

Proceedings and Addresses of The American Philosophical Association

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ON NOT KNOWING WHERE YOU ARE GOING

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Dewey Lecture delivered before the One Hundred Seventh Annual Central Division Meeting of The American Philosophical Association in Chicago, Illinois, on Thursday, February 18, 2010.

If sixty years ago I had known where I was going, would I have chosen to work for a Master's degree in philosophy and two years later to apply for jobs as a teacher of philosophy? If forty years ago I had known where I was going, would I have emigrated to the United States? The reflections that the invitation to deliver this Dewey Lecture have prompted suggest that sometimes you may be better off not knowing where you are going.

Dewey lecturers are to fulfill four conditions. They must be old. They are to be autobiographical and, it is implied, truthfully so. They are invited to explain how they have been "shaped by or have shaped the profession of philosophy," while at the same time providing "a personal perspective on the field today." With the first condition I have no problem. I *am* old, not only old enough to have taught in the United States for forty years, but old enough to have taught in England for nineteen years before that. But, if I am to be not only truthfully, but relevantly autobiographical, I should begin my story even earlier by explaining how I first became engaged by philosophy and why I would have been astonished at that stage to learn that philosophers could be thought of as members of a profession.

I

After World War II I was an undergraduate at what was then Queen Mary College in the University of London, a student of Classics, reading among other Greek and Latin authors Plato and Lucretius, as well as some Aristotle. What focused my attention were not just theses and arguments advanced by Plato, Aristotle, and Lucretius but the relationship between these and claims on my intellectual and moral allegiance made by authors whom I read outside the curriculum. As a schoolboy with a passion for the archaeology of Roman Britain I had gone from reading Collingwood the archaeologist to Collingwood the philosopher in his *Autobiography*. A Dominican priest had introduced me to Aquinas and the secretary of the local Communist Party branch told me to read Engels' *AntiDühring*. By others I was sent to Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* and T.S. Eliot's philosophical poetry, and during a stay in Paris I read Sartre's *La Nausée*.

and *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. As important was the influence of some of A.J. Ayer's students at University College and, after I had been to some of his seminars, of Ayer himself. So *Language, Truth and Logic* was added to my reading. But now, of course, I had a problem.

Collingwood, Aquinas, Engels, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Ayer—let alone Plato, Aristotle, and Lucretius—not only made rival claims, but rival claims about how one should go about deciding between their rival claims. So what was I to do? I would have to find some way of studying philosophy systematically, if I was to situate myself as a rational agent in the moral, political, religious, and scientific conflicts of my time. What might happen if I failed so to situate myself? One dread possibility was that I might be reduced to leading a drab conformist existence as the member of some profession, an accountant, say, or a librarian, or even a lawyer. It never occurred to me that philosophers might be thought of as members of a profession any more than, say, poets might. For consider: Collingwood, an archaeologist as well as a philosopher; Aquinas, a teacher of theology and papal adviser; Engels, a textile manufacturer; Sartre, a schoolteacher and man of letters; Kierkegaard, with an independent income; Eliot, first a banker and then a publisher; Ayer, who had just made the transition from soldier to professor; let alone Plato, Aristotle, and Lucretius—do they seem to be members of one and the same profession? I did not at that stage even take there to be much of a connection between *being a philosopher* and *being a teacher of philosophy*. Nobody at all on my list had a PhD or would have wanted one. And neither did I. Collingwood had been and Ayer now was a teacher of philosophy, but Ayer, unlike other university teachers whom I knew, dressed stylishly, spoke wittily, published in literary journals like *Horizon*, and was a character in one of his former students' novels. *Language, Truth and Logic* had after all been published by Victor Gollancz, the rest of whose list was made up of the volumes of the Left Book Club and of some of the best mystery stories ever published.

Moreover, the genres and styles of their philosophical writings were so various: Plato's dialogues, Aristotle's lecture notes, Lucretius's poem, T.S. Eliot's very different poems, Collingwood's autobiography, Aquinas's *quaestiones*, Sartre's novels, as well as the sharply contrasting styles of argument of Engels, Kierkegaard, and Ayer. I knew, of course, that there were academic philosophical journals, but, had the thought occurred to me that there might be some future time and place where the journal article would be considered the standard genre of philosophical writing, I would have dismissed this as a fevered fantasy. That is how naïve I was when I was twenty years old.

