

**The Crisis of the Human Sciences:
False Objectivity and the Decline
of Creativity**

Edited by

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P U B L I S H I N G

CHAPTER EIGHT

PHILOSOPHY 101:
WHAT'S LEFT OF THE DISCIPLINE
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

ANDREI G. ZAVALIY

My primary goal in this article is to address the question of philosophy's role as a core discipline in the curriculum of most Liberal Arts institutions. Of necessity, the discussion below will hardly be exhaustive, and will at best highlight a direction for a more comprehensive answer. But any attempt to discuss the relevance of philosophy in whatever context inevitably leads to a more general and traditional question of the nature of philosophy itself. Philosophy is quite notorious among other disciplines for its never-ending self-reflective speculations, at all times trying to define itself and find its proper place in the family of other academic subjects. Indeed, this perennial feeling of insecurity about its proper status is what initially sets philosophy apart from the disciplines exhibiting a much more confident posture. Moreover, philosophy's ongoing crisis of identity, which one could perhaps tolerate in a new and immature discipline, seems to get worse with age. Yet, before we can decide whether this apparent lack of confidence in the pronouncements of the philosophers regarding their own subject matter is philosophy's serious flaw or its special advantage, it will be helpful to briefly outline several important developmental tendencies that philosophy has shown during its long history.

Philosophy: A Historical Overview

One may argue that among all the survived disciplines in the Humanities philosophy has suffered the most unfortunate fate. Looking from one angle, history of philosophy is a history of the continuous narrowing of its subject matter. Western philosophy originated in Ancient Greece as an all-encompassing yearning for wisdom. That philosophy proper begins in wonder was first

suggested by Plato, and later reiterated by his exceptional student, Aristotle.¹ The suggestion implied that any object that inspired that wonder, any puzzling state of affairs or any baffling question was the proper concern of a philosopher. The domain of wisdom in those early years had no bounds; it included in its scope everything starting from the questions about the nature of distant stars to the issues surrounding the theory of government. Incidentally, the titles of Aristotle's works are read today as the combined list of publications from all the different departments of a large modern university. His legacy includes works on Logic, Physics, Ethics, Meteorology, Psychology, Biology, Political science, Literary criticism, History, Rhetoric, and, of course, Metaphysics. Surely, there are enough *wonder-ful* things in each of these areas; hence, it is the philosopher, the ancients thought, the lover of wisdom, who should make an attempt at *understanding* as well as take the real risk of failure of his best intellectual efforts.

Traditionally, philosophy is characterized as the search for truth with the help of reason. Philosophy is a natural intellectual response to the universal and innate human desire to know. This is in part what has been attracting many young people to philosophy – its promise to provide plausible answers to the most perplexing questions of human existence. But the intellectual authority of metaphysics has been seriously challenged since the time of the Enlightenment by the rapid development of new areas of study and new methods of investigation. For some time philosophy was able to absorb these new developments without losing its identity – partly because of its own rich history of empirical investigations, dating back to at least Aristotle. Writing in the 17th century, Isaac Newton considered himself a philosopher, who is primarily concerned with nature. Indeed, the title of his groundbreaking book reads as “The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy.” As late as in the middle of the 18th century, Immanuel Kant, considered by many as one of the most influential philosophers of modern times, published serious studies in astronomy (and has a scientific hypothesis named after him)², proposed new theory of the winds, and speculated about the nature of the volcanoes on the Moon, alongside his more familiar books, which are generally studied only in the philosophy departments.

¹ “[You are perplexed, Theaetetus], because you are a philosopher, for philosophy begins in wonder” (Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d). Cf. Aristotle: “It was their wonder, astonishment, that first led men to philosophize and still leads them” (*Metaphysics*, 982b12).

² *The Kant-Laplace theory* – a hypothesis that the Solar system evolved from a nebula.

