

Philosophy and the Professional Image of Philosophy

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The first philosophy course I took was called "The American Pragmatists" (I have never thought of the logic course I took before that as a course in philosophy). It was taught by John Dreher at Lawrence University. Professor Dreher introduced me to philosophy and has continued to be a model for me of what a philosophy teacher should be. He was funny, demanding and caring. It is because of him and that course that I have always thought of John Dewey as an important philosopher, and it was because of him that I wanted to be a philosophy professor.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom and to the memory of my dad. Incredibly, they never once doubted that I would finish it, and they have been a source of support and love for a long, long time. Thank you.

We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy.
- Thoreau, "Natural History of Massachusetts"

Abstract

Philosophy is an academic discipline whose practitioners are subject to forces of professionalization. These forces shape the discipline in ways that often go unnoticed. I present an analysis of the currently dominant image of philosophy that working philosophers have, one that focuses on philosophy's formality, fundamentality, and the widespread use of intuitions, showing that it is partly determined by the history of the professionalization of the discipline. I argue that readings of historical philosophers that are informed by this image tend to obscure the thought of those philosophers. In particular, John Dewey's work in logic is misunderstood when it is evaluated according to the now dominant conception of logic as the study of validity; and the moral writings of John Dewey and Henry David Thoreau are neglected because they do not engage in the contemporary project of grounding normativity. Finally I propose that thinking of philosophy as a practice can help to recover lost historical insights at the same time that it can appropriately focus our attention as philosophers on institutional problems that currently bedevil the discipline.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: Philosophy is a Practice

The notion that a philosophy arises in purely individual excogitations upon existences and truths which nakedly and directly confront a thinker is an absurd legend. Theoretical reflection arises in a social medium. The conflicts and discrepancies within the traditions of a social group, or between them and newly forming beliefs, are the occasion of philosophizing. The philosopher's problems come to him in this context ... He casts his imaginations in material drawn from tradition and from the peculiar context of his day and place.

-Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*

I. Philosophy and its predicament

In the popular imagination all scholars are aloof. Whether this is a negative perception – of scholars worrying over trivial details that can have no bearing on ordinary life – or a positive one – of a commitment to truth – it is one that inflects ordinary thinking about intellectuals and academics. This perception is even stronger with respect to philosophers. Ever since Thales stumbled into the well because he was busy contemplating the universe, philosophers have been thought of as having concerns that go beyond the everyday demands of life. And many philosophers embrace the distance between what they do and the patterns of ordinary life that hold it hostage to fashion, conformity and tradition. Philosophers regularly appeal, as a kind of disciplinary mission statement, to the Socratic commitment to truth even above one's own claim to life.

But many philosophers are also beginning to appreciate that their working life is structured by forces not directly responsive to reasoned argument and that these forces shape the work they do. The practice of philosophy is conditioned by forces outside the control of individual philosophers. For example, although many philosophers favor increasing diversity among philosophers, the evidence concerning the deplorable treatment of women in the profession¹ is now so overwhelming that even the high status champion of philosophy as a profession, Brian Leiter,² has noted it on his blog. Leiter also regularly notes the attempts of administrators and deans to shrink or shut down philosophy graduate programs, majors and even whole departments. Brian Leiter tends to dismiss these attempts as mere shortsightedness. But combined with the revelations of the way women have been treated, and with the experiences of black, Hispanic and other

¹ In addition to the work cited below, see the website *What is it Like to be a Woman in Philosophy* (<http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com>) (but prepare to be outraged) as well as updates on philosophy conferences with no female participants at the blog *NewAPPS* (<http://www.newappsblog.com>).

² Brian Leiter is currently the Karl N. Llewellyn Professor of Jurisprudence in the University of Chicago Law School; he is also the founder and director of University of Chicago's Center for Law, Philosophy, and Human Values. In addition, he writes a blog, *Leiter Reports: A Philosophy Blog*, about the profession of philosophy: he makes public information about philosophers taking new appointments, he regularly comments on issues of interest to professional philosophers, and he fields questions from undergraduate and graduate students about the profession. (In November of 2012, Leiter's blog had its 20 millionth visitor: <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2012/11/twenty-million-visits.html>). More importantly, Leiter oversees the publication every other year of the *Philosophical Gourmet Report*, which uses surveys of professionals to rate faculty at graduate programs in philosophy. Since there is no other comparable rating service, Leiter's report exercises significant influence over the decisions graduate students make about where to apply and where to attend, and, importantly, it influences university hiring decisions: philosophy departments use their Leiter ranking to convince deans and administrators to agree to hire people with status sufficient to either cement or increase their ranking.

minority philosophers,³ the trend can seem more troubling. There is also evidence that other academics tend to have a low regard for philosophers, especially as colleagues on committees.⁴ Brian Leiter's explanation is that generally people outside of philosophy don't really know what philosophy is, and he places much of the blame squarely on the shoulders of a few bad philosophers:

If *real* philosophy ... is less familiar to readers and scholars outside the field, the explanation is, in part, that a handful of philosophers who have, in recent years, reached a wide audience outside the discipline have generally done a poor job representing the *actual* state of affairs. Richard Rorty is both the best-known and worst offender on this score... (Leiter (2004) p. 18, emphasis in original)

But this move is typical of the kind of arrogance that many academics, according to Lamont's study presented in her book *How Professors Think* (2009), think is standard among philosophers: outsiders do not really understand philosophy and so they are taken in by charlatans. The situation calls for some difficult self-scrutiny. (I discuss these contemporary issues in more detail in the conclusion to this dissertation).

These facts concerning the predicament of professional philosophy add urgency to recent calls for reconstruction of the discipline. Philip Kitcher, a prominent philosopher (he currently teaches at Columbia University, which consistently ranks in or near the top 10 in Leiter's rankings) who specializes in the philosophy of biology and epistemology, recently criticized what he sees as the increasingly insular, technical and narrow focus of professional philosophers (Kitcher (2011)). Kitcher cites John Dewey as an important

³ See, for example, the essays in Sullivan and Tuana (2007) and Yancy (2012).

⁴ See Lamont (2009). Lamont provides evidence that academics outside of philosophy tend to see philosophers as at best exceptionally clever. (I discuss this point in more detail in the conclusion).

influence on his critical stance towards contemporary professional philosophy – he says that "[t]he approach I shall elaborate renews Dewey's concerns with respect to our own times" (Kitcher (2011) p. 249). That is to say, Kitcher takes himself to be renewing Dewey's critical attitude towards the tendency professional philosophers have of isolating themselves from contemporary public problems.⁵ Kitcher highlights the importance of technical language in isolating philosophers. In this dissertation, I make a similar criticism of professional philosophy, and Dewey's thought is both a central influence *on* and an example *in* what follows (indeed many of the passages from Dewey's work that Kitcher cites are discussed here). So it will help to situate this work if I indicate the central way in which it differs from Kitcher's critique.

Kitcher does not connect the trends he identifies in contemporary philosophy – the ever increasing specialization, the widespread use of technical notation, and its irrelevance to "the broader human condition" (Kitcher (2011) p. 251) – to the structures that condition the work being done, and so, in light of the views presented in this dissertation, he ends up sounding rather naïve in arguing that philosophers should simply

⁵ Kitcher admits to being late in coming to this appreciation of Dewey:

Like most of my contemporaries in philosophy departments in the Anglophone world, [twenty years ago] I would have seen the three canonical pragmatists – Pierce, James, and Dewey – as well-intentioned but benighted, laboring with crude tools to develop ideas that were far more rigorously and exactly shaped by the immigrants from Central Europe whose work generated what is ... known as 'analytic' philosophy. (Kitcher (2012) p. xi)

Kitcher's explanation of the evolution of his thinking is personal and does not appeal to institutional or sociological factors: "During the past decade, I have become increasingly moved by this reformist approach to philosophy..." (Kitcher (2012) p. xiii).

begin to concern themselves in a different way (without, for example, resorting to technical notation) with different questions and different problems. Philosophers work in ways that respond to features of the world beyond their control. The practice of philosophy – the teaching and presenting and writing – influences the content of philosophy. We have to abandon the picture of the philosopher as the rational mind selflessly pursuing timeless truth.

II. Hating school

I thought that I could never dislike anything as much as I disliked junior high and high school: the never-endingness of it, the routines, the tedium of the classes, the enforced and weird social situations, the arbitrary uses of power. But it was a visceral dislike, a dislike of reflex and instinct that I didn't really understand until I had some distance from it, distance I got studying philosophy as an undergraduate and then for a brief time immediately after as a graduate student.

Some of this study was explicitly about education, though very little. I read John Dewey as an undergraduate – he was the first philosopher I ever read, really – but I read *Human Nature and Conduct* and some essays, and it wasn't until the summer following graduation that I read *Democracy and Education*. Sometime that summer I also read *Art as Experience*, and it was reading these books and thinking back on my time in junior high and high school that allowed me to understand it better, to see what I reacted against, and to begin to theorize my dislike.

Dewey tried to focus attention on the role that social institutions and practices play in giving content to particular experiences, in making them meaningful. In his *Ethics*, for example, he treated systems of morality and ethical codes as growing out of the material conditions faced by social groups. His general orientation, described in his late *Freedom and Culture*, is that

...the idea of culture that has been made familiar by the work of anthropological students points to the conclusion that whatever are the native constituents of human nature, the culture of a period and group is the determining influence in their arrangement; it is that which determines the patterns of behavior that mark out the activities of any group, family, clan, people, sect, faction, class. (Dewey, LW 13, p. 75)

The hopeful strand of his thought is that, with these analytic descriptions of the relation between social institutions and experience at hand, a course can be mapped for the progressive transformation of social institutions with the aim of enriching experience. What counts as enriching experience is a vexed question, but Dewey's account begins with making it more democratic, more humane and more shared. I didn't see all this then, but I did think that philosophy, at least practiced this way with a keen focus on actual particular experience combined with a hope for better life, offered the potential for a kind of self-understanding that was worth working for.

It turned out that I did dislike something more than I disliked being in junior high and high school, and that was teaching junior high and high school. After my first round of graduate study (I earned an MA in philosophy in 1994), and under the influence of a mostly idealistic idea of Dewey that I had gradually acquired, I thought that I understood the experience of schooling well enough that, as I teacher, I would be able to improve

dramatically the experiences kids would have. That was a mistake. It was all there, still, when I was in the classroom as a teacher: the endless routines, the boredom, the arbitrary flexing of power. And there was very little I could do about it. In coming to my appreciation for Dewey's idealism I hadn't yet really understood his more pessimistic or realistic strain concerning the way habits and institutionalized ways of dealing with people were stubbornly persistent conditions of the world and were in fact part of the structure that made the thing go. These social institutions act as forces in the world with as much inertia and constraining power as the classroom walls and the desks. This understanding I didn't acquire until very recently, during my graduate study of philosophy the second time around, and it is this understanding that I develop in this dissertation.

My brief first round of graduate study was, aside from two courses in the history of philosophy, not to my liking, though I didn't really understand why. I thought: I don't understand what's going on, I'm not smart enough. Towards the end of my more recent second round of graduate school – the one that led to this dissertation – I came to see that philosophy too is structured by habits and institutionalized ways of acting, that it isn't really an ideal perch from which to see the world but a practice affected, like all practices, by the world. It is determined by patterns of activities, social structures, and habits of mind, too. But it is hard to see that, or at least it was for me. In this dissertation I try to bring some of this to light. I dislike much of the philosophy that goes on in seeming willful ignorance of these conditioning structures because of the pretense

involved in assuming that philosophy is unconditioned. But I owe the insight I think I have gained to philosophy, to the teachers I have had and the space of reflection that philosophy opened to me, so that even if I don't finally know what philosophy is, I do know that I am grateful to philosophy and to many philosophers for the small bit of understanding of my own experience that I now have.

That way of putting it leads directly into the argument of the dissertation: I care about philosophy because it has – directly but more indirectly – helped me to understand my experience. But what I love is precisely the way philosophy has of being unlike a discipline, "undisciplined" (which is not the same as lazy or lacking rigor). The introduction I received to philosophy led me to believe that just about everything one does has to do with philosophy – that was certainly Dewey's notion about philosophy. That will strike many professional philosophers as an old-fashioned, or uninformed, way to think about philosophy. There is a much more specialized conception of philosophy, as a particular predominately formal academic discipline with a definite subject matter of its own, capable of progress, supported by a hierarchical ranking of graduate schools, journals and conferences, textbooks and guides, all embracing a system of abstract knowledge and methods the acquisition of which makes one a professional. This conception frames the way philosophers are read in academic contexts, *all* philosophers, even those who wrote long before such a conception had taken hold. Some historical philosophers fare better than others when they are read through the prism of this

professionalized conception; John Dewey and Henry David Thoreau have not fared very well. And this conception now dominates philosophy.

As a philosopher, Dewey thought his role was to present a kind of bridge between the ordinary life of people (which of course takes account of the values and beliefs, the ideology, people actually live with) and a more hopeful, humane way of life that, for Dewey, could be summed up simply: it would be democratic. Dewey was interested in ordinary life. And this is why he is not often included in undergraduate instruction in philosophy nowadays.

III. The professional image

According to the now more familiar picture of philosophy, certain features of Dewey's practice of philosophy, focused as it was on contributing to the building of democratic communities, look like serious difficulties, even weaknesses: his informal style of writing, his lack of engagement with the most up to date developments in technical philosophy, his at times simplified historical narratives. According to this picture – I will call it *the professional image* – philosophers ask questions that have been around at least since Plato. The questions get at central problems that face anyone trying to think, that is to use reason to understand the world. What distinguishes philosophy from other disciplines that also pursue central problems is a) the general and fundamental nature of the questions philosophers ask; b) an understanding of the rules of reasoning as

purely *formal*;⁶ and c) a methodological practice that privileges fanciful thought experiments and appeals to intuitions. Philosophers present arguments that can be analyzed independently of any particular context or subjectivity; these arguments aim to use true premises (or at least plausible and uncontroversial premises) linked together in the correct way to derive conclusions that then must be accepted by anyone thinking reasonably. Often these conclusions are in at least apparent conflict with what *seems true*, and so there is a puzzle. When a philosopher is being reflective he will say that to work on such puzzles, patiently, is to take very very small steps towards figuring out the truth about the world.

This familiar picture is in fact a relatively recent development. That is the argument I will pursue here. I will show that it emerged during the 20th century as the result of pressures associated with philosophy becoming a well-behaved discipline. When the picture is seen in this light – as a historical development conditioned by extra-philosophical factors – it loses some of its charm; this opens a new perspective on the history of philosophy. The familiar picture contrasts with one that sees philosophy as less unified and more diverse; as pursuing specific questions in contexts and with methods that cannot easily be reinterpreted as universal questions susceptible to formal analysis. In this alternate picture it isn't always clear who the philosophers are or what are the philosophical questions. Unfamiliar figures play central and important roles, and

⁶ Gerson (1997, unpublished manuscript) provides an excellent history of how formalism emerged as the dominant orientation in American philosophy in the mid 20th century. He attributes formalism's triumph over instrumentalism in part to pressures exerted by the structure of the research university.

familiar figures are seen in unfamiliar ways. My aim is to model a way of doing philosophy that challenges the familiar picture because the familiar picture obscures the history. If we can get a glimpse of what philosophy looked like prior to the familiar picture, we might be able to conceive of a way of going on doing philosophy in the contemporary setting that doesn't distort the history. This is important for the future of philosophy, particularly given the way in which its home – the university – is changing.

IV. Discipline

In spite of its familiar rhetoric of presentation – that philosophy is pure inquiry; that philosophy cares simply for truth; that philosophy contrasts with literary theory and other humanities in being immune to academic fashions – in spite of it explicitly taking for its subject any and everything, restrained only by curiosity and, of course, truth, and in spite of the seemingly categorical nature of the argument that, in examining foundations, philosophy leaves nothing outside itself to constrain it, philosophy is a discipline. It is a discipline in the sense of occupying a definable position in the modern university, and this fact, the fact of the institutional nature of the practice of philosophy, accounts for certain of its features. Philosophy has achieved a complete disciplinary identity; it is now fully professionalized.

To say that philosophy has been fully professionalized is not to express a value judgment; it is to say that according to widely accepted accounts of what it is to be a profession, being a philosopher (like being any other stripe of academic) means being a

professional (this claim is elaborated and defended in chapter 3). Professions function in several important ways, not the least of which is in allowing for the development of certain kinds of knowledge and skill protected on the one hand from the harmful effects of selfishness and on the other from bureaucratic interference.⁷ Professions license knowledge claims and claims to authority. Critics of professions correctly point to their anti-democratic monopoly on the skills and knowledge that tend to accrue power (though even they are sometimes happy to let their doctors rule tyrannically). Academic professionals have long tried to blunt such criticisms by claiming to be disinterested in power and by swearing fealty to truth. Nevertheless academics do exert power and influence.⁸

I set aside the general question of the value, culturally and politically, of professionalization and claim this: there are recognizable patterns that mark the behavior of professionals and their clients and that modify the context of their interactions; when those professionals ignore or disregard this they lose control over the conditions of their own determination. And that is a bad thing to lose control over. Philosophers overwhelmingly ignore or disregard those features of their interactions that are here lumped together under the category of professionalism. Even if such disregard were to improve the philosophy that is created, the conditions under which it is created are left to

⁷ The claim that professions never had real power is appropriately refuted in Freidson (1986).

⁸ Today academic scientists are often appealed to as experts, in venues like *The New York Times*, and their contributions to the cultural conversations about issues like genetic testing and testing in schools are often presented as definitive. Academics are also frequently called upon to advise politicians about economics, for example.

operate by themselves or, more likely, in the hands of those who do not disregard such things: deans, university board members and presidents, and political overseers of the funding. But I will argue, primarily in chapters 5 and 6, that the philosophy that is created is weakened by this disregard because it tends to disregard sources of insight that have been in effect banished for no good philosophical reasons. It is bad for philosophers not to try to understand some of the determinants of their precarious status in the university⁹ (a subject I return to in the conclusion), and blocking access to insights and novelties of style and thought for no very good reasons produces bad philosophy.

But do philosophers working under the sway of the professional image create bad philosophy? Professional philosophers say that philosophy has never been better, never produced finer work in the quantities it is now being produced. There is agreement (among philosophers) that the work produced today is clearer, sharper and more technical than at any other time. There is agreement, too, that progress is being made on the core questions that philosophy exists to answer.¹⁰

⁹ I have in mind here the relatively frequent, these days, threats to shut down or consolidate philosophy departments for budgetary reasons (for example, Brian Leiter, on his blog, has in the past two years reported on proposals to close or make drastic cuts to the philosophy departments at UNLV, Northern Iowa, Royal Holloway, London Metropolitan University, The University of Greenwich, Keele University, Arizona State, Howard University, and The University of Southern Mississippi), but also the isolation of philosophers from their academic peers documented by Lamont (2009), for example. The problem academic philosophy has with diversity adds to its precarious status. So long as it is an outlier among the humanities in terms of gender ((Paxton, Figdor and Tiberius (2012), (Buckwalter and Stich (2010)), and minority participation ((Sullivan and Tuana (2007), (Dotson (2012))), and so long as there is no good explanation for this, the impression is abroad that something is not right.

¹⁰ For example this is the thesis of Gutting (2009).

This is the assessment of professionals according to their own scale of value, which judges work meritorious when it is technical, sharp, clearly reasoned and addressed to some ongoing controversy within the discipline. And of course it is within the province of professionals to make such determinations. But consider: in spite of the perennial popularity of lawyer jokes, lawyers continue to provide services that are in high demand, as do doctors and accountants and most of the other professionals. It becomes problematic for a profession when it no longer seems to provide anything that lay people want or understand. This is more or less the condition of philosophy today: no one doubts that its membership values work that its members judge to be worth valuing; but it isn't at all clear that this work provides value or that it even aspires to be the work that many people (outside philosophy, and so comprising its potential clients) still think philosophy should aspire to be.

This sort of criticism is often met with impatience: this is philosophy after all, and philosophy is central to any picture of a cultivated citizenry, let alone a respectable research university. But this just evades the real issue through obfuscation enabled by the indefiniteness of the label *philosophy*. If philosophy is central to culture, it is *undisciplined* philosophy, philosophy as a subject with a long historical tradition that is not reducible to the discussion of "perennial problems": it is a long and diffuse tradition, one that has at different times played many different roles. But that isn't how most philosophers think of philosophy. That, conveniently, is a matter of professional expertise. So there is a sense here of an elaborate shell game: philosophers know what's

good (the professional image) but philosophy is vital to the culture (the lay image).

Threats to the former are taken to be threats to the latter, and those are easily shunted.

But then there is no attempt to connect the former to the latter.

The professional image of philosophy – that philosophy is formal, general and fundamental, and that it often relies on fanciful thought experiments and appeals to intuition (a characterization I elaborate in chapter 2) – constitutes the shared conception that operates for most academic philosophers today and frames for them the reading of philosophical texts. There have always been strands of philosophy concerned with fundamental questions, and so the professional image does have roots in work that has historically been thought of as philosophy, work by people who have identified themselves as philosophers. But historically philosophy has been many things, not all of which are together consistent. It is this large mass of historical work, much of it addressed to contemporaries facing shared problems and not to all rational creatures facing universal problems, that lay folk have in mind when they agree that philosophy should be a part of what students get at the university.

This still may be as it may be: philosophers can still claim professional privilege. But the professional image is *false* since in practice it implies (incorrectly) that it captures what has always been essential to philosophy and it *mystifies* because it prevents philosophers from seeing some of the real determinants of their practice. I don't argue for replacing the professional image with Dewey's image, but I do argue for a) acknowledgement of the pluralistic and undisciplined nature that characterizes

philosophy historically and b) understanding that philosophy, since it is a practice and so something people do, is subject to ordinary forms of social determination.

V. Situating this dissertation

This is a work about philosophy written by a philosopher. But there is a question about whether it is a work of philosophy.¹¹ This question arises because the work does not conform to the expectations one has under the influence of the professional image of philosophy. So it is necessary here to explain the aim of this work, which is to be a work of philosophy about how philosophers can improve their practice.

Studies having most in common with this dissertation are those that present some form of critique of a discipline from within the discipline. There are many such works. Gouldner (1970) offered an explanation for the predominance of functional explanations in American sociology and predicted, as the title had it, a *Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* because it was no longer tenable to think of sociological science as “value free.” Gouldner’s study is explicitly reflective: he tries to present a sociology of sociology, something that is, of course, fraught with difficulty yet that nevertheless has

¹¹ Dotson (2012) entitles her paper: “How is This Paper Philosophy?” Her paper primarily addresses the coercive nature of the implicit norms of the discipline that tend to silence what is potentially distinctive in the voices of female and minority philosophers. But the mechanism she identifies is general: work that in any way veers away from fundamental questions posed as universal and mostly formal can be met with the demand for proof of identity: *how is this philosophy?* That this question is so often asked in this rhetorical way suggests both that a) there really is no explicit theoretical agreement about what philosophy is and b) the background assumption that philosophy is identical with the professional image is fairly widespread.

the potential to yield genuine insights about a certain kind of intellectual practice.

Gouldner chides sociologists for not taking themselves as objects of their own study but instead thinking of themselves as somehow immune from normal social determinants:

“Sociologists must surrender the human but elitist assumption that *others* believe out of need whereas *they* believe because of the dictates of logic and reason” (Gouldner (1970) p. 26). Something similar applies to philosophers, who are disinclined to think of anything constraining their work beyond logic and reason.

Graff (1987) argues that his discipline, English, could be reinvigorated by including in its teaching the very theoretical disputes that he describes in giving a historical account of the development of the discipline in the United States. He argues that there are disciplinary pressures preventing this: it is thought that to expose these disputes might invite the charge that the discipline itself lacks unity and coherence. Graff’s book combines insider disciplinary knowledge (he has published widely on English theory) with a keen sense of the history of the discipline and ends up presenting a vivid and challenging critique of the practice of English.

Like Gouldner and Graff, Clarke & Primo (2012) offer a critique of their discipline, political science, from the inside. For Clarke and Primo, the problem facing political science is its inadequate grasp of some of the finer philosophical points concerning what it is to try to model reality. They say, “Our goal in this book is to provide political scientists with a coherent way of thinking about the models that pervade our discipline” (Clarke & Primo (2012) p. 1), and they begin by arguing that much work

in political science betrays incoherent thinking about these models. Interestingly, they draw on work in the philosophy of science to support their view about how models represent. (See also Strickland (2011) for an insider history of the development of composition studies, and Townsend (2013) for an insider analysis of the professionalization of the discipline of history).

So there is a (small) body of work that can be thought of as disciplinary critique from the inside, and this dissertation is an addition to that body. Such works fulfill an important function in that they create some breathing room in the otherwise shrinking balloon of space that each discipline inhabits (to borrow a metaphor from Andrew Abbott that is fleshed out in chapter 3). Think of them as blowing some air into the balloon when it is about to collapse: just when it might appear that literature professors have nothing more to say about Jane Austen, a literature professor can pose the question: what institutional features of the world make it possible for us to write and lecture about Jane Austen as we do? What are the conditions under which we work? Is there any value to what we do? Suddenly the intellectual space inhabited by literature professors is enlarged, and new important questions get asked. The questions are important because they focus attention on practice.

One difficulty is that there is no clear sense in which a literature professor has the competence to answer such questions – speaking squarely as a professional matter, the knowledge and skills acquired in the course of his training make the literature professor an expert about literature but not about *academic practices*, or *social value*, or *the*

political economy of the university. This perhaps explains why it is that sociologists are much more likely to engage in this sort of project – they at least have the professional credentials to raise and answer questions about social practices (even though, as Gouldner says, sociologists are inhibited from seeing themselves in the same way as they see their typical subjects).

Still there is a tension in either horn of this dilemma: the literature professor who takes on the critique of his discipline lacks expertise in the critique of academic disciplines, or social systems, or social values. On the other horn the sociologist or political scientist lacks insider knowledge about what literature professors actually know and do. The sociologist who decides to study literature professors risks missing her target due to ignorance of her subject; the literature professor who studies literature professors risks missing the target through mishandling his methods. Short of acquiring full on training and membership in two academic specialties, this dilemma might seem irresolvable: some intellectual space is paradoxically there for everyone to see yet unapproachable.

But if we can't have a work that inhabits both the worlds of the philosopher and the social scientist, it is good to have studies from both worlds: work that tries to situate philosophy in a social and political economy without insider knowledge and work that tries to describe from the inside the ways in which social determinants appear to infect philosophy. This study aspires to be one of the latter.

There are works by non-philosophers that treat philosophy as a social practice within a structure of other such practices; Collins's *The Sociology of Philosophies* (1998) at 1,098 pages is by far the most ambitious. But Collins, in looking to uncover the general social structures that influence philosophy, is forced to reify philosophy: he begins with a conception of what it is, and then finds something like it in a variety of world cultures (e.g. Ancient Greece, Ancient China, India, modern Japan, Medieval Europe, etc...). This is perhaps unavoidable in a work such as his, but the pre-emptive identification of the essence of philosophy as "...the turf of intellectuals who perpetually re-dig their conceptual foundations" (Collins (1998) p. 856) ends up just treating the professional image of philosophy as philosophy.

In a similar manner Stan Godlovitch's "What Philosophy Might be About: Some Socio-philosophical Speculations" (2000) just begins with noting that philosophy is concerned with questions like "What is X?" and "What is the fundamental nature or essence of X?" (Godlovitch (2000) p. 3), and then considers explanations for this that are all taken from earlier works of philosophy.¹² He explicitly forbears looking outside philosophy for explanations of its practice:

This account is socio-philosophical with a mildly Socratic seasoning. It says: Seek not the content of philosophy outside the practice of philosophers, and further, seek not the practice of philosophers outside the conventions of institutions which make and have made that practice and its transmission of content both possible and reliable.... this account takes philosophical content to be stably, because willfully, self-perpetuating. (Godlovitch (2000) p. 17)

¹² Godlovitch publishes in philosophical journals but his departmental home is the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Calgary.

But this assumes that the practice of philosophy just is the articles and books that are published, and it assumes that philosophers shape their own practice independently of surrounding social conditions. Works about philosophy by non-philosophers like this tend to look to high status works of philosophy for sources, and this ends up treating assumptions that are part of the professional image as truths about philosophy *per se*.

Joel Isaac's recent (2012) *Working Knowledge: Making the Human Sciences from Parsons to Kuhn* does draw attention to the way a particular university's departmental structure affected the development of a school of thinking, and so is an ally of this dissertation in bringing to light the ways in which academic thought is conditioned by social structures; but as the title indicates, even though he discusses prominent philosophers like Quine and an important school of philosophical thought (logical positivism), his work is primarily oriented towards the social sciences and not philosophy (and it focuses on just one university: Harvard).¹³

There are works by philosophers that explicitly aim to address the social structures that influence philosophical practice, though these are rare. Campbell (2006) is one, a laudatory official history of the American Philosophical Association (APA). It is a valuable work of history, but it refrains from theorizing about causal relationships between professional organization and philosophical content and instead tries to identify particular philosophical contributions that, for example, APA addresses have made to the discipline. It is, that is, still a history of ideas separated from material conditions.

¹³ Isaac is a member of the Faculty of History at Cambridge.

The criticisms of philosophy developed in this dissertation are similar to some works of philosophy, works like Rorty's *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature* (1979), Kitcher's "Philosophy Inside Out" (2011) and Rohatyn's *Two Dogmas of Philosophy* (1977), all of which draw explicitly on Dewey's work. Rohatyn's two dogmas are that "(1) philosophy is a branch of knowledge, and (2) the essence of philosophy lies in reasoned argument" (Rohatyn (1977) p. 16), and his argument is that like all dogmas these mystify the folks who hold them. He is right, as I argue in this dissertation, but, unlike him, I argue that the explanation for this lies at least partly in the fact that philosophy is a practice of human beings and so is determined and constrained by institutions of social life. Kitcher, Rohatyn and John Cottingham, in his "What is Humane Philosophy and Why is it At Risk" (2009) all claim that part of the problem is that philosophers, impressed with the way scientific disciplines have advanced and have achieved a kind of cultural authority, want philosophy to be more scientific. This leads philosophers to consider as philosophy only work that has the formal sheen and elegance of some scientific work. Again, this thesis is a close cousin of the one developed here, but what I add is an attempt to explain these developments in philosophy in part by appealing to institutional features of academic work.

Finally there are many histories of philosophy written by philosophers, but these almost never take seriously the influence of social structures on philosophical styles and content. John Passmore's *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (1968) occasionally appeals to particular styles associated with either Cambridge or Oxford (Passmore (1968) p. 212),

but there is no attempt to analyze the development of these characteristic styles in terms of the institutions themselves or the different working conditions of philosophers in different universities. Again he does say that “[attempts] to found a new discipline – theory of objects, phenomenology, analysis, logical syntax, semantics – were to be a feature of twentieth-century philosophy” (Passmore (1968) p. 182), but his explanation appeals to conscious decisions philosophers made to distinguish themselves from “...psychology or political theory or sociology...” (Passmore (1968) p. 182). He doesn’t explain why such pressures existed or how they determined these philosophical responses. More recent histories like Scott Soames’s two volume *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century* (2003) explain developments only as philosophical responses to philosophical theses and arguments. Often books that seem superficially to be about the way institutions and social practices affect the work philosophers do turn out to be simply about the ideas of philosophers. Chauncey Maher’s *The Pittsburgh School of Philosophy: Sellars, McDowell, Brandom* (2012) seems to promise a reading of these influential philosophers focused on their institutional setting. But the book turns out to be an analysis and comparison of the ideas of the three philosophers with scant attention paid to the material conditions they shared in virtue of having the same academic home. (This point was made in a perceptive review of the book: Wanderer & Levine (2013)).

More historical work often does gesture at situating philosophy in a historical context, and there are some works that succeed in showing the way a particular philosophy makes sense given what is known about the history (e.g. Snyder (2006)). But

very few works analyze the way the particular social structures that philosophers inhabit influence the work they produce – these very few works being for that reason invaluable. One such work is Neil Gross's *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (2008), which does draw connections between Rorty's philosophical development and conditions of work in the changing American academic institutions.

