On Construing Philosophy

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I

What is chemistry? is not a chemical question nor a question in chemistry. What is economics? is not an economic question nor a question in economics. And What is history? is neither a historical question nor a question in history. But, notoriously, What is philosophy? is itself a philosophical question and a question in philosophy. This has led some, among them Ludwig Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell, and Gilles-Gaston Granger, to deny that there can be such a thing as metaphilosophy as something standing before or above philosophy and saying what it is, properly is, or should be. To assert — or, for that matter, to deny — that philosophy is, properly is, or should be so and so is to engage in philosophy itself and any such claims, or attempted claims, will themselves be bits of philosophy and not something meta-to-philosophy.

Thus, while strictly speaking there can be no metaphilosophy, we will, as a term of art, and following what has become something of a tradition, call the philosophy of philosophy 'metaphilosophy.' That is to say, we will take as metaphilosophical that cluster of questions

or perplexities concerning ‘What is philosophy?'; ‘What is it, properly?'; ‘What should it be?'; ‘What (if anything) is its point, purpose, or task?'; ‘What is its proper subject matter, scope, method or methods?'; ‘What is its nature (if indeed it has one)?'; ‘What kind (if any kind) of discipline is it?'; ‘Is it a science? If so, in what sense: is it a formal science or an experimental science?'; ‘Can it, and should it (if it can), be scientific?'; ‘What, if anything, are the data of philosophy or is that even the right way to conceptualize things in speaking of philosophy?’ These, and similar questions, are themselves philosophical questions — though perhaps some of them are pseudo-questions — about philosophy which we, as a kind of shorthand, will call metaphilosophical questions; and the inquiries going on in this volume will, directly or indirectly, be metaphilosophical.

Analytic philosophers, the founding figures in some of their founding programmatic documents aside, have usually not been interested in metaphilosophical issues. The attitude has characteristically been, though it has seldom been clearly articulated, that we understand well enough ambulando what philosophy properly done is. The thing is to get in there and do it as rigorously as possible, going directly to the issues without a lot of dancing around the subject or navel-gazing over what we are doing. Even if we do not command a clear view of how philosophy is to be characterized, if we have much in the way of philosophical skills, we have enough of a feel for the kind of activity we are engaged in to just get in there and do it. Scientists may not have any clear view, either, about what science is, but still, some of them so situated, do their scientific work very well indeed. Thinking about what science is, or at least thinking about it very persistently, would just get in the way of their scientific work. Why should it be different, these philosophers ask, in philosophy? They conclude that it isn’t and think they are quite justified in setting metaphilosophical issues aside and just getting on with their philosophical work.

This is not, of course, true of all philosophers, including all great philosophers. Ludwig Wittgenstein was a striking example of an exception. Still, Wittgenstein’s obsession with what we have called metaphilosophical issues was widely regarded as, for all his brilliance, aberrant, as were the preoccupations of such lesser luminaries as John Wisdom, Frederick Waismann, Rush Rhees, Alice Ambrose, O.K.
Bouwsma, and Morris Lazerowitz. That metaphilosophical considera-
tions played such a large role in the work of such later important figures as Richard Rorty, Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Cavell, Hilary Putnam, and Charles Taylor was often taken as just one further sign of their apostasy from the analytic tradition. Yet these philosophers — most forcefully, Wittgenstein and Rorty — as well as some winds from the Continent have given some philosophers (including some analytic philosophers and other intellectuals interested in philosophy) pause concerning the very doing of philosophy. It is not obvious, though many analytical philosophers persist in thinking so, that all is well in the kingdom of Denmark. How to proceed and the point of doing what we standardly have done has come up for serious consideration and this has fuelled the subject of metaphilosophy.