A philosopher, as we know him today, becomes an elusive figure as soon as we project our definitions deeper into the past. No student of philosophy can fail to notice, as Kwame Appiah remarks, that contemporary reference books “almost invariably give pre-twentieth-century philosophers compound designations: this person is a philosopher and mathematician, that a philosopher and litterateur, the other a philosopher and political economist” (Appiah 2008:11-12). To someone like Descartes these designations would border on the category mistake - it is like calling nowadays, say, James Watson, a co-discoverer of DNA, a scientist *and* a molecular biologist.³ The former seems to be logically implied by the latter, and the two concepts seem out of place in a single conjunction. But it is during the late 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century that we saw a slow emergence of the profession of a philosopher, as a character quite distinct from all the other scientists, who (we are told) deal with the “real world.” Physics, chemistry and astronomy have initiated the breakup, with many other disciplines to follow. Psychology was one of the latest branches of philosophy that secured independence at the turn of the 20th century,⁴ followed by its close cousin, the cognitive science. Formal logic has started a drift toward departments of mathematics; many of the ethical concerns are now taken over by moral psychologists and anthropologists, and philosophy of language keeps gravitating toward linguistics. In addition, a number of mainstream philosophical debates in the 20th century have been started by people anchored to the departments of Comparative Literatures, Political Science and Evolutionary Biology. It was then only a matter of time when the question could be asked of any student majoring in philosophy: “So, what *exactly* are you doing over there?”

The ongoing dismembering of the once comprehensive discipline took a heavy toll on its image. In the eyes of contemporary college students philosophy has long ceased to be the source of any relevant knowledge. Utilizing that notorious distinction, beloved by so many students, between *facts* and *opinion*, philosophy is perceived as a collection of strange opinions, which, one is led to believe, has no bearing on the reality outside the classroom. It is undeniable that today the intellectual authority of the discipline is at one of the lowest points.

³ Descartes had a grand vision of the unity of sciences, structured in a hierarchical order. In a letter to Picot, who translated *Principia Philosophiae* into French, he writes: “All philosophy is like a tree, of which the roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches, which grow from this trunk, are all of the other sciences, which is to say medicine, mechanics, and morals” (Descartes 1647).

⁴ Or at least this is how a story is *traditionally* told. But as Appiah observes, one can make an equally strong case arguing that modern philosophy calved off from psychology, not the other way around (Appiah 2008: 14-15).

But besides the purely intellectual inquiries with the goal of knowledge as the highest benefit, philosophy, in addition, was thought to make a particular emotional contribution. Both the Stoics and the Sceptics of the ancient world clearly realized that having the correct understanding of one's own place within the universe or identifying one's epistemic limits eliminates the unnecessary worries and leads to a much more comfortable emotional state.⁵ Philosophy was thought to provide a path for peace of mind, and, hence, happiness. It was worth being a philosopher even if no positive knowledge was gained in the process. Seneca offered philosophical meditations to his mother Helvia as an effective medicine, capable of conquering even the most stubborn of emotions – grief. And in a letter to a friend he went to a great length detailing how through the proper exercise in philosophy one can shake off all the troubles and achieve that “supreme and nearly divine” state of mind – passionless serenity (Seneca 1997: 73).⁶

The tradition did not die out with the ancients, and had an immense influence on the subsequent history of thought. The title of the widely-read book of Boethius, a late antiquity figure, “The Consolation of Philosophy”,⁷ speaks for itself, and for the centuries to come this particular approach to philosophy as the source of reassurance in adverse circumstances would be perceived as a real alternative to the emotional comfort offered through the more familiar venue, namely, through religion. This attitude was epitomized by Montaigne in the 16th century France in his famous motto: “To philosophize is to prepare oneself for death.” Montaigne's idea, expressed so eloquently in many of his *Essays*, was that our basic emotions, including fear of death, could be trained and controlled through a systematic intellectual effort, with the end result of an individual who does not lose his composure even in the face of the most terrible prospects. The claim that philosophy, that *medicina mentis*, is capable of taming unruly emotions can be traced, of course, back to Socrates' speech in the *Apology*, it had its great champion in the figure of Spinoza, and its echo can be found as late as in Tolstoy's writings.

⁵ The desirable end-result of skeptical investigations was usually transmitted by the term *ataraxia* (tranquility) (e.g., Pyrrho, Sextus Empiricus), whereas Stoics often referred to their final goal as *euthymia* (gladness, serenity) (e.g., Seneca). Both schools equally used the term *apatheia* (passionless state).