The present work draws a connection between a social structure – professionalism – and the content of philosophical work. It does so from inside philosophy, with a practitioner's understanding of what counts as good philosophy, of what professional philosophers think the philosophical questions are, and of the mechanisms for achieving success in philosophy. It borrows from the literature on social structure and professionalism, undoubtedly in a way that betrays a lack of expertise. That this is unavoidable makes it no less regrettable. Nevertheless, it is hoped that, in combination with studies more grounded in the social sciences, this work from its perch within philosophy advances understanding more than it evinces its shortcomings.

Finally, to complete this attempt to situate this work, I mention two sorts of inspiration. The first is the work of John Dewey and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Theodor Adorno. A part of what follows is given over to an attempt to rehabilitate Dewey's thought for ongoing work in philosophy, to show where his insights are neglected and to show where his view of philosophy can enlighten. But his work serves as inspiration too for the project as a whole. When Dewey wrote about philosophy he always wrote about it as an activity that people engage in. But it wasn't just his work in

philosophy; Dewey took his thought about art, about education and about science to be similarly concerned with the way these practices were animated by people and the way people lived with them. This is an avowedly anti-professional stance to take, of course, but it is one that is consonant with a picture of philosophy, and of intellectual work more generally, that has at least a pulse throughout much of our intellectual tradition. It is currently out of favor, though this work argues that it needn't be and shouldn't be.

Many years ago when I was an undergraduate philosophy major considering graduate school, an advisor (one of three philosophy professors at the liberal arts college I attended) scolded me for excluding Arizona from among my options because I didn't think I could tolerate the heat. This same advisor suggested that I disguise my interest in India in my application materials (I had studied in India and I was interested in Indian classical music and Indian literature). I didn't understand at the time that this was merely well-intentioned sound professional advice: becoming a philosopher these days means making it as easy as possible for other philosophers to see you as a philosopher, and concern for such philosophically irrelevant material conditions as climate or interest in subjects that are not obviously susceptible to formal or technical treatment looks un-philosophical.

Dewey's understanding of philosophy was very different. He thought that philosophy could (and did) come out of virtually any form of living, from virtually all activities and practices. And in saying that, it should be added that he understood

philosophy to be not something in addition to other activities and practices but something that could be an ongoing part of whatever activities one engaged in.

So Dewey's view that doing philosophy is just another way of doing whatever people do implies that it has to be understood as responsive to, as in part determined by, the conditions of life that people are subject to. Philosophers of course know that the reason farmers don't grow bananas in Wisconsin is the climate, so that climate sets conditions on the ways farmers live and make their living. And they will acknowledge that the public education system determines much that goes on in schools, and that control of public resources influences the structures of the universities in which they work. And on and on. But you won't find philosophers admitting that *philosophy* responds to such things.¹⁴ Of course it is simply common sense and consistent to acknowledge that what people do is partly conditioned by the structures in which they live, and philosophy is something that people do, after all. This may not be Dewey's most breathtaking thesis, but it is one that is well worth holding on to because it connects the work philosophers do with the rest of life.

¹⁴ Except for Nietzsche:

One will ask me why on earth I've been relating all these small things which are generally considered matters of complete indifference: I only harm myself, the more so if I am destined to represent great tasks. Answer: these small things – nutrition, place, climate, recreation, the whole casuistry of selfishness – are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far. Precisely here one must begin to *relearn*. (Nietzsche (1989 (1908), p. 256)

But Nietzsche is a special case because, from within the professional image, his writing takes a lot of reconstruction to make it philosophical.

My training in philosophy has left me incapable of understanding lots of work that others think of as philosophy. I cannot claim to understand Adorno. But what even a reader like me cannot fail to notice is the strength of Adorno's commitment to preserving the significance of the particular.¹⁵ In extremity this means the significance of the particularity of people. What he condemns in instrumental rationality is just that it neglects what is particular in service of whatever concept motivates it. Adorno once praised what he called of all things Dewey's *humanity*, which is surprising for many reasons, perhaps especially to philosophers who think they know that Adorno and other critical theorists are anti-humanists. It is more genuinely surprising because of Adorno's unsparing identification of pragmatism with American consumer culture and instrumental reason grown monstrous.

But it shouldn't be so surprising. What Adorno resisted was the pressure exerted in all sorts of ways to see someone as representative of a school or, worse, a view or position, to affix to the individual the appropriate ruling concept.¹⁶ And this resistance is clear in Dewey as well. The present work then seeks to show what it takes to find Dewey the particular philosopher, not Dewey the representative of pragmatism.

¹⁵ What I do know about Adorno I learned in Richard Leppert's Adorno seminar, one of the best and most challenging courses I have ever taken. I am still trying to come to terms with what I read that semester.

¹⁶ This tendency, in many ways responsive to the professional image, is explicit in the survey David Chalmers and David Bourget did of the "views" professional philosophers have of the "important" philosophical questions. The assumption was that all philosophers would have easily identifiable views. The assumption is reinforced by the decision to "collapse" all of the responses that did not match one of the main options into the category of "other" (Chalmers and Bourget (forthcoming), p. 11).

The second inspiration for this work is the large and growing literature in the history and philosophy of science, by which I mean work inspired by Kuhn and carried on by Bruno Latour and Ian Hacking, among others.¹⁷ It is work that goes on in places like the philosophy department at the University of Minnesota, where it simply isn't necessary to defend an approach to science that sees it as something that people do and so subject to all sorts of external influences and determinants. It was necessary to defend such an approach when it was new, when it made everyone uncomfortable to think of science as just another thing people do. It was necessary to defend such work because it did seem to some to threaten the entire tradition of scholarly thought – that is, the tradition of seeing scholarly thought as committed to trying to come closer and closer to an objective understanding of the way things are anyway, independently of our thinking about them.

Many philosophers continue to take this threat seriously: *philosophers*, they say, are the ones who reason about the most fundamental things like truth and knowledge; unlike sociological studies of ethics, for example, in which the aim is, as Durkheim saw it, to establish ethics as "...a social science beside and in the midst of others" (Durkheim (1993 (1887)) p. 127), some philosophers have positioned their study of morality as the study of unconditioned reason. Philosophy as understood according to the professional image is necessary so long as so many other disciplines ignore these fundamental

¹⁷ See, for example, Hacking (1983), Hacking (1990), Hacking (1995), Latour and Woolgar (1986), Latour (1987), Longino (1990), Shapin and Schaffer (2011 (1985)) and Wimsatt (2007). Zammito (2004) is critical of some of this work.

questions in pursuit of smaller game: the norms of actual social groups, or the values of actual people.¹⁸ For Dewey, as for Mill and Durkheim, for example, this poses a false dilemma: either study morality *a priori*, and so make it philosophical, or concede that here there is only historical and social contingency.

The historical and philosophical study of science is now taken for granted in many places, even in many philosophy departments, but it isn't particularly popular with practicing scientists. If the present work succeeds in being a work of 'philosophy studies,' it won't be surprising if it isn't popular with practicing philosophers. But that is no proof of its worth or competence; that's in the pudding.

VI. Summary of chapters

Part 1 of this dissertation, consisting of chapters 2-4, presents a general argument about the way academic philosophers read historical philosophers.

Chapter 2 Even as philosophers frequently say that there is a kind of uncertainty about what philosophy is, there is agreement about who the philosophers are and how what they do is unique. In chapter two I offer an analysis of the professional image of philosophy

¹⁸ In the introduction to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim explicitly positions his study of the social origins of religion as a challenge to philosophical studies of religion, which he says limit themselves to seeing the problem of religion as one for *a priori* reason. But it isn't clear why religion should be unconditioned by social life, he says, and similarly there is no clear reason why we should expect philosophy itself to be unconditioned. It is, after all, like religion, a human practice. An important facet of Dewey's ethical thought is missed when he is read as a *philosopher* and not in a kind of conversation with Durkheim and other early sociologists.

that now dominates academic philosophy. Briefly it conceives of philosophy as *formal*, *fundamental*, and committed to a methodology that gives priority to *intuitions and thought experiments*, and it identifies as philosophical historical work that can be read according to this conception.

Chapter 3 The professional image can be thought of as a set of background assumptions about philosophy, and then we can ask: why are these assumptions made? How do we explain the prevalence of these assumptions? I argue that the forces accompanying the professionalization of the discipline of philosophy are a significant part of the explanation for the prevalence of this way of thinking about philosophy. This means that the professional image doesn't capture the essence of philosophy but is instead a conditioned and contingent way of thinking about what philosophy is.

Chapter 4 My conclusion of chapter three is important because, as I argue, the set of assumptions about what philosophy is leads to misunderstanding of historical work. When these assumptions are projected onto historical works, they are read as if they are engaged in the same pursuit as contemporary philosophers. This leads to misrepresentations and, more importantly, the loss of insights that are available in this historical work. The particular significance of a historical figure's thought is lost when s/he is under these assumptions. I show in chapter four that Dewey's thought has, in a general way, been systematically misunderstood by both his admirers and critics because these assumptions project onto his work a conception of philosophy that he did not have.

In part 2, consisting of chapters 5 and 6, I present two more detailed accounts of historical work that is misrepresented in contemporary philosophy. I argue that this leaves philosophy poorer and less vital than it could be.

Chapter 5 In contemporary philosophy logic is taken to be the formal study of implication. Epistemology is understood to be the fundamental study of knowledge, where that typically means the attempt to refute a set of skeptical problems that arise for the knower *simpliciter*. When read in these lights, Dewey's *Logic* and his earlier writings about logic look naïve. Similarly his interest in scientific method and empirical knowledge are often presented as bad philosophy: he mistook particular problems besetting particular enquirers for philosophically fundamental problems of knowledge. I show that in fact Dewey was working within a set of assumptions about philosophy that is at odds with the professional image, and that this accounts for persistent misunderstandings of his thought.

Chapter 6 Philosophical studies of ethics typically seek universal, fundamental principles of reason that are thought to underlie normative judgment. I argue that this marginalizes important historical work that sees ethics as always engaged in particular social settings and confronting particular social problems. The professional image works like this: a philosopher such as Thoreau, who was avowedly speaking to his neighbors about shared problems confronting them at a particular time and place, is read by many contemporary philosophers as if he were trying to answer the timeless question about *the good*. This risks losing what is most distinctive about his work. Similarly Dewey's

educational thought is often presented as work concerning fundamental and timeless concepts like *learning* and *teaching*, whereas he saw his work as oriented towards solving specific problems arising from social movements that occupy a particular historical period. Again, his contributions are misunderstood when they are so situated.

Chapter 7 The conclusion argues that the professional image is beset with tensions. I identify these and argue that the tensions help to explain the marginal status philosophy has in contemporary academic life. The first step to resolving the tensions is to identify their causes. I argue that philosophers should concern themselves, professionally, with their practice. This would involve identifying the material and institutional conditions of their work and noting the roles such forces have on thought.

Chapter 2 The Professional Image

"The cow is there," said Ansell, lighting a match and holding it out over the carpet. No one spoke. He waited till the end of the match fell off. Then he said again, "She is there, the cow. There, now."

"You have not proved it," said a voice.

"I have proved it to myself."

"I have proved to myself that she isn't," said the voice, "The cow is *not* there." Ansell frowned and lit another match.

"She's there for me," he declared. "I don't care whether she's there for you or not. Whether I'm in Cambridge or Iceland or dead, the cow will be there."

It was philosophy. They were discussing the existence of objects. Do they exist only when there is some one to look at them? or have they a real existence of their own? It is all very interesting, but at the same time it is difficult. Hence the cow.

-E. M. Forster, opening to *The Longest Journey* (1907)

I. Introduction

One day my son asked: "Is pain an emotion?" We had been talking about what I do (philosophy) and, bored with that, he had tried to change the subject. He didn't know that this is the sort of question that any philosopher will pounce upon, and so I said, "Well, let's think about that. What is pain?" And for the rest of the drive home we were doing philosophy.

At least, we were doing something that looks like what many philosophers have come to think philosophy is. But this activity – asking very general "What is x?" questions, framing off-the-cuff definitions and theories ("an emotion is something you feel"), using (often fanciful) thought experiments to test these definitions ("what if you were given a drug that, without doing anything else, made it impossible for you to feel

sad?”), all the while taking our own extemporaneous thoughts as the relevant guide – is it philosophy? It bears a certain similarity to the questioning that goes on in some of Plato’s dialogues, and it looks a lot like what Forster’s characters thought philosophy was (especially the way objections are given by “a voice,” since what is said is what is important, not who’s saying it). And it is a (much simplified) version of what counts as philosophy in many undergraduate courses and in many philosophical journals. But it isn’t what one finds in Hegel, or Nietzsche, or Dewey, or Thoreau.¹⁹ So, the question is, how does one go about answering the question whether what my son and I were doing was philosophy?

Well, clearly (one is tempted to say) what is needed is some account of what philosophy is, and this account can be arrived at by trying to answer the “what is philosophy?” question through framing possible definitions and then looking for counter-examples. But then the activity starts to seem essentially circular and potentially endless. This accounts for some frustration undergraduates sometimes feel in introductory courses in philosophy: philosophy doesn’t seem to get anywhere.

Here I pursue a different method. I begin by developing a picture – I call it the professional image – of what many philosophers think philosophy is.²⁰ This picture

¹⁹ Many philosophers working within the professional image do try to reconstruct the thought of these thinkers so that it aligns with the “what is x?” approach. I discuss the examples of Dewey and Thoreau in chapters 5 and 6.

²⁰ In most of what follows when I talk about philosophy I mean the academic discipline as it is configured in most of the major research universities and colleges in the United States and England. I mean the enterprise that comprises the leading journals, the APA meetings, the courses taught to undergraduates, the introductory and other textbooks that are used in those

makes a certain kind of activity philosophical – that is to say, the picture is a bundle of disciplinary presuppositions that a social group – academic philosophers – projects onto the world. But the picture is one that developed over the course of the 20th century, and it developed contemporaneously with the professionalization of the discipline of philosophy. The more substantive thesis I pursue in this dissertation is that the picture developed as philosophers professionalized. So that in fact my son and I were doing philosophy given the picture of philosophy that dominates the discipline. When the picture dominates our thinking, we are able to distinguish philosophers from other thinkers. And we are able to identify in a historical work the parts that are genuinely philosophical. But other pictures of philosophy have dominated at different historical periods, and there are others operating today along the margins of the academic discipline.

courses, the canonical texts published by Hackett, for example, and in these days the highly reflexive and sometimes imperial blogs that track important activities in the discipline. At times it will simplify matters to make use of the term ‘analytic philosophy,’ because, as Hans Glock, one of its advocates, says, analytic philosophy is “...now the dominant force within Western philosophy” (Glock (2008(b)) p. 1). (Glock supports this claim with a reference to an article by the prominent philosopher John Searle, in which Searle says that analytic philosophy dominates Western philosophy!) I mostly avoid referring to ‘analytic philosophy,’ because it is part of my argument that philosophy under the professional image isn’t just what it is easy to call ‘analytic philosophy,’ because philosophy in this sense certainly includes people interested in Hegel and Heidegger and Nietzsche and the other ‘continental’ philosophers. They are treated as philosophers under the dominant picture, for the most part. But, as I hope will become clear, I don’t at all mean to imply that everyone who calls him or herself a philosopher buys into the picture that I present here. For an interesting critical history of analytic philosophy, see Preston (2007); Chase and Reynolds (2010) try to identify the different methodological assumptions made by analytic and continental philosophers. For a brilliant account of the historical episode that many see as the commencement of the division between analytic and continental philosophy, the confrontation between Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer at Davos in 1929, see Gordon (2010).

II. What is philosophy?

Philosophers frequently say that the question, "What is philosophy?" is one of the central philosophical questions. Brian Leiter, for example, in his introduction to a collection of essays on the state of the discipline, begins this way:

Philosophy, perhaps more than any other discipline, has been plagued by debates about what the discipline is or ought to be. ... Meta-philosophical questions, i.e. questions about what philosophy is, its proper concerns, methods, and limitations, and its rightful ambitions are inevitably on the table in any consideration of philosophy's future. Yet 'what philosophy is' is also the implicit subtext anytime one 'does philosophy'. (Leiter (2004) p. 1)

In a similar vein, Hans-Johann Glock says:

The very nature of philosophy is itself a contested philosophical issue, and views about this issue are philosophically controversial. Although the investigation of the proper aims and methods of philosophy is nowadays known as 'metaphilosophy', it is not a distinct higher-order discipline but an integral part of philosophy itself. (Glock (2008) p. 6)

Still, and surprisingly if Leiter and Glock are correct about all of this uncertainty, there is remarkable agreement about who the philosophers are, about what counts as good philosophical writing, and about the sort of question a philosophical question is. How can there be so much agreement if no one knows what philosophy is? Why don't we find people constantly making mistakes about who the philosophers are?

Under the guidance of an experienced teacher or writer there is never any doubt that Socrates is a philosopher, or that Descartes and Mill are philosophers, or that Brian Leiter is a philosopher. There is no room for questioning whether the speaker on an APA panel is a philosopher. If you don't know *that*, you probably haven't been doing the reading or listening to the lectures. From the inside there is conviction. The enterprise

depends on there being this conviction: philosophy is a field of study. One comes to know one's way about in it. One learns to see things the right way (or one decides to study comparative literature or science). The key fact, seldom acknowledged in these discussions, is that one's certainty about what philosophy is emerges from social interactions and is realized or actualized in social interactions: lectures, classroom discussions, suggestions from trusted advisors about what to read, comments on papers, etc..... The importance of this conviction often emerges in discussions where one might expect it to come under scrutiny. For example, in mildly defending the use of labels in philosophical discussion, Glock says that "... some labels are essential if we are to detect important similarities and differences between various thinkers and positions, and if we are to tell a coherent story about the historical development of our subject" (Glock (2008) p. 8). In other words, the professional image of philosophy as a coherent discipline requires that certain kinds of similarities and differences be reified into disciplinary facts while others are ignored. Labeling key views performs this work.

But once we try to look at philosophy from the outside, without making the assumptions and tacit agreements that we make in order to do philosophy, the question of what philosophy is looks like a very deep and difficult question. The historical texts have very little on the surface in common (compare Plato's dialogues to Spinoza's *Ethics*, written in the form of definitions and proofs; or compare anything from the 18th or 19th century with what gets published today). Trying to consider philosophy as a whole, it doesn't look like it has a set of problems or subjects or methods. From the outside, and in

the absence of the kinds of implicit agreements that the picture of philosophy furnishes, it isn't at all clear that there is anything to ask the "what is it?" question about.

But the nature of philosophy isn't a central question of philosophy from the inside. Philosophers think of it as the philosophy of philosophy and call it 'metaphilosophy', and, even though it has a technical name, it isn't a highly regarded part of the discipline.²¹ This is because, in spite of the fact that we are frequently reminded at the beginning of discussions of the profession or in reflections on the profession or in introductions to the profession that the nature of philosophy is a central philosophical problem, it isn't. It's a historical problem, or perhaps a sociological or cultural problem, and it is an educational problem. From within the professional image, it's pretty clear what philosophy is: philosophy is the discipline that asks very general, foundational and timeless questions and that uses reason to try to answer them. There is no mystery about that.

In this chapter I characterize the professional image of philosophy, the picture within which so much philosophy gets done. In his book about Heidegger and Cassirer, Peter Gordon describes the disagreement between them as originating in competing *images* of mankind; he says "I will refer to it as an *image* largely because I wish to underscore the point that intellectuals often ground their argumentation in a basic picture, the character of which is as much aesthetic and metaphorical as it is rational" (Gordon

²¹ At a talk given in my department recently a high-status professor's criticism was that the speaker was doing metaphilosophy, and when you start doing metaphilosophy "no philosophy gets done."

(2010) p. 5). This is how I see the professional image: it provides the grounds for doing philosophy, though it isn't arrived at by philosophers doing philosophy. Students are initiated into it, not overtly taught about it: nobody ever teaches philosophy students to make up weird examples. It is discussed, when it is discussed at all, in value-laden aesthetic terms: philosophers are told to write clearly, some are said to write elegantly. The image is doing the work of sorting out the philosophers from other writers. Without the image there really would be no agreement about what philosophy is.

But what picture of philosophy does the professional image furnish? First, this picture, unsurprisingly given the broad range of things that philosophers have been interested in, is primarily formal (you can do philosophy about anything, from objects to emotions, from science to art). Second, according to the picture the properly philosophical questions are general, fundamental and timeless: do objects exist? What is beauty? Finally, the picture includes a methodological practice: many philosophers use thought experiments and appeals to intuitions or general background shared beliefs to establish their conclusions. These three characteristics are connected. The subject matter is identified most simply by a list of very general questions about which many people have strong intuitions; and what makes form formal is that particulars have been washed of their particularities. But it will be helpful to discuss each one separately to try to gain a clearer focus on the picture.

The picture is doing a lot of work but mostly behind the scenes – it makes us think that a philosopher, whatever period he is from,²² is someone who has views about the main questions, views that can be stated quickly using specialized language and, oftentimes, formalisms. The views are meant to be supported by arguments that can be assessed independently of knowledge of any other specialized disciplines so that they are amenable to formal analysis. This picture determines a way of reading even historical works of philosophy. Jonathan Barnes makes this picture explicit in his book on the Pre-Socratic philosophers:

Philosophy lives a supercelestial life, beyond the confines of space and time; and if philosophers are, perforce, small spatio-temporal creatures, a minute attention to their small spatio-temporal concerns will more often obfuscate than illumine their philosophies. (Barnes (1982) p. xii)

More recently, here is Don Garret, a respected scholar of modern philosophy, on how one can profitably interpret modern texts:

One especially useful strategy for accurate evaluation is the simple one of reconstructing an author's argument formally, *in the words of the text itself*, with individual propositions as numbered steps and with relations of inferential support clearly labeled. When done well, this provides specific and accurate objects for critical assessment, since each undefended premise can be assessed for truth or falsehood, and each inference can be assessed for validity or invalidity, strength or weakness; the restriction to outlining material that is actually present in the text helps to provide an accurate version of the argument to be evaluated. (Garret (2004) p. 68 (emphasis in original))

Garret is careful here to stress the importance of using original words, but of course that requirement gets weakened when it comes to interpreting the claims. Garret's interesting

²² Canonical philosophers are all men and most philosophers still are men. The problem professional philosophy has with women was mentioned in the introduction and is discussed in the conclusion.

article defends the notion that, by doing this sort of work – formally restating a view so that truth and validity can be assessed more easily – one is advancing the philosophical project: “Much of the excitement of the history of modern philosophy lies in the range of its application to contemporary philosophical debate – which has arguably never been greater” (Garret (2004) p. 69). And, more programmatically, Bennett says in his two volume work on six modern philosophers, “Sometimes, I contend, a philosopher’s proclaimed doctrine may be better understood as a misformulation of something different, more interesting, and closer to the truth” (Bennett (2001) v. I, p. 8). Getting at the true doctrine obviously implies reformulating what has been misformulated; attending to formal matters assists this reformulation because it abstracts away from historical and other forms of contingency and allows the focus to be on the purported answers to the timeless questions.

III. The dominant picture – the professional image

III.1 A penchant for formalism

We have seen Don Garrett’s advice that, when we read historical works, an aim is to extract arguments and display them “formally.” This attention to form is explicable mainly as the result of the development of the understanding of logic and validity; the powerful tools of logical analysis that were developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries gave philosophy a language of its own (this is discussed in chapter 5). A prominent feature of contemporary philosophical practice is the use of variables and

symbols in written work. This signals that the argument under consideration is amenable to formal analysis. Moreover, one of the primary justifications for the development of the tools of logical analysis was that it could overcome sources of unclarity and general messiness that plague natural languages – the ideal way of presenting reasoning is in a formal language that is clear because unambiguous and untainted by allusion, connotation, metaphor, and the rest of the adornments of natural language. For an example drawn more or less randomly from a very recent edition of one of the most important all-purpose journals in the profession (*The Philosophical Review*), here is David Chalmers describing “...a common proposal for characterizing verbal disputes...”:

A dispute over the truth of S is verbal if S is definitionally equivalent to S_1 for one party and definitionally equivalent to S_2 for the other, and the parties agree on the truth-values of S_1 and S_2 . (Chalmers (2011) p. 518)

We see here, in this utterly typical example, a characteristic presentation of philosophy: a putative definition containing variables. It isn't clear, from the outside, what is gained by the use of variables in this case, and, while this form of writing isn't necessarily any worse than any other, using it is a mark of membership, and definitions of this sort are primed for being plugged into more elaborate logical matrices.

Garrett alludes to the tools of logical or formal analysis when he mentions numbering of premises. The idea that guides formalism in philosophy is that the proper philosophical aspect of a piece of writing can be captured in a form of writing that has

sloughed off all forms of literary adornment.²³ What is literary in a work of philosophy is then thought of as not central to the core philosophical content. In this way the commitment to formalism allows philosophers to think of their work as continuous with historical works that, plainly, do take advantage of the same characteristics of natural language that philosophers try to silence in their formalisms.²⁴ In this way the penchant for formalism does end up making a substantive contribution to the reading of historical figures by selectively treating parts of what is written as *philosophical* content. The contemporary picture is projected into the past and serves to justify itself.

²³ Mulhall (2001) opens with a description of what Anthony Kenny wrote in a review of Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* as giving "...a particular picture of the essence of philosophical writing" (p. 1). Mulhall's book concerns the ways in which some philosophers – Cavell, Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Kierkegaard – have tried to develop a philosophical voice that doesn't make some substantial commitments that one makes by writing in the dominant style. Part of my aim in this dissertation is similar though more limited: I want to explain how the dominant picture interferes with a reading of Dewey and of Thoreau that accepts their conceptions of philosophical reflection.

²⁴ Sandra Peterson draws attention to a famous example: Gilbert Ryle called the digression in the *Theaetetus* "philosophically quite pointless" (Peterson (2011) p. 59). Plato's texts have tended to be read by philosophers for the last 150 years as containing arguments for views that are at times hard to pin down because of the literary qualities of the texts and as containing much else besides that is not philosophical. Typically philosophers have tried to separate the literary qualities from the philosophical content. For example, they tend to ignore the scene setting that goes on at the beginning of many dialogues, they tend to ignore the fact that what are depicted are discussions, and they tend to ignore wordplay and other "ornaments." Peterson's account takes all of these things as relevant to interpreting the texts, and, unsurprisingly, her interpretation is at odds with the dominant readings.

While it is true that there are similarities between a picture of philosophy that emerges from the dominant way of reading the texts (Peterson gives an outline of one that emerges from the *Theaetetus* on pp. 61-62) and the picture I claim emerged in the 20th century, there are many ways in which the pictures differ and, moreover, it is because one can find elements of the currently dominant picture in historical texts that the dominant picture seems to capture something essential about what philosophy is.

George Pappas's recent monograph on Berkeley makes this explicit. Towards the end of the introduction in an "Excursus on Methodology," Pappas says about Berkeley's literary style:

The main difficulty with the *Three Dialogues* comes with the occasional passage in which Philonous gives an oratory on the beauty and organization and design of nature. While this is of great literary value, philosophically it causes difficulties, because it falls short of explicitly stating some thesis. (Pappas (2000) p. 21)

If philosophers really were uncertain about what philosophy is, this sort of reasoning would beg the question. But most philosophers are quite confident about what philosophy is – the picture they have is not at all fuzzy. Philosophy, at a minimum, explicitly states theses and defends them with argument. The problem with writing that has "literary value" is that it cannot straightforwardly be rendered symbolically or formally, simply because a part of its value is the particular vehicle of its expression. The language is doing more than containing a content that can more easily be contained or presented in an artificial formal language. But with a picture in place according to which what cannot be rendered formally is not philosophical, patterns of thought, modes of argumentation, and methods of reflection that do not assume the picture or that cannot be rendered legible by the picture,²⁵ are either missed or actively ignored. We see this in Pappas's monograph – whereas Berkeley is throughout his writing committed to defending the views of the common people and so almost never indulges in any kind of

²⁵ Philosophers – like Rousseau, Thoreau, Wittgenstein and Cavell, to name a few – who experiment with forms of writing to draw attention to deep-seated habits of reasoning are persistently misunderstood when the picture is projected onto readings of their texts.

specialized or technical language, and whereas he indulges in poetic writing meant to attract a wide audience (much to the annoyance of some contemporary philosophers), Pappas's work is replete with reconstructions like the following, purported to capture Berkeley's thesis about immediate perception:

(1) An object O is immediately seen by an observer S at time t = (i) O is seen by S at t, and (ii) it is false that O would be seen by S at t only if S were to see some object R at t, where R is not identical to O. (Pappas (2000) p. 149)

The justification for this kind of violence to the original expressions of historical figures is that, when put this way, their work can more easily be seen to be a part of the project of philosophy.²⁶ Jonathan Bennett makes this clear in the preface to his volume on Locke, Berkeley and Hume:

I do not aim to be scholarly... Nor are my concerns historical: they relate primarily to three topics, and only secondarily to three philosophers. I hope to contribute to the understanding of the latter, not by presenting an amply rounded picture of their thought (even on central themes), but by making it easier to get a firm hold on the logic of some of what they wrote. (Bennett (1971) p. v)

Here what is interesting is not so much the constriction of interest – all writing blinds itself to some things – but the idea that what the philosopher is most keenly interested in (as against the historian or biographer) is the *logic* of what was written. This is what merits philosophical attention.

John Dewey avoided formal expression; he advocated against exclusive philosophical attention to formal logic because he thought that it tended to solidify

²⁶ It is part of the dominant picture that philosophy is written for philosophers. This is an important difference between the dominant picture and the picture that Dewey had – Dewey, like Thoreau and in his way Berkeley, thought of themselves as participating in a public discussion.

patterns of thinking that were as yet not fully understood. In his preface to his *Logic*

(1938) Dewey explained his reasons for eschewing formalisms:

In the present state of logic, the absence of any attempt at symbolic formulation will doubtless cause serious objection in the minds of many readers. This absence is not due to any aversion to such formulation. On the contrary, I am convinced that acceptance of the general principles set forth will enable a more complete and consistent set of symbolizations than now exists to be made. The absence of symbolization is due, first, to a point mentioned in the text, the need for a development of a general theory of language in which form and matter are not separated; and, secondly, to the fact that an adequate set of symbols depends upon prior institution of valid ideas of conceptions and relations that are symbolized. Without fulfillment of this condition, formal symbolization will (as so often happens in the past) merely perpetuate existing mistakes while strengthening them by seeming to give them scientific standing. (Dewey (LW v. 12 (1938) p. 4)

The “existing mistakes” he has in mind are precisely those associated with thinking that reasoning can be given a fully formal analysis. The penchant for formalism in the contemporary picture has made Dewey’s work hard to read for many philosophers.

III.2 A penchant for generality, fundament and timeless questions

Philosophers claim no monopoly on conceptual analysis, just generic expertise.

-Sorenson (1992) p. 111

If the picture that dominates contemporary philosophy is one that privileges formalism, there is still the question about content: what are philosophers concerned with when they apply their formal tools? As a discipline philosophy must mark out a territory that distinguishes it from other university departments. Typically philosophers mark their territory by highlighting the sort of questions they ask, questions that are normally not asked by other disciplines and certainly not with the kind of abstractness and formal rigor

with which philosophers ask them. These questions are general conceptual questions that, in virtue of their generality, can be thought of as timeless – anyone at any time, it seems, can ask: what is beauty? When they do, they are asking the core question of philosophical aesthetics. Such questions are also thought to be fundamental questions, though there is seldom any explicit attempt to explain why the most general questions are also the most fundamental. This is one of the *a priori* disciplinary commitments that gives the picture its solidity.