II

This rethinking of philosophy, though it has some constant features, has taken different forms. But in any of its forms it gives us firmly to understand that philosophy, facing either misleading or well-
grounded critiques, confronted with either dead ends or new chal-
enges, is in need of justification. None of the contributors to the present book will conclude, with Richard Rorty, that no such justifi-
cation can be given and that the philosophy of philosophy should be an anti-philosophy philosophy.\textsuperscript{2} But the effect of the Rortyizing of

\textsuperscript{2} Anti-philosophy philosophy is \textit{not} anti-philosophy \textit{simpliciter}. It is not Aristotle lampooning Socrates or, in our time, some academics (to say nothing of some non-academics) dismissing philosophy as bull, as either being rhetorical hot-air or nit-picking ‘logic chopping’ to no issue. Some anti-philosophy philosophers will acknowledge that there is sometimes more in such scoffing dismissals than many philosophers are willing to acknowledge. (The usual defense mechanisms are at work here.) But anti-philosophy philosophers also realize, and acknowledge, that there are deep intellectual as well as other pressures that drive some people into thinking philosophically. Philosophy has a long history in our Western tradition and cannot, and should not, be just shrugged off or joked off. Anti-philosophy philosophers do not just engage in ridicule and such shrugging.
off, but, with all the perils of pragmatic self-contradiction, argue philosophically for the end of philosophy as it has been traditionally conceived (conceived of either in the grand metaphysical-epistemological tradition or in systematic analytical philosophy). The work of both Wittgenstein and Rorty is crucially paradigmatic here. But Rorty (to say nothing of Wittgenstein), I suspect, would not welcome the term 'anti-philosophy philosophy.' Rorty rightly argues that there is no sensible talk of 'the end of philosophy' sans phrase. (See the last section of this essay.) But, all the same, Rorty, perfectly and brilliantly, exemplifies what, in Section II and the beginning of Section III, we characterize as anti-philosophy philosophy. Rorty distinguishes, in a way that is germane here, between philosophy and Philosophy. The former is something Rorty takes to be quite unproblematic and as something that is not about to come to an end. It is — he adopts the phrase from Wilfrid Sellars — 'an attempt to see how things, in the broadest sense of the term, hang together, in the broadest sense of the term' (xiv). He goes on to add that in 'this sense, Blake is as much a philosopher as Fichte, Henry Adams more of a philosopher than Frege. No one would be dubious about philosophy, taken in this sense' (xv, italics added). But besides philosophy, a desirable and, he believes, an unproblematic activity, there is Philosophy, something which is much more specialized and, he believes, very dubious indeed. It is Philosophy — either in the grand metaphysical and epistemological traditions or in the naturalistic and scientific forms of Quine or Armstrong — that Rorty opposes and rejects. He agrees with the pragmatist, indeed he is himself a pragmatist, in believing 'that one can be a philosopher precisely by being anti-Philosophical, that the best way to make things hang together is to step back from the issues between Platonists and positivists, and thereby give up the presuppositions of Philosophy' (xvii). Key programmatic statements by Rorty occur in his Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1982), xiii-xlvi and 211-30. It is from this text that we have been quoting in this note. Given his distinction between philosophy and Philosophy, when we call him an anti-Philosophy philosopher, the anti-Philosophy part is with a capital 'P.' In this crucial sense John Dewey is an anti-Philosophy philosopher as well, though his tone is less arch. Wittgenstein, however, might be thought to be an anti-philosophy philosopher in both senses of 'philosophy.' See here Michael Williams, 'The Elimination of Metaphysics' in Graham Macdonald and Crispin Wright, eds., Fact, Science and Morality (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986), 20-4. Joseph F. McDonald, in an unpublished doctoral dissertation from the University of Ottawa, 1993, entitled Wittgenstein's Therapeutic Conception of Philosophy, sets out a convincing textual and argumentative case for the claim that, from his early Notebooks, through the Tractatus, the Investigations, and on to and through On Certainty, Wittgenstein retained a thoroughly therapeutic conception of philosophy. See also James Conant, 'The Search for Logically Alien Thought: Descartes, Kant, Frege and the Tractatus,' Philosophical Topics 20 (Fall 1991) 100-66.
philosophy, to label the anti-philosophy philosophy position after its most uncompromising articulator in the contemporary Anglo-American context, shows itself in various forms in the present volume.