⁶ It should perhaps be also mentioned that another effective method to get rid of all troubles, suggested by Seneca, was alcohol: “Occasionally we should even come to the point of intoxication, sinking into drink but not being totally flooded by it: for it does wash away cares, and stirs the mind to its depths, and heals sorrow just as it heals certain diseases” (*Ibid.*: 105).

⁷ Boethius, 480-525 C.E. The modern version of the book, with the same title, was published by Alain de Botton in 2000, and became an instant bestseller, with a TV series based on it.

Yet even this modest function of philosophy was taken away from it in the 20th century by professional psychotherapists and psychologists. Several recent attempts to bring back philosophy as an alternative to mainstream psychotherapy do appear like exotic peculiarities rather than serious developments.⁸ And now Bertrand Russell can condescendingly claim that studying the philosophers of the past is the process not without “the aesthetic satisfaction”, but would deny any therapeutic or other substantial value to the traditional ways of doing philosophy.⁹ Reducing the long history of philosophical efforts to a purely aesthetic enterprise did seem like a death blow to the discipline. If philosophy is neither the guide for the perplexed nor the comforter of the disturbed, then what exactly is it?

The notorious question of the practical value of philosophy, repeated by so many students (as well as our colleagues from other departments), betrays a deeper issue. The self-image projected by philosophy in the modern world bears the scars of dismemberment and shows signs of inner insecurity. And yet it continues to exist and to play a role in the intellectual life of our society. Its survival is partly due to its impressive adaptive mechanisms. The crisis of identity of philosophy led to two different reactions in the 20th century.¹⁰ On the one hand, those philosophers who were particularly impressed by the obvious success of empirical and mathematical sciences loudly announced “the end of metaphysics” in its traditional form, arguing that all the meaningful questions that the philosophers could have formulated are now picked up by the special disciplines; and the ones which are not addressed by science are simply not meaningful and should be abandoned. Rudolf Carnap, one of the defenders of this attitude, wrote in 1934: “Philosophy is the logic of science, i.e., the logical analysis of the concepts, propositions, proofs, theories of science” (Carnap 1934: 6). On this view, after the heralded “linguistic turn”, the role of the philosophers was reduced to servicing ‘hard’ scientists by supplying the necessary definitions and working out the logical implications of scientific

⁸ Cf. Lou Marinoff, “Plato not Prozac! Applying Eternal Wisdom to Everyday Problems”, New York, Harper Collins, 1999.

⁹ “There is the essential difference between the aesthetic satisfaction, which I allow, and the religious comfort, which I deny to philosophy.” (Bertrand Russell 1967: 81). Although Russell presents a more positive outlook on the field in his other collection of essays “The Problems of Philosophy” (1912).

¹⁰ The two reactions, described below, only *partly* correspond to the analytic-continental traditions in philosophy.

theories.¹¹ Having just recently emancipated itself from service to religion, it was now enslaved by religion's more agile successor, natural science.

But not all philosophers were content with playing a second fiddle to science. This internal opposition led to important new developments. Indeed, it gave rise to a distinct tradition of philosophizing, and, as is often the case, the new beginning was signaled by a common danger. The continuous emigration of the various questions and problems out of philosophy into other fields of enquiry has initially prompted a strong defensive attitude and increased efforts to demonstrate the relevance of the field to human life as it is *actually* lived. Humans and human experience in the world were placed on the banner of this movement. Questions of meaning were once again posed, but not in the purely semantic context. Rather, it was the meaning of human existence that was at issue, and, it was argued, the conceptual analysis of ordinary language was quite irrelevant for solving that pressing problem. The tradition in question is too rich and too complicated to allow for a short overview that would be both fair and informative, but there is at least one feature that is common to such diverse philosophers as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer. All of them find beginnings of philosophy in the concrete participation in the world, rather than in the detached observation of the objects "outside" of us. "Philosophy of the object ends up in positivism," writes John Macquarrie, implying that this result is indicative of an intellectual dead-end, rather than an achievement. But, he continues, "the philosophy of existence attempts to overcome the subject-object split" (Macquarrie 1968: 51-52). The infamous split was supposed to be overcome primarily by shifting attention of the philosophers from the external phenomena to the various modes of human involvement and human interaction with the world. Hence the vocabulary of the 20th century philosophy was enriched by such 'unscientific' terms as mood, care, concern, despair and anguish, for these are the terms that best characterize our natural attitude toward the world we find ourselves in.