II

The same naïveté informed my decision to go to Manchester University to study for an M.A. with Dorothy Emmet. I was in fact preparing myself for a career, but did not know that I was doing so. What I wanted was some excuse to go on doing philosophy, a desire strengthened by my experience at Manchester. Dorothy Emmet was one of a group of admirably tough-minded women—Susan Stebbing, Martha Kneale, Margaret Macdonald,

Margaret Masterman, Dorothy Tarrant—who had broken through the barriers of male prejudice by the sheer quality of their work. It was her virtue as a teacher—and also the virtue of such of her colleagues as Peter Lucas, whose teaching successfully, if unintentionally, inoculated me against Kantianism for the rest of my life—that, while she had strong views as to what the worthwhile problems in philosophy are, she never tried to impose her own standpoint in respect of their solution. So in the philosophy of the social sciences I was introduced both to the doctrines of the Vienna Circle and to the phenomenology of Alfred Schütz and in ethics both to Kant's followers and to Charles Stevenson, the first North American philosopher whom I encountered. What I learned from this was the need to understand how any particular cluster of philosophical problems appears when viewed from well-defined rival points of view, whatever one's own standpoint. And this conviction was strengthened by the impact of a second North American philosopher.

In 1952 W.B. Gallie had introduced British readers to C.S. Peirce in his *Peirce and Pragmatism*. This led me to think about Peirce's canons of enquiry and to ask what analogy there might be between scientific enquiry, as characterized by Peirce, and philosophical enquiry. I concluded that in philosophy as in natural science falsifiability is crucial, that imaginative conjectures—Popper's term, of course, not Peirce's—have to be confronted with the widest and strongest range of objections from rival points of view, and in the light of those objections rejected or revised and reformulated. As reformulation and revision proceed through successive confrontations of conjectures with objections a philosophical tradition of enquiry is apt to emerge. And to do good work is generally to work within such a tradition.

By the time that I read Peirce I had become a teacher of philosophy at Manchester. And so, of course, I now had a profession, but not that of a philosopher, that of a university teacher, whose discipline happened to be philosophy. The profession I shared with teachers in other disciplines. The discipline I shared with other philosophers, some of whom earned their living in quite other ways: in England, for example, H.J. Blackham, who cofounded the British Humanist Association and wrote *Six Existential Thinkers*; Maurice Cornforth of the Communist Party's publishing house, once Wittgenstein's student, now author of *Science versus Idealism*; D.J.B. Hawkins, Catholic parish priest and critic of empiricist epistemology; and that notable Marxist historian and theorist of both revolution and cricket, C.L.R. James; in Ireland, Aarland Ussher; in France, Sartre, De Beauvoir, and Camus; in the United States, one of Trotsky's former secretaries, Raya Dunayevskaya, afterwards both political organizer and philosopher. So I still had no use for the expression "professional philosopher."

Moreover, many of those in the North of England who aspired to engage with philosophy were not studying for degrees. Because our salaries as university teachers in the early 1950s were very low, we had a strong incentive to teach evening classes, adult education classes sponsored either by the Workers Educational Association or by universities

as Extramural Classes. And some of us who were members of various Marxist organizations would sometimes lead similar discussion groups under their auspices. In such classes and groups I learned how to argue philosophical issues with textile workers, dockworkers, clerks in local government offices, secretaries, school teachers, small business owners, and trade union organizers. By so doing I embarked on a new phase of my own education. What did I learn from them?

When such students read Plato or Kant or Mill, they took them to be fascinating and ingenious spinners of interesting theories, with much to be said for and much against them. When, however, they read Aristotle, many of them at once understood him as extending enquiries that were already their own, as presenting them with a conception of practical activity that both illuminated the forms of their own activity, by identifying and exposing its limitations, and provided a way of posing further questions about practice. They had already asked themselves: "What ends am I pursuing, as family member, in the work place, as member of this or that organization?" Aristotle gave them the resources for asking "But what is it *all* for? What is my end *qua* human being?" And Aristotle's reflections on the human qualities needed to achieve worthwhile ends, on the virtues, coincided with and deepened their own reflections. So it was from these very unAristotelian productive workers, just the kind of people that Aristotle himself believed to be incapable of engaging in philosophical thought, that I learned how, if you have sufficient practical experience of the right kind—the sort of experience that the standard training of college students and academics often prevents them from having—you may be open to Aristotle's arguments at the level of and in the context of practices. The only other thinker to whom such workers responded in a similar way was Marx. He too had asked their questions.

