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PHILOSOPHY INSIDE OUT

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Abstract: Philosophy is often conceived in the Anglophone world today as a subject that focuses on questions in particular “core areas,” pre-eminently epistemology and metaphysics. This article argues that the contemporary conception is a new version of the scholastic “self-indulgence for the few” of which Dewey complained nearly a century ago. Philosophical questions evolve, and a first task for philosophers is to address issues that arise for their own times. The article suggests that a renewal of philosophy today should turn the contemporary conception inside out, attending to and developing further the valuable work being done on the supposed “periphery” and attending to the “core areas” only insofar as is necessary to address genuinely significant questions.

Keywords: reconstruction in philosophy, importance of philosophy, pure philosophy, applied philosophy, scholasticism.

1

Once upon a time, in a country not too far away, the most prominent musicians decided to become serious about their profession. They encouraged their promising students to devote hours to special exercises designed to strengthen fingers, shape lips, and extend breath control. Within a few years, conservatories began to hold exciting competitions, at which the most rigorous etudes would be performed in public. For a while, these contests went on side by side with concerts devoted to the traditional repertoire. Gradually, however, interest in the compositions of the past—and virtually all those of the present—began to wane. Serious pianists found the studies composed by Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, and Ligeti insufficiently taxing, and they dismissed the suites, concertos, and sonatas of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Prokofiev as worthy of performance only by second-raters.

Popular interest in the festivals organized by the major conservatories quickly declined, although the contests continued to be attended by a tiny group of self-described cognoscenti. A few maverick musicians, including some who had once been counted among the serious professionals, offered performances of works their elite ex-colleagues despised. When reports of the broad enthusiastic response to a recital centered on the late

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Beethoven sonatas came to the ears of the professionals, the glowing reviews produced only a smile and a sniff. For serious pianists, the fact that one of their former fellows had now decided to slum it was no cause for serious concern. Compared to the recent competition in which one pianist had delivered *Multi-Scale 937* in under 7'10" and another had ornamented *Quadruple Tremolo 41* with an extra trill, an applauded performance of the *Hammerklavier* was truly small potatoes.

As time went on, the outside audience for "serious performance" dwindled to nothing, and the public applause for the "second-raters" who offered Bach, Chopin, and Prokofiev became more intense. The smiles of the cognoscenti became a little more strained, and the sniffs were ever more disdainful.

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Is this sorry tale relevant to the current state of philosophy in the English-speaking world? I shall not try to offer conclusive reasons for thinking that it captures the predicament of Anglophone philosophy in the early twenty-first century, but I shall argue that the question is worth taking very seriously. My aim will be to offer suggestions for "reconstruction in philosophy." I shall present a vision of our discipline that questions the dominant assumption that topics currently viewed as central deserve the emphasis placed on them, and that celebrates issues often regarded as peripheral.

Reconstruction in Philosophy is the title of a book by John Dewey (Dewey 1957), whom I take to be the most important philosopher of the twentieth century. The approach I shall elaborate renews Dewey's concerns with respect to our own times. To add to the madness of my estimate of Dewey's significance, let me start with his provocative characterization of philosophy: "If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as *the general theory of education*" (Dewey 1997, 328). Dewey's proposal reminds us of his pioneering work in setting up the lab school at the University of Chicago, and of his continual willingness to cross West 120th Street to join Columbia University to Teachers College. For those who have been well brought up in late twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy, the suggestion is, at best, quaint. Applied philosophy is all very well, but we know where the center of the discipline lies: in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind—the "core areas," as aficionados typically call them.

Yet why exactly should we accept that standard picture? What is philosophy supposed to do—for individual people or for a broader culture? Pragmatists will think of areas of inquiry as making contributions to human lives, and suppose that those areas are healthy only if they are

directed toward delivering the things expected of them. When some discipline seems to be cut off from other areas, when the “literature” it produces is regarded as arcane and irrelevant, they will think it worth asking if that discipline is doing its proper job. Immediately after characterizing philosophy as the “general theory of education,” Dewey buttresses his definition by raising this issue: “Unless a philosophy is to remain symbolic—or verbal—or a sentimental indulgence for a few, or else mere arbitrary dogma, its auditing of past experience and its program of values must take effect in conduct” (Dewey 1997, 328). The danger that a field of inquiry will become a “sentimental indulgence for a few”—or perhaps a site of intellectual jousting for a few—is especially urgent in the case of philosophy. “The fact that philosophical problems arise because of widespread and widely felt difficulties in social practice is disguised because philosophers become a specialized class which uses a technical language, unlike the vocabulary in which the direct difficulties are stated” (Dewey 1997, 328). Two important points are made here: first, philosophical problems emerge from situations in which people—many people, not just an elite class—find themselves; second, the development of technical language is particularly problematic in philosophy. Both these points need to be treated carefully.