Most philosophers, rightly or wrongly, would simply think, as Putnam does, that such anti-philosophy philosophy self-destructs. If it succeeds it refutes itself and if it fails, it of course fails. Moreover, it is hardly news, waiting for a movement of anti-philosophy philosophy to announce it, that what philosophy is is itself problematic. Outside of philosophy there is (where it is thought about at all) often consternation about philosophy and what it can come to and what it has become. But inside philosophy itself, a not inconsiderable number of philosophers have come to feel a not inconsiderable dissatisfaction with their subject.

In a way, that story is an old one. Again and again in our subject, philosophers have condemned their predecessors and have called for foundations radically different from what they have had in the past. Not infrequently, later historians of ideas have correctly pointed out, typically long after the fact — think of Etienne Gilson on Descartes — that the forger of new ways was not as radically different as he took himself to be. Still, some of these philosophical iconoclasts have radically reconstructed the very conception of what philosophy is and some seem at least to be talking themselves out of doing philosophy altogether. What may be happening with some, as, say, with Frederich Nietzsche, John Dewey, Richard Rorty, Michel Foucault, or Jacques Derrida, is that their reconceptualization of philosophy is so deep that many philosophers cannot see it, and perhaps rightly, as philosophy at all. The turmoil caused by Jacques Derrida is a striking example. But for the truly anti-philosophy philosopher, it is salutary to keep in mind the remark made quite independently by both Etienne Gilson and George Santayana that philosophy has always lived on to bury its self-appointed grave diggers.

Whatever may have been true in the past, the present anti-philosophy philosophy challenge cuts deep, at least culturally speaking, particularly when one tries to construe philosophy, as it has standardly been construed in the modern tradition, as an autonomous discipline with a subject matter, a method (or methods), and (sometimes) truth-claims of its own. With anti-philosophy philosophy, with philosophers such as Rorty, and to some extent with Wittgenstein
himself, there is not, as with Descartes, Kant, Hegel, or Peirce, just a call for a setting aside of our old philosophical practices and the articulating of new — radically new — firmer philosophical foundations and for a better philosophical method, but for the very setting aside, as 'a house of cards,' of philosophy itself, taken as an autonomous or even a distinctive discipline. Such anti-philosophy philosophers are not skeptics denying that we can have any knowledge at all or, more consistently, just remaining doubtful concerning all knowledge claims in any domain. They say neither of those things but rather that philosophy is a source of ersatz knowledge. They reject the idea of there being any such thing as philosophical knowledge or justified philosophical beliefs. They do not believe that any philosophical theory can gain extensive rational assent among the community of impartial inquirers. They need not be, though some are, against theorizing in general but only against philosophical theorizing.

Philosophy, they claim, has neither a method nor a subject matter that could yield anything like a distinctive knowledge. Philosophers cannot be the guardians of truth or of good sense or of meaning or of rationality or of what it makes sense to say. And they cannot coherently set themselves up as the judges or referees of the legitimacy of the rest of culture. There is, the claim continues, no domain where by logical, conceptual, or linguistic analysis philosophers can, if they are very careful, imaginative, and ingenious, provide us with some distinctively philosophical knowledge or justified beliefs.

In the present volume, Simon Blackburn and Thomas McCarthy seek to meet Rorty's challenge head on. Blackburn first states some core parts of the anti-philosophy philosophy case, tersely and clearly in his own terms, then seeks to show that some rather standard prima facie plausible responses will not do, and finally, again tersely, he provides his own defense of the practice of analytical philosophy.