The other lesson that I learned during these same years had its origin in a rule imposed on graduate students at Manchester University: they were required to take at least one course in a discipline other than their own. By chance I had already become curious about social anthropology under the influence of Franz Steiner, poet, translator, and social anthropologist, and the effect of Max Gluckman's lectures at Manchester on law and conflict among the Barotse people, who live in what is now Zambia, was to strengthen the impulse that Steiner had implanted, so that three sets of questions became inescapable.

European and North American moral philosophers have tended to suppose that there is a single social phenomenon called *morality*, an unproblematic subject-matter for their enquiries. But social anthropologists recognized a number of very different *moralities*, each with to some degree its own concepts and standards of judgment. So the concept of morality was itself put in question: Is what moral philosophers have taken to be morality as such perhaps no more than the local morality of the bourgeoisie of eighteenth- to twentieth-century Europe and North America? A second set of questions concerned translation. If it was true of at least some initially alien cultures that we could only understand them

and their morality from within, as those who had learned to speak their language and at least in imagination to participate in their practices, was this because any translation into my own language would be defective? Were there issues of untranslatability?

Neither of these sets of questions could be pursued without also pursuing a third, questions about the relationships of the varying modes of reasoning that are at home in the discourse and practices of different cultures to rationality as such. Because I had earlier been inoculated against Kantianism in all its proliferating versions, I formulated these questions with an eye to Aristotle's claims about practical and theoretical rationality. And in the earlier stages of my thinking about all three sets of questions I was, although I could not then know it, waiting for Kuhn and Foucault.

III

These then were questions that I brought with me to the United States when I emigrated at the beginning of the 1970s and, after a short stay at Brandeis, had the good fortune to join the departments of philosophy and political science at Boston University. The lessons that in the next few years I learned from my new colleagues and students were of two kinds.

On the one hand, I discovered that, once again not knowing where I was going, I had now inadvertently become a professional philosopher, a member of a profession institutionalized both in the career structures of American universities and in the shaping and reshaping of those structures by The American Philosophical Association. So I found myself to have become not only a teacher, but also a gate-keeper, deciding together with my colleagues who was to be admitted to advanced study and who excluded, who was worthy of the Ph.D. and who unworthy, who deserved appointment, promotion, and tenure, and who did not. And I gradually became aware of the widely shared background beliefs generally, but often tacitly presupposed in the making of such decisions, beliefs about where the cutting-edge of enquiry in this or that philosophical subdiscipline now is, about which issues are to be treated with great seriousness and which cavalierly, about which individuals and departments are to be treated with deference and which instead may be condescended to, about who is in, out, up or down, the kinds of belief and the kinds of prejudice characteristic of those same drab hierarchical professions of which I had dreaded becoming a member twenty years earlier.

I was more immediately aware of the great benefits that membership in The American Philosophical Association affords by protecting the fairness of procedures, by publishing important information, by providing numerous occasions for seminal philosophical encounters, by promoting the social and collegial aspects of our shared philosophical life. And I also became aware of the large generosity exhibited by individuals who selflessly put themselves at the service of our profession by holding office in the APA. I name only a few: Jerry Schneewind, Ruth Marcus, Ernest Sosa, Philip Quinn, all of them also remarkable philosophers. If, then, as I shall do later, I emphasize some of the negative aspects of professionalization,

it is not because I am ungrateful for its benefits. And I had much else for which to be grateful.

For I had chosen almost by accident to join a remarkable philosophy department with a remarkable chair, Marx Wartofsky. The Boston University department in the 1970s had three striking characteristics. First, it was a meeting place for philosophers of radically different points of view. Secondly, an unusually large number of its members were also at work in some other discipline or practice. And thirdly, and consequently, the conversations between us, some generated by conflict, some by cooperation, enabled us to learn a great deal from each other. My education began all over again.