Take the second first. Philosophy is hardly unique in using a specialized language. Mathematicians, physicists, and biologists all talk and write in ways that outsiders find incomprehensible. Can the pragmatist suspicion that all is not well with the technicalia of philosophy be distinguished from the philistine dismissal of the esoterica of mathematics, physics, and molecular genetics?

There are indeed important differences between philosophy and the practice of the natural sciences. Faced with skepticism about the worth of seeking the Higgs vector boson or investigating the concentrations of particular molecules in particular cells of apparently uninteresting organisms, particle physicists and molecular biologists can describe, at least in outline, a sequence of steps that will lead from answers to the technical questions they pose to issues of far broader, and more readily comprehensible, significance. Investigations of these molecules can be combined with those achieved in different studies to yield a picture of a small step in the development of organisms, and that picture, in its turn, can be integrated with perspectives similarly achieved on other aspects of development, until, at last, our successors may understand how a multicellular organism emerges from a zygote. Not only is there a vision of how a large question, one whose significance outsiders can appreciate, can be decomposed into smaller issues, significant because of their potential contribution to giving the large answer, there is also every reason to believe that well-grounded answers can be found. Discovering those answers may require time, persistence, and ingenuity, but researchers are encouraged by the recognition that others have done similar things

before. They see themselves as having “methods” for arriving at reliable results.

Philosophy isn't like that. To the extent that the technical issues that fill Anglophone journals result in any comprehensible way from questions of large significance, they do not seem to have reached the stage at which firm answers might be found. 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.

Mathematics might provide a more promising comparison, since there are affinities between the purest parts of mathematics and game-playing, and some famous players have even gloried in the “uselessness” of the subject (Hardy 1967). Here too, however, similar points hold. Even at their most playful, mathematical investigations have rules for bringing the game to an end; one may fail to see the point of a theorem (why anyone would care about it), but disputes about its status as a theorem can typically be settled. Furthermore, the alleged uselessness of pure mathematics should be placed in historical context. Until the Renaissance, mathematics was viewed as a low-status activity, precisely because its practitioners were perceived as playing games of no great significance. Developments of mathematics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries showed how mathematical languages, devised for esoteric purposes or for no purpose at all, might be valuable in framing physical inquiry. Talk of imaginary numbers, for instance, characterized apologetically by Bombelli (who introduced them) as “subtile and useless,” became an integral part of an algebraic language for a nascent theory of functions that could be deployed in understanding motion. The role of mathematics within inquiry—and the social status of mathematicians—changed. In effect, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on, mathematicians have been given license to focus on the questions they (collectively) regard as significant, to introduce new languages, and to find promising new games as they please. Workers in other fields can borrow from these languages in reformulating their own questions, and even though not every extension of mathematics lends itself to appropriation by physicists or biologists or economists, there have been enough successful examples to justify the original faith in free mathematical play.

Philosophy might aspire to something similar, 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. In part that is because of the lack of procedures for yielding firm solutions, but also because philosophical issues evolve. As Dewey remarks of philosophical questions, "We do not solve them: we get over them" (Dewey 1998, 19).