Yet, the tradition that centers on the value and meaning of human existence soon finds itself facing a dilemma. Either all the incredible multiplicity of the personal life-projects *should* (in the sense of rational normativity) converge on the single grand-project, the fundamental

¹¹ Cf. Ayer: "For the philosopher, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. He is only concerned with the way in which we speak about them. In other words, the propositions of philosophy are not factual, but linguistic in character – that is, they do not express behavior of physical, or even mental, objects; they express definitions, or the formal consequences of definitions." (A. J. Ayer 1936: 57).

meta-narrative, the ultimate common goal, or else, it allows for unrestricted coexistence of all value-systems, without attempting to establish any normative hierarchies between them. Rationally arguing for the first option seems hopeless; opting for the second – disastrous. Efforts to avoid the dilemma, or to reformulate it in more acceptable terms, led to some curious stylistic consequences, which, for the years to come, would become the hallmark of this, broadly speaking, ‘continental’ way of doing philosophy. I mean the unbridled use of metaphors, analogies and similes to the point where it becomes virtually impossible for the lay reader to get to the intended meaning, or, alternatively, where practically any meaning could be assigned to the text with some plausibility.¹² Proficiency at deep exegesis now becomes a necessary skill for any reader of the contemporary philosophical texts, and, as the skill is rare, the circle of serious readers inevitably narrows down. From the outsider’s point of view, this only brings further isolation of the discipline, with the professional university philosophers turning into a separate caste of gurus armed with their esoteric language, technical jargon of Greek or Latin origin, and a particularly condescending attitude towards all other departments. Philosophy has thus survived the wave of scientism trumpeted by Carnap and his colleagues, but at the cost of being marginalized with respect to the mainstream academic development and gaining more than a few unfortunate connotations.

Shaking Confidence: a Starting Point

How can the relevance of philosophy be maintained in the ever changing realities of modern higher education? Two points of view need to be distinguished before we can address the question. From the point of view of the philosophers themselves, the question might be misleading, since it rests on various controversial assumptions. Given this ‘internal’ perspective, it might well appear that the crisis of the discipline is just another myth, and that philosophy today, judged by the number of journals devoted to it, is in full flourish, or at least more so than at any time during its long history. The ‘outsiders’ who think otherwise, one might argue, simply betray the limitations of their intellectual acumen. The affront felt by many philosophers at any

¹² Interestingly enough, there have been attempts to demarcate the main competitor of this tradition, namely, the analytic philosophy, precisely by reference to these stylistic differences, rather than the content of their respective investigations. Thus, Lebedev and Petjaksheva define analytic philosophy as “philosophy which consistently removes metaphors and arbitrary analogies from its argumentation” (Lebedev 2006: 12).

attempt to categorize and evaluate their discipline using the standards applicable to all other academic departments (e.g., by requiring the addition of the bullet-point list of the ‘student learning outcomes’ to the course syllabus), shows that the colonial longings of philosophy, as well as the genetic memory of its past glory, are not quite sublimated yet. It seems to me, though, that assuming a posture of self-righteousness and refusing to respond to legitimate criticisms can do substantial further damage to the discipline in the long run. As in many other cases, trying to look at oneself from the “other person’s perspective” is part of a healthy ‘reality-check’ procedure. It does matter how philosophy is perceived by the outsiders, and we owe it to the general public to offer a reasonable explanation of what we do in our departments and, more importantly, *why* we continue doing it despite numerous setbacks.¹³

Whatever else our understanding of the proper place of philosophy in the humanities might involve, the starting point seems quite clear: settling the question of expectations. It should be clear what one could realistically expect the philosophers to tell us about the world or ourselves. There is always a lingering danger of expecting too much or too little from philosophy. No doubt, many tender minds are attracted to the subject in the hope of getting precise and authoritative answers to all the questions of existential importance after reading the first introductory text on philosophy. But, as many of us have experienced, in most cases this initial enthusiasm is quickly curbed once the student delves deeper into the never-ending philosophical controversies, often giving way to feelings of disappointment and frustration. As one student of mine once exclaimed: ‘Professor, how can you evaluate our tests and papers and assign grades if there is no such thing as *the* correct answer in philosophy?’ One hopes, though, that with some patience, the extreme views on philosophy, as being either amorphous and unhelpful, or as containing the ultimate truths if one could only decipher the strange code of the philosophers’ jargon, would lead to a more moderate and more realistic set of expectations.