This penchant for the big questions is apparent most clearly in works addressed to the lay reader. One such work is called *The Big Questions: Philosophy for Everyone*. In it, Nils Rauhut defines philosophy as “...the attempt to develop a ‘big picture’ view of the universe with the help of reason” (Rauhut (2006) p. 5). We have seen that philosophers typically understand reason as a capacity for performing formal analyses of arguments. The “big picture” that Rauhut describes is achieved by framing answers to big, general, timeless questions. For example, the chapter entitled “What do we know?” begins with the paradigmatic philosophical question: “What is knowledge?” (Rauhut (2006) p. 62). This question, Rauhut says, marks out the field of epistemology: “This project of determining the scope and limits of knowledge is the main part of epistemology” (Rauhut (2006) p. 18).

Another such book, Simon Blackburn’s *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*, offers this on the inside flap of its cover: “This is a book about the big questions in life: knowledge, consciousness, fate, God, truth, goodness, justice. It is for

anyone who believes there are big questions out there....” The book begins this way

(obviously the source of the list on the cover flap):

This book is for people who want to think about the big themes: knowledge, reason, truth, mind, freedom, destiny, identity, God, goodness, justice. These are not the hidden preserve of specialists. They are things that men and women wonder about naturally, for they structure the ways we think about the world and our place in it. They are also themes about which thinkers have had things to say. In this book I try to introduce ways of thinking about the big themes. (Blackburn (1999) p. 1)

Blackburn goes on to say that these questions arise from "self-reflection" (Blackburn (1999) p. 4). In other words, these are questions that are not tied to any particular historical time or social milieu. Blackburn's writing makes clear that they are, for him, simply natural questions that arise for any human who thinks. It follows that they are the same questions for any human at any time; hence they are timeless. This is the picture of philosophy that its practitioners describe when they address the general reader.

But it is also the picture that animates these practitioners when they are addressing other professionals. Wilfrid Sellars, described in the entry about him in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as a "philosopher's philosopher" (deVries (2011)), famously said: "The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (Sellars (2007 (1962)), p. 369). Leiter in his edited collection says, in characterizing the influential "naturalist turn" in recent philosophy, that "...naturalists believe that the problems that have worried philosophers (about the nature of the mind,

knowledge, action, reality, morality, and so on) are indeed real” (Leiter (2004) p. 3). And here again is Glock:²⁷

Philosophy as a distinctive intellectual pursuit is constituted at least in part by *problems* of a peculiar kind. These problems are supremely abstract and fundamental, and they include questions such as ‘Can we acquire genuine knowledge?’, ‘How is the mind related to the body?’, and ‘Are there universally binding moral principles?’. (Glock (2008) p. 872)

It is clear, then, that the picture philosophers have is of a subject that is primarily concerned with answering general, fundamental questions that occur to anyone, at any time or place, when he reflects.²⁸

This focus on general questions ironically serves the further purpose of giving philosophy a history. Though the questions are timeless, there is a history of asking them and trying out answers to them. The importance of this history is debated among philosophers,²⁹ but there is virtually unanimous agreement that there are key historical thinkers who were philosophers in virtue of their having addressed these fundamental questions. This allows the writing of histories of philosophy, and the teaching of courses

²⁷ Leiter and Glock, of course, were seen above repeating the canard that philosophers don’t know what philosophy is!

²⁸ See also Cohen (1986) for a defense of the claim that philosophy is characterized by pursuit of *general* questions:

The philosophical question might be ‘What makes a belief a reason for doing something?’ but not ‘Why did you go to London yesterday?’ Similarly the reason for the prevalence of malaria in a hot and swampy country is not philosophically important, but the general nature of causal explanation (or of truth) is. (Cohen (1986) p. 55)

²⁹ Glock (2008(a)) defends analytic philosophers against the charge that they are ahistorical by arguing that they are appropriately concerned just with the philosophical content of the thought of historical philosophers. But he warns that reading historical philosophers can breed laziness: what is philosophically interesting about Hume, for example, ought to be independently discoverable by anyone who thinks hard enough!

in history of philosophy – indeed, this interest in its own history is taken to be distinctive of the discipline of philosophy when it is thought of as akin to the sciences.³⁰ Bertrand Russell’s immense *History of Western Philosophy* aims to describe the “milieu” from which each significant philosopher he treats emerged, but lest this become merely an exercise in intellectual history Russell, in his introduction, articulates the conception of philosophy from which the book springs: philosophy exists somewhere between science and religion:

Almost all the questions of most interest to speculative minds are such as science cannot answer, and the confident answers of theologians no longer seem so convincing as they did in former centuries. Is the world divided into mind and matter, and, if so, what is mind and what is matter? Has the universe any unity or purpose? Is it evolving towards some goal? Are there really laws of nature or do we believe in them only because of our innate love of order? ... Must the good be eternal in order to deserve to be valued, or is it worth seeking even if the universe is inexorably moving towards death? (Russell (1945) p. xiii)

Identifying the subject matter of philosophy in this way makes it possible to identify philosophical content in historical writing that is often presented in forms (dialogues, poems, aphorisms) that have fallen out of favor among professional philosophers. Hence the central importance of the development of formal languages for the presentation of historical writing. Even a more recent work dealing with more recent history depends on this picture of philosophy – John Passmore in his *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (covering English philosophy from 1850 to 1950) worries about coverage but hopes to

³⁰ Though it is not uncommon to hear philosophers compare philosophy to science, and indeed for self-proclaimed naturalists to say that science has the final word, still many philosophers have an idealized and simplistic conception of science. See the essays in Wimsatt (2007) for an account of science, unfamiliar to many philosophers, that emphasizes its messiness.

have “... drawn attention ... to a reasonable proportion of the most important work in ‘pure philosophy’ which has been published since 1957” (Passmore (1968) p. 9). The ‘pure philosophy’ he has in mind is philosophy addressing the central questions of epistemology, metaphysics and logic.

In sum, then, generality and formalism work together to enable philosophers to think of themselves as contending with a subject that is both very old and at the same time timeless. Historical works are read for their way of attending to the timeless problems. Works of philosophy that discuss historical figures typically differentiate themselves from purely historical works by attending to the content in the work that can be seen as responding to the very questions that define the discipline today. Differences in expression are seen as contingent and ideally overcome through the introduction of formal techniques of interpretation and analysis. We will see how this picture treats an historical figure like Dewey, whose main philosophical interest was in seeing how the historical and social contexts in which humans live open up possibilities for improving life. That is, for Dewey, philosophy is not timeless but historical.

III.3 A penchant for intuitions and thought experiments

The traditional methods of philosophy are armchair ones: they consist of thinking, without any special interaction with the world beyond the chair, such as measurement, observation or experiment would typically involve. (Williamson (2007) p. 1)

If philosophers picture themselves as asking general, fundamental questions for which formal means of expression are taken to be ideal, what sort of method is appropriate? Clearly no naïve empirical investigation is going to be sufficient – you cannot observe the concept GOOD to determine its necessary and sufficient conditions, and you cannot bring it into the lab to perform experiments on it. This presents a *prima facie* problem for contemporary philosophers under the sway of the dominant picture because they like to think of themselves as aligned with the sciences in producing knowledge, and not aligned with what they consider the “softer” disciplines of English, Comparative Literature and the like. Roy Sorenson makes this explicit in his defense of the method of thought experiment: “...philosophy differs from science in degree, not kind. Understand science, understand the parameters to be varied, and you understand philosophy” (Sorenson (1992) p. 3). On this picture the sciences are characterized by a kind of theoretical elegance that incorporates simplicity and formal expression. And they have experiments to rely on. The humanities typically lack such elegance and they lack experimental methods. So how does one do philosophy rigorously?

Williamson (currently holder of the esteemed Wykeham Professor of Logic chair at Oxford, a position fraught with disciplinary power) in the quotation above supplies the canonical answer: philosophers pursue their distinctive methods by thinking. Here is Williamson again, in an “Afterword” to his book *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (2007), describing in general terms what philosophers are about when they do philosophy:

To reach philosophical conclusions one must reason, usually in areas where it is very hard to distinguish valid from invalid reasoning. To make that distinction reliably, one must often attend carefully to the semantic form of the premises,

the conclusion, and the intermediate steps. That requires implicit semantic beliefs about the crucial words and constructions. (Williamson (2007) p. 284)

But, Williamson bemoans the fact that philosophers tend to be lazy:

Much contemporary analytic philosophy seems to be written in the tacit hope of discursively muddling through, uncontrolled by any clear methodological constraints. That may be enough for easy questions, if there are any in philosophy; it is manifestly inadequate for resolving the hard questions with which most philosophers like to engage. All too often it produces only eddies in academic fashion, without any advance in our understanding of the subject matter. (Williamson (2007) p. 286)

In these two passages the key features of the dominant picture are brought into focus: the questions philosophers work on are hard because they are abstract and fundamental. The reasoning is so subtle that formal methods of analysis are the only tool sharp enough for the job. The only thing philosophers have to rely on is reason, and given the human nature of most philosophers, the tendency towards laziness and sloppiness is always lurking. The antidote to this – the way to preserve the self-image of philosophy as akin to science and not to the soft humanities – is for philosophers to discipline themselves:

Discipline from semantics is only one kind of philosophical discipline. It is insufficient by itself for the conduct of a philosophical inquiry, and may sometimes fail to be useful, when the semantic forms of the relevant linguistic constructions are simple and obvious. But when philosophy is not disciplined by semantics, it must be disciplined by something else: syntax, logic, common sense, imaginary examples, the findings of other disciplines (mathematics, physics, biology, psychology, history, . . .) or the aesthetic evaluation of theories (elegance, simplicity, . . .). Indeed, philosophy subject to only one of those disciplines is liable to become severely distorted: several are needed simultaneously. To be “disciplined” by X here is not simply to pay lip-service to X; it is to make a systematic conscious effort to conform to the deliverances of X, where such conformity is at least somewhat easier to recognize than is the answer to the original philosophical question. Of course, each form of philosophical discipline is itself contested by some philosophers. But that is no reason to produce work that is not properly disciplined by anything. (Williamson (2007) p. 285)

The popular way of advancing the philosophical project that conforms to this demand for discipline is the testing of intuitions by posing “thought experiments.” Williamson says, “Of all the armchair methods of philosophy, one of the most conspicuous is the thought experiment” (Williamson (2007) p. 179). When a question is as fundamental and context-independent as, “what is the good?”, it is hard to know what resources one could have for developing an answer other than the “intuitions” one has, the things we feel compelled to say about the question just in virtue of being reflective, reason-using creatures. Cohen provides an example of this kind of *what else is there* defense of the use of intuitions:

Those readers who find themselves unwilling to accept something like the following account of intuition and its function in analytical philosophy need to ask themselves what alternative source of philosophical premises they would propose. Or would they wish to confine analytical philosophy to the hypothetical mode of procedure? (Cohen (1986) p. 73)

Of course Cohen expects the reader to respond negatively to his rhetorical question; apparently there are no other genuine alternatives to intuitions in philosophical argument.³¹

These intuitions are nurtured by often elaborate, fantastical examples that require the thinker to tease out the nature of the concept under investigation. Machery describes some familiar thought experiments:

³¹ Machery (2011) is critical of the use of thought experiments and their intuitions as sources for premises in philosophical argument, but he doesn’t offer any alternative (he does, though, appeal to cognitive research). Cappelen (2012) thinks philosophers do not use intuitions, and that the appearance of talk about intuitions in philosophical texts is misleading. Cappelen’s argument uses a highly selective definition of intuitions, though, and, as he says, he is denying what seems to be a widespread and widely accepted practice.

Thought experiments are a distinctive feature of contemporary analytic philosophy, and many influential arguments rest on premises supported by judgments elicited by thought experiments. Just think of the Godel cases and Twin Earth in the philosophy of language, Mary the neuroscientist and zombies in the philosophy of mind, Gettier cases in epistemology, and trolley cases or the Society of Music Lovers in ethics. Philosophers seem to assume that the judgments elicited by such thought experiments have an important role to play in the growth of philosophical knowledge. (Machery (2011) p. 191)

The often-fantastical nature of these thought experiments allows Williamson and other defenders to claim that philosophy requires above all a creative imagination.³² It is instructive to see that even philosophers critical of “arm-chair” methods often rely on the very same kind of thought experiments to perform “empirical” studies. Recently there has been interest in so-called “experimental philosophy” or “x-phi,” in which philosophers typically use surveys to elicit intuitions from ordinary people about the standard philosophical thought experiments (zombies, trolleys, etc....) (see Knobe and Nichols (2008), Weinberg, Nichols and Stich (2001)).³³

³² The dominant picture allows philosophers to see even cognitive capacities in a particular light. Thus they have little understanding of what imagination means in, for example, the Romantic literature that so influenced Emerson and Thoreau.

³³ Consider how the debate about experimental philosophy is carried out. Williamson, a critic of the movement, does not deny that what philosophers rely on in making progress is philosophical knowledge; rather he criticizes experimental philosophers for looking to “folk” intuitions rather than the intuitions of philosophical experts – those trained to do philosophy (Williamson (2011)). Machery argues that the claim that thought experiments do elicit judgments that can be used as premises in philosophical arguments is subject to grave skeptical objections, and he denies that there is evidence that philosophers have an expertise that would make them immune from these skeptical considerations (Machery (2011)). Machery’s argument appeals to evidence from the literature on cognitive capacities. Machery is in an History and Philosophy of Science department, so it isn’t entirely surprising that he is somewhat dubious about the dominant picture of philosophy. Nevertheless his discussion of philosophical knowledge and philosophical arguments does seem to indicate that he sees philosophy largely as the activity that goes on under the dominant picture.

It is true that historical figures have used imaginative examples in canonical philosophical texts: the Ring of Gyges in the *Republic*, the mad demon in Descartes's *Meditations*, Locke's little finger that comes to possess someone's consciousness, and so on. These examples make plausible the claim that this is simply how philosophers reason. But consider, first, that the dominant picture allows philosophers to identify the philosophical content of writings of historical figures. This makes the claim about the distinctive methodology of philosophy circular. Second, Plato, Descartes and Locke do not rely on thought experiments and appeals to intuitions exclusively. Finally, in none of these paradigmatic historical cases is the thought experiment or example used to supply a premise for a philosophical argument,³⁴ which is typically the use made of thought experiments in philosophy today. And many historical philosophers, including Dewey, simply never engage in thought experiments.

IV. Conclusion

We have seen that the picture of philosophy that currently dominates – the professional image – provides a conception of the subject matter of philosophy as general, fundamental and timeless questions. It privileges the investigation of these questions through formal analysis. And it encourages thought experiments and appeals to

³⁴ At least, it isn't obvious that this is how the examples are used. Philosophers working under the dominant picture, of course, will offer reconstructions of the works that interpret the examples as doing some work to motivate an argument. But there is certainly nothing in the texts that determines this sort of interpretation. The examples mentioned above are used for persuasive purposes, but there are many forms of persuasion.

intuition. In the next chapter an explanation for the development of the professional image is offered. The explanation is in terms of features of academic institutions.

Chapter 3 A Model of Change in Philosophy

One could say that the sociological understanding of “reality” and “knowledge” falls somewhere in the middle between that of the man in the street and that of the philosopher. The man in the street does not ordinarily trouble himself about what is “real” to him and about what he “knows” unless he is stopped short by some sort of problem. ... The philosopher, on the other hand, is professionally obligated to take nothing for granted, and to obtain maximal clarity as to the ultimate status of what the man in the street believes to be “reality” and “knowledge.”

-Berger & Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*

I. Introduction

A number of recent publications have addressed the question of contemporary philosophical methodology (Cappelen (2012), Chase & Reynolds (2010), Daly (2010), Gutting (2009), Williamson (2007)). The concern to understand and defend philosophic methodology arises in an attempt to rationalize the history of philosophy, a history that can seem to lack any real unity.

Missing from these works, and indeed missing from the literature about philosophy generally, is an attempt to comprehend philosophy as an ongoing material practice, one that has a particular kind of institutional setting which gives it shape and that includes a set of typical *social* actions: teaching, lecturing, attending conferences and meetings, grading, reviewing, reading. Works of “meta-philosophy” (as those listed above are called) tend to simply ignore these aspects of philosophy, and the sociological

work about philosophy is scant; what does exist tends simply to accept the self-image presented by authorities in philosophy. In other words it looks past the practice of philosophy to high-status texts. There is a tendency among both philosophers and non-philosophers to think that philosophy is, by its nature, immune from determining conditions that constrain all other practices.

For example, one of the key texts in the field of the sociology of knowledge, Berger and Luckman's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), presents a kind of tension when it comes to its understanding of philosophy. The epigraph to this chapter shows that they are aware of disciplinary constraints on what philosophers do, but that is mostly ignored in their other remarks about philosophy. In a book devoted to explaining the way in which social structures determine knowledge, they are strangely, even naively, willing to depict philosophy as a mode of knowledge that is aloof, universal and formal. In fact they seem to think that the understanding of philosophy is exempt from the social pressures they identify. They view philosophy as a kind of purchase or perspective from which to understand and analyze social structures. They say, for example, that

[t]he man in the street inhabits a world that is "real" to him, albeit in different degrees, and he "knows," with different degrees of confidence, that this world possesses such and such characteristics. The philosopher, of course, will raise questions about the ultimate status of both this "reality" and this "knowledge." *What is real? How is one to know?* These are among the most ancient questions not only of philosophical inquiry proper, but of human thought as such. (p. 1)

This reproduces the core of the image of philosophy described in the previous chapter: philosophers ask timeless questions that occur to anyone who tries to think. The authors refrain from considering for philosophy the kind of social determinants they appeal to in

other knowledge domains. It is this – the thought that philosophy provides a perch from which fundamental questions about reality can be posed and answered – that I challenge in this chapter.³⁵

To pose the question of the origins of the currently dominant picture is to consider philosophy to be a practice that has a particular material structure. Certain features of the work philosophers do are determined by the material structure. This way of thinking about philosophy is as unusual in sociology departments as it is in philosophy departments. Nevertheless we will see that the nature of the work philosophers do and the self-understandings philosophers have about their work have changed along with changes in the setting in which philosophers work. The basic claim is that professionalization and the demands of disciplinarity, as these forces are configured in contemporary American research universities, have contributed to the development of the professional image.

The claim being made here is not that professionalization is *the cause* of the professional image; rather it is simply that the practice of philosophy is shaped in part by pressures attendant upon the increasing professionalization of the discipline. But what, specifically, are those pressures, and how do they operate? In the next section of this chapter I set the parameters of my discussion. In the third through fifth sections I describe

³⁵ There have been a few attempts to analyze philosophy as a discipline from a sociological perspective. But, as I said in the introduction, these have all understandably *begun* with the received picture of what philosophy is. This means that they have not been able to pose the question about how the received picture arose to the level of dominance it currently has. Collins (1988) and (1998) are good examples of this.

models that have been used to explain philosophical change. In the sixth I develop a model of professionalization, adopted from sociological literature. Then, in the seventh section, I give a brief survey of the history of the professionalization of philosophy in the twentieth century.

II. Change in philosophy

In an early essay, Dewey sees a common aspiration between poetry and philosophy:

We must, in the cold, reflective way of critical system, justify and organize the truth which poetry, with its quick, naïve contacts, has already felt and reported. The same movement of the spirit, bringing man and man, man and nature, into wider and closer unity, which has found expression by anticipation in poetry, must find expression by retrospection in philosophy. Thus will be hastened the day in which our sons and our daughters shall prophesy, our young men shall see visions, and our old men dream dreams. (Dewey, *Poetry and Philosophy*, EW v. 3, pp. 123-124)

This was a not uncommon way of understanding the nature of philosophy: it aimed, like poetry, to be “... the vehicle of serious thought and ennobling emotion, that it shall ... more and more convey genuine and helpful interpretation of life” (Dewey, *Poetry and Philosophy*, EW v. 3, p, 111). Compare that understanding of philosophy to the one that dominates the teaching of philosophy today, one that sees the task of philosophy as primarily a matter of formal analysis. For example, in an introductory text on philosophical methods, Daly says that one of the claims made by the prevailing model of philosophical analysis is this:

- (1) An analysis has the logical form of a universally quantified biconditional:

$$\forall x(Fx \Leftrightarrow Gx). \text{ (Daly (2010) p. 45)}$$

It is hard to imagine an understanding of philosophy, austere and formal as it is, more at odds with the one Dewey held a century earlier. How did this change happen?

From a certain distance the history of philosophy can look directionless, like a train going nowhere in particular, as if there is no pattern or system to the ways philosophers have gone about their business. Here I survey some models that explain these changes. Some accept that there is no order to the thing: philosophical views and methods, like other cultural practices, shift and change in ways that cannot be given a principled explanation. Perhaps the most common competing model, especially these days, is that there is a principled explanation of the shape of the history of philosophy, though it takes some work to discern it: the principle is progress on the timeless questions of philosophy. Understood correctly, the history of philosophy is a slow history of progress being made on some fundamental questions.

Another approach is to grant that from a distance there isn't a principled order, but that for any particular shift there are cultural or social mechanisms that explain it. Here again there are competing models. After surveying the most prominent that have been used to interpret the changes in 20th century American philosophy, I develop my model: professionalization and the attendant pressures of disciplinarity help to explain why philosophy looks the way it does. I use this model in the following chapters to explain the trajectory of the reception of Dewey's thought about logic and epistemology;

to develop a perspective on Dewey's work in education; and to explain how Thoreau's *Walden* can be used to challenge conventional thinking about moral philosophy.

At this point my general thesis bears repeating: the way philosophers have come to think about philosophy – that it is a discipline with its own problems and methods – is a relatively recent development; there are explanations for this that are not philosophical in the sense that they follow from purely rational argument; and this recent way of thinking about philosophy unnecessarily blinds philosophers to sources of novel and potentially fruitful insights.

III. Models of change

Some philosophers have a particular kind of nagging worry, a kind of existential trouble that calls into question the things they say in public (to students, or in the newspaper) about what philosophy is. This worry most often comes out in asides in memoirs or in the behind-the-scenes shoptalk that goes on in hallways or at conferences. The worry is: can we *really* justify our way of doing what we do? Is there an argument that justifies *this way* of doing philosophy, of having *just these* interests and tools? Have we *really and truly* refuted idealism (or pragmatism, or Platonism, or ordinary language approaches...)? Is there any reason at all for relying on intuitions in epistemology, ethics, philosophy of science, etc....? Do we have methods of our own?

This phenomenon is not unique to philosophy; Gerald Graff in his *Professing Literature* says that the self-doubt is in some ways the most important institutional

feature of the discipline of English in the 20th century. Current controversies in Anthropology³⁶ (Is it science? Should it be?) are evidence of similar uncertainty in that discipline. As will become clear below, I take this to be a consequence of the professionalization of academic disciplines.

Here I survey some models that try to offer an understanding of the phenomenon of philosophical change. The first group (sometimes happily, sometimes despairingly) admits that there is no final explanation or justification for our way of doing philosophy. The second agrees that there is an explanation but disagrees about the nature of the justification that the explanation provides.

IV. (Hap)hazards of philosophy

The fashion model: According to some the history of philosophy is directionless. Instead like the whims of tastes in clothing some approaches become fashionable for a while and then just as suddenly become *outré*. Here the most common thought is that, while we

³⁶ Anthropology makes for an interesting comparison. In America both philosophy and anthropology professionalized at the beginning of the 20th century (The American Anthropological Association was founded in 1902; The American Philosophical Association in 1900); both disciplines have had internal debates about the extent to which they are like or a part of science and about their place in the humanities. These debates were central to the well-known disputes about Margaret Mead's work in Samoa. Like Dewey, Mead was a public intellectual as well as an academic. Derek Freeman's criticisms of her in his *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead* (1999) were largely centered around her lack of professionalism, though he was also critical of what he took to be her anti-biological and anti-scientific approach. With Dewey, the familiar charge is that he is not rigorous enough. These internal disputes continue to be a part of anthropology's professional discourse, as they are in philosophy. See Shankman (2009), *The Trashing of Margaret Mead: Anatomy of an Anthropological Controversy*.

may be able to reconstruct historical arguments in a way that makes their conclusions reasonable in light of their premises, often the premises just embody a way of thinking or feeling that is simply no longer attractive.

This model is seldom made explicit but it shows up frequently in the ways philosophers more or less casually dismiss rival views. For example in an article celebrating J. L. Austin, Stuart Hampshire says that Austin

... refused to adopt any special or elevated tone for the discussion of philosophy, and he refused to accept from others any peculiar inherited canons of argument. Particularly during the 1930's, when technical pretensions were rife, these refusals had the effect of fair, and devastating, comment on the Emperor's New Clothes. He continued in this vein of patient literalness, *through changing fashions*, until the end. (Hampshire (1992) p. 240, emphasis added)

The temperament model: Like the fashion model, the temperament model assigns a causal role to features that are not subject to rational manipulation. William James explicitly adopted this model in his *Pragmatism*:

The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments. Undignified as such a treatment may seem to some of my colleagues, I shall have to take account of this clash and explain a good many of the divergencies of philosophers by it. Of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries, when philosophizing, to sink the fact of his temperament. Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so he urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises.... He *trusts* his temperament. (James (1955 (1907)) p. 19)

James here notes that what he is saying is likely to be unpopular with his colleagues, and this is important. It reveals the fact that there is some discomfort involved in these public discussions of philosophy's supposed shortcomings.

A corollary of this model is that, unlike fashion, there is something that can be said for some temperaments at some times. And temperaments can change. Rorty's championing of the work of his favorite philosophers (the later Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Dewey, Sellars and (sometimes) Davidson) often aims at a change not in rational understanding but in temperament. Perhaps, he says, if we start reading and talking to different people, we will come to embody a different way of thinking about philosophy. In a very general way, he urges philosophers to stop being argumentative so that they can be better conversationalists.

Both of these models get at something that no doubt plays a role in philosophical change. However, there are more comprehensive models that, while not denying the role of fashion and temperament, seek to place these factors within a more complicated framework of causal mechanisms that can (however weakly) explain some of these shifts.

V. Explaining philosophical change

Progress model: According to this model, the fact that philosophers continue to argue about whether Descartes knows that he isn't dreaming and whether Socrates knows anything shouldn't be taken as evidence that philosophy doesn't progress. Instead from a finely-enough grained perspective, we can see that these discussions are (very gradually) gaining in conceptual clarity. These advances in conceptual clarity are gained through the development of more sophisticated tools of analysis, tools that weren't available to earlier philosophers. The fact that people continue to die shouldn't be taken to show that

there has been no progress in medicine, and the fact that we are still arguing about skepticism doesn't show that there has been no progress in epistemology. Timothy Williamson says:

In many areas of philosophy, we know much more in 2007 than was known in 1957; much more was known in 1957 than in 1907; much more was known in 1907 than was known in 1857. As in natural science, something can be collectively known in a community even if it is occasionally denied by eccentric members of that community. Although fundamental disagreement is conspicuous in most areas of philosophy, the best theories in a given area are in most cases far better developed in 2007 than the best theories in that area were in 1957, and so on. (Williamson (2007) p. 280)

This model has the advantage of providing some traction in contemporary debates about the role of philosophy in the University. If philosophy is a well-behaved discipline that is in some way aligned with the sciences (as many today claim), then it should progress. And it should progress in a way that is genuinely helpful to people as they try to understand themselves and the world. Gary Gutting claims that it has:

I maintain ... that there is a body of disciplinary philosophical knowledge achieved by (at least) analytic philosophers of the last fifty years. ... I do claim that it is a substantive body of knowledge and one of great cultural significance. Those without access to this knowledge will be severely limited in the essential reflective dimension of human existence. (Gutting (2009) p. 2)

Scott Soames clearly embraces this model in his two-volume history of analysis in the 20th century³⁷:

Looking back, we are now in a position to separate success from failure, to discern substantial insights, and to identify what turned out to be confusions or dead ends. The aim of this work is to do just that. This will involve not only explaining what the most important analytic philosophers of the period

³⁷ For a critical review of Soames (2003) from the perspective of a philosopher working primarily in the continental tradition, see Livingston (2006).

thought, and why they thought it, but also arguing with them, evaluating what they achieved, and indicating how they fell short. If the history of philosophy is to help us extend the hard-won gains of our predecessors, we must be as prepared to profit from their mistakes as to learn from their achievements. (Soames (2003) volume I, p. xi)

These are recent examples, but many histories of philosophy have the same arc: the period is described as one in which, through many turns and some undeniable dead ends, progress was made (see for example Russell (1945), Passmore (1968), Scruton (2002 (1981)), and Kenny (2007)).

The progress model sometimes includes the notion that professionalization lubricates the mechanism of progress. Soames, for example, says that it will be difficult to write general histories of philosophy in the future because

Philosophy has become a highly organized discipline, done by specialists primarily for other specialists. The number of philosophers has exploded, the volume of publication has swelled, and the subfields of serious philosophical investigation have multiplied. Not only is the broad field of philosophy today far too vast to be embraced by one mind, something similar is true even of many highly specialized subfields. (Soames (2003) volume II p. 463)

In other words it is evidence of philosophy being a well-behaved discipline, one that makes progress, that it is no longer possible for one person to understand everything about it. It has subfields (like, for example, biology), specialized journals and specialized jargon – all evidence of a certain kind of progress.

Given this close association between professionalization and progress, it isn't surprising that at one of the early meetings (in 1916) of the American Philosophical Association (APA), the main professional organization of philosophers in the United States, Arthur Lovejoy devoted his presidential address to the question of philosophical

progress. As James Campbell says in his (quasi) official history of the APA, Lovejoy “wanted to discuss with his professional colleagues the disappointments that result from the lack of philosophical progress” (Campbell (2006) p. 165). Lovejoy promoted a conception of the business of philosophy that both emphasizes its credentials as a profession (and as a science) and clarifies the notion of philosophical progress. Looking back Campbell’s assessment is largely positive: “...the APA and more broadly philosophy in America has made great progress in recent years” (Campbell (2006) p. 290).

It will be my aim in much of what follows to try to prise apart the effects of professionalization from the rhetoric of progress. What is important here is that there is a model that (sometimes) recognizes the undeniable role that professionalization plays in philosophical change, even if there is no attempt to understand the way this institution affects philosophical progress in a systematic way. The progress model is the favored model today among philosophers who identify themselves as doing analytical philosophy.

Reactionary model: In direct contrast to the progress model is what I will call the reactionary model. Unlike the progress model, which explains developments in philosophy largely by appealing to internal factors, the reactionary model views philosophical change largely as the attempt to respond to a variety of forces acting on philosophy from the outside. In its most common form, these responses are thought of as

conservative and invidious. That is, this model often explains particular changes as in some way deviating from an ideal possible trajectory. The ideal possible trajectory typically is implicit but it is usually aligned with broader social programs aimed at increasing openness, tolerance and empowerment. John McCumber's book *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (2001) is the most explicit development of this model. American philosophy, he says,

[i]n the 1940s and 1950s confronted a political movement that threatened its future in important ways. The record suggests that philosophers did not exactly win their battle against that movement, which is usually called McCarthyism. And there is also evidence suggesting that American philosophy largely remains, even today, what Joe McCarthy's academic henchmen would have wanted it to be. (McCumber (2001) p.xvii)

A less extreme and more limited form of this model is developed in George Reisch's *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science* (2005). Reisch argues that the "social ambitions" associated with logical empiricism got lost in the transformation of philosophy of science generally that was brought about

...during the 1950s at least partly, if not mainly, by political pressures that were common throughout civic as well as intellectual life during the Cold War following World War II. In large part, these pressures led logical empiricism to shed its cultural and social engagements by shedding Neurath's Unity of Science movement. The movement was not merely a public, scientific front for an otherwise independent philosophical program. It helped to determine which kinds of questions and research topics were pursued, and how they were pursued, at the heart of philosophy of science. (Reisch (2005) p. 6)

From the perspective of this dissertation, while these works do point to possible social and political determinants of philosophical change, the explanation lacks a model to explain with precision *how* large-scale social movements determine or constrain philosophical practice. *That* they do is of course something that I accept, but in the

absence of immediate mechanisms that describe forces acting on philosophical practice, these explanations finally remain only interpretive hypotheses.

