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After Analytic Philosophy, What's Next?: An Analytic Philosopher's Perspective

Philosophy, at the moment, seems to be in a transition period in which analytic philosophy, of the sort that has been predominant, is giving way to something new. But what will come next? Deconstructive and hermeneutic philosophies seem to indicate the right directions to fit the current relativistic climate of thought, but have failed to yield enough of a useful structure or method to carry philosophy forward to a next sustainable phase. Analytic philosophy carries on as the established mainstream work in philosophy departments, but clearly there has been a widespread loss of morale. As this work is currently pursued, it has lost much of its initial glow of promise and enthusiasm, especially for the younger generation.

Although it is hazardous to predict the future, and presumptuous to prescribe the course philosophy as a professional discipline should take, this article goes ahead anyway to sketch out a proposal that is at the same time a projection. Mapped out here is a different kind of philosophy which-it is argued-can build on the strength of analytic philosophy. It is to use reasoned argumentation (logic), but it can also be rich and flexible enough to deal with real world problems in an engaging and useful way.

The view of philosophy advocated in this article is one of a subject originating in conflicts of opinion that puzzle or bother the ordinary person in everyday activities and discussions of controversial subjects. That is, the subject does not originate within discussions the professional philosophers have amongst themselves. According to this view, the goal of philosophy is to try to resolve these conflicts of opinion through reasoned discussion of

the strongest, most persuasive arguments on both sides, and thereby to deepen our understanding of the positions on both sides. This view of philosophy is called "dialectical" (from the Greek word *dialektikos* for "conversation" or "dialogue")¹ because the goal is to deepen maieutic² insight through dialogue, even if the conflict of opinions is not resolved in the sense of showing that one opinion is known to be true and the other (opposed) opinion false. The case study method is shown to have an important place in this conception of philosophy.

1. THE DIALECTICAL VIEW OF PHILOSOPHY

Like everything in philosophy, views of what the goals and methods of philosophy are supposed to be have changed over historical periods, fluctuating with the prevailing climate of opinion. It is even common to find conflicting points of view during the same period. For example, after World War II, analytical philosophers saw philosophy as a scientific subject, whereas existentialists saw it as a literary subject.

It is even possible to see these conflicts in the writings of the same philosopher. Plato taught that philosophy was a knowledge of the true and unchanging, while Socrates, Plato's spokesman in the dialogues, professed that all he knew as philosopher was that he didn't know anything for sure. Socrates, in practice, conveyed a philosophical style of discussion that was ready to deal critically with all sorts of opinions and controversies, and arriving at certain knowledge of the truth of the matter was not a realistic prospect.³ We can see two points of view on philosophy represented here. One sees philosophy as a kind of knowledge. The other sees philosophy as a kind of reasoned dialogue that is worthwhile even though it typically does not result in (hard) knowledge, but only in a critical questioning of assumptions.

The purpose of philosophy, according to the latter view, is to consider controversial arguments that occur in everyday discussions on all sorts of conflicts of opinion—for example, in political debates, legal arguments, ethical disputes, scientific and religious controversies, and all dialogues where argumentation takes place—and critically question the strongest relevant arguments on both sides of the issue. The function of good philosophy is to unearth the hidden assumptions and biases in these arguments, in a way that will make the person involved in, or following, such an argument re-examine and refine her own personal position on the issue and "think twice," deepening her understanding of what is at stake.

This could be called the dialectical view of philosophy. It was very familiar to the ancient Greeks,⁴ but seems to have been largely lost sight of in recent times-or even, perhaps, for a long time. After Plato and Descartes, most notably, we seem to have come to accept the idea that philosophical conclusions are supposed to be a kind of knowledge. In the heyday of analytical philosophy, the assumption seemed to be that findings in philosophy are, or should be, a kind of scientific knowledge.

The dialectical view challenges this conception of philosophy, claiming that philosophy should not present itself as a kind of knowledge.⁵ Instead, it should be presented as a kind of personal insight, achieved through discussion of opinions, which can prepare the way for knowledge by piercing unsupportable preconceptions, revealing biases and errors of reasoning, and exposing fallacies. Thus, the dialectical view sees philosophy not as a science-either a natural or a social science-but as something more like a traditional humanities subject. This view sees logical skills of argumentation and linguistic skills of interpretation and analysis of a text or discourse in a dialogue exchange as equally important. Philosophy, from this perspective, moves forward by exposing fallacies, biases, and false views that pretend to be knowledge. This move forward could be called a kind of "self-knowledge," but it is not knowledge in the sense of "hard knowledge" that we expect to get as a result of scientific research. Instead, it is a kind of personal insight or maieutic awareness (critical sensitivity) which is different from scientific knowledge.