¹³ Many of us, the adherents of the discipline, can bear witness to the truthfulness of Blackburn’s comment, when he writes: “I suspect that all philosophers and philosophy students share that moment of silent embarrassment when someone innocently asks us what we do” (Blackburn 1999: 1). Blackburn himself offers a way of avoiding the embarrassment by restyling philosophy as ‘conceptual engineering’. My guess is that it will take much more than a simple name change. But the suggestion reminds me of the practice of certain ardent believers, who, being unhappy with all the burdensome connotations of the word ‘religion’, prefer calling their faith a ‘spiritual path’.

Bernard Williams once aptly defined philosophy as a “humanistic enterprise of trying to understand ourselves” (Williams 2006: 205). Now, there are a lot of things we might want to know about ourselves, and much of the information might indeed come from special sciences. If I am wondering why my body reacts in a certain way to certain foods, a dietologist or a nutritionist would be the best candidates for answering that question. Yet we may agree that the sum of all true statements about ourselves delivered by the empirical sciences will not exhaust all there is to know, that is, *to wonder* about our nature. Questions of ethical values, problems of meaning and the quest for a general understanding of our place and our role within the universe immediately come to mind as specifically philosophical issues. Often people turn to philosophy to clarify their religious beliefs, or to find a solid foundation for their lives outside any religious framework. All of these (and many others) are legitimate philosophical concerns, but here I would like to highlight yet a different aspect of philosophy, which concerns primarily its therapeutic functions rather than its substantive content.

A fair number of my students, who take an *Introduction to Philosophy* class, complain that at the end of the semester they end up knowing *less* than they supposed they had known before they signed up for the class, whereas in all other classes their body of knowledge was definitely increasing. In all other classes students learn certain amount of facts which they now can claim as part of their belief system. But something else is happening in a typical philosophy class. We start by identifying beliefs which students hold to be true, and are, perhaps, quite convinced of their absolute certainty. But a brief reflection on the origin of those beliefs, as well as a critical analysis of the available justificatory patterns for those claims, often diminishes the initial confidence. Ideas and conceptions that seemed quite simple suddenly become at the center of controversy with no clear way out of the puzzle. The everyday notions turn out to be the hardest to define. The world in general, including the social world, becomes increasingly more complicated; the comforting feeling of obviousness evaporates. And then, finally, frustration explodes: “Why, why do you have to make everything so complicated? Can’t we just go back to the initial simplicity?”

Now, I take this negative effect on the level of confidence in one’s ‘commonsensical’ beliefs to be one of the most important contributions of philosophy to the whole enterprise of liberal education. The students’ complaints, then, are only partially justified – they do end up

knowing more after taking a philosophy class, but in many cases it is knowledge of what they do *not* really know. Indeed, acquiring knowledge of one's ignorance was one of the time-honored therapeutic functions of philosophy, from the time of Socrates to our own age. One's ignorance is revealed when we realize that the complexity of the subject matter at hand fails to correspond to the simplified patterns of our thoughts about the subject. The process is especially painful when it touches the entrenched ways of thinking about the most familiar things and our dearest prejudices. Martin Heidegger, one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century, characterizes the function of philosophy in the following way:

It is in the very nature of philosophy never to make things easier but only more difficult. And this is not merely because its language strikes the everyday understanding as strange if not insane. Rather, it is the authentic function of philosophy to restore to things their weight (Heidegger 1961: 9).