VI. Professionalization

The point of the preceding survey is to show the range of models that have been appealed to in the attempt to explain the history of philosophy and more specifically the recent history of philosophy in America. I turn now to the model that I will defend in this dissertation. I develop this model in part by drawing on features of the other models that I think are worth preserving and by explicitly distinguishing the model from weaknesses in the others. The model both explains many otherwise apparently accidental features of contemporary philosophical practice and offers a perspective from which insights can be seen more clearly.

There is a vast literature on the professions and professionalization (Parsons (1939) is a classic; see more recently Freidson (1986), Macdonald (1995)). This work is primarily concerned with accounting for the role that the professions play in the knowledge economy. Much of it consists of arguments over what a profession is – there is widespread agreement about the paradigm cases of medicine and law, but quibbles erupt over just which features of these make them professions and so which features need to be present for there to be a profession. Abbott summarizes the basic concept of a profession:

Expert, white-collar occupations evolve toward a particular structure and cultural form of occupational control. The structural form is called

profession and consists of a series of organizations for association, for control, and for work. (In its strong form, the professionalization concept argues that these organizations develop in a certain order.) Culturally, professions legitimate their control by attaching their expertise to values with general cultural legitimacy, increasingly the values of rationality, efficiency, and science. (Abbott (1988) p. 16)

Key for our purposes is the idea that there is a characteristic form to the professions, a structure that exerts some kind of control over the day-to-day behavior of its members.³⁸

In turn, the members exert an influence over other social actors in virtue of their affiliation with the values cited above. Sciulli offers what he calls “today’s premier definition” of a profession:

It is a full-time, liberal (non-manual) occupation;
It establishes a monopoly in the labor market for expert services;
It attains self-governance or autonomy, that is, freedom from control by any outsiders, whether the state, clients, laymen or others;
Training is specialized and yet also systematic and scholarly;
Examinations, diplomas and titles control entry to the occupation and also sanction the monopoly;
Member rewards, both material and symbolic, are tied not only to occupational competence and workplace ethics but also to contemporaries’ beliefs that their expert services are ‘of special importance for society and the common weal.’ (Sciulli (2009) p. 45)

The literature on professions isolates the pressure this unique form of social organization exerts on members, clients and, in virtue of the status professions enjoy, on the wider social world. For example, professionals sacrifice some freedom of action by submitting to codes of conduct; but these codes provide the professionals with an aura of neutrality

³⁸ There is a developing consensus that the professions are losing their influence (See Dingwall (2008) chapter 10, Freidson (1994) chapter 2, Prechel and Gupman (1995) and Schuster (2011)). Managed care of medicine, for example, removes power from doctors. This development will be discussed in the conclusion of this dissertation, where it is argued that control of the universities too is increasingly being removed from academic professionals and placed instead in managing committees with ties to the corporate world. Insouciance about these matters, especially when supported by claims to philosophy’s existing above the fray, betrays a pernicious naiveté.

and incorruptibility that carries much social, indeed political, weight. The doctor's advice isn't followed because of any personal characteristics she has, even any particular features of her education or training; instead it is the professional authority she holds in virtue of adhering to professional standards that puts her advice beyond any conventional reproach. The price paid by society for ceding control over key areas of knowledge (as Freidson says, professionals enjoy "... a degree of discretion or autonomy at work that marks them off from other workers"³⁹ (Freidson (1986), p. 209)) is compensated by the uses to which the knowledge gets put, often enough, but also by the recognition that individualist and selfish mores are disciplined by professional training.

Here it is important to develop briefly the part of the definition that refers to the role played by knowledge. Our definition notes that "training" is "systematic and scholarly", and that "examinations, diplomas and titles" are used to certify membership. These factors indicate the central role knowledge plays in the professions. But it is knowledge of a particular kind – typically highly specialized knowledge encrypted in formal, technical language. It is proficiency with this formal language as much as facility with specific content that is developed during the systematic training and then tested for in professional examinations (the law and medical board tests, for example, and the

³⁹ Freidson goes on to say of professionals that
...their expertise can gain them special privilege in the courts that marks them off from ordinary people. The activities of their associations in legislatures and of individual members in committees created to formulate policy recommendations for various agencies of government and in committees that in effect establish national standards for the manufacture of products and in the staffing of critical services testify to a position that can have considerable influence on national affairs. (Freidson (1986), p. 209)

dissertation exams in the academic professions). Medical professionals, lawyers and other professionals communicate with each other in highly specialized codes that signal to the uninitiated their relative position.

The literature on professions includes an increasing literature on the academic professions. Parsons (1939) and Parsons & Platt (1968) are important instances, but of late there is an increasing interest in this form of profession (see Abbot (2001), Bender & Schorske (1997), Bourdieu (1988), Camic, Gross & Lamont (2011), Clark (1987), Graubard (2001), Hermanowicz (2011), and Lamont (2009)). The historical shift (and its effects) from academic and scholarly knowledge being the domain of either religious orders or independent scholars to the domain of professional academics is the subject of this growing literature. That the shift accounts for at least some features of the current academic world is obvious from this research even if academics themselves are typically content to ignore this field of influence.

For our purposes the central feature of academic professionalization is the important role disciplines play: indeed, Light goes so far as to say that "...the 'academic profession' does not exist. ... [W]e have the academic professions, one for each discipline. Each discipline has its own history, its own intellectual style, a distinct sense of timing, different preferences for articles and books, and different career lines" (Light (1974) p. 12). Becher provides a more balanced view, suggesting that the question of whether there is one or many academic professions is appropriately answered differently depending on the interests of the investigator: both general academic pressures and

disciplinary pressures exert influence on the work academics do and on their self-understandings (Becher (1987) p. 277). Much of what follows assumes a central role played by the disciplines, though this is consistent with the existence of higher level professional pressures. The self-regulation, training and certification that are essential features of all the professions are conducted for academic professionals by some form of disciplinary institution. The work of academics is policed not by laymen, government or even university bureaucrats but by disciplinary representatives in one form or another. Becher (1987) analyzes the ways in which different disciplines negotiate the tasks of initiation, social interaction, specialization, and change and mobility. These structures, the structures of authority exerted by the disciplines, have real felt consequences for practitioners – the world of the academic is largely a world defined by the discipline.

But how do disciplines exert this influence? What is the mechanism? The answer is already apparent in what has been said: disciplines a) monitor the entrance, accepting only those whose prior history gives evidence of capacities that are thought to be necessary; b) train the aspiring professionals, giving both content knowledge and proficiency in the formal language in which the knowledge is presented; c) certify by granting degrees; and d) oversee advancement, promotion and general success through the mechanism of peer review of publications and presentations and then of these for the key moments of career advancement: tenure review, promotion, and lateral and other hiring. That all of this exerts strong pressure on the self-understanding of academics, as well as on their work, is surely beyond question. Yet, as we have seen, the role of

disciplinarity in the changes noticed in philosophical practice have not received attention from philosophers or from sociologists.

Abbott (2001) develops a model of how disciplines work. It will be useful here to give a brief description of his model as a way of specifying the pressures exerted by a discipline. We will concentrate on the *functions* of the disciplines and on their *dynamic operations*. We assume as background condition the following features of the university: limited funding, constraints on size of disciplines in both material terms (buildings, numbers of students, etc....) and immaterial terms (preexisting divisions in subject matter, for example), and demands for novelty. It is worth pointing out here, too, that disciplines are disproportionately more powerful in the United States as compared to higher education in other countries (Abbott (2001) p. 128) – I address philosophy primarily as it is currently practiced in the United States at the major research universities and to a lesser extent at elite colleges. The discipline functions differently at community colleges as well as at lower status institutions.

According to Abbott, academic disciplines (in the United States) provide the single most important structural feature of the universities. All undergraduates choose a major from among the disciplines (Abbott (2001) p. 127); this provides for a built-in reproduction of disciplinary traditions. Very often each discipline assigns someone to the role of undergraduate advisor, someone who mediates between the student and what the student experiences as the larger often unfathomable world of the university with its regulations, traditions and larger social connections.

In addition, Abbott points out that the labor markets for academics are largely the concern of the disciplines. In philosophy (until very recently, at least) virtually all junior hiring has been done at the annual professional meetings. Departments, of which each university typically has one per discipline, vet prospective hires and nominate candidates.

Disciplines also “...provide the core of identity for the vast majority of intellectuals in modern America” (Abbott (2001) p. 130). The self-understanding of academics is filtered through their discipline – it gives form to the often abstract work they do, even if this form is often inaccessible to those outside the discipline.

Finally, disciplines make academic work manageable. As Abbott says,

Disciplines legitimate our necessarily partial knowledge. They define what it is permissible not to know and thereby limit the body of books one must have read. They provide a specific tradition and lineage. They provide common sets of research practices that unify groups with diverse substantive interests. Often, as I have argued throughout this book, these various limits are quite arbitrary. Sociology could substitute Ihering for Weber in its canon without experiencing much intellectual change. What matters is not the particular canonical writer but rather the legitimation of knowing only the one or the other. (Abbott (2001) pp. 130-131)

All philosophers have read Plato, Descartes, Kant and at least some Wittgenstein; more importantly, today philosophers need not have read Whewell, or Dewey, Derrida⁴⁰ or, for that matter, Shakespeare.

There is though a tension between the constancy needed to perform these functions and the ongoing demands for novelty within the realistically finite intellectual space of academic knowledge. The negotiation of this tension – what I am calling

⁴⁰ Recall that I am writing about philosophers working within the professional image. Derrida is important to philosophers working in the continental tradition.

(following some of Abbott's language) the *dynamical operation* of the disciplines – is the work of what Abbott calls "settlement." Abbot defines settlement as “the ensemble of forces that define the relation of a given amoeba⁴¹ to the intellectual turf that it has invented and/ or invested” (Abbott (2001) pp. 139-140). In other words the settlement of a discipline refers to the mechanisms that it uses to maintain its institutional standing in the face of encroachment from other disciplines as well as, especially for humanities in the current economic downturn, threats to its existence in the form of defunding. More broadly, settlement comprises everything that members of a discipline do that marks them as members of a particular discipline and not some other and also implies the importance of the disciplinary work that is done. This includes, for Abbott, cultural structures (“an ensemble of research practices, evidentiary conventions, rhetorical strategies, canonical works...” (Abbott (2001) pp. 139-140) as well as social structures, like the credential system, associations and journals, and typical audiences (Abbott (2001) pp. 140-141).

Settlement, then, describes the mechanism that maintains disciplinary identity. It is diffuse and varied so that it can be flexible and innovative. The settlement of philosophy as it is currently arrayed in the United States can be characterized by the features identified in the previous chapter – philosophy occupies the space of intellectual turf concerned with fundamental questions of universal scope that can be addressed most

⁴¹ Earlier Abbott uses the metaphor of disciplines as amoebas to i) emphasize the sense in which the shape of a discipline changes and ii) to allow himself the further metaphor of "pseudopods" for the attempts by disciplines to capture external intellectual turf (Abbott (2001) p. 138).

conspicuously in logical notation. Philosophical journals do their part by publishing works that carry out this agenda. And graduate programs perform the important work of reproducing scholars committed to this particular settlement, this way of being a philosopher. Finally, the institution of peer review means that the popular connotation associated with philosophy – that it aims to provide people with a sense of meaning – is impotent with respect to the academic discipline: philosophy’s settlement depends on keeping such popular notions at bay, lest philosophy lose its distinct academic status.

VII. Philosophy

In the period after the Civil War there was a tremendous change in the nature of post-secondary education institutions⁴² (Rudolph (1990 (1962))). Prior to the war the typical American college was a “... small unpretentious institution at which inspired teaching molded young men of good character rather than of accomplished scholarship” (Rudolph (1990 (1962)), p. 243). The typical college president functioned essentially *in loco parentis*. Here is how the president of the University of Rochester understood his duties in 1868:

No class passes through my hands which does not contain more or less young men who are on the eve of ruin from wayward natures, bad habits, or hereditary tendencies to evil. These men must be watched, borne with, and if possible saved to the world and to their families ... This work must

⁴² What follows is a necessarily extremely abbreviated overview of the history of higher education in the United States. For more detailed accounts, in addition to Rudolph (1990 (1962)), see Thelin (2004). For a critical perspective on the more recent history of public higher education in the United States, see Newfield (2008).

mainly be done by the president. (Quoted in Rudolph (1990 (1962)), p. 169)

The major shift that occurred was from the college as a kind of paternalistic training ground for young men of good character to a diverse system of colleges and universities whose main mission was the promotion of scholarship, heavily geared to scholarship in the sciences and emerging technologies. What the nation needed were fewer gentlemen and more scientists and innovators.

But there was no central agency overseeing the reforms in higher education; new institutions adopted their own agendas, and older institutions changed in diverse ways.

According to Rudolph,

By the dawn of the twentieth century, under the aegis of necessity and, later, of the richly endowed educational foundations, there would be an almost frantic effort to put some order into the collegiate and university scene. For the old unity, the old sameness, were by then utterly destroyed, and the paramount problem was to determine what had taken their place. (Rudolph (1990 (1962)), p. 245)

And one key way of establishing order was the disciplinary professional organization. If universities and colleges adopted diverse missions, disciplines tried to maintain some unity by organizing themselves. The significance of this is readily apparent today in the way that professional organizations are often the center of scholarly production and provide the structure for academic careers.

In the nineteenth century in the United States philosophy wasn't just one subject among many, one that you might study alongside the others. Instead it was typically a course taken in the last year of study, often taught by the president of the college or university, often by a minister, and it was intended to provide a kind of moral perspective

to the young adults about to make their way into the higher strata of American society.

G. Stanley Hall, in an article from 1879 called "Philosophy in the United States," was severely critical:

There are nearly 300 non-Catholic colleges in the United States, most of them chartered by the legislatures of their respective states, and conferring the degree of A.B. upon their students at the end of a four years' course, and A.M. three years after graduation. In nearly all these institutions certain studies, aesthetical, logical, historical, most commonly ethical, most rarely psychological, are roughly classed as philosophy and taught during the last year almost invariably by the president. The methods of instruction and examination are so varied that it is impossible in the space at our disposal to report in detail upon the nature and value of the work done in these institutions. More than 200 of them are strictly denominational, and the instruction given in philosophy is rudimentary and mediaeval. ... Many teachers of philosophy have no training in their department save such as has been obtained in theological seminaries, and their pupils are made far more familiar with the points of difference in the theology of Parks, Fairchilds, Hodges and the like, than with Plato, Leibniz or Kant. (Hall (1879), pp. 89-90)

Here Hall deplores the lack of professional competence in philosophy, something the American Philosophical Association was created to establish. Hall's comments are particularly interesting because they issue from a period just prior to the establishment of the professional image of philosophy. Hall here pays attention to the material practices of philosophers: he notes the institutional context in which philosophy is taught, identifies courses of study and culminating degrees, and even characterizes, if briefly, the nature of instruction. In pointing to the significance of canonical figures like Plato and Kant towards the end of his remarks, Hall is anticipating the way philosophy is understood from the professional image: rarely do philosophers today discuss institutional structures in their discussion of *philosophy*. Even in the massive two-volume *A History of Philosophy in America* (Flower & Murphey (1977)) there is no

attention paid to what actually went on in philosophy courses in the United States. It is a history of ideas, not material practices, giving the impression that the ideas floated above the fray of the convulsing changes going on in the country generally and in higher education specifically.

Dewey received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins in 1884 (after two years of graduate study!). The president of Johns Hopkins tried to dissuade Dewey from studying philosophy because it had no real disciplinary or professional identity:

[President Daniel C. Gilman] felt that graduates in philosophy had little chance of getting positions teaching philosophy in American colleges and universities, which continued to employ as instructors only those trained in Christian theology. As a gesture of friendship, he tried at first to dissuade Dewey from majoring in philosophy. (Dykhuisen (1973), p. 29)

Becher summarizes the change that occurred during Dewey's lifetime in this way:

Such subjects as philosophy, which once comprised 'a rung in the ladder of an individual's intellectual and professional training,' subsequently claimed for themselves 'a special place in an impersonal map of learning.' This shift in emphasis gave rise to a significant increase in intellectual productivity, at least in terms of research publications; it also succeeded in deepening the contrasts between those with specialized training and those without it. (Becher⁴³ (1987) pp. 277-278)

There have been a number of "internal" accounts of the changes in philosophy during this period, that is, there have been a number of histories of the philosophy of the twentieth century, and there is a well-known arc to most of these histories – the idealism that had prevailed in England was rejected due to a renewed commitment to scientific empiricism on the one hand and to the promise of formal techniques for representing and analyzing reasoning and inference on the other. This is told as a story of progress – from hoary

⁴³ Becher is quoting and, he says, relying on the unpublished notes of Jonathan Rée.

unconstrained speculative thought to hard-nosed empiricism and disciplined (by logic) reasoning. Hilary Putnam offers a biographical history of philosophy in the United States between roughly 1930-1990 in a volume entitled *American Academic Culture in Transformation* (Bender and Schorske (1997)). His account aims to correct some “subtle falsifications” in the standard story about the importance of logical positivism (Putnam (1997) p. 194), and, given both his prominence in the discipline and the high status institutions (Harvard, Oxford) and scholars (Quine, for example) that he associated with, his biographical account is authoritative concerning the internal philosophical understanding of the development of the discipline. But while Putnam makes passing mention of the key institutional fact that retirement of older professors often leads to new innovations, his account is otherwise silent about how academic and other institutional features shaped philosophical development. His account is entirely in terms of the way philosophers responded to other philosophers. This is surprising in a piece in a volume intended to address these *institutional and structural* forces:

Questions have been raised about the nature and definition of American academic disciplines, the role of ideology and political commitment in scholarship, the possibility of objectivity, the status of theory, and the place of knowledge in the larger culture and polity. ... There is a deeper historical background to these debates that bears examination and deserves attention in its own right. ... The achievement of new levels of disciplinary professionalism over the course of a half century has generated its own needs and produced its own internal tensions as well as changed relations to the larger public realm... neither the scholar nor the academy as a whole is inclined to pause from its normal pursuits to take itself as its subject and examine its own transformations and condition. This study, launched by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, presents the yield of a collective attempt at such an examination. (Bender & Schorske (1997) pp. 3-4)

It is telling that, given these aims, the philosopher assigned to write about philosophy gives an account that ignores all nonphilosophical conditions.

The internal history of philosophy given by Putnam, like the ones mentioned above by Soames, Passmore, and Russell, treats philosophy as something independent of particular contexts. It rings true to philosophers because philosophers have come to inhabit the professional image, according to which philosophy is the study of timeless questions: the study of timeless questions is philosophy's disciplinary niche, and the professional image's presumption influences the way philosophers think of their work. I have been arguing that there are external pressures that help to explain the emergence of the professional image of philosophy.

The importance of structural changes is evident in Campbell's laudatory history of the American Philosophical Association. Campbell combines an appeal to the well-known internal history of philosophy in the twentieth century with a high-level assessment of progress in philosophy, and he attributes a leading role to the youthful

APA:

What had begun in obscure gatherings in unlikely locales had by the mid-1920's blossomed into a national organization of over four hundred members that could bring to the United States an international gathering of the world's philosophers, and make a profit doing it. This is a story of great advance that should be better known, at least by contemporary American philosophers. During this quarter-century, there had been a major shift in the direction of America's philosophical thinking. Idealism's primacy had been challenged by the human urgencies championed by the pragmatists, and undermined by the analytical epistemology of the realists. There had also been many changes in the institutional situation of philosophy in America. Philosophy had completed its move from the old-time college to the new university, where it had secured its own place – in terms of distinct departments, graduate study, and specialized journals – among the many other professionalizing disciplines. (Campbell (2006) pp. 278-279)

Note here the implicit recognition, in the form of an admonition to learn it, that most philosophers are ignorant of the structural history of the discipline in the United States. This ignorance is consistent with the self-understanding engendered by the professional image: such institutional, structural, contingent, and external – in a word, such unphilosophical – material is irrelevant to the concerns of the properly disciplined philosopher. Rational reconstruction, the aim of much contemporary work in philosophy that treats of historical material, requires precisely the setting aside of all such considerations.

Campbell describes the very developments that would be expected given our working definition of a profession: specialized knowledge, formal training, and disciplinary identity. From the very beginning Campbell notes that the APA was focused on, among other things, “...the teaching of philosophy, leadership issues, membership matters...” (Campbell (2006), p. 80). Campbell describes Alexander Thomas Ormond’s presidential address of 1902 as calling on philosophers to “...vindicate their efforts by adopting a distinct point-of-view, method, and criterion of validity. To do so would enable philosophy to clarify its uncertain relation to science” (Campbell (2006), p. 78). In other words, from the very beginning members of the APA understood the need for a professional image of philosophy that would define for it boundaries in intellectual space. As I have argued, these efforts were largely successful: philosophy invented a “criterion of validity” for itself and has used it to construct an understanding of its own history.

VIII. Conclusion

The developments I have described in the preceding section and throughout this chapter constitute the professionalization of philosophy, and they encourage certain practices within philosophy. Journals devoted to the reporting of research encourage uniformity of style among writers. The availability of textbooks and the need to fill slots in the curriculum lead to uniformity of the content of teaching. And as has been stressed the pressures over control of academic intellectual space encourage the formation of a more rigorous shared identity among philosophers. The professional image of philosophy provides an ideal solution to these various demands.

We will see in the next chapter that this picture, responsive as it is to the demands faced by the academic discipline of philosophy and open as it is to continuing and ongoing successful research programs that promise some form of progress, also beautifully fulfills the function, described above, of cutting the subject down to a manageable size. The fundamental, formal nature of philosophy according to this picture yields a conceptual space of possible "views." A philosopher like John Dewey is read as holding views on the philosophical questions, and he is read this way by critics as well as admirers. What is distinctive about his conception of philosophy is lost sight of when he is read by philosophers working within the professional image.

Chapter 4 Dewey and the Professional Image

Readers not particularly conversant with contemporary logical discussions may find portions of the text too technical, especially Part III. I suggest that such readers interpret what is said by calling to mind what they themselves do, and the way they proceed in doing it, when they are confronted with some question or difficulty which they attempt to cope with in an intellectual way. If they pursue this course, I think the general principles will be sufficiently intelligible so that they will not be unduly troubled by technical details. It is possible that the same advice is applicable in the case of those whose very familiarity with current logical literature constitutes an obstruction to understanding a position that is at odds with most current theory.

-Dewey, preface to *Logic*

I. Introduction

Philosophers project the professional image onto the historical texts they read, making it seem as if there is a common philosophical project that has been pursued since Plato wrote about Socrates. One reason the projection of the image goes unnoticed is that it provides for the possibility of a way of talking, writing, reading and teaching that is just a part of our ordinary experience as philosophers. It seems that nothing can be more obvious than that Plato, Descartes and John Searle, a prominent contemporary philosopher, are all wondering about the relation between bodies and minds. There seems no reason to ask about the conditions that make what is obvious *seem* obvious. But there are such conditions, and they are, here as elsewhere, conditions of social practices.

The approach taken here to uncovering the work that the dominant picture is doing is to consider the history of Dewey's thought and its reception in the 20th century.

Dewey gained prominence in the burgeoning professional discipline, teaching at some of the most highly regarded institutions (The University of Chicago, The University of Michigan and Columbia University) and serving as president of the American Philosophical Association in 1905 (Campbell (2006) p. 299). But Dewey's reputation waned as the older pre-professionalized picture – the one Dewey held, described below in section two – was eclipsed by the now dominant one. Dewey is still read today, but both his admirers and his critics interpret him in the light of the professional image. Dewey can seem a little like a character in a novel who keeps quarreling with how he is depicted – in a way, the dominant picture makes Dewey a pragmatist advancing a view of truth and morality, his protests notwithstanding.

In the next section of this chapter I explain Dewey's picture of philosophy. Then, in the third section, I describe how some of Dewey's earliest critics misread him in light of the professional image of philosophy. In the fourth section I show that this misreading continues, among both his critics and his admirers. But first it will be helpful here to discuss the label 'pragmatist', because many professional philosophers will know of Dewey as an example of a pragmatist. Philosophers deploying the professional image of philosophy try to identify the views historical philosophers have on the timeless questions: it is assumed that all philosophers hold identifiable views on the big questions.⁴⁴ A pragmatist, as the term is understood today amongst professional philosophers, is one who holds particular views about knowledge (for example that it is

⁴⁴ See Chalmers and Bourget (forthcoming).

"warranted assertability") and about truth⁴⁵ (for example that it is "what works" or that it is what will emerge at the end of inquiry).

It is true that Charles Peirce, William James and John Dewey (the so-called "classical pragmatists") did at various times write about knowledge as warranted assertability or about truth as what works. But they were not defending views on the timeless questions. Dewey often bemoaned the fact that philosophers who read his work were focused on identifying the unique *pragmatist* position on the big questions: that wasn't what Dewey was up to, as we will see in the next section. 'Pragmatism' was originally adopted as descriptive name by Charles Peirce, who intended to capture a distinction Kant had made.⁴⁶ Here is how Dewey tells the story:

The term 'pragmatic,' contrary to the opinion of those who regard pragmatism as an exclusively American conception, was suggested to [Peirce] by the study of Kant. In the *Metaphysic of Morals* Kant established a distinction between *pragmatic* and *practical*. The latter term applies to moral laws which Kant regards as *a priori*, whereas the former term applies to the rules of art and technique which are based on experience and are applicable to experience. (Dewey LW 2 p. 3)

Originally, then, the term was meant to capture a distinctive orientation that privileged the "arts and techniques" of experience. Dewey in the same article argues that pragmatism is different from classical empiricism:

Pragmatism, thus, presents itself as an extension of historical empiricism, but with this fundamental difference, that it does not insist upon antecedent phenomena but upon consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but

⁴⁵ See Haack (1976) for a sympathetic interpretation of the pragmatist "theory of truth." Her article is partly historical, though she ends up arguing that the pragmatist theory of truth is a genuine contender, an unconventional view.

⁴⁶ See Bacon (2012), especially the introduction, for another version of the history of the name "pragmatism."

upon the possibilities of action... when we take the point of view of pragmatism we see that general ideas have a very different role to play than that of reporting and registering past experiences. They are the bases for organizing future observations and experiences. (Dewey LW 2 p. 12)

In other words the pragmatist isn't trying to find general ideas that will report general views as responses to timeless questions. Rather he uses them as tentative hypothesis to be measured against future experience. It is ironic that the term 'pragmatist' itself gets used to label a set of responses to timeless questions! In a reply to his critics in the volume *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (Schilpp and Hahn (1989 (1939))), Dewey makes just this point in a response to criticisms from Bertrand Russell: Russell, Dewey says, used a particular passage from Dewey's *Logic* "...only as a means of identifying me as a pragmatist, but not as a means of understanding what I mean by any pragmatic theory of 'consequences' which I accept" (Schilpp & Hahn (1989 (1939)) p. 571). He then quotes himself in *Logic* saying that, given the tendency philosophers have to try to affix labels to views, it is better to avoid using labels like pragmatism.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The word 'pragmatic' outside of philosophy has a connotation that is closely aligned with Dewey's overall orientation: to be pragmatic is to be concerned with the actual problems and difficulties one faces (this is the sense of 'pragmatism' that Burt is relying on in his new book about Lincoln: *Lincoln's Tragic Pragmatism* (2013)). But 'pragmatic' also has a negative connotation, as when it is used to criticize someone for being overly concerned with what is practical and losing sight of principle, and though his critics sometimes accuse Dewey of being pragmatic in this sense, there is little warrant for this, other than the connotation of the word.

II. Dewey's picture of philosophy

In this light it is interesting to see that, at the very end of his career, Dewey focused on the professional nature of academic philosophy. He still is one of the few philosophers to have acknowledged the role of social organization in determining the meaning of what an individual says and writes.⁴⁸ In an introduction to a reissue (written in 1948, 25 years after the work was originally published and just four years before he died) of his *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey constantly tied the notion of reconstruction in philosophy to the idea that philosophy is conditioned by social and historical events.

A plea for reconstruction cannot, as far as I can see, be made without giving considerable critical attention to the background within which and in regard to which reconstruction is to take place. Far from being a sign of disesteem, this critical attention is an indispensable part of interest in the development of a philosophy that will do for our time and place what the great doctrines of the past did in and for the cultural media out of which they arose. (Dewey MW 12 (1948), p. 258)

Here Dewey describes philosophy as tied to a particular time and place. He goes on to say that an important philosophical task is to show *why* historical systems of philosophy are “obstructive in intellectual dealings with the present scene” (Dewey MW 12, p. 274) by relating them to the conditions from which they arose.

⁴⁸ Interestingly this insight animates a variety of work in the history and philosophy of science. That social organization is one of the material conditions of epistemic practice in science is now a commonplace, though Dewey noted its absence in his day: “The institutional conditions into which it [i.e. scientific inquiry] enters and which determine its human consequences have not as yet been subjected to any serious, systematic inquiry worthy of being designated scientific” (Dewey MW 12, p. 268). But little attention has been paid to such material conditions of epistemic practice in philosophy.

The epigraph to this chapter gives a sense – touching to those in sympathy with the idea that philosophy is for everyone, foolishly naïve to those under the spell of the professional image – of Dewey’s commitment to the idea that philosophy is not simply an academic discipline whose intended audience is composed of professional philosophers. Dewey thought logic should concern itself with the way people think, the way *actual* people *actually* think, and so he expresses the hope that people will compare their own experience of thinking to the theoretical analysis he provides. Dewey is not trying to reduce logic to psychology. He is rather trying to present in a systematic way a theory of inquiry that will bring to light certain of its features so that future inquiry can be more self-aware.

But perhaps the passage most revealing of Dewey's picture of philosophy is to be found in his 1916 *Democracy and Education*, the work that appeared at the pinnacle of his professional reputation and the work of his that is most likely to be studied today (in departments of education, not philosophy). In the chapter called “Philosophy of Education”, Dewey says this:

If we are willing to conceive of 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*. 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 MW 9, p. 338, emphasis in original)

The focus here is clearly on the particular factors that together determine the lived-in world of experience, and the claim is that philosophy is the project of understanding how people come to experience the world they do. The second sentence posits that this (the

forming of dispositions, the generation of a world of experience) doesn't happen in the abstract but to particular individuals in particular circumstances. Philosophy, for Dewey, is not the study of timeless questions.

In these wider statements of his conception of philosophy, Dewey, especially in the introduction to *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, addresses a plausible criticism of his picture of philosophy. Dewey imagines a philosopher saying, "But clearly there is continuity between Plato and Descartes: they are both concerned with skepticism! And many philosophers do try to develop a theory of Truth or Being or The Good." Such a philosopher might point to John Stuart Mill, in *Utilitarianism*, who makes an explicit claim to be pursuing a "timeless question":

From the dawn of philosophy, the question concerning the *summum bonum*, or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality, has been accounted the main problem of speculative thought, has occupied the most gifted intellects and divided them into sects and schools carrying on a vigorous warfare against one another. And after more than two thousand years the same discussions continue ... (Mill (2001 (1861)) p. 1)

That sounds a lot like the professional image, and it might seem problematic for the view that I am attributing to Dewey. So it will be worthwhile to discuss the point in some detail.

First, Dewey's picture – that philosophy is always addressing particular problems that arise in particular contexts – assumes that these problems are faced after all *by people*, and so there will be some more or less stable clusterings of problems. That does not make the problems timeless. Moreover the social institutions that frame many of the

problems people face endure for long periods of time. So again there is no reason to think that Dewey needs to deny that there are some persistent problems.