The range of sometimes conflicting and sometimes complementary standpoints was impressive. There was Boston University's own theistic personalism, authored initially by Lotze's student Borden Parker Bowne, the very first professor of philosophy at Boston University in 1876, further developed first by Bowne's student, Edgar Sheffield Brightman, and then by *his* students, Walter Muelder and Peter Bertocci, who became the teachers of Martin Luther King. In constructive contrast stood the creative Marxisms—and the plural is important—of Bob Cohen and of Wartofsky. John Findlay, follower of Meinong and at one time a member of Wittgenstein's seminar, held classes on Plato, Plotinus, and Hegel. George Berry gave an annual graduate seminar on Quine, and Quine's visit to it each year was an important departmental event. Popperian and postPopperian philosophy of science was represented by Joseph Agassi and for a tragically short time by Imre Lakatos. Erazim Kohak introduced us to the phenomenology of both Husserl and Patočka. Add to these Elizabeth Rapaport's feminism and Tom McCarthy's critical theory and the list is still incomplete.

Equally diverse were the affiliations to other disciplines whose relationship to philosophy is crucial. Bob Cohen had chaired the Physics Department and Abner Shimony had already in 1969 coauthored one of the most important papers published in particle physics. For Wartofsky it was the visual arts and the psychology of perception, for Bernard Elevitch, psychoanalysis. For Michael Martin, interests in law and the philosophy of law would issue later in his book on H.L.A. Hart. Judson Webb made us aware of the bearing of logic and computing science on the philosophy of mind. Wartofsky, together with Gary Orgel and David Solomon, reinvigorated the philosophy of medicine. And my own commitments were to those areas in which political science and sociology overlap, finding in their empirical studies material for answering the three sets of questions that I had brought with me.

Add to these the extraordinary achievement of Bob Cohen in directing the Boston Colloquium for the Philosophy of Science and in editing and publishing the forty or so volumes of its *Proceedings* and of kindred work that had appeared by 1980. The meetings of the colloquium and the volumes that it published exemplified both those conflicts of standpoint and those interactions with other disciplines that were so important to the common philosophical life of the department. As were the wonderful

quality and contributions of such graduate students as Kevin Brien, Andrew Buchwalter, John Cleary, Denis Corish, Owen Flanagan, Patrick Grim, Don Howard, Michael Howard, Eric Katz, Richard Pruitt, Cheyney Ryan, Larry Simon, Georgia Warnke, and Don Weightman. I hope that we taught them as much as they taught us.

It mattered, of course, that we were provided with so much to think about by the philosophers whose names by then defined the key issues: Quine, Hempel, Kuhn, Kripke, Davidson, Gadamer, Derrida, and Foucault. But it was because of the enquiries in which we ourselves were already engaged that we had good questions to pose about the implications for our enquiries of the debates set on foot by such philosophers. So my earlier questions about translatability were reformulated in the light of my encounters with Kuhn, Davidson, and Foucault, as consequently were my questions about how the history of conceptual change should be written and how rival conceptual schemes should be characterized. And, consequently, my enquiries into the relationship between Aristotelian ethics and post-Enlightenment ethics that were to issue later in the writing of *After Virtue* were renewed and redirected. But the lessons that I and others learned while at Boston University concerned not only the particular philosophical issues about which we were thinking, but also the question of what it is for a philosophy department to flourish.

What I, at least, concluded was that what matters most is the quality of the philosophical conversation in a department, the quality of the exchanges both between those who share a standpoint and cooperate on detailed work on problems defined from that standpoint and between those who have different and incompatible standpoints and who therefore define their problems in different terms. When exchanges of the latter kind are absent, conversation is apt to become sterile, the like-minded talking only to each other.

Secondly, although those who sustain such conversation of high philosophical quality generally include some who publish notable articles or books, they also often include some who only publish occasionally or even not at all, and the latter may be as important to the quality of the whole as the former. In a good philosophy department nobody would be rewarded or esteemed for publication as such, let alone for quantity of publication. Knowing when and what and why *not* to publish is a great philosophical virtue, one for which I have been less than notable.

Thirdly, sustained philosophical conversation of high quality both contributes to and draws part of its life from the various philosophical projects of the individual participants, some of those projects perhaps short-term, but many of them—and these characteristically the most fruitful—long-term with indeterminate prospects, projects whose future is to some degree unpredictable, projects that may involve digressions and interruptions, even ultimate failure. What such projects cannot therefore be neatly fitted to is some predetermined time scheme, some set of unrevisable deadlines.