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This feature of philosophy is central to the other point I mentioned above as worthy of careful treatment. It is easy to suppose that there are timeless questions, formulated by the Greeks, or by Descartes, or by Frege, or by Wittgenstein, that, once introduced, must constitute the core of the subject thenceforward. I want to suggest a different history, one more consonant with the pictures historians paint of the evolution of the natural and social sciences. Philosophy grows out of an impulse toward understanding nature and the human place in it, an impulse that was present long before the invention of writing. At early stages of written culture, that impulse is expressed in undifferentiated concerns about the cosmos, matter, life, society, and value. As Dewey remarks in the opening pages of *The Quest for Certainty*, the impetus to philosophy was present in all human contexts, from the natural and social environments of our Paleolithic ancestors, through the variant forms of society we know from history and anthropology, to the circumstances of the present. At each stage, the philosopher's first task is to recognize the appropriate questions that arise for his contemporaries. Dewey focuses this thought by offering a diagnosis of the needs of the 1920s: "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" (Dewey 1988, 204). Whether or not this is a good diagnosis for his time or for ours is something I'll consider later. For the moment, however, I want to see it as pointing to two axes along which philosophy has historically operated, and as recognizing an important shift along one of these.

For most of the history of the sciences, those most deeply involved saw themselves as doing "natural philosophy." Similarly, figures we continue to teach in philosophy classes recognized no limitations that prevented them from pronouncing on issues we take as scientific. From the fragments of their writings that have come down to us, the pre-Socratics were plainly concerned with questions of physics; Aristotle evidently took all nature as his province; Descartes wrote the discourse on method as a preface to treatises on geometry, optics, and meteorology; Kant discussed the formation of planetary systems as well as the categories of pure understanding. Ambitious attempts to advance and defend claims about the natural world, without venturing very far into it, waned in popularity only as the need for intricate and demanding experimentation became more evident. Never-

theless, the connections between philosophy and the search for knowledge of nature show the value of informed reflective thought: philosophers with a thirst to acquaint themselves with the best information available to their contemporaries have often found ways of framing a nascent field of inquiry. Philosophical *midwifery*, as I shall call it, is a valuable result of the original urge for systematic knowledge of nature.

The search for natural knowledge defines one axis along which philosophy has been directed. As that search is undertaken, the form of the question changes. Ancient thinkers wanted to know the fundamental elements out of which the cosmos is built. Two millennia later, it began to become clear that answers to questions like that would require complicated interactions with the natural world to address all sorts of preliminary issues, and that dawning recognition gave rise to a division of labor. From the nineteenth century on, philosophy's role in the search for natural knowledge has been that of an assistant. There are places where difficulties arise through conceptual confusion, or where options are limited because some presupposition defines the apparent possibilities—and in these places natural philosophy can still flourish. I'll postpone for the moment any further consideration of this role for philosophy, and of how it can contribute to the enterprise of factual knowledge.

The second axis marked out by Dewey's diagnosis is directed toward identifying value. For Paleolithic people, living together in small bands, as for well-born members of a Greek *polis* and for citizens of contemporary societies, there are issues about what ways of life are worthwhile, what ends are worth pursuing, what rules should govern their interactions, and what institutions they should fashion or maintain. Questions like these arise from the conditions in which they find themselves, and as those conditions change, we should not expect that the formulations that are most salient or most apt should remain invariant. They are questions that are urgent for all people—or at least for all people who have any chance of directing the course of their lives. They deserve answers that not only are pertinent to the situations in which people find themselves but also are as well informed as possible about the character of the world in which we live (including what is known about ourselves). Hence Dewey emphasizes the importance of integrating the contributions of various forms of inquiry, and of connecting them with our search for what is valuable. As he goes on to remark: "Man has never had such a varied body of knowledge in his possession before, and probably never before has he been so uncertain and so perplexed as to what his knowledge means, what it points to in action and in consequences" (Dewey 1988, 249). The evolution of philosophy along the value-oriented axis should respond to the changing circumstances of individual and social life, and also incorporate the best general picture that can be derived from the contributions of the various specialized sciences. Framing that general picture is itself a philosophical problem that emerges along the knowledge-axis.

We can now begin to understand how philosophy can continue to be more than a “sentimental indulgence for a few,” how it can be a vital part of evolving human culture. Setting aside any further ventures in philosophical midwifery, societies and individuals continue to need an integrated picture of nature that combines the contributions of different areas of inquiry, and different fields of investigation can be assisted by thinkers whose more synthetic perspective can alert them to missed opportunities and provide them with needed clarification. Along the value-axis, philosophy can offer an account of ethics as an evolving practice, one that has probably occupied our species for most of its history, and that has been variously distorted by claims to expertise that are based on alleged religious revelations or on supposed *a priori* reasoning. They can seek, as Dewey recommended, methods for advancing the ethical project more “intelligently.” In light of this account, using whatever methodological advice can be garnered from it, they can identify the points in current ethical, social, and political practice where tensions and difficulties arise, attempting to facilitate discussions that will lead to progressive shifts.