Second, while it is true that philosophers across wide historical distances use similar forms of expression in defining and responding to their problems, this by itself doesn't establish that they are pursuing the same questions. This is a question that cannot be dealt with exhaustively here, but proponents of the "timeless question" view at least have to explain why the fact of similar superficial features of language is evidence for identity of concepts. On the face of it one would think that dramatic changes in the world of experience (e.g. new political settings, technological changes, increased knowledge, etc....) would significantly alter the concepts with which one speaks. As MacIntyre says, "...in some large degree the sense of continuity that so many standard histories of philosophy provide is illusory and depends upon the adroit, although doubtless unconscious, use of a series of devices designed to mask difference, to bridge discontinuity and to conceal unintelligibility" (MacIntyre (1984) p. 33).⁴⁹ But it is actually even more difficult for the "timeless question" view: very often philosophers are using texts translated into English, where the translations themselves often make

⁴⁹ The devices MacIntyre describes are unconscious because they are part of the picture that dominates the profession. That they are unconscious does not imply that they aren't at times made explicit in methodological discussions. MacIntyre's essay appears in *Philosophy in History: Essays in the Historiography of Philosophy* (Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner (1984)). See also the essays in the volume by Rorty, Hacking and Skinner for further arguments along these lines. Skinner (2002) replies to Taylor's essay in that volume; whereas Taylor had argued that historians should bracket the question of the truth of historical claims, Skinner rejects that model. For Skinner, the goal is "...that of trying so far as possible to think as our ancestors thought and to see things their way" (Skinner (1984) p. 47). This is incompatible with the dominant picture of philosophy.

substantive attempts to provide the kind of superficial similarities that are then used as evidence for there being timeless questions. If the translators are under the sway of the dominant picture, then again this begins to look viciously circular.

Third, Mill claiming to be continuing a two thousand year old discussion doesn't make it so. There are rhetorical reasons for claiming to be dealing with problems that are timeless, and for claiming for oneself interlocutors of the status of Plato and Aristotle. Every attempt to identify what one is doing in philosophy is also an attempt to identify the importance of what one is doing (this holds, of course, no less for Dewey).

Dewey is clear about the way in which nascent professionalization, in 1916, has made it difficult to see the history of philosophy clearly:

The fact that philosophic 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 MW 9, p. 338)

It is interesting to see that Dewey recognized already in 1916 that his picture of philosophy was likely to be in tension with another picture developing among the “specialized class” of professional philosophers.

The picture of philosophy operative in Dewey's texts is one that ties philosophical reflection to specific features of the social and historical context. And it was not just Dewey's idiosyncratic view that philosophy focuses on particular contexts. In an article called “The Aims of an Introductory Course in Philosophy,” Edgar Hinman, in 1910, could say that

...philosophy is the criticism of life, and to be effective it should engage with life as the modern American knows it, rather than with the theorizing

of German metaphysicians. And certainly in our modern intellectual world there are sufficient jars and bickerings, contrasts and antagonisms, to give point and interest and cultural significance to such a study; certainly also the distress of our day in the consciousness of its distracting and conflicting cultural tendencies will yield the dialectic necessary to evoke and sustain sounder and more philosophical views. (Hinman (1910) p. 562)

This picture, coming as it does in a discussion of teaching and curriculum in the key professional journal for philosophers (*The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, which is now called simply *The Journal of Philosophy*), is strikingly at odds with the professional image. *The Journal of Philosophy* no longer publishes articles about teaching philosophy. Campbell accurately captures the professional mood:

Philosophers who are particularly dedicated to the teaching aspects of their careers often see themselves as being in the minority within the contemporary profession. The profession, it seems to them, is interested in the ongoing flow of philosophical ideas, in the historical development of this topic or the current literature on that; but this interest in matters of philosophical content is seldom matched, they believe, by an equal devotion to matters pedagogical. (Campbell (2002) p. 53)⁵⁰

Philosophical questions for Dewey originate in the activities and practices people engage in, and they get their meaning and significance from the particular conditions that people experience. For Dewey, whatever prevents experience from going on in an uninterrupted way poses a problem for reflection; philosophy aims to give a general picture of experience and its problems, and then to frame methods that are in accord with the best available practices for resolving problems. This is the picture presented in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.

⁵⁰ Campbell argues that teaching was never a central concern of the members of the American Philosophical Association.

For example, in the early 20th century the United States was undergoing massive disruptions of social order. Among the causes were industrialization and shifts in population, urbanization, influx of immigrants, economic changes caused by participation in the war, and developments in scientific understanding, all of which broaden the horizon of experience and so create disruptions in traditional sources of meaning and value. For Dewey, these challenges constituted the primary obstacle to continuous meaningful experience:

The hypothesis here offered is that the upsets which, taken together, constitute the crisis in which man is now involved all over the world, in all aspects of his life, are due to the entrance into the conduct of the everyday affairs of life of processes, materials and interests whose origin lies in the work done by physical inquirers in the relatively aloof and remote technical workshops known as laboratories. It is no longer a matter of disturbance of religious beliefs and practices, but of every institution established before the rise of modern science a few short centuries ago. (Dewey MW 12, p. 265)

These "upsets" then become, for Dewey, the focus of philosophical reflection. Dewey's abiding commitment was to the thought that developments of scientific technique were the best available means for solving problems, but they had yet to be brought to bear on problems of value:

Here, then, lies the reconstructive work to be done by philosophy. It must undertake to do for the development of inquiry into human affairs and hence into morals what the philosophers of the last few centuries did for promotion of scientific inquiry in physical and physiological conditions and aspects of human life. (Dewey MW 12, p. 266)

This provides a perspective on works like *Democracy and Education*, *Logic*, *Art as Experience*, *Theory of Valuation* and *Experience and Nature*: these works try to apply elements of scientific inquiry to areas of ordinary life that had, so far, been considered inappropriate objects of scientific study. This also suggests a limitation: Dewey's

studies are grounded in his (sometimes naïve) understanding of scientific practice, and the problems he is concerned with are tied to conditions that have undergone further changes. Nevertheless our understanding of Dewey's thought has to begin with this recognition of the picture he had of his undertaking.

III. Dewey meets the professional image

Chapters 5 and 6 will fill out the picture described above. Here I describe the origins of the misreading of Dewey that characterizes his reception still today. Bertrand Russell's contribution to *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, which appeared in 1939, was a consideration of Dewey's *Logic*. For Russell, logic constituted the more or less continuous study of inference from Aristotle to the present. Insofar as Dewey tried in his *Logic* to examine historical and contemporary cases of discovery, primarily in science, he was, Russell thought, getting off topic:

This book is very rich and varied in its contents; it contains highly interesting criticisms of past philosophers, very able analyses of prejudices inspiring traditional formal logic, and an intimate awareness of the realities of scientific investigation. All this makes the book far more concrete than most books called 'Logic.' Since, however, a review should be shorter than the work reviewed, I shall ignore everything that occurs by way of illustration or history, and consider only those positive doctrines which seem to me most characteristic. (Russell (1989 (1939)) p. 137)

We see here the results of a clash of pictures. What Dewey thought of as central to his project, Russell considers merely "illustration or history." The last sentence quoted above makes explicit that what Russell means by the "positive doctrines" is the philosophical material of the book. It is unsurprising then that Russell takes the book to

be, centrally, a defense of a set of answers to the timeless philosophical questions about truth, knowledge and being.

For example, Russell is critical of Dewey for emphasizing *inquiry* as the focus of investigation rather than the more traditional “truth or knowledge” (Russell (1989 (1939)) p. 143). Russell quotes Dewey’s provisional statement concerning the nature of inquiry:

Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole. (quoted in Russell (1989 (1939)) p. 143)

Russell of course takes this, not as a characterization for a definite purpose, but as a definition, providing necessary and sufficient conditions, and he clearly enjoys lampooning it:

I cannot but think that this definition does not adequately express Dr. Dewey’s meaning, since it would apply, for instance, to the operations of a drill sergeant in transforming a collection of raw recruits into a regiment, or of a bricklayer transforming a heap of bricks into a house, and yet it would be impossible to say that the drill sergeant is ‘inquiring’ into the recruits, or the bricklayer into the bricks. (Russell (1989 (1939)) p. 143)

Note that Russell doesn’t explain why it would be “impossible to say” that the sergeant is inquiring into the recruits: he is relying on his readers sharing his intuitions that this is simply an improper use of a fundamental concept.

Russell says that “ ‘Truth’ is not an important concept in Dr. Dewey’s logic” (Russell (1989 (1939)) p. 144), and he is critical of this: if Dewey understood the nature of the questions that a logic ought to answer, Dewey would see that truth is the central concept. Russell goes on to quote a footnote in which Dewey cites Peirce’s definition of truth as the end of ideal inquiry, and then Russell shows that that definition fails to be a

convincing answer (in the sense of identifying necessary and sufficient conditions) to the question, What is truth?. For example, Russell criticizes Peirce's idea (quoted by Dewey in the footnote referred to above) that "The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth..." (quoted in Russell (1989 (1939)) p. 144). Russell retorts:

During breakfast, I may have a well-grounded conviction that I am eating eggs and bacon. I doubt whether scientists 2000 years hence will investigate whether this was the case, and if they did their opinions would be worth less than mine. (Russell (1989 (1939)) p. 146)

This manner of criticizing Dewey by taking what he says as an answer to a timeless question was relatively common in the mid-twentieth century. May Brodbeck says that Dewey talks about "warranted assertability" instead of truth, and that "Warranted assertability is, so to speak, truth by Gallup Poll" (Brodbeck (1952) p. 43). That is, Dewey has a conception of truth that, in reducing it to the results of an opinion poll, is clearly wrong. In criticizing Dewey's alleged view that moral judgment is always about means and never about ends, Brodbeck criticizes Dewey for not providing a fundamental ethic that would answer once and for all questions about what we ought to do:

One difficulty with this view is that which was pointed out bitterly by Randolph Bourne in his 'Twilight of the Idols,' namely, that, preoccupied as he is with means and anxious as he is to deny all final ends, Dewey failed to supply the generations of World War I that looked to him for guidance with a set of standards by which it could consistently behave. (Brodbeck (1952) p. 50)

Such a set of standards is what Dewey thinks philosophy in isolation from historical context cannot provide. But Brodbeck is convinced that that is what philosophy must aspire to:

The perennial problems of philosophy have always required hard thinking as well as technical skill. To take philosophy seriously is to recognize these problems as important in their own right and, therefore, to recognize those special skills as worth acquiring. (Brodbeck (1952) p. 94)

It is clear in the context of the essay that Brodbeck thinks "hard thinking" and "technical skill" exhaust the set of skills philosophers need, a view (as noted in chapter 2) that Timothy Williamson shares. In what seems to be an early, shortened version of the 1952 essay, Brodbeck essentially defines philosophy as the study of the "classical" problems of

...the ultimate nature of knowledge and reality; how and what do we know; the meaning of truth, goodness, and beauty; the nature of justification in matters of morality, our ethical standards, as well as in matters of fact. (Brodbeck (1950) p. 51)

Since, she claims, Dewey thinks all such questions should be answered by science, for all intents and purposes Dewey is not really properly identified as a philosopher, and his view if followed would lead to the "liquidation of the philosophical enterprise" (Brodbeck (1950) p. 48). As we have seen, excising Dewey from the canon of philosophers is the natural outcome of the reification of the professional image. From the perspective of the present, we can see that Dewey, and not the philosophical enterprise (as the professional image conceives of it), has been all but liquidated. For similar dismissive discussions of Dewey see Brodbeck (1949).

Dewey was frequently criticized during this period for his apparent unwillingness to do philosophy in the increasingly technical and formal way professional philosophy

was being done. Churchman and Cowan (1946), in a brief response to a series of articles Dewey co-wrote with Arthur Bentley trying to establish some uniformity in terminology used by logicians and epistemologists, seem most dissatisfied by Dewey and Bentley's commitment to the idea that the names "...are to be based on observations such as are accessible to and attainable by everybody" (Dewey LW 16, p. 47). In response, Churchman and Cowan offer a technical definition of "the scientific ideal," using variables and set names. They end with this criticism: "Is it amiss to suggest that philosophical thinking on scientific matters become as technical as the thing it discusses?" (Churchman and Cowan (1946) p. 219). The point of the rhetorical question, of course, is to reaffirm commitment to the professionalized picture of philosophy as a discipline primarily committed to formal work carried out in technical language.

In an article criticizing Dewey's "philosophy of nature," Morris Cohen makes his uneasiness with Dewey's conception of philosophy explicit:

Some of my difficulties are doubtless due to the limitations of my interests and temperament. To me the central problems of philosophy are the perennial or, if you like, traditional ones of ontology, of the nature of the world into which we are born and which we sooner or later leave. And I am bewildered when I find fundamental cosmic issues ignored or treated only in the interstices of the much more complicated, and to me always illusive, problems of the psychology of human thought or behavior. (Cohen (1940) p.197)

Cohen establishes one of the terms under which philosophy should operate (though he is here coy in saying that these may be limitations of his "temperament"). Philosophy should pursue perennial problems and fundamental cosmic issues; in eschewing these

questions, Dewey, according to Cohen, ceases to be a philosopher (later in the article Cohen calls Dewey a “psychologist” (Cohen (1940) p. 205)).

What these examples show is that the professional image is deployed in two ways. First, it is used to demarcate philosophy: Brodbeck thinks Dewey risks undermining philosophy by turning its central questions over to "science." Second, Churchman and Cowan use the image to evaluate Dewey's work; they find it comes up short because it is not sufficiently formal. We will see in the next section, and then also in chapters 5 and 6, that Dewey's admirers deploy the image in the first way: they accept that the professional image demarcates philosophy and argue that what makes Dewey an important philosopher is that he provides answers to the timeless questions. What is missed when the image is deployed in this way is an understanding of Dewey's work from within the picture of philosophy that he developed – philosophy as a historically grounded attempt to solve particular problems.

IV. Dewey's contemporary reception

I have been arguing that philosophy in the professional image takes its task to be providing answers, couched in formal terms, to timeless fundamental problems, and that it privileges a methodology centered on the testing of claims to have identified the essential content of some concept or term. The testing is often accomplished through the use of thought experiments. In the next two chapters, I describe some contemporary responses to Dewey's work in logic and to Dewey's and Thoreau's moral philosophy.

Here I shall provide a brief but general analysis of how Dewey is read in contemporary philosophy.

Two approaches dominate discussions today. First, many philosophers treat Dewey and pragmatism in general as failed attempts to solve the traditional problems of philosophy. This approach is most common in texts used in undergraduate teaching and in general surveys, so that most students, if they engage with Dewey at all, engage with him as having proposed one of the positions in the space of possible responses to the fundamental questions. Typically such texts borrow from the storehouse of well-worn philosophical labels and views and characterize Dewey as *a naturalist*, as having an *instrumental* view of truth, as being in some sense a *positivist*, a *non-cognitivist* in ethical theory, and so on. These labels serve to cover over, indeed eliminate, what is particular and specific in Dewey's thought (as well as in the thought of other historical philosophers who receive the same treatment).

For example, in *The Great Conversation* (Melchert (2010, 6th ed.), a widely-used textbook in the history of philosophy,⁵¹ Norman Melchert describes Western philosophy as a conversation across the generations about the fundamental problems of philosophy. In his chapter on Pragmatism, he presents Peirce, James and Dewey as trying to solve the traditional problems of knowledge and morality by "naturalizing" them: that is, he says that what is significant about Dewey's philosophical work is that it aims to answer finally

⁵¹ I here rely on my experience taking and being the teaching assistant for such courses. I have also looked at online syllabi for such courses. And the book has gone through several editions and appears to continue to sell.

the question about what knowledge is, or what the good is. Since Melchert emphasizes Dewey's "Darwinian" influence, he does refer to Dewey's historically situated conception of nature. But in the context of the history that Melchert is telling, this looks like just one more attempt to solve the timeless questions.

In *The Philosopher's Toolkit*, the authors' present the pragmatists' conception of truth as one among many to choose from. According to them, the pragmatists think that "... what we ought to adopt as true is what we can formulate as propositions that have warrant because they solve problems for us and help us get along better in the world" (Baggini and Fosl (2010 2nd ed.) p. 244). Presenting it that way, as a ready-made view or system, it is vulnerable to the sorts of criticism that Russell and others have repeated: there is a difference between what is true and what is useful.

Second, there are Dewey's admirers, scholars who think that Dewey, for the most part, was dealing with the fundamental timeless questions of philosophy, and who think that on the whole Dewey gave the right answers to them. These scholars constitute a camp within the profession of philosophy: they are often associated in some way with the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (which publishes the standard edition of Dewey's collected works); their books are often published by Fordham University Press, Indiana University Press or Vanderbilt University Press (and not with Oxford University Press or Cambridge University Press, the most prestigious publishers in the profession); and they meet annually at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (SAAP) conference. The SAAP also

publishes a journal in which articles defending Dewey frequently appear. Specific texts by such scholars relating to Dewey's work in logic and moral philosophy will be discussed in the next chapter. But generally, such scholars, even while acknowledging that Dewey rejected most of the traditional problems of philosophy, still defend his answers to them.

For example, Larry Hickman, the current director of The Center for Dewey studies, defends Dewey's epistemological view against some of the traditional positions. In his essay "Tuning Up Technology" he writes,

It was by means of [his] view of the instrumental or productive role and function of inquiry in human experience that Dewey avoided the problems that had vitiated the work of many of his predecessors. His view avoids the problems of the empiricism advanced by John Locke, for example, since the central place that his instrumentalism gives to production allows it to undercut both the sensory atomism and the associationism on which such empiricism depends. ...His view avoids the difficulties of Cartesian rationalism, moreover, by treating productive inquiry as a public, observable enterprise that takes place within a community... It also avoids the pitfalls generated by the Kantian treatment of knowledge, especially the view that perceptual and conceptual contents have different origins... (Hickman (2001) pp. 28-29)

Here we see Hickman deploying the labels that the profession generally uses to reduce Dewey's work to one possible view ("instrumental") to point to ways in which Dewey's view does a better job than his predecessors of answering epistemological questions. Hickman compares Dewey's "answer" to Locke's, Descartes's and Kant's because he thinks that they are all aspiring to answer the same question.

In the introduction to his book *Dewey's Metaphysics*, Boisvert identifies his aim:

Locating Dewey as one in a long line of thinkers who recognized the importance of ontological considerations, it examines in particular the way Dewey dealt with the perennial issue of permanence and change. Since the

time of Plato, this topic has been discussed within the context of ‘forms.’ As we shall see, Dewey’s own reflections bring him to a revised understanding of this venerable philosophical term. While rejecting much that was in the tradition, Dewey nonetheless continued to ask questions and to suggest answers that place him at the level of classical metaphysicians. The aim of this book is to examine, explain, and interpret his questions and answers pertaining to the issue of change and permanence. (Boisvert (1988) p. 1)

Boisvert thinks that Dewey was working on the old question of metaphysics, the nature of change and permanence, and he thinks (as becomes clear in the book) that Dewey’s answer is preferable to others in the tradition. This is the tactic Dewey’s admirers increasingly use, no doubt under the pressures of the professional image: in order to defend Dewey it is first necessary to show that he is genuinely a philosopher, and this is most effectively accomplished by identifying the fundamental problem that he worked on.⁵² But this has the unfortunate consequence of projecting onto Dewey a conception of philosophy that, as shown above, he rejected.⁵³

I omit discussion here of prominent philosophers like Robert Brandom and Hilary Putnam who, at least in some of their work, see themselves as working broadly in the

⁵² Not all scholars among the group of Dewey’s admirers pursue this tactic. Michael Eldridge, for example, in his *Transforming Experience*, explicitly disavows trying to fit Dewey into the history of “the problems of philosophers” (Eldridge (1998) p. 14); his reading of Dewey is sensitive to Dewey’s own conception of what his work was about. This, unfortunately, means that while he avoids the *Scylla* of projecting the professional image onto Dewey, he crashes against the *Charybdis* of immersing himself in Dewey’s conceptual itinerary in such a way that the book looks unphilosophical to most professional philosophers: they cannot find their way in it. Evidence for this is that while the book has been influential amongst Dewey’s admirers, and it was reviewed favorably in sympathetic journals (see Mendell (1999) and Morse (1997)), it seems not to have been reviewed in journals appealing to the broader profession.

⁵³ For similar treatments of Dewey by his avowed admirers, see also Hickman (1990), Koopman (2009), Pappas (2008), and Shook (2000).

pragmatic tradition (see for example Brandom (2011) and Putnam (1995)) because they typically eschew direct engagement with Dewey's texts. They see themselves as working in the spirit of the classical pragmatists even as they continue to pursue the fundamental timeless questions. I omit Richard Rorty here, too, with whose work this dissertation is in profound sympathy (see especially Rorty (2009 (1979))). The dominance of the professional image is perhaps nowhere so obvious as in the tendency to read even Rorty (who, in part under the influence of his reading of Dewey, abandoned his position as professor of philosophy because he thought the timeless questions were better ignored than pursued) as articulating just one of the many possible philosophical views: anti-foundationalism.

V. Conclusion

In this chapter I have described how Dewey's influence within the profession waned as the philosophers became more committed to embracing the professional image. The professional image continues to influence the reception of Dewey's work. Earlier, in chapter 2, I provided an analysis of the professional image; and I argued, in chapter 3, that it came to prominence in part as a result of the professionalization of the discipline of philosophy. In chapter 4, I give a more detailed analysis of Dewey's work in logic and its contemporary reception; and, in chapter 5, I discuss Dewey's work in education and Thoreau's moral philosophy in light of the way in which these works are read by philosophers deploying the professional image. In the conclusion to this dissertation I

return to the question of the connection between the professional image and the contemporary problems facing the discipline.

Chapter 5 Dewey, Logic and Epistemology

The systematic study of validity is the concern of **logic**. Logicians are concerned to devise perfectly reliable procedures for detecting validity... Since the validity of an argument is independent of the truth-values of its premises, logic has a unique status amongst the sciences; for other sciences are concerned to find out the truth-values of particular propositions about its [sic] characteristic subject matter. Ichthyology, for example, seeks to know which propositions about fish are true, and which false. The logician has no particular concern with fish, nor with the truth as regards anything else in particular. Logic has no concern with particular truths. In a sense, the logician does not have to know anything.

-Tracey Bowell & Gary Kemp, *Critical Thinking: A Concise Guide*

The logician is not concerned with the *process* of inference, but with the propositions that are the initial and end points of the process...

-Irving Copi, *Symbolic Logic*

I. Introduction – the contemporary conception of logic

In philosophy departments today, logic is narrowly focused on the study of consequence or validity. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article on logical consequence, "Contemporary analyses of the concept of consequence – of the *follows from* relation – take it to be both *necessary* and *formal*..." (Beall & Restall (2005)). The epigraphs to this chapter convey the conventional view of logic as a purely formal discipline that requires no substantive or material knowledge or expertise. Undergraduate courses in logic teach formal methods for assessing arguments largely through the use of the predicate calculus. These courses are pitched as appropriate for all students because it is claimed that, although not all reasoning aims at deductive validity, deductive reasoning constitutes the ideal form of reasoning (because it can guarantee the

truth of conclusions given the truth of premises). Logic is thought to be the preeminent *fundamental* discipline in virtue of its *formality*.

For example, in a popular textbook for undergraduate logic courses, Howard Pospesel's *Introduction to Logic: Propositional Logic*, the preface for students notes that one of the goals of the book is "... to sharpen your native ability to evaluate arguments. This is a goal of utmost consequence; one of the marks of a well-educated person is the ability to assess correctly the worth of arguments" (Pospesel (2000) p. ix).⁵⁴ This claim that logic is fundamental to reasoning is made as well in a common text used in upper-level/ graduate courses, Bergmann, Moor & Nelson's *The Logic Book*:

Historically two overlapping concerns have driven research in deductive logic and the development of specific formal systems of deductive logic: the desire to formulate canons or principles of good reasoning in everyday life, as well as in science and mathematics, and the desire to formalize and systemize existing and emerging work in mathematics and science. Common to these concerns is the view that what distinguishes good reasoning from bad reasoning, and what makes good deductive reasoning 'logical' as opposed to 'illogical', is truth preservation. (Bergmann, Moor & Nelson (2009) p. 1)

The easy and unremarked conflation of deductive logic with "good reasoning" is a part of the dogma of logic in philosophy. Obviously this casts inductive reasoning, along with analogical or genealogical reasoning, or reasoning that makes substantive use of rhetorical or literary tropes, in a subordinate light. These forms of reasoning are subordinate because, while the ideal form (that is, reasoning that achieves deductive validity) shows perfect truth preservation, they do not. The study of deductive validity

⁵⁴ The examples in the book are often drawn from newspaper articles and comics. This is meant to both interest students and to show that logic, understood as the formal analysis and evaluation of arguments, applies to everything.

shows what is given up when we engage in other forms of reasoning. Figures like Dewey, who thought of logic as encompassing not just deduction but induction and the variety of patterns of reasoning actual people engage in, are excluded from the contemporary study of logic.

This picture of logic is dogma in philosophy today: reasoning is to be evaluated according to the ideal which provides formal principles that mechanically ensure truth preservation. And this scheme influences the way philosophers read historical work: as we have seen in previous chapters, a conventional way of treating historical works is to extract arguments from them that can be assessed for validity and soundness, whether or not the writer of the work aspired to this kind of argument. And this means that works for which this kind of reconstructive analysis is very difficult are seen as not philosophical.

Though many philosophers would agree that philosophy can only be defined as "unbridled criticism" (Priest (2006) p. 207), the methodological tool that philosophers rely on is treated as sacrosanct. One cannot begin to successfully philosophize until one has accepted the dogma of logic: ideal reasoning is formal and necessary. Priest says

This is why philosophy is so absolutely essential to any university worth the name, and any society worth having. We all need to be challenged out of our mistakes, stupidities, complacencies – especially when it is our own intellectual blinkers that prevent us from seeing them as such. This is the preeminent role of philosophy. (Priest (2006) p. 2007)

It is ironic that the tool philosophers rely on to remove "intellectual blinkers" is itself rarely questioned.⁵⁵ One intellectual blinker philosophers suffer from is an ahistoricism when it comes to logic, for only in the 20th century did logic become exclusively the formal study of deductive reasoning. It is the aim of this chapter to recover a small part of the history of logic that has largely been forgotten. In the 19th and in the early part of the 20th centuries, many philosophers thought of logic as the study of *actual* reasoning, of substantive, material inference, deduction and induction. Influential philosophers like Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923) were unwilling to "...separate logic from epistemology" (Allard (2007) p. 81) because they were interested in how reasoning developed knowledge. Although Bosanquet and other idealist logicians like Lotze, all broadly influenced by Hegel, were the main targets of Dewey's critical work in logic, Dewey agreed with them that there is no real distinction between logic and the attempt to understand how actual reasoning produces knowledge.

This conception of logic is now mostly absent in philosophy. It is common in community colleges to have a course in critical thinking taught by a philosopher, but within the profession these are low status jobs, often referred to slightly as courses in "baby logic." The shift in thinking of logic as the study of reasoning to thinking of logic as the study of valid inference was gradual. The great achievements of formal logic in

⁵⁵ I owe this insight to Paul Hoyningen-Huene, who in discussion condemned what he called the "wholly unphilosophical" way logic is taught in university departments: there simply is no questioning of the assumptions built into the picture logic presents of reasoning as formal and necessary. His introductory text, *Formal Logic: A Philosophical Approach*, isn't dogmatic about formalism or about the way to understand inference.

the early 20th century – for example the proof that any logical system powerful enough to generate arithmetic is formally undecidable⁵⁶ – did not immediately alter the way the profession taught logic. Stephen Toulmin’s book *The Uses of Argument*, for example, was published in 1958 and was used in philosophy courses, and it is a study of “...the practical assessment of arguments” (Toulmin (2003 (1958) p. 2). But Toulmin was already reacting to the view, a view that is virtually unchallenged in the profession today, of logic as a formal science having little to do with actual reasoning:⁵⁷

Certainly the man-in-the-street (or the man-out-of-the-study) expects the conclusion of logicians to have some application to his practice; ... By the twentieth century A.D. it may have become possible to question the connection, and some would perhaps want to say that ‘logical demonstration’ was one thing, and the establishment of conclusions in the normal run of life something different. (Toulmin (2003 (1958)) p. 2)

Many factors played a role in the shift in the understanding of the nature of logic. Philosophical histories point to progress in understanding inference and in moving away from thinking of logic as a branch of psychology, giving a purely philosophical explanation. For example, in their canonical history of logic (the first sentence of which states: "Logic is concerned with the principles of valid inference..." (Kneale and Kneale (1962) p. 1)) the Kneales trace the history of logic from Aristotle to the mid-twentieth

⁵⁶ For a somewhat accessible and mostly non-technical account of Godel's proof of this, see Nagel and Newman (2001).

⁵⁷ In the preface to the "updated" edition of his book, published in 2003, Toulmin says that he wrote his book in 1958 to challenge what I have been calling the professional image of philosophy:

When I wrote it, my aim was strictly philosophical: to criticize the assumption, made by most Anglo-American academic philosophers, that any significant argument can be put in formal terms... (Toulmin (2003 (1958)) p. vii)

century. They describe the history as one of progress of ideas that culminates with the formal proofs of undecidability.⁵⁸

But there were other factors, particularly disciplinary pressures brought on by changes in the way colleges and universities functioned in the United States. After World War II and the passage of the GI Bill, college attendance boomed. Philosophy departments might have had a hard time convincing these students that it was necessary to read Plato, but they could convince students and university administrators that a solid foundation in reasoning is essential to success in college. There was at this time a proliferation of logic textbooks, each intent on explaining to beginners how to use formal analysis to evaluate arguments, a skill that would be useful no matter a student's major. So logic became a way for philosophy departments to get students into their classrooms, and this played a role in shaping the professional image of philosophy.⁵⁹ It helped that logicians had played an important role in decoding war secrets during World War II, and that logicians were making advances in computing.⁶⁰ Philosophers working on logic benefitted from increasing government funding of basic research in science and technology. Here was philosophy making a contribution that was tangible, and it was

⁵⁸ Their history ignores Dewey; while they do discuss Mill, it is only to point out that, while most of his *System of Logic* concerns "...induction and the methodology of the natural and social sciences", and so isn't properly logic, he does in the first two books give "... a systematic account of formal logic instead of dismissing it with contempt..." (Kneale and Kneale (1962) p. 372). I discuss Mill below.

⁵⁹ This was suggested to me in conversation by Doug Lewis. Frankfurt (2011, p. 90) discusses the increased demand for higher education, and the resulting increased demand for college and university teachers (including philosophers), as a result of the GI Bill.

⁶⁰ See Dyson (2012) for a popular history of the role logicians played in the development of computing.

made possible by formal analysis. Older conceptions of logic, like the one Dewey held, seemed musty to philosophers, and they were happy to allow departments of communications and rhetoric to take over the teaching of informal logic and critical thinking: philosophy attached its disciplinary identity to formal reasoning.

In what follows I argue for the relevance of Dewey's logic, and his theory of induction in particular, by defending an approach to the history of philosophy. My thesis is that Dewey's logic is understood correctly when it is read as engaged with discussions among 19th century philosophers interested in logic and science and not as an answer to timeless philosophical questions concerning truth and knowledge. Scholars have recently tried to explain the influence of 19th century German philosophy on Dewey's mature metaphysics,⁶¹ but the role of 19th century logic and philosophy of science in the development of Dewey's mature epistemology has not been explored in the literature. In the next section I explain my approach to Dewey and say why the 19th century debate between Mill and Whewell is important for understanding Dewey. The third and fourth provide a brief account of the Mill-Whewell debate. In the fifth I consider Dewey's only published discussion of the Mill-Whewell debate, and in the sixth and seventh sections I present an account of Dewey's theory of induction from his relatively late *Logic*, of 1937, an account which has some interesting similarities with Whewell's view. Finally, I conclude with some remarks intended to bring out the importance of this episode in the history of philosophy.

⁶¹ See, for example, Good (2006(a) and 2006(b)) and Shook (2000).

II. Resituating Dewey, or with friends like these ...

Dewey's critics have had a fairly easy time of it. His *Logic* is easily criticized in part because nobody reads it anymore. But Dewey has not always been helped by his admirers. Few of them read the *Logic*, either. Instead they rely on standard formulations of Deweyian ideas, for example, "Thought is a natural activity," "Truth is what works," hoping that others will agree that Dewey had better answers to a standard set of philosophical questions like "Is dualism true?" "What is truth?" than his contemporaries had. Few are persuaded by this. Tom Burke is one of the few of Dewey's admirers who is interested in his logic, yet even he continues to read Dewey as responding to the same set of problems that people like Russell and Carnap worked on (the subtitle of his book is: *A Reply to Russell*).

