Be Funded', *Nature*, 492 (2012), 34–46.

orthodoxies. Inasmuch as mainstream analytic philosophy is both the contingent product of the normalization in McCarthyism as well as the model or norm for the continuous normalization of the philosophical discourse, it seems as if it is a victim as well as a beneficiary of these practices. In relation to non-analytic philosophies, however, mainstream analytic philosophy ultimately benefits from these practices, precisely because it represents the orthodoxy of the philosophical discourse.

♦

But if there are already *Nature* articles denouncing the devastating epistemic effects of peer review and quantified research evaluation, is it not merely a matter of time before there will be a solution to this problem? Probably, yes, but from the perspective of the history of power, there is seldom reason to hope for the best.[43] On the one hand, peer review and quantified research evaluation have been criticized for at least 20 years with virtually no effect. Thus, there is reason to believe that the abolition or at least the reform of these practices will take some time, which isn't much of a comfort for all those being worn down by this machinery right now. On the other hand, we must assume that fixing the problem will concern the evaluation and ranking techniques with respect to the epistemic deficits, as this would be in the best interest of funding organizations and university managements. Any institutional approach to the problem, however, will most likely not interfere with the disciplinary control of the academic field, let alone initiate a fundamental reflection of the intimate relation of power-knowledge. This is exactly the problem with merely epistemological, methodological, or economic critiques: it is just about the epistemic

[43] See Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on Control Societies', in *Negotiations: 1972–1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 177–82 (p. 178).

inefficiency of the current system. However, that this system could be strategically and power-theoretically coherent – and as such efficient in ways not obvious at first glance – escapes these approaches.

The epistemic dysfunctionality and intellectual impoverishment of the academic field seem to be a sort of unintended, although disastrous side effect of its disciplining. From the perspective of power, one advantage lies in the possibility to control a field that is notoriously hard to oversee due to its specialization and expertise while at the same time reducing costs and increasing exploitation margins by creating an artificial competition among researchers through precarization and project work and by imposing on them unpaid labour, extra hours, and wage dumping. Essentially, the techniques of peer review and research quantification provide the opportunity to bind research to power in a way that goes beyond the Foucauldian intertwining of power and knowledge. It is about securing the '"contract" between science and state',[44] thought and power, even against the interests and results of science and thought, while pretending to guarantee their quality. It is an extra-legal instrument for guiding and controlling, if not deforming and corrupting, an academic freedom that is legally protected.

This relation becomes clearer from the point of view of a genealogy of peer review. As Biagioli demonstrates, the birth of peer review is best understood as the attempt to secure the autonomy of science against extra-scientific interferences on the basis of a pact with the state that goes back to the publication privileges of the academic societies of the 17th century. This pact amounts to becoming a sort of self-organized and deliberate branch of the state censorship system that guarantees the internal disciplining and control of academic text production.[45] By the end of the 19th century, peer review gained a certain independence from

[44] Biagioli, 'From Book Censorship to Academic Peer Review', p. 13.
[45] See Biagioli, 'From Book Censorship to Academic Peer Review', p. 12.

political authorities and functioned as a distinct disciplinary technology (in the Foucauldian sense) and spread in the academic field.[46] However, it was not until after the Second World War, especially in the 1970s, that peer review became indispensable for journal publications.[47] It seems that even though peer review was fully developed around 1900, it became politically useful only later in the 1970s, when the implementation of austerity in academia and the successive establishment of competitive, project-based funding schemes began.

The general problem of the complicity of the subjected individual that arises from the dispersion of power in disciplinary contexts intensifies in the case of peer review, as there is no clear distinction between discipliner and disciplined since the roles are frequently reversed during an individual's academic career.[48] This impedes the development of resistance against and a professional critique of the disciplining function of peer review, all the more so as academia is habitually disposed to accept and even affirm the measuring of 'performance' and prestige on the basis of the 'myth of meritocracy',[49] as Robin Zheng puts it, a myth that also serves as the ideological justification for the massive discrimination implicit in precarious working conditions.

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As Biagioli's genealogy of peer review suggests, the normalization of philosophy has to be perceived against the backdrop of the emergence of disciplinary power by the end of the 18th century and the refinement

[46] See Biagioli, 'From Book Censorship to Academic Peer Review', p. 32.
[47] See Baldwin, *Making 'Nature',* p. 180.
[48] See Biagioli, 'From Book Censorship to Academic Peer Review', p. 12.
[49] Robin Zheng, 'Precarity is a Feminist Issue: Gender and Contingent Labor in the Academy', *Hypatia*, 33.2 (2018), 235–55 (p. 238).

of disciplinary technologies of power in the context of the neoliberal backlash of the 1970s that are sometimes also discussed under the heading of control.[50] These control techniques are related to processes like privatization, individualization, precarization, and performance measurement. It is crucial to understand that this is not a system gone haywire, but a strategically coherent intensification of older technologies of power that very effectively does what it is supposed to do: reduce costs of academic labour, control intellectual work and research with supposedly low administrative effort, increasing quantifiable research performance without compensation, and breaking the institutional power and relative autonomy of academic staff.

[50] Neoliberalism as well as control or control power are notoriously difficult if not tedious notions. Throughout this article, I follow Thomas Biebricher's approach in understanding neoliberalism as a heterogenous formation that shares a common political problematic, which concerns the precondition of functioning markets. Generally, markets represent a means of governing in neoliberalism while depending on governmental interventions at the same time, which relates to a particular inclination to authoritarianism. See Thomas Biebricher, *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019). As for control, in this article I use this notion more or less as synonymous to discipline, although there is a quite lively debate on the particularity of control in comparison to especially Foucauldian conceptions of power, see for example Thomas Nail, 'Biopower and Control', in *Between Deleuze and Foucault,* ed. by Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail, and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 247–63. From my perspective, especially the difference between control and discipline is more a philological one that is closely linked to the complex relation between Deleuze and Foucault and their intertwined, but fundamentally different conceptions of power. For analytical purposes, discipline and control are very similar 'conceptual instruments' that draw attention to the inconspicuous, productive, and non-juridical forms of power in modernity. Since Deleuze took over the notion of control from William S. Burroughs with the explicit intention of actualizing Foucault's history of power, this notion tends to integrate more recent refinements of these practices that were a bit more obscure for Foucault 20 years earlier. Nevertheless, I would hold that from the perspective of the history of power, control does not designate a new epoch in contrast to discipline, but a specific form of technologically mediated intensification of disciplinary practices.

In universities, the intensifying transition of discipline into control becomes particularly manifest in the import of authoritarian management practices based on the model of corporate management and the professionalization of a newly created managerial class that consists of executives with either little academic experience or of former scholars that internalized the manager role in such a way that they become '*para-academics*'.[51] But rather than a streamlining of decision-making, this authoritarian reconstruction of universities results in a massive increase of administrative personnel at the expense of tenured academic staff, which in turn appears to be correlated with the precarization of academic labour predominantly as casual teaching staff with occasional employment. In the US, for example, the number of tenured academic staff increased from 1975 to 2009 by about 63% (from ca. 450,000 to 730,000) while administrative staff increased by 231% (from ca. 270,000 to 890,000).[52] In roughly the same period, the proportion of tenured to non-tenured staff was effectively inverted, from 78% tenured and 22% non-tenured in 1969 to 30% tenured and 70% non-tenured in 2011.[53] We now have the absurd situation where tenure is framed as a reward for good performance rather than its precondition.[54] Additionally, there are clear indications of gender and racial bias as women and people of colour are overrepresented in non-

[51] Fleming, *Dark Academia*, p. 53. See also Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), p. 1; Cary Nelson, *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 153–70.
[52] See Fleming, *Dark Academia*, p. 52.
[53] See Adrianna Kezar and Daniel Maxey, 'The Changing Academic Workforce', *Trusteeship*, 21.3 (2013), 15–21. On the problem of distinguishing 'tenured' and 'non-tenured', see for example Fulvio Castellaci and Clara Viñas-Bardolet, 'Permanent Contracts and Job Satisfaction in Academia: Evidence from European Countries', *Studies in Higher Education*, 46.9 (2021), 1866–80.
[54] See Ian Robinson, 'The Decline of Tenure in Higher Education: Three Analyses of Causes and Consequences', *Contemporary Sociology*, 39.5 (2010), 536–40.

tenured positions.[55] Teaching positions tend to be non-tenured and precarious while research and publication work is mostly done by tenured staff, which clearly suggests a care-work structure with the differentiation between the poorly paid care of teaching and the prestigious, better paid productive work of research and publication.[56] This development is accompanied by a redistribution of resources from tenured academic staff to administrations and executives on the basis of the massive expansion of precarious, non-tenured positions. This redistribution of resources to administrations and executives meets the surveillance demands that the 'entrepreneurial university' and quantified research evaluation intrinsically produce as disciplinary institutions. The emulation of the 'corporate form',[57] as Peter Fleming puts it, cannot but result in authoritarianism since corporations are inherently undemocratic organisations. Authoritarianism, corporate reorganisation, de-democratization of universities, precarization, and the disciplinary control of intellectual work and research go hand in hand, sustaining and facilitating each other.

While this academic nightmare is not even a new problem – the two-tier system of tenured and non-tenured staff, for example, has been criticized for about 30 years – and some of its origins can be traced back to the 18th century, it is nonetheless an evolving process that tends to get worse over time. Also, these trends do not only concern precarious, non-tenured academics, but have clear effects on tenured staff, for example, in the sense of a more general 'change of culture' in academia, or more directly via budget cuts and interference in academic autonomy and academic freedom, or through the kind of wage dumping made

[55] See Zheng, 'Precarity is a Feminist Issue', p. 242.
[56] See Karen Cardozo, 'Academic Labor: Who Cares?', *Critical Sociology*, 43.3 (2017), 405–28.
[57] Fleming, *Dark Academia*, p. 53.

possible by the academic reserve army, the 'lumpen professoriate'[58] of precarious non-tenured academics. While this problem would essentially call for classical industrial action, the level of unionization among academics is low, as there still prevails the classist myth of academic exceptionalism ('We're not part of the ordinary labour force') that goes quite well with the meritocratic ideologeme described by Zheng.[59] The general suggestion is that better working conditions are the result of personal merit rather than organized, collective resistance against the 'entrepreneurial university' that will do everything possible to reduce labour costs and increase 'performance'. This extreme ideologization and self-mythologization of the academic labour force as a precondition of its more or less self-organized exploitation was apparent in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, where basically the entire academic education depended on the goodwill of academics working unpaid extra hours.

Besides reducing labour costs, the disciplining and control of the academic field also have more direct economic effects. The increase in 'research performance' with next to no epistemic surplus seems to be a sort of self-legitimization of the managerial class and thus an artefact of control techniques themselves as well as of the authoritarian reorganization of universities. At the same time, however, this process also conforms to the interests of the big publishing companies that established an oligopoly in academic publishing that lives off the valorisation and privatisation of publicly funded research.[60] Peer review and quantified research evaluation produce an exceptional

[58] Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt, *Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 208.
[59] See Zheng, 'Precarity is a Feminist Issue', pp. 238–39.
[60] See Vincent Larivière, Stefanie Haustein, and Philippe Mongeon, 'The Oligopoly of Academic Publishers in the Digital Era', *PLoS ONE*, 10.6 (2015), e0127502; Iain Pirie, 'The Political Economy of Academic Publishing', *Historical Materialism*, 17.3 (2009), 31–60.

standardization of research products (primarily in the form of journal articles) that simplifies marketing and commercialization significantly. This standardization of research products equals intellectual mass production encouraging conformity and self-classification according to established disciplines and hegemonic traditions. Peer review and quantified research evaluation simultaneously provide for a quality control procedure that is certainly erroneous, but also free of costs. After all, it's also good business.

♦

So speaking as a good-willed, good-natured participant in the philosophical discourse – what to do? I don't really know. The situation is dire, though not due to a lack of concrete political objectives. Not at all. It is quite obvious that we need to abolish peer review and quantified research evaluation, end non-tenured and precarious working conditions through a massive increase in base-line funding, create new jobs, abolish project funding, make open access publication the standard form of academic publishing, re-democratize universities, abolish authoritarian management structures, abolish the academic grind culture and unpaid or poorly paid work like reviewing, encourage affirmative action in hiring processes, etc. The problem is, rather, how to achieve these objectives, both from the perspective of generating enough political momentum and battling the temptations of a deliberate complicity with the academic disciplinary regime that depends on our habitual, almost incorporated belief in the myth of meritocracy and that succeeded in turning our capacities – our productivity, creativity, intelligence, inventiveness – against ourselves.

Academic Philosophy: A Way of Life?

FRISO TIMMENGA

Summary: This paper evaluates Pierre Hadot's concept of 'philosophy as a way of life' (PWL) as a tool to critique academic philosophy. Firstly, I will provide a concise overview of Hadot's critique through a discussion of two lesser-known texts. I will go on to submit that PWL, contrary to what its name might imply, does not primarily distinguish between philosophical theory and practice. Through an exploration of relevant secondary sources, I will emphasize PWL's focus on the spiritual dimension of philosophy, or rather the lack thereof in the modern research university. A return to philosophy as a way of life does not imply emancipation from the university as such but rather from contemporary academia's research practices and standards. Only then can philosophy rekindle its true essence, namely transforming the lives and worlds of many.

Undoubtedly, the current state of academic philosophy is most revealingly demonstrated by the fact that no academic philosopher calls themselves an academic philosopher. The reason behind it is known to us all: academic philosophy has become increasingly associated with producing excessively theoretical papers that do not make tangible contributions to philosophical discussions, let alone impact the lives of those beyond the academic realm. The relentless pursuit of citations has paradoxically led to increasing amounts of philosophical papers that are never cited and, quite possibly, never even read.[1] It seems indicative of

[1] The debate about the actual numbers remains ongoing, see Eric Schwitzgebel, 'How Often Are Philosophy Articles Actually Cited? Encouraging News', *The Splintered Mind*, 20 October 2022 <https://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2022/10/how-often-are-philosophy-articles.html> [accessed 19 July 2023].

the way many people feel about contemporary academic philosophy: that it has ceased to be of any genuine meaning.

At the same time, this prevailing sentiment seems somewhat misplaced. Over the past decades, the most prolific philosophers emerged from an academic background, and the institution of the (medieval) university has played a pivotal role in safeguarding the vulnerable philosophical discipline throughout European history. It is hard to deny that the present-day 'trendiness' and democratization of philosophy,[2] fostered by a general yearning for meaning and an earnest desire for authentic living, owe much of their existence to the institutional support that the university continues to provide to the discipline.

The growing critique of academic philosophy therefore calls for a careful reassessment of the complex and ancient symbiosis of philosophy and academia. Their intricate relationship indicates that any comprehensive critique of academic philosophy must go beyond easy dismissals of scholastic exegesis, fetishized jargon, and dry linguistic analyses. Only then can we gain a deeper understanding of the position

[2] In the Netherlands, this trendiness and democratization can be seen in the increasing number of students enrolled in philosophy programmes at universities (+30% over the past five years), an increase in the number of philosophy books sold (+25% over the past five years), and the flourishing of popular philosophy institutes such as Alain de Botton's School of Life, see Jonasz Dekkers, 'In een chaotische wereld vinden mensen nu houvast in filosofie', *NRC*, 10 August 2023 <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/08/10/in-een-chaotische-wereld-vinden-mensen-houvast-in-filosofie-a4171654> [accessed 23 September 2023]. Rising student numbers have also been observed in Canada and the United States, see Ian Coutts, 'Is Philosophy Having a Moment?', *University Affairs*, 16 January 2021 <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/is-philosophy-having-a-moment/> [accessed 23 September 2023]; Sarah Fullerton, 'Defying Negative Stereotypes, Humanities Majors Are Booming at UC Berkeley', *University of California*, 4 November 2022 <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/defying-negative-stereotypes-humanities-majors-are-booming-uc-berkeley> [accessed 23 September 2023].

of academic philosophy in the modern world and carefully evaluate its impact, or lack thereof, on the accessibility and relevance of popular philosophy.

This paper points to Pierre Hadot's concept of 'philosophy as a way of life' (PWL) as a starting point to delve into the symbiotic relationship of philosophy and academia. Hadot famously uses PWL to capture the way philosophy was practiced in Greco-Roman antiquity, namely as 'a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being'.[3] He describes how ancient philosophy concerned itself with the art of living the good life, involving concrete practices in which one's entire being was engaged.[4] As this essay unfolds, it will become clear that the concept of PWL offers a nuanced perspective from which to critique academic philosophy. Whilst PWL expresses disapproval of (overly) scholastic approaches to philosophy, it simultaneously acknowledges that philosophy has in fact always taken place within institutional frameworks.

My claim is that the concept of PWL serves as a valuable tool to identify the central issue with academic philosophy: its neglect of the inherently spiritual dimension of philosophy. Instead of merely focusing on the perceived overemphasis on theoretical aspects, I contend that philosophy as a transformative practice necessitates *both* practical engagement *and* theoretical discourse. My argument begins with an exposition of Hadot's critique of academic philosophy in two lesser-known texts. In the subsequent section, I expand upon Hadot's critique through an analysis of secondary literature, which, as I reveal, often prioritizes the practical over the spiritual and, in doing so, overlooks the

[3] Pierre Hadot, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life', in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold I. Davidson, trans. by Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 264–76 (p. 265).
[4] See Pierre Hadot, 'Spiritual Exercises', in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 81–125 (pp. 82 ff.).

essence of Hadot's critique. The third section turns to the modern research university and shows why this type of university impedes a return to teaching and studying philosophy as a way of life.

I. Hadot's critique of academic philosophy

Pierre Hadot (1922–2010), a prominent historian of ancient philosophy, is mainly remembered for introducing the concept of 'philosophy as a way of life'. He developed this concept to understand the incoherence frequently encountered in ancient philosophical texts.[5] While other interpreters often smooth out these inconsistencies to create coherent philosophical systems, Hadot took a different approach. His argument was that the very incoherence evident in the writings of ancient philosophers was a natural outcome of the essence of ancient philosophy: a way of life aimed at radical transformation.

Nonetheless, Hadot's concept of PWL serves a dual purpose. It not only offers a descriptive reconstruction of an ancient past but also functions as a normative tool explicitly designed to expose the deficiencies of 'doing' philosophy academically. Therefore, as Marta Faustino aptly notes, Hadot's criticism of academic philosophy has been 'consistent and harsh throughout his work'.[6] However, despite this overarching theme, the precise contours of Hadot's criticism of academic philosophy remain far from clear, due to the various ways in which he articulates it across different texts. In this section, I look at two of them, both of which explicitly delve into the critique of academic philosophy: Hadot's talk at the University of Paris Nanterre in 2006 titled 'Enseignement antique et enseignement moderne de la

[5] See Pierre Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, trans. by Marc Djaballah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 59.

[6] Marta Faustino, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life Today', *Metaphilosophy*, 51.2–3 (2020), 357–74 (pp. 365–66).

philosophie', and his 2007 interview by Arnold I. Davidson published as 'L'enseignement des antiques, l'enseignement des modernes'.

I start, however, by recalling that Hadot's criticism of the university is not a rejection of organized philosophical schooling *as such*. Quite the contrary: Hadot always emphasized the pedagogical nature of philosophy and its inherent tendency, from the ancient Greeks onwards, to institutionalize.[7] One could even argue that Hadot's central theme throughout his work is that ancient philosophy cannot be understood separately from the institutional framework in which it took place. Nevertheless, Hadot makes a distinction between two modes of institutionalized philosophical education. I refer to these as 'the school' and 'the university' (or 'academia').

The classical philosophical schools that Hadot describes, for example, the Platonic Academy or the Aristotelean Lyceum, were communities that epitomized the flourishing of philosophy as a way of life. In these schools, students mainly practiced *dialectica*, a structured dialogue according to precise rules, and listened to lectures that explored specific questions, followed by lively discussions afterwards. For students and teachers alike, philosophical discussion was more than a theoretical exercise: it was a praxis that engaged one's entire being. Hadot underscores how this oral practice made up the essence of philosophy in the ancient and medieval world. Accordingly, he interprets ancient philosophical texts, even the theoretical treatises of Aristotle, through the lens of their broader pedagogical aim: the radical transformation of one's self and world.[8]

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[7] See Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. by Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 57.

[8] See Pierre Hadot, 'Enseignement antique et enseignement moderne de la philosophie', in *La Philosophie comme éducation des adultes: textes, perspectives, entretiens* (Paris: Vrin, 2019), pp. 149–75 (pp. 156–57); Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, pp. 52–54; Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', pp.

This transformation of one's way of seeing and being holds great importance for Hadot's understanding of philosophy, as we shall see. But what exactly does this transformation entail? Transforming our world involves shifting from a first-person perspective to a comprehensive cosmic outlook, where we acknowledge nature's indifference to our individual self and 'accept [the world] in its entirety, as willed by fate'.[9] This disinterested cosmic vision, Hadot underlines, requires a 'going beyond oneself', recognizing oneself as part of the whole, and therefore inherently contains a universalist dimension.[10] The transformation of one's being, in turn, aims at 'peace of mind (*ataraxía*) and inner freedom (*autarkeia*)'.[11] It is an elevation of one's self and therefore constitutes both a loss and a gain: 'One might say that the highest point the self can attain is the point at which one has the impression of losing oneself in something that totally overcomes one.'[12] For Hadot, the transformation of one's world and of one's self were always intertwined in the philosophical way of life.

This is not to say, Hadot adds, that every philosophical school in ancient Athens pursued this transformation. Just as philosophers coexisted alongside sophists, philosophical schools that practiced philosophy as a way of life always appeared beside institutions where philosophy was merely lectured, not 'lived'. Hadot infers this from the historical fact that ancient philosophers were known to denounce the academic 'professors' who only concerned themselves with 'discourse'

156–57; Hadot, 'Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy', in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 49–70 (pp. 61–63).

[9] Hadot, 'Spiritual Exercises', p. 83.

[10] Hadot, 'Reflections on the Idea of the "Cultivation of the Self"', in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 206–14 (p. 211).

[11] Hadot, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life', p. 265.

[12] Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 84.

and overlooked the transformative essence of philosophy as a way of life.[13]

The tension between the school and the academy reflects the dichotomy between the philosopher and the sophist, which pervades the entirety of Hadot's work. In this regard, he speaks of two poles of philosophy: 'one might say that there have always been two opposed conceptions of philosophy, one puts the emphasis on the pole of discourse, the other, on the pole of choice of life.'[14] Given the fact that Socrates epitomized the ancient understanding of what it meant to be a philosopher, it is no surprise, Hadot writes, that Socrates continued to serve throughout antiquity as the antithesis of the (mere) philosophy professor.[15]

How did this difference materialize in ancient philosophical education? Hadot mentions two notable aspects of the ancient philosophical schools: 'on the one hand, communal life with the teacher [*maître*], on the other hand, the practice of a certain mode of life that distinguishes the philosopher from the non-philosopher.'[16] The first point, communal life, should be taken quite literally: the disciples of the philosophical school would share a house with their teacher or build huts around it to be as close to him as possible. These were the so-called fervent followers (*zelotaí*), who, along with their teacher, would actively practice philosophy as a way of life. Next to the zealots, however, there was also the 'simple audience', to use Hadot's words. This audience consisted of listeners who came to enjoy classes that were open to the public, free of charge. Unlike the diehards, their motivation was to

[13] See Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', p. 149.
[14] Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 60.
[15] See Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 36; Pierre Hadot, 'The Figure of Socrates', in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 147–78; Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', p. 151.
[16] Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', p. 150 [my translation].

acquire philosophical skills that could prove beneficial for their political or administrative careers. Their interest in philosophy, in short, stemmed primarily from the pursuit of personal gain.[17]

This distinction increases in significance as the ancient philosophical school gives way to the (medieval) university in the 11th century. Hadot argues that the primary objective of the university is for students to pass exams, aiming at securing comfortable societal positions: 'for the medieval or modern student, it's about passing exams, with a lucrative aim.'[18] In the medieval era, this lucrative aim materialized by being admitted into the more prestigious faculty of theology, after which a profitable career in the church or the theological faculty awaited. Philosophy became the handmaiden of theology and was therefore primarily taught as a set of (onto)logical and dialectical skills that prepared for theological studies. According to Hadot, academic philosophy continued to have its utility, as it assisted individuals in achieving personal ambitions. However, when considered in isolation, it fell short of embodying true philosophy, as it did not strive for philosophy's highest aim, 'the destiny of man', wisdom.[19]

Scholasticism, which has always been the method of academic philosophy *par excellence*, is then merely a byproduct of the university's functional aspirations. It enquires into 'the systematic unity of the philosophical construction'[20] instead of grappling with life's bigger questions. Using the scholastic method, academic philosophy tends to concern itself more with nitty-gritty distinctions than with the ultimate

[17] See Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', pp. 154–60.
[18] Pierre Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques, l'enseignement des modernes', in *La philosophie comme éducation des adultes*, pp. 305–22 (p. 309) [my translation].
[19] Pierre Hadot, 'La philosophie comme éducation des adultes', in *La philosophie comme éducation des adultes*, pp. 179–88 (p. 185) [my translation].
[20] Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', pp. 167–68 [my translation].

ends of existence.[21] One can think of how the modern philosophy student is not required to *live* the philosophy of, say, Nietzsche or Heidegger but rather to catch it in a net of conceptual clarification and systematic interpretation.

Hadot traces the roots of the scholastic method to the rise of the Roman empire, when philosophy started to be practiced throughout the Mediterranean. This expansion led to the dissemination of Greek philosophical treatises, sparking a surge in questions about their precise meaning. As a consequence, philosophical education shifted its focus from addressing specific questions or theses to dedicating itself primarily to the exegesis of foundational texts.[22] Moreover, the increased student numbers resulted in such large classes that the intimate community life, as it had existed in the ancient schools, became practically impossible.[23]

Consequently, the link between philosophical texts as explorations of particular problems and their small-scale audience in specific contexts, which according to Hadot was essential for practicing philosophy as a way of life, broke down. Philosophy gradually shifted to being taught in public, for-profit, state-sanctioned academies by 'professional' philosophers skilled in navigating texts and concepts. Philosophy became an affair of state, with imperial academies studying philosophy as mere *historia*, without engaging in the philosophical way of life. The focus was on training professional philosophers pursing academic careers or putting their knowledge to financial use in other ways. That is why, according to Hadot, these institutions failed to produce any notable philosopher that we still know of today.[24]

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[21] See Hadot, 'La philosophie comme éducation des adultes', p. 185.
[22] See Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', pp. 160–62.
[23] See Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques', p. 307.
[24] See Hadot, 'Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse', pp. 62–64; Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques', p. 311; the only possible exception, mentioned by Hadot, to the absence of notable philosophers in the late Roman period is Alexander of Aphrodisias, see Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', p. 163.

Throughout his critique, Hadot voices the opinion that philosophy and its education should always be disinterested: 'Philosophy does not teach people a particular craft, it does not prepare them for a particular profession, but it seeks to transform their sensitivity, their character, their way of looking at the world or their relation with others.'[25] As I already pointed out above, Hadot identifies this transformative process, which he also calls 'conversion', as the essence of philosophy, rather than the pursuit of theoretical knowledge. He emphasizes the distinction between merely *informing* students and genuinely *forming* them. The method of the latter, the formation or conversion, is embodied in the famous spiritual exercises he describes in his article of the same name. These include exercises of attention (*prosoché*), memorization (*mnéme*), or meditation (*meléte*).[26]

To end this section, let me summarize the distinction Hadot makes between the ancient school and the medieval/modern university. On the one side, there is the university: the public institutionalization of sophistry, where students pay to attend lectures on textual exegesis and pass exams to become professional philosophers, in search of material gains. On the other side, we find the ancient schools of philosophy: private communities where one's way of life consists of freely discussing concrete philosophical questions in pursuit of wisdom and practicing spiritual exercises aimed at the total transformation of one's self and world.

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[25] Hadot, 'La philosophie comme éducation des adultes', p. 180 [my translation].

[26] See Hadot, 'Conversion', in *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy As Practice*, trans. by Matthew Sharpe and Federico Testa (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), pp. 83–91 (pp. 89–90); Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 73; Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 91; Hadot, 'Spiritual Exercises', p. 85.

II. Academic philosophy between theory and practice

Although I promised in the introduction that Hadot's concept of PWL would enable a nuanced critique of academic philosophy, one cannot ignore how the previous section relied heavily on oppositional binaries. I will therefore begin this section by underscoring two ways in which Hadot relativizes his concept of PWL. This will allow us to examine the potential of the modern research university to revive philosophy as a way of life in section III.