The dialectical view stresses the negative function of philosophical dialogue-it is a method that works by deflating the false opinions and superficial views popular at a given time. This view of philosophy as a critical discipline makes the study of fallacies and errors of reasoning (such as bias and prejudice) fundamentally important in philosophical methodology. But philosophy is not purely negative or destructive in this view. The positive increment of successful philosophical dialogue is the increased maturity and depth of one's personal position on an issue. By eliminating or reducing biases and prejudices, one is led to a deeper, more subtle, more insightful view of things, enabling him to guide himself more wisely through the affairs of everyday life.

The dialectical view, however, has often seemed distasteful to philosophers, who like to see themselves as dealing in knowledge, and not just charting a path through a sea of fluctuating opinions. Despite the general aversion in philosophy to coming to terms with the dialectical conception, some philosophers have expressed it very well from time to time. Cohen

(1986, p. 3) has captured the basic idea and the main characteristics of it concisely.

[P]hilosophy aims at persuasion, appeals to shared principles, and invites criticisms. It therefore takes place within the framework of a dialogue either in informal conversation, or in formal debate, or between imagined *dramatis personae*, or in successive publications, with one contributor taking over from another, through minutes, months, years, or even centuries.

Wang (1986, p. 208) has also expressed a central feature of the dialectical view, calling it a method that organizes the complex interactions between the general and the particular, and finds the proper mixture between the subjective and the objective. According to this view, the aim of philosophy is not to discover objective knowledge (like science), but to engage in dialogue that leads to intelligent criticism of received or plausible opinions.

As Cohen nicely put it, the aim is persuasion, but it is a particular kind of persuasion. The aim of each participant (pro or contra) is to persuade the other side that the arguer's view is right. But the goal of the dialogue as a whole is to move towards resolution of the conflict of opinions by rational argumentation. Whether this goal is accomplished or not, however, an important benefit is the maieutic insight yielded by the discussion, for the participants and for the audience that may follow the discussion.

This view of philosophy vindicates the sophists, because it concedes that philosophy is really about the contest between the weaker and the stronger arguments in the marketplace of persuasion. Plato attacked the sophists, using the *ad hominem* argument that they took fees for their lectures-not a very fair argument. Perhaps to back up this denunciation, Plato required that genuine philosophy must be knowledge of the true-the fixed and unchanging Forms-and relegated to the sophists the area of rhetoric, a subject that, ever since, has had a bad reputation.⁶

2. DOES PHILOSOPHY RESULT IN KNOWLEDGE?

It is often presumed that since philosophy is the pursuit of truth, therefore philosophy is only successful or genuine if it is based on, and results in, knowledge. The background presumption is that the only kind of academic enterprise worth undertaking is one that results in knowledge. These presumptions seem to have been emphatically expressed in twentieth-

century philosophy, particularly of the analytic kind. There the use of formalistic methods and tough-minded styles of inquiry seems designed to convey the impression that hard evidence is being deployed to build up solid knowledge of technical results.

Of course, the forerunner of this point of view was the Platonic conception that philosophy is a kind of knowledge-knowledge of the true and unchanging. Implicit in this conception was the rejection of opinion-based reasoning as unreal and illusory, the province of sophists and other tricksters who deal in illusions and deceptions-sophistical tactics of argumentation.

Quite another conception is found in the philosophy of Socrates (curiously, expounded by Plato) which presumes that philosophy arises through the discussion of conflicting opinions critically questioned. In this more modest view of philosophy, the philosopher only knows that he does not know things, and his goal is to advance personal insight (described by Socrates as a kind of self-knowledge) through the questioning and criticism of opinions. Of course, it is an historical-exegetical question whether these are really two distinct views, or parts of a more general and systematic Platonic overview. But you can distinguish two distinct views here, and they sometimes seem to be at odds with each other in the Platonic dialogues.

The second, Socratic view has been nicely expressed by Rescher (1987), who sees philosophy as the evaluation of problems where the lack of knowledge (underdetermination by evidence) to resolve the problems requires reasoning based on plausibility. According to Rescher (p. 283), an *apory* is a collection of contentions that are individually plausible but collectively inconsistent. One example given (p. 291) is the following collection:

1. Only something real can produce real effects.
2. Delusions and illusions can produce real effects.
3. Delusions and illusions are not real.