Fourthly, it is characteristic both of such projects and of the conversations to which they contribute that they characteristically involve movement between very different areas of philosophical enquiry, perhaps from ethics to the philosophy of mind or vice versa, perhaps from either of these to metaphysics, perhaps from theories of identity to theories of reference and from either of these once again to metaphysics. Work too narrowly focused within one of these areas, so that it does not seem to need to draw resources from elsewhere, is apt to be work with serious limitations.

Fifthly, and finally, philosophical conversation of high quality requires some awareness in depth of what is going on in the world outside philosophy, both in other relevant academic disciplines ranging from physics to history, from the neurosciences to Shakespeare studies, and in the everyday life of those social and economic practices and institutions where so many of our concepts find or fail to find application, concepts such as those of identity, role, function, norm, and end, such practices and institutions as those of the farmer and the soldier, the trade union organizer and the beekeeper. The first of these requirements will only be met if there are quite a number of joint appointments with other departments. The second will only be met if one takes care to appoint some colleagues who are also or have been farmers or soldiers, trade union organizers or beekeepers, and if, in addition, Marx's key texts are among one's own and one's colleagues' shared reading.

I am not, of course, suggesting that the Boston University department of the seventies satisfied these standards other than imperfectly. Like every department it had its flaws, its follies, and its failures. But its unusual virtues enabled some of us to form a clear, if contentious, view of what an even better department would be like. Why contentious? I cannot answer that question without responding to the invitation to Dewey Lecturers to provide "a personal perspective on the field today."

V

The conception of philosophy presupposed by my praise of the Boston University department of the seventies is in more than one respect at odds with a conception of how philosophical enquiry should be organized that has been widely influential in the last thirty years. This latter conception is one that is very much at home with and in the bureaucratic and professionalized structure of the contemporary American university and its administrators. To understand philosophical or any other enquiry in this way is to be happy with the increasing specialization of higher education and with the thought that to advance enquiry is to focus more and more narrowly on this or that problem within this or that subdivision or subsubdivision of one's discipline. It is to be equally content with the imposition of rigid time constraints on completing a dissertation, on fulfilling the requirements for publishing in approved journals in time first for a three-year review and then for tenure, so always favoring the short-term project with a predictable outcome over the long-term and the unpredictable, always favoring the cautious rather than the adventurous.

And it is to be mute before the recent extraordinary and often absurd growth in quantity of published philosophical literature consequent on those requirements, a growth such that remaining abreast of the literature in any one area is now so time consuming that it reinforces the other incentives to narrow specialization, a specialization that both fragments philosophy into a number of semidependent enquiries and is inimical to dialogue with any point of view radically different from one's own.

What sometimes underpins this contemporary understanding of philosophical enquiry is a conviction that "what seems to be the fragmentation in philosophy found at the end of the 20th century may be due to more than the institutional imperatives of specialization and professionalization. It may be inherent in the subject itself."¹ So declared Scott Soames in his admirable history of *Philosophical Analysis in the 20th Century*. "In my opinion," Soames wrote, "philosophy has changed substantially in the last thirty or so years. Gone are the days of large central figures, whose work is accessible and relevant to, as well as read by nearly all analytic philosophers. Philosophy has become a highly organized discipline, done by specialists primarily for other specialists. ...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."² We should note that Soames seems at times to use "philosophy" and "analytic philosophy" interchangeably and that his history is written as a history of progress towards the solution of what he takes to be the central problems. "I wouldn't be doing philosophy if I didn't think that it progressed," he has said, and "I don't view its history as a story of the clash of defensible but irreconcilable views."³ So the philosophers of the past are to be evaluated by their contribution to or their failure to contribute to the understanding that we here now are engaged in attaining. And the end result of fragmentation and specialization is philosophical achievement. The dictates of the bureaucratized institutional structures of the contemporary North American research university and the modes in which philosophy is best done just happen happily to coincide.

If I find this difficult to believe, it is not because I have any doubt about the high quality of Soames' excellent history. My problem begins instead from two observations. The first concerns a recurrent feature of philosophical enquiry and debate in the last thirty years. Consider such disagreements as those in the philosophy of mind between dualists and physicalists or those in moral philosophy where expressivism concerning moral judgments is pitted against some version of cognitivism or the opposition of Fregean to anti-Fregean views of sense, reference, and related concepts, or the disputes concerning the relationships of truth to some kind of warranted assertibility, or the conflicts between Kantians and utilitarians. In all these cases significant progress in answering objections and revising formulations has been made by the various contending parties. But this progress has not been a progress towards resolving their basic disagreements. So far as these are concerned, each group of protagonists has remained unflinchingly convinced by their own arguments and adamantly unmoved by those of their opponents.