Hadot seems to be aware that his interpretation of ancient philosophical schools leans towards romanticism and his portrayal of academia veers towards caricature. He therefore adds nuance to his critique in two ways. Firstly, Hadot acknowledges that the academic way of practicing philosophy (or what in hindsight could be designated as such) dates back to the origins of philosophy itself. He emphasizes that there have always been philosophers who were only interested in philosophical discourse and not in philosophy as a way of life.[27] In doing so, Hadot challenges the perception that academic philosophy is a recent phenomenon or parasitical departure from the philosophical tradition.

Secondly, Hadot points out that numerous philosophers in the 19th and 20th centuries, in their critique of university philosophy, again succeeded in 'converting' their readers to the philosophical way of life through their works. He specifically mentions Bergson, Nietzsche, and 20th century phenomenologists like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.[28] This observation underscores the enduring presence of philosophy as a way of life. It never truly disappeared but instead continued to thrive and exert influence through thinkers who sought to catalyse a spiritual transformation amongst their readership.

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[27] See Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques', pp. 308–09.
[28] See Hadot, 'Enseignement antique', p. 175.

Both points underscore that Hadot's advocacy for philosophy as a way of life should not be interpreted as a nostalgic or reactionary call to return to a mythical past when philosophy was still pure and uncorrupted. As Hadot himself remarked, we should instead understand his concern for the Greeks merely as a detour, a means of communication, to make his more fundamental point.[29] That is why, as Faustino pointed out above, Hadot's *prima facie* descriptive claims about ancient philosophy never truly hide their underlying normativity. This makes it all the more strange, it seems, that Hadot never explored at length the possibilities of practicing philosophy as a way of life in the modern age.

It is therefore unsurprising that the central question that plagues interpreters of Hadot's work concerns the feasibility of philosophy as a way of life in the contemporary world. Hadot himself seemed ambivalent. On the one hand, he warned that attempting to replicate the way the Greeks 'lived' philosophy in contemporary education risks rendering PWL artificial. On the other hand, Hadot occasionally displayed a more optimistic outlook, noting that the spiritual exercises practiced in ancient philosophy, such as attention or meditation, remain viable and can be undertaken individually even today.[30] How could he not, after pointing to Bergson and Nietzsche time and again as modern examples of PWL practitioners? Nevertheless, Hadot's ideas on the matter never really concretized. It is therefore necessary to turn to secondary literature.

Michael Chase, the most important translator of Hadot's work into English, argues that, according to Hadot, practicing philosophy as a way of life is still possible 'if we are willing to separate the wheat from the

[29] See Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, pp. 147–48.
[30] See Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 56; Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques', pp. 315–18.

chaff'.[31] What Hadot means by this, Chase explains, is that we should understand the ancient philosophical systems as superstructures built upon a handful of elemental insights and their accompanying spiritual exercises. In fact, the theoretical considerations of each school are 'secondary and nonessential accretions to a fundamental insight'.[32] This seems in line with Hadot's assertion that the number of philosophical positions that can be taken is limited,[33] meaning repetition of old practices is less of a vice to be avoided than a necessary imperative for practicing philosophy. I will return to this point and contrast it with the scholarly objectives of the modern research university.

Chase goes on to describe his own experiences with both the analytic and the continental tradition. He observes how analytic philosophers apply 'sophisticated philosophical reasoning […] for the purpose of not doing anything at all, or rather for the justification of continuing to live precisely the way one is living now'.[34] Chase notes how the embarrassment of analytic philosophers vis-à-vis the modern sciences leads them to strive for the abolition of philosophy in general.[35] At continental philosophical departments, Chase observes a radical determinism and relativism that could only result in 'fatalistic quietism and acceptance of the status quo'.[36] He is appalled by the shameless indulgence of extravagant jargon, which he suspects is often used to mask the utter banality of continental philosophical claims. He concludes: 'Neither seemed able to speak to my thirst for the honest,

[31] Michael Chase, 'Observations on Pierre Hadot's Conception of Philosophy as a Way of Life', in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns: Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, ed. by Stephen R. L. Clark, Michael McGhee, and Michael Chase (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), pp. 262–86 (p. 263).
[32] Chase, 'Observations', p. 263.
[33] See Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 69.
[34] Chase, 'Observations', p. 269.
[35] Chase, 'Observations', p. 272.
[36] Chase, 'Observations', p. 274.

jargon-free discussions of philosophical issues that genuinely mattered to my life.'[37]

Disappointed by both philosophical traditions and their lack of care for practical life, Chase sees Hadot's idea of philosophy as a way of life as a possible third way to escape the aporias of the major philosophical discourses of 20th century philosophy:

> Unlike analytic philosophy, [philosophy as a way of life] does not shun the Big Questions in an attempt to appear scientific, but deals with issues that interest and affect the lives of people everywhere, both within and outside the Academy. It does not, of course, propose a readymade list of answers in a dogmatic fashion, but it gives people access to a wide variety of solutions that ancient philosophers have proposed, as models and guides for further reflection. Yet since Hadot's conception of philosophy is anchored in the philologically based study of Greek and Latin literature and the historical comprehension of ancient thought within its context, it is free from the arbitrariness, superficiality, and subjectivity of much New Age thought. Since it tries to express itself in clear, jargon-free language, it avoids the hermeticism of Continental thought and the impenetrable forests of logico-mathematical symbols favored by many Analytics. Yet if it is unconcerned with being fashionably scientistic, it also lacks an interest in coinciding with the typical features of many Continental philosophers. It is neither skeptical, ironic, nor relativistic, but upholds the values of social concern and action in defense of justice, as well as the importance of transcending our limited, individualistic viewpoint in the direction of universality.[38]

In this paragraph, Chase eloquently captures the aspects of philosophy as a way of life that appeal to many, precisely as it contrasts with academic philosophy. However, in doing so, Chase forgets that Hadot regards central thinkers in the continental tradition, such as the highly jargony Heidegger, as having practiced philosophy as a way of life. More importantly, however, Chase clearly values *practical* over

[37] Chase, 'Observations', p. 275.
[38] Chase, 'Observations', p. 280.

theoretical philosophy. He approvingly describes the rise of philosophical counselling groups, which practice Socratic dialogue for therapeutic aims, as an instance of the de-professionalization of philosophy.[39]

Similarly, Faustino agrees that Hadot values philosophy's 'deep practical, existential, and transformative dimension' over the 'mere theoretical, abstract, and logical discipline, as seems to have become the rule in most contemporary universities'.[40] She lists three similarities between modern (for example, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard) and ancient practitioners of philosophy as a way of life:

i. the valorization of practice (actions, behavior) over theory (theses, books) and the consistency between the two;
ii. the performative character of their writings and their aim to promote self-transformation;
iii. a concern to provide guidance for one's life on the basis of an ideal of human flourishing or perfection.[41]

Although the last two points are undoubtedly valid, I find it harder to agree with the first point. It seems to me that reading Hadot's position as valuing the practical over the theoretical contradicts his idea, reiterated many times, that philosophical theory and practice are as incommensurable as they are inseparable: 'There is no discourse which deserves to be called philosophical if it is separated from the philosophical life, and there is no philosophical life unless it is directly linked to philosophical discourse.'[42] This is because 'the philosopher, who himself practices philosophy, cannot act upon himself and others

[39] See Chase, 'Observations', pp. 281–82.
[40] Faustino, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life Today', p. 365.
[41] See Faustino, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life Today', p. 370.
[42] Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 174.

except through discourse. Philosophy is, therefore, a way of life which brings with it, integrally, a certain mode of discourse.'[43]

The risk of interpreting Hadot as privileging practice over theory is that one reduces him to an ordinary 'practice what you preach' advocate, where theory is but a means to a certain practice. Let us, for instance, take Javier Hidalgo's interpretation. He correctly observes how Hadot deems a philosophical way of life to be an indispensable complement to philosophical reasoning, identifying spiritual exercises as the key method to achieve this aim.[44] But for Hidalgo, it seems this merely means using theoretical philosophical insights to inform our practical lives.[45] He gives Peter Singer's decision to become a vegetarian as an example of someone who let himself be convinced by his own arguments on animal suffering.

I am not saying that Hadot would object to philosophers living up to their own philosophical conclusions. What I am saying, however, is that Hidalgo's interpretation fails to understand that philosophy as a way of life does not separate theory and practice: they are *one and the same*. Against Chase, Faustino, and Hidalgo, I maintain that Hadot does not favor practice over theory but instead invites us to interpret philosophical theorizing *itself* as a sort of practice.

My reading is supported by both John Sellars and Matt Sharpe. Sellars refers to Lucretius' assertion that 'a good life is impossible without a mind purged by reason, which only philosophy can deliver'.[46] Sellars contends that true philosophy does not choose between theory

[43] Pierre Hadot, 'Ancient Philosophy: An Ethics or a Practice?', in *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot*, pp. 54–73 (p. 64).
[44] Javier Hidalgo, 'Why Practice Philosophy as a Way of Life?', *Metaphilosophy*, 51.2–3 (2020), 411–31 (p. 421).
[45] Hidalgo, 'Why Practice Philosophy as a Way of Life?', p. 417.
[46] John Sellars, 'What Is Philosophy as a Way of Life?', *Parrhesia*, 28 (2017), 40–56 (p. 52).

and practice but is in a constant back-and-forth between the two.[47] Sellars claims that 'perhaps it does not matter so much whether we start out in the pursuit of truth or with a desire for a transformed life, for if we do our philosophy well we shall always end up with both'.[48] Sharpe concurs and points out, against what he refers to as the 'standard image of Hadot', that

> Hadot does go to some length to guard his readers against supposing that his idea of ancient philosophy speaks against rational philosophical argumentation. Hadot's point is just that philosophical discourse and more or less formal, often-written argumentation cannot claim to be the whole of which it was always only ever the key part.[49]

Even writing systematic philosophical treatises, a favorite target of Hadot's polemic,[50] can qualify as spiritual exercises, as Sharpe correctly points out.[51] One could say that both Sharpe and Sellars view Hadot as deconstructing the theory/practice binary that is often read into his work, by making the point that philosophical theorizing can *itself* be a form of practice. To quote Hadot once more: 'my main preoccupation has been precisely to show that what was considered to be pure *theory*, abstraction, was *practice* in both its mode of exposition and its finality.'[52]

For this reason, Miranda Vilchis' critique of Sharpe does not hold. Miranda Vilchis argues that, for Hadot, philosophical discourse

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[47] See Sellars, 'What Is Philosophy as a Way of Life?', p. 48. This is a position shared by Tom Stern, see his 'Complications of Philosophy', *The Point Magazine*, 10 (2015) <https://thepointmag.com/examined-life/complications-of-philosophy/> [accessed 14 July 2023].
[48] Sellars, 'What Is Philosophy as a Way of Life?', p. 53.
[49] Matt Sharpe, 'What Place Discourse, What Role Rigorous Argumentation? Against the Standard Image of Hadot's Conception of Ancient Philosophy as a Way of Life', *Pli*, *Special Volume: Self-Cultivation* (2016), 25–54 (p. 39).
[50] See Hadot, 'La philosophie comme éducation des adultes', pp. 184–85.
[51] See Sharpe, 'What Place Discourse', p. 42.
[52] Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 88.

originated in the choice of life, not the other way around, and that 'the knowledge that theory can provide us, though necessary, is just preparatory or justificatory'.[53] Although this quote might be used against Hidalgo's 'practice what you preach' interpretation of Hadot, I do not see how this undermines Sharpe's position, as Sharpe's point is precisely that, as a necessary preparation for philosophical practice, the discourse of philosophy cannot be separated from its practical dimensions. This, however, does not mean that theory is merely secondary to practice. Therefore, rather than characterizing Hadot's position as 'downplaying and dismissing the importance of discourse',[54] I agree with Sharpe that philosophical discourse constitutes the 'key part' of philosophy as a way of life.[55]

This means that Hadot's critique of academic philosophy cannot be (primarily) directed against the theoretical nature of academic philosophy. After all, discussions on logic and epistemology featured just as prominently in ancient schools as they do in the modern university. The only difference is that in these schools, logic and epistemology were a 'lived' enterprise.[56] But what does that mean? For Hadot, philosophy as a lived practice entails spiritual training in disinterestedness, aimed at a radical transformation of one's self and world. I therefore submit that Hadot's critique of academic philosophy is above all targeted at the modern university's relinquishment of its spiritual calling. This calling is irreconcilable with the pursuit of worldly matters and profits described in the first section. For this reason, Hadot underlines the great importance of universality in philosophy education: 'One could say […] that educating oneself, becoming adult, is

[53] Rogelio Miranda Vilchis, 'The Place of Discourse in Philosophy as a Way of Life', *Metaphilosophy*, 53.4 (2022), 418–30 (p. 424).
[54] Miranda Vilchis, 'The Place of Discourse', p. 424.
[55] Sharpe, 'What Place Discourse', p. 39.
[56] Hadot, 'Ancient Philosophy: An Ethics or a Practice?', p. 66.

"universalizing oneself", sometimes placing oneself in the place of others, but, perhaps also, restituting oneself in the universe.'[57]

The secondary literature will likely remain divided over what constitutes the core of Hadot's argument. Although most scholars, including Miranda Vilchis, observe that Hadot deems the spiritual exercises to be the most fundamental dimension of philosophy,[58] it remains debatable whether these exercises should be placed on the theoretical/practical-axis (as spiritual *exercises*) or rather on the spiritual/material-axis (as *spiritual* exercises). I have argued for the latter option. Hadot's suspicion of systematic and/or exclusively theoretical philosophy should be viewed from his deeper denunciation of academic philosophy as a means for personal gain. Philosophy is not about winning, it is about losing, mainly yourself. This raises the question of how to (re)incorporate, if at all, the spiritual dimension into contemporary philosophical education.

III. Towards a new spiritual philosophy

Before suspicions arise that I am advocating a return to religious practices, let me briefly point to Hadot's understanding of the word 'spiritual'. As already stated, Hadot defines spiritual exercises as 'voluntary, personal practices meant to bring about a transformation of the individual, a transformation of the self'.[59] Hadot is aware that his use of the adjective 'spiritual' is less than ideal. However, he thinks that alternative substitutes ('exercises of thought', 'ethical exercises', 'intellectual exercises', and some such) do not acknowledge that one's

[57] Hadot, 'La philosophie comme éducation des adultes', p. 188 [my translation].
[58] Miranda Vilchis, 'The Place of Discourse', p. 424. See also Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 88: 'In fact, all philosophy is an exercise – instructional discourse no less than the inner discourse that orients our actions.'
[59] Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 87.

entire being is engaged in the exercise. He furthermore denies that the term 'spiritual exercise' necessarily has a religious connotation, pointing to Paul Rabbow's work *Seelenführung*, in which Rabbow claims that Ignatius of Loyola's *Exercitia Spiritualia* stand in a much older tradition of spiritual exercises that goes back to ancient times.[60]

Hence, I propose to interpret the adjective 'spiritual', as I have (implicitly) done in the first two sections, in contradistinction to the adjective 'material'. This choice stems from the fact that, particularly in Hadot's discussions of academic philosophy, he presents spirituality as the opposite of the pursuit of philosophy for material gains. Hadot's advocacy of a more spiritual philosophy thus intersects with ongoing critical discourses that resist the commodification, marketization, managerialization, and wholesale neo-liberalization of academia.[61] While Hadot doesn't explicitly acknowledge the emergence of knowledge capitalism as a central catalyst for the erosion of spirituality within the modern university, it is hard to see how his critique can lead elsewhere. In this section, however, I will only focus on the emergence of the modern research university as an important factor.

For some this may come as a surprise. After all, one of the most important features of the research university, beside the primacy of research over teaching and its holistic conception of knowledge and

[60] See Hadot, 'Spiritual Exercises', pp. 81-82; Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, pp. 92–94.

[61] See, for example, Achille Mbembe, 'Decolonizing the University: New Directions', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15.1 (2016), 29–45; Stewart Lawrence and Umesh Sharma, 'Commodification of Education and Academic Labour: Using the Balanced Scorecard in a University Setting', *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 13.5–6 (2002), 661–77; Thomas Bauwens, Denise Reike, and Martín Calisto-Friant, 'Science for Sale? Why Academic Marketization Is a Problem and What Sustainability Research Can Do about It', *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 48 (2023), 100749; Stephen J. Ball, 'Performativity, Commodification and Commitment: An I-Spy Guide to the Neoliberal University', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60.1 (2012), 17–28.

truth-seeking, is the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake. Does this not perfectly overlap with what I have referred to above as 'spiritual' philosophy, that is, a disinterested philosophical practice that does not aim for material gain? Indeed, this Humboldtian ideal of *Bildung* contrasts with the medieval university, the main goal of which was to supply the emerging European states with lawyers, priests, and medical professionals.[62] Some may therefore assume that Hadot's ideal of philosophy, which *forms* rather than *informs* students,[63] is best achieved precisely in the research university.

Sadly, this is not the case, for two reasons. First of all, the great paradox of the research university is that, despite its calls for academic freedom and autonomy, in reality the modern university fundamentally depends on nation-states (as well as, in recent times, on private businesses).[64] Philosophical education in the modern age has become an affair of the state. Secondly, as pointed out by Sharpe,[65] the *Bildung* ideal has always been subordinated to the other ideal of the research university: the systematic conception of knowledge and its pursuit. The research university is designed to train large numbers of students to become independent researchers, obtain PhDs, and publish articles in

[62] See Thorsten Nybom, 'The Humboldt Legacy: Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of the European University', *Higher Education Policy*, 16 (2003), 141–59 (pp. 144 ff.); Spencer E. Young, 'Education in Medieval Europe', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Education*, ed. by John L. Rury and Eileen H. Tamura (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 98–113.

[63] See Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 73; Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, p. 91.

[64] See Harold Perkin, 'History of Universities', in *International Handbook of Higher Education*, ed. by James J. F. Forest and Philip G. Altbach (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), pp. 159–205 (pp. 174–78).

[65] Matthew J. Sharpe, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life, the System, and the Advent of the Research University: Contributions Towards an Unwritten Chapter of the History of PWL', *Academia.edu* <https://www.academia.edu/103740118/Philosophy_as_a_Way_of_Life_the_System_and_the_Advent_of_the_Research_University_Contributions_Towards_an_Unwritten_Chapter_of_the_History_of_PWL> [accessed 9 August 2023].

order to contribute to a seemingly endless expansion of scientific knowledge.[66]

This expansionist objective translates to the 'newness' that nowadays serves as the exclusive hallmark of academic quality. Adding new results, new insights, and new arguments to the growing corpus of philosophical knowledge has become the primary task of the academic philosopher. Of course, this role need not necessarily conflict with the repetitive nature of Hadot's spiritual exercises or his belief in the limited range of positions that can be adopted vis-à-vis philosophy's 'bigger questions'. After all, research practices can at times be repetitious as well, and within each philosophical school, new insights are always possible.

The true departure from the spiritual aim of philosophy as a way of life has to be sought in the clear preference the research university shows for prioritizing research over teaching. This leads academic philosophers to primarily identify as (highly) specialized researchers rather than transformative teachers. Philosophy as a way of life, in contrast, does not subordinate teaching to research. Hadot stressed numerous times how virtually all philosophical texts of the ancient world served teaching purposes and addressed the small community that is the classroom.[67]

Nevertheless, the question of whether or not the abovementioned pursuit of publications qualifies as a spiritual exercise cannot be answered definitively. This highlights a fundamental challenge within Hadot's concept of PWL: spiritual transformation is something that one has to achieve by oneself, and it cannot be effectuated by outside

[66] John C. Moore, *A Brief History of Universities* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 66–67.
[67] See Nybom, 'The Humboldt Legacy', p. 144; Hadot, 'Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse', p. 62–64.

coercion.[68] Since the transformation concerns the self of the philosopher, there is no standardized procedure that could guarantee or even evaluate the spiritual transformation of students. As a result, we can never know for certain whether students are *in general* transformed by academic practices or not. Each case has to be assessed independently.

The absence of a uniform procedure also explains why philosophical education, when limited to merely *informing*, fails. The conveying of theoretical truths can only have a transformative impact on someone's life if the student has already decided to be open to that change. This means that excellent philosophical research abilities do not automatically imply a propensity for spiritual transformation. That is precisely what Hadot means when he says that philosophical discourse originates in an existential choice.[69]

At the same time, the fact that Hadot deems PWL to have a necessary theoretical component implies that reading and commenting on philosophical texts, which university lectures usually consist of, can itself be considered a spiritual exercise.[70] Even though spiritual transformation will never take place as long as university education focuses solely on preparing students for exams, Hadot argues, this does not necessarily preclude the possibility of philosophy students answering the text's call to 'a work of the self on the self'.[71] This in turn requires, first and foremost, that philosophy teachers themselves practice spiritual exercises:

> Here, it is rather he who teaches that has to practice a spiritual exercise. Because to do scientific work, one has to constrain oneself to objectivity, and objectivity can only be the result of a work of

[68] See Kevin Gary, 'Kierkegaard and Liberal Education as a Way of Life', *Philosophy of Education*, 63 (2007), 151–58 (p. 154).
[69] See Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 3.
[70] See Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques', pp. 315–16.
[71] Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques', p. 316 [my translation].

> the self on the self. [...] This spiritual exercise consists of changing one's viewpoint, abandoning the egoist and utilitarian viewpoint of the self of everyday life, in order to elevate oneself to a universal viewpoint. This is already what the interlocutors in the Platonic and Socratic had to do: to rise to the point of the *logos*, of the reason that they had in common, to judge objectively the value of their respective arguments. There is the true beginning of scientific objectivity.[72]

Good philosophy teachers train themselves in spiritual exercises, which, Hadot concedes, have to be adapted to the contemporary mentality.[73] These include the writing, reading, and exegesis of theoretical writings, as long as they invite the transformation of one's being and world.

To sum up, my point is the following. Given the fact that Hadot's critique of academic philosophy revolves around the somewhat vague notion of 'spiritual transformation', it is hard to point out which aspect of academic philosophy would have to change in order to return to practicing philosophy as a way of life. After all, it seems that a banal academic practice such as reading and commenting on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* can already qualify as a spiritual exercise, as long as this text's (trans)formative potential takes centre stage, instead of dryly conveying information. Does this, then, mean that Hadot's concept of PWL, being too tolerant, is useless to effectively critique academic philosophy?

I think not. In the telling passage quoted above, Hadot points to the teacher in particular as an indicator of what practicing philosophy as a way of life in the university setting looks like. What is crucial is the practical judgement of a good teacher. This is different from the judgement of a good researcher, who mainly seeks to add value to the expanding aggregate of philosophical knowledge. Teachers, in contrast, have to look for the transformative potential in a particular text or

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[72] Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques', pp. 316–17 [my translation].
[73] See Hadot, 'L'enseignement des antiques', p. 318.

exercise. How? By being transformed themselves. If the teacher is spiritually transformed by a particular text or exercise, it is the best (and perhaps only) indication that this text is conducive to a philosophical way of life amongst students.

In short, Hadot's critique of academic philosophy should, if anything, be understood as a call to reinstate the philosophy *teacher* (not researcher) at the centre of academic philosophy. Against the contemporary 'disappearance of the teacher', which is fuelled by postmodern discourses, neoliberal policies, and constructivist language that prefers to frame students as autonomous 'learners',[74] Hadot emphasizes the vital role of the teacher in enacting philosophy as a transformative practice. This does not imply that the quest for truth through scholarly work has no role in university philosophy. As I have argued at length, the opposite holds true. However, this intellectual pursuit must always aim at spiritual transformation, with the philosophy teacher leading the way.

IV. Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated that philosophy as a way of life provides a compelling and nuanced critique of academic philosophy. Based on historical research, PWL employs a narrative that maps the history of philosophy as *institutionalized* philosophy. This perspective challenges the notion that academic philosophy inherently contradicts practicing philosophy as a way of life. The compatibility between the two depends upon the way the university environment is structured.

However, in terms of practical guidance for reshaping the modern research university, PWL's instructions become less clear. PWL does not advocate a more *practical* philosophy. Rather, it underscores the

[74] Gert J. J. Biesta, 'Giving Teaching Back to Education: Responding to the Disappearance of the Teacher', *Phenomenology & Practice*, 6.2 (2013), 35–49.

importance of amplifying the *spiritual* dimension of philosophy. Nonetheless, this directive remains vague, as it can only truly be grasped through personal experience, primarily by teachers themselves. Hence, Hadot primarily points to teachers when he discusses what PWL in the university setting could look like. Teachers of philosophy should first train *themselves* in spiritual transformation before they proceed to instruct their students.

At present, there are many barriers that hinder the integration of a more spiritual dimension into academic philosophy. These challenges include bad job contracts, an excessive pressure to publish, and inadequate time allocation for teachers to engage and inspire their students. Therefore, I conclude by acknowledging that academia faces deeper structural predicaments that must be solved before philosophy departments can return to practice philosophy as a way of life. Crucially, the fixation on theory over practice is *not* among the problems vexing academic philosophy today.

The Double Bind of Knowledge:

An Aesthetic Approach

EMINE SARIKARTAL

Summary: A long history links philosophy to academic institutions. The production as well as the transmission of knowledge is normalised by academia, leading to a major problem: the totalisation of philosophical knowledge within academic forms. However, we can diagnose another problem affecting the discipline of philosophy caused by an opposite movement in the world of education: the subordination of knowledge to the demands of the job market, implying the devaluation of disciplines such as philosophy inside academia. These disciplines may then turn to non-academic education models and remain excluded from the institutional security and research resources provided by academia. To deal with this twofold problem, I set up a philosophical critique of academia by drawing on several works by Jean-François Lyotard, proceeding in three steps: a reading of *The Postmodern Condition* from the perspective of education, a discussion of the 'Vincennes experience' in the context of the postmodern crisis in education, and a focus on *Les Immatériaux*, an exhibition Lyotard curated at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1985. I highlight the concepts of postmodern apedagogy and avant-garde as the main elements of a philosophical critique of academia, claiming that an aesthetic approach is a powerful tool to understand and perhaps overcome the current crises of academia.

'I was very engaged in the direct relationship with young people, with students. But the idea of creating an academic work is not mine because it entails what Lacan called "the discourse of the master", and I'm not about to take myself as a master, just a perpetual student, a child.'[1]

'The Academy was notorious for breeding tyrants.'[2] This is how Karl Popper saw Plato's Academy and the model of society that grew out of it. Founded in 387 BC and dedicated to train the guardians of the city, the Academy's anti-democratic stance has caught the attention of historians and philosophers,[3] insofar as Plato conceives the Academy as a means of political transformation. According to Plato, Athenian democracy was responsible for Socrates' death and was not a place for philosophy to thrive. He conceived a strong opposition between philosophy (meaning literally the friendship of wisdom) and rhetoric: while the former was guided by truth, the latter was the art of persuasion not searching for truth but for popular consent. Rhetoric was the functioning tool for Athenian democracy, whereas Plato's Academy taught philosophy to the elite. This is why, historically and conceptually, philosophy is involved in the debate about the constitution of academia.

Philosophical knowledge is mainly produced and shared within academia, it is shaped by the forms in which academia functions, by certain methods, forms of teaching, writing, problematising, conceptualising, etc. Can we imagine philosophical knowledge outside academic forms? This is the question that this paper revolves around.

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[1] Jean-François Lyotard in Gary A. Olson, 'Resisting a Discourse of Mastery: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard', *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 3.15 (1995), 391–410 (p. 395).

[2] Karl Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies. Volume 1: The Spell of Plato* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 229, n. 25.

[3] See Yves Charbit, 'La cité platonicienne: Histoire et utopie', *Population*, 57.2 (2002), 231–260.

The totalisation of philosophical knowledge within academic forms is a major problem,[4] not least because it entails the monopolisation of knowledge: if a certain form becomes the norm for any discipline, it means that the discipline risks becoming uniform, lacking diversity in its tools and effects. However, another problem affecting the discipline of philosophy is caused by the current situation in the world of education: the subordination of knowledge to the demands of the job market. This implies the devaluation of disciplines such as philosophy, the products of which are not directly convertible into commodities. Under these conditions, disciplines that the market might deem less valuable turn to alternative forms of education, which operate in greater independence from market pressures. However, the downside is that these 'inefficient' disciplines, once they leave the academic confines, remain excluded from the institutional security and research resources provided by academia. The alternative forms of production and transmission of knowledge, that is, the forms that suit neither the academic norm nor the demands of the market, often have difficulties in thriving in our education system.

Knowledge is therefore trapped between academic normalisation and capitalist commodification. Academia imposes its norms on the production and transmission of knowledge, providing this process with institutional security and resources, a process that, outside academia, becomes subjected to the rationality of exchange.