The various ways of escaping the inconsistency of maintaining 1, 2, and 3 all involve assumptions that cannot be absolutely verified or known to be true beyond further discussion and questioning. But they can, if carefully reasoned through, represent plausible ways of viewing important and controversial concepts such as "delusion," "illusion," and "real effect." According to Rescher, any resolution of such a dispute is based on a process

of evaluation by setting priorities on what is more plausible or natural to accept, given that such questions are undetermined by purely evidential considerations (hard knowledge). Hence Rescher's view of the methodology of philosophy is a dialectical view.

Such an aporetic, plausibilistic, evaluative view of philosophy is, of course, anathema to many philosophers who see philosophy, above all, as an objective discipline that should be a pure pursuit of truth. From this point of view, once we start dealing in plausibilities, we are on the road to hell and damnation, to conceptual shell-games and, in a word, sophistry—a kind of slippery slope. Part of the fear here seems to involve the worry that if we admit that philosophy deals in apories and tricky verbal and conceptual puzzles that can only be resolved by arguing for plausible assumptions, not based on hard facts and verifiable propositions, philosophy will get bad press. Outsiders' worst suspicions will be confirmed, and not only that; philosophers may be overtaken by a loss of integrity, once freed from the restraints against discussing presumptions and plausibilities. A danger, for example, is that philosophers could become rationalizers of bad causes, using plausible reasoning: "What the heck, I could be wrong. But here's how it seems to me...." The fear is that once the aporetic view becomes respectable (established), it could lead to a release of restraints and a disintegration of philosophy as a discipline. As we see in section 4 below, this danger is quite real; in fact, influential schools of philosophy are currently pushing public opinion towards the view that philosophy should be a kind of free-ranging narrative excursion.

The question whether such a slippery slope might or would occur as a result of rethinking philosophy as a discipline should be judged in relation to two factors. One is that philosophy as a discipline does not appear to have the respect, or even the serious attention, of the public at present. The public and, in particular, the mass of introductory level students in universities who have not been exposed to philosophy pretty well seem to operate on the presumptions that philosophy is not a scientific subject or discipline offering objective knowledge, and that it is not a practical subject useful for job training. The public appears to widely presume that philosophy is opinion-based and subjective. This is not a denial that the subject is interesting, or worthwhile for some purposes; but there the presumption is against the proposition that philosophy is a kind of knowledge, i.e., a kind of "hard" knowledge, based on or resulting in propositions known to be true.

The other factor concerns the methodology of philosophy. Even if

philosophy is only a form of critical discussion and reasoned questioning that results in plausibilistic evaluations of apories and controversial issues where knowledge is insufficient to definitively solve the problem, it could still be a sober, restrained, controllable discipline, provided there are methods of informal logic to pin down the fallacies, errors of reasoning, biases, and other shortcomings of argumentation in such discussions.

Analytic philosophy, in its puristic heyday, used mathematical logic—a semantic, truth-oriented kind of methodological framework—as its guiding structure for resolving or evaluating disputed questions. But this approach has actually had the effect of leaving large areas of philosophy—ethics and political philosophy in particular—as open arenas where there is no method that can effectively be brought to bear in resolving or guiding disputes. As analytical philosophy grew more powerful and influential, Dewey (1946; 1989) worried about this tendency to abandon the search for wisdom and values in philosophy. What appeared to be tight disciplinary control was really no control at all—a kind of illusion, based on the unrealistic preconception that tight logic assured hard knowledge in philosophy.

3. THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF OPINION

To see how philosophy as a discipline has arrived at the state it is in today, you have to look at the methods and viewpoints within the field and also the external climate of opinion—how those who are not professional practitioners of the discipline see the field. The latter aspect is much more important than the insiders tend to think, in defining what is possible for philosophy as a discipline.

Philosophy in recent years has been a discipline turned inward. The practitioners mainly aim to influence each other in their writings, and few concessions are made to the nonprofessional reader in current books and journal articles written by professional philosophers. Many of the journal articles, for example, are highly specialized, and only of interest to the few readers who are carefully following the literature on a particular subject. The recent literature on possible worlds, for example, would most likely appear bizarre and unintelligible to nonprofessional readers (and also of dubious practical help to readers in dealing with things that concern them).

Does philosophy have a future? Judging from current developments, it does not seem to have much of one. The social sciences seem to have taken over the real issues of concern to people in their daily lives. They take social scientists fairly seriously, and look to them for answers, or at least for some

insight or help with personal and professional problems. People do not appear to be taking philosophers seriously. They do not seem to know what philosophers are doing-only that it is difficult, weird, and of no evident practical use. Moreover, there is a presumption that philosophy is not a scientific subject, and that it is populated by "heavy intellectuals" who are probably out of touch with everyday reality. The idea of trusting a philosopher for personal or professional advice would likely be treated with a good deal of suspicion, and even scorn, by the public. However, there is some recent empirical evidence that this view of public opinion could be wrong, and that the public is prepared to demonstrate confidence in philosophy as a valuable service-by paying for it.