It is not that there has never been an occasion for shared recognition of new insights. Members of rival parties to disputes about the relationship of mind and brain may all be able, for example, to agree that Kripke's identification of the possibility of a posteriori necessary truths—a discovery central to Soames' narrative—puts paid to any argument that mind states and brain states cannot be identical, because the relationships between mind and brain can only be known a posteriori and yet statements of the identity of mind states and brain states, would, if true, be necessary truths. And Soames is, of course, in the right in arguing that this undermines positions taken in the past by, for example, Gilbert Ryle. Yet no serious contemporary dualist would concede that she has thereby been deprived of sufficient reason for upholding her dualism. Dualists and physicalists, like their counterparts in other areas, find good reason to continue to disagree. So the question becomes inescapable: What can progress in philosophy be, if it is compatible with so much ineliminable disagreement concerning fundamental issues? Yet this is not all.

Scott Soames' narrative of progress in philosophy needs to be set alongside a very different narrative, that presented in a book that is also a report of progress in philosophy, but in which the understanding of what such progress is of quite another kind. I have in mind Jean-Luc Marion's *Réduction et donation: recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*.⁴ Soames has said of his book that it is both a history of analytic philosophy and itself a piece of analytic philosophy.⁵ Marion's equally admirable book is both itself a piece of phenomenological philosophy and a history of phenomenology, highly selective, of course, just as is Soames'. And so, while Soames' line of progress runs through Wittgenstein, Quine, Kripke, and Davidson, Marion's runs from Husserl through Heidegger and Derrida towards his own work, lines of progress that take different directions and move towards different endpoints. Note that this contrast between Soames and Marion is not just one more version of the generalized "analytic" versus "continental" contrast. The interest in both cases is in the particularities of each history, in this particular analytic account of analytic philosophy and in this particular phenomenological account of the history of phenomenology.

Both histories have, of course, incurred criticism. There are analytic philosophers who would tell the story differently from the way Soames tells it, just as there are phenomenologists who would tell it differently from the way Marion tells it. But, while those criticisms matter, it also matters that we acknowledge the power of both rival narratives and perhaps also of some others, and respond to the fact of their giving expression to rival and incompatible conceptions of progress in philosophy. Moreover, there seems to be no way of deciding between them that does not presuppose a prior commitment to one of them. How then should we respond?

VI

The question is inescapable and it is on the face of it the same type of question that I was asking nearly sixty years ago, when I first committed myself to philosophical enquiry in the hope of learning how to decide

between a variety of rival philosophical claims. So does the fact that I now have to return to this kind of question mean that I have largely wasted fifty-nine years? Happily, I can answer "No," partly because I am now able to identify the alternatives a good deal better, more importantly because I am also able to frame three different and rival responses to the question, each of which represents a different future for philosophical enquiry.

The first of the three responses to my question in its present form, that of how we should respond to such fundamental disagreements as those of Soames and Marion, let alone to the endemic disagreements internal to analytic philosophy and phenomenology, is: By continuing to act exactly as before, that is, by simply refusing to acknowledge the question as worthy of an answer. So the response is: Let each of us from our own present vantage point, whatever that may be, Soames-like analytic, Marion-like phenomenological, or whatever, continue the line of enquiry that we are already engaged in, treating the conclusions of those with incompatible points of view as erroneous just because they fail by *our* standards. Indeed, such respondents may well ask themselves: "But how could I do otherwise? For mine are not just the best standards of which I am aware, they are, so far as I can see, from my point of view, the best standards of which anyone is aware." So we will already have to have moved to some degree beyond the limitations of each of such contending standpoints, if we are to characterize this first type of response, as I am strongly inclined to do, as a response by those who have *imprisoned* themselves within their own standpoint, who have become the victims of their own philosophical powers.