4 Kai Nielsen, 'On There Being Philosophical Knowledge,' *Theoria* 56 (1990) 193-225
McCarthy also challenges anti-philosophy philosophers on their own ground, arguing that in their attack on logocentric philosophical thinking they themselves engage in a form of self-referential or performative contradiction. Michael Williams, Stanley Stein, Bjørn Ramberg, and Barry Allen do not attempt to meet anti-philosophy philosophy claims head on, but, self-consciously philosophizing after Wittgenstein and Rorty, and after the powerful anti-foundationalism and holism of Quine and Davidson, they seek to find a place for fruitful work reflecting importantly altered ways of philosophizing. Others, such as John Passmore, Jules Vuillemin, J.J.C. Smart, Gilles-Gaston Granger, and Francis Sparshott, write in studied distance from such trends and attempt to forge paths that are not explored by the critique of traditional philosophy coming from the first group of philosophers. There is also a considerable distance between the analytical pragmatism of Isaac Levi and Mark Kaplan and Rorty’s pragmatism without method as there is a considerable distance between the points of view on philosophy expressed by two such different analytical philosophers as Granger and Blackburn.

III

A central metaphilosophical claim of what we have called anti-philosophy philosophy is that philosophy, construed as an autonomous or even as a distinctive discipline with some distinctive methods justifying distinctively philosophical beliefs, rests on a mistake. This

traditional conception of philosophy is at best false. If philosophy is somehow distinctive, the claim goes, then it is distinctive not as a discipline, but as a gigantic aberration.

The essays in the first section of this volume in various ways attempt to rebut these anti-philosophy philosophy claims and seek to show that philosophy, having a subject matter and methods of its own, first, is a discipline, and second, is a distinctive discipline yielding genuine and distinctive knowledge. We shall not rehearse or summarize the arguments of those essays here, for they are clear enough, but shall, stepping back a little in time, look first at how the demarcation problem, as it has been called, was characteristically viewed by both the logical positivists and many linguistic philosophers. Indeed, it was also a view shared by many opponents of those philosophers as well, though not by pragmatists or Frankfurt School critical theorists or (later) by scientific realists or by Quine and philosophers who are broadly Quinean. But even such naturalistic and holistic philosophers, rejecting the idea of any sharp demarcation, based on a difference in kind, seem implicitly to presuppose something like a difference of degree. The fence is down indeed, but there still seems to be terrain which is distinctively philosophical, though exactly what this is is difficult to characterize.

The way of demarcating for logical positivists and ordinary language philosophers poses clearly the problematicity of philosophy and makes us ask what, if any, legitimate subject matter, methods, or problems philosophy can have. The problems of philosophy on such a view are different from the problems of *lebenswelt* and yet philosophy is not science or logic or literature, though it may, of course, in certain ways, utilize science or logic or literature. But if philosophy is none of these things, and if it is not an informal reflective hashing over of the problems of our time, e.g., what to do about abortion, nationalism, or alienation, then the question of what it is stands starkly before us.

Of the many articulations of this question, Isaiah Berlin’s is one of the more forceful or at least one of the more colorful. In his 1962 essay ‘The Purpose of Philosophy,’ Berlin claims that in trying to ascertain the subject matter of philosophy, it is best to start by asking of it, as one should of any other discipline one wishes to demarcate from other
disciplines and the other activities that surround it, what kind of questions is the (putative) discipline supposed to answer. Berlin's assumption is that the 'subjects or fields of study are determined by the kind of questions to which they have been invented to provide the answers. The questions themselves are intelligible if, and only if, we know where to look for the answers.'

If we look to the questions arising in our common life, in science, in mathematics and logic, we will find that there are two generally accepted procedures used to answer them. If we ask 'Where is her sweater?'; 'Are there detention camps in Serbia?'; 'Why did the Soviet Union break up?'; or 'Are there robins in New Zealand?' we very well may not know the answers to these questions but we have at least a rough idea of the procedures that must be used to find an answer. 'Where is her sweater?' or 'Are there robins in New Zealand?' are, of course, simpler than the question of why the Soviet Union broke up. But in all three cases we know how to set about finding answers.