According to a report in *Newsweek* (1990), some seventy (estimated) philosophers in Europe have hung out their shingles to give private philosophical consultations to treat clients-typically people in the midst of some "disorienting" personal experience. The method used, according to practitioner Eite Veening of Groningen, Holland, is to draw on such thinkers as Plato and Nietzsche to "offer a framework in which people can discover new ways to look at problems, to think them through differently, to reflect on them." ⁷ How much would philosophical counseling be worth to the public? Veening says he can charge fifty dollars an hour for regular sessions.⁸

Judging from their willingness to pay this much for dialogue sessions with a professional philosopher, it sounds as if the public may have a fairly high regard for philosophy as a professional discipline that is practically useful to them. However, a comment in *Reader's Digest* ⁹ may give a truer account of how many people feel: "[Fifty dollars] seems a little steep, especially when you can accomplish the same thing at a cafe or diner-for the cost of a cup of coffee with a friend." This remark suggests a scepticism-a doubt that the methods professional philosophers have to offer are any better than ordinary conversation over coffee between participants who have no philosophical training.

There is also further evidence that philosophers are failing to convince the public that what they are doing is worthwhile, interesting, or of practical value to them. If you go into the chain bookstores in the shopping malls, you see that the "philosophy" section is very skimpy-it probably contains some inspirational (religious) books, perhaps the *I Ching*, some new-age books, and possibly some of the more popular Bertrand Russell paperbacks. There is usually one shelf of "philosophy" books, and they make an odd assortment. Few, if any of them are written by current

professional philosophers (professors of philosophy). You get the impression of a derelict subject.

By contrast, the social-sciences section is flourishing. It probably has many shelves, full of very recent books. Many of these are paperback practical advice books on family, marriage, personal well-being, and related subjects. Here you get the impression of a subject that is alive and well. These paperbacks are selling very well, and typically they are written by current practitioners in the fields of psychology, sociology, and so forth. They are written in a lively, readable, unpretentious style, even though they use special terminology from the social sciences.

Of course, there are exceptions to these typical practices and expectations. But on the whole, there is, at the moment, a presumption against philosophy as a serious subject that has anything more to offer than entertainment value, or a kind of literary or cultural value that removes it from the everyday concerns of the average person. Most people think of philosophy as a kind of "brainstorming" that probably doesn't hurt anything, as long as you don't take it too seriously, but that should not get in the way of serious, scientific collection of data, or other important professional pursuits. The idea that philosophy results in, or contributes to, knowledge is an assumption treated with great scepticism. The presumption is that philosophy is "subjective," i.e., while it may be interesting, it definitely does not contribute to knowledge and is not a part of knowledge as a subject.

You can confirm these popular preconceptions by discussing this subject with students, others who have taken one philosophy course, or those who have never taken philosophy at a university-or by listening carefully to what they say and how they say it. This method of discussion and analysis of the subject is a much better way of finding out what popular assumptions are than taking an opinion poll. The latter method is too often easily biased by loaded, simplistic, misleading questions, asked out of context-usually over the telephone-to which the respondent gives a fast (and probably false or misleading) reply, in order to get rid of the nuisance of being polled. Such methods have their uses, but they are not very informative in answering a question of this sort.

4. HOW PHILOSOPHY GOT WHERE IT IS

When we look back to the doctrines of the leading analytic philosophers, many of their sweeping methodological pronouncements seem ridiculous

now. We can see why they made philosophy a sterile subject, of no interest except to the coterie of insider technicians. G. E. Moore stipulated that it is a fallacy to argue from an "is-proposition" to an "ought-proposition."¹⁰ This presumption pretty well guaranteed the sterility of ethics-"good" was defined as an "undefinable quality," and ethics, now regarded as a purely abstract, verbal type of inquiry, was barred from taking the practical realities of particular cases into account.

Strangely enough, the growth areas in recent years have been in practical ethics-such fields as medical ethics and business ethics. But these new subjects have grown up in an ad hoc way, necessarily because the only existing theory they had to fall back on was the analytic philosophers' peculiar, theoretical approach to ethics. The new practitioners were not ready to deal with analysis of case studies, and had no case study methodology. The best they could do was to fall back to discussing "ethical theories," e.g., Kantianism vs. utilitarianism. Most often, this tactic did not engage the issue directly enough to convince anyone that philosophers are up to anything more than abstract theorizing. In other words, the philosophers were confirming what everyone had suspected all along-that they were abstract theorizers who liked to play with words but did not directly address the issues or have anything important to say about them.