A second type of response was a long time in the making and I had the privilege of observing its making from near the beginning. Before I finally emigrated to the United States I had twice been a visiting Fellow of the Council of Humanities at Princeton, where the young Richard Rorty was engaged in redefining analytic philosophy by editing *The Linguistic Turn*. Conversations with him were as philosophically exciting as any that I have ever had. And later he put me in his debt even more by introducing me to Davidson—both to the man and to the work. But the Davidson to whom Rorty introduced me turned out to have a *Döppelgänger*, that subtle and imaginative fiction, Rorty's Davidson. And Rorty's Davidson became one of the major *dramatis personae* in a story that Rorty developed of how "analytic philosophy culminates in Quine, the later Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Davidson—which is to say that it transcends and cancels itself."⁶ We, therefore, according to this interpretation of the history of analytic philosophy, not only can but must leave it behind, so that we cease to understand ourselves as analytic philosophers and instead understand ourselves as ironists, each of us with a final vocabulary, through which we express our fundamental projects and our deepest convictions and expectations. Over time such vocabularies change, but there can be no rational justification for speaking in the terms of one rather than another and no such vocabulary is "closer to reality" than any other. So an ironic distancing from one's own vocabulary, even while employing it, is appropriate, and for such ironists philosophical texts are to be read

as literary texts, since "literary criticism does for ironists what the search for universal moral principles does for metaphysicians."⁷ So, the story concludes, we—or at least some of us—would do better to think and teach alongside professors of Comparative Literature rather than as professors of philosophy.

This unforgivably compressed account of Rorty's project conceals both the admiration that I felt and feel for him and the combination of admiration and exasperation that I felt and feel for his project. Unlike some analytic philosophers I did not resent his change in professional identification. Unlike quite a number of others I did not think that I had a knock-down argument with which to refute him, except perhaps on this or that point of detail. But just that was my central problem with Rorty's new claims. His ability to respond to his critics' arguments seemed to be more than a matter of his splendid dialectical skills. It was also the case that he had in the end succeeded in formulating his positions so that they were in effect immune from refutation. And this is, as I had learned much earlier from Peirce, the worst fate that can befall any theorist. We need, if we are rational, to be able to say what would show us to be mistaken. But in the end this Rorty could not do.

So we confront these two rival responses to the present condition of North American philosophy, one that remains within the limits set by professionalization and specialization and another that involves a rejection of philosophy, both of them unacceptable. So what third direction might we take? This is a question to which I had already begun to frame an answer even before I found myself reopening the question. From my undergraduate days I had been reading and rereading Aristotle. My later teaching of Aristotle's texts, both to continuing education students in England and to graduate students at Boston University, Vanderbilt, and Notre Dame, confirmed me in a disposition to interpret Aristotle as Aquinas had interpreted him. Aquinas I had been reading ever since the English Dominicans first introduced me to him, when I was eighteen, and the subsequent impact on my thinking of quite a number of Thomistic Aristotelians had been considerable. But it took a long time for me to integrate this strand in my thinking with my other preoccupations. And, perhaps because some of my Thomistic mentors taught in Dominican Houses of Study or in seminaries, I thought of Thomists as at once possessing a philosophical tradition of their own and yet also situating themselves within, even if on the margins of professional academic philosophy, both intellectually and institutionally, sharing many of its central concerns, but able to put it to the question from an external vantage point. As I came to identify more and more with that vantage point, I also came to recognize that just such a double life may be what we need if we are to work within and against the professionalization of philosophy.

What Thomism initially supplied me with were not answers but questions. From early on in the Thomist revival set on foot by Leo XIII there had developed a critique of modern philosophy, in which the suggestion was that, where two or more antagonistic sets of views on some particular

issue continue to be in contention, each of them unable to defeat the other, this may well be because both views are false or inadequate. Each may indeed give expression to some aspect of the truth and at the same time be a type of misconception to which, given our human condition, we are peculiarly prone. The history of modern philosophy is thus a history of important and illuminating errors, errors that result from their being answers to badly posed questions. What was wrong with much modern philosophy, rationalist or empiricist, idealist or materialist, analytic or continental, were the questions. If we could only replace them by rightly posed questions, we might be able to move towards answers more adequate than the alternatives now being entertained.

Rightly posed questions, on this Thomistic view, presuppose a conception of the human being as having a kind of unity that neither any version of dualism nor any version of materialist monism can account for. It is a conception of each human being as having physical, aesthetic, moral, and intellectual powers directed towards specific finite ends, yet as a human being directed towards one final end, an end to which those other subordinate ends are ordered. This conception is put to the test whenever questions that presuppose it are brought to bear on the apparently irresolvable conflicts of modern analytic philosophy or modern continental philosophy, with a view to rendering them amenable to resolution. And it is of crucial importance that the outcome of this enterprise may always be such that it is Thomism that is thereby to greater or lesser degree discredited. Some unfriendly critics of my own work in ethics, politics, and their history have indeed concluded that just this is in fact the outcome.