My first aim is to diagnose the complex problem of academia through two aspects of Jean-François Lyotard's work: the place of

[4] By totalisation as a problem, I mean the risk of almost absolute control of academia over philosophical knowledge: philosophical knowledge is mostly produced and shared inside academia, according to academic norms. The reason I choose the term totalisation is to echo the Lyotardian idea of the totalitarian threat by modern narratives monopolising knowledge. In the specific context of this paper, I refer to the idea of emancipation by knowledge as a form of modern narrative embodied by the university.

education in the postmodern condition and the 'Vincennes experience' as an alternative educational model. First, I offer a reading of *The Postmodern Condition* from the perspective of education. I argue that Lyotard's conception of the postmodern has multiple implications for academic institutions and their educational models, challenging the normalisation of knowledge.

However, I also claim that the postmodern challenge of academic norms, posed by the efficiency criterion, cannot solve the problem of the subordination of knowledge to the job market. I discuss the 'Vincennes experience' in the context of this dual burden that is weighing on knowledge. The Centre Universitaire Expérimental de Vincennes, where Lyotard taught in the wake of the May 1968 events, challenged the academic normalisation of knowledge in a way that differed from the postmodern criterion of efficiency. Furthermore, set on the margins of the official system, Vincennes offered teaching that went beyond the generation of marketable intellectual skills. Yet the autonomy from academic norms and the job market also brought with it a lack of opportunities and resources. Vincennes did not last long.[5]

Finally, I focus on a non-academic work provided by Lyotard, to sketch out a positive suggestion to overcome the dual tension weighing on knowledge: the exhibition he curated at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1985, *Les Immatériaux*. I highlight the debate on education and pedagogy as conveyed by *Les Immatériaux* and I draw some conclusions for educational institutions. My three-step approach will bring forward the concepts of apedagogy and avant-garde as the main elements of a philosophical critique of academia, claiming that the

[5] The Centre Universitaire Expérimental de Vincennes was created at the beginning of the 1968–1969 school year and was dismantled by Jacques Chirac in 1980. The philosophy department was transferred to Université Paris VIII Saint-Denis.

aesthetic power of reflection[6] can help us understand and eventually resolve the crisis of academia.

I. Knowledge in common: teaching and research under the postmodern condition

Jean-François Lyotard may well claim that *The Postmodern Condition* was the worst book he wrote, and that those who have been generous enough to take an interest in his writings should put this 'horrible book' aside, which was merely a 'passage for him'.[7] Nevertheless, the concept of the postmodern plays a major role in his philosophy and its reception. Indeed, Lyotard prepared the ground for a fertile discussion on the nature and legitimation of social bonds in contemporary societies, with a critical focus on modern institutions of knowledge. However, the philosophy of education contained in *The Postmodern Condition* is yet to be explored.[8]

Published in France in 1979, *The Postmodern Condition* is a 'Report on knowledge' (as its subtitle indicates) written by Lyotard for the 'Conseil des Universités' of the Québec government in Canada at the request of its president. In the short introduction, Lyotard notes that he dedicates his report to the 'Institut Polytechnique de Philosophie de l'Université de Paris VIII (Vincennes)', 'at this very postmodern moment that finds the university nearing what may be its end, while the Institut

[6] I use the term 'reflection' in reference to Kant's reflective judgment and its interpretation by Lyotard: a thought in search of its rule. The general relationship between Kant's philosophy and Lyotard's critique of pedagogy is a rich topic that I cannot entirely cover in this paper, but I will try to clarify in the footnotes. In the main text, I will stay focused on the aesthetic aspect of reflective judgement, as far as Lyotard's concept of avant-garde is concerned.

[7] Olson, 'A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard', p. 410.

[8] For some valuable readings on Lyotard's philosophy of education, see Pradeep Dhillon and Paul Standish (eds.), *Lyotard: Just Education* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

may just be beginning'.[9] Lyotard's dedication underlines the importance that he attributed to research and education as philosophical concepts, and indicates the direction of his own conception by referring to the Vincennes experience, where he and his colleagues engaged in an alternative model of higher education after May 1968. Indeed, the idea of education that Lyotard outlines in *The Postmodern Condition* leans on this non-academic model.

From an educational perspective, *The Postmodern Condition* focuses on the production and transmission of knowledge. Lyotard describes three forms of knowledge: narrative (customary) knowledge, metanarrative (modern) knowledge, and postmodern (multi-narrative) knowledge. Within the narrative form of knowledge production and knowledge transmission, the consensus on the limits of knowledge defines the culture of a community, a people. The combination of multiple language games constitutes a social bond. In this sense, through its affinity with customs, the narrative form of knowledge organically constitutes the culture of a people.

The modern metanarrative form, for its part, focuses on the idea of *Bildung*, whether in its speculative version as the formation of the Spirit or in its emancipatory version as the progress of humanity. The truth value (whether a proposition is true or false), coming from the denotative language game, [10] plays a dominant role in this form,

[9] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984), p. xxv.

[10] Language game is a term Lyotard borrows from Wittgenstein and adapts to his own philosophy with Kantian inspiration, forming the concept of the phrase family. Phrase families array sentences according to their construction rules. Even though Lyotard admits that multiple language games are possible within a discourse, he mostly writes about the difference between the denotative (or descriptive) phrase family and the prescriptive phrase family. Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical judgments is the model for Lyotard's argument: the descriptive family concerns the objects of knowledge and arrays

interfering with the prescriptive phrase family: knowledge is legitimate only if it conveys some truth value, generating consensus within the community as a step towards the community's progress (as *Bildung* or emancipation). Lyotard notes the risk of totalitarian tendencies inherent in this form, caused by two factors: the rule of consensus is based on a community understood as an organic whole, and the legitimation of knowledge through a narrative of emancipatory progress means that descriptive and prescriptive phrase families are totalised into one metanarrative.

In its postmodern form, Lyotard argues, the question of the production and transmission of knowledge immediately implies that of research and teaching. Adopting H. D. Laswell's schema of communication, he poses a series of questions in this regard: 'who transmits? what? to whom? through what medium? in what form? with what effect?'[11] To answer the question regarding effectiveness, Lyotard follows the schema of systems theory: 'The desired goal becomes the optimal contribution of higher education to the best performativity of the social system'. In other words, in postmodern knowledge, 'the ends of higher education are functional'.[12] As for the addressee of education,

propositions that can be said true or false (e.g., 'The door is open'); the prescriptive family concerns practical situations that are neither true nor false but convey action (e.g., 'Open the door'). Science can use the descriptive phrase family for making propositions or hypotheses and coming to conclusions, whereas ethical or political propositions, that are not concerned by the truth value but the justice of an action, are made within the prescriptive family. Lyotard observes that modern knowledge discourse tends to omit the difference between descriptive and prescriptive phrase families and merge them into one metanarrative that leans on legitimation by truth value (originally reserved to the descriptive family). In political or ethical terms, Lyotard considers the merging of two phrase families as an act of totalisation, witnessing a totalitarian tendency carried by modernity.

[11] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 48.

[12] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 48.

> [it] is no longer a youth from the 'liberal elite,' more or less concerned with the great task of social progress, understood in terms of emancipation. In this sense, the 'democratic' university, (no entrance requirements, little cost to the student and even to society if the price per student is calculated, but [welcoming] high enrolment), which was modelled along the principles of emancipationist humanism, today seems to offer little in the way of performance.[13]

Thus, the postmodern condition seems to challenge the academic form of research and teaching, not because it is clearly opposed to the academic normalisation of knowledge, but mainly because the academic form is not efficient enough. The efficiency criterion seems to have a dual character for Lyotard. Unlike the metanarratives of modernity, which proceed to the total legitimation of knowledge in virtue of the criterion of truth, what Lyotard calls the postmodern efficiency criterion implies a performative legitimation that is linked to the performance of the system, privileging the question of utility: 'what's it for?' In other words, while modern knowledge is legitimate only if it is true, postmodern knowledge is evaluated for its performance and considered legitimate if it is efficient.

In terms of education, the efficiency criterion entails two outcomes. On the one hand, linking up with capitalist models of production and growth, the efficiency criterion tends to exclude the academic form of education insofar as it is not sufficiently efficient. The value of education lies in its measurable performance in terms of output. On the other hand, by not accepting the hegemony of the descriptive game, the efficiency criterion promotes the separation of phrase families, particularly of the true and the just, and thus makes it possible to overcome the problem of totalisation posed by grand narratives. Thus,

[13] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 49.

the efficiency criterion defies the normalisation of knowledge that comes with the monopoly of one language game.

How can we understand Lyotard's position here? He observes both the affinity of postmodern education with capitalism and its ability to defy the totalitarian threat carried by the hegemony of the modern descriptive metanarrative. Does this mean that there is no need to problematise the capitalist system in terms of education, that the liberal utilitarian position is adequate to criticize both totalitarianism and institutional interventionism in the free exchange of language games (as is the case with modern narratives)?

Lyotard disentangles two aspects of the postmodern condition of knowledge: efficiency, imposing its criterion of the best performance in terms of output, and the creative, performative imagination of the here-and-now. Here, we see Lyotard's dual use of the notion of performance, the first referring to the efficiency criterion, the second to the act of creative imagination. To illustrate the difference between these two aspects, Lyotard uses the distinction between 'having a good memory for data' and 'the capacity to actualize the relevant data for solving a problem "here and now".'[14] Postmodern education relates to the power of imagination as a creative tool in the second sense. As opposed to games of imperfect information, which privilege the acquisition of additional knowledge for better performance, postmodern knowledge, when 'governed by a game of perfect information', could allow 'arranging the data in a new way, which is what constitutes a "move" properly speaking'.[15] Lyotard admits that 'this capacity to articulate what used to be separate can be called imagination', a performative imagination in the second sense, which serves to invent new moves in

[14] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 51.
[15] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. 51–52.

a game, or even new games, in tune with the here-and-now.[16] According to Lyotard, transdisciplinarity and teamwork are the properties of teaching that can encourage the use of this kind of imagination.

The intervention of performative imagination, which relates postmodern science to the here-and-now through the invention of new moves and rules, has the potential to challenge the relationship between postmodern knowledge and capitalism. According to Lyotard, this relationship is based on the model of positivist determinism, which seeks efficiency and follows the hypothesis of a stable system. Unlike modern narratives that value the idea of stability, postmodern knowledge privileges creative imagination over coherence and admits the possibility of inventing new rules on the go, when a particular problem arises, even though it requires a paradigm-change. Hence, Lyotard conceives postmodern knowledge as multinarrative and paralogical, admitting multiple narratives and depending on multiple logics.

Furthermore, Lyotard's conception of postmodern science underlines the role of dissension. 'To the extent that science is differential, its pragmatics provides the anti-model of a stable system.'[17] Consensus is only ephemeral, local, and momentary, as in game theory and catastrophe theory. Science should be thought of as an 'open system' in which the relevance of any statement is that it 'generates ideas', it generates other statements and rules for the game.[18]

[16] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. 51–52. Lyotard's conception of performative imagination implies a reference to Kant's reflective judgment, which goes from the particular (here and now) to the general, in order to find the general concept or rule relevant for the particular case. Lyotard draws a parallel between the use of performative imagination and the avant-garde.
[17] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 64.
[18] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 64.

In this way, postmodern science could break its affinity with capitalism without losing its ability to challenge the totalisation of knowledge. Highlighting the relationship between creative imagination and the performative character of postmodern knowledge, Lyotard intends to overcome its proximity to a capitalist production model based on market efficiency. If we understand the performativity of postmodern knowledge as creativity here and now, the multiplicity of logics and narratives as well as dissensus would become dominant values of postmodern science to the detriment of the efficiency criterion. Postmodern science would 'tell stories' or 'little narratives'[19] that are paralogical and incompatible with each other, which represents a motivation for scientific knowledge.

II. *Vincennes*, the double bind of academia, and postmodern apedagogy

If Lyotard's conception of postmodern knowledge is significant from the point of view of the critique of academic forms of research and teaching, it is because postmodern knowledge directly concerns schools and universities. Lyotard admits that 'to the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it'.[20] Therefore, Lyotard's dedication of his report to the 'Institut polytechnique de philosophie de l'Université Paris VIII (Vincennes)' is highly relevant in this context.

A few years before these statements, Lyotard tried to put into practice a model of teaching on the margins of academic norms and

[19] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 60.
[20] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv.

marketisation as part of the 'Vincennes experience'.[21] The Vincennes Experimental University Centre was founded in the fall of 1968 at the initiative of the French Ministry of Education (with Edgar Faure as minister), under the presidency of General de Gaulle and in the wake of May 1968, as part of a project aimed primarily at providing for the growing number of university students. From the outset, transdisciplinarity, autonomy, and participation of students, teachers, and administrative staff in management affairs were the main goals of the project. All members of the institution, keen to distance themselves from academic norms, were in agreement with these objectives.

Nevertheless, frictions emerged between supporters of an educational model that is radically different from the norm and those who want to maintain links with the existing system, especially with an eye to career opportunities. The question was whether to follow the official curriculum of the qualification exams for teachers, which are still essential in the French education system and academic job market. In the philosophy department, radical tendencies were dominant, particularly because many students did not have a bachelor's degree or were already employed and thus were not interested in qualification exams. This departure from the official curriculum resulted in the withdrawal of national accreditation for degrees awarded by the philosophy department. The Institut polytechnique de philosophie de l'Université Paris VIII (Vincennes) was created to solve this problem. Therefore, it is a concrete example of the tension between the domination of academic norms and the demands of the job market.[22]

[21] For a detailed study and documentation of the history of the University of Vincennes, see Jacqueline Brunet and others (eds.), *Vincennes ou le désir d'apprendre* (Paris: Éditions Alain Moreau, 1979).

[22] For further information, see Charles Soulié, 'Le destin d'une institution d'avant-garde: Histoire du département de philosophie de Paris VIII', *Histoire de l'éducation*, 77 (1998), 47–69; Fr. Dosse, 'Deleuze à Vincennes', in *Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari. Bibliographie croisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), pp.

Looking closer at Lyotard's conception of the postmodern crisis in education, we find the components of Vincennes's non-academic model. In its postmodern condition, education performs two functions in relation to the addressee. First, there is a 'professionalisation function', which is a didactic model aimed at 'young people who have yet to become active' and will make up 'the professional intelligentsia and the technical intelligentsia', and at those who follow the official qualification process and become educators.[23] Students who do not belong to these two groups 'outnumber the openings in their disciplines (arts and human sciences)'.[24] However they are the bearers of the second function performed by postmodern education: 'job retraining or continuing education', which challenges functionalist models of education, where education aims at a given function.[25] Continuing education, as exemplified by Vincennes, involves continuous transmission of knowledge 'outside universities, departments or vocational institutions'. According to this function,

> knowledge will no longer be transmitted *en bloc*, once and for all, to young people before their entry into the work force: rather it is and will be served 'à la carte' to adults who are either already working or expect to be, for the purpose of improving their skills and chances of promotion, but also to help them acquire information, languages and language games allowing them to

408–427; Rémi Faucherre, 'Atypie-Utopie, Vincennes, naissance d'une université. Mai 1968-Janvier 1969' (unpublished master's thesis, Université Paris VII Jussieu, 1992) <http://www.ipt.univ-paris8.fr/hist/Atypie-Utopie.htm> [accessed 7 Feburary 2024].

[23] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 49.

[24] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 49.

[25] The term 'job retraining', which is used in the English translation of *The Postmodern Condition*, may be confusing. The French term 'recyclage' refers to changing one's occupation. According to Lyotard, 'job retraining' challenges the functionalist model because it is an education model that is not tailored for one function.

> widen their occupational horizons and to articulate their technical and ethical experience.[26]

Through the Vincennes experience, we can see different aspects of the tension between the academic model and alternative forms of education that do not conform to the logic of the market. On the one hand, postmodern knowledge highlights the limits of academic research and teaching, insofar as the modern metanarrative apparatus was dominant in academia and postmodern knowledge entails its obsolescence. Alternative forms develop in this climate of crisis. On the other hand, these alternative forms confirm the devaluation of disciplines such as philosophy that are not directly useful to the job market, which means that these non-efficient disciplines remain excluded from academia and the research resources it provides. Philosophy departments do not train a specific segment of the labour force: there are a lot more students in philosophy departments than philosophy-related jobs in the market. We may then ask two questions: How to teach philosophy under the postmodern condition? *And* what will be the employment opportunities for philosophy students?

As early as 1978, Lyotard noted that the education system did not exhibit a lot of interest in philosophy, a discipline that was not appropriately efficient. In 'Endurance and the Profession', he takes this problem as the starting point for a reflection on the state of the academic institution.[27] In the philosophy department at Vincennes, which kept its doors open despite being excluded from the academic system, students continued to attend courses even though it would not bring any employment opportunity to them. Lyotard underlines the effects of the

[26] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 49.
[27] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Endurance and the Profession', trans. by Christophe Gallier, Steven Ungar, and Barbara Johnson, *Yale French Studies*, 63 (1982), 72–77 [originally published as 'L'endurance et la profession', *Critique*, 369 (February 1978)].

academic vacuum not only on students but also on teachers. On the one hand, the withdrawal of academic support made it possible to experiment with new forms of teaching, and study texts and concepts in depth independently of the requirements of the official curriculum. The teachers and students had the opportunity to explore philosophical texts with new conceptual tools and alternative lectures, outside and contrary to the received categories of the history of philosophy. It is worth noting that some ground-breaking works of 20th century continental philosophy are based on Vincennes lectures.[28]

On the other hand, the withdrawal of academic support also raised questions about the value of such study. As philosophy is disqualified under the postmodern condition, Vincennes illustrates how alternative teaching models take place in the absence of the security usually provided by the institution. The teacher, cast out from the system of efficiency, finds it difficult to persuade students of the merits of a type of study that is not officially recognised. Putting philosophy out of circulation, while allowing a non-academic form of study outside the curriculum, discredits the discipline of philosophy because it becomes, professionally speaking, irrational.

To direct this tension towards a debate on the critique of academia, I propose to move forward with the help of an expression that I have developed from Lyotardian notions, that of *postmodern apedagogy*. The term apedagogy appears in Lyotard's texts in the 1970s, in a discussion of the university and political activism.[29] It describes the philosophy

[28] For example, Gilles Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Kant. See the resources listed at https://www.webdeleuze.com/recherche?recherche=vincennes [accessed 7 February 2024].

[29] See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Nanterre, Here, Now', in *Political Writings*, trans. by Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). For an interesting study on the term 'apedagogy', see James Williams, 'For a Libidinal Education', in *Lyotard: Just Education*, ed. by Dhillon and Standish, pp. 215–230.

'here and now', which is distinct from both spontaneism[30] and classical Marxism. At that moment, within the French left, there was an intense debate on the political character of the student movement and on whether political organisations should lead masses in a pedagogical way to accomplish the revolution. With the term apedagogy, Lyotard sought to move beyond that debate. I use this term by adding the adjective postmodern, to mean that if we are to think about the crises of knowledge in contemporary Western societies, we need to move beyond the pedagogy/non-pedagogy opposition. My argument is that this perspective is suited to a critique of academia today based on Lyotard's thinking.

Postmodern apedagogy is different from the ideas of emancipation and *Bildung*, which presuppose that the human mind is not complete but is to be formed. Apedagogy relates to the notions of rewriting and anamnesis, of which the 'course of philosophy'[31] constitutes a paradigm: not a linear progression but a re-start of the formation process that is neither chronological nor genealogical.[32] As such, the course of philosophy is connected to Lyotard's concept of childhood.[33] While I

[30] Spontaneism theory was developed by Mikhail Bakunin and Rosa Luxemburg, defending the spontaneous revolutionary power of individuals and the masses. According to spontaneist theory, political parties or other organisations are not necessary for implementing a revolutionary movement.

[31] Lyotard uses the term 'course' in a double meaning, to signify the motion or progress of philosophical thinking as well as the philosophy lesson. The philosophy lesson, that is the teaching of philosophy, Lyotard suggests, should follow the motion of philosophical thinking.

[32] See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Address on the Subject of the Course of Philosophy', in *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 99–108.

[33] The concept of childhood in Lyotard's philosophy is of major importance and goes beyond the limits of this article. See Emine Sarikartal, 'Enfances chez Jean-François Lyotard: Sur les traces d'une notion plurielle' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université Paris Nanterre, 2017). For a study on the relationship between childhood and education in Lyotard's philosophy, see Paul Smeyers and Jan Masschelein, '*L'enfance*, education, and the politics of meaning', in *Lyotard: Just*

do not have the space to address childhood in detail, Freudian psychoanalysis and the Kantian concept of critique are the main references for understanding it. Yet there is no clear definition of childhood in Lyotard's writings, only fragmentary descriptions.

Even when Lyotard alludes to actual childhood, it refers to a state rather than an age. For him, childhood connotes both the constitutive and the alterity element within articulate or systematic entities (like language or spirit). Childhood does not simply oppose systematic entities but challenges their edifice from within, because all the edifice is put against an inarticulate, a childish element to attempt to clarify it. Childhood preserves thought from stagnation as well as from totalisation while putting it in motion by an an-amnesiac impulse, signalling that something is left behind in the simple forward-movement of thought. Philosophy, which in its anamnesiac motion 'obeys a demand for a return to the childhood of thought', is linked to 'a desire to rewrite the institution',[34] Lyotard argues, a desire that corresponds to the second function of postmodern education, the continuing education. According to Lyotard, institutions such as the Collège International de Philosophie and the Université de Vincennes respond to this desire to rewrite, by suggesting that 'thought may have more childhood available to it at thirty-five than at eighteen, and outside the curriculum than within it'.[35]

Education, ed. by Dhillon and Standish, pp. 140–156. See also Emine Sarikartal, 'Childhood and Education in Jean-François Lyotard's Philosophy', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 52.1 (2020), 88–97.

[34] Lyotard, 'Address', p. 102.

[35] Lyotard, 'Address', p. 102. In a parallel sense, Lyotard ('Endurance and the Profession', p. 72) writes: 'A public institution of higher learning is by law an organ by which a nation insures the education of its children. The State is the guardian of such institutions. When the State removes all credibility from the Department of Philosophy at Vincennes, one expects it to die out. But the nation's children - grown-up children at that, and even foreigners - persist in attending the courses in large numbers.'

Inspired by the *course of philosophy*, postmodern apedagogy is an education model that privileges imagination, free association and free-floating attention[36], involving the educator and student in the same process of questioning. It is not the maturation or the fulfilment of childhood in a learning process, but a critical return to the roots of knowledge to reshape it. The student is not led towards the truth by an instructor who already holds it. The educator is not primarily concerned with transmitting a systematic corpus of knowledge to the student. Instead, both engage in a deep study of the corpus, with transdisciplinary references, to sift and rearrange it. Postmodern apedagogy is a demand for a return to the childhood of thought, insofar as thought is not the mastery of an object: thought ignores what the object is in itself and tries to determine it.[37] As such, postmodern apedagogy would provide an opportunity to reform the institution in which knowledge is produced and transmitted. Going beyond the pedagogical relationship between the student and the educator, without stopping to be concerned about sharing knowledge, postmodern apedagogy encourages educational institutions to transform and improve themselves. It serves as a tool for the critique of academia and as a strategy for solving the problem of the disqualification of philosophy by the demands of the market.

[36] Concepts inspired by Freud's psychoanalysis technique, as Lyotard puts it in *The Postmodern Explained*.

[37] I note here not only Freud's influence on Lyotard (through the concepts of anamnesis, rewriting and floating attention, which Lyotard uses with reference to Freudian *Durcharbeitung*), but also that of Kantian reflection, interpreted by Lyotard as thought in search of its own rules. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Enthusiasm: The Kantian Critique of History*, trans. by Georges van den Abbeele (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

III. *Les Immatériaux*: Emancipatory pedagogy challenged by the aesthetics of reflection

Postmodern apedagogy is also akin to the avant-garde in the sense of a practice in search of its rule, as Lyotard sees it, and this is how we may see a way out of the problem of the devaluation of research and education outside academia. Indeed, Lyotard's emphasis on the role of imagination in education through the postmodern condition shows an avant-gardist tendency: an education that encourages imagination as a power for inventing new rules.

Lyotard's conception of the avant-garde and imagination is inspired by Kant's critical philosophy. In the introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant distinguishes between determination and reflection as two types of judgment.[38] Determination is the judgment where reason possesses a general concept, a law, an idea, and searches for a particular case that can be determined by that law, under that general form. This is the type of judgment that systematic philosophy requires to form objective knowledge. Theoretical philosophy (addressed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) and practical philosophy (addressed in the *Critique of Practical Philosophy*) make use of determination insofar as they are the two parts of systematic philosophy. In contrast, reflection is a type of judgment in which reason starts from a particular case and searches for the general concept or rule under which the particular case can be subsumed. Reflective judgment does not form any knowledge because it does not determine any object, but it explores the harmony between the world and the mind's powers and faculties. As such, Lyotard considers reflection as the main tool for critical philosophy,[39] insofar as critique is philosophical research on the

[38] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. by Eric Matthews and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[39] See Lyotard, *Enthusiasm*, p. xvii.

possibility of systematic philosophy[40] and does not function in possession of general rules determining objects, but in a reflective movement to find these rules.

Furthermore, Lyotard understands creative imagination as the power of reflection: from a particular situation here and now, creative imagination invents new generalities, new rules, a new game. In arts, this is what the avant-garde does. The 'here and now' of the imagination would then preserve knowledge from becoming a mere object of consumption, and convey an approach of work of art that is of an altogether different 'complexity' than that promoted by the criterion of efficiency: 'the inexhaustible "complexity" of a work merely bears witness to a singular, inextricable difficulty to exist, that should be called infantile.'[41] Lyotard plots out a path for thinking about postmodern apedagogy through art: the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* that he co-curated. This provides an opportunity to look for elements of a critique of academia in art, at a time when this exhibition is once again topical.[42]

Situated in the aftermath of *The Postmodern Condition*, *Les Immatériaux* is a large-scale exhibition that allows for non-academic forms of research. The themes of new technologies, matter, and language, as well as the relationship between art and philosophy are the focus of the exhibition. Presented in 1985 at the Centre Georges Pompidou, *Les Immatériaux* takes as its context the emerging computer

[40] See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, First Introduction, § 1.

[41] Anita Hocquard, *Éduquer à quoi bon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), p. 78 (interview with Jean-François Lyotard in *Le Monde de l'éducation*, April 1985).

[42] This large-scale exhibition that brought together philosophers, artists and scientists is highly topical today, thanks to several projects involving the art world and researchers. See *Cine Immatériaux* sessions at Le Centre Pompidou (7–9 June 2023); 'Les Immatériaux' (1985); Aperçus d'une manifestation postmoderne au Centre Pompidou (virtual reconstruction of the exhibition) (5 July–30 October 2023); *Les Immatériaux Research* project seminars (les-immateriaux.net); European Research Project *Beyond Matter* (beyondmatter.eu).

technologies that are destabilising the classic dualities of Western thought, such as mind and body, form and matter, nature and culture. The exhibition comprises some sixty sites featuring examples of works attributed to artistic modernity or contemporary art (for example, Duchamp, Monory, Kosuth, Graham, Sonia Delaunay, Eisenman, Fontana, Morellet, Flavin) as well as objects or documents that are not works of art in the strict sense of the word and that belong to fields as diverse as astrophysics or cooking. There are also many examples of 'automatic works', such as *Les variables cachés*, in which the public's interaction with the exhibition matrix determines what is 'exhibited', or *Les Epreuves d'écriture*, in which several users write a collective text using specially designed software (like social media today), where a theme is shared and discussed collectively through user comments.[43]

As Lyotard explained to Bernard Blistène (and as his colleagues affirmed on other occasions), the aim was to make the exhibition itself a work of art, seeking to maintain the event in the form of an essay and without claiming a pedagogical position.[44] The exhibition is organised around 'the idea of reflexive/perceptive journeys, which move from question to question, rather than from object to object, proposed as references'.[45] As Lyotard states in the catalogue, 'the exhibition is a postmodern dramaturgy. No hero, no narrative. A maze of situations organised by questions',[46] in which the viewer is more disorientated than guided. Indeed, having been invited to join the exhibition team

[43] See Thierry Chaput and Jean-François Lyotard (eds.), *Les Immatériaux: Épreuves d'écriture* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985).
[44] Interview with Bernard Blistène, 'Les Immatériaux: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard', *Flash Art International*, 121 (March 1985).
[45] Élie Theofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et après? Les Immatériaux* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 1985), p. 18 (comments by Martine Moinot).
[46] Thierry Chaput and Jean-François Lyotard (eds.), *Les Immatériaux, Album et Inventaire* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), p. 48.

based on the vision he proposed in *The Postmodern Condition*,[47] Lyotard tries to put into practice the fragmentary thinking that posits the need to 'demultiply rationalities' and to 'undo a confusion characteristic of modernity, as well as its taste for grand systems and totalities'.[48] The idea of experimentation lies at the very heart of the exhibition: a game whose rules have yet to be established, invoking the idea of the artistic avant-garde.