Burke, in his *Dewey's New Logic*, shows that Russell misunderstood Dewey. Russell thought Dewey was trying to answer the same questions that he was interested in, and he thought Dewey's answers were silly. Burke's mistake is to accept Russell's way of framing the dispute: he denies just that Dewey's answers were silly. Burke contends that

...there is more involved here than rectifying a misreading of Dewey. Russell, whether or not he was reading him correctly, had good reason to attack Dewey's logical theory, for Dewey was proposing a conception of logic which does undermine much which is central to logic as Russell conceived of it. What is at issue here is not just how to think about some key notions of interest to logicians but more generally how to conceive of the very subject matter of logic. Russell's and Dewey's debate over the

proper conception of particular logical concepts is ultimately a debate about what logic is. (Burke (1994), p. 14)

This is the wrong way to think about Dewey's project. Calling the exchange between Russell and Dewey a debate misrepresents it. Russell and Dewey did not debate, Dewey does not "undermine" Russell's project, and Dewey was not interested in defining what logic is. Dewey is largely neglected in contemporary discussions of logic because, when the "debate" is read in this way, Russell clearly wins: the remarkable innovations in formal logic of the twentieth century have their origins in Russell's work, not Dewey's.

Indeed, Burke is aware of the difficulties confronting his project:

In the long run, a solid vindication of Dewey's conception of logic will require that it assimilate what has been accomplished in mathematical logic over the last several decades. (Burke (1994), p. 17)

But only Dewey's keenest admirers think that such a vindication is likely, and few even of them think it is worth the trouble.

Burke's mistake is his approach to reading Dewey. We might distinguish two methodological approaches to the history of philosophy. Call Burke's the *timeless questions* method, which is philosophy in the professional image described in earlier chapters. The timeless questions method sees all philosophers as participating in a conversation about some core problems: What is truth? What is knowledge? This method assumes that one can set aside the philosopher's historical context, set aside questions about what a philosopher has been reading, and instead concentrate on the philosopher's answer to the core question.

This method creates significant blind spots: philosophers whose work cannot easily be read as contributing to the timeless questions are often either ignored, because they seem not to have had the right interests, or their writings are reconstructed to make them relevant to contemporary concerns. Either way the potential is that their originality is sacrificed.

I think we can recover important philosophical insights by adopting the *historical context* method in reading Dewey. The historical context method assumes that, since a philosopher is engaged with contemporaries and with social and cultural forces, understanding the philosopher's ideas requires an awareness of the nature of the philosophical conversation at the time and some knowledge of the historical situation. Note a difference in emphasis here: in my description of the historical context method I stress "understanding the philosopher's ideas." The timeless questions method is less interested in recovering a particular philosopher's ideas, that is, in getting an accurate understanding of the ideas that a particular philosopher had, than in seeing some view as a possible response to some philosophical question. There are occasions when knowing that some position belonged to some figure is irrelevant. But there are times when a careful attention to the development of a particular philosopher's thought, through a consideration of his/her broadly construed historical context, can open up new philosophical terrain and contribute to the contemporary discussion.⁶² Such is the case, I

⁶² Snyder argues that Whewell presents an alternative to the currently dominant theories of discovery, that it has been ignored because Whewell has been misunderstood, and that he has been misunderstood because he has been read without sufficient attention to the context in which

think, with Dewey. Dewey did not take himself to be answering timeless questions, and when his work is approached as if that is what he were doing, it can seem unsophisticated and unpersuasive. But the historical context method shows that Dewey had insights which, if they can be recovered, might contribute to some important contemporary discussions. One such important contemporary discussion concerns the nature of induction.

John Norton, in a recent paper entitled “A Material Theory of Induction,” argues that “... our failure to agree on a single systemization of inductive inference is not merely a temporary lacuna. It is here to stay” (Norton (2003) p. 648). Norton goes on:

We have been misled, I believe, by the model of deductive logic into seeking an account of induction based on universal schemas. In its place I will develop an account of induction with no universal schemas. Instead inductive inferences will be seen as deriving their license from facts. These facts are the material of the inductions; hence it is a “material theory of induction.” (Norton (2003) p. 648)

There are differences between the theory of induction Norton develops and the ones described by Dewey and Whewell, but they are all material theories of induction in the sense that they hold that inductive inferences in some sense “derive their license from facts.”⁶³ It follows that, for material theories, reasoning cannot be understood or evaluated independently of the substantive claims made throughout the reasoning process. Dewey calls his theory a material theory of induction to distinguish it from formal accounts. Recognizing that Dewey and Whewell were approaching induction in

he was writing. See Snyder (2006), pp. 331-332. See also her remarkably rich reconstruction of Whewell's intellectual culture in Snyder (2011).

⁶³ On material theories of induction, see also Love (2012(b)) and Brigandt (2010).

this way, and that it represents an alternative to formal and Millian accounts of induction, has the potential to move the discussion of induction in a fruitful direction.

But to see that Dewey was approaching induction in this way one needs to know with whom he was arguing. He was not arguing with Russell and the logicians⁶⁴ of the twentieth century but with the logicians of the nineteenth century, primarily those who were trying to present a theoretical account of scientific reasoning. Dewey's interest was historical and philosophical: he wanted to show that historically significant philosophical developments followed periods of great conflicts between tradition and intellectual discovery. Developments in the nineteenth century, prominent among them the publication of *Origin of Species*, marked a new period of conflict calling for philosophical reflection. This is Dewey's large project: to develop a philosophically sound response to the rupture presented by modernity. The epistemological project is to provide an account of reasoning that is consistent with contemporary science. The importance of providing an account of induction was part and parcel of a 19th century understanding of philosophy as playing an important role in the progressive transformation of society. Dewey, in many ways a man of the 19th century, shared this understanding of philosophy. This explains his lack of interest in the developments of formal logic that were occurring precisely when he was writing, teaching and thinking most about logic: he did not see developments in formal logic as having a bearing on

⁶⁴ The logicians thought mathematics could be derived from or shown to be equivalent to more fundamental logical principles: this was the principle aim of Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*. See Musgrave (1977) for a brief history of logicism.

social and cultural problems.⁶⁵ In other words, the problems motivating work on formal logic were not Dewey's problems.

Here I will show that the Mill- Whewell debate about induction is an important part of the context of Dewey's logical theory. My argument, in brief, is that, though Dewey thought about induction in terms set by the debate, because he dismissed the philosophical work of Whewell for what he took to be its Kantian idealism, he did not give serious attention to Whewell's account of scientific epistemology; nevertheless, Dewey's considered view of induction bears some striking similarities to Whewell's theory of induction. In contrast, Dewey was sympathetic to Mill's metaphysics, and this influenced his less critical reading of Mill's account of induction. Induction for Whewell and Dewey is material; Mill's induction is formal. Understanding induction as formal gives rise to the problem of justifying inductive inference, and this has been the focus of philosophical treatments of induction. The problem, so understood, is not a concern for material induction. In contrast to the formal interpretation of induction, according to which it is simply a kind of inference that can be represented independently of content, the material view is that inductive inference is essentially tied to features of the particular object of investigation and so no purely formal account can capture its distinctive movement.

This history is interesting and important because Dewey was the last major American philosopher to hold a conception of philosophy firmly rooted in the 19th

⁶⁵ This was one of Dewey's blind spots, because of course developments in formal logic led to the explosion of computing which had far reaching effects on social and cultural phenomena.

century according to which the role of philosophy is to make life better. Dewey, like Mill and Whewell, thought that providing a theoretical account of successful reasoning, looking primarily to episodes of significant scientific discoveries, would result in the creation and proliferation of a method that could be applied to other significant areas of inquiry. For Dewey, this meant primarily application to the essential problem of resolving tensions and ruptures of meaning created by modernity. These tensions present themselves in questions about education, democracy, and social justice.

III. Whewell, induction, and the epistemology of science

Whewell has been misread and misunderstood by subsequent philosophers because he does not fit easily into familiar categories. Mill was the first, and he set the terms for the subsequent reception of Whewell.⁶⁶ Roughly, it has looked like the choice is between Mill's empirical metaphysics and Whewell's strange amalgam of Kantian and Platonic idealism. Since the rise of positivism and naturalism Mill wins that contest easily. For my purposes, it will be useful to provide a brief account of Whewell's approach, and then describe Mill's criticism. Much that is interesting about the debate will be ignored here (but see Snyder 2006).

Whewell published a massive, three volume history of science, *The History of the Inductive Sciences, from the Earliest to the Present Time* in 1837; this was the study on

⁶⁶ Snyder's *Reforming Philosophy* (Snyder (2006)) is an excellent account of the debate. She sets the debate in its 19th century context.

which he based his philosophy of science, published in the equally ambitious *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences Founded Upon Their History* which went through three editions from 1840, when it first appeared, to 1857. In the second edition of the *Philosophy*, published in 1847, Whewell added a chapter to the first volume called “On The Fundamental Antithesis of Philosophy.”⁶⁷ He says in the preface that the essay of the same name, published earlier, had attracted much attention, and also that the view expressed there is fundamental to his overall view. It is also fundamental to understanding why his position has been misread.

The fundamental antithesis of philosophy (FAP) that Whewell identifies is, he tells us, seen in several related conceptual pairings: thoughts/things, theories/ facts, subjective/ objective, necessary truths/ experiential truths, deduction/induction. Whewell says that the “...antithesis is constant and essential, but yet that there is no fixed and permanent line dividing its members” (Whewell (1847, v. 1) p. 17). This is an antithesis of philosophy, not of reality or metaphysics. Mill and subsequent commentators have read what is said here as implying that there is an irresolvable but fluid dichotomy in the structure of reality. This is not Whewell's view. Rather it is that, in constructing a theory of scientific knowledge, the conceptual distinction between idea and fact is natural, recurring and explanatory.

Whewell tells us that his purpose is to determine “the nature and conditions of human knowledge” (Whewell (1847, v. 1) p.16). For Whewell this means providing a

⁶⁷ In the *Studies in Logical Theory* Dewey appears to refer to this chapter, though his citation is to the 1840 edition.

theoretical analysis of scientific knowledge, science being the pinnacle of human knowledge. Beginning with an attempt to analyze ordinary or common sense knowledge would, for Whewell, be like trying to understand the art of painting by watching children play with finger paint. By Whewell's time remarkable advances had been made in physics and chemistry as well as in practical sciences like meteorology and the study of tides; he points to great discoveries in various sciences as evidence that a) science is the pinnacle of human knowledge and b) philosophical understanding of knowledge might be gained from looking closely at these advances to discover unifying principles:

The advances which have, during the last three centuries, been made in the physical sciences; -in Astronomy, in Physics, in Chemistry, in Natural History, in Physiology;- these are allowed by all to be real, to be great, to be striking: may it not be, then, that these steps of progress have in them something alike? – that in each advancing movement there is some common process, some common principle? (Whewell (1847, v. 1) p. vi)

Anyone interested in understanding what knowledge is would be foolish, Whewell thinks, to look to ordinary modes of thought; science is the only reliable source of genuine knowledge.⁶⁸ This is why he says that the philosophy of science "...would

⁶⁸ Whewell says

We may best hope to understand the nature and conditions of real knowledge, by studying the nature and conditions of the most certain and stable portions of knowledge which we already possess...Now there do exist among us doctrines of solid and acknowledged certainty, and truths of which the discovery has been received with universal applause. These constitute what we commonly term *Sciences*. (Whewell (1847, v. 1) , pp. 1-2)

imply nothing less than a complete insight into the essence and conditions of all real knowledge” (Whewell (1847, v.1) p. 1).⁶⁹

Whewell’s claim that knowledge requires the correct apprehension of the appropriate fundamental ideas has been taken as evidence that there is a tendency towards Platonism in his thought. His view that the manifold of sensation is a chaotic, confusing swarm of disorder until, in perception, it is filtered through concepts provided by the mind has been taken as evidence of his unreconstructed Kantianism. The supposed incompatibility between his Platonism and his Kantianism, and his obvious competence as a scientist, suffices to explain why he is neglected in treatments of the history of philosophy. But both readings commit the same error: they interpret Whewell’s epistemology in metaphysical terms. Whewell does think knowledge requires apprehension of fundamental ideas, but this need not commit him to metaphysical Platonism. And he does think that concepts make possible the perception of facts, but this need not commit him to an irresolvable tension between reality-as-perceived and reality-in-itself. In his work on the philosophy of science, Whewell makes no metaphysical claims; he is, with respect to what is taken to be the important and timeless philosophical question of the ultimate nature of reality, a quietist. His philosophical

⁶⁹ Not just any science can serve as a model, either, but only those that have stood the test of time, that have “been fixed by means of distinct and permanent phraseology, and sanctioned by universal reception, and formed into a connected system, and traced through the steps of their gradual discovery and establishment, so as to make them instructive examples of the nature and progress of truth in general” (Whewell (1847, v. 1), p. 7). Whewell takes the physical sciences, primarily physics, astronomy and chemistry, to have stood such a test.

interests are limited to the epistemology of science. His insights in this area have been neglected because of a persistent metaphysical misreading of his work.

The misreading begins with the interpretation of Whewell's fundamental antithesis. It is, as he says, "the basis of" his conception of the philosophy of science, but the relationship between the two sides of the antithesis is complicated and has led to confusion. Dewey, as we shall see, misread Whewell. Ironically, what Whewell was doing was arguing for a view much like the one that Dewey spent years developing, the view that metaphysical dualism is the mistake of reifying successful epistemological or methodological strategies or distinctions.⁷⁰ This is not to say that Whewell was a monist; in his philosophical works about science Whewell was noncommittal on metaphysical issues, except that he seemed to have taken for granted a simple realism about the objects of study; his interests were not metaphysical. He was primarily interested in the epistemology of science. Whewell did have theological beliefs that, worked out into a systematic metaphysics, are quite antithetical to Dewey's naturalism. Nevertheless, his epistemology can be understood independently of his theology. To put it simply, as a philosopher working on science Whewell was uninterested in metaphysics. The action was in epistemology. And his epistemology ends up bearing striking similarities to Dewey's.

For Whewell, scientific knowledge consists of the application of the correct fundamental ideas to materials made available to the mind from sensation: neither

⁷⁰ I owe this way of expressing the point to Alan Love.

rational analysis of concepts nor careful attention to sensations alone can provide knowledge. The history of scientific discovery consists of the conversion of theories and hypotheses into incontrovertible facts. What begin as contingent discoveries become, over time and through meticulous and rigorous testing and analysis, necessary truths. A truth is necessary, for Whewell, when its denial is inconceivable. Whereas, at an early stage in the development of astronomy, it was possible to conceive of a universe made up of perfectly spherical planets inhabiting perfectly spherical orbits around the earth, it is no longer possible for those who know what the universe is really like to conceive of the cosmos as anything other than planets orbiting sun in elliptical orbits. Of course *I* can conceive otherwise, but then *I* have not achieved a familiarity with the fundamental ideas by which knowledge of the planets is organized. Whewell says that experience, by which he means observations made in the conduct of science, provides true facts but cannot provide necessity or universality. But since we do have necessary knowledge of matters of fact, according to Whewell, this proves that such knowledge includes application of ideas.

Whewell thinks, then, that "...knowledge involves an active as well as a passive element" (Whewell (1847, v. 1) p. 67), and he thinks that the active element, the conceptualization that the mind imposes, is the source of that necessity which attaches to knowledge which is universal and necessary. Indeed he seems to go further, providing some evidence for those⁷¹ who would read Whewell as a rationalist or deductivist, when

⁷¹ See Wettersten (1992) for an example.

he says that the fundamental ideas govern the activity of the mind according to rules which

...may be made the basis of demonstrations by which the necessary relations imparted to our knowledge by our Ideas may be traced to their consequences in the most remote ramifications of scientific truth. (Whewell (1847, v. 1) p. 66)

Though Dewey does not cite this passage, it, and some few others like it, might have convinced him that Whewell does think that the analysis and clarification of concepts and pure objects of thought is sufficient for knowledge.

But this is not Whewell's view. To see why, I turn to a discussion of his theory of induction. The first thing to note is that, even if particular facts that are known present a mixture of idea and sensation, and even if no cognizing about the sensation independently of ideas is possible, still we can gain a complete understanding of the ideas we use so that, by implication, we can have some apprehension of what is supplied by sensation. The ideas, as it were, can be subtracted out, analyzed, and the remainder is, we can be assured, not idea or concept but objective material. This process Whewell calls the "Decomposition of Facts." It involves removing from our perceptions all thoughts not supplied directly by the fundamental idea. For example, Whewell says that progress in astronomical science required abstracting from observation of comets resemblance to familiar forms, such as "the form of a sword, of a spear, of a cross, and so on" (Whewell, (1847, v. 2) p. 32). These ideas do not follow from the fundamental ideas which regulate space and form and so must be, in the decomposition of facts relating to comets, set aside. Whewell says

Thus the Facts which we assume as the basis of Science are to be freed from all the mists which imagination and passion throw round them; and to be separated into those elementary Facts which exhibit simple and evident relations of Time, or Space, or Cause, or some other Ideas equally clear. (Whewell, (1847, v. 2) p. 33)

These elemental facts, though they are the basis of science, do not yet constitute science: science consists of general statements or propositions formed on the basis of these elemental facts through the process of what Whewell calls the colligation of facts. “The whole of our physical knowledge consists in the establishment of such propositions” (Whewell (1847, v. 2) p. 36). This, together with the processes through which ordinary facts are decomposed, is, for Whewell, induction, the creation of new knowledge: induction “...is usually and justly spoken of as the genuine source of all our *real general knowledge* respecting the external world” (Whewell, (1847, v. 2) p. 47).

For example, prior to Kepler’s discovery of the elliptical orbit of planets, the decomposition of facts produced a series of observed positions. These were the elemental facts. The hypothesis of the elliptical orbit colligates these facts; that is, it organizes them, renders their relationship comprehensible and stable such that further predictions can be made on this basis. For Whewell this is a prime example of induction. In the end there can be no accounting for the precise process through which the hypothesis was arrived at; but the induction includes all of the work that went into making the initial observations, decomposing the facts, and then the barely conscious guessing at and testing of possible forms of organization. When finally the correct hypothesis is formulated, the facts are seen in a new light that stands up to testing and more careful observation, and knowledge is achieved. This knowledge, to be explicit,

requires both the clarification and analysis of fundamental ideas into conceptions and the decomposition and colligation of facts, of material provided by the world. The rationalist reading is a misreading because Whewell is adamant that

The neglect of Facts gives rise to empty speculations, idle subtleties, visionary inventions, false opinions concerning the laws of phenomena, disregard of the true aspect of nature. (Whewell (1847, v. 1) p. 47)

Ideas and conceptions alone provide merely the form or ‘mould’ of knowledge; reality supplies the material.⁷²

IV. Whewell’s reply to Mill

The exchanges between Mill and Whewell are full of interest and are often entertaining. I wish to highlight two themes that run through the “debate.” The first is that Whewell and Mill fundamentally disagree over the extension of the word ‘induction.’ Mill is happy to call any behavior of any organism ‘induction’ just so long as it appears to have as its motivation an inference from some experience. So, for example, if my dog refrains from biting a porcupine after having once suffered from having done so, Mill would call this an induction. Whewell demurs. Perhaps, he says, something is to be gained from seeing my dog’s pattern of behavior as in some respect similar to the discover of the elliptical orbit of a planet. But what is not gained is an

⁷² To be clear, a fact for Whewell does combine idea and material present through sensation. But the sense material is a real constituent of any fact, even if it cannot be thought or cognized independently of concepts. A fact for Whewell, even as it contains idea, is given, not constructed.

understanding of what human induction is, because human induction is the difficult and rational process described above, a process requiring such steps as no one suspects dogs or other brutes of having the capacity to undertake. Whewell goes further. It is a sign, perhaps, of intelligence if I am successful at selecting ripe fruit by applying some kind of rule that I generate through trial and test. But Whewell would not call this an induction. We have, Whewell thinks, many examples of hard won truths of general application and near universal acceptance, and we have accounts of how these truths were achieved. These should be taken as exemplars of the creation of knowledge. Whewell is adamant:

We are speaking of *Induction*, and we mean that kind of Induction by which the sciences now existing among men have been constructed. On this account it is, that we cannot include, in the meaning of the term, mere practical tendencies or practical habits; for science is not constructed of these. No accumulation of these would make up any of the acknowledged sciences. (Whewell (1849), pp. 12-13)

The second point concerns the large question of the origin of our ideas. Mill and Whewell disagree over where, for example, the conception of the ellipse in Kepler's discovery of the elliptical orbit originates. Mill thinks that Kepler *observed* the ellipse; Whewell thinks that Kepler supplied the concept.⁷³ I point out this disagreement simply to show that the debate between Mill and Whewell, and Whewell's position in particular, is terribly distorted if it is seen merely as a philosophical disagreement that fits nicely into the opposing categories of rationalism and empiricism. Mill presented the disagreement in this way and, unfortunately, Dewey followed him in this.

⁷³ Snyder (2006), especially pp. 143-144, provides a very useful discussion of this aspect of the debate.

V. Dewey and the context of *Studies in Logical Theory*

In 1903 Dewey and some of his students and colleagues at the University of Chicago published *Studies in Logical Theory*. Dewey wrote the first three chapters, edited the volume and contributed a short passage to the chapter “The Nature of Hypothesis,” written by Myron Ashley. This latter contribution will be my focus here, because it was the first time that Dewey wrote about Mill and Whewell.⁷⁴ The volume as a whole is an attempt to defend a view of logic quite at odds with the then prevalent treatment of logic. The essays in the volume try to refute the notion that logic is primarily a formal science, in the sense that it studies relationships of implication independently of the material content of actual investigations. The reigning theory at the time was that logic dealt with ideal forms that could be approached in an *a priori* manner, though empirical theories of logic were on the rise. Dewey thought both committed the fundamental error of treating the subject matter of logical investigation as independent of particular investigations. More broadly, Dewey’s essays constitute a vigorous challenge to what are taken to be persistent dualisms in philosophical theories. Dewey’s aim is to show that philosophical theories of logic that do not explicitly challenge the metaphysical dualism of thought and world, or idea and fact, merely repeat old mistakes about the sort of thing rational thought is. The mistake is to think that rational thought deals with ideal,

⁷⁴ He had written about Mill earlier, for example in “The Present Position of Logical Theory” in 1891 (EW 3, pp. 125-141).

persisting, knowable forms. When experience fails to reveal such consistency, the problem of the relationship between rational thought and experience is generated (and, Dewey thinks, unsolvable).

Dewey had two principle aims in publishing the volume: 1) to offer an alternative to the dominant philosophical treatments of logic, all of which, according to Dewey, accept a fundamental metaphysical dualism of thought/idea and world/ fact; and 2) to bring about a reconstruction of the discipline of philosophy, primarily in its approach to epistemology. Narrowly this would mean replacing the commonly used logic texts with texts advocating an instrumental approach. But more generally it would mean philosophy casting aside metaphysical assumptions it had acquired as a result of its long period of service in universities and colleges as a fundamental part of the study and dissemination of a particular theological view of the world.⁷⁵ As discussed in earlier chapters, Dewey thought philosophy had an important, constructive role to play in the development of a free, democratic society, and he thought it neglected this role so long as it was attached to antiquated metaphysical ideas. This is not to say that Dewey rejected philosophy's past, or that he thought metaphysics should be abandoned. On the contrary, he thought that the historical moment in which he wrote demanded a critique of

⁷⁵ Both Coughlan (1975) and Dykhuizen (1973) note that the men who taught philosophy to Dewey, though they were university professors of philosophy, had responsibilities quite different from what contemporary philosophers have. For example, Coughlan ((1975) p. 15) says of Henry Torrey, who was one of Dewey's undergraduate professors, that "...his principal responsibility was to the New England church culture. ... his duties were to demonstrate *how* philosophy and human reason tended to support the teachings of Scripture (certainly not to ask *whether* they did)." One of Dewey's goals was to challenge this status of the discipline of philosophy in the university.

traditional, and development of a new, metaphysics. It also required logical reconstruction.

A sense of the argument of the book can be had from the following long passage from the preface, written by Dewey, in which he tries to state the shared commitments of the authors and to describe the tendency of the argument:

All agree, the editor takes the liberty of saying, that judgment is the central function of knowing, and hence affords the central problem of logic; that since the act of knowing is intimately and indissolubly connected with the like yet diverse functions of affection, appreciation, and practice, it only distorts results reached to treat knowing as a self-enclosed and self-explanatory whole – hence the intimate connections of logical theory with functional psychology; that since knowledge appears as a function within experience, and yet passes judgment upon both the processes and contents of other functions, its work and aim must be distinctively reconstructive or transformatory; that since Reality must be defined in terms of experience, judgment appears accordingly as the medium through which the consciously effected evolution of Reality goes on; that there is no reasonable standard of truth (or of success of the knowing function) in general, except upon the postulate that Reality is thus dynamic and self-evolving, and, in particular, except through reference to the specific offices which knowledge is called upon to perform in readjusting and expanding the means and ends of life. And all agree that this conception gives the only promising basis upon which the working methods of science, and the proper demands of the moral life, may cooperate. (Dewey, MW 2, p. 296)

There is much in this passage that is obscure, but the main themes treated in the volume are here stated succinctly. Thinking is an activity that is continuous with other ways of responding to the world. Interaction with the environment calls forth various sorts of response; what is called thinking is one among many others. The reference to psychology here must be treated carefully. Dewey does not reduce logic to psychology, that is, he does not think that a complete account of the way people think will exhaust the study of logic. Logic is a normative science, as is evident from his claim that judgment is

reconstructive. This points to what would become one of the most controversial of Dewey's claims regarding logic, his view that objects of knowledge are created in the situation, so that judgment is the construction of a new object. What comes to be known, then, is not the same object that initially entered into experience.

Dewey's discussion of Whewell and Mill appears, without attribution, in the middle of a chapter called "On The Nature of Hypothesis," written by Myron Ashley.⁷⁶ The chapter criticizes what it takes to be the commonly accepted view that hypotheses are the fundamentally mysterious products of persons of a particular kind of genius; that true hypotheses unify data that are there for anyone to see, so that there can be no way of accounting for the creation of a hypothesis save by appeal to a unique insight on the part of the creator. In contrast to this received view, but consistently with the views presented in other chapters of the *Studies*, Ashley says that data are not present prior to hypothesis but that "...the hypothesis exercises a directive function in determining what are the data" (Ashley (1903) p. 145). This is taken to follow from the general view of inquiry as an organic process in which form (hypothesis) and matter (data) are in some sense continuous and never fully separate. Data are not given but created, selected and organized. The principles by which data are generated play a role in determining the nature of the data. Ashley's argument, consistently with the approach of the book as a whole, is genitive: he tries to show how hypotheses arise and function in real inquiry. It is interesting to note that Ashley's examples include episodes of scientific discovery (he

⁷⁶ Ashley is identified in this way: "Myron Lucius Ashley, Ph. D., Instructor, American Correspondance School."

discusses Darwin and Kepler) but also more pedestrian cases (such as coming to recognize a figure one approaches from a distance).

To support his argument, Ashley gives a brief historical description of theories of hypothesis, and Dewey's addition to the chapter occurs here. He presents Whewell as an example of someone holding the common view that hypotheses are essentially lucky guesses. Now, Whewell does say that a hypothesis is often a "happy guess," so there is some warrant to including him in the list of philosophers holding the received view. But it is a very small warrant, and, as I have tried to show above, his view is much more complicated. Briefly, a "happy guess" is only possible for one who has a clear understanding of the simple, fundamental ideas and who has decomposed the relevant facts. There is nothing lucky about having done this; it takes much work. So Whewell does not think the data are available to all. To make a guess for Whewell was in part to make an inference. Whewell thinks only the sagacious generate successful hypotheses. Nevertheless, in Dewey's contribution to the chapter, Whewell is associated with the commonly held but, in Dewey's view, false theory that hypotheses spring from the mind of the investigator in a mysterious way and are wholly disconnected from the data they organize. The data are facts, the hypothesis idea.

Though noting the fundamental differences in their views, for the purposes of the argument pursued in the chapter Dewey thinks Mill and Whewell make a similar basic mistake:

[Mill] and Whewell have one point in common: they both agree in the existence of a certain subject-matter which is given for logical purposes quite outside of the logical process itself. (Dewey, MW 2, p. 373)

Dewey regards Mill as having achieved a significant advance over idealist logics because he does not think that ideas, or the content of concepts, occupy a distinct and separate ontological realm of stability. But, according to Dewey, Mill does think that the subject matter for logical investigation is simply given in empirical intuition:

Mill was equally attached to the belief that ultimate reality, as it is for the human mind, is given in sensations, independent of ideas; and that all valid ideas are combinations and convenient ways of using such given material. (Dewey, MW 2, p. 368)⁷⁷

The discussion of Whewell in the chapter on hypothesis was Dewey's only published comments on Whewell (though Whewell is mentioned in some of the syllabi Dewey wrote for his logic courses, it does not appear that Whewell's books were used in his courses). He begins by taking note of some passages in Whewell that are in line with the treatment of logic and the relation between thought and fact that is developed in the volume.

[Whewell] began by stating a distinction which easily might have been developed into a theory of the relation of fact and idea which is in line with that advanced in this chapter, and indeed in this volume as a whole. He questions (Ch. 2) the fixity of the distinction between theory and practice. He points out that what we term facts are in effect simply accepted inferences; and that

⁷⁷ There is insufficient space here to treat Dewey's view of Mill's logic, a subject that Dewey returned to again and again. It is interesting to note, though, that in the only other published work that mentions Whewell (though without discussing his work), a contribution to the *Cyclopedia of Education*, "Deduction and Induction" (MW 7, pp. 239-245), Dewey ends up attributing to Mill a view that is formally much closer to Whewell's! The piece is meant for a wide audience so there is no attempt to cite passages; in the event this would have been impossible for the view Dewey attributes to Mill is not to be found in Mill. That Dewey does not see that the view he does attribute to Mill is actually a near relative of Whewell's is understandable if my speculation is correct: Dewey, once he had decided that Whewell was at bottom an epistemological idealist, did not read his works carefully or consider his work seriously.

what we call theories are describable as facts, in proportion as they become thoroughly established. A true theory is a fact. (Dewey, MW 2, p. 370)

Dewey agrees that the distinction between theory and fact is fluid, and he here indicates that he thinks Whewell should have developed this insight in a different direction. But whereas Dewey gives to this account an instrumentalist justification (a fact is, for some particular purpose, accepted as given, and may be subjected to examination as a theory when some other purpose motivates investigation), for Whewell it is purely historical: a theory comes to be regarded as fact when those who have the right sort of expertise cannot conceive otherwise.

Dewey thinks that Whewell has the right insight but errs in its development. Dewey says instead of developing the insight into an instrumentalist account of logic, Whewell "...[choose] rather to fall back on the Kantian antithesis of sense and thought" (Dewey MW 2, p. 372). This makes a metaphysician of Whewell, and from here Dewey seems almost bored with having to explain his reasons for rejecting this view:

We do not need to present again the objections already offered to this view: the impossibility of any orderly stimulation of ideas and facts, and the impossibility of any check in the imposition of idea upon fact. "Facts" and conception are so thoroughly separate and independent that any sensory datum is indifferently and equally related to any conceivable idea. (Dewey MW 2, p. 373)

Dewey, for all of his interest in the history of philosophy, and in spite of his interest in reconstructing the discipline, misread Whewell. While unfortunate, this is perhaps unsurprising given the high regard Dewey had for Mill's ethical progressivism and given the fact that Mill's logic text was widely used. Though Dewey recognizes some affinity

between the views he was developing and a strand of Whewell's thought, he passes over this quickly and condemns Whewell for his rationalism and idealism.

Dewey continued to write and teach about logic; in notes for a course given in 1922, for example, he is clearly in the early stages of developing the theory of induction that he presents in his *Logic*, published in 1938. Here is how he presents the distinction between induction and deduction: "There is a technique for discovering and describing data (socalled [*sic*] induction) and for defining and developing meanings – deductive."⁷⁸ This prefigures his view that induction consists of the various strategies taken to generate facts or data, and it shows that he was committed to a view of induction that was quite at odds with a formal account.