So, on the one hand, we had a central literature of sophisticated, analytic theory, and on the other hand, we had a growing body of working philosophers struggling to address practical issues, but bereft of any kind of framework or methodology useful for this purpose. This gap was reflected in the field of logic-an important source of method for philosophers. Logic was intensely mathematical, semantical, theoretical, but not very useful for philosophical analysis or assisting philosophical discussions. What we needed was a practical, applied, "informal" logic that would assist philosophical clarifications and questioning in a critical discussion.¹¹ What we got was a proliferation of abstract systems of propositional and quantifier logics. These systems proliferated so rapidly that the end result was a kind of relativism-pick any system you like. Moreover, it seemed that all of the systems rested on assumptions that were questionable. Each system was applicable to one bit of reality or natural language discourse, but seemed to be inappropriate or inapplicable to another bit of realistic discourse. For example, the analysis of the conditional, "if A then B," which seemed to be the central problem for logic, slid into chaos as hundreds of ways of analyzing it were proposed, each of them technically correct within narrow limits, but demonstrably inapplicable to the if-then of natural language.

The current state of affairs in philosophy is a direct outcome of Pascal's terribly effective ridicule of casuistry in the 1640s. Before that time, philosophers had discussed the applicability of philosophical viewpoints to particular cases, using casuistry, a kind of "case ethics" that studied questions and conflicts of opinion arising from the discussion of particular circumstances in specific examples. As Toulmin (1988, p. 339) has shown—see also Jonsen and Toulmin (1988)—Pascal's *Provincial Letters* was so successful in ridiculing the casuistic methods used by the Jesuits that the entire enterprise of studying individual cases in philosophy was brought into "lasting discredit." As Toulmin notes (p. 339), the trend in ethics afterwards, starting notably with the Cambridge Platonists, was to proceed as if ethics were purely a study of abstract theory which should not discuss concrete questions arising out of particular cases. The upshot was that as philosophy moved towards the twentieth century, it more and more often ignored practical questions. With the rise of analytic philosophy after the turn of the century, philosophy began to portray itself as a purely abstract inquiry into verbal and theoretical questions, using technical methods derived from mathematics and theoretical linguistics.

Meanwhile, the trendy philosophical writers, who have won an enthusiastic readership among the nonspecialist public, have launched into the subject of how to interpret and analyze a text of discourse in natural language, with such techniques as deconstruction and hermeneutics. Like the existentialists before them, these authors succeeded in impressing a nonspecialist public with clouds of gaseous rhetoric, picturesque images, and new faddish terms that sounded impressive. However, at the end of it all, we were no better off than when we started. In fact, worse off, because the bottom line seemed to be that one argument is as good as another—a kind of relativism that is good for literary license and free expression, but is the death of philosophy as a subject to be taken seriously.

The basic idea was timely. Start with a text. Root out bias, questionable assumptions, points of view, implicit premises. Then pose critical questions, find errors and gaps, cite fallacies and other critical shortcomings. Good ideas, but the hermeneutic-deconstructionist philosophies had no useful method or structure to offer to help us carry out these tasks. Their ideas were posturing and had no real content. As a fad, those philosophies destroyed themselves in the mad relativistic rush from one popular cause to the next. They now seem to form a convenient political platform to support your favorite interest group—a sure sign of corruption, emptiness, and rationalization paraded as critical argumentation.

According to Rorty (1991), twentieth century philosophical thinkers have converged on a position of anti-representationalism, meaning that any reality independent of, or prior to, thought and language is rejected, with the consequence that rational argumentation cannot lead philosophy to agree on some truth about the way things really are. This may be a less radical relativism than that of the deconstructivists. But Rorty prefers, in his writings, to talk about "stories" rather than arguments. Thus Rorty's form of relativism also goes a good way towards an abandonment of concern over analyzing and evaluating arguments by a philosophy that is critical, methodical, and logical. For even if philosophy does not result in knowledge, of the kind typified by scientific investigation, it should have rules of reasonable dialogue that enable a rational critic to evaluate some arguments as reasonable and other arguments as fallacious, or open to critical questioning. Rorty's relativism seems to license an abandonment of standards of consistency and of rules that require sticking to a position; it would license going along with, or even rationalizing, the dominant climate of opinion. After all, argumentation doesn't force us to agree on truth about the way things really are, or to resolve or argue out our disagreements by rules of critical discussion and argumentation schemes.

The danger with anti-representationalism is that, like the deconstructivist approach, it may make for the weaving of interesting narratives that are good reading for nonspecialists, but may lack enough substance or underlying hard edges to be of lasting interest. The failure is not to yield some critical basis for judging one argument as better than another. This gives philosophy lots of freedom, but leaves it with no method.