Berlin continues that what 'makes this type of question intelligible in the first place is that we think that the answer can be discovered by empirical means, that is, by orderly observation or experiment, or methods compounded of these, namely those of common sense or of the natural sciences.' There is, however, another class of questions where we are no less clear about the proper route by which answers are to be sought, namely the formal disciplines: mathematics, for example, or logic, or grammar, or chess, or heraldry, defined in terms of certain fixed axioms and certain rules of deduction, etc., where the

6 Isaiah Berlin, Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1980), 1. In this volume of Berlin's more generally see vii-viii, 1-11 and 143-72. See, as well, his long interview with Bryan Magee in Magee's Men of Ideas (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982), 2-27 and his 'Austin and the Early Beginnings of Oxford Philosophy' in G.J. Warnock, ed., Essays on J.L. Austin (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1973) 1-16. Stated just like that Berlin's claim is too strong. It would have been better if he had said that we must at least have some idea, though sometimes not a very clear one, of where to look for answers.

7 Berlin, Concepts and Categories, 1
answer to the problem is to be found by applying these rules in the manner prescribed as correct. Of course, sometimes in these formal disciplines we do not know the proof of a theorem. No one has yet found the proof for Fermat’s theorem. ‘But,’ as Berlin puts it, ‘we know along what lines to proceed: we know what kinds of methods will and what kind of methods will not be relevant to the answer.’

We know we will not find answers to logical or mathematical problems by observing the moon, digging deep into the earth, or asking people how they feel about the reunification of Germany. Similarly, and perhaps a little less obviously, we cannot answer empirical questions such as whether there are robins in New Zealand or whether we are moving toward a new ice age ‘by pure calculation without any factual content at all.’ If someone tries to solve formal questions by observation or empirical questions by pure deduction, we recognize that he simply does not understand what these practices are. He does not understand the sorts of answers one seeks by using these methods and he does not understand the kind of questions that formal and empirical disciplines are intended to solve.

In contrasting the sciences with philosophy, it should be kept firmly in mind that both formal and empirical sciences, using their own specialized techniques, can, in favored circumstances, yield definite answers. There are, of course, breakthroughs in the use of these techniques made by people of genius, but once the new techniques are firmly established they can be used in a fairly routine manner by people of no genius at all to obtain reliable results. Berlin sums up what he is claiming here in the following striking passage:

The hallmark of these provinces of human thought is that once the question is put we know in which direction to proceed to try to obtain the answer. The history of systematic human thought is largely a sustained effort to formulate all the questions that occur to mankind in such a way that the answers to them

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8 Ibid., 1-2
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
will fall into one or other of two great baskets: the empirical, i.e., questions whose answers depend, in the end, on the data of observation; and the formal, i.e., questions whose answers depend on pure calculation, untrammelled by factual knowledge. This dichotomy is a drastically oversimple formulation: empirical and formal elements are not so easily disentangled but it contains enough truth not to be seriously misleading."11

Berlin then goes on to remark that a distinguishing feature, perhaps the distinguishing feature, of philosophical questions — the way of demarcating them, and with them philosophy, from other disciplines — is that they are neither empirical nor formal. Here he is giving voice to what at the time he was writing (1962) would have been the dominant view among philosophers in the analytic tradition.

The two great proven instruments of human thought, the claim went, seem quite helpless to answer philosophical questions. A hallmark of philosophical questions is that we do not know how to proceed to answer them or even to understand what we would take as an answer to them. That is why philosophers such as John Wisdom and O.K. Bouwsma characteristically refer to philosophical problems and questions as perplexities. It is not, they give us to understand, even clear that we have coherent questions before us. If I ask 'Where is my coat?' and you say 'It's in the downstairs closet,' we know how to go about settling whether that is so. We know where to look. But if a child asks 'Where is the image in the mirror?' there is not a similar straightforward way of telling her where to look or even a well-marked way of responding to her question. We do not know our way around with philosophical questions. We do not understand what to do to settle them. They generate perplexities; they are questions that call themselves into question. Philosophical 'questions' are, to underst-ate it, very strange. They are, of course, strange outside of philosophy, but they are also strange when we reflect on them inside philosophy. We are aware, if we are philosophers with much of a critical bent, that we are unclear about what we are asking in asking them. As Berlin points out 'What is the meaning of "the future tense"?'