Since the close of the 1970s I have then lived a certain kind of double life, moving between the professionalized center and the unprofessionalized margins, deeply grateful for the hospitality of my academic colleagues at Wellesley, Vanderbilt, Duke, and Notre Dame, and, more widely, in the APA, in tolerating this philosophical eccentricity. If during this period I have finally by and large known where I was going, the credit has to go almost entirely to others, and quite as much to those with whom I have been in creative disagreement as to those with whom I have come to agree. Yet if, in this respect, there is a sharp contrast with the period in which I first engaged with philosophy, there is another respect in which my convictions now remain what they were then.

What I feared then was that, if I did not educate myself in philosophy, I would be unable to situate myself as a rational agent in the moral, political, religious, and scientific conflicts of my time. About this I take myself to have been right; I also take it that the single most important justification for teaching philosophy to undergraduates, whether in universities or liberal arts colleges or community colleges, is that without philosophy they will be unable to acquire either those habits of constructive questioning or those abilities to engage with rival conflicting views that they will need in order to become this kind of rational agent. Ours is now a culture in which a great many people are prepared to announce their confident

answers to moral, political, religious, and scientific questions without ever having found out what the questions are. And it is for the sake of that culture, as well as for the sake of philosophy, that we need to understand our central tasks as those of learning how to bring philosophy to bear on the formulation of those questions and of sharing that activity of learning with our undergraduate students. My fear is that this justification for a philosophical education is no longer sufficiently understood either by those who govern our universities or by those of our colleagues who value specialized expertise above all else and that this double failure to understand may deprive others of opportunities that I and my generation were privileged to enjoy. I pray that it may not be so.

Endnotes

1. Scott Soames. *Philosophical Analysis in the 20th Century: Vol. II: The Age of Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) 476.
2. p. 463.
3. Scott Soames. "Reply to Critics of *Philosophical Analysis in the 20th Century*, Pacific Division Meetings of the APA." 2006, online, p. 3.
4. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989, translated as *Reduction and givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger and Phenomenology* by T. A. Carlson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998).
5. "Reply to Critics," p. 3.
6. Review of *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*, *London Review of Books* (January 20, 2005).
7. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

A PHILOSOPHER'S CALLING

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Dewey Lecture delivered before the One Hundred Sixth Annual Eastern Division Meeting of The American Philosophical Association in New York, New York, on Tuesday, December 29, 2009.

The description provided by the Dewey Foundation reads as follows:

Each Division would choose a very senior (typically retired) philosopher, someone with a clear tie to that particular division, to give a talk of an autobiographical sort—an intellectual autobiography—with perhaps some account of the way in which he or she was shaped by or shaped the profession, how the profession seems to have changed over the years, etc. The lecturer might reflect on the people and issues that led him or her into philosophy. It is supposed to be a more personal perspective on the life of an important philosopher, a more reflective set of remarks. The lecturer would not be expected to have any particular ties to the work or ideas of John Dewey.

I have quoted the description at length so that autobiographical musings are seen by the audience to fall within it. I am surely very senior. Sixty-nine years have passed since I entered graduate school, and jogging my memory has been daunting. It was never my inclination to save papers and records, and in several moves much has gone astray. Much that very likely should have been included has not been retrieved. Additions and corrections are welcome.

I gave no thought to posterity. The philosophical pantheon, even where there is disagreement about membership, will remain small. I once asked a celebrated twentieth-century philosopher well into his seventies and ailing why he tirelessly traveled to give talks despite the toll it took. His reply was, "I do not wish to be forgotten." My thought was that he had, perhaps, gained a year or two in collective philosophical memory.

We are asked to reflect on the issues or persons that led the Dewey lecturer into philosophy. This requires some autobiography. By age three I had somehow taught myself to read by mimicking my older sisters. I recall reading about Chicken Little with the book turned upside down. But then one day the sky was falling right side up. I was reading. It just happened. I also loved numbers and had some computational skills, which were willingly demonstrated. I also had eidetic memory. Some of those abilities gradually faded.