Moving away from the style of the *salons* and *expositions universelles*, without being a scientific or documentary event, *Les Immatériaux* seeks neither to please nor to educate, still less to form the public, but to awaken a destabilising sensibility. This perspective, which goes beyond pedagogy, translates into Lyotard's attempt at a philosophy of contemporary art that is completely disengaged from the aesthetics of Romanticism, the seeds of which may already be present in *Discours, figure* in the form of a reflection that seeks to 'supplant' current political thought.[49] Under the impact of the concept of the postmodern, this philosophy focuses on the decline of modern ideals. For Lyotard, 'the most essential question' is that of resistance in a context where the horizon of emancipation is lacking, a question intimately linked to artistic activity. He names 'philosophico-artistic' the artistic activity that engages with this question.[50]

In his interview with Élie Théofilakis, the reasons he gives for taking part in this work restate his goal of abandoning the pedagogical position and embrace the criticism of academia: getting out of the university and

[47] Theofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et après?*, p. 15 (comments by Thierry Chaput).
[48] Chaput and Lyotard (eds.), *Les Immatériaux, Album et Inventaire,* p. 48.
[49] See Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. by Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). *Discours, figure* is Lyotard's PhD thesis, originally published in 1971.
[50] Olson, 'Les Immatériaux: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard', p. 37.

bringing a reflexive dimension to this collective work in the context of the postmodern condition.[51]

His reasons are based on the position of the philosopher in this context. First, the philosopher should leave the university, a modern institution declining in parallel with the ideal of emancipation. Then, the philosopher should attempt to capture knowledge in its postmodern condition by privileging creative imagination to the detriment of the efficiency criterion. Finally, the philosopher should confront their activity with the process of techno-scientific development, which is not only having an effect on technology and science but is shaking the whole field of the human[52] at great speed, from social relationships to forms of organisation, from means of communication to conceptions of the world, with a strong impact on the formation of knowledge itself. Philosophy as a reflexive activity could thus attempt to escape the state of sclerosis afflicting institutional teaching and find a place for itself in this moment of 'removal of disciplinary barriers', in contrast to the process of specialisation of scientific disciplines in modernism.[53]

The philosophical profession, in its teaching function, is commonly associated with a cultural pedagogical task aimed at the audience's receptive faculty. By contrast, the task that Lyotard assumes in the context of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* is an 'intellectual'[54] task

[51] Theofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et après,* pp. 5–6.

[52] The human is a notion Lyotard starts to confront with the inhuman since *The Postmodern Condition*. It refers to the human dimension of our individual and our social lives. As put forward by the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, techno-scientific progress is constantly challenging the human. As we move forward in Lyotard's philosophy, we will see that this challenge has both positive and negative outcomes. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[53] Theofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et après,* pp. 5–6.

[54] A term that Lyotard most often uses with a negative connotation, but which here indicates the reflexive character in the Kantian sense of the task he sets himself in the context of this exhibition.

seeking to awaken a feeling faculty, a destabilising and destabilised *aisthesis*, provoked by questions about the legitimacy of practices in a given society.[55] Here, Lyotard highlights the difference between the passivity of receiving (the passivity that the audience is expected to have in a pedagogical situation) and the activity of feeling (the activity of sensibility as an intellectual faculty, *aisthesis*, whose role is to process the objects of sensation). The modern ideal of emancipation has conveyed a pedagogical conception of society, Lyotard argues, and has suffered a decline. The postmodern condition considers this decline of modern ideals and institutions. As illustrated by the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard often leans on the power of the aesthetic faculty to take account of the crisis of modernity: the postmodern condition may lack major ideals, but it provokes us to feel and reflect upon the dislocation of metanarratives. What remains after the decline of the ideal of emancipation is the feeling of that decline, upon which multiple narratives are built.

IV. Conclusion

The first conclusion I draw is that Lyotard's texts contain underexplored resources for the philosophy of education. Although Lyotard did not develop a philosophy of education as such, his treatment of the postmodern condition is an inspiration for developing one.[56] Around the concepts of the postmodern, reflection, and childhood, to name but a few, Lyotard's thought stimulates us to think more about education and its contemporary situation.

From this perspective, the reading I offer allows us to problematise academic institutions and their impact on normalising the field of

[55] Theofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et après,* p. 7.
[56] For some interesting work on this theme, see Michael Peters (ed.), *Education and The Postmodern Condition* (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1995).

philosophy. If alternative institution models can resolve the academic normalisation problem, they also contribute to the exclusion of the discipline of philosophy from the established education system, which is increasingly dominated by the demands of the job market. As illustrated by the Vincennes experience, university teachers and students in philosophy departments are confronted with this double bind.

In response, I developed the argument that, by lifting the barriers between disciplines, as in the case of *Les Immatériaux*, we find a way out of the double bind of academic knowledge. *Les Immatériaux* shows that the philosopher (and the teacher) can address the crisis of academia not by leaving the institution altogether but by remaining in a hybrid space, at the crossroads of disciplines. With this effort, Lyotard seeks to replace the pedagogical exercise with the awakening of an aesthetic power based on reflection, this Kantian concept that he interprets as a thought in search of its rules and which he uses as the foundation of the avant-garde. Such an aesthetic approach could not only liberate philosophy from academic forms but also contaminate academic thought with heterogeneous forms of research and teaching, helping academics to diagnose the crises of their institutions and perhaps overcome them.

On Peripheral Philosophy:

A Para-Academic Polemic

PETER HEFT

Summary: In an age of increasing university privatization, neo-conservative think tanks shaking hands with 'liberal' institutions, and questions of fake news, disinformation, and the concomitant 'problems' of Internet philosophizing being foregrounded, we would do well to take a step back and look at the larger picture. Philosophy, the State, and the market share a comfortable queen bed where each feed upon the other. On the handle of the door – in lieu of 'do not disturb' – a sign which reads 'Enlightenment thought occurring' hangs. Indeed, liberated from the shackles of religious fideism and political fiefdom, us post-Enlightenment academics are constantly reminded that we no longer must fear suffering the fate of Bruno, being burnt at the stake. While such overt repression no longer exists (at least in the West), we have traded such overtness for a 'liberatory' tool: the Academy itself. Despite no more stake burnings or religious zealotry, we have erected new walls with new rules, all under the influence of the co-incidence between thought and the State. While we need not fear the iron maiden, we ought to fear the dean of the university. The aim of this editorialized polemic is to argue that, contra institutional norms which focus on traditional 'scholarship', philosophers – so as to maintain any semblance of relevance – ought to look to philosophy's Other for guidance in our quest(s): the pseudonymous blogger, the anonymous commenter, the amateur. Only with a multiplication of voices from disparate backgrounds can philosophy properly engage in 'ruthless criticism of all that exists'.

'[I]f there is to be a philosophy at all,
[it must be] withdrawn from all State influence.'
– Arthur Schopenhauer[1]

'[E]verything interesting happens on the periphery,
outside the standard modes of "developed" existence.'
– Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU)[2]

'I don't say "interdisciplinary" anymore because
once a word becomes a talking point for the
administration, it has all vitality sucked out of it.'
– Professor Π[3]

The trifold relationship between philosophy, the State, and commoditization is a problematic knot that has roots as far back as, at least, Ancient Greece, with Socrates' relentless mocking of the Sophists who sold truth to the highest bidder and the State's attempt to exterminate undesirable thought with a glass of hemlock-laced tea. Despite being 'enlightened', or at the very least despite living 'in an *age of enlightenment*' that pushes us towards greater 'freedom' from the dogmatism of religion and the State – a trajectory we shall trace shortly – our intellectual liberation has only remained nominally post-dogmatic with the overt repression of the Church and State replaced by an invisible system of exclusion born from more insidious hegemonic attitudes.[4] Indeed, our intellectual revolution has tracked with Lacan's

[1] Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays (Volume 1)*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 137–97 (p. 180).
[2] CCRU, 'Communiqué Two: Message to Maxence Grunier (2001)', in *Writings: 1997–2003* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2017), pp. (:)(:)–::(:) [9–12] (p. (:)(:) [9]).
[3] Said in a classroom setting.
[4] Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', in *Practical Philosophy,* trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 13–22 (p. 21 [8:40–41]).

(in)famous comment to the 1968 student protestors in France: 'What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master [and] [y]ou will have one!'[5] The master of our intellectual liberation, in a perverse irony, is the institution we post-Enlightenment academics built to free ourselves from the tyranny of religion and the State: the Academy as such. In what follows, I will wax poetic about the history of anti-academic philosophy and then argue two things: first, traditional philosophy caters to a rigid, academic milieu that is intrinsically exclusionary and thus will remain deficient in its accounts of subjectivity; second, the crisis of the relevance of philosophy not only within the Academy itself, but also in everyday life, can only be solved by appealing to a new mode of thinking – one which Edward Said isolated as that of the 'amateur' as para-academic – and the creation of Outsides to academia. Indeed, the aim of this paper is to track para-academic thought through Deleuze and Guattari, the CCRU, and others, while ultimately aiming to affirm and take seriously the radical Other of philosophy *as such*: the pseudonymous blogger, the anonymous poster, the peripheral philosopher. Indeed, if we take seriously the presupposition of liberal academia – that is to say, that texts are ambiguous and thus require disambiguation *while retaining multiple potential meanings* – can we really consider novel ideas anything but conglomerations of unique interpretations? If that's so, why ought we to afford the 'proper' academic any more credence than the pseudonymous blogger? To do so not only seems to be a recapitulation of the fetish of established knowledge, but it is a powerful, institutional way to privilege certain subjectivities above others based on contingent educational factors. These questions – or, more specifically, their implications – are the tracks upon which this paper travels.

[5] Quoted in Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 12.

I. The Spectre of State Philosophy

In his essay 'On Philosophy at the Universities', Arthur Schopenhauer launches a scathing attack on what he sees as the Religio-State amalgamation of 'professional philosophy'. For him, the growth of professional philosophy – that is to say, philosophy at the institutional level as opposed to the street philosophy of Socrates – is inexorably bound up with the propagation and legitimization of the State. As he notes, interwoven with religious and metaphysical dogmas of the time, the State 'promulgate[s its ideology] from all the pulpits by thousands of its appointed priests or religious teachers' and demands conformity. The effective dissemination of ideology thus requires that contradiction be denounced: '*improbant secus docentes* – ["We reject and condemn the man who teaches something different."]'[6]

But can we really expect anything else? Indeed, the State is a structure that makes instrumental use of systems around it, molding and using people for its ends and co-opting various institutions – religious when spiritual sway is needed, capitalist when market forces dominate, etc. Following from this, we would then be wise to recognize that

[6] Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', p. 139. A larger problem about the formation of the subject (of academia) rears its head. Indeed, questions surrounding the masks one wears as one navigates different social milieus – and the subjectivities and power relations at play therein – are significant issues. That being said, their direct relevance is tangential and best taken up elsewhere. While the issue of the author *will* be foreground later in this paper, properly treating the *creation* and *subjectivation* of the academic is a task that is both untenable here and better suited to a longer, more focused analysis. Thus, I simply point readers to appropriate sources. See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 1–36; Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. by Carol Diethe, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 25–27 (1: §13), pp. 83–85 (3: §10–11). For my own account of multiplicitous subjectivities, see Peter Heft, 'Xenofeminism: A Framework to Hack the Human', *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, 12.1 (2021), 121–39 (pp. 126–28).

professional philosophers employed by the State are bound by an imperative: they mustn't 'examine a new system that appears to see whether it is true', rather they must 'see whether it can be brought into harmony' with the current ideals of the State.[7] Implicitly drawing upon Kant's 'What Is Enlightenment?', wherein Enlightenment is nothing but freedom from minoritarianism – that 'inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another' – which, nevertheless, rests upon rigid duties, Schopenhauer goes a step further.[8] The pursuit of truth – '*truth,* which has at all times been a dangerous companion and everywhere an unwelcome guest' – will always be *mediated and distorted* by the State: 'Realists and Nominalists, or Aristotelians and Ramists', the State has 'taken sides' and in doing so has 'trumpeted sophists'.[9]

Further, as Kant, the great State philosopher (second only to dear Hegel), notes, while all that is required for Enlightenment is '*freedom*', a very odd set of restrictions apply. Indeed, for Kant, freedom, as it relates to Enlightenment, involves the 'freedom to make *public use* of one's reason'. Such an invocation of the public requires that we examine what Kant means. Public use, for Kant, is the use of one's faculties '*as a scholar* before the entire public of the *world of readers*': the independent thinker invested in the marketplace of ideas. The private, in contradistinction, is the use of one's faculties 'in a certain *civil* post or office with which [one] is entrusted'.[10] In sum, all that is required for Enlightenment is free thought in intra-personal affairs.

As the Academy becomes increasingly privatized, with funding for institutions coming from countless and unknown sources, vested

[7] Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', p. 149.
[8] Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', pp. 17–18 [8:36–37].
[9] Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', pp. 153, 168.
[10] Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', p. 18 [8:37].

interests become par for the course. Indeed, not only is academized thought bound up with the State, but financial interests come to dominate the educational sphere. Further drawing upon Kant, our mighty proponent of freedom, it is vital to note that 'for many affairs conducted in the interest of a commonwealth a certain mechanism is necessary, by means of which some members of the commonwealth must behave merely passively'. Not only must members remain passive whilst working in a professional capacity – indeed for Kant, the existence of a civil servant who questions orders from their superior 'would be ruinous' – it is wholly 'impermissible to argue; instead, one must obey'.[11] While free to dissent amongst one's cohort – one's friends, family, and, theoretically, the 'citizens of the world' – the professional – that is to say, the individual 'on duty', educating and lecturing, practicing and preaching – must not question the dogmas of the Religio-State apparatus as they were 'employed by it on that condition'.[12] Thus, as privatization spreads and funding is bound up with *what* is taught, the interests of the financier become more closely aligned with the goals of the Academy, thereby necessitating the active discouragement of dissent. This can be seen most clearly in the cults of personality surrounding specific intellectuals who, when 'invited' (read as: hired) to speak for ungodly sums of money, play to public opinion and court

[11] Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', p. 18 [8:37].
[12] Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', pp. 18–19 [8:37–8:38]. One can see a corporatizing trend within public educational institutions in North America mirroring Kant's odd inversion of public-private. Indeed, in the context of Canada, 'our presidents are "CEOs," professors are "human resources" and students are "clients"' and as *(in)vested knowledge* is privileged, 'academics are doing more and more research for and with "partners," often from the business community' instead of 'setting their own research agendas in response to a variety of social needs and interests.' Claire Polster, 'Privatizing Canada's Public Universities', <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/privatizing-canadas-public-universities-claire-polster> [accessed 5 August 2023].

agreement from impressionable graduate students. While a level of critique is certainly permissible – 'Herr Dr. X, what do you mean when you say Y? Is that not incongruent with the claim in your *New York Times* bestseller *How to Think!*, where you said Z?' – one must not stray too far from established norms, lest one be branded as a heretic. Indeed, what department attempting to secure funding from the *wellspring* of humanities monies can afford to have a rabble-rouser in their midst, a student who questions the orthodoxy of Herr Dr. X flown in from afar and fed sushi and lobster at the town's finest restaurant?

Such a hegemon(oton)y ought not to seem utterly foreign to us, however, as Deleuze and Guattari make a similar point in their examination of 'State/royal' science in relation to 'nomad/minor' science.[13] For Deleuze and Guattari, 'State science' – or 'royal science' – is science with the end of subordination. Royal science sees all that is different from itself – the dominant form of knowledge (production) – as a threat upon which, in order to secure a stable base of knowledge, it 'imposes its form of sovereignty' and makes the dynamic, uniform; the numerous, bound; 'space, occupiable'.[14] The relation of royal science to nomad science is not merely one of the sovereign exertion of power in quantifiable ways but rather 'a qualitive change' in how the world is seen. Indeed, under the epistemological framework of royal science, staticity is favored over dynamism as the former, when instantiated by the sovereign, promotes the control and management of bodies in space in contradistinction to the intrinsic nomadism of the latter, which promotes fluidity and vectorization.[15] What's more, royal science seeks

[13] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Volume 2)*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 361–74.
[14] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 362–63.
[15] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 364, 366. See also Michel Foucault, 'Part Three: Discipline', in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), pp. 134–228.

to instrumentalize nature and make the world uniform by searching for laws and 'extracting constants' so as to eliminate unknowns. On the other hand, nomad science – what we might practically think of as science extricated from the State, performed by independent researchers and free citizens – always existing on the periphery and attempting to avoid capture and appropriation, seeks instead to problematize the hegemonic worldview populated by the royal scientists by not only undermining them but fundamentally fuzzing the world, bringing forth a plurality of different voices, and 'placing the variables [which royal science seeks to contain] in a state of continuous variation'.[16]

We can thus draw a comparison between the professional philosophy Schopenhauer so despised and the two different epistemic models put forth by Deleuze and Guattari. Reading Schopenhauer's professional philosophy retroactively through the DeleuzoGuattarian lens of royal science, where there must be *a specific* taught truth that is static and conforms to the ideology of the State, we can see that dissident, nomadic science must be squashed. Thus, '[w]hat is at stake in both cases is not argument, however rancorous, but the relation of mutual revulsion between the academy and a small defiant fragment of its outside'.[17] This cat-and-mouse relationship between the State (with its academic fangs) and the Outside can be understood as a despotic game where the plug is pulled whenever the tides shift. The justification for such malevolent moves can be traced back to Socrates' mocking of established systems of knowledge and the exposition of the hypocrisy of those in power.[18] These moves, moves to squash the nomads, moves birthed in Athens, have since become endemic to the Western

[16] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 369, 362.
[17] Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 10.
[18] See Plato, 'The Apology of Socrates', in *The Trials of Socrates,* trans. by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), pp. 26–61.

philosophical tradition. Thoroughly infected by the State and its desire for control, when

> exploratory philosophy ceased to generate the outcomes favourable to established (theistic) power, […] we were suddenly told: 'this game is over, let's call it a draw'. The authoritarian tradition of European reason tried to pull the plug on the great [heretical philosophical] voyages [of Spinoza, Nietzsche, et al.] *at exactly the point they first became interesting*, which is to say: atheistic, inhuman, experimental, and dangerous.[19]

Radical thought, thought that is dangerous to the status quo can thus only be allowed into the Academy under one of two conditions: either its radicality must be thoroughly defanged, or it must fall in line with – and indeed, support – popular ideology.[20] If Marxism, that 'dangerous idea which killed hundreds of millions', is accepted and indeed *taught* at universities, it is only because armchair theorizing has overtaken political action, rendering the 'red menace' nothing more than a pop-philosophical-book-production machine.[21]

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[19] Nick Land, 'Shamanic Nietzsche', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2017), pp. 203–28 (p. 204).

[20] At this point – both in this paper and in history – it ought to be noted that the radicality discussed above is not to be interpreted as an affirmation of sloppy scholarship or charlatanism of the worst kind. Ron DeSantis and other fascist pigs are not paragons of radical thought as they 'rage against the machine' of 'woke critical race theory' and 'transgenderism'; they are the perfect example of parochial reterritorialization coming 'down on us heavier than ever' and ought to be resisted at every turn. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 161.

[21] Admittedly, I am here succumbing to the cynicism Edward Said (to whom we'll turn later) chastises as 'coarse and finally meaningless'. Edward Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', in *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 65–83 (p. 69). Nevertheless, in the 30 years following his Reith Lectures, I fear the state of academia as politicized and privatized has only gotten worse.

II. Para-Academia and The Periphery

George Yancy, commenting on the stereotypical State philosophy of today, notes that there is a disparity between the thought that goes on within the gates of the Academy and that of bodies not included. For the former, thought is abstracted with the goal of exposing 'a weak argument, a fallacy, or someone's "inferior" reasoning power', and of 'taking down' enemies while presuming to 'speak for *all* of "us"', whereas for the latter, thought is rooted in personal experience and, in turn, is more open.[22] While this does not mean that personal experience and intensely phenomenological philosophy *cannot* occur behind the doors of the Academy – indeed, such thought *can* and *does* take place in our venerable institutions of higher education – such philosophizing is always subject to rigid restrictions around language used, authors cited, academic mores followed, etc. Students proclaiming radicality will nonetheless be required to fall back on citational norms and Western, colonial educational structures. More significantly, in order to shore up its own cracks – that is to say, retain its hegemonic credibility – the Academy must engage in a spurious game of recognition.

Writing in the context of gender affirmation within conservative status quos, gender nihilist Aidan Rowe notes that positive recognition is fundamentally dangerous. As Rowe contends, recognition is always conditional and operative within frameworks of power. It does not only imply prior categories of acceptable identification, but recognition as a force of institutional power 'retains the possibility that [such] recognition will be withdrawn if you become something else'.[23] Thus,

[22] George Yancy, 'Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 19.4 (2005), 215–41 (p. 215). It should be noted that para-academic discourse is not *inherently* non-exclusionary but is seemingly more open and, when exclusionary, it is less repressive and/or violent.

[23] Aidan Rowe, 'Gender Nihilism', in *What is Gender Nihilism? A Reader* (version 1.2), ed. by wign (Contagion Press, 2016), pp. 341–47 (p. 345).

recognition by existent power structures 'is also simultaneously the power of misrecognition and non-recognition'. Indeed, recognition is, implicitly, a *re-cognizing* of existent modes of understanding. It is a recolonization of the subject by systems of control 'interested not in the elimination of difference but in its assimilation'.[24]

The problematic becomes worse. In his account of so-called 'openness' within liberal systems, Reza Negarestani isolates a tactic of 'affordance' that remains in play. When radical alterity is allowed to engage in the Academy (nominally) on its own terms, the politics of affirmation come into play. As Negarestani notes, '[a]ffirmation does not attain openness to the world'.[25] Instead, modern liberal affirmation operates according to the logic of '[e]conomical openness' – that is, 'the ultimate tactic of affordance' – wherein the Other is not accepted as such but rather *budgeted for* within the current system.[26] Negarestani continues: 'Economical openness is not about how much one can be open to the outside, but about how much one can afford the outside.'[27] Like a pressure release valve operating so as to allow small, controlled amounts of flight from repression, economical openness and its 'tactic of affordance' is not a means for meaningful inclusion within a system but instead a means of maintaining control over aberrant and/or deviant behavior, *pre-scribing* how the Other is to be engaged with. Ultimately, liberal openness – the openness of the modern Academy operating within a politics of recognition – 'can be recapitulated as "I have the capacity to bear your investment" or "I afford you"'; a fundamentally

[24] Rowe, 'Gender Nihilism', pp. 345, 344.
[25] Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), p. 197. I thank Rowan Elizabeth Cabrales for forcing me to read Negarestani.
[26] Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 197.
[27] Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 197.

conservative position that will, when threatened, tear 'out the tongue of alterity'.[28]

Thus, the rigorized and highly structured mode of State philosophizing, at best, only excludes those not privileged enough to exist within the Academy while allowing a modicum of resistance so as to rehabilitate itself; or, at worst, denies altogether the experiences of the Other. While there are certainly ways to *try* to remain radical – that is to say, dangerous to the Politico-Academic status quo – within the Academy by carving out a niche for oneself, we must remember that for every comfortable, 'radical' academic out there, there are ten other thinkers existing on the edges of society who don't have a voice within the Academy.

Perhaps that is for the best. If we take Schopenhauer seriously – and indeed, it seems as if we must, given the current moribund state of 'radical' academia – then we ought to be wary of inclusion for the sake of inclusion. The Academy, like The Blob, assimilates and normalizes all that comes too close by acting as a homogenizing force to turn 'the philosophical lecture-room into a school of the shallowest philistinism' where radical ideas are salted before they germinate.[29] Back in 2001, the CCRU (Cybernetic Culture Research Unit) began mapping precisely the movement of the nomad scientist toward the periphery:

> Many members of the Ccru had fled cultural studies, disgusted by its authoritarian prejudices, its love of ideology, and its pompous desire to 'represent the other' or speak on behalf of the oppressed. To us, it never seemed that the real articulacy of the leftist academic elites was in any way superior to the modes of popular cultural expression which were either ignored or treated as raw material to

[28] Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 198. Nick Land, 'Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest: A Polemical Introduction to the Configuration of Philosophy and Modernity', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2017), pp. 55–80 (p. 64).

[29] Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', p. 153.

> be probed for a 'true' (i.e. ideological) meaning by white middle-class intellectuals. […]
> Ccru engages with peripheral cultures not because they are 'downtrodden' or oppressed, but because they include the most intense tendencies to social flatness, swarming, populating the future, and contagious positive innovation, hatching the decisive stimuli for the systematic mutation of global cybernetic culture.[30]

Indeed, with the blossoming of personal weblogs and the intensification of social disparities, those disgruntled with academia and engaged in 'peripheral cultural processes' began setting up shop on the tatters of the digital map, where new social enclaves built around pseudonymity and cyber-culture were, like bubbles, constantly arising.[31] Is it at all surprising that the response to the rigor (mortis) of academia and the explosion of locked-off academic journals was a rise in theory blogs? The Internet was, and is, alive with conversations that cannot be found in the stuffy pages of *X, Y, Z Quarterly*.[32] As pamphleteering was to the State, blogs and Twitter are to the Academy.

Apart from being nodes of non-traditional, and thus non-monotonous, philosophy, blogs and niche areas of study provide a counter to the structural exclusionary features of the Academy. Indeed, to be 'taken seriously' within the Academy, 'authority' must be achieved by, typically, undergoing what Mark Fisher (a.k.a k-punk) called 'the

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[30] CCRU, 'Communiqué Two', p. (:)(:) [9].
[31] CCRU, 'Communiqué Two', p. (:)(:) [9].
[32] I do, of course, fully recognize the performative contradiction that arises from publishing this article in an academic journal. While further justification will be implicit as we move forward, for now I merely quote Deleuze and Guattari: 'You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn', you must '[l]odge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them'. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* pp. 160–161. All the above being said, it also ought to be noted that blogs are not *intrinsically* liberatory. For a critical approach, see Adam Kotsko, 'A Dangerous Supplement: Speculative Realism, Academic Blogging, and the Future of Philosophy', *Speculations*, 4 (2013), 35–37.

traumatic experience of doing a PhD'. For him, such work – and the same can be said of academia more generally – 'bullies one into the idea that you can't say anything about any subject until you've read every possible authority on it'.[33] While there is certainly a level of expertise gained from studying a given thinker or topic for an extended period of time, the notion of 'authority' is itself a uniquely modern problematic that arguably has no parallel in (Western) history. Indeed, for much of the history of Western thought, knowledge production was done collectively and collaboratively through dialectical inquiry, philosophical and theological commentaries, and pseudonymous scholastics. If one *could* pin down an author, the role of the author-function was drastically different than we understand it to be in contemporary academia.[34]

Indeed, looking to Foucault, we can attempt to make sense of the shift that has occurred. As the exercise of power variously shifted from unconditional sovereign power through disciplinary power to biopolitical power, the figure that was birthed and refined was that of the subject.[35] Concomitant with shifts in power that were increasingly

[33] Mark Fisher and Rowan Wilson, 'They Can Be Different in the Future Too: Mark Fisher Interviewed', <https://www.versobooks.com/en-ca/blogs/news/3051-they-can-be-different-in-the-future-too-mark-fisher-interviewed> [accessed 3 January 2019].

[34] Taking Greek and Roman historians as further examples – e.g., Diogenes Laërtius or St. Jerome – we can see that the utilization of the name serves to index a collator of information. Or, as Foucault notes, '"Hippocrates said," "Pliny recounts," were not really formulas of an argument based on authority; they were the markers inserted in discourses that were supposed to be received as statements of demonstrated truth.' Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984 (Volume Two)*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Josué V. Harari and Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 205–22 (p. 212).

[35] For accounts of the shifts in power mentioned here, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1 (The Will to Knowledge)*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 133–59 and Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

focused on targeting individuals as opposed to scaring groups, stable, isolatable, and static subjects had to be formulated. It is for this reason that Foucault begins his famous text, 'What Is an Author?', with the following statement: 'The coming into being of the notion of "author" constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas.'[36] Whereas *author*ity was previously more diffuse and writing was pointed to an exteriority, at some point – and Foucault is, unfortunately, rather vague here – an internalization occurred where 'author' was subsumed by the text and the two became inexorably intertwined.[37] We then ought not to think that the institutionalization and formalization of an author as an identifiable subject – especially within the early-modern era of universities – is a neutral accident of history. Rather, the creation of the author *as such* served as the backbone for the Enlightened, Kantian subject subordinated to the State and for the professional academic re-producing privileged knowledge. 'Texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors […] to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive.'[38] Criticism, real criticism, had its wings clipped before it could get off the ground.