VI. Dewey on induction in *Logic*

Dewey takes logic to be the study of inquiry. This is the core of Dewey's position, and it remains constant from his early work in the *Studies in Logical Theory* to the late *Logic*. The early *Studies* was a defense, in general, of treating logic as the study of successful inquiry. The *Logic* aims to provide a more detailed account. At the heart of Dewey's epistemological reconstruction of inquiry is something like Whewell's fundamental antithesis of philosophy. He says that

Inquiry is the directed or controlled transformation of an indeterminate situation into a determinately unified one. The transition is achieved by

⁷⁸ Unpublished notes from the Dewey Collection, collection 102/04/1, Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University.

means of operations of two kinds which are in functional correspondence with each other. One kind of operations deals with ideational or conceptual subject-matter. It anticipates a solution, and is marked off from fancy because, or in so far as, it becomes operative in instigation and direction of new observations yielding new factual material. The other kind of operations is made up of activities involving the techniques and organs of observation. ...The ground and criterion of the execution of this work of emphasis, selection and arrangement is to delimit the problem in such a way that existential material may be provided with which to test the ideas that represent possible modes of solution. (Dewey LW 12, p. 121)

I stress again that, like Whewell's *fundamental antithesis of philosophy*, this is an epistemological distinction, not a metaphysical one. It is an artifact of the attempt to provide a theoretical account of reasoning. The operations dealing with conceptual subject matter encompass the analysis of concepts, and here formal techniques for the analysis of implication are appropriate. Dewey thinks that the advances made in formal logic contribute to the understanding of inquiry; the apparatus of formal logic simplifies and solidifies the analysis of conceptual subject matter. It is, therefore, wrong to suggest that Dewey's logic 'undermines' the approach taken by Russell and others. In fact they are complementary. Both Dewey and Whewell see the process of acquiring knowledge as containing two epistemologically distinguishable modes: the clarification and analysis of concepts and the acquisition and organization of empirical data. That the modes are distinguishable carries no implications for the being of thought or its objects.

For Dewey, induction, then, is the movement in thought wherein conceptual innovations are brought to bear explicitly on empirical subject matter. Induction does not proceed merely by accumulating several instances of something but by organizing

material such that it is taken to be a particular instance of some kind.⁷⁹ According to the Millian formal account, as understood by Dewey, the general claim that malaria is transmitted by mosquito bites is justified by some number of particular instances of malarial transmission. But Dewey thinks this obscures the fact that seeing something as an instance of malarial transmission requires a complex combination of conceptual and empirical analysis and organization (of which the method of comparing instances is just one among many others). Once these processes have allowed some occurrence to be seen as a case of malarial transmission, that is as a paradigm case of a kind or class or event, the induction to the general claim is a trivial matter (or, as Dewey puts it with some exaggeration, “a matter of pure tautology” (Dewey, LW 12, p. 432)):

...“induction” is a name for the complex of methods by which a given case is determined to be representative, a function that is expressed in its being a *specimen* or *sample* case. The problem of inductive inquiry, and the precautions that have to be observed in conducting it, all have to do with ascertaining that the given case *is* representative, or is a sample or specimen. (Dewey, LW 12, 432)

Dewey has two arguments against the view that induction succeeds via enumeration of instances.⁸⁰ First, the only way to make such arguments valid, that is, the only way in which the instances could be taken as justification for the general claim, is if a premise is added stating the uniformity of nature. Mill takes this to be a premise of all valid inductive arguments. But such a premise cannot be justified deductively (without

⁷⁹ Kinds for Dewey are not metaphysical realities but groupings that are useful for some purpose.

⁸⁰ The first argument appears in Dewey (LW 12, pp. 323-328); both arguments appear in more concise form in a draft manuscript page for a chapter of the *Logic* (Dewey Collection, collection 102/52/18, Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University).

relying on antiquated metaphysical assumptions) so, if it is justified it is justified inductively. But then the argument is circular. Second, Dewey denies that nature is uniform and he denies that bare experience ever presents us with instances of a kind. For Dewey here, everything in experience is particular: the red that we see on the tip of a bird's wing changes in brightness and hue from moment to moment, and is not "identical" to the red seen on the tip of a different bird of the same kind. Seeing all of these as instances of red is an inference, a complicated movement of reasoning that involves conceptual work as well as refinements in observations.⁸¹

VII. Common sense and science

Finally, the relationship between common sense or everyday reasoning and scientific reasoning is, for Dewey, neither one of formal identity, as it is for Mill, nor of radical discontinuity, as it is for Whewell. Instead Dewey sees the methods of science as representing the most successful ways of transforming problematic situations into relatively ordered and settled conditions allowing for the continuation and growth of experience. That is to say that, when projects or plans or goals are frustrated by an intransigent reality, the method of careful analysis of ideational subject matter, rigorous

⁸¹ When I presented this material to an audience at an SAAP conference (as noted earlier, an organization composed primarily of Dewey's admirers), someone objected to this by saying that "Dewey was not a nominalist." This is symptomatic of the unfortunate tendency of philosophers under the professional image to think that the ideas philosophers have can always be reduced to well-known views or positions. There is a crucial difference between noting what Dewey wrote in his private papers and identifying him as a nominalist, as that position is defined in contemporary philosophy.

empirical observation and testing, and careful consideration and comparison of outcomes is more likely to produce conditions of successful completion than alternative methods, such as the reliance on traditional coping methods, appeal to authority or custom or relegating outcomes to fate. The success, in general, of scientific methods is a solution to the problem of intelligent inquiry but it also poses several problems: 1) How can the methods of science be applied to social and cultural problems? 2) How can the methods and discoveries of science be made to fit with traditions and customs that provide meaning? And, 3) What do the successes of the various sciences imply about what the world is like and where humans belong? These are, for Dewey, the properly philosophical questions that arise from the interest in science.

I think Dewey's view of the relationship between science and common sense is that science provides a model for the investigation of particular kinds of difficulties that arise when practices and needs achieve a high level of complexity. If the problem is how to scramble an egg, the scientific method is the wrong implement. Custom or authority here provide the proper means. But if the problem is what to do with children so that they will, at some time in the future, be prepared to participate intelligently in democratic institutions, then understanding how scientific advances and discoveries have been made is relevant. Relevant, but not determinant, because, again, recognizing that there is a method for resolving problematic situations that has been successful in some inquiries does not just solve some problems but it presents a new one: how to apply to people and

institutions methods that have been shown to deal successfully with physical subject matter.

In contrast to Mill, Dewey doesn't think that common sense constantly performs inferences that are formally like scientific inferences. Most of the time habit and custom operate without intervention of thought. When problems do arise, such as when an egg needs to be scrambled, depending on custom or authority provides for the continuation of experience. The problem with common sense is that, when the problems become complicated, habits and custom interfere with the recognition that some new procedure is required. For Dewey providing a theoretical account of scientific inference and reforming scientific education are the only ways to make common sense more intelligent. In contrast to Whewell, Dewey sees inquiry as a common response to difficult or problematic situations. Science is a *response to* a particular kind and complexity of problem, not a unique *kind of* response. Dewey thinks there is intelligence in some inherited or customary responses, and the study of inquiry can illuminate these. Unlike Whewell, Dewey thinks logic includes an analysis of common sense.

VIII. Conclusion

I have argued that Dewey's work, especially his work on logic, has been neglected primarily because, when it has been read, it has been read in the light of contemporary developments in formal logic. In this light it looks antiquated. The work is correctly understood when it is read as responding to the conversations surrounding

logic, science and epistemology which were occurring toward the end of the 19th century, conversations that had their origins in the debates between Mill and Whewell. Further, understanding Dewey's work can contribute to some contemporary philosophical discussions – Dewey's theory of induction offers an alternative to formal theories which have been bogged down for some time in the problem of justification. Moreover, Charles Peirce, whose work in semiotics and logic has been of interest to contemporary philosophers, also wrote about the Mill-Whewell debate. He too took the debate to be important for understanding induction, though this feature of his work has not been explored. The historical context approach has the potential to uncover philosophical ground that has been neglected and that can contribute to philosophical progress. In addition, the historical approach can identify places where a historical figure got things wrong. In contemporary philosophy under the professional image, Dewey's admirers mostly refrain from attributing errors and mistakes, of the kind identified above, to Dewey because this would have the practical effect of supplying Dewey's critics with more ammunition. Philosophy under the professional image becomes this kind of reductionist battle over territory. We will see in the next chapter that a similar pattern occurs in the way philosophers read the moral philosophy of Dewey and Thoreau.

Chapter 6 Dewey, Thoreau and Moral Philosophy

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses the desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?

-Dewey, *Experience and Education*

Our whole life is startlingly moral.

-Thoreau, *Walden*

I. Introduction - contemporary moral philosophy

When contemporary philosophers write about morality and ethics they rarely avoid discussing hypothetical cases that force one to confront, immediately, a decision that will lead to the intense suffering or death of some if not many people. In a book often used in introductory ethics courses, Gilbert Harman, for example, begins the first chapter in this way:

Can moral principles be tested and confirmed in the way scientific principles can? Consider the principle that, if you are given a choice between five people alive and one dead or five people dead and one alive, you should always choose to have five people alive and one dead rather than the other way round. (Harman (1977) p. 3)

Another commonly used book in introductory ethics courses, Peter Singer's *Practical Ethics*, has twelve chapters, the titles of three of which begin with the phrase "Taking Life." Chapter 4 is entitled "What's Wrong with Killing?", and chapter 11 is about "Civil Disobedience, Violence and Terrorism" (Singer (2011, 3rd ed.)). In the general

introductory textbook *Thinking Through Philosophy: An Introduction*, the first example discussed in the chapter on ethics seems, in comparison, almost benign:

Consider how we respond to concrete moral dilemmas where we are faced with a choice of two evils – for example, we must decide whether to tell the truth to someone and cause them pain or instead to lie and spare them this suffering. (Horner & Westacott (2000) p. 127)

Still, the emphasis here is on the high stakes of the decision: to lie or cause suffering and pain.

And it is not that these exciting and extreme examples from undergraduate texts are simply there to attract the attention of students to philosophy. In a recent edition of the professional journal *Ethics*, one of the four articles is called "Vague Projects and the Puzzle of the Self-Torturer." It begins like this:

In Warren Quinn's notorious puzzle of the self-torturer, a person has agreed to wear a device that delivers a constant but imperceptible electric shock. She is then offered the following trade-off: she will receive a large sum of money—say, \$100,000—if she agrees to raise the voltage on the device by a marginal, that is, imperceptible or just barely perceptible, amount. She knows that she will be offered this same trade-off again each time she agrees to raise the voltage. It seems that, at each step of the way, the agent should and would raise the voltage; after all, each rise in voltage makes at most a marginal difference in pain, well worth a gain of \$100,000, so it would be irrational to do otherwise. But of course in so doing, she would eventually find herself in unbearable pain and would gladly return all of the money, even pay some in addition, to be restored to the initial setting, at which she was poor but pain free. Thus the self-torturer appears to face a dilemma: no matter which choice she makes—continue indefinitely or stop at some point—her action seems irrational or leads quickly to a state of affairs that no rational agent would accept. (Tenenbaum & Raffman (2012) p. 9)

This focus on questions in which the stakes are high, which force one to choose life or death (or at least pain and suffering) *immediately*, is evidence of the professional image of philosophy doing its work. Philosophers who write about ethics see themselves as

doing something *fundamental*: they are asking questions about the most significant and challenging problems facing people. They also take themselves to be working on questions of complete *generality*, since, of course, everyone dies and everyone feels pain, and thinking about examples of the sorts described above is thought to be the way to achieve the appropriate level of abstraction. Most introductory works make this explicit by, early on, arguing against versions of relativism that, they say, are common among the philosophically uninitiated (cf. Horner & Westacott (2000) pp. 126-129).

It should be clear from the examples above that many philosophers writing about ethics favor the methodology of thought experiment and intuition-testing. Even in the field of applied ethics, where the focus is on practical problems instead of theoretical questions, the discussion very often is pursued through the use of implausible and fictional examples rather than ordinary or factual examples. In her famous paper about abortion called "A Defense of Abortion," for example, Judith Jarvis Thomson asks her readers to consider: a) waking up to find themselves in a hospital with their circulatory system connected to that of "a famous unconscious violinist;" b) finding themselves trapped in a very tiny house with a "rapidly growing baby," a baby growing so fast that they will be soon crushed to death; c) being sick with a disease for which the only cure is "the touch of Henry Fonda's cool hand on [their] fevered brow;" and d) a world in which "people-seeds" float around and sprout into babies when they lodge in carpeting (Thomson (1971)). This article, and others very much like it, constitute the core

curriculum in classes with titles like "Contemporary Moral Problems" at many colleges and universities.

Finally, the questions moral philosophers pursue are considered to be formal – that is why they can be broached using devices like the growing child or the self-torturer. It is thought that abstracting away from particular real cases and carefully constructing thought-experiments allows the philosopher to focus with laser-like precision on the real questions that can then be treated formally, using the system of formal logic with perhaps some additions like operators for 'should' and 'must.'

Much conventional moral philosophy these days tries to explain, justify or, failing that, explain away what it takes to be our intuitions about what we, as moral agents, may and may not do. That is, it uses a method of intuition testing to clarify our use of normative language. Allan Gibbard, for example, says “What to do can be a serious question, the question I ask myself in thinking my way to a decision. Ethics concerns what to do. In morality figure injunctions 'Thou shalt' and 'Thou shalt not'" (Gibbard (2003) p. 13). In other words, moral philosophy is concerned with the normative question.

Korsgaard identifies what she calls "the normative question":

a first-person question that arises for the moral agent who must actually do what morality says. When you want to know what a philosopher's theory of normativity is, you must place yourself in the position of an *agent* on whom morality is making a difficult claim. You then ask the philosopher: must I really do this? Why must I do it? And his answer is his answer to the normative question. (Korsgaard (1996) p. 160)

On the standard account of moral philosophy, this is the timeless question that moral

philosophy tries to answer: it is perfectly general, apparently of fundamental importance, and is best approached through inventive thought experiments that abstract away from any distracting particulars, allowing the application of formal methods of analysis.

If we take this to be the central problem of moral philosophy, we have a way of identifying works that belong to the tradition of moral philosophy. Such works typically fit, more or less, into a model that lends an aura of rigor to the enterprise in virtue of exhibiting the virtues of formality and systematicity. This model suggests that the moral philosopher:

1. Thinks of moral philosophy as (he thinks of) science, an organized body of knowledge, whose form is ideally a demonstration (i.e. one that utilizes the proof procedures of formal logic);
2. Thinks such a science requires a first or fundamental or at least very general principle;
3. Thinks such a principle can be discovered by the correct kind of investigation of the world;
4. Thinks the object of the science is to give us rules for deciding what to do;
5. And finally, can be read as trying to answer a timeless version of the question about what to do.

When moral philosophy is thought of as primarily addressing the normative problem, and when Mill and Kant are read selectively so that they appear to be using this model and become the significant figures in the tradition, a canon emerges as well as a way of reading past philosophers. Philosophers who aren't primarily concerned with the very general normative question or with proposing abstract and formal solutions are either neglected or "rationally reconstructed" as having a view about the normative question.

In this chapter I intend to show how the professional image distorts the way some contemporary philosophers think of the project of moral philosophy and, in particular,

how it distorts the way they read historical philosophers. It is true of course that some historical philosophers used examples and that they wrote about cases where the stakes were high. This thin resemblance, though, is used as evidence that contemporary philosophers are engaged in essentially the same project as all historical philosophers. But, this is merely the professional image at work, being projected back onto historical works.

I discuss, in addition to Dewey's "normative" philosophy, the work of Henry Thoreau, for two reasons. First, I want to show that what I have been saying about philosophy is not limited to its treatment of Dewey: a similar story could be told of many historical writers who have been excluded from the canon. Thoreau is another example. (The limitations of space prevent me from writing about how the professional image distorts the reading of works that constitute the canon.) Second, a number of recent publications have argued for looking to Thoreau as a philosopher (see for example Cafaro (2004), Furtak, Ellsworth & Reid (2012) and Robinson (2004)). A consideration of the ways in which these works, through projecting onto Thoreau the professional image of philosophy, distort his work is, therefore, timely.

II. The recent reception of Dewey's work in moral philosophy

Dewey's admirers continue to see the relevance of his work to moral philosophy, of course, but it is striking that the increasing interest in his work, and pragmatism generally, among some prominent philosophers has focused almost exclusively on his

"naturalism" in metaphysics and epistemology. Robert Brandom's *Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent & Contemporary*, for example, takes up questions in metaphysics, epistemology and the philosophy of language; Philip Kitcher's *Preludes to Pragmatism: Toward a Reconstruction of Philosophy* is mostly devoted to questions in the general philosophy of science (its one chapter on ethics, chapter 13 "Naturalistic Ethics without Fallacies" is really concerned with advancing a metaphysical naturalism that Kitcher associates with Dewey). There is no comparable work by a prominent moral philosopher trying to assimilate Dewey's work.

Harman in the introductory text discussed above provides a clear description of the essential task of the moral philosopher as seen through the professional image. He bemoans the fact that so much teaching in ethics is concerned with "social issues," so much so that "[t]he unhappy effect has been a decline in the philosophical content of courses in ethics and the books designed for use in such courses" (Harman (1977) p. ix).

Here is how he describes that philosophical content that he thinks is in decline:

"Philosophy aims at understanding. In ethics, for example, you must try to develop an overall account of the nature of morality" (Harman (1977) p. ix). Work that does not undertake this fundamental, general task is something other than philosophy. Now, while it is true that Dewey occasionally raised the question of the nature of morality, he thought that question could be pursued only through a consideration of social issues. His

*Ethics*⁸² consists of two parts, the first of which, called "The Beginnings and Growth of Morality," would today be called anthropological and historical. In the second part, called "The Theory of the Moral Life," Dewey explicitly denies that there can be a pure theoretical investigation into the question of the nature of morality. Instead he says that

No fundamental difference exists between systematic moral theory – the general theme of this Second Part of our study – and the reflection an individual engages in when he attempts to find general principles which shall direct and justify his conduct.... Children make at least a start upon the road of theory when they assert that the injunctions of elders are arbitrary, being simply a matter of superior position. Any adult enters the road when, in the presence of moral perplexity, of doubt as to what it is right or best to do, he attempts to find his way out through reflection which will lead him to some principle he regards as dependable. (Dewey (LW 7) pp. 163-164)

This picture of what moral theory is, particularly in seeing it as in some sense including the way in which children first start to speculate about the source of moral authority, is so far removed from the professional image of moral theory that it is not surprising that contemporary philosophers have found little in Dewey's writings to use in their projects trying to define the nature of morality.

Dewey's admirers, on the other hand, have tried to defend his work in moral philosophy as work that merits the attention of other philosophers. In doing so, they have frequently projected the professional image of philosophy onto these works. As I have argued in previous chapters, this can be seen as a tactical decision given the constraints

⁸² Dewey co-wrote this book, originally published in 1908, with James Hayden Tufts, his colleague at the University of Chicago. It was intended to be a textbook for use in college courses in ethics. A new edition, significantly revised, was issued in 1932; it is from this edition that my quotations are taken. See the introduction to the collected works edition (Dewey (LW 7), written by Abraham Edel and Elizabeth Flower, for details about the interesting history of this work.

generated by the forces of professionalization: philosophy today is dominated by the professional image, so that if you want to present some historical thinker as worthy of philosophical attention, a good way to start is with the assumptions built into the professional image about what philosophy is and what its distinctive questions are. As a tactic, then, this way of reading Dewey has some credibility. But it carries the serious risk of distorting Dewey's thought in a way that erases its insights.

Gregory Pappas's recent book, *John Dewey's Ethics* (2008) is a good example of how Dewey's admirers have taken the tactical approach. Pappas is an influential member of the group of Dewey's admirers, frequently appearing on panels at The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy meetings and other events sponsored by the Dewey Center. His book is published by Indiana University Press, one of the main publishers of work by Dewey's admirers.

Pappas is aware of this danger, and he tries to pursue a middle course:

There needs to be a more detailed consideration of the arguments and views in current moral theory from a Deweyan perspective. My present project, however, issues a warning: we must not become so eager to become part of the mainstream philosophical dialogue that we compromise Dewey's unique and most worthwhile contributions. The Dewey who is worth reconstructing is often the one who calls into question the basic assumptions that ground present debates. A selective reconsideration of Dewey's ethics fails to represent the more radical Dewey and may amount to a failure to use his approach in the most productive way. (Pappas (2008) p. 3)

This sounds promising, but it quickly becomes apparent that what Pappas has not called into question is the conception of philosophy at the heart of the professional image.

Pappas opens his book with the claim that "Dewey had a cohesive and coherent ethics

developed in many writings that spanned his long career" (Pappas (2008) p. 1). He goes on:

It is a moral philosophy that provides answers to questions raised by moral agents in the midst of living, such as: How should we live? How should we approach moral problems and reach moral judgments? And: How should we settle moral disagreements? Dewey wanted to provide better answers to these moral questions than had traditional ethical theory. (Pappas (2008) p. 1)

So Pappas does take Dewey to be answering the timeless question pursued by moral philosophy. Gone here is the emphatic way in which Dewey always (tried to⁸³) ground his discussion of moral questions in concrete historical and cultural detail. Of course, Pappas is aware of Dewey's commitment to the particular in his moral philosophy – it would be impossible to be a careful reader of Dewey and miss it. But the constraints imposed by the profession of philosophy are real and influence the way Dewey's admirers are forced to present his work if they hope it to have a wider appeal.

Since this is the way Dewey's moral philosophy is treated by his admirers in books published by sympathetic presses, it should come as no surprise to see him given the full professional treatment when he is discussed in more mainstream and so dominant venues. The recent *Cambridge Companion to Dewey* is such a venue. In it Dewey's work is measured against the standards set by the professional image. In her article, "Dewey's Moral Philosophy," Jennifer Welchman situates Dewey's work amongst the

⁸³ It cannot be denied that Dewey's historical narratives often combine sweeping historical narrative with potted accounts of individual thinkers, thereby undermining a genuine understanding of narrower contexts. But that doesn't affect the larger point, which is just that Dewey thought moral philosophy had to begin with an understanding of the time in which particular questions are asked.

various views on offer in contemporary moral philosophy. He is, she says, a naturalist like Hume but, unlike Hume, a cognitivist, which means that he is forced to confront the puzzles that contemporary philosophers have identified as problems for those views. Dewey, like all cognitivists, Welchman says, "holds that value judgments, moral and non-moral, make assertions about things, acts, and persons that can be true or false in a pragmatic sense" (Welchman (2010) p. 166). But since these are judgments about the world, such a view, she says, has a problem explaining how they can be motivating:

For cognitivists, however, conclusions of moral reasoning are propositions about what is or is not the case. But this can seem to leave our motivation to act upon them unexplained. (Welchman (2010) p. 167)

This is a familiar (alleged) problem in contemporary moral philosophy, but it is certainly not one that Dewey would have recognized: the worry that a judgment about the value of something, because it is a judgment *about the world*, is thereby not motivating is one that can seem, well, unmotivated unless one is familiar with the kinds of examples and intuitions contemporary moral philosophers write about.⁸⁴

III. Dewey and the philosophy of education

Another reason why Dewey's "normative" writings are rarely cited or discussed by contemporary philosophers is that he devoted the majority of them to discussions of specific questions of particular social problems without abstracting from the historical

⁸⁴ For similar professionalized treatments of Dewey, see Fesmire (2003) and Welchman (1995).

and cultural origins of those problems. Many of these writings are on education, but they concern the practical problems of teaching and learning. We have seen that this tends to make his work look, to contemporary philosophers, unphilosophical.

But it is also the case that education is not a prominent subject in contemporary philosophy. It is only relatively recently that philosophers began to neglect education in their scholarly writings. There is a striking list of philosophers who have thought that an understanding of political authority, of justice and morality, and of knowledge and science required understanding education: the list would include at least Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Mill, Russell, Whitehead, James, Dewey, and Adorno. Given this list, the fact that the philosophy of education has for the most part disappeared from American philosophy departments is surprising. For example, of the 36 contributors to the recent (2003) *A Companion to the Philosophy of Education* edited by Randall Curren, only two have primary appointments in philosophy departments. What explains this?

The professionalization of philosophy and changes in the institutional way teacher training is handled have led to the current division of labor. This has been fueled by the huge increase in the numbers and percentages of students who attend school over the last 150 years, and the corresponding huge increase in the number of teachers. According to The National Center for Education Statistics, in the academic year 1889-1890 there were about 14.5 million students enrolled in education institutions in the United States; in 2009

there were 75 million.⁸⁵ Another study showed that in 1850 only about 47% of 5-19 year olds in the United States were enrolled in school; in 1991 93% were (Snyder (1993) p. 14). Between 1870 and 1980 the average number of days students attended school doubled (from about 80 to about 160) (Snyder (1993) p. 28). This vast increase in the number of students and in school days was combined with an even greater increase in the number of teachers: in the academic year 1869-1870, there were about 200,000 adults working in schools as educators; by 1989-1990 there were over 2.5 million (Snyder (1993) p. 34).

This huge increase in the number of people pursuing teaching licensure has created incentives for colleges and universities to build schools of education around licensing programs. Since most programs require a course in the philosophy of education, and since philosophy departments cannot compete with the vast numbers of students in schools of education, these schools have cornered the market on this work.

This is a bad thing. The way education curriculums are designed, these philosophy of education courses are always institutionally distinguished from what are called “methods courses” that deal with the practical question of what to teach. So teachers come to see philosophy of education as separate from their worries about what to do Monday morning. For example, in my experience, students seeking state licensure see the philosophy of education courses that they are required to take as impractical, unhelpful and idealistic. This shows the influence of the professional image of

⁸⁵ http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_003.asp, accessed 1/17/2013

philosophy even on those working in other departments: philosophical questions about education are not seen as bound up with practical questions about teaching as they had been for Plato and as they were by Dewey.

I take it for granted that improving the system of public education is a moral concern. And I think philosophers can play a central, constructive role in dealing with these problems. But they aren't. First, as I have just said, philosophy of education has disappeared from most philosophy departments. But I also want to criticize some work that does seem to involve philosophical treatment of questions concerning education. I will use two examples that I think are representative, one from scholars sympathetic to Dewey and one from a philosopher writing from within the professional image. In general, my claim is that these are examples of philosophical work that fail to address the contemporary problems, and that Dewey's work gives a model for work in philosophy of education.

In a recent book, *Dewey's Dream*, three scholars (none of them professional philosophers, but each of whom nevertheless has absorbed the professional image) take up what they call the "Dewey problem." They say that they try to do three things. The first is to give a brief history of the development of Dewey's thought. Then

2. We critically analyze Dewey's failure to specify and demonstrate empirically the practical means needed to realize his utopian vision.
3. We propose a possible solution in order to stimulate the development of a massive worldwide academic movement dedicated to solving the terribly hard, critically important problem Dewey failed to solve. (Benson, Harkavy & Puckett (2007) p. ix)

I agree that Dewey failed to demonstrate empirically practical means needed to realize a utopian vision. But I don't think Dewey had a utopian vision, and he wasn't trying to solve, once and for all, a terribly hard problem. That is precisely the conception of the aim of philosophy that he rejected. When we read Dewey like this, it is easy to come away thinking that he has very little to offer. After all, whatever the "terribly hard, critically important problem," Dewey failed to solve it (the nature of truth, of ethical judgment, of logic, of consciousness, of democracy...).

There are some prominent philosophers whose work discusses education. Here I will briefly discuss Elizabeth Anderson. In an article published in *Ethics* in 2007 called "Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective," Anderson claims to be using "... Rawls's insights to different ends than Rawls himself did, because [her] concern lies with nonideal theory" (Anderson (2007) p. 621). In other words she means to differentiate her project from those that are simply or primarily theoretical or conceptual. She goes on to say that this implies "...constructing workable criteria of justice in educational opportunity for our currently unjust world, rather than for a well-ordered society" (Anderson (2007) p. 621). But the problem is that she is still theorizing about education from the outside. That is, she is thinking of education as a kind of function in the complicated model of society she works with, not as the actual school buildings and the students and teachers in them. This becomes clear with one of her proposals. She says that her argument about the injustice of social segregation

...entails much more extensive policies designed to integrate education at all levels. For starters, this could include the right of any child to cross municipal lines to be admitted to any public school in which their group is

underrepresented, relative to the demographics of their state ... provided that their parents or guardians pay the school the same tax rate that prevails in the community where the school is located. This would not deter the poor from attending schools in wealthy communities, since the poor typically pay higher school tax rates than the rich do. (Anderson (2007) p. 619)

This is a stunning example of the failure of philosophers to contribute to contemporary political problems. The fact is that, first, in many states, open enrollment has been the norm for years. Second, even before open enrollment, busing as an approach to solving the problem of school segregation met with very little enduring success. Third, open enrollment is at best an experiment, and it raises many problems of its own; for example, many students don't like going to schools in communities where they have no connections. These students have bad experiences. Finally, school districts are currently experiencing serious budget problems because the old schemes for allocating funds don't make as much sense in the era of open enrollment and charter schools. School districts have accumulated responsibility for buildings, buses, technology and staff that cannot be justified given the current enrollment picture. But Anderson ignores all of this.

Philosophers can make contributions if they take a Deweyan approach to the questions of the philosophy of education. Currently, when philosophers consider education, they are likely to ask very general questions like: What kind of good is education? Or, how does education contribute to the good life? For example, in a small volume *On Education* in a series called *Thinking in Action*, Harry Brighouse says that he intends to join in the debates about schools by "...elaborat[ing] and argu[ing] for a set of principles that schools, policymakers, and educators should adopt" (Brighouse (2006) p. 2). As an example, he says

I argue that children have a right to learn about a range of ways of living and to the kind of education that will enable them to reflect on their own way of life in the light of these alternatives. ...I argue that children should be educated so that they can have rich and flourishing lives independently of their participation in the economy.... (Brighouse (2006) p. 2)

Brighouse is trying to answer the questions: what kind of good is education? How can it contribute to the good life? These are good questions to ask, but the problem is that there are no prominent philosophers asking the question Dewey asked: Is the education that children are getting in the public schools a good? In what ways is it a good? What is their experience in school like? These questions are more important because they force us to take a closer look at what goes on in schools, at how children experience their time in school, and at what happens to children in school. The point of asking the kinds of questions Brighouse asks should be to help us to try to answer the questions Dewey asked. But philosophers no longer ask those questions.

In his late work, *Freedom and Culture* (1939), Dewey foresaw the need for the kinds of sociological analyses of education that were produced beginning in the 1970's.⁸⁶ These present radical critiques of the ways social institutions, like schools, are affected by broader economic interests, and they seek to understand the experience children have in school in light of these influences. Too often Dewey is read as a kind of grandfatherly defender of our public schools. But he would have been highly critical of our schools

⁸⁶ See, for example, Anyon (1997), Apple (1990 (1979)), Apple (1982), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Freire (1997 (1970)), Giroux (1983), Illich (1970), Kozol (1967), Kozol (1991), Shor (1996) and Willis (1981 (1977)).

because of what we have learned from the sociological literature on schooling.⁸⁷ It might be hard to think of Dewey, the kindly looking old man typing away on his porch in Connecticut, as a radical, but he was. That is, “radical” is the best we can do with our current topography of the intellectual layout to capture his position. He did not have a naive optimistic faith in our institutions and public figures.