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.

4

I'll attempt to remedy the vagueness of this vision by offering some illustrations with respect to each of the axes along which philosophical discussions should advance. Consider, first, the knowledge-seeking axis. There are, of course, the grand questions that dominate our standard curricula: What is knowledge? Can various forms of skepticism be rebutted? Professional meetings are typically abuzz with spin-offs from these grand questions: Should we opt for internalism or externalism? Is knowledge distinct from belief or a form of belief? We lack firm answers to these questions. That does not seem to matter very much. Inquiry goes on, often delivering valuable results. It is far from evident that it would go even better if especially clever philosophers settled these issues once and for all.

Some of the questions were once important. In the early seventeenth century, as Aristotelianism crumbled after two millennia of dominance, it was extremely natural to ask how knowledge could be placed on an immovable foundation. For those who saw the past as an exercise of building on sand, it was important that this should never happen again. Out of their (ultimately unsuccessful) efforts to find firm foundations came many of the questions that dominate our courses. Yet our predicament is

different. We have grown used to the idea that almost everything—or for some of us, everything—is revisable. What issues should arise in our times?

The knowledge-axis of philosophy began by seeking to identify the structure of the cosmos. Today it is doubtful that there is any grand structure to be found. As Nancy Cartwright has forcefully argued, we live in a dappled world (Cartwright 1999). The predicament of inquiry is to select questions that are particularly salient for people, given their cognitive capacities and their evolving interests, and then to work to address *those* questions—not to seek some grand “theory of everything.” Perhaps some insightful philosophers can help through further midwifery: helping neuroscience in its struggles to tackle hard problems about consciousness, say—although I harbor doubts about whether these topics are tractable in our current situation. Or perhaps philosophers can bring broader perspectives to bear on areas of inquiry where there are protracted debates and difficulties: in debates about how to square quantum mechanics with the theory of relativity, or in disputes about biological determinants of behavior, for example.

As the division of labor between philosophy and natural science was more firmly instituted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was an obvious way to redirect the knowledge-seeking of philosophers. The natural scientists would investigate the world, while the philosophers would study the methods of investigation. Provision of canons of evidence, and explication of metascientific concepts—like *theory*, *law*, *cause*, and *explanation*—would contribute to philosophical midwifery by demonstrating how nascent sciences might begin to grow. From the efforts of nineteenth-century methodologists, Mill and Peirce for example, to the attempts of logical positivists, logical empiricists, and contemporary Bayesians, some valuable things have been learned, and we have acquired better tools for the resolution of scientific controversies. Yet, just as there is no grand theory of nature, so too there is no overarching scientific method of any substance. There are the various fields of inquiry with their collection of techniques for assessing hypotheses, techniques passed on to aspiring practitioners in “methodology” courses. If the philosophy of science is to make genuine contributions to the methods used in any of these fields, it must be by delving into the details—as, for example, Clark Glymour and his colleagues do with respect to the discovery and evaluation of causal models from statistical data (Spirtes, Glymour, and Scheines 2000).

The epistemological questions I’ve so far considered focus on *individual* knowledge. Yet it should be evident that the principal issues in an age in which so much potential information abounds are *social*. In what directions should inquiry go, if it is to respond to human needs? How can collective knowledge be certified, and its status made clear? How can the body of knowledge we have be organized so it is available for distribution to the people who need it? How are the claims of expertise

to be balanced against the claims of democracy? Among others, Alvin Goldman, Nancy Cartwright, and I have begun to consider questions of these types (Goldman 1999, Cartwright 2007, Kitcher 2001 and forthcoming b). I submit that our preliminary efforts are not peripheral investigations that derive from “core epistemology.” They are central to a renewal of philosophy at a time when one significant project along the knowledge-axis is, in Cartwright’s apt phrase, to explore how knowledge can best be adapted “for human use.”