What, then, has to be done? Ought we to burn our caps and gowns, shunning all academic mores? Perhaps. But we must also recognize that

[36] Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 205.
[37] Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', p. 206. See also Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 25–27 (1: §13); Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142–148. For a different account of authorship and the history of the 'author' as a figure (as well as an account of the life of 'the author') – an account which perhaps, following my own claims, brings forth more questions than answers – see Lawrence Lipking, 'The Birth of the Author', in *Writing the Lives of Writers*, ed. by Warick Gould and Thomas F. Staley (London: MacMillan Press, 1998), pp. 36–53.
[38] Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', pp. 211–12.

the Academy *does* exist, and we can't just wish it away; instead, we must engage with it in some form.

Thus, in conjunction with the above, we can use contemporary critiques of international relations studies coupled with a 'post-modern' Saidian launching pad to provide tangible alternatives to the rigid State philosophy. Indeed, for Shampa Biswas writing on the relevance of Said, the Academy has become yet another battlefield upon which the tanks of neo-conservatism roll.[39] While Biswas will maintain that there is a technical distinction between 'scholars working for the state' and a scholar's 'intellectual orientation', such a dichotomy, *if* it ever existed, has long since evaporated in any practical sense. Indeed, just as '[i]t is not uncommon for IR [international relations] scholars to feel the need to formulate their scholarly conclusions in terms of its relevance for global politics, where "relevance" is measured entirely in terms of policy wisdom,' philosophy within the Academy falls prey to the very same problems, as dominant discourses are reproduced, cults of personality are maintained, and professional philosophers '[r]ender […] unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's'.[40]

For Biswas, such an 'encroachment' of politics into, ideally, independent institutions – although their claim to independence is itself dubious, as the Academy is an *institution* (coming from *instituere*, 'to set up / to put in place': in other words, to make static and hegemonic) – is fundamentally dangerous insofar as it brings with it 'nationalist and statist agendas'.[41] What is required? Asking a prior question, Said begins his investigation:

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[39] Shampa Biswas, 'Empire and Global Public Intellectuals: Reading Edward Said as an International Relations Theorist', *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 36.1 (2007), 117–33.

[40] Biswas, 'Empire and Global Public Intellectuals', p. 122; Matthew 22:21.

[41] Biswas, 'Empire and Global Public Intellectuals', p. 120. Said himself provides a very interesting account, summarizing Régis Debray, of French intellectual life

> And yet the question remains as to whether there is or can be anything like an independent, autonomously functioning intellectual, one who is not beholden to, and therefore constrained by, his or her affiliations with universities that pay salaries, political parties that demand loyalty to a party line, think tanks that while they offer freedom to do research perhaps more subtly compromise judgement and restrain the critical voice.[42]

After running through a rapid-fire crash course on intellectualism in the United States post-World War II (especially during the hippie and beatnik movements) – an account I'll leave the reader to peruse at their leisure – Said goes on to comment on the distinction between an 'academic' and an 'intellectual', the latter of whom is 'a stubborn force engaging as a committed and recognizable voice' who aims toward 'a combination of enlightenment and emancipation or freedom'.[43] In eerie synchronicity with Schopenhauer almost 150 years prior, what Said critiques – contra my own claims – 'is not the academy, nor the suburbs, nor the appalling commercialism of journalism and publishing houses'. Rather, like the pessimist before him, Said critiques 'professionalism': 'thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living, […] not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable.'[44] Said continues to outline the pressures that force one into professionalism, but the ultimate question for us is *what is the alternative?* As per Biswas' formulation, the alternative is thus: in contradistinction to abject professionalism, one ought to adopt 'a spirit of "amateurism"' to act as

from 1880 to the seminal year, 1968. See Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', pp. 66–67.

[42] Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', pp. 67–68.

[43] Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', p. 73.

[44] Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', pp. 73–74. Professionalism: what we, in this edition of *Pli*, are perhaps not succumbing to (unless, of course, it's marketable to be anti-academic within academia).

a bulwark against the onslaught of professional philosophy.[45] Or, as Said himself will put it, our task must not be to ignore the influences of the State, capital, pushes for professionalism, etc., rather we must articulate 'a different set of values and prerogatives' – amateurism as 'care and affection', love of learning – *philo-sophia*.[46]

There is, however, another reading of amateurism one can draw out: a reading Said alludes to but is nascent in his writings, a more *guerilla* form of intellectualizing. Even when working within the Academy, we can become amateurs embroiled amongst the professionals – lambs pretending to be wolves, in an odd inversion – and are, as such, '"a species of nomads, despising all settled modes of life" who come from a wilderness tract beyond knowledge [… and are] invasion routes of the unknown'.[47] We can, as per Said,

> enter and transform the merely professional routine […] into something much more lively and radical; instead of doing what one is supposed to do one can ask why one does it, who benefits from it, [and] how can it reconnect with a personal project and original thoughts.[48]

How might we envision such a figure? What would they look like? It is certainly easy to abstractly talk about such a free intellectual, but discerning how they might operate around the zone of the Academy is different altogether. I suggest two figures with whom we might think, two in a commensalistic relationship: the para-academic and the peripheral philosopher.

The first figure, that of the para-academic, is an obtuse figure formulated in many different ways. If Google's Ngram Viewer is to be believed, the word 'para-academic' has seen a 140% increase in the frequency of its usage from its supposed coining in 2011 to 2019. Insofar

[45] Biswas, 'Empire and Global Public Intellectuals', p. 124.
[46] Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', p. 82.
[47] Land, 'Shamanic Nietzsche', p. 208.
[48] Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', p. 83.

as the usage of the word has spiked, it's not surprising that one finds a myriad of different uses of the word. Recent banal and/or bureaucratic uses see the figure of the para-academic as another side of the Academy as such: a subsection of academics that are formed by privatization and, in turn, help run the university like a business with different departments – 'student skills advisers, educational developers', etc.[49]

On the other end of the spectrum, we see accounts that situate para-academics as 'individuals who work across and against the corporate agenda' of university privatization.[50] Others figure the para-academic as 'motivated [by] the ruined university's apparent betrayal of [the above described] desire for autonomy' and thus 'echoes earlier countercultures such as the free and anti-universities of the late 1960s.'[51] And there are, of course, still other accounts ranging from an #alt-academy project, to an incredibly interesting reading of the university through Fred Moten's concept of 'the undercommons', to a new, open-access publishing model, to a *handbook* for the para-academic – which, interestingly enough, contains an essay entitled 'A Lesson from Warwick' (itself sadly devoid of any mention of the CCRU).[52]

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[49] Bruce Macfarlane, 'The Morphing of Academic Practice: Unbundling and the Rise of the Para-academic', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65.1 (2011), 59–73 (p. 59). See also Neil Mulholland, 'Para-Academic', in *Re-Imagining the Art School: Pedagogy and Artistic Learning* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 61–71.

[50] Gary Wolfe, 'We Are All Para-Academics Now', in *The Para-Academic Handbook: A Toolkit for Making-Learning-Creating-Acting*, ed. by Alex Wardrop and Deborah Withers (Bristol: HammerOn Press, 2014), pp. 1–5 (p. 1).

[51] Mulholland, 'Para-Academic', p. 68.

[52] See '#alt-academy: a media commons project', <https://mediacommons.org/alt-ac/> [accessed 6 August 2023]; Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, 'The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses', *Social Text*, 79 (22.2) (2004), 101–15; Eileen Joy, 'PARTY! Or is It a Panel Discussion on Para-Academic Publishing, or BOTH?', <https://punctumbooks.com/blog/party-or-is-it-a-panel-discussion-on-para-academic-publishing-or-both/> [accessed 6 August 2023]; Paul Boshears, 'Open Access Publishing as a Para-Academic Proposition: Besides OA as Labour Relation', *tripleC*, 11.2 (2013), 614–19; Wardrop and

Indeed, in Gary Hall's 2016 book, *The Uberfication of the University*, an entire chapter is devoted to examining the academic who is living precariously amidst the rising tide of educational privatization and who seeks supplemental income and/or satisfaction by publishing with non-academic presses – for example, Zer0 Books. Nonetheless, for Hall, such attempts are potentially co-opted. With regard to Zer0 Books, he notes that the publishing house has an 'air of edginess and nonconformism about it' but nonetheless is not open-access and thus doesn't actually challenge 'academics and the way they live, work, and think (in terms of copyright, IP fixity, the finished object, etc.)'.[53] That being said, I would be remise if I didn't at least mention three very promising alternative academic structures: The New Centre for Research & Practice, The School of Materialist Research, and Foreign Objekt. While each may have their own flaws, they are nonetheless very promising and unique examples of philosophy outside the traditional academy.[54]

Contra traditional academic norms, I don't want to engage with any of the existent literature because, while interesting, it is ultimately of little help to us (save for Moten and Harney). I suggest we burn our dictionaries and come at the figure of the para-academic from a different angle. Following Said, we can conceive of the para-academic as one who, while ultimately in the employ of the Academy, is first-and-foremost an intellectual. She plays the games of academia and attends committee meetings, but this is all a disguise. She is actually one who traffics with the academic Outside and, while not assimilating it to

Withers (eds.), *The Para-Academic Handbook*; The Provisional University, 'A Lesson From Warwick', in *The Para-Academic Handbook*, pp. 81–85.

[53] Gary Hall, *The Uberfication of the University* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 42 n. 5.

[54] I give thanks to my anonymous reviewer for making me aware of my oversight (and *ignore*ance) of these 'institutions'.

traditional philosophy, smuggles peripheral thought – the odd tweet by whomever; a post on a now-defunct GeoCities weblog; etc. – under the door of traditional academia, presenting it in a new light in her class, publications, etc. Indeed, this is exactly the figure that Elizabeth Lewis Pardoe of the University of Venus describes; a figure that takes up the cry of the guerrilla intellectual.

For Pardoe, the para-academic ought to be understood, at least initially, etymologically. Starting from the prefix, she borrows from the French and draws upon *para-* as 'a combining form meaning "guard against"', further adding that the para-academic can be found 'camouflage[d], parachuting down into the back corners of campus quads, and skulking the perimeter, as [they] prepare to take the academy by storm'.[55] For her, the 'dual status' of being within the Academy while not being *part* of the Academy gives the para-academic the freedom to operate as they like, and support the invasion from the periphery while holding back the assimilation of radical thought.[56] The para-academic can 'think, theorize, and produce with rather than "about" (or – even worse – "for")' those not present in the walls of the Academy, all while operating unseen but all seeing.[57] She is one who has accepted her fate of being bound up with the Academy while retaining a modicum of freedom – that is to say, she operates within its walls and requires its affirmation but is *not* part of it. This formulation is fundamentally Saidian insofar as one aims not to please, but to synthesize; not to kowtow, but

[55] Elizabeth Lewis Pardoe, 'Para-Academics', <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/university-venus/para-academics> [accessed 31 March 2019]. She links to Dictionary.com as the source of her definition.
[56] See Pardoe, 'Para-Academics'.
[57] CCRU, 'Communiqué Two', p. (:)(:) [9]. Indeed, such creatures may be found, amongst other places, within Western University's Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism or McMaster's Cultural Studies and Critical Theory program. While such institutions *do not* escape the trappings outlined above, if one digs deep enough, asks the right questions, conducts the proper *séances*, etc., one will find para-academics.

to work parallel. To be truly trans-disciplinary is to be an amateur, cross-pollinating one's thought with whatever is devourable.

Alongside her, however, is the figure of the peripheral philosopher. Shunned by the Academy – or with no interest in it whatsoever – the peripheral philosopher cares not for securing grant money or placating an audience; her goal is Schopenhauer's 'unwelcome guest': truth. As a *bricoleur*, she hijacks ideas and repurposes them for different ends, taking what she needs and discarding the rest, separating the wheat from the chaff. Writing on Twitter or blogging pseudonymously, posting on image boards or obscure forums, she is able to do what traditional academics – at least today – cannot: she can play with dangerous ideas. We might take two examples and draw them out further. Following Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams' publication of '#Accelerate: Manifesto for Accelerationist Politics' in 2013, the pseudonymous, trans-continental collective of materialist feminists, Laboria Cuboniks, penned 'Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation' in 2015. The bodies which made up Laboria Cuboniks came from various disciplines and intellectual milieus, from different backgrounds and locatable along various vectors of precarity. Professor and poet, artist and activist, disciplinary distinctions mattered not, thus allowing the collective to take up several provocative stances that were heterodoxic amongst the humanities today, namely the insistence that rationality is neither masculine nor feminine but rather – as a concept itself – a 'suspension of gender', as well as not merely a rejection of orthodox Marxist views that alienation is bad – a monstrous plight of the worker – but a call for 'not less, but more alienation!'[58] Despite the pseudonymous and online publication of 'Xenofeminism', the ideas found within the text have been taken up by 'serious' scholars, both critically and supportively,

[58] Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics for Alienation* (London: Verso, 2018), pp. 21, 15.

while the text itself has found its way onto various syllabi of respected academics at venerated institutions.

Even more obscure, and on the further fringes of the remains of the Internet, another pseudonymous figure – a computer-coder (and part-time Twitter theorist) n1x – wrote an even more radical 'manifesto', taking the ideas within '#Accelerate' and 'Xenofeminism' still further, producing 'Gender Acceleration: A Black Paper' (2018). Drawing from widely disparate sources ranging from the history of computer science to cyber feminism to Jewish mysticism, a variety of theses come to the fore. While we do not need to examine them in detail – that has been done elsewhere – we might simply note some of the more outlandish claims that have gained the essay traction not merely amongst academics but, in an interesting turn, as a foil for the most banal forms of conservatism.[59] Within the text, n1x draws a parallel between Unix as an operating system, the number 0, and a vulva; an incredibly interesting argument that links passing the Turing Test to passing as a trans person (an AI passing the former and a trans person passing in society are both figured as radically Other with passing being necessary for survival); and the position that the progression of techno-capital will render the concept of gender obsolete.[60]

Regardless of the position one takes with respect to the aforementioned texts, they could not have been authored – much less published – in traditional academic environments (even if Verso

[59] For a discussion of Accelerationism and Xenofeminism, see Heft, 'Xenofeminism', pp. 128–136. For a short exegesis on the Gender Acceleration Black Paper, see Peter Heft, 'On Gender Acceleration and Its Critics', <https://guerrillaontologies.com/2018/11/on-gender-acceleration-and-its-critics/> [accessed 7 October 2023]; for its usage as a foil for bland conservatism, see Mary Harrington, 'The Fight Against Erasing Women', <https://americanmind.org/features/the-fight-against-erasing-women/> [accessed 7 October 2023].

[60] n1x, 'Gender Acceleration: A Black Paper', <https://vastabrupt.com/2018/10/31/gender-acceleration/> [accessed 7 October 2023].

eventually printed a copy of 'Xenofeminism' – three years too late, I might add). Indeed, the occulted and obscured generation of these texts occurred entirely on the periphery where the ideas were originally thrashed out. Only later, after being run through the shredder labeled 'Twitter', did the ideas found therein percolate into mainstream academic thought, being smuggled into term papers by intrepid graduate students and courses by eccentric professors.

At the end of the day, it is the thought and work of peripheral philosophers, among many other things, that keeps philosophy not merely relevant but *interesting*. These thinkers are, fundamentally, the Other for whom we ought not speak for – such a task is a fool's errand anyway – but argue alongside and feature in our work. Ideas birthed *outside* the Academy are the true existential threat to the status quo of a rigid, calcified academia. As philosophers, professional or not, we need thinkers on the periphery (although they certainly don't need us). All of us as philosophers – or, perhaps more significantly, free agents worried about the fate of our world (or, as Said would put it, as 'thinking and concerned member[s] of a society' interacting with other 'citizens as well as other societies') – must don the fatigues of the para-academic and engage with the periphery. *Not* to assimilate it, but to affirm it.[61]

To return to the question set forth out at outset – 'if the conceit of liberal academia is true (namely that texts are always in need of disambiguation), then why privilege one group's ideas over another's?' – and, in turn, to provide an answer, we ought to say that there *is no intrinsic reason* to prefer institutional, accepted, and signed and sealed interpretations over those of faceless commentors. If anything, we ought to be *more skeptical* of the former than the latter. Ultimately, by affirming the status of the peripheral philosophical Other as a legitimate thinker in their own right – something they hardly need but we, in order

[61] Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', pp. 82–83.

to stay relevant, desperately do – by taking seriously the contributions made by those pseudonymous bloggers and anonymous posters in cluttered comments sections, working with, and defending those, who are Outside, and, in the final estimation, marshalling such thought *against* conservative and traditional institutional norms, a new form of academia has the possibility to arise.[62]

[62] An editorialized and highly embryonic form of this argument appeared on *The Mantle*. See Peter Heft, 'On Peripheral Philosophy' <https://web.archive.org/web/20221204061934/https:/themantle.com/philosophy/peripheral-philosophy> [accessed 5 March 2019]. This paper was more fully developed for and at Binghamton University's 2019 graduate student conference.

Ahh, Umm, Ohh: The Work of Philosophy

CHRIS FISHER

Summary: This article expresses a wariness towards academic critiques of academia. Wariness because such critiques so often pass smoothly from confession and self-flagellation to righteousness. What hope does academic context, any context, have in the face of the superiority of the philosophical conceit which decides to critique it? Philosophy critiques its context and presupposes itself to do so, returning us to the classroom. Those already outside the classroom are barely in need of an academic's critique of academia. The closed circle robs us of a critique that might end up elsewhere. This article does not break the circle, it reflects how closed it is. Reflection, that classic tonic, goes today by the words: Ahh, Umm, Ohh.

We were stood by the bar. So, what do you do? I study philosophy. Ahh. A short pause. And what do you do with that? Umm. A longer pause. My friend interjects: we're researching the different conceptions of intuition in the A and B versions of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Ohh. We all move back to the table.

Later, to my friend I say: thanks for taking that question, it's a bit awkward when people ask what we do. Yeah, it mostly goes like that. They ask what it's for *here*, but back home philosophy is part of the culture, so they don't need to ask. Sometimes they've even heard of Kant. Most people don't understand philosophy, I finish.

What would it take for those *ahhs*, *umms*, *ohhs* to be replaced by understanding? More learning, more openness, more respect, like *we* have? What if the only failure of understanding here was on the part of the philosophers, who cannot hear in that *ahh* and *umm* the death knell of their own superiority, a highchair mistaken for a throne.

How many times have philosophers taken to the *umm* and the *ahh* when someone announces they do administration? But from that *umm* and *ahh*, they put themselves above. Because philosophy is not a job among other jobs, what we do cannot be exchanged in a greeting. What we do is not like administration, hairdressing, or sports coaching. Yet, you draw a pension, eat, watch TV; you live like the rest of us administrators! Yes, but this is incidental, philosophy is more. If it stoops to communicate this 'more' to those who 'need to ask', the result is further *ahh umm ohhs*. With these sounds the throne turns back into a highchair. Philosophy: it is different because it studies the highest, most fundamental things but cannot translate the pursuit of the good life into any particular life. The study of *being* turns out to be good for *nothing*. Or good only for those whose bills it pays.

♦

There is something suspect about inviting reflections and critiques on academic philosophy from an academic journal ran out of a philosophy department. The response invites self-contradiction – a well-oiled argument against well-oiled arguments – readily supposing what is under critique. But the suspicion lies not in this contradiction – after all, *where there is contradiction there is life* – but the displacement that lies at its heart. For clearly the critique of academic philosophy only has steam if critique and philosophy do. If the problem is not forced to address these terms, then the results will be paltry. Because philosophy, uniquely, is practically identical with the critique of philosophy, the viability of critique is crucial to it. Just as it is crucial to any *critique* of academic philosophy.

Yet, it is that viability which is today in doubt. Critique is pervasive, it has become a keyword not just for philosophy or academia but for the institutions of Western society. Critique is restorative, good practice:

problems have been identified, committees assembled, citizens engaged. Critique becomes equivalent to feedback. No wonder, then, there's been mutterings that critique itself has run out of steam. That it can serve to mask a complicity with the object under critique as much as to expose it should warn philosophy that critique is not unambiguously secure. Yet, if critique is central, identical even, to philosophy, its plight will affect philosophy. To acknowledge this, however, philosophy would have to register a historical situation which has put one of its prized possessions in doubt. It could not assume itself or its critique were secure and impervious to history. It would have to relate its own possibility to history. Whether philosophy can register this historical situation requires questioning it once more. Precisely this question can illuminate our current concern, for the way a philosophy construes its relation to history will dictate how it understands the nature of academic context.

You have been asked to address academia and now you want to critique philosophy!? This is not the question – and is there anything more safely overdone than philosophy's critique of philosophy?

The justification for this need to examine philosophy is found in the terms of the problem itself: philosophical thinking and its context. It is impossible to address the (academic) context of philosophical thinking without addressing the thinking itself. Context is a relative term. It is relative to what is primary – in this case, thinking. Any intention to focus solely on context is thus contradicted by the meaning of the term 'context', which is subordinated to what it *contextualises*. One can examine the contexts of Plato's thought: the Peloponnese Wars, prior philosophical endeavors, the mercantilism of the Aegean, etc. Or one can examine the mercantilism of the Aegean itself. Named as a context, the problem forces one back to the nature of the philosophical thinking contextualised.

The object under critique – academic philosophy – is not simply given but emerges from a philosophical conception of what context and philosophy are. How one construes the relation of philosophy and history or thought and existence will govern what is made of philosophy's academic context. The true critique of 'academic context' thus passes to the philosophical conception which constructs this object.

So, a question addressed to contexts evolves to become the critique of philosophy and what its various flavours think about context? Is there anything more conventional than this very move!

Directed to a specific context, philosophy will likely have little to say. Indeed, it is striking how indifferent philosophy has been to context – including its own. How strange an extended examination of Aegean mercantilism would appear in any philosophical book on Plato. Philosophy is encountered contextless. Or at best, its context is solely the history of philosophy – one places oneself in the literature, the history of a problem or concept but not in a time, a place, a feeling, a need. The obligation of this call for papers to speak about context, indeed its own context, sounds peculiar and taxing to those practiced at handling the imperious philosophical ideal.[1] The social or historical existence of philosophy – 'context' – is usually left to others. What can philosophy say about something which is not an idea, a concept? What can philosophy say about the institution of the academy?

The answer, of course, is a lot. Philosophers are as primed to complain about their workplace as any other.

Critiques of academia are multiple and ready-to-hand: balkanisation of departments, the evermore quantitative assessments, measurements by a narrow 'impact' and their attachment to funding, the

[1] The call for papers can be found at https://plijournal.com/call-for-papers/call-for-papers-for-vol-35/ [accessed 18 February 2024].

persistence of class, race, and gender oppressions in both module content and their teachers, the dominance of a particular lexicon and style. The list goes on, and it would not be difficult to find academics who agree that some, if not all, of these problems are problems. But are these problems anything specific to academic philosophy, or are they the problems of academia in general? The catalogue of errors for academic philosophy looks a lot like the same catalogue for academia as a whole. As such, the way is cleared for philosophers to pass off the critique of academia as the critique of academic philosophy, laundering their complicity in the process. Though concerning, we might conclude that the problems highlighted are not more significant for philosophers than any other academics, and thus philosophers, no more responsible.

Apprehending the philosophers means addressing the relation between philosophical thinking and its (academic) context, yet this is harder than it appears. We can begin and philosophically criticise the academic context in some way or other. But this acts as mere shadow play and illustration for whatever philosophical conception is brought to bear. In this case, philosophy is presupposed. Alternatively, we might investigate the context, the situation faced by academics today, and undertake a workers' inquiry. This approach might apply to academic philosophy, but it need not be anything philosophical. In this case, philosophy is displaced. Every critique appears doomed: either we step outside philosophy, in which case our currency isn't recognised by philosophers and we're side-lined; or our critique remains recognisably philosophical, in which case we prejudge in philosophy's favour and join the tradition. These are the rules of the game.

If one cannot make a way through these difficulties, we might at least discover their source. For this, we need to look no further than the formulation of the call for papers itself: what happens when philosophical thinking becomes academic. Philosophy is prior to the history it undergoes. This history is separable and delimited as 'context'.

The meaning of this context is measured against the given philosophy. The order in which the elements come together, mediated by the category of becoming, ensures philosophical thinking remains impervious to the academic context which appears to be the focus. By this construction of the problem, the possible answers to the relation of academic context and philosophy are constrained in advance. This construction is not accidental. It originates from a widespread conception of philosophical thinking's relationship to history: the subordination of history, living existence – in this case, philosophy's own – to philosophical thinking follows from the idea of that thinking as contextless rational thought and truth as ahistorical.

Since Plato, philosophy could no longer ignore 'context' and call everything water. Instead, it began to account for context, inaugurating the great oppositions of Western metaphysics. Yet, by deferring the investigation of a particular context to the general relation of thought and context, or thought and being, philosophy prejudices the investigation in favour of generality, of thought and thus of itself. And the particular slips away. For all the nuance, philosophy has nevertheless invariably resolved the relation between thought and its history by either reducing history to nothing, to transient waste, or by showing it to already be thought and thus under the universal. Take Hegel, a philosopher who more than most asserted the claim of context, of transient history, on thought, and mobilised it against a static rationalist ontology. Yet, the history that matters and through which philosophy can understand its relation to the world is itself, ultimately, philosophy (otherwise it would not be legible). Only the historical context that is suffused with the Idea and thus commensurate with philosophy is history proper. Without the Idea, history for Hegel is barren, negligible, barely even history. It was not just for Africa that Hegel reserved this indignity but for nearly all generations of human life. The turn to history thus becomes, at a late date in the history of

philosophy, a new way to animate the opposition between philosophical thought and the historical existence it thinks from.

Taking an alternative route, a group of Anglo-America philosophers drive towards the Cambridge School of intellectual history and their long-running book series *Ideas in Context*. In a founding publication, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre defended the need for context to comprehend the fullness of a given philosophy and, crucially, to mediate between different philosophical conceptions. The occasion for this was to break the logical absolutism of Quine. Yet, what passed under the heading 'context' turns out, just as in Hegel, to be philosophy under a different name. Unsurprisingly, their contribution is to emphasise the role of the history of philosophy; the context that matters is solely intellectual. The detour to context, to break a static anti-genetic ontology, is again made to return to philosophy.

A thought for context is a well-worn path for philosophy. Down it, philosophies have critiqued their lineage without removing themselves from it. This is why suspicion should ring when philosophy decides to investigate contexts; for the context is invariably philosophy's own. Thus, there are as many interpretations of the academy as there are academic flavours to its philosophy: a Hegelian may stress the objectification of reason, a Nietzschean its paralysing of the art of life and – at the outer reaches of what would like to admit itself as philosophy – a Foucauldian might stress it as manifestation of biopower. Each gets out what they put in. Assessing what they say about the academy is no different from assessing what they say about themselves. The context is discardable, a mere occasion for the exercise, an illustration. Thus, we can all return to our dorms. Determining what happens when philosophy becomes academic requires nothing more than deducing this from a given general conception of philosophical thinking and context.

This is the incipient hollowness of philosophy – this critique included. When it appears forced to address something other than itself, it returns to itself. This disregard for historical and social content is justified because the universal, ahistorical determinations are, at some distant point, supposed to deliver up real concrete insights. Yet, these insights seem irrevocably deferred, the study of Being never arrives at beings but nevertheless grounds them. Dissatisfaction at this turns our attention to other academic disciplines, ones that seem to deal more directly with the living. And yet, such is philosophy's conceit, this discontent is barely registered. After all, the study of Being is impervious to the discontent of a few beings. Is this all that is left? A philosophy resigned to speaking about all time but no time in particular? A hollow generalism that leaves the specifics, the direct contexts in which we live, to historians, sociologists, economists – to the specialists?

No, philosophy must be taken past its word. Those words, at every step, say more than they intend. With attunement, the contexts which philosophy has repeatedly subsumed before its unlimited generality, ring out. There is not a single thought of philosophy which has not been made out of a history and which is thereby recoverable within it. For every shape the philosophical idea assumes so too does its nagging shadow. Whether by the name haecceity, the ontic, particularity, the Real, *Ding an sich*, contingency, appearance – the universal thought determinations must renegotiate the relation to their other, by peace or by conquest. Through a secret clause, the negotiation has so far favoured philosophy; for contexts, unlike philosophy, do not speak. The question of the relation between the two is dealt with in general, and qualitative particularity converted into an instance of universality – a determinate specification – and thus thought. Yet, at every point the meaning of this thought is dependent on real existence down to its very core. Without a non-thought which thought thinks, thinking itself would not be comprehensible. We could not apprehend the meaning of a

transcendental subject if we did not already know living human subjects; we could not explicate numbers if we did not have fruit to count. This is the aporia at the core of the philosophical project of the West. Without ephemera, without our living contact with things, without the real contexts out of which the need for philosophy grows, the very move to *abstract from* or determine first principles is meaningless. The more philosophy forgets what allows it to make sense in favour of its self-sufficient omnipotence, its tautological truth, the more meaningless it becomes. It declares victory just where it most hopelessly loses.