11 Ibid.
can be answered by grammarians by mechanically applying formal rules; but if I ask 'What is the meaning of “the future”?,' where are we to look for the answer? There are no built-in or even relatively determinate agreed-on techniques, or even agreed-on techniques at all, for answering philosophical questions.

Considerations of this sort led the logical positivists and many linguistic philosophers, and long before them, Hume, to draw the conclusion that philosophical questions were pseudo-questions to be dissolved as conceptual confusions rather than genuine questions to be answered. But, whether pseudo-questions or not, this common feature gives us a way, Berlin argues, of demarcating philosophical problems:

This shows that between the two original baskets, the empirical and the formal, there is at least one intermediate basket in which all those questions live which cannot easily be fitted into the other two. These questions are of the most diverse nature; some appear to be questions of fact, others of value; some are questions about words and a few symbols; others are about methods pursued by those who use them: scientists, artists, critics, common men in the ordinary affairs of life; still others are about the relations between various provinces of knowledge; some deal with the presuppositions of thinking, some with the nature and ends of moral or social or political action.

The only common characteristic, which all these questions appear to have, is that they cannot be answered either by observation or calculation, either by inductive methods or deductive; and, as a crucial corollary of this, that those who ask them are faced with perplexity from the very beginning — they do not know where to look for the answers; there are no dictionaries, encyclopedias, compendia of knowledge, no experts, no orthodoxies which can be referred to with confidence as possessing unquestionable authority or knowledge in these matters.

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 3-4
IV

There is a number of responses that can be made to such a basketing, such a demarcation, of philosophy. Traditional philosophy did, and still does (as in the works of F.C. Copleston, Richard Swinburne, Peter Geach, C.B. Martin, and Hugo Meynell), take these philosophical 'questions' — these perplexities or conundrums — at face value. So taking them it sets about, or tries to set about, answering them. One could seek, in one way or another, to prove that there is a God or that there isn't, that we could know that sensations are brain-processes or bodily functions or that they are not, that we can know ultimate reality or that such a notion is an illusion, that we know that time flows or doesn't, that there is an external world or that solipsism is true, and the like. One cannot, these traditionalists agree, ascertain or vindicate these beliefs purely formally (though one perhaps can sometimes use logic along the way) or vindicate them experimentally, but some of them can be established, traditionalists claim, by careful philosophical thinking. Philosophy, after all, is an armchair activity. The method, if we want to call it a method, is the method of careful and disciplined reflection.

This traditionalist view, historically, has been a very influential view but it would have few takers today. We are at a loss as to how to establish such claims — there is nothing like a consensus on them or about how to proceed here — or even a consensus as to what they mean. We can hardly, no matter how much we wish to, take them at face value, for we do not know what their face is. We do not have to say that they are completely unintelligible, but when we inspect them with any tolerable care we are at a loss as to what we would take as answers to them and thus as to what we are asking.

A second way to respond is to take philosophical questions as second-order questions. Scientists, writers, and plain folk talk about