5

My earlier discussion of the value-axis takes for granted a view of the ethical project that I cannot fully defend here. Like Dewey, I take ethics to be a human invention, although not an arbitrary one. It grows out of our needs and our social condition—it is, if you like, a social technology that responds to the problems of that condition. We have been at it for at least fifty thousand years, and for most of that time our ethical practices have been worked out in very small groups.

Here is a brief and blunt overview (a more extended account is given in Kitcher forthcoming a). Our hominid ancestors, like our evolutionary cousins the chimpanzees, lived in groups mixed by age and sex. They were able to achieve that social state because they had acquired psychological dispositions to altruism. Like contemporary chimp societies, those hominid groups were constantly in danger of social dissolution because of the limits of the altruistic tendencies. Unlike our relatives, who continue to solve their social problems through time-consuming forms of reconciliation, we human beings gained an ability to control some socially disruptive inclinations through self-command. The ethical project began when our ancestors deliberated with one another, on terms of equality among the adult members, all of whom were needed for the survival of the band, and arrived at an agreement on rules that would govern their lives together. They initiated a series of experiments of living—to use Mill’s phrase—and we, who come late in that series, have inherited the experimental ideas that were most culturally successful.

Neither natural nor cultural selection has any tendency to generate elements of ethical practice that might merit the title of “truth” or “rightness.” Despite this, the analogy I suggested provides a way to think about ethical progress. We can understand technological progress in terms of the solution of problems, both the problems that a branch of technology addresses at its origin and those it generates as it proceeds—and just this type of progress can be identified in the ethical case. Ethical progress has probably been rare, and has certainly been unsteady. Dewey’s hope—which I share—is that an understanding of the character of the ethical project can help us make progressive transitions more frequently and more easily.

If anything like this picture of ethics is correct, then it bears on the way philosophy should proceed along the value-axis. Contemporary metaethics, as practiced in the English-speaking world, is full of questions about “reasons” and “knowledge” that an account of ethics as social technology bypasses. Instead, we might employ the picture to diagnose the condition of contemporary ethical practices. They are radically different from those that obtained at early stages of the ethical project, for causal involvement with other members of our species takes place on a far vaster scale, what ethical discussions we have are not undertaken on terms of equality or with any close connection with many people who might be affected by what we decide, and our entire thinking is dominated by the myth that there are experts who can answer ethical questions—religious teachers who have access to the will of a being who sets the rules, or (a *far* less influential version of the myth) clever philosophers who have discovered the fundamental principles on which the governance of conduct should rest. Both versions sometimes fasten on *stable elements* of ethical traditions, principles, or ideals that were introduced in a progressive shift and would remain in place under further progressive modifications—we might introduce a notion of ethical truth to mark this feature of them—but instead of presenting these ideals and principles in the vague forms that underlie their stability, religious teachings and philosophical pronouncements, driven by the desire for complete systematization, transform them into universal claims that brook no exception.

One task for ethical practice is to pay attention to the places at which these vague, but useful, pieces of technology get in each other’s way, and to find ways of harmonizing them. Another is to facilitate some analogue of conversation in a world in which billions of voices are typically lost. Once the myth of expertise is abandoned, philosophers can only propose. A proposal I favor is that we seek to emulate the features of the ethical project that dominated its early stages, requiring conversation to engage with the aspirations and needs of others—*all* others, on an equal basis—and that discussion must accord with the best integrated knowledge we have (according to the synthetic philosophical picture generated along the knowledge-axis).

One particular task for philosophical inquiry is to attend to the functioning of those roles and institutions that the evolution of the ethical project has generated. Many of the questions people pose about what they should do or about what they should aspire to be are already framed in terms of existing roles and institutions—*caregiver* and *worker*, *property* and *marriage*. Given the picture I have sketched, we should anticipate that roles and institutions were introduced in response to problems that were salient for our ancestors. Through a genealogical investigation, one that traces their original functions, we can prepare the way for exploration of alternatives that are better suited to the problem-background of our own times.