Restoring to things their 'weight' implies, first of all, restoring our lost sensitivity to the *wonderfulness* of the world, that quality, which, according to Plato and Aristotle, was at the root of philosophical inquiry. This, in turn, requires the capacity and willingness to look beyond the familiar surface into the deeper mysteries of things, however disconcerting that experience might be. We should never forget that one of the earliest similes suitable to a philosopher was that of a gadfly – a strange creature that annoys the general public by posing novel and unsettling questions. Philosophy destroys the reassuring lightness of being, or rather, in the words of Milan Kundera, makes that lightness "unbearable."

We have all read an old story about a young, ambitious man, meeting up on his way to the court with a barefoot old simpleton, who was apparently quite ignorant of the most obvious things. What was even more disturbing, the old man, defying the saying that wisdom comes with age, appeared to be ignorant of the notion of 'piety' – a notion crucial for proper conduct toward other people and the gods. Surely, the old man was to be given a quick lesson. Now, as the story goes, it was young Euthyphro who ended up taking a lesson from old Socrates instead, but the point of that initial setting was not just to raise a good laugh against arrogant Euthyphro. It does illustrate a typical feature in the student-teacher relationship. The difficulty seems to be that the students rarely start from a position of ignorance when they come to a philosophy class; rather, they come to class *knowing* what, for instance, freedom, democracy, justice or human nature

are. And even if, like Euthyphro, they are unable to express what they mean, still in some significant sense they do have genuine knowledge of various important concepts. The job of the professor, then, is not to convince the students that all their initial beliefs are false, but rather to show them that there is much *more* to know, and that one cannot remain intellectually satisfied with the surface level familiarity with ideas that matter. A closer scrutiny requires sacrifices – those of time and efforts. Euthyphro, we recall, excused himself from the conversation with Socrates pleading shortage of time. If we can only convince the students that critical thinking is not just a class activity, initiated and limited by the university schedule, we have fulfilled most of the notorious ‘course goals’ from the second page of the course syllabus.

What Philosophy Might Become: Further Thoughts

It should be expected, then, that a discipline that postulates as its priority the decrease of confidence in everyday beliefs on the part of those who risk taking philosophy seriously, should be less than confident about its own status among other disciplines in the humanities. After all, philosophy should not be spared from the critical stance that it aims at other areas of life and research. If the established and familiar beliefs tend to shatter after being scrutinized by an intrusive eye of a philosopher, so must the much more contentious belief in the preordained division of sciences into separate departments with well-defined borders. The hard partitions between disciplines that we witness today in most universities result in part from a peculiar belief we all have inherited from the age of the Enlightenment. It is the belief that meaning is essentially *atomic* rather than *holistic*, as well as its straightforward logical implication, the belief that one can partition nature and all other areas of human interest into convenient discrete elements, and study it separately.¹⁴ And once all the special sciences do their job and deliver the results, all that remains is to collect those results in a comprehensive encyclopedia, which would then function as the final reference for all possible inquiries. Those contemporary philosophers who accept this general picture work hard either to show that philosophy *also* has some positive results that deserve a modest chapter in the future encyclopedia of all sciences, or else proclaim that philosophical investigations are simply redundant in our present age, where the empirical sciences hold unrivaled sway over all aspects of human life.

¹⁴ This particular theory of meaning, namely the theory that a sentence could be true in virtue of the individual meanings of the words it contained, has been under assault since 1960s by leading philosophers of our time (e.g., by W. V. Quine, 1980), but has shown surprising resistance.

But, of course, denying the value of philosophy is itself a philosophical claim of a certain value. This kind of claim presupposes a whole lot about the hierarchy of human needs and interests, about the nature of the world and the best ways of dealing with it, as well as a whole lot of other less-than-obvious assumptions. Both the denial of philosophy, as well as the affirmation of its supreme intellectual authority, requires some serious rational justification. This in turn cannot be accomplished without mastery of particular logical tools which are traditionally acquired in philosophy classes. There is a certain paradox in the fact that the grip of philosophy proves tighter than it first seemed – by denying philosophy and refusing to have anything to do with it, we thereby assume a *philosophical* position, perhaps, that of extreme skepticism or naïve scientism.