15 Kai Nielsen, 'On There Being Philosophical Knowledge,' 193-225
the world. The task for philosophers, or at least their central task, is to talk about the talk about the world. We should do this by patiently, carefully, and imaginatively charting the uses and implications of our natural languages keeping as much as possible philosophical conceptions and categories out of the way. What we need is pure and careful second-order interpretive description. This admittedly open-ended task was the task assigned to philosophers by post-positivist, non-therapeutic linguistic philosophy (e.g., Gilbert Ryle, Peter Strawson, and John Austin). But while this view plainly has its attractions, for philosophical questions then become tractable, it suffers from the difficulty that not all the philosophical questions can be plausibly said to be second-order. (John Passmore here and elsewhere has useful things to say about that.16) Think, for example, of the questions about justice, freedom, and equality dealt with by John Rawls, Brian Barry, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, G.A. Cohen, David Gauthier, and Joseph Raz or of questions about consciousness as dealt with by J.J.C. Smart, Hilary Putnam, Daniel Dennett, John Searle, or Jerry Fodor. Such philosophers, at least most of the time, in engaging in such activities are, rather plainly, not principally, or typically even at all, concerned with second-order issues. Moreover, even if many philosophical questions, typically questions about science, mathematics, logic, or philosophy itself, truly are second-order questions, it is not clear that they reduce to questions about the use of language in science, mathematics, logic, or philosophy. Is a philosophical argument opposing the use of modal logic in theoretical physics always an argument about the way of talking about the world and never an attempt to say something about how the world itself is supposed to be? Is the claim that philosophy is a pseudo-discipline talk about the language of philosophy or a claim about what can and cannot be shown to be true to the facts? And is the assertion that ethics cannot make genuine

truth claims an assertion about the language of morals or an assertion about the furniture of the world? There is perhaps a clear-cut distinction between second-order and first-order questions, but that distinction, clear-cut or otherwise, does not clearly — or so some believe — run along the line of the distinction between the ‘talk about the talk’ and the talk about some extra-linguistic ‘reality.’ Semantic ascent will sometimes leave enough philosophical residues to fill the third basket. Philosophers — at least traditional ones — who ask ‘Is time real?’ will not be happy with an answer to ‘How do we use temporal predicates?’ And, some would claim, that by insisting that an answer to the latter really is an answer to the former, one would simply show, not only that one does not understand the philosophical question, but that one does not understand what kind of question is being asked by philosophers. Finally, if it were the case that semantic ascent is at the core of philosophical questions so that they are all strictly equivalent to questions about use, then philosophy would be indistinguishable from linguistics or perhaps from logic. This is, of course, a way of resolving the problem of demarcation. But philosophy thus construed will have no specificity, except perhaps à la Wittgenstein a therapeutic one, and philosophers, as distinct from linguists or logicians, cannot have any pretention to contribute a distinctive, leave aside an autonomous, knowledge.

As a third way to respond to Berlin’s principle of demarcation, some might, as Bertrand Russell, A.J. Ayer, Austin, and sometimes Berlin himself did, grasping the above putative reduction, take a transformative view of philosophy. The thing to do is to work hard either by formal techniques à la Russell or informal ones à la Austin, to transform intractable philosophical perplexities into tractable genuine questions of either formal science or empirical science. Our life-world and science generate perplexities, quandaries, puzzles, ‘questions’ that belong in the third basket; the task, or a central task, of philosophers is by being reflective and by careful elucidation, through logical, linguistic, or conceptual analysis, to transform these perplexities (paring them down to size a bit) into genuine questions of either formal or empirical science so that they can be answered by one or another of the established techniques of these sciences. Austin, articulating that view, remarks:
In the history of human inquiry, philosophy has the place of the initial central sun, seminal and tumultuous: from time to time it throws off some portion of itself to take station as a science, a planet, cool and well regulated, progressing steadily towards a distant final state. This happened long ago at the birth of mathematics, and again at the birth of physics: only in the last century we have witnessed the same process once again, slow and at the time almost imperceptible, in the birth of the science of mathematical logic, through the joint labours of philosophers and mathematicians. Is it not possible that the next century may see the birth, through the joint labours of philosophers, grammarians and numerous other students of language, of a true and comprehensive science of language? Then we shall have rid ourselves of one more part of philosophy (there will still be plenty left) in the only way we ever can get rid of philosophy, by kicking it upstairs.17