5. CASE STUDY METHOD IN PHILOSOPHY

A better case needs to be made for a distinction between theoretical and applied philosophy. Philosophy needs some kind of method or theory, worked out by the senior, professional practitioners of the discipline, which can be applied by the junior (learning) practitioners. This theory should be a method of dialogue (critical discussion) that can be applied to a particular case where there is a controversial issue, in order to examine the strongest arguments on both sides.

Medical ethics is a good model to begin with. A good case presents a controversial issue or question. The case study needs to look at the arguments on both sides. The key thing for philosophy is to critically analyze the techniques of argumentation employed by both sides. By asking critical questions concerning both arguments, the analysis yields insight (personal

knowledge or understanding) that can be gained by anyone who reads the case study report and relates it to his personal position on the issue. This process does not always resolve the initial conflict of opinions, but even so it can yield personal insight through the maieutic function of dialogue.

A big problem in philosophy is that Ph.D. students tend to go adrift trying to finish a thesis. This tendency has been well documented in the book *The Ph.D. Trap* (Cude, 1987). The reason for this tendency, particularly in philosophy, is the lack of a method that can be applied to a problem. The problem may be clear enough, but the student's attempt to deal with it often becomes unmanageable, because there is no method or set of procedures which the student can learn and then apply to the problem.

For this reason, the least problematic kind of Ph. D. thesis in philosophy is the historical thesis. There is a given data base (the historical philosopher's writings), and the graduate student can take a historical exegetical approach to studying some part of the corpus of writings. If the writings are in another language, for example ancient Greek, the student needs to master the language. Having reached that point, she will already be treated as a kind of specialist, and her work will have a methodical procedure she can follow, amassing evidence and arriving at a conclusion.

A student in logic needs quite a lot of mathematical training. But again, having achieved a certain level of knowledge of mathematical methods, he can proceed methodically, avoiding the Ph.D. Trap of going on and on for years and never finishing. The more astute and better organized students realize that the trick is to learn the methodology of some other field, such as history, mathematics, or law, and then apply it to a philosophical problem. Those who try to tackle their problem using philosophical methods are in the greatest danger of falling into the Ph.D. Trap, because there is no philosophical method-or at least none that can be learned in time to finish a Ph. D. thesis. Small wonder that many graduate students in philosophy tend to be confused, disoriented, and depressed. The ones who sincerely want to do some real philosophy find themselves in quicksand. No matter how much ingenuity and effort they put into the hard discipline of writing, they can never be confident that they are really making progress.

Thesis supervision can make a big difference here. But a capable and motivated student should not have to rely heavily on detailed supervision. At the Ph.D. level she should be able to work on a project without constantly having to be supervised concerning minute details. This process is exhausting and inefficient for both parties, and too often a frustrating experience.

One way out of the trap would be for the student to collect case study materials related to the problem or issue of the project. In medical ethics and business ethics, this type of research is already widely accepted. But the same kind of methodology can be used in other areas. In informal logic, fallacies and other phenomena can be studied by collecting texts in which argumentation has been used—for example, in speeches or other discussions. In some ways, this task of collecting case studies is comparable to the collection of empirical evidence in the sciences. The cases do not have to be "real." You can even make them up. But they have to be plausible, in the sense that they represent common and useful moves in argumentation. Their "realistic" aspect makes philosophical analysis "practical" in an appealing way—it is connected to "the real world," and people can see how and why. Philosophy has ceased to be the insider theorizing of the few, and has become something that anyone can do and can see how to do. It is no longer mysterious and elusive; it now relates to practical concerns, and everyone can see that it does. You don't have to be a mathematician or a Greek specialist to do it. There is plenty of work to do, and at least some hope of seeing how to go about doing it.

Of course, we don't have a case study methodology for philosophy yet. But other fields, such as medicine, business, and law have it, and it works fine there. We can easily adapt this method to our own ideas, and even improve on it, given the special dialectical skills of philosophers.