Philosophy today looks exhausted, its concerns antiquated. Fortunately, some of us are not only antiquaries. Our hobbyist concern extends to the context which philosophy wished away but could not do without. The sound of context vibrates beneath the history of philosophy because no thought is truly beyond history, is contextless. Admitting this, philosophy can transform itself into the voice of these sounds. Only then can philosophical meaning endure.

For philosophy, few of these sounds have been as nearby as the academy. Kierkegaard quipped that academics only remember they are part of the world when they draw their paycheck every month. Among them, philosophers alone have made forgetting and effacing the mundane world a fundamental premise. It is the comedy of philosophy to have had as few thoughts about that paycheck as about the fact that we need food to survive. Philosophers have excelled at forgetting themselves as academics, even though at the foundation of the Western tradition stands the academy and Plato. To other academicians, then, it may appear somewhat sheepish for philosophy, after two-and-a-half millennia, to now investigate its academic context. One can imagine this investigation – like a government inquiry – recognising, with some difficulty, that there are indeed many issues with the academy but none particular to philosophy.

Yet, philosophy cannot so easily make its association with the academy a coincidence. Philosophical thinking did not *become* academic. There has scarcely been a philosophical thought outside the academy for two centuries. Even those philosophers who so energetically loathed academia (but also common life) – Kierkegaard, Nietzsche – now find their legacy protected and work upon by legions of academics. Non-academic philosophers are notable in their rarity. Patronised by wealthy protectors or commercial ventures, they flourished singularly around the emergent capitalism of the early modern period. The relative academic independence of Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau, Hume was bookended by the medieval and modern universities. The history of philosophy is chiefly the work of those in codified, secluded institutions: the academy and lyceum, the monastic orders of the scholastics, medieval universities, the modern research institutes. There is scarcely a single philosopher since 1800 whose work has not been nourished by prolonged academic existence. For the question of what academic context does for philosophy it must first be recognised that there is barely another context to speak of. Philosophers, to think about academic context, need not apply their research but begin to recall more than their pay check.

Yet, what better place is there to bracket existence and search for the ideal than an institution in which the context of society, normal affairs, are – as far as possible – suspended? The idea of academia is something independent of society and its common sense, an allotted space for 'free thinking', free from social and political imperatives. The affinity with philosophy should be immediately obvious. The idea of the academy repeats philosophy's very idea. The same distance that philosophy has taken theoretically from historical life, from contexts, academia has taken practically. Hence, the complaints against academia and philosophy converge: locked away in an ivory tower,

their pursuits incomprehensible, their concerns eternal and indifferent, enclosed in pretense and jargon and so on.

Philosophy and academia don't just meet coincidentally, they go together out of a shared aloofness towards historical life, towards society. Perhaps, philosophy didn't just find a convenient home in the academy. Perhaps, this very context, this experience, shaped philosophy into contextless rational pursuit, like a good guest.

Clearly without the academy – this codified space of apparently disinterested research – not even the intention of philosophy to determine the true nature of thought and being would have survived. This meagre insight qualifies every pretense to academic or philosophical freedom. After all, it was in experiencing the death of Socrates at the hands of political power that Plato sought to remove philosophical reflection from the polis, from the space where it had political consequences, and to found his academy beyond the city walls. Philosophy could continue as long as it had no discernable effect. That was the price of its freedom, and of the academy's. If philosophy interprets this refuge as freely chosen and forgets its price, this only serves social power better by effacing it. This is the paradox of philosophy's context: academia is both a sanctuary and a prison. Only through philosophy's separated context is its relative freedom guaranteed.

If a philosopher left the academy today to pursue philosophy, they would become directly dependent on the economy for an income, for survival, and their ideas must turn a profit, becoming all the worse for it. Undoubtably, it wouldn't be long before their philosophy – like the School of Life's – became the selling of notepads and keyrings. The increasing marketisation of academia – the breeching of its state-backed autonomy – must be depicted against this background. That marketisation led to a curiously nostalgic impetus in the last major phase of Britain's student-university conflict in 2010. There, a major slogan,

indeed the name of several organising groups, was Defend Education. The left found itself in the highly comical position of having to now defend an institution – namely the university – which it had repeatedly and rightly decried as a conservative and elitist bulwark. The cause of this is easy to discern. In the course of the 20th century, there's been a broad left-wing transformation – the right would say 'infiltration' – of the academy. After the world-historical defeats of the organised left in the early 20th century, the university became its new home. Leaders of the left, who once headed mass organisations, now – at least in Europe and North America – live an academic life, with inconsistent and wary forays into activism. This process is intertwined with the massive expansion of university attendance since WW2. For all the nostalgia for a more potent past, the left – as much as we can still speak of one – would be in a much worse position if there was not the sanctuary of the universities sustain them. Yet, that sanctuary is built on a ruin. It is a ruin. Philosophy shares in exactly this. The poison for both is to forget this in the rearguard defense of a limited and highly questionable freedom. True freedom would be to break out of the sanctuary once again, or simply no longer to need it.

Academia duplicates the philosophical ideal of a suspended reality, of unconditioned free thinking. An ideal that needs to bracket common sense, as Husserl had it, could do no better than an institution in which common life was bracketed. For this reason, philosophy has more than just a passing interest in the academy. As the historic expression of philosophy, academia makes visible philosophy's concrete limitations. For philosophy can no more determine the unconditional nature of all existence for all time than the academy can truly suspend reality. For both, reality has a way of creeping back in. Only by recognising the dependency of academia's autonomy on the state, on the society it is autonomous *from*, does the critique of academia have legs. It gains power by naming power, not by imagining itself safely beyond it.

Similarly philosophy. Only by recognising the dependency of the philosophical idea, the contingency of every philosophical project on what is disreputably derided as 'context', ephemera, can philosophy's true and only power be found.

Philosophy thus becomes the unceremonious 'philosophical thinking and context' without resolving itself into either element. When this relation is admitted as something other than subsumption or synthesis or determination, then the element of philosophical thought is qualitatively transformed. The storehouse of philosophical ideals which once stood above history becomes available as a critical corpus to challenge their own conditionality, but this conditionality is no longer something simply thought, it is the traces of something real, society. The unconditional, contextless aspirations of philosophy become critical resistance to this conditional context, this existence right here. The idea of transcendence survives as hope in the concrete possibility that society can be transformed. Returned to its context, philosophy can explicate how academia, which needed to suspend the relation of its members to common reality so they could 'think freely', implicitly denounces a reality for which 'free thinking' needs such an extreme protection. Awareness of this carries over into philosophy's own 'free thinking', which now appears fragile, revocable. Social and political power comes into view, overpowering all concern for philosophy's own absolute. Only by admitting the unchosen determination of philosophy by its contexts – whether academia or not – can this context be challenged. This admission transforms philosophy, pulling it from eternity and into now. This unavoidable participation in the now permits philosophy to finally replace its *ahhs*, *umms*, *ohhs* with understanding – not by way of a universal or ever-present ideal but by way of a shared context and historical situation we want to break out of. By way of that pay cheque we share. Philosophy's language of beyond can help us break out of this context, but only by acknowledging that it is not yet broken out.

What Do Philosophers Do?

MATTHEW C. ALTMAN

Summary: With some universities closing departments and eliminating the major, philosophers are expected to explain and justify what they do. Does philosophy develop transferable skills that are useful in other professions, train the public to think more critically, help individuals to live more meaningful lives, or lead humanity in progress toward the truth (or all of the above)? Which of these aims is valued often depends on the audience – be they students, administrators, or other philosophers – yet when philosophers try to hold these aims simultaneously, they inevitably come into conflict, which has led to an identity crisis in the profession. In this paper, I argue that academic philosophers should focus their efforts on promoting what Bertrand Russell calls 'the goods of the mind'. Philosophers should acknowledge students' need to live more meaningful, distinctively human lives by asking big questions about personal identity, ethics, and justice. By pursuing this aim above the others, philosophers will incidentally also help students to become better workers, better democratic citizens, and better philosophers.

In the face of unprecedented challenges to higher education and the humanities, it is time for philosophers to undertake a rededication of purpose. In this paper, I turn the philosopher's gaze back on academic philosophy itself and raise questions about the profession: What is it we think we are doing? What are we actually doing? What are our institutions telling us to do? And what are we having our students do? I conclude that we are in a schizophrenic profession. We tell different stories about what we do, to ourselves and to others, which leads to a kind of confusion about our own identity. Ultimately, professional philosophers are going to have to sort this out so we can defend our

place in the academy and avoid becoming an anachronism – a stranger in our own land.

I. The state of philosophy

These are tough times for philosophy. The raw number of philosophy majors in the United States has increased over the past fifty years, but it hasn't kept up with overall growth in college enrollment. As a percentage of undergraduate degrees awarded in the US, the total number of philosophy degrees has dropped by more than 40 percent.[1] This raises a red flag for college administrators. Although budgetary constraints threaten funding for other departments too, philosophy finds itself in a unique position. Its supposedly esoteric subject matter and its focus on universal questions seem irrelevant to students' career-focused ambitions, and this raises the question of whether philosophy has *any* place in today's higher education. Over the last few years, philosophy has been threatened or eliminated at a number of schools in the US, including Fresno Pacific University, Ithaca College, Marymount University, St. Cloud State University, the State University of New York at Potsdam, Newman University – and the list goes on.[2] For defenders of the liberal arts, this transforms the university, whose traditional role

[1] In the US, 8,149 bachelor's degrees in philosophy and religion were conferred in 1970–1971, which amounts to about 0.97 percent of the total number of bachelor's degrees that year (839,730). In 2020–2021, the number of degrees in philosophy and religion increased by about 47 percent (to 11,988), but this only amounts to about 0.58 percent of the total (2,066,445). See US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_322.10.asp> [accessed 30 December 2023].

[2] For a current list of programs that are being cut or under threat of being cut, see Daily Nous, 'Cuts and Threats to Philosophy Programs – Category' <https://dailynous.com/category/cuts-and-threats-to-philosophy-programs/> [accessed 30 December 2023].

has been to educate the whole person, into something more like a trade school.

With undergraduate philosophy programs being squeezed, the effects are also felt upstream. The supply of philosophy PhDs is greater than the demand for philosophy professors. Over a ten-year period, from 2012–2021, there were on average 499 new philosophy PhDs each year across the US and Canada. During that time, an average of 190 tenure-track or similar (non-fixed-term) positions were advertised each year. So, there were enough tenure-track positions in philosophy for about 38 percent of the doctorates earned.[3] Of course, PhDs can apply for tenure-track jobs the following year – but then that creates a backlog of candidates for the same number of jobs. Across several studies, the data are consistent: no more than 40 percent of philosophy PhDs obtain tenure-track or similar positions.[4] And remember, these people are the cream of the crop: they were good enough to get into graduate school and good enough to complete the work to earn their PhDs. Yet fewer than half of them end up with what we would call stable employment in the field for which they trained. That's one of the reasons why, when a philosophy major expresses interest in getting a PhD, one of their professors has to give them 'the talk': 'You should only go to graduate school in philosophy if you can't imagine yourself doing anything else.'

II. The Hegelian model: Philosophical progress

Think for a moment about why you became a philosopher, or, if you're still in school, why you're becoming a philosopher. At some point in your undergraduate career, when you decided to declare the major and

[3] APA Committee on Non-Academic Careers, 'The Numbers Game', 30 June 2023 <https://www.apaonline.org/members/group_content_view.asp?group=110435&id=918649> [accessed 30 December 2023].
[4] APA, 'Numbers Game'.

pursue graduate work, someone (maybe a parent) had to have asked you why: 'Why do you want to be a philosopher?' I bet that almost none of you said that you wanted to be a teacher. After all, teachers get education degrees, and philosophy programs seldom provide much pedagogical training. Most graduate programs give you a series of courses followed by a dissertation so that you can learn philosophy and how to think philosophically. If you're interested in philosophy, you're probably trying to answer 'big questions'.

A cursory glance at the program for any meeting of the American Philosophical Association shows that most papers are or at least begin by critiquing other people's positions before defending their own, more promising lines of thinking. This notion of more and less 'promising' positions implies that there are better and worse answers to philosophical questions, and thus that there is progress in philosophy. This is something that most non-philosophers would question, and indeed, it is a common lament from students: 'Philosophers have been debating subject *x* for centuries and they haven't gotten anywhere! They're arguing in circles.' It's a complaint as old as Socrates: he won't stake out a position; he keeps shifting around without getting anywhere.[5] But the presumption behind making philosophical arguments is that there are better and worse reasons for some positions over others and that good objections and counterexamples demand either a convincing response, revisions to the theory, or abandoning the position entirely.

The latter response – abandoning one's position in response to a cogent objection – is very rare. Sam Harris describes the situation well: 'The virtues of rational discourse are everywhere espoused, and yet witnessing someone relinquish a cherished opinion in real time is about

[5] Plato, *Euthyphro*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 169–85 (p. 180/11b–e).

as common as seeing a supernova explode overhead.'[6] This reluctance may be attributed to the fact that we are only human and are thus flawed thinkers, driven by 'motivated reasoning' and 'self-deception', as Harris claims. The authorities dismissed Galileo's heliocentric theory of the universe at first too – perhaps the ultimate example of 'motivated reasoning' by the Catholic Church. But the right view eventually prevailed. Similarly, philosophers continue to espouse 'the virtues of rational discourse' because we believe implicitly that the better argument will (eventually) win out. There may be no proof that one view is right, but science can't achieve that either. As with scientific hypotheses, we test a philosophical theory by trying to falsify it – with reasons rather than empirical evidence, of course – and if it withstands repeated scrutiny, it is better than alternative theories that collapse under the pressure.

I call this the Hegelian view of philosophy. G. W. F. Hegel says that, as rational beings, we participate in *Geist* (usually translated as 'spirit' or 'mind'), which means that our beliefs and actions are the result of judgments we make. When we try to make sense of things, we're making truth claims, and we can get things right or wrong. Unlike nature, which only has causes and explanations, we have reasons and justifications. And that process of reason-giving involves more than just us. One can only justify one's beliefs and actions to other people. Reason-giving depends on having a community of thinkers.

As rational beings, we attempt to explain ourselves, and as a whole we gradually understand ourselves better over time. Hegel conceives of history as a series of conflicts by which the progress of ideas is achieved through a dialectical process. Repeatedly, one way of life, which embodies certain ideas, encounters its own limitations and faces a crisis,

[6] Sam Harris, 'The Marionette's Lament: A Response to Daniel Dennett', 12 February 2014 <https://www.samharris.org/blog/the-marionettes-lament> [accessed 30 December 2023].

after which it is forced to incorporate some elements of opposing ideas. The clash of ideas often results in violent conflicts: Hegel calls history a 'slaughter-bench, upon which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals were sacrificed'.[7] Over time, *Geist* comes to a fuller awareness of what it is doing, and the philosopher comes to recognize a logic in these successive dissolutions. Understanding this historical movement is what Hegel refers to as the science of pure reason: the active pursuit of truth by working through all the partial, distorted engagements between self and world.

Hegel's philosophy is more complex than this, of course, and academic philosophy is simpler than the Hegelian dialectic. Philosophical disagreements hardly resemble the Battle of Salamis. I'm using Hegel's name here because of his claims that history is the progress of ideas, that philosophical thinking has a privileged place in understanding these ideas, and that reason-giving happens in a community of thinkers, when conflicting ideas come into contact with one another. What I call the Hegelian view of philosophy is committed to all these things.

The whole value of academic freedom is predicated on the assumption that there can be progress in the academic disciplines, including philosophy. John J. DeGioia, president of Georgetown University, explains this by distinguishing the value of free speech generally from the value of academic freedom specifically. He says that people's right to free expression in general is necessary for social progress, but it is not sufficient. That is, if people are not allowed to speak their minds and challenge established ideas, we will not be able to progress in our beliefs, but being able to speak freely doesn't mean that we *will* progress, because what people say may be wrong.

[7] G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to 'The Philosophy of History'*, trans. by Leo Rauch (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett), p. 24.

Academic freedom is different. While non-academics express mere opinions, DeGioia says that

> one of the things society looks to the university for is for authoritative knowledge […] in their discipline. We call that authoritative knowledge truth. The truth is always provisional. Our whole purpose and being is to continue to interrogate what we consider to be the truth. And we're constantly revising and making new insights and new inroads and reinterpreting what we thought we had as received wisdom. That's the work of universities. […] We're always in progress, always trying to pursue further, push back the boundaries of knowledge.[8]

Since academics are leading society's collective pursuit of truth, they should be allowed to go wherever that pursuit takes them. Academic freedom is thus not only necessary but also sufficient for intellectual progress.

Given their characteristic skepticism, often expressed as cynicism, philosophers like Harris may question such grandiose claims. However, I contend that we are committed to this idea, either consciously or unconsciously. Professional philosophers regularly consider other philosophers' arguments, respond to them in print and at conferences, and field challenges to and questions about their positions. All this activity is based on the assumption that philosophy can arrive at better positions through a dialectical process (broadly construed) of reason-giving by which we justify our 'authoritative' claims to the truth.

III. The Deweyan model: Democratic citizenship

A second conception of what philosophers do is typified by the work of John Dewey, and it grows out of his broader theoretical commitments.

[8] John J. DeGioia, 'The Distinction between Free Speech and Academic Freedom', American Council on Education, 22 October 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8e5aGa7jys> [accessed 30 December 2023].

Like Hegel, for whom the achievement of Absolute Knowing demonstrates the fundamental unity of subject and substance, Dewey rejects the epistemological distinction between knower and known, what he calls the 'spectator theory of knowledge'. On that view, knowledge is understood as a subject's apprehension of an independent object: one knows something when one's thinking conforms to a fixed thing that is antecedent to human thinking. As a pragmatist or 'experimentalist' (his preferred term), Dewey instead commits himself to what we now call functional psychology. Our mental life is defined by our relationship with the place we inhabit, how we shape and are shaped by our natural environment and cultural circumstances. We are not mere observers of the world. We are participants within it.

Although Dewey rejects Hegel's idealism, he adopts the Hegelian notion that philosophers reflect the cultural tendencies of their times. Philosophers seem to address grand ideas such as 'Truth' and 'Reality', but in fact, Dewey says, they are confronting a singular problem with many facets – the clash of past and present:

> When it is acknowledged that under disguise of dealing with ultimate reality, philosophy has been occupied with precious values embedded in social traditions, that it has sprung from a conflict of inherited institutions with incompatible contemporary tendencies, it will be seen that the task of future philosophy is to clarify men's ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their day.[9]

Dewey thought that contemporary philosophers should relinquish the 'disguise' and deal directly with these conflicts so that we can make progress on important social issues. On his view, philosophy's subject

[9] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, 15 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–1983), XII (1982), pp. 77–201 (p. 94).

matter is society itself, with philosophy being 'a method of moral and political diagnosis and prognosis'.[10]

Philosophy in this sense is a shared social project. Dewey rejects the idea that society merely coordinates conflicting private interests. Rather, a democracy is an ethical community to which each member makes their own contribution. Individuals are constituted in relation to others, and through the political process, they develop a unity of purpose.[11] This is not a smooth process. Established traditions and progressive ambitions inevitably conflict. Philosophers do not dictate how to move forward, nor do they bring truths to the masses. Instead, they reflect on the conflicts we face and clarify them for individuals who understand them implicitly, but only implicitly, by means of their personal experience.

Dewey's faith in the ability of everyday people to make sense of their own lived situation is reflected in his educational philosophy. The purpose of education, particularly early education, is not to indoctrinate students in the content of academic subjects but to provide them with the tools to engage their changing environment in new and creative ways. They become capable of participating in democratic society by helping to develop better and more workable social practices, more ethical relationships, and more effective political institutions. The goal is not to achieve theoretical certainty but to adopt provisional solutions to real-world problems.

Dewey's conception of philosophy as a social practice is contrary to the idea that philosophy should be restricted to those who enroll in

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[10] John Dewey, 'The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy', in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, 15 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–1983), IV (1977), pp. 3–14 (p. 13).

[11] John Dewey, 'The Ethics of Democracy', in *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882–1898*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, 5 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969–1975), I (1969), pp. 227–50.

universities. The recent interest in public philosophy thus reflects a Deweyan idea. Public philosophy uses non-traditional means (for example, a podcast rather than a standard academic paper) to engage people outside of the classroom and without formal philosophical training, and to get them to think more deeply and critically than they otherwise would about a philosophical issue – typically, though not necessarily, an ethical or political issue. Philosophy can invite laypeople to challenge the status quo, to think more critically about commonly accepted beliefs (including their own), to value diversity of opinion, and to engage others in rational dialogue, all of which support democratic self-governance.

IV. The practical model: Transferable skills

In the United States, students seldom learn philosophy in high school, so philosophy departments have to generate interest among students who are often taught that college is job preparation and who have other, more conventional ambitions than becoming college professors. First-generation students who must work to make ends meet and whose parents go into debt to send them to college are not swayed by idealistic talk about 'authoritative knowledge' or 'democratic citizenship'. To meet students where they are, many programs tout philosophy's usefulness in developing so-called 'transferable skills'. This is a practical justification of philosophy: what philosophers do is train students to be successful in non-philosophical occupations.

The American Philosophical Association's pamphlet *Philosophy: A Brief Guide for Undergraduates* (1981, revised 2017) lists what it calls 'the uses of philosophy'. It includes 'general problem solving' and 'communication skills', the ability to argue and write well (which it broadly characterizes as 'the ability to be convincing'), and the capacity

to engage in systematic 'research and analysis', among other things.[12] Following the APA's lead, philosophy department websites around the country have pages devoted to the 'professional skills' that are developed through the study of philosophy, and many reproduce charts showing how well philosophy majors tend to score on the GRE, LSAT, and GMAT, as compared to students in other fields. On this view, philosophy professors teach proficiencies that students can use in their chosen professions, whatever they happen to be. Philosophical content is at best of secondary interest, instrumentally valuable for learning the techniques we use when we do philosophy – or anything else.

At this point, the fact that I narrowed the scope of my inquiry to professional philosophers becomes important. Socrates refused payment for his questioning because he claimed not to impart any substantive wisdom to his students. He didn't have to justify an expense because he focused on 'the perfection of your soul' rather than 'money', 'reputation', and 'honor'.[13] Sophists demanded payment because they promised to help their students achieve the latter measures of success. Similarly, since postsecondary education must attract students in order to remain economically viable, it has to act like a business. Students approach it as customers, with professors as service providers. Philosophy is valued instrumentally as skills-based professional training. As the APA says, philosophy can be 'useful'.

[12] Robert Audi and others, *Philosophy: A Brief Guide for Undergraduates*, rev. ed. (Newark, DE: American Philosophical Association, 2017) <https://www.apaonline.org/page/undergraduates> [accessed 30 December 2023].

[13] Plato, *Socrates' Defense (Apology)*, in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, pp. 3–26 (p. 16/29d–e).

V. The Russellian model: Philosophy and the good life

Socrates thought that philosophy should help people to live more meaningful lives. On this view, the academic study of philosophy is a kind of personal enrichment that helps students to expand their minds and live up to their humanity. In the modern period, this view is best represented by Bertrand Russell, who gave a famous defense of philosophy at the end of his introductory textbook, *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912). He says that someone who clings to their own beliefs without considering conflicting views is living a small life, 'like a garrison in a beleaguered fortress'.[14]

The first and sometimes most difficult part of philosophy is to jolt someone from their traditional ways of thinking. Socrates emphasizes this with the image of himself as a gadfly rousing a sluggish horse.[15] To have positions for which we cannot give reasons, or which cannot be justified according to shared principles, is to turn away from our higher capacity for analysis in favor of a more comfortable, less interesting life. Russell thus rejects the notion that philosophy is job preparation. That's demeaning to students because it conceives of them as mere cogs in the corporate machine:

> The 'practical' man, as this word is often used, is one who recognizes only material needs, who realizes that men must have food for the body, but is oblivious of the necessity of providing food for the mind.[16]

If students only want to learn things that are relevant to their careers, then they are not fully living. There is more to life than making money. To live meaningful, distinctively human lives, they need to exercise their higher capacities:

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[14] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 158.
[15] Plato, *Apology*, pp. 16–17/30e.
[16] Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, p. 154.

> It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time.[17]

Philosophers enlarge our collective understanding not by giving us a list of new things to know but by calling us beyond our customs and prejudices so that we consider the deepest questions more deeply – such as the meaning of life, the difference between right and wrong, the nature of knowledge and the mind, and what makes a just society.

Ultimately, this is about freedom. First, there is the freedom from prejudice and habit. This is a common theme in the history of philosophy, from Socrates to Descartes to Angela Davis: we must challenge the views that we have thoughtlessly held as a result of what we've been taught by others. Like Socrates, who valued the love of wisdom rather than its attainment,[18] Russell emphasizes this negative project of questioning our beliefs. Acknowledging the traditional criticism that philosophy isn't getting anywhere, Russell says that the point of philosophy is to confront the limits of what you know:

> The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason.[19]

The most learned people are the most uneasy in their contentions. The way to achieve this is continually to challenge your own beliefs and the beliefs of others. Philosophical thinking may not result in discernable

[17] Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, p. 154.
[18] See Plato, *Symposium*, in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*. pp. 526–74 (pp. 555–56/203b–204b).
[19] Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 156–57.

intellectual progress, as it would on a Hegelian model. For Russell, 'the consideration of such questions' is a goal in itself.[20]

VI. Conflicting aims in academic philosophy

The Hegelian, Deweyan, practical, and Russellian models that I have described conceive of the goals of academic philosophy very differently. One could try to put a positive spin on this: philosophy is a rich discipline that has something to offer to everyone. Non-majors in our general education courses get the tools that will help them in their future careers, and they learn how to participate in the marketplace of ideas. At the same time, we prepare some of our majors for graduate school. In the process, professional philosophers contribute to the advancement of ideas by presenting at conferences and publishing in philosophy journals. Philosophy can be all things to all people. All is well.

The goals of the four models of philosophy are not only different, however. They are often incompatible, and they inevitably come into conflict:

- On the Hegelian model, the goal is to make progress on big philosophical problems.
- On the Deweyan model, big philosophical problems are distractions, at best disguised versions of real-world problems. Individual well-being is only indirectly important insofar as it affects the functioning of a democratic community.
- On the practical model, philosophy is a tool whose purpose is to make individuals more employable. It won't solve any philosophical problems, and it need not make society better off.

[20] Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, p. 156.

- On the Russellian model, the process of thinking is valuable in itself because it enriches the individual's life, regardless of whether it provides any economic or political benefit, or whether it helps us make progress on philosophical issues.

As a result of pursuing all four of these aims simultaneously, philosophy departments and the profession as a whole feel schizophrenic. The university demands that we attract students to the program who are unfamiliar with philosophy, that we fill our classes to the course caps, that we make philosophy relevant to all students in our general education courses, that we increase our major and minor numbers, and that we maintain a presence in the discipline, mostly by publishing. Meanwhile, we tell different stories about ourselves to different audiences, which leads to confusion about our own identity.

To illustrate the resulting tensions, I'm going to focus on three areas where the different models of professional philosophy take us in contradictory directions: course and major requirements, the department's role at the university, and standards for tenure and promotion. First, consider major requirements. They typically include classes in the history of philosophy, contemporary philosophy, and critical thinking or logic. Students planning to go to graduate school should perhaps take all these types of classes. It's good for them to have a grasp of the history of the discipline – although even this depends on the kind of philosophy one hopes to do – and if they plan to do current work on ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, or any other field, it's good for them to know what's happening now. It is harder to justify those kinds of courses when we purport to be helping students develop transferable skills or to be making them into good democratic citizens. It's doubtful that philosophy of mind makes someone into a better citizen; or, if it does, other subjects are more effective and more directly conducive to it. Similarly, are 'general problem solving' and

'communication skills' best learned in an advanced logic course, or would they be better developed in an introductory course on critical thinking? A course in critical thinking would be woefully inadequate for future graduate students, who should probably learn predicate logic. But students with other majors will, as graduates, mostly be hearing arguments (and fallacies) from non-academics on social media.