It is clear enough that this transformative view of philosophy has its attractions. Astronomical questions in the Middle Ages were partly metaphysical. Marking a clear advance in human thought, they are now, and have been for some time, transformed into empirical questions. Surely logic, anthropology, and semantics have profited by such a transformation; and perhaps psychology and sociology have as well. In so paving the way for ‘real knowledge,’ philosophy would indeed be a useful activity. But is it so clear that the task of philosophy so conceived is not also sometimes harmful to both philosophy and perhaps to our conception of the sciences as well? On one hand, the corpus of the natural sciences, let alone the human sciences, may not be utterly reducible to purely empirical or formal claims or some amalgam. The work in the history and philosophy of science of Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, and Hilary Putnam may make us skeptical of the positivist conception of science accepted uncritically by Berlin with its ‘division between questions that are definitely answerable and those that are not, and the division again, of the answerable questions into the empirical and the formal.’18 Perhaps scientific theories themselves, or at least some scientific theories, cannot be adequately understood without reference to their philosophical ancestors. Scientific

18 Bernard Williams, Introduction to *Concepts and Categories*, xiv
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theories make use of interpretive hypotheses which themselves are neither formal nor observationally determined. Berlin seems to recognize this himself when he remarks that 'with the progressive separation of the positive sciences, no philosophers' questions are physical, some physicists' questions are still philosophical.' It may well be that sometimes such transformations, if carried out, will suffer the fate of naive reductions in psychology (e.g., B.F. Skinner, Paul Churchland, and Patricia Churchland). In looking at the problems that actually pop up in the domains of politics, history, and the human sciences, the question remains whether many of them still have a philosophical side. And, for some of them, it appears to be a hopelessly unrealistic task to try to transform them into such determinately empirical or formal questions. Perhaps, where such a reductionistic picture of what understanding should come to has a grip on us, this transformative conception is an ideal that impoverishes our understanding of such phenomena. If, for example, we tried to view Rawls's work in this way we could hardly make sense of it. Even if we tried to view what he calls the moral psychology of the person in that way, we could not, as he is well aware, make sense of it.

On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that Berlin's baskets — his principle of demarcation — were also the baskets of the logical positivists and of some therapeutic linguistic philosophers (e.g., John Wisdom or Morris Lazerowitz). They indeed stressed this demarcation with something in mind quite different from what Berlin had in mind. The transformative conception of philosophy does not imply that all philosophical questions can be transformed into empirical or formal questions nor does it imply the claim that all normative and metaphysical questions can, without remainder, be transformed into scientific questions. What remains, for these therapeutic philosophers, are pseudo-questions — linguistic or conceptual confusions — that should be exposed by philosophers themselves for being just that. Philosophy, until its final retirement, can usefully remain the secre-

19 Berlin, Concepts and Categories, 5
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tary of science, the detector of nonsense that we utter or think when we incautiously generalize about language and it can and should write the obituary of metaphysics, revealing metaphysical systems and claims to be houses of cards, to be set aside.²⁰

Again — or so it seems to us — this view is attractive. There is a lot of nonsense in the world — work for Locke’s underlaborer — and it would be a very good thing to be rid of it or at least to diminish it a bit. Still, old questions remain about how exactly such a therapeutic task fits in with the transformative view of philosophy. When and how do we know that we have reached the point where no more ‘real’ questions can be extracted from philosophical perplexities? How do we know that, in the light of future scientific answers, what appears today as nonsensical will not become highly suggestive of real questions? How, and when, do we know that elimination should be carried on? Does elimination require a metaphysics itself and does a transformative-elimitative conception of philosophy presuppose, curiously, that philosophy can establish categorically the closure on the domain of scientific questions? Still, it is also unclear whether the positivist and scientific ‘dogmas’ are not the more compelling, or at least the most efficient, way of setting aside the confused asking of pseudo-questions. These issues, by now rather unfashionable, should still be on the agenda of metaphilosophy. They are not, as many think, merely of historical interest.

V

The positivist characterization of formal and empirical knowledge