We can see the radical nature of Dewey's work in education by considering his commitment to an experimental approach to the philosophy of education. Dewey oversaw the creation and running of The Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. This meant that a part of his daily work as a philosopher included: interacting with and teaching children; observing and advising teachers; and dealing with issues concerning staffing, building maintenance and relations with parents and the wider community. In other words, Dewey's philosophical work in education was grounded in his practical expertise gained through experience as an educator.⁸⁸

Fundamentally, Dewey began with a problem: we have a child – what should we do with it? The first step is to try to understand it. What does it do? What can it do? How does it respond to the environment? Then, stepping back: what is the world like that this child lives in? What has happened? What are the institutions that will shape the

⁸⁷ I came across an essay called “On Having Survived the Academic Moral Philosophy of the Twentieth Century” by Alasdair MacIntyre (in O’Rourke (2013)) too late to have incorporated a discussion of it into this chapter. But in that essay MacIntyre explicitly criticizes the fact that moral philosophers typically have not looked to sociology and anthropology for insights into how institutions work and how moral systems develop.

⁸⁸ There is an interesting connection here with the emerging consensus in philosophy of science that attention to and experience with the practice of science is expected of philosophers writing about science.

child? Finally, what are our best thoughts about what the world could be like? These are the three matrices in which Dewey thought. The first – understanding the child – is best approached through observation, investigation, and the study of children at home and in school. The second – understanding what the child's world is like – is approached through our own experience, through history and sociology. The third – understanding our hopes for the world – is traditionally a central topic of the humanities. Philosophy has the potential to address all three together. That is what Dewey took to be the opportunity for a philosophical contribution to democratic culture.

Dewey's admirers err when they make the tactical decision to write about Dewey as if he had solved the problems of the philosophy of education. That is a mistake, and it is a pernicious one. It directs our attention to texts and their interpretation when the problems we face are in the world. It is particularly ironic that people interested in Dewey should make this mistake. Dewey thought that what he had done was to draw attention through philosophical investigation to problems in the culture, and that the contribution the philosophical work made was to present a new, better understanding of the problem. The charter school movement is a good way to see this distinction. To some, like Joe Nathan, who runs the Center for School Change in Minnesota which advocates for charter schools, and President Obama, charter schools represent the solution to a problem. But Dewey would have said that they present us with a new set of problems, and that the philosopher can contribute by helping us to see these new

questions. In *Freedom and Culture*, in which Dewey is clearly rethinking some of his more youthful optimism about American democracy, he says this:

...after a century of belief that the Common School system was bound by the very nature of its work to be what its earlier apostles called a "pillar of the republic", we are learning that everything about the public schools, its official agencies of control, organization and administration, the status of teachers, the subjects taught and methods of teaching them, the prevailing modes of discipline, set *problems*; and that the problems have been largely ignored as far as the relation of schools to democratic institutions is concerned. In fact the attention these things have received from various technical standpoints has been one reason why the central question has been obscured. (Dewey, LW 13, pp. 92-93)

In other words, as we have identified problems and created reforms designed to address them, we have often failed to keep something like the philosophical perspective: why do we have schools? What do we hope children get out of school? While charter schools have responded to real problems in the large public schools, we need to ask the question: does the experience children have in charter schools, many of which have the specific mission of attracting children of a particular cultural or racial or ethnic background, help to meet the aim of building democratic communities? This, for Dewey, is a paradigmatic philosophical problem. Education, as it is actually experienced by students, teachers, parents and the community, presents us with problems of knowledge, of ethics, of value, of development, of justice, of logic, and of meaning. And for Dewey, when these problems are confronted in their historical and social context and assessed according to the "democratic ideal," they are philosophical problems. Unlike the philosophers who do "ideal theory," Dewey thought philosophy had to play an active role in shaping institutions:

...the democratic ideal of education is a farcical yet tragic delusion except as the ideal more and more dominates our public system of education.
(Dewey, MW 9, p. 104)

IV. Thoreau and contemporary moral philosophy

As is the case with Dewey, Thoreau's distinctive contribution to moral philosophy is obscured when he is read as if he were pursuing the timeless questions of moral philosophy. This is the way Thoreau is often read when he is read by philosophers and by those who want to think of him as a philosopher. For example, Philip Cafaro's recent book, *Thoreau's Living Ethics* (2004), argues that Thoreau is a "real philosopher." But this reading puts Thoreau in the wrong company. Professional philosophers expect works in moral philosophy to have a distinctive kind of approach to the subject. When Cafaro says that Thoreau is a "real philosopher," he means that Thoreau meets these expectations. He calls Thoreau a real philosopher "...in the modern sense of someone who thought deeply about fundamental ethical issues and whose writings on these issues bear close scrutiny..." (Cafaro (2004) p. ix). But what this means is that, according to Cafaro, Thoreau ends up discovering an answer to the question about why one should be moral or ethical, and the answer is a kind of naturalism. In other words, in a perfectly general way, and ignoring particular cultural and historical determinants, we can see that a certain kind of life is good and worth living, and so we ought to see that we should seek to live this kind of life. The source of the normativity here lies outside the self. Cafaro says:

The joylessness of Thoreau's neighbors testifies to their failure and

impoverishment. Life is good, and human lives should be pleasurable and enjoyable, for the most part. (Cafaro (2004) pp. 207-208)

Cafaro reads the important passage (at the end of the chapter of Walden called "Where I Lived, and Why") about finding a hard bottom as evidence that Thoreau thinks we can find a foundation for our ethical judgments in, as Cafaro puts it, "knowledge of the way things are." Thoreau writes:

Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and State, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call *reality*, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then begin, having a *point d'appui*, below freshet and frost and fire, a place where you might found a wall or a state, or set a lamp-post safely, or perhaps a gauge, not a Nilometer, but a Realometer, that future ages might know how deep a freshet of shams and appearances had gathered from time to time. If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) pp. 92-93)

On Cafaro's reading of the passage there is a distinction to be made between our "social and intellectual constructions" and reality, and that, to justify ethical judgments, we need to get *past* these constructions *to* reality. It is in attributing this view of the centrality of knowledge about reality in ethical judgment to Thoreau that I find Cafaro projecting the standard model of moral philosophy onto Thoreau. Cafaro's conception of Thoreau's naturalism commits him to seeing knowledge of the way the world is as in some sense a foundation for moral judgments.

Another recent work, *Thoreau's Importance For Philosophy* (2012), is explicit

about its advocacy: it aims to open "...up the lines of communication between Thoreau's project and the central areas of philosophy" (Furtak, Ellsworth & Reid (2012) p. 13).

While the editors, in their introductory chapter, are aware of the ways in which contemporary expectations can distort the reading of *Walden*, they adopt the tactic identified earlier: they project the professional image onto Thoreau's work:

The metaphysician will find suggestive remarks on the nature of reality and our fascination with appearances; Kantians will discover an idealist who praises the life of the knowing subject and her conceptual contribution to the perceived world; ... aestheticians and philosophers of language are likely to find a wealth of material that is well worth pondering; and, of course, the moralist will come face to face with either an ally or an eloquent and quarrelsome foe. (Furtak, Ellsworth & Reid (2012) p. 4)

Thoreau's importance to philosophy, then, is reduced to the way in which he can be understood as holding views on and debating the big questions in a way familiar to contemporary philosophers.

V. Thoreau, the imagination, and romantic philosophy

It is well known that John Stuart Mill suffered a serious mental collapse during his adolescence. It is less often noted that the crisis convinced him that normative theory is not all there is to moral philosophy. Here is how Mill describes the nadir of the "crisis" in his mental history:

In this frame of mind it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, 'No!' At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in continual pursuit of this end.

The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for. (Mill (1944 (1873)) p. 94)

Mill says that one of the important "changes in his opinions" when the crisis had passed was that "...I, for the first time, gave its proper place, among the prime necessities of human well-being, to the internal culture of the individual." Later in discussing the importance Wordsworth had for him at the time he says

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. (Mill (1944 (1873)) p. 104)

Here I present an interpretation of Thoreau's moral philosophy that sees it as addressing this problem, the problem of finding that one doesn't care about life. Thoreau develops an account of self-culture or "culture of the feelings" focused on the development and appreciation of the role of the imagination in experience. While this is not exactly Mill's way out, it shares the emphasis placed on the importance of the self. This is a neglected topic in much contemporary moral philosophy which, ironically, leads us to expect philosophical work on ethics and morality to do what Mill does in *Utilitarianism*, a mainstay of introductory courses: address the normative question and tell us what, as human beings *simpliciter*, to do. As a result Thoreau's significance as a moral philosopher is either neglected or distorted by the attempt to draw a normative account from his writings.

Thoreau's approach is a part of a historical tendency to see moral philosophy as less about what we may and may not do and more about understanding what the possibilities

are for living lives of meaning, where these possibilities are tested against actual experience and where they emerge out of particular experience. My thesis about Thoreau is that he thinks that the active involvement and appreciation of the creative imagination in experience is what makes a life meaningful, and that the atrophy of the imagination caused by a variety of factors in modern life leads to the "quiet desperation" with which so many of his neighbors are afflicted. *Walden* is the account of a part of his life spent living through his imagination. I focus here on the central chapters called "Baker Farm" and "Higher Laws" because they offer an alternative model to the one that dominates contemporary philosophy: in them, Thoreau takes the occasion of an unsettling experience to imagine his way to a new sense of his connection with his neighbors. He is not interested in formally valid or defensible general principles.

Thoreau's response to the problem of "quiet desperation" is the cultivation of the self, accomplished in part by recognizing and developing the imagination's role in ordinary experience. But this raises the question of the relevance to *moral* philosophy, to the question of our obligations to others. In fact *Walden* is aimed directly at the other, as a kind of challenge to conventional ways of responding to moral questions. Typically Thoreau's encounters with his neighbors involve challenging them to examine their way of life. In the two chapters, "Baker Farm" and "Higher Laws," Thoreau is challenged himself by the gulf that separates his experience from that of the poor Irish family, and this leads to an attempt to reconstruct his experience.

"Baker Farm" begins with Thoreau in full stride, experiencing a world infused with

sacred significance: "Sometimes I rambled to pine groves, standing like temples..." (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 190). The first long paragraph ends, "These were the shrines I visited both summer and winter" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 191). In the next paragraph Thoreau describes standing "in the very abutment of a rainbow's arch," and, he says, "for a short while, I lived like a dolphin" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 191). The language is poetic and suggestive.

The chapter goes on to describe his happening, in the middle of a rainstorm, to find himself in the squalid cabin of the family of John Field, a poor Irish laborer. Reading the chapter one gets the impression that Thoreau lectured Field in front of his wife and all the children about how much better he, Thoreau, was at making his little money go a long way. Thoreau says that he "tried to help him with my experience" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 193), but this effort fails. As he is leaving Thoreau says that his present preoccupations (loafing, fishing) "appeared for an instant trivial to me who had been sent to school and college" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) pp. 195-196).

What happened at Baker Farm was a failure to merge experiences, a failure to genuinely bring his experience to bear upon Field's life. Instead Thoreau reflects on his inability to "find the flower and fruit" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 73) of the man. At the end of the chapter he is rationalizing: "Poor John Field! - I trust he does not read this..." (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 197). But that thought – that he doesn't have to worry because John Field won't read the book – is unsettling because it means avoiding confronting the real issue – he had merely presented his manners to the Fields, and so he had failed to

acknowledge their humanity. Thoreau's failure to have much to offer the Field family is particularly unsettling because it is a failure of what Thoreau considers "love for one's fellow-man in the broadest sense" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 71). It is the failure to find "the flower and fruit of a man: that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavour our intercourse" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 73).

When he finds that he has nothing to offer to John Field, he is faced with a problem that challenges his entire conception; his experience is no longer infused with thoughts of the sacred. And so, in the next chapter, "Higher Laws," we find Thoreau turning to a wide-ranging examination of his psychology. He is prompted by his difficulty knowing what to say to John Field to try to understand his own sympathies. The chapter begins with a description of the real "savage delight" he feels at the thought of devouring a woodchuck raw; he says he has in himself two instincts – a higher and a "primitive rank and savage one," and that he 'reverences' them both (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 198). This intense focus on the particular – on his experience with the Fields and on his own temperament – contrasts with the central role played by the perfectly general in contemporary moral philosophy.

Thoreau brings to the fore tensions within his own thinking here and, for a time, tries to resolve them by appealing to principles, higher laws, that will achieve a kind of unity that the experience at Baker Farm has unsettled. But these are principles of imagination, not general and formal principles of reason. For example, he says animal food, tea and coffee "were not agreeable to my imagination" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p.

202) (Field's coffee-drinking was one of the things Thoreau was critical of). Again, he says that "it appeared more beautiful to live low and fare hard in many respects" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 202). And finally he says "it may be vain to ask why the imagination will not be reconciled to flesh and fat. I am satisfied that it is not" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 203). This work of finding principles of the imagination was prompted, I suggest, by his failing to have anything to say to John Field. He may have something to say, next time he sees him. In fact the last strange paragraph of the chapter, which suddenly shifts to a present-tense description of a "John Farmer" relaxing and recreating after a hard day's work, may have been written as a poetical description of how John Field might start to imagine himself into a different world:

A voice said to him, -Why do you stay here and live this mean moiling life, when a glorious existence is possible for you? Those same stars twinkle over other fields than these. -But how to come out of this condition and migrate thither? All that he could think of was to practice some new austerity, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with ever increasing respect. (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 209)

This trick, of imagining the other places from which the stars are visible, is one of the "simple tests" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 10) Thoreau mentions in chapter 1 that can help to relieve the "tedium and ennui" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 9) of ordinary life. In other words this whole chapter, focused as it is on resolving a very specific kind of failure to meet an obligation, is a kind of moral experiment. This is what is distinctive of Thoreau's approach: he thinks of moral philosophy not as the pursuit of timeless questions through formal analysis but as practical problems that each require unique solutions. Thoreau does not "mean to prescribe rules" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 15) to everyone; rather he

speaks "mainly to the mass of men who are discontented, and idly complaining of the hardness of their lot or of the times, when they might improve them" (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 15). That is to say that he is not trying to answer a timeless philosophical question but to speak to particular problems that arise in particular contexts. He is for experiments in ways of living:

I would not have any one adopt *my* mode of living on any account; for, beside that before he has fairly learned it I may have found out another for myself, I desire that there be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue *his own* way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead. (Thoreau (2000 (1854)) p. 67)

This pluralistic, contextualized approach to moral philosophy itself has a long history that is worth preserving.

VI. Conclusion

The previous chapter highlighted the role logic plays in contemporary philosophy. Its commitment to the conception of valid inference as the model of good thinking privileges the search for very general, if not universal, principles to serve as premises in arguments. This characterizes much contemporary work in moral philosophy. Moral philosophers typically look for a general principle or at least a theoretical model; the connection to particular problems is secondary. Such a focus establishes the discipline as one concerned primarily with general questions and in such a way that formal analysis as developed in discussion of axiomatic and other inferential systems is the primary tool for doing philosophy.

This conception is part of the professional image of philosophy; it is used even in the interpretation of historical philosophers like Dewey and Thoreau who privileged the particular difficulties people face in ordinary life. The discipline of philosophy loses the chance to utilize their insights when they are read through the professional image.

Chapter 7 Conclusion: Tensions in the Professional Image

One of the most immediate duties of philosophical reconstruction with respect to the development of viable instruments for inquiry into human or moral facts is to deal systematically with *human* processes.

-Dewey, introduction to reprint of *Reconstruction in Philosophy*

I. Introduction

Today the dominant conception of philosophy among professional philosophers is that there are a number of central philosophical questions that have been around for a long time because they are very difficult. They are also fundamental in the sense that they concern the foundations of all of our knowledge. The fundamental nature of these questions implies that specialized disciplines or forms of inquiry cannot cope with them. The questions are so basic that they challenge the assumptions and methodologies of particular disciplines. But logic, on this conception, provides a normative account of reasoning that is not limited by particular disciplinary assumptions or methodologies. This logic formalizes principles of deductive inference, which means it privileges claims of perfect generality or sweeping universality. The importance of philosophy, on the dominant picture, is that, since these questions bedevil any kind of inquiry, philosophy has to be of central importance to everyone, and it is implicated in all thinking.

I have argued in the previous chapters that this conception of philosophy crystallized relatively recently, in the mid- to late twentieth century, in part as a result of the demands of professionalization and the importance of disciplinary identity in the

contemporary university. The image exercises an influence not only over philosophers reading and writing about historical philosophers; it also shapes the practice of philosophers as teachers. In this conclusion I identify some tensions within the professional image that have consequences for the experience students have of philosophy and also for the way philosophy is seen by the wider university community. I then very briefly sketch a possible way of going forward that addresses these tensions.

II. Tensions and unsettlement

John Dewey said that thinking "...is occasioned by an *unsettlement* and it aims at overcoming a disturbance" (Dewey MW 9, p. 336). The discipline of philosophy is currently in a state of unsettlement. The unsettlement is tied up with the professional image of philosophy, and the way to overcome it is to try to understand how philosophy gets practiced, the "human processes" involved in doing philosophy. This means recognizing that determinants of the practice are real but not rationally guided, that is that social pressures determine the content of work philosophers do, and that philosophy in the future will continue to be shaped by factors beyond our control.

In the introduction to this dissertation I mentioned a number of reasons for thinking the discipline of philosophy is facing a crisis. Increasingly African American and Hispanic scholars are writing about their sense of being excluded from the mainstream of the discipline. Linda Martín Alcoff says that

[a]s a Latina in the academic world of North American philosophy, I regularly feel that, indeed, I have lost, or am in the process of losing, my

marbles. Neither my general lived experience, nor my reference points in argumentation, nor my routine affective responses to events, nor my philosophical intuitions are shared with most people in my immediate milieu. (Alcoff (2012) p. 23)

(See also Sullivan and Tuana (2007) and the other articles in Yancy (2012)).

In 2009 Kathryn Norlock estimated that only about 21% of college-level philosophy instructors are women; in the humanities generally there is a roughly 50-50 split between male and female instructors.⁸⁹ The American Philosophical Association has recently vowed to improve the status of women in the profession, an indication that there is a serious problem.⁹⁰

Finally, in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, as colleges and universities look to cut expenses, philosophy departments have increasingly been targeted. Most recently (as of January 2013) the board of trustees at Cedarville University has recommended getting rid of the philosophy department.⁹¹

While each of these crises has received attention, less attention has been paid to drawing a connection between them and the disciplinary identity of philosophy. In what follows I make a modest attempt to identify some possible ways in which tensions within the professional image of philosophy generate unsettlements.

⁸⁹<https://docs.google.com/a/fsmn.org/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxhcGFjb21taXR0ZWVvbnRoZXN0YXRlc29md29tZW58Z3g6MTBkMjEyYmExMDg2NDZjYQ>

⁹⁰ See also Buckwalter and Stich (2010); Paxton, Figdor and Tiberius (2012)).

⁹¹ <http://ourcuprotest.wordpress.com>

III. An external tension

Brian Leiter notes that the term 'philosophy'

... has a currency in everyday parlance and ordinary self-reflection that 'linguistics' or 'sociology' or 'anthropology' do not. One doesn't need an advanced degree to have a 'philosophy of life,' and this has bred an expectation, even among those with advanced degrees, that the discipline of philosophy ought to be continuous with ordinary attempts to forge a philosophy of life. (Leiter (2004) p. 1)

Leiter goes on to say that professional philosophy does not meet these expectations. But Leiter tends to see this as a kind of marketing problem: he thinks philosophers should try to convince the wider public that what professional philosophers do is what philosophy really is, and that the everyday associations of the word are out dated and should be put to rest.

The problem is that philosophers also tend to use the everyday associations of the word when pressed to explain the significance of philosophy. Earlier I noted that, in moral philosophy, philosophers tend to defend their approach by saying that they are working on the big problems but by analyzing them into small, manageable bits. It is common for articles in moral philosophy to begin by talking about justice, or evil, or the good life, but then to quickly shift to a focused formal analysis of some (often fantastic or contrived) example. Philosophical outsiders tend to quickly lose interest, even as the philosophers point to the introductory sentiments as proof of the work's significance.

It is this tension – between the professional image of philosophy and the ordinary idea of philosophy – that allows administrators and boards of trustees to call for the elimination of philosophy departments. If philosophy is not playing its historical role of

addressing the question of a "philosophy of life," as Leiter puts it, then it isn't clear (to those outside the practice) what role it is playing that distinguishes it from the rest of the humanities. By a "philosophy of life," Leiter has in mind the idea that philosophy should be of help when one is faced with a difficult choice, for example, or that it might help to allay the fear of death or of loneliness. The scholarly work of philosophers is seldom about these ordinary problems of life that a philosophy of life might be expected to address; and anyways it is mostly inaccessible to those lacking training in formal logic. This tension conspires to make philosophy the low hanging fruit of the university in a context where identifying budget items to cut is a priority.

IV. Internal tensions

The professional image of philosophy supplies philosophers with a clear disciplinary identity and unifies the research they do. But it is merely an image and not an explicitly articulated organizing principle. It has developed over time as a result of a variety of pressures, both internal and external to philosophy. It isn't surprising, then, that it contains some important internal tensions that end up affecting the way philosophy is experienced.

IV.1 History

W. V. Quine was an influential twentieth-century philosopher. In his book about him, Peter Hylton says that Quine "... is surely among the best known analytic

philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century" (Hylton (2007) p. 1). He taught for many years at Harvard, and some of his papers have been very influential. Most philosophers know of his antipathy to the history of philosophy. In his autobiography, just after reporting how dismal he thought it was to have to try to explain what Hume thought and why it was wrong, he says this about science, clearly thinking of philosophy as a kind of science:

Science and the history of science appeal to very different tempers. An advance in science resolves an obscurity, a tangle, a complexity, an inelegance, that the scientist then gratefully dismisses and forgets. The historian of science tries to recapture the very tangles, confusions, and obscurities from which the scientist is so eager to free himself. (Quine (1985) p. 194)

This conception of philosophy as a discipline that should pursue its subject without paying attention to its history is a part of the professional image: the proposals of historical philosophers are of interest if they are true, but then that is only because they provide solutions to problems that we have anyway. There is nothing *philosophically* important, on this conception, in knowing the history of the discipline.

But it is also true that philosophers typically do spend a lot of time writing about, reading and teaching historical figures. Students in introductory courses are usually expected to read (or at least read about) Plato, Aristotle, Descartes and Kant, at a minimum. Often philosophers identify the questions they are pursuing by using the name of an historical philosopher: Hume's problem of induction, for example, or Locke's question about personal identity. Even the views themselves that philosophers hold and defend are often named after historical figures: there are Platonists in the philosophy of

math, Aristotelians in ethics, Humeans in moral psychology, and (these days, only a few) Cartesian dualists in the philosophy of mind.

So there is a tension: many philosophers think of their discipline as a kind of science, where what defines it is the pursuit of truth concerning some very general questions. The history of such disciplines is not obviously relevant to practitioners. Yet philosophical practice implies that the history is relevant. This tension is the subject of a large and still expanding literature,⁹² but it also contributes to some incoherence in the undergraduate experience of philosophy. As the professional image gets solidified by departments through hiring and curriculum, fewer historians of philosophy are employed in philosophy departments. Yet historical figures continue to dominate philosophical discussions. The writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), for example, are a staple of introductory courses in political philosophy, yet there tends not to be an attempt to fill in the historical context of his life or of his writings – he lived through a tumultuous time in English political history, and he often had the ear of powerful people. Some students, of course, are almost immediately able to see the *philosophical* (in the narrow sense implied by the professional image) interest of his writings, but many are left confused by the inattention to what he was actually writing about.⁹³

⁹² See for example Garber (2005), Glock (2008(a)), Mash (1987), Preston (2007), and the papers collected in Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner (1984).

⁹³ My evidence for the claims made in this paragraph and the ones following is mostly my experience of taking such classes and being the teaching assistant for these classes, though I have also looked at publicly available syllabi and listened to recordings of lectures for such classes. Textbooks that are aimed at undergraduate courses in political philosophy will usually provide a

IV.2 Reasoning and writing

A more disruptive tension is generated by the idea that logic codifies the principles of sound reasoning. We have seen that logic is understood by contemporary philosophers narrowly to be the study of deductive inference. Now, since philosophers see themselves as committed to sound reasoning and not to any particular or novel methodological practices, there is very little attention paid in courses other than logic to the actual patterns of reasoning that philosophers track. This means that students who have not taken a logic course, and so who do not identify reason with deductive inference, have a difficult time identifying what philosophers see as the significant moves in arguments. The tension is felt most clearly by students, because even as philosophy presents itself as just good, clear thinking, it, like any other discipline, makes use of distinctive patterns of reasoning, common tropes (the use of familiar (to philosophers) short-hand references to well known examples; the impulse to construct counter-examples, no matter how outlandish, to any proffered thesis; the imagery of war and battle that pervades philosophical discussions), and has a preferred specialized language.

This conception of philosophy as the discipline that privileges pure or general reason is in tension with the idea that there are important cultural differences in patterns of reasoning or in the weight to be given to experience.

paragraph or two about Hobbes's historical context, but the philosophical import of his writings is treated as separable from that context.

The tension with respect to students is most obvious when it comes to writing. Most students in philosophy courses are evaluated based on their written work, yet very little instruction is given in philosophy courses in how to write philosophically.⁹⁴ This is because many philosophers think that what they expect is just good writing, not anything that is native or peculiar to philosophy.⁹⁵ But research shows that, as the title of one article says, "Writing is not Just a Basic Skill" (Richardson (2008)). And there are writing practices that are uniquely rewarded in philosophy (the use, for example, of the tropes listed above). Students expect to learn how to write and think philosophically, but the professional image of philosophy suggests that there is nothing unique to writing and thinking in philosophy. Students come away confused, or worse: if philosophy rewards sound thinking and clear writing, and a student struggles in a philosophy course, he may naturally conclude that he is deficient.

The tension is evident in some guides to philosophical writing. For example, in his *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays*, Lewis Vaughn acknowledges in the preface that there are "unique demands of philosophical writing" (Vaughn (2006) p. vii), but in the text he explains how to write an "argumentative essay," which type of essay he says is familiar from "advertising, political speeches, philosophical writing, letters to the editor, legal cases, special interest advocacy, press

⁹⁴ Again, my evidence here is primarily my experience of having taken philosophy courses at several different colleges and universities, of having been the teaching assistant for many introductory level philosophy courses, and of talking with philosophers about their teaching.

⁹⁵ One professor for whom I was a teaching assistant said: "Good philosophy writing is just good writing."

releases, position papers, and business communications of all kinds..." (Vaughn (2006) p. 56). In other words, the dominant form of writing in philosophy is, according to Vaughn, a perfectly common and ordinary form of essay. The implication is that there are no special skills or formulae for writing a paper in philosophy. This is belied by our practice, which privileges writing that conforms to particular disciplinary conceptions of clarity and rigor and that uses "in-house" references to key examples and central debates.

IV. 3 Knowing nothing means knowing everything

In her book, *How Professors Think*, the sociologist Michele Lamont notes four common views other scholars have about philosophers:

- (1) philosophers live in a world apart from other humanists, (2) nonphilosophers have problems evaluating philosophical work, and they are often perceived by philosophers as not qualified to do so, (3) philosophers do not explain the significance of their work, and (4) increasingly, what philosophers do is irrelevant, sterile, and self-indulgent. (Lamont (2009) p. 64)

She argues that colleagues see philosophers as arrogant because "...they see their field as uniquely demanding" (Lamont (2009) p. 65). Philosophers, according to Lamont, think philosophy is more rigorous than other disciplines in the humanities, less tolerant of unclear writing and thinking, and more difficult.

What gives rise to this perception and to the bad relationships that Lamont documents between philosophers and their colleagues is the tension between a) thinking that philosophy, since it is perfectly general, does not require any specific or particular

knowledge⁹⁶ (Lamont quotes a historian who says, "it's very hard to find a philosopher... who has any common ground of discussion with the rest of the world" (Lamont (2009) p. 66)) and b) thinking that philosophy, since it is committed to the principles of sound reasoning *in general*, is uniquely suited to assess the arguments of scholars in all fields. A philosopher need have no knowledge of any particular field to criticize work that, according to the philosopher, is unclear, or too rhetorical, or simply not easily assimilated to formal logical analysis.

As Lamont shows, grant proposals by philosophers are often received poorly because of this perceived undeserved arrogance displayed by philosophers. This contributes to the sense that philosophy is isolated – scientists don't recognize the work of philosophers as scientific, but philosophers typically do not get along with scholars in the other humanities, either. The professional image that helped to establish a disciplinary identity for philosophy tends also to undermine its connections to other disciplines. This helps to create the current unsettlement faced by the discipline of philosophy.

V. Conclusion: looking back, looking ahead

I have argued that these tensions are intrinsic to the picture of philosophy that dominates the practice of philosophy today. The picture developed in large part as a response to pressures associated with the need to establish a disciplinary identity in the

⁹⁶ Recall the epigraph to section III.2 in chapter 1: "Philosophers claim no monopoly on conceptual analysis, just generic expertise" (Sorenson (1992) p. 111).

contemporary university, pressures associated with professionalization. Since these pressures are, if anything, increasing, simply calling on philosophers to change the way they think of philosophy is unlikely to have much effect.

But if the diagnosis of the problem given above is accurate, then an approach to remedying it is clear: to confront the current "crisis of philosophy,"⁹⁷ philosophers should attend to the practice of philosophy.⁹⁸ Consider that it was by just slightly diverting the gaze of practitioners from patients and their diseases to the practices of doctors treating those patients that the discovery of the role of germs in disease transmission was made. Something similar is possible for philosophy. After all, there is no reason philosophical attention should not be directed at the way philosophical knowledge is produced, communicated and taught. Many of the texts in our canon feature extended discussions of the way knowledge is produced and transmitted: the *Republic* devotes considerable space to this question, as does Hobbes in *Leviathan*; Descartes wrote about little else. It only requires a minor shift in focus to see that these questions are, after all, philosophical, and their discussion would increase our understanding of the production of knowledge in other fields.

⁹⁷ This is the title of a piece by the prominent philosopher Jason Stanley (Stanley (2010)). Stanley notes the low status philosophy has among academics, but his analysis of it is quite different from mine: he blames other academics for misunderstanding the nature of philosophical inquiry.

⁹⁸ This is happening. The American Philosophical Association is now committed to improving the climate in philosophy for people who have traditionally been excluded. And scholars like Naomi Scheman are focusing their attention on what it means to think of philosophy as a practice.

John Dewey, in 1949, arrived at a diagnosis of the problems facing the professionalized discipline of philosophy (it is this diagnosis that was the inspiration for this dissertation). He wrote of a movement

active and even assertive within its own chosen but narrow limits, [that] identifies philosophy exclusively with search for forms simply as forms; it engages in an attempt to discover forms that are comprehensive only because they are so abstract as to have no connection with any specific subject whatever, human or otherwise. This movement, in spite of or rather because of its devotion to acquisition of merely technical skill, results in forms that are useful only in producing more forms of the same empty type. (Dewey LW 16, pp. 361-362)

Dewey identified the professionalization of philosophy as the factor that encouraged such a movement. And he thought one way out of the crisis philosophy was facing in his time was for it to focus on the methods of producing knowledge and understanding:

... the one thing of prime importance today is development of methods of scientific inquiry to supply us with the humane or moral knowledge now conspicuously lacking. The work needs to be done. It is not of urgent importance that it be done by philosophers, or by any other special group of intellectuals. It is, however, in harmony with the claim of philosophers to deal with what is comprehensive and fundamental that they take a hand, perhaps a leading one, in promoting *methods* that will result in the understanding that is now absent. This type of activity at least seems to be the only way to halt the decline of philosophy in influence and in public esteem and bring about something like restoration. (Dewey LW 16, pp. 375-376)

60 years later philosophy has yet to slow its decline in "influence and in public esteem." Philosophy has become even more professionalized. If it is to experience "something like a restoration," it can only be by confronting its own practice, which means reflecting upon its contemporary image. This work would result in a kind of synthesis of philosophy, understood in the common way as primarily concerned with the problems of

life (the production of knowledge is one of the problems of life, after all), with the professional image of philosophy.

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NOTE: All references to John Dewey's work are to *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969-1991), published in three series as *The Early Works* (1882-1898)(EW), *The Middle Works* (1899-1924) (MW) and *The Later Works* (1925-1953) (LW). I have adopted the convention of giving the abbreviation for the series and then the volume number along with the page number in my text.

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