The case study method goes with the dialectical view of philosophy because each case is different from the last one, even though the two may be similar. Hence you need a dynamic model of reasoning (logic) with which presumptions can be retracted or modified, as new evidence comes in, to fit the changed circumstances of a different case. The kind of practical reasoning needed to argue in a case study is a nonmonotonic kind of default (defeasible) reasoning that is inherently tentative and subject to retractions and corrections.¹² The key concept here is the arguer's commitment in a dialogue. Commitment may be tentative, and may need to be withdrawn if a conflict, or new contrary evidence, is pointed out by one's partner in a dialogue. The kind of logic that is useful is a dialectical logic of reasoned commitment—in the current jargon it would be described as a shift from a purely formal logic to an informal logic of argumentation.¹³

6. PROGRESS IN PHILOSOPHY?

Why has there appeared to be no progress in philosophy, in contrast to science, in which there has been an accumulation of established findings,

built upon by successive generations of scientists?¹⁴ In comparing philosophy with science, this question suggests that the investment of effort in philosophy in the past has been a failure. But is the question based on the misconception that philosophy is a type of inquiry, an incremental investigation, starting from premises that can be established as knowledge and verified as true by repeatable (reproducible) methods? Once we get away from a positivistic point of view, the question can be seen to be based on some questionable presumptions.

According to the foundationalist view of scientific inquiry, science is a forward-moving investigation because the established premises, founded in a particular science, do not need to be retracted, at least not very often. Given well-established premises, the inquiry can go forward without requiring constant discussion about these premises by the community of working researchers. Whether such a foundationalist view of scientific reasoning is correct is open to dispute among philosophers of science. But this view, that science is an inquiry, has often been maintained by leading scientists, and it is a view of science that has won a place in the public perception of science as an activity.

The kind of argumentation involved in philosophy appears to be quite different, however. Philosophical argumentation does not seem to be directed towards the goal of moving forward on the basis of premises that are known to be true—despite the contrary views of Plato and Descartes, which have been so influential in modern philosophy. Conceived as an inquiry, the history of philosophy would map out the record of a subject that has quite clearly failed to reach its goals. But contrary to this interpretation, it has always seemed that philosophy characteristically has chosen controversial issues as subjects for discussion, issues precisely where established knowledge cannot be brought to bear to resolve the conflict of opinions one way or the other.

Johnstone (1978) sees philosophical argumentation as distinct in type from scientific argumentation. Unlike a scientific inquiry, philosophical argumentation is typically directed towards refuting opposed views. To proceed in this way simply by adducing alleged facts would, according to Johnstone (p. 55), beg the question: "[A]ny philosophical argument based on alleged facts or evidence is doomed, because a philosophical position always is, or implies, a decision as to what is to count as facts or evidence." The question is how the facts are to be used in philosophical argumentation. Here we should note that "fact" is different from "case." A case is represented by a delimited text of discourse, set within a given context of dialogue, that describes an exchange or situation familiar to its readers.

The case represents something about the way things can usually, normally, or typically be expected to go. The case is based on presumptions shared by the participants in the case and the readers (interpreters) of the case. Also, there may be many things about a particular case that are not known or stated. Hence, our evaluations of a case often have to be conditional and incomplete in some respects.

Presentation and discussion of a case raise critical questions that should be dealt with in its analysis. A case is always evaluated in relation to similar cases, where particular conclusions have already been drawn. Thus, the evaluation of a case does not result in (hard) knowledge, but in provisional (defeasible) conclusions that are subject to revision, should new information come in, changing the case.

Knowledge of empirical data is, of course, relevant to a case study analysis of a disputed philosophical issue. But the empirical data are not "hard evidence," or decisive in resolving an issue, in the same way they are in a scientific investigation. In praising a book by Lamb (1990) on the ethics of organ transplantation, Crisp (1991) notes that applying philosophy to concrete moral issues in organ transplantation needs empirical information as well as ethical theory.

Being a philosopher, and one not inclined to press any precisely principled position on his reader, he [Lamb] identifies in an impartial way important areas of ethical dispute and provides the empirical data necessary for informed ethical reflection. Questions of allocation, for instance, are quite insoluble in the absence of clear data about the rates of success of various forms of therapy.

In a good case-study approach to discussion of a philosophical question, such as an ethical issue posed by advances in technology, the knowledge relevant to the particular circumstances is clearly important. But the tasks of the philosophers are to search out and provide this knowledge, showing why it is relevant, and also to clarify the dispute, looking at both sides of it.

Empirical knowledge is not irrelevant to philosophical argumentation, but it is not decisive. The main aim of philosophical argument is not to collect the known facts and, once they are established, to draw logical inferences from them. Philosophical issues are not resolved in this way.

Moreover, if you look to the writings of past philosophers on one of these issues, the findings are often useful, but only as a starting point for further discussion—even if, in some cases, the starting points can be quite ad-

vanced. You do not get established knowledge, but what you typically do get is a good basis for further discussion, one that clears some of the ground, but may be based on presumptions now questionable (in light of current views, some of which will inevitably have changed). Thus, in a discussion on whether the war in the Persian Gulf can be morally justified, you would get a lot of insight and benefit from consulting a past philosopher-for example, Aquinas-on the concept of a just war. But you wouldn't expect to find final answers there, or to find that all the assumptions made in Aquinas's discussion are beyond dispute or questioning in relation to a current situation.