This raises the larger question of whether students who are not going to graduate school should major in philosophy at all. Two or three years of philosophy courses are probably excessive if one's primary goal is to develop transferable skills. Students who major in another subject develop at least some of those skills in their own program, and they also get content that's related to their future careers, which is probably why the APA and many departments hedge their bets and recommend that students double major.[21] The same thing is true if we're training students to be better democratic citizens. For students in the US, even a course in political philosophy wouldn't be as important as a course in civics, American history, or American politics. Yet, to justify a philosophy major – something that more and more programs are having to do – we have to explain why it is valuable for all kinds of students.

Philosophers are bound to fail if they try to do two things simultaneously: argue to administrators that the university needs a philosophy major and tell students that the purpose of philosophy is to improve their transferable skills. These skills may be crucial for students who don't know what they want to do or may change professions from what they originally thought they'd do, but it's unlikely that they need ten or twelve philosophy classes to do that, including classes in ancient philosophy and metaphysics, especially if it means learning less of the non-transferable skills they will need in the profession they expect to pursue. Sometimes philosophy programs attract students to the major

[21] See Audi and others, *Philosophy: A Brief Guide for Undergraduates*.

with talk of transferable skills, and then professors teach them like they're future graduate students who need to know about possible worlds, philosophical zombies, and the gaze of the other – a kind of bait and switch.

Of course, students with an interest in philosophical content also develop critical thinking skills and the ability to read and analyze difficult texts. As philosophers, we can take comfort in the fact that the students we teach develop the abilities that employers want. However, emphasizing transferable skills isn't a good marketing strategy because it concedes too much: it grants that the content of philosophy is less applicable to the 'real world' of gainful employment than other fields, and then it tries to compete with those other fields by claiming that the transferable skills are taught *better* in philosophy. Not only is this a hard case to make – why gain transferable skills if another major teaches you how to succeed in the job you want? – but it also treats as superfluous the subject matter that makes philosophy distinctive as a discipline.

A second area where the four models take us in different directions concerns the department's role at the university. If we are training philosophy majors to go to graduate school and advance the discipline, then we should focus on specialized topics in small classes. There is no harm in keeping philosophy in the ivory tower because that's where the best philosophy tends to be done. However, if the ability to think philosophically helps us to live more meaningful lives (Russell's view) or to become better citizens (Dewey's view), then it shouldn't be limited to those who attend college. According to the US Census Bureau, 37.9 percent of people twenty-five or older have completed at least a bachelor's degree,[22] leaving most of the population unexposed to philosophy. If thinking deeply about big questions is important and if

[22] United States Census Bureau, 'Census Bureau Releases New Educational Attainment Data', 24 February 2022 <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/educational-attainment.html> [accessed 30 December 2023].

philosophy coursework is one of the best ways to get there – an assumption that academics must hold in order to justify themselves – then that means a majority of the US population is living less-than-full lives or is unprepared for democratic participation. This raises issues of economic and racial justice, insofar as college graduates are predominantly white and well-off economically. To address this, philosophers should ply their trade in the public arena.

Typically, though, this isn't what universities incentivize in their faculty evaluations. A common objection to public philosophy is that philosophical issues are too complex for people who are not academically trained, so philosophy done in public has to be dumbed down. Ultimately, public philosophy distracts academics from important work that would advance the field – a Hegelian view. As a result, public philosophy often counts as service rather than scholarship, and, as all academics know, none of us needs more service.

VII. A common problem?

One could object to my less-than-sanguine view of the state of the discipline by saying that such conflicts arise not only in philosophy. Plenty of other fields must cope with the fact that students have different aims and different professional ambitions. Not every chemistry major plans to be a chemist, not every music major plans to be a musician, and not every construction management major will end up managing construction.

That last example shows just how different other majors are from philosophy. The construction management department does not have to attract students to the major who have no plans of going into construction, and it does not have to tailor its courses to students who want to become, say, paralegals or journalists. Similarly, the chemistry department teaches people chemistry and the music department teaches

people music. Students know what those majors are, and if a student takes chemistry, it's either because they want to be a chemist or a doctor or a pharmaceutical researcher – or something else. They want to know what chemists know, whatever their reasons. These departments don't have to appeal to students with no prior interest in chemistry or music. And it would seem ludicrous if administrators asked them to open their advanced classes to students who don't know what an ion is or who don't know how to read music.

VIII. Bad solutions

One way to resolve this problem in philosophy would be to have a division of labor within each *program*. Science programs often tailor their general education offerings so that they have separate tracks for prospective majors and for students who only want to get their science credit and move on. Such courses often have colorful nicknames such as 'Rocks for Jocks' (an introductory geology class), 'Chemistry for Citizens', or 'Physics for Poets'. With waning interest in philosophy, however, most philosophy programs simply can't afford to have two tracks. Introductory courses need to be geared for both general education students and potential majors, and advanced courses need to be geared for non-majors with an interest in the topic, double majors developing transferable skills, and future graduate students. Unlike chemistry, music, and construction management, we need to be all things to all people – but we can't be.

Another way to resolve this problem would be to have a division of labor within the *profession*. Philosophers at top-tier, R1 institutions would prepare students for graduate school and publish regularly to advance the field. Mid-range public universities would foster the characteristics and teach the subject matter that supports democratic participation. Community colleges would offer philosophy, if at all, so

that students have the skills they need in non-academic jobs. Indeed, with the proliferation of non-tenure-track appointments and so-called 'teaching professorships' at the latter institutions, this is the direction we seem to be heading. The now-frequent threats to and elimination of the philosophy major at many non-elite colleges and universities is a symptom of this trend. Usually, students at these institutions can still take general education courses in philosophy; they just can't major in it.

There are many reasons to resist this division of labor. Plenty of philosophers who aren't at top-tier institutions have important contributions to make to the field, for example. But the most important reason is that it would contradict the iconoclastic spirit of philosophy. There's been a lot in the news lately about how prestigious universities reinforce existing class divisions by disproportionately favoring the rich, especially through legacy admissions.[23] Philosophy ought to challenge the status quo, not reinforce an unjust distribution of goods, including education. Furthermore, this grates against the Deweyan model of philosophy. Leif Weatherby argues that threats to the humanities in states controlled by Republicans risk widening the economic and political divide, with the so-called 'elites' getting a liberal arts education and the least privileged being trained to be future laborers and nothing else – and the latter resenting the former.[24] A division of labor within the profession would foment moral and political strife rather than fostering

[23] See, for example, Aatish Bhatia, Claire Cain Miller, and Josh Katz, 'Study of Elite College Admissions Data Suggests Being Very Rich Is Its Own Qualification', *New York Times*, 24 July 2023 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/07/24/upshot/ivy-league-elite-college-admissions.html> [accessed 30 December 2023].

[24] See Leif Weatherby, 'What Just Happened at West Virginia University Should Worry All of Us', *New York Times*, 20 August 2023 <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/20/opinion/west-virginia-university-cuts.html> [accessed 30 December 2023].

productive philosophical conversations and building a democratic community.

IX. A call to action

The challenges facing philosophy are part of a broader crisis. Forces are aligned to get students thinking that higher education is nothing but glorified job training: the skyrocketing cost of college, the pressure for students to declare their majors earlier and earlier, the smaller presence of the liberal arts in general education (or de-emphasis on general education as a whole), and, yes, the culture wars in which some people see the humanities as an instrument of 'cultural Marxism'. Under the circumstances, students and parents demand an economic return on their investment, they gravitate toward subjects they are already familiar with, they resist courses outside of their majors, and they object to the liberal arts on political grounds.

If academics promote the transferable skills that students develop in philosophy courses at the expense of more fundamental self-transformation, they may generate interest in the short term, but it eviscerates philosophy in the long term. The emphasis on marketability is fundamentally conservative in the sense that it neatly forecloses questions about the values that underpin the culture. Education is used in the service of whatever eighteen-year-olds happen to want when they graduate from high school.

Philosophers cannot address such cultural attitudes by pandering to students or squabbling with administrators. Such a broad problem requires a wide-ranging solution. Under these circumstances, I suggest that philosophers take a two-pronged strategy, one that plays to our existing strengths and the other that takes us decidedly outside of our comfort zone. First, we should remind ourselves of something that many of us weren't really told in graduate school: we are teachers, and culture

is partially produced through students' educational experience. Thus, the way that we teach our students will have a long-term impact on how philosophy and the liberal arts in general are perceived.

We may be underestimating college students. Although many of them profess a single-minded desire to develop career-oriented skills, ample research shows that students also crave a larger sense of purpose, a belief that what they do is personally meaningful and matters to others.[25] The existential challenges confronting this generation that were already increasing before the COVID-19 pandemic and were exacerbated by it are in part issues around meaning and value: being able to locate themselves in a narrative grander than themselves, as Cornel West says[26] – a domain not framed by consumerism, self-marketing, and competition (the contemporary version of 'money', 'reputation', and 'honor'). (The growing demand for philosophical counseling indicates that people outside of college also want to articulate and evaluate their belief systems so they can live more meaningful lives.) Whether young adults realize it or not, many of them want to ask big questions about identity, ethics, and justice, and philosophy is uniquely qualified to help students ask these questions and interrogate familiar answers to them. Russell is the guide here: we should resist the practical view by continuing to introduce students to 'the goods of the mind'. This should be our *modus operandi* in the classroom, and it should inform our arguments to administrators about general education.

Exposing students to big questions in the classroom will help to change the cultural narrative, but only gradually, and it doesn't help

[25] For an overview of relevant research, see Robert J. Nash and Michele C. Murray, *Helping College Students Find Purpose: The Campus Guide to Meaning-Making* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).
[26] See, for example, Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 177.

when philosophy programs are eliminated or when new general education programs diminish the liberal arts. We can talk about 'the goods of the mind' all we want, but there is a real fear, voiced by Russell, that 'the "practical" man' will be 'indifferent to these goods'.[27] Traditionally, we have changed the culture through teaching. Now, we have to change the culture to continue teaching.

The second prong of my proposed strategy, and perhaps our best hope, is to challenge the assumptions about philosophy further upstream and further downstream, in those who are not yet, have never been, or are no longer in college. The struggle for the soul of academic philosophy is a war to be fought at the societal and political level, not just battles to be fought at the institutional level. Philosophers need to join with other academics and supportive members of the public to champion the value of the liberal arts. As AI can perform more and more intellectual tasks, this may be an opportune moment to show that higher education is part of the good life, and that a lot of skills-based training is becoming technologically redundant. Philosophy poses fundamental questions about who we are and who we ought to be, and confronting these questions is distinctively human.

To achieve this broader cultural shift, philosophers need to do more outside of the college classroom. We should support high school Ethics Bowl competitions and community essay contests about important political and ethical issues. But we should think bigger than this. Outside of the US, philosophy is often taught to students in earlier grades. Many countries in continental Europe, including France, Germany, and Austria, typically offer philosophy coursework in the latter part of secondary school. There are also philosophy for children (P4C) initiatives at the primary level. Many primary schools in the United Kingdom have P4C programs, and there is a push from

[27] Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, p. 154.

organizations such as the Philosophy Foundation and the Royal Institute of Philosophy to make philosophy a core subject at the secondary level. The official education curriculum of Ontario, Canada includes training in critical thinking beginning at preschool. The US is lagging behind. Although P4C has gained some traction in the US and organizations such as the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) actively support programs for K-12 students, high school courses in philosophy tend to appear sporadically and infrequently, depending on the interest of individual teachers and the willingness of individual administrators. Working at the state level, where graduation requirements are set, philosophers need to mount a sustained campaign to introduce the discipline more formally into the high school curriculum. If we succeed, students won't arrive at college without a sense of what philosophy is and what it's worth.

Academics should also do more public philosophy. Philosophy cafés and other community discussion forums allow non-philosophers to familiarize themselves with philosophical questions, to practice critical thinking, and to become more proficient in philosophical analysis. They learn to address complex problems constructively, uncover shared values, and understand those with whom they disagree, all of which are crucial to becoming better democratic citizens. But more importantly, public philosophy shows that intellectual curiosity is intrinsically good. It is, as Russell says, a prerequisite for truly free self-determination. We need not accept what the culture gives us, regarding the purpose of higher education or anything else. Philosophy is a meaning-making activity, and in this sense it contributes to society's ongoing self-generation.

Public philosophy can change social attitudes, but to effectively confront the threats to the discipline, philosophers also should ignore their *daímones* and enter political life, where impactful decisions are made about public colleges and universities. Philosophers should

organize to advance their cause, either with professional associations like the APA or, if they don't become more politically active, without them. Philosophers should talk to their representatives or even run for state offices themselves so they can defend the liberal arts against conservative attacks masquerading as economic efficiencies. In short, following Dewey, we should conceive of philosophy as a method of social and political analysis with direct, real-world implications. And all this should be encouraged in tenure and promotion standards. Bringing our perspective to public service is crucial to advancing philosophy as an academic profession, just as publication in philosophy journals helps to advance the discipline's 'authoritative knowledge'. The former is not less important than the latter.

To be sure, changing the culture is difficult, and it may seem unattainable. However, philosophers such as Peter Singer, Martha Nussbaum, James Tully, and George Yancy are already shaping the culture beyond the academy. We need people like them not only to exemplify the value of philosophy but also to explain why philosophy is important. It's okay to talk to other philosophers so we can sharpen our own views and, possibly, move philosophy forward. However, in light of recent economically, socially, and politically motivated crises in academia, we will only be able to continue doing what we do – at conferences and in the classroom – if we get out of the ivory tower and into the halls of power, into the schools, and into the streets.

X. Hope for the future

One may object that this call to action rests on a false assumption. Indifference to the goods of the mind has not caused people to think that higher education is job training. Instead, even if they recognize the goods of the mind, college students do not want to take on student loan debt only to risk poverty and starvation in a system with few economic

opportunities for philosophers. That is, we are not only grappling with 'practical men' but material institutions designed around those values. If that's the case, touting the value of philosophy along Russellian lines may turn it into a luxury resource provisioned by elite institutions and available only to the independently wealthy. Although I warned against such a division of labor, we seem to be drifting in that direction every time a philosophy program closes at a mid-level university.

This is all the more reason why a broader cultural shift is necessary. By working both in and out of the college classroom, there will be more demand for liberal arts education, and if we exercise political power, there will be more liberal arts offerings. If we want philosophy in elementary and high schools, we will need more teachers with philosophical training. If we want public philosophy, we will need more philosophers in the media. If we recognize the importance of asking big questions, we will need philosophers working in medicine (how should scarce resources be allocated during a pandemic?), in law (if there are going to be abortion restrictions, what should they be so as not to risk the lives of pregnant women?), and in technology (how should we program AI systems so they avoid doing things that violate our considered values?). If we ask big questions in our K-12 schools, in public health, in politics, and in industry, there will be jobs for philosophy graduates that not only use their transferable skills but also draw on the content expertise that only philosophers have.

If the culture embraces philosophical thinking, students will be more comfortable examining our core values, and they will have the opportunity to do so. This will inevitably transform the philosophy curriculum. For example, courses in professional ethics should not just teach students how to get along in their chosen professions, since this tends to do little more than list legal requirements and existing codes of professional behavior. Instead, such courses should confront the ethics *of* the profession itself: What is my conception of the good life such that

I want to pursue this profession? How does this fit with the moral commitments I have in the rest of my life? Regardless of the law and what is generally practiced in the profession, how should I act? Posing these questions as part of a fully human life will incidentally make students into better democratic citizens who are ready to investigate the values that our society ought to have. By debating tough questions and reading difficult philosophical texts, students will also practice reading carefully, writing clearly, and thinking critically – the transferable skills that are crucial outside of the profession. This gives us a story to tell legislators and administrators as we make the case for more support for philosophy programs.

If examining complex philosophical issues is crucial to the good life, students will gain the necessary background to continue with philosophy at the graduate level, should they choose to do so. Rather than studying only the shallow topics that are sufficient for skills training or democratic engagement, students will consider both historical and current responses to big questions. This will produce the next generation of philosophers, and they will move the discipline forward. In short, making a case for the Russellian view to the broader public will, if successful, incidentally support Hegelian, Deweyan, and practical aims. It will answer students' concerns about the usefulness of the discipline, administrators' concerns about the role of the department, and politicians' concerns about why there should be public investment in the liberal arts – all while maintaining the soul of philosophy in higher education.[28]

[28] I am grateful to Cynthia Coe for reading early drafts and suggesting promising directions for this essay. A version of this paper was delivered as the keynote address at the Northwest Philosophy Conference in November 2023. I am grateful to the conference organizers, especially J. M. Fritzman, for inviting me to give the keynote, and to the conference participants for their questions and comments. The anonymous reviewer for *Pli* also provided valuable suggestions as I revised the paper for publication.

On the (Lack of) Usefulness of Professional Philosophy of Science

PHILIPPE STAMENKOVIC

Summary: This article investigates the lack of usefulness of professional philosophy of science, a danger which threatens philosophy of science when it becomes disconnected from scientific practice. I first recall the goals of philosophy of science, which are to describe, evaluate and help improve science, as well as its relationship to society. I then focus on two ways in which philosophy of science can divert from these goals, thereby becoming useless: by showing how the skills necessary to philosophy (such as thought experiment and conceptual analysis) can hinder consensus, and how an unrealistic picture of science can lead to descriptive and normative irrelevance. In order to overcome these issues, philosophy of science should reflect upon its own values, in the same way it does for other sciences, and on the influence they have on all phases of philosophical research, from the goals pursued and the choice of research avenues to the way claims are made and their consequences envisaged.

There are of course many things to criticise regarding professional philosophy, like for any profession. This is especially easy to do, since – and this an admirable thing – philosophy is certainly the academic discipline, and more generally the professional field, which most criticises itself. This is first due to the fact that, by virtue of being a science (since philosophy can indeed be considered a science – although not only that (see I.a) – in the large, German sense including the humanities),[1] philosophy constantly revises its presuppositions,

[1] Sven Ove Hansson, 'Is Philosophy Science?', *Theoria*, 69.3 (2008), 153–56; Sven Ove Hansson, 'Philosophy and Other Disciplines', *Metaphilosophy*, 39.4-

methods and outputs, and therefore constantly self-improves. But this is especially so because the speciality of philosophy is self-reflection (much more than any other discipline), self-critique and even self-redefinition.

In this article, I will limit myself to the issue of *usefulness* – and especially the lack thereof – of philosophy of science, and will not talk about other endemic, and much-discussed problems of academic philosophy, common to all academic disciplines, like the marketisation and privatisation of research, the insane competition and glorification of performance, the 'publish or perish' and self-advertising cultures, with all the disastrous consequences it can have on individual researchers.[2] These problems perhaps threaten philosophy's *raison d'être* more than any other discipline, given philosophy's fundamental goals and intrinsically critical nature (see I.a). I will also limit myself to (analytic)[3] philosophy of science, and not address the much bigger

5 (2008), 472–83. Therefore, I am mainly talking here about analytic philosophy (of science). Indeed, (at least some parts or traditions of) continental philosophy can hardly be considered a science in the general sense (although some of its branches can, like its hermeneutic tradition which can be assimilated to history of philosophy), since it does not generally aim at providing the best available knowledge about something, it does not systematically strive for rigour or clarity (as do all other sciences), and it does not necessarily respect the other scientific disciplines (for a convincing definition of science, see Sven Ove Hansson, 'Science and Pseudo-Science', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/pseudo-science/> [accessed 10 December 2023])

[2] Philippe Stamenkovic, 'On Precarity in Academia: Competition, Hypocrisy and Humiliation', *Inscriptions*, 3.2 (2020), article 66.

[3] In spite of the critique about the distinction between analytic and continental, I still find this distinction helpful and quite accurate with respect to actual practice within philosophy of science. What we may call 'continental' philosophy of science is much more concerned with the historical development of science (following the French conception of *épistémologie*), whereas analytic philosophy of science is more ahistorical and focused on conceptual contemporary issues. This characterisation also holds for the philosophy of the particular sciences.

(analytic) theoretical philosophy (which I suspect contains fields highly susceptible to uselessness), not to speak of philosophy *tout court*. In general, given the limited scope of this article, I cannot but make choices regarding the definitions of the concepts I will tackle here: science, philosophy of science, usefulness, etc. Philosophy, including philosophy of science, can of course be conceived in many ways. But it falls outside the scope of this article to consider more deeply this issue. Instead, I choose to base my inquiry on what I take to be a rather uncontroversial, common and convincing understanding of what philosophy, philosophy of science and science are (at least within the analytic tradition).[4] I will make further remarks with respect to these limitations in the course of the article.

To answer the question 'what is philosophy of science (used) for?', one of course needs to know what is philosophy of science, and what are its goals. Whether these goals are effectively pursued determines the usefulness, or lack thereof, of philosophy of science. Obviously, the answer to this question depends on the chosen concept of philosophy of science (see I.b), but again, mine belongs to the received view. It is not my intention to engage into heavy definitional work about the notion of usefulness, which may be conceived in a quite complex and multi-dimensional way. For example, the work of an artist may be called useful even if it not useful in any practical sense (as e.g. the work of a nurse or a refuse collector obviously is), because it enables people to have artistic experiences. Let me here just distinguish between the *objective*[5] goals of philosophy of science which are part of its definition (see I.b), and the *subjective* goals one may pursue by practicing

[4] This is why I take Kitcher's (see footnote 12) and Hansson's conception as starting points of this article, even if, of course, there are countless others, some of which very interesting as well.

[5] Because they are attached to the object 'philosophy of science', and not to the subject practicing it.

philosophy of science (which may be called personal reasons for doing philosophy), which may also be useful in this subjective sense (because one enjoys doing philosophy for its own sake, finds joy, meaningfulness in its practice). A philosopher of science may write articles which no one reads and which therefore are not objectively useful in the sense that they do not help achieve the objective goals of philosophy of science, yet they can be subjectively useful because she takes pleasure or finds meaning in it. The lack of usefulness of an activity, job and especially profession[6] (which, in contrast with a normal job, is supposed to deliver a public good) is of course problematic both on the objective[7] and subjective levels, because ones does not accomplish what is supposed to be done, and one does not find self-accomplishment in it. In the following, I will limit myself to the objective sense of usefulness. My conception of usefulness is of course not limited to practical usefulness, since the goals of philosophy of science are not only practical (see again I.b).

The plan of the article is the following. In order to inquire about the usefulness of philosophy of science, I first need to quickly recall what philosophy (I.a), and philosophy of science in particular (I.b), are supposed to deliver: what are their goals. In a second section, rather than providing an overview of how these goals are met or not, I focus on two problematic ways in which philosophy of science can divert

[6] Professions (such as medical doctors, lawyers, engineers) are usually characterised by specific diplomas, internal ethical standards, and by the fact that its practitioners perform an activity useful to the public (providing public health, ensuring that one's rights are respected, etc.). Philosophy is a profession in this sense, although it is of course not only that, and can be practiced outside any professional framework.

[7] Except if the objective goals are themselves disputable, see the phenomenon of 'bullshit jobs' where the goals are themselves useless or absurd: David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018). Fortunately, this is not the case of philosophy, whose goals are clearly worth pursuing.

from these goals, thereby becoming useless (which does not mean, of course, that philosophy of science is useless in general). More precisely, I show how the skills and qualities necessary to practice philosophy can hinder consensus (II.a), and how an unrealistic picture of science can lead to descriptive and normative irrelevance (II.b), both of these situations leading to uselessness. I then show why, and how, reflecting upon its own values is a good way, for philosophy of science, to ensure it usefulness (III). This again has an impact on usefulness, but potentially a positive one. The conclusion (IV) summarises my claims and suggests a further avenue of improvement for philosophy of science: the assessment of the consequences of its practice.

I. What is philosophy of science for?

a. Philosophy in a nutshell

The most fundamental goals of science are truth and objectivity (which, in addition to truth, includes a concern about balancedness and fairness in the way an object is studied),[8] in addition to explanation, pre- or retro-diction of the facts (for empirical science). Briefly put, (empirical) science gives an account of the facts.[9] Science in general can be defined as the activity which provides us with the most reliable knowledge about its subject matter, and philosophy can be considered a science in the large German sense of this word (*Wissenschaft*), which includes not

[8] Paul Hoyningen-Huene, 'Objectivity, Value-Free Science, and Inductive Risk', *European Journal for Philosophy of Science,* 13 (2023), article 14. Of course, objectivity is a historically changing, multi-faceted concept which can be conceived in various ways. Nevertheless, I believe this simple characterisation captures its core meaning.

[9] Philippe Stamenkovic, 'Facts and Objectivity in Science', *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 48.2 (2022), 277–98.

only the natural sciences but all the academic disciplines.[10] However, philosophy, whose goals are to throw light on the age-old 'grand riddles of existence',[11] such as knowledge, virtue, duty or beauty (concepts which delimit its main branches), also has concerns which go beyond those of science, and has a distinctively normative dimension, which goes beyond knowledge. This is why, according to Kitcher (who follows Dewey),[12] philosophy's goal can be divided into two dimensions, a knowledge axis and a value axis.

> Philosophy, so understood, is a synthetic discipline, one that reflects on and responds to the state of inquiry, to the state of a variety of human social practices, and to the felt needs of individual people to make sense of the world and their place in it. Philosophers are people whose broad engagement with the condition of their age enables them to facilitate individual reflection and social conversation.[13]

In other words, philosophy integrates various forms of knowledge in order to help us look for what is valuable.

Philosophy is neither an inferior nor a superior discipline. It is not an 'auxiliary science' (*Hilfswissenschaft*) such as dendrochronology (which is the scientific method of dating tree rings) or numismatics

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[10] Hansson, 'Is Philosophy Science?'; 'Philosophy and Other Disciplines'; 'Science and Pseudo-Science'. Of course, this is only one definition of science among many which have been proposed in the so-called 'demarcation problem' between science and non-science, which has occupied much of philosophy of science. However, I believe it is the most convincing one, mainly because of the methodological differences between the various sciences which make it practically impossible to find a more precise definition.

[11] Sven Ove Hansson, 'Philosophical Craftsmanship', *Metaphilosophy,* 25.4 (1994), 316–25.

[12] 'The problem of restoring integration and cooperation between man's beliefs about the world in which he lives and the values and purposes that should direct his conduct is the deepest problem of modern life. It is the problem of any philosophy that is not isolated from that life.' quoted in Philip Kitcher, 'Philosophy Inside Out', *Metaphilosophy,* 42.3 (2011), 248–60 (p. 252).

[13] Kitcher, 'Philosophy Inside Out', p. 254.

(which are not practiced as a scientific discipline in its own right).[14] Neither is it a 'super-discipline' supervising other disciplines. As Hansson remarks, in many cases treated by the particular sciences, philosophy has little to say. However, philosophy has (the luxury, and at the same time the challenge, of having) an integrating role with respect to other disciplines, as its very design allows it to take them as objects of study, in the same way history or sociology can study other academic disciplines. I believe this integrating role is even essential in trying to answer the above-mentioned 'grand riddles of existence' from this variety of perspectives.[15]

Philosophical activity can be considered as a craft (*téchne*) requiring skills learned through practicing, rather than as a purely theoretical, 'top-down' activity where one would learn and then apply theoretical principles, or as an artistic activity where one would be either gifted or not (although even in artistic activities such as literature or painting, I believe practice and training are essential). Among philosophical skills, one finds:[16]

- thought-experiments (coming up with imaginary cases), often used in a negative way (to provide counter examples);
- linguistic (and hence conceptual) analysis, and use of definitions;

[14] Hansson, 'Philosophical Craftsmanship', p. 325. Numismatics can of course be practiced for its own sake, but not as a science, rather as a collection or hobby.

[15] In this sense, philosophy is a synthetic discipline, as both Hansson and Kitcher remark, although at different levels. Hansson calls philosophy synthetic with respect to philosophical standpoints (such as structural realism) which it produces itself (hence it produces its own object of study), whereas Kitcher talks of the synthetic character of philosophy assembling and articulating disciplinary standpoints from already existing disciplines (this is the assembling, but not the creative sense, of synthetic).

[16] Hansson, 'Philosophical Craftsmanship'.

- idealisation, which simplifies a complex situation by abstracting some of its aspects or distorting it.

Some qualities are also important to practice philosophy, such as open-mindedness (the willingness to consider other points of view) and skepticism (putting into doubt unsubstantiated claims). I will come back to these skills and qualities in section II.a. As mentioned previously, another fundamental feature of philosophy (which can perhaps be called a skill as well) is reflective and critical thinking, to which I will come back in section III.

b. Philosophy of science

Philosophy of science takes science (in general, or a particular one) as its object, or the relationship between science and the wider society. The above definition of philosophy as a synthetic discipline is particularly applicable to the subfield of philosophy of science, which is a second order activity taking science as its object and critically reflecting upon it. As a subfield of philosophy, philosophy of science of course inherits its main characteristics. It also aims to answer the 'big questions' of philosophy on the basis of the scientific knowledge it takes as object of study[17] – questions which professional scientists often do not have time, or interest, to tackle. In particular, it should not lose sight of these more general questions by delving into technicalities or conceptual virtuosity, if it is to deserve the 'philosophy' appellation, as both Kitcher and Hansson remark.[18]

[17] In the case of philosophy of science, such big questions typically concern knowledge or reality.

[18] 'In setting high standards for precision and clarity, the Anglophone philosophy of the past half century can be valuable for Deweyan practitioners – just as finger-tangling etudes can be excellent preparation for aspiring pianists. Yet unless one can show that the more abstract questions do contribute to the solution of problems of more general concern, that they are not simply exercises in virtuosity, they should be seen as preludes to philosophy rather than the

But philosophy of science also has its own, specific goals, which basically amount to (descriptively) understand and (normatively) assess the scientific enterprise, as well as its relationship to the wider society. Philosophy of science examines the presuppositions, theories, methods, structures (including the social and institutional ones), goals and impacts of the sciences (again in the large sense), and how they interact with society, trying to answer questions such as: what are the relationships between the different sciences? between science and reality? to which extent are scientific claims justified? how do, or should, non-scientific values influence science? and conversely, how does science influence society? etc. In sum, philosophy of science aims to describe, evaluate and help improve science itself, as well as the way it interacts with society – what is sometimes called 'socially relevant philosophy of science', and I may add, socially useful.

How exactly can these goals make philosophy of science useful? By pursuing them, philosophy of science helps understand the respective domains of validity of the various claims made by the different sciences, and the underlying (theoretical, methodological, etc.) assumptions that have to be fulfilled for these claims to be valid. This is of utmost importance because our modern societies are so much science-based, and because there is a strong specialisation and division of labour not only in research but also in society at large, so that people tend to be focused on their speciality field and have difficulties stepping

substance of it.' (Kitcher, 'Philosophy Inside Out', p. 259) 'The criterion by which to judge the success of philosophy is not its function as an auxiliary discipline but its capability of elucidating world-view issues. Nothing is wrong with the exertion of philosophical skills on applications or on purely technical issues, so long as the ultimate connection with philosophy's central issues is cherished. But if that connection is lost, then these skills are no more philosophical than surgery would be medical if it developed into the artful cutting and sewing of living tissues, with no curative objective whatsoever.' (Hansson, 'Philosophical Craftsmanship', p. 325)

back. In this respect, philosophy of science can have both an intra- and an extra-scientific utility:

- By providing a theoretical understanding of what science is and how science works, philosophy of science enables (both scientists and philosophers alike) to critically evaluate and improve scientific work.
- Philosophy of science enables members of society to assess the validity and limits of expertise, including their own,[19] which is very important if it is to be relied upon, and experts held accountable, in a democratic society. This can be particularly useful in cases of controversies, where different experts, possibly from different scientific disciplines, have diverging points of view.

For philosophy of science to be useful (not only with respect to science or the science-society relationship, but also with respect to the 'big questions'[20]), the answers it comes up with must have some *relevance*[21] for science itself, as well as for science stakeholders: decision-makers steering science or relying on its results, the general public, etc. Philosophy of science is not metaphysics, it should not be practised on its own, in its ivory tower,[22] but carefully study its object, science, which

[19] Roger Strand, 'Vitenskapsteori: What, Why, and How?', in *Social Philosophy of Science for the Social Sciences,* ed. by Jaan Valsiner (Cham: Springer, 2019), pp. 31–43.

[20] Otherwise, these big questions are no more informed by *science*, and are addressed from the point of view of something else than philosophy of science (perhaps theoretical philosophy or one of its other subfields).

[21] Relevance is a relational concept, always with reference to something else. An activity can be devoid of any relevance (as opposed to irrelevant) if it is an end in itself. I am here concerned with the relevance of philosophy of science with respect to science or the science-society relationship, following my 'objective' conception of usefulness (I have excluded subjective usefulness according to which it may be performed for its own sake).

[22] In fact, I believe no field of philosophy should be practiced so, if it is indeed to answer the 'big questions', but this is not the place to argue for this.

is, what is more, a human, institutionalised activity (in contradistinction to metaphysics or even epistemology), itself embedded within the larger civil society. As Kitcher writes: 'Philosophy might aspire to [...] the framing of conceptions that can assist existing disciplines, or even initiate new modes of inquiry. At important moments in its history, it has done just that, but its success has resulted from careful attention to features of the state of knowledge or of the broader human condition. There is no internal dynamic of building on and extending the problem-solutions of a field that can be pursued in abstraction from other inquiries.'[23] Indeed, if philosophy of science is to be a science in the large sense, then it must respect, and cooperate with, the other sciences (especially, of course, those it takes as objects of study), as all sciences do.

More precisely, by relevance I mean that philosophy of science:

- fairly accurately describes
    - scientific practice;
    - the relationship between science and society, i.e., how science influences society (e.g., how political decisions are taken on the basis of scientific knowledge) and conversely how society influences science (e.g., how social values influence the various phases of scientific activity);
- can realistically hope to normatively influence scientific practice or, more generally, the way science and society interact. To do so, its normative proposals must be *realistic* (descriptively informed) and *applicable* (i.e., not too far from existing practice).

A philosophy of science failing to answer such requirements would not, in my opinion, be relevant and therefore could not be useful. Again, one

[23] Kitcher, 'Philosophy Inside Out', pp. 251–52.

may argue that philosophy of science may be practised for its own sake, that it is an enjoyable and meaningful activity in itself. This would allow philosophy of science to escape the concept of relevance altogether. [24] But I take this conception to be incompatible with the very definition of philosophy of science. Therefore, philosophy of science *must* be relevant, in order to be useful for science and the science-society relationship. Most philosophers of science are aware of these requirements, and indeed pretend to come up with relevant philosophy of science. But as we will see, this is not always the case. When irrelevant work is presented as relevant, the situation is even more problematic than when there is no pretence to relevance whatsoever, because of the potential detrimental consequences such pretence may have (see section III). In my experience, the lack of relevance seems more widespread in general philosophy of science than in the philosophies of the special sciences, probably because general philosophy of science stands further away from its object(s) of study. When talking about irrelevance, it is also tempting to blame over-specialisation, which threatens all the sciences (including philosophy of science), in the same way natural scientists can, by over-specialising, become dogmatic in their favourite theory or model, or reductionist in their discipline, and/or lose sight of the big picture of science. But, less than any other discipline should philosophy, which aims precisely at fighting dogmatism and reductionism, indulge in such a justification.

[24] Note that I do not deny that philosophy of science can, or should, be considered *partly* as an end in itself. But it is *not only* that: it is also a means to describe, evaluate and improve science and the science-society relationship.

II. How philosophy of science can become useless

a. Philosophical skills undermining philosophy

Ironically, the skills and qualities needed to practise philosophy and mentioned above (conceptual analysis, thought experiments, idealisations, open-mindedness and skepticism) can also hinder consensus in philosophy, which itself hinders progress, because there is no accumulation of a body of philosophical knowledge on which everyone can agree. Lack of consensus also makes any useful contribution from philosophy of science impossible, or at least very difficult to achieve, because one simply does not know which claims are correct and should be used.

Indeed, discussions in philosophy of science often develop through always more refined conceptual distinctions dividing the problem at hand into cases, sub-cases, sub-sub-cases, and so on; and through conflicting thought experiments, based on diverging idealisations (each keeping or abstracting different aspects of the problem), providing counter-arguments, counter-counter arguments, etc. This way of proceeding can easily lead to stalemates, as Kitcher writes:

> Any defense of the idea that philosophy, like particle physics and molecular biology, proceeds by the accumulation of reliable answers to technical questions would have to provide examples of consensus on which larger agreements are built. Yet, as the philosophical questions diminish in size, disagreement and controversy persist, new distinctions are drawn, and yet tinier issues are generated. Decomposition continues downwards, until the interested community becomes too exhausted, too small, or too tired to play the game any further.[25]

This situation is clearly different from classical specialisation (which is the fate of any science) because here there is no progress: matters are

[25] Kitcher, 'Philosophy Inside Out', p. 251.

not settled, consensus is not found, and instead an endless discussion goes on until protagonists lose interest in it and move on to something else.

According to Hansson, idealisation (and meta-idealisation, i.e., the right way to conduct idealisations) has a major role in the lack of consensus in philosophy of science, contrary to idealisation in natural science. This is because '[t]here is always some feature of the real world which it does not take into account, and in general it is possible to devise a counter-example in which that feature plays a decisive role and seemingly invalidates the standpoint (theory)'.[26] This is where the issue of relevance (see section II.b) becomes crucial: while in natural science scientists manage to agree on which features of the object of study are relevant and which are not,[27] this is generally not the case in philosophy of science. Rather, endless thought experiments, conceptual analysis and idealisations continue to contradict each other, fuelled by endless open-mindedness (the willingness to consider any claim, however unrealistic it may be) and endless skepticism (putting into doubt any claim, however firmly established it may be). Obviously, the problem comes from endlessness: this endless conceptual sophistication must come to a stop, and this stop is given by reality, in the case of philosophy of science by actual scientific practice, which must inform philosophical idealisations or thought-experiments. Philosophical skills should not be exercised by ignoring what other scientific disciplines do. This does not mean, of course, that current scientific practice would in fact be the ideal, ultimate state which philosophy of science should accommodate: philosophy of science has an important evaluative and normative role

[26] Hansson, 'Philosophical Craftsmanship', p. 321.

[27] This is again a general, uncontroversial characterization of natural science: although there may be occasionally disagreements (for frontier science or during paradigm shifts), in general (during Kuhn's 'normal science') scientists agree on the relevant features of a given problem. Such a consensus is generally hard to find in philosophy (and I take this claim to be also quite uncontroversial).

to perform. But it does mean that there is some empirical reality, and also knowledge, which philosophy of science must take into account.

Of course, as Hansson remarks, lack of progress is not always to be deplored, since it enables to capture new aspects of reality. Nevertheless, there should be *some* consensus and progress if philosophy is to deserve to be called science, and to have some usefulness. In fact, according to Hansson 'there has been significant progress within each of several competing traditions that has a relatively unified view of its idealizations.'[28] However, even that claim seems disputable, or the traditions in question are so small that they do not deserve this name. While one should not be surprised that endless conceptual refinement and thought experiments are particularly widespread in theoretical philosophy, one could expect that the situation is not so extreme in philosophy of science because the latter is supposed to have a better connection to the empirical world (through science itself), which is supposed to be the ultimate arbiter.[29] But this is not always the case. For example, within general philosophy of science, even in the subfield of values in science, there is hardly a consensus to be found on which influence values should have in science (at the normative level), or even do have (at the descriptive level).[30]

Let us take the example, within the subfield of values in science, of the so-called inductive risk argument. According to this argument, in accepting or rejecting a hypothesis, a scientist has to consider the risk of being in error, by either wrongly accepting an actually false

[28] Hansson, 'Philosophical Craftsmanship', p. 322.

[29] Of course, this connection with the empirical is more complex for the normative aspects of philosophy of science, but even normative claims about science must, as argued above, be reasonably connected to how science is actually practiced, on pain of being unrealistic, inapplicable and therefore useless.

[30] See, e.g., Kevin Elliott and Daniel Steel (eds.), *Current Controversies in Values and Science* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

hypothesis ('false positive') or wrongly not accepting an actually true hypothesis ('false negative'). Because of these risks, scientists should let non-scientific values (such as social or political values) influence their decisions to accept or reject a claim (more precisely the level of evidence they require), if they are to uphold their responsibility towards society.[31] An example is typically to lower their standards of evidence for a claim which may have detrimental social effects. Now there are at least four counter-arguments to this argument.[32] Let us take just one of them, namely the objection that scientists can avoid inductive risk by just reporting probabilities instead of accepting or rejecting a claim. [33] A response to this objection (i.e. a counter-counter argument) claims that there are still inductive risks associated with stating these probabilities.[34] A response to this response (i.e., a counter-counter-counter argument) says that these higher-order probabilities become irrelevant at the fifth order.[35] A response to this (i.e. a counter-counter-counter-counter argument) is that the statements scientists come up by doing so are too vague and useless.[36] Let me stop here, noting that this is absolutely not an isolated case, quite the contrary. Therefore, even regarding an issue in a highly specialised subfield of philosophy of science, consensus is not to be found. I fear that there will never be a consensus on how values should influence science regarding the acceptance or rejection of

[31] An argument originally formulated by Richard Rudner, 'The Scientist Qua Scientist Makes Value Judgments', *Philosophy of Science,* 20.1 (1953), 1–6.
[32] Kevin C. Elliott, *Values in Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 23.
[33] Richard C. Jeffrey, 'Valuation and Acceptance of Scientific Hypotheses', *Philosophy of Science,* 23.3 (1956), 237–46.
[34] Katie Steele, 'The Scientist Qua Policy Advisor Makes Value Judgments', *Philosophy of Science,* 79.5 (2012), 893–904.
[35] Gregor Betz, 'Why the Argument from Inductive Risk Doesn't Justify Incorporating Non-Epistemic Values in Scientific Reasoning', in *Current Controversies*, ed. by Elliott and Steel, pp. 94–110.
[36] Elliott, *Values in Science*, p. 27.

hypotheses, in the same way there has never been an agreement on how to distinguish science from non-science.[37] That does not mean, of course, that I do not have my own position for both of these debates.[38] But that is of little help: as long as the philosophical community will not show a consensus to the outside world, its production will probably not be relied upon and used.

b. Lack of descriptive and normative relevance

As I have suggested,[39] there are arguments in the philosophy of science literature based on a misconception of how science is actually practised, and how it is actually used in society. Several authors advocating the influence of values in science either: claim, at the descriptive level, that non-scientific values are inevitable for doing science, that it is basically impossible to do science without them; or, at the normative level, that values should take precedence over evidence in some cases. An example of the first claim is given by Douglas, who claims that

> none of these jobs [performed by epistemic values] can tell you whether the evidence you have is *strong enough* to make a claim at a particular point in time. [...] the "internal" or "epistemic" virtues of science are not designed to assist with the judgment of whether the evidence is sufficient. They can assist with assessments of whether the theory or claim at issue is minimally adequate, with how strong the evidential support is, and with whether further research is likely to be productive. The question of how strong the evidence needs to be remains unanswered by such considerations.[40]

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[37] See David B. Resnik and Kevin C. Elliott, 'Science, Values, and the New Demarcation Problem', *Journal for General Philosophy of Science,* 54 (2023), 259–86.

[38] Philippe Stamenkovic, 'Straightening the "Value-Laden Turn": Minimising the Influence of Values in Science', *Synthese*, 203 (2024), article 20.

[39] Stamenkovic, 'Straightening the "Value-Laden Turn"'.

[40] Heather Douglas, *Science, Policy, and the Value-Free Ideal* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), pp. 83–84.

An example of the second claim is given by Brown,[41] who has disputed the 'lexical priority of evidence over values', advocating 'an account [which] would allow that evidence may be rejected because of lack of fit with a favoured hypothesis and compelling value judgements, but only so long as one is still able to effectively solve the problem of inquiry.'[42] One thing seems clear: accepting a claim is not fully, algorithmically rule-governed (as is, probably, the vast majority of scientific activities),[43] and some value judgements are inevitable. This does not mean, however, that such values are *non-scientific*. It seems doubtful that not only a mathematician checking his proof, or a particle physicist setting his statistical significance level, but also a molecular biologist exploring the structure of an enzyme, a palaeontologist studying a fossil or even a toxicologist studying a structure-activity relationship of a molecule, always have recourse to non-scientific values when making their claims – note that I am talking here about values *consciously* endorsed, not unconscious bias. *Contra* Douglas, I rather think that scientific practice would be practically *impossible* if scientists had to take non-scientific values into account each time they make a claim – and not that non-scientific values make such claims possible in the first place, as Douglas seems to think. It seems more plausible that in many, and probably most cases, especially – but not only – for disciplines which don't have social implications, scientists follow their own, intra-scientific and intra-disciplinary standards of

[41] Matthew J. Brown, 'Values in Science beyond Underdetermination and Inductive Risk', *Philosophy of Science,* 80.5 (2013), 829–39; Matthew J. Brown, 'Values in Science: Against Epistemic Priority', in *Current Controversies*, ed. by Elliott and Steel, pp. 64–78.

[42] Brown, 'Values in Science beyond Underdetermination and Inductive Risk', p. 838.

[43] One can perhaps think of the calibration of instruments, or performing standardised experimental tests, as counter-examples.

evidence (much in the spirit of Levi's 'canons of inference'),[44] governed by intra-scientific values, the first of which is probably, and simply, error avoidance (i.e. trying to assert as few false statements as possible).[45] Brown's position seems even more extreme, and one wonders what the reaction of a scientist would be if she was told to disregard evidence in favour of values. Such claims, which are apparently aimed at all scientific fields, do not seem to correspond to actual scientific practice and in any case must be *empirically* assessed. Such puzzling claims can lead to descriptive and normative irrelevance, which hinders any usefulness from philosophy of science: if the claims in philosophy of science are not based on a correct assessment of how science works, they are probably not reliable and should not be used.

III. Why, and how, reflecting on its own values can help philosophy of science to ensure its usefulness

In this section, I will first explain why philosophy of science, and in particular the subfield of values in science, should reflect more on the values influencing its own research, before suggesting how doing so may contribute to its usefulness.

a. Why philosophy of science should reflect on its own values

The previous section basically showed that some authors in philosophy of science do not take sufficiently seriously the reasons scientists have to make their claims. In other words, while rightfully promoting the social responsibility of science, these authors do not take sufficiently

[44] Isaac Levi, 'Must the Scientist Make Value Judgments?', *The Journal of Philosophy,* 57.11 (1960), 345–57.
[45] Sven Ove Hansson, 'Values in Pharmacology', in *Uncertainty in Pharmacology*, ed. by Adam LaCaze and Barbara Osimani (Cham: Springer, 2020), 375–96.

seriously scientific truth and objectivity. It would be helpful for philosophy of science to reflect upon this 'value-laden' trend,[46] in both senses of 'value-laden': as a trend asserting the influence of values in science (as its descriptive and/or normative claim); and as a trend being itself value-laden (as its motivation, which is, like any motivation, value-driven). One may summarise this double influence by saying that philosophers belonging to this trend have a *research agenda* with respect to the research avenues they pursue, the evidence they gather and the claims they want to put forward, where certain values are explicitly promoted (typically, the demand for a good social impact of science).[47] Now one thing missing from such research agenda is the assessment of its consequences, not only within science but also outside. This is ironic because assessing the consequences of one's claims is part of the process of assessing the influence of values in science. In other words, the values in science community does not follow its own recommendations for other sciences.

A telling example is given by publication practices in philosophy, which illustrate the way values influence the communication of research results. The acceptance rate of philosophy journals is notoriously low, apparently less than 10%.[48] Now according to the argument of inductive risk, this very low acceptance rate would be justified only if false positives were socially detrimental, which seems most unlikely. In general, it seems very unlikely that philosophical claims have a big impact on society, which would justify such stringent

[46] The values here are non-scientific, such as social welfare or democracy.
[47] See, e.g., Janet Kourany, *Philosophy of Science after Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[48] See Justin Weinberg, 'The "Insanely Low Acceptance Rates" of Philosophy Journals', <https://dailynous.com/2018/05/24/insanely-low-acceptance-rates-philosophy-journals/> [accessed 18 February 2024].

standards.[49] At the same time, and quite ironically, for the fields whose false positives *are* socially detrimental, acceptance rates are much higher: around 30% for education and 50% for health! Of course, that does not mean that the latter, high acceptance rates are the right way to go, but 10% is below any of the surveyed fields by Sugimoto and colleagues,[50] and seems exceedingly low. In any case the social impact of philosophical research is certainly much lower than the impact of the empirical sciences, such as medical science, typically. Of course, such a stringent editorial practice can have a positive impact on philosophical research, in the sense that authors will polish their papers and publish their arguments only if they are extremely well justified and argued for. But it will also decrease the total number of accepted articles, some of which are worth publishing (as indeed many of us have experienced when being forced to reject a valuable paper because it has been negatively reviewed), hence decreasing the usefulness of philosophy, including its intra-scientific value for further research.[51] In any case, there does not appear to be a valid reason why philosophy should have such low acceptance rates in comparison to other

[49] Note that I am here talking about *professional (i.e., academic)* philosophy which is the one obeying to this 10% standard. There are of course public intellectuals calling themselves philosophers who may perhaps have a big impact on society (let me mention, in France, Alain Finkielkraut, or Michel Onfray), but they do not belong to academia and do not respect its very stringent standards – and, ironically enough, do not produce valuable work which is nevertheless published, but this is another problem.

[50] Cassidy R. Sugimoto**,** Vincent Larivière**,** Chaoqun Ni, and Blaise Cronin, 'Journal Acceptance Rates: A Cross-Disciplinary Analysis of Variability and Relationships with Journal Measures', *Journal of Informetrics,* 7.4 (2013), 897–906.

[51] To be rigorously assessed, this claim would have to balance the quality vs. the quantity of published papers: raising the bar leads to better and fewer papers, lowering it to less quality and more papers. But the bar cannot be raised indefinitely, and an optimum has to be found. This big issue would be the subject of an article in itself (at least), but *prima facie* the acceptance rates of philosophy seem very (too) low.

disciplines, quite the contrary. Whatever values may explain the very high standards of publication in philosophy (either scientific values related for example to extremely high standards of knowledge, or non-scientific values related for example to the lack of jobs and the generalised competition), philosophy must reflect upon, and criticise them.

Now, what are the consequences of the value-laden trend in the philosophical literature on values in science? It is fair to call this trend relativistic, in the sense that for these authors scientific facts are or should be established, to a variable extent, relatively to the values, and hence context of interest. [52] Although this kind of philosophical relativism is different from, more rigorous and less extreme than the one advocated by some authors in science studies[53] (where indeed some of these philosophers find inspiration), nevertheless it shares (to a lesser extent) the same approach to put into question important conceptual distinctions, such as the one between facts and values, scientific and non-scientific values, [54] or even science (which descriptively establishes the facts) and politics (which normatively decides what to do with these facts). As it has been documented, such relativistic approaches can have harmful consequences, not only within science, but also in society (for

[52] See again Brown, 'Values in Science: Against Epistemc Priority'.

[53] Such as Bruno Latour and John Woolgar, *Laboratory Life. The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 1986); or Bruno Latour, *Les microbes: Guerre et paix* (Paris: Métailié, 1984). For a critique, see Philippe Stamenkovic, 'The Contradictions and Dangers of Bruno Latour's Conception of Climate Science', *Disputatio: Philosophical Research Bulletin,* 9.13 (2020), 227–60.

[54] E.g., Helen E. Longino, 'Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Values in Science: Rethinking the Dichotomy', in *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*, ed. by L. H. Nelson and J. Nelson (Springer, 1996), pp. 39–58; or Phyllis Rooney, 'The Borderlands Between Epistemic and Non-Epistemic Values', in *Current Controversies*, ed. by Elliott and Steel, pp. 31–45.

example by fuelling climate change denialism[55], or putting patients at risk[56]). Therefore, philosophers of science should take great care before making recommendations about how values should influence scientific practice.

What this value-laden trend and the previous example on publication practice show is that philosophy of science does not take into account the consequences of its own claims, in contradiction with the argument for inductive risk. More than any discipline probably, philosophy is able to grow on its own, in 'soilless cultivation'. Therefore, philosophy of science, and especially the subfield of values in science, should engage into a self-reflection on how its own values influence its practice, by reflectively applying the conceptual tools (such as the argument from inductive risk) it has developed for dealing with such situations.

b. How reflecting on its own values may help philosophy of science to be more useful

To conclude, let me suggest how a self-reflection on its own values may help philosophy of science to be more useful. A well-known aspect where values have an influence in science, and which is decisive in determining the potential usefulness of any research, is the choice of research avenues. In the traditional, post-war conception of Bush and Polanyi[57], based on the unpredictability of research results, full freedom for scientists to choose their research avenues was the best way to guarantee not only the creativity of research but also its applicability to

[55] Sven Ove Hansson, 'Social Constructionism and Climate Science Denial', *European Journal for Philosophy of Science,* 10.3 (2020), 1–27.
[56] Stamenkovic, 'Straightening the "Value-Laden Turn"'.
[57] Vanevar Bush, *The Endless Frontier* (Washington, DC: National Science Foundation, 1945); Michael Polanyi, 'The Republic of Science: Its Political and Economic Theory', *Minerva*, 38 (2000), 1–21.

societal needs. But there are now strong arguments against letting research avenues being determined on purely intra-scientific grounds, without consideration for the wider society in which science is embedded. Such arguments are based both on intra- and extra-scientific grounds: they deny that the creativity of science is necessarily higher when research avenues are fully decided within science; and they deny that such freedom automatically leads to findings which are useful for society. [58] From a democratic point of view, they also claim that society should have its say on what the science it finances is dedicated to[59]. This aspect of the choice of research avenues obviously applies to philosophy, where both scientific (epistemic interests, current state of the literature) and non-scientific (non-epistemic interests, career considerations, etc.) values are at play. Ironically, while philosophy has developed an elaborate reflection on the choice of *other disciplines'* research avenues,[60] it has not, to my knowledge, applied this reflection to *itself* (I am talking here specifically about the debate on values in science). This is a pity because philosophy is probably the discipline where freedom to choose one's research avenues is the highest.

To see how this could work, let us take the example of climate change, which represents a vital threat for humanity and is obviously linked to non-scientific values such as well-being and health, justice, the value we attribute to other species, or indeed our own survival as a species. In our current climate predicament, one could rightfully argue that research avenues and resources should, to an important extent, be dedicated to fighting and adapting to global warming. One could apply

[58] Stéphanie Ruphy, 'La science doit-elle être autonome pour être utile', in *Science, Philosophie, Société,* ed. by Alexandre Guay and Stéphanie Ruphy (Besançon : PUFC, 2017), pp. 61–79.
[59] See Philip Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Douglas, *Science, Policy, and the Value-Free Ideal*; Kourany, *Philosophy of Science after Feminism*.
[60] See, e.g., Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy*.

this reasoning to the choice of research avenues within philosophy, but also to philosophy itself, and question the relevance and usefulness, and even the ethical justification for, practising philosophy itself (at least some fields within it, say metaphysics) in a time of crisis, where any research should be carefully weighted for and potentially redirected.[61] One could prioritise some research avenues within specific areas of philosophy deemed useful in this respect (for example in ethics, political philosophy or philosophy of science), and, on the contrary, deprioritise others (such as, say, in metaphysics or philosophy of language). Therefore, for each research avenue and each research field, a trade-off would ideally have to be made (although it would probably be impossible to perform rigorously) between what such research costs vs. what such research brings from an environmental point of view. Note that in the case of philosophy, the environmental impact of a given research avenue is essentially linked to the human, and hence financial, resources allocated to it: namely the job position, which could potentially be allocated to other research endeavours. It is not (or only negligibly) linked to the *way* research is conducted, for example how CO2 intensive it is.[62]

[61] Of course, one could also argue for the contrary, and maintain that philosophy does not have to be useful whatsoever for fighting even such a vital threat as climate change (or any more or less urgent threat, such as the trespassing of planetary boundaries, the fight for democracy, for truth in the public space, etc.), or that in general it does not have to take into account any extra-academic consideration, that it should remain in its ivory tower. As the preceding has made clear, this is not the conception I defend here, which I take to be incompatible with the very definition of philosophy.

[62] Among all disciplines, philosophy probably has the lowest environmental impact (together with pure mathematics), since it is essentially a purely conceptual, *a priori* discipline and does not require any experiments (except for few areas of 'empirical philosophy' related to some empirical activity like gathering data from surveys or interviews, but again it is probably much lower than in other empirical disciplines which perform lab experiments and require equipment). With respect to how research is conducted, the most important environmental impact is probably linked to academic traveling (which, when it

IV. Conclusion

In this article I have shown how philosophy of science, and in particular its subfield of values in science, can, and sometimes does, become useless. In my first section, I have explained what it means for philosophy of science to be useful: I have briefly proposed some definitions of philosophy and philosophy of science, insisting on the goals which must be pursued for them to be useful. In a second section, I have shown how philosophy of science can become useless, by misuse of philosophical skills and lack of descriptive and normative relevance. Finally, I have shown why and how a self-reflection of philosophy of science upon its own values is a good way to contribute to its usefulness. It is a pity that great intellectual energy may be devoted by very brilliant people to activities whose usefulness can be questioned. Their resources should be put to a better use.

is linked to gathering empirical data, can then make the latter problematic from an environmental point of view).

Critique of Academic Philosophy

Contributions