I do not want to suggest that the ‘destructive’ or critical side of philosophizing exhausts all there is to a serious philosophical undertaking. I quite agree with Bernard Williams, when he maintains that “there has to be such a thing in philosophy as *getting it right*” (Williams 2006: 202) (and here is my justification for marking certain questions as wrong on the class tests). Philosophy at its best is clearly *not* just about having a conversation with no concern for truth, as Richard Rorty and other postmodernists suggest. But as a discipline in humanities taught at the introductory level, philosophy should perhaps limit its ambitions to the goal of shaking up the customary thought patterns and opening up new horizons of fresh possibilities. If a student leaves the classroom realizing the existence of the various alternative ways of looking at familiar things, concepts and relations, even if he is not yet in a position to chose the most plausible way, his time in the class was not wasted.

So far I was talking about the role of philosophy in raising the skeptical awareness of the students, that is, in undermining the original confidence by training them to look beyond the façade. But as we all know, skepticism, once tasted, can be addictive. It can also be dangerous. As Simon Blackburn observes, the form of skepticism prevalent in our own times is quite different in its end results from the classic skepticism of the ancients: whereas the ancient skeptics, by discovering that the truth of their beliefs is less than fully demonstrable by the available logical and empirical means, took this as the reason for complete suspension of judgment, the moderns, by contrast, take this as a license for believing anything they feel like (Blackburn 2005: xvi-xvii). I strongly feel that a proper philosophical education is also meant to

guard against that latter extreme of indiscriminate acceptance of any wild opinion. There clearly is such a thing as being too open-minded, with no cognitive filters installed. The notion of a *rational belief* with the identifiable constraints on its acceptance should be at the center of any introductory course on the subject, however questionable the idea of objective rationality might turn out to be in the long run. Even if rationality is nothing more than a western, artificial, ethnocentric or a sexist construct (i.e., even if all those horror stories that psychoanalysts and social anthropologists like to tell us will turn out to be true), it should not be dismissed too easily, with a characteristic ‘freshman sneer’. One should *earn the right* to deconstruct such notions as rationality, truth and objectivity by travelling first through all the circles of hell of the philosophers’ debates. But this, of course, goes beyond the college level of education, and is a subject for a separate discussion.

Again an old question is posed: what is left of philosophy today and what can it give to us, the moderns? It is indeed an old question, since it was raised and variously answered by every generation in the last two and a half thousand years. Perhaps, if we look hard enough, we can find some obvious instrumental value in philosophy. A 19th century thinker Arthur Schopenhauer was exhibiting this (broadly speaking) pragmatic attitude toward philosophy when he famously observed: “My philosophy has never brought me in a six-pence; but it has spared me many an expense” (Schopenhauer 2006: 18). No doubt, this is a laudable outcome, although one wonders, whether similar results could not have been achieved through a less arduous and time-consuming practice. But whatever the external benefits of philosophy are, it would be ill-considered to stop there. The *art of wondering* was not an invented science, developed with a certain practical goal in mind. It is rather a spontaneous outpouring of who we are, and what we do as human beings. How important it is to keep reminding ourselves that one begins thinking philosophically, and thus, becomes a philosopher, not as a result of an earned degree or a professional affiliation. Now is the time to demystify philosophy, bringing it back to what it was in the early days of its life – the natural yearning for wisdom and knowledge, alive in the marketplace, often walking around barefoot and unkempt, but at all times penetrative, rigorous and inquisitive.

I will conclude with a quote from Martin Heidegger, which strikes me as especially perceptive. In a series of lectures, entitled “An Introduction to Metaphysics”, which he delivered

in the 1930's, at the time when scientism and logical positivism were at their strongest, Heidegger begins by recounting a number of standard charges against philosophy, and then concludes with these words:

It is absolutely correct and proper to say that 'You can't do anything with philosophy.' It is only wrong to suppose that this is the last word on philosophy. For the rejoinder imposes itself: granted that *we* cannot do anything with philosophy, might not philosophy, if we concern ourselves with it, do something *with us*? (Heidegger 1961: 10).

Shifting the emphasis of the original question from what the discipline can do *to* us, to what it can do *with* us is the only way to do justice to philosophy's rich heritage and resources, without reducing it to a merely auxiliary subject matter.

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