The model of dialogue appropriate for philosophy is, therefore, different from that of the scientific inquiry. Dewey (1946; 1989, p. 157) noticed that a problem with the postwar analytical philosophy was its tendency to neglect wisdom and values-"intelligent conduct of the affairs of human life"-in favor of investigating the foundations of "the various authentic knowings that form the sciences." Philosophy began to take its cue from mathematics and formal logic, concentrating on theoretical questions, and denouncing any study of practical affairs as beyond the reach of knowledge, according to Dewey (p. 159). Pragmatism, as a school of thought, sought to offset this theoretical tendency on the part of philosophy. The pragmatists were right to worry that philosophy might become so technical that it would lose touch with the practical issues and questions of everyday conversations.

Philosophical argumentation is different from argumentation in a scientific inquiry. The burden of proof and conditions for retraction are different. Philosophical dialogue does not allow for completely free retraction of premises, but for an organized kind of retraction that is not freely allowed in any situation. Knowledge of relevant facts can be important in a philosophical discussion, but does not (by itself) resolve the issue. Also important is the personal set of commitments (position) of each participant in the discussion, representing the pro and contra sides of the issue.¹⁵ The value of a philosophical discussion lies in the depth of argumentation revealed in the positions on both sides as the argument advances. The goal is not to establish knowledge, but to resolve the initial conflict of opinions, or at least understand it better by extracting the plausible arguments and key presumptions on both sides. Opening your philosophical view to a public discussion with an able opponent is like the test of empirical evidence for scientific hypotheses, in that it will reveal weaknesses and counter-instances, and possibly will even lead to refutation. But the goal is

not the same in the two types of dialogue. The scientific inquiry has the goal of proving or disproving a proposition, as being a part of established knowledge or not. The critical discussion of a philosophical issue has the goal of sharpening the positions on both sides by extracting the key presumptions and subjecting them to argumentation. The benefit here is the personal (maieutic) function of revealing the deeper (implicit) position behind a point of view on a controversial issue.

What is proposed here is a different way of looking at philosophy as a subject, making it an altogether different enterprise from the scientific inquiry. According to this conception, philosophy involves the use of reasoned argumentation, but the purpose to which this reasoning is put is not one of proof or disproof of a hypothesis based on premises that are established or verified as knowledge. Accordingly, the appearance of "no progress" in philosophy, compared to science, condemns philosophy because it is based on the questionable assumption that philosophy is a kind of inquiry. In a way, there has been "progress" in philosophy, but it is not an accumulation of established findings beyond questioning. Instead, it is a continuation of a discussion that is extended and deepened as it is applied to different circumstances, where some assumptions have changed. Progress, defined in this setting, is not a linear increment of established results. Describing the goal in those terms makes philosophy appear to be a dramatic failure. But from the point of view of the dialectical conception of philosophy, this appearance is an illusion generated by inappropriate expectations.

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NOTES

Acknowledgment: The author would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a Research Grant that helped to support the work for this paper. Thanks are due to Henry Johnstone, Erik Krabbe, and Nicholas Rescher for helpful comments on an earlier draft that led to many corrections and improvements in formulation of my arguments.

1. The dialectical view is not new. Plato, at least in his earlier writings (Robinson, 1953), and Aristotle (Evans, 1977) have been portrayed as exponents of the dialectical method in philosophy. It can be argued that the sophists were the originators of this view of philosophy (Kerferd, 1981).

2. The Greek word *maieutikos* (skill in midwifery) was often used as a metaphor by

Socrates to describe assisting to bring a new idea to light, the function of the dialectical philosopher.

3. See Robinson (1953).
4. See note 1 above.
5. No claim is made that the dialectical view presented in this paper represents the views either of Plato or Aristotle on what dialectic as a method is supposed to be. However, the view expounded here is obviously much closer to the Greek idea of dialectic than it is to the Hegelian or Marxist conception.
6. See Kerferd (1981), who argues that Socrates was himself a sophist.
7. Dickey (1990, p. 17).
8. Ibid.
9. Part of an editorial in *Newsday* quoted in "Notes from All Over," *Readers Digest*, February 1991, p. 78.
10. In *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge University Press, first edition, 1903.
11. See Walton (1989).
12. Walton (1990).
13. Walton (1989).
14. At least, according to the foundationalist interpretation of scientific inquiry often advocated by scientists, and accepted by the public. Many philosophers of science would, of course, disagree with this interpretation.
15. Walton and Krabbe (to appear).

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