Another task is to address the opportunities for people, individually and collectively, to engage in reflection and conversation about the sense of their lives. Aristotle's brilliant anatomy of the good life proceeds from the circumstances in which elite members of the *polis* found themselves. We need not only an anatomy that is responsive to the full range of modern subjects but also a physiology that will give, beyond the bare list of possibilities, a sense of how a particular kind of life might be experienced. Dewey recognized the need for a physiology of this sort, and saw it as proceeding through the interaction between philosophy and the arts: "As empirical fact, however, the arts, those of converse and the literary arts which are the enhanced continuations of social converse, have been the means by which goods are brought home to human perception. The writings of moralists have been efficacious in this direction upon the whole not in their professed intent as theoretical doctrine, but in as far as they have genially participated in the arts of poetry, fiction, parable and drama" (Dewey 1958, 432). Work that points to the philosophical significance of literature is not peripheral but central to a philosophical question that arises in different specific forms in different epochs.

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Much of what I have said is probably crude, simplistic, and wrong. Yet I don't think the errors and the need for refinement matter to my plea for philosophical redirection. Whether I have the details right, it seems abundantly clear that there are important questions along both axes that philosophy should be addressing, and that much of what is taken to lie at the center of our subject has no obvious bearing on any such question. Appearances might be deceptive. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on philosophers to consider just what, if anything, makes their intended contributions worth having.

There are many places in contemporary Anglophone philosophy where work that genuinely makes a difference is being done. Philosophers of the special sciences, not only physics and biology but also psychology, economics, and linguistics, are attending to controversies that bear on the future evolution of the focal field, and sometimes on matters that affect the broader public. Some political philosophers are probing the conditions of modern democracy, considering in particular the issues that arise within multicultural societies. Ventures in normative ethics sometimes take up the particular challenges posed by new technologies, or the problems of global poverty. Social epistemology has taken some first, tentative, steps. A growing number of thinkers are engaging with questions of race, gender, and class. Within aesthetics, attention has been paid to connections between art and politics, and some philosophers have followed Stanley Cavell's pioneering work in exploring the philosophical significance of major works of music, drama, and literature (Cavell

1969). In many of these developments, there is a welcome rapprochement between ways of thinking that were too often blocked off from one another by prominent “Stop” signs, marked with one of the two unhelpful labels, “Analytic” and “Continental.”

The many praiseworthy ventures to which I have just alluded rarely view themselves as part of a common philosophical approach: what, after all, does a critique of rational choice models in economics have to do with an excavation of the moral perspective in the novels of Henry James? (Sen 1977, Pippin 2000.) Whatever the degree of shared consciousness, these parts of contemporary Anglophone philosophy realize Dewey’s vision, in their attempts to renew philosophy in relation to contemporary life and culture. Dewey’s own major works work through similar terrain, as they range from science to politics, from religion to aesthetics. Dewey’s descendants may even be seen as exemplifying his account of philosophy as general theory of education, in their serious consideration of the world as the current state of inquiry presents it, in their attempt to provide an integrated vision of that world that can guide the developing individual, in their attention to the meaningful possibilities for that individual, in the shaping of a self that will live in community with others.

What binds these endeavors together is a concern for philosophical questions that matter, rather than a shared method. 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 substance of it. As I said at the beginning, I leave it to those for whom metaphysics and epistemology, philosophy of language and of mind, as currently practiced, count as the center of philosophy to respond to the challenge. If that challenge cannot be met, then our current image of philosophy should be turned inside out.

Why does that image matter? What is the point of the metaphilosophical question? I gave one part of the answer already: the common Anglophone conception of philosophy shapes the ways in which practitioners relate to other areas of inquiry and to the problems of everyday human life. A faulty image will mislead the profession of philosophy, and the consequence will be a failure to fulfill the functions with which philosophers are properly charged. My reintroduction of the theme of education suggests the second part of the answer. Graduate programs in philosophy currently train highly intelligent and imaginative young people, whose lives will be dominated for decades by the problems their mentors and colleagues take to be central to the field. We train them well by giving them studies that improve their facility for thinking precisely and rigorously. If, however, our image of philosophy fails to distinguish

the preliminary studies from the genuine work, if it treats what is most important as mere periphery, as a place in which the second-raters slum it, then their education will have failed them. Whether they eventually recognize it or not, they may spend their entire lives knocking a second off the performance of *Multi-Scale 937* or adding an extra trill to *Quadruple Tremolo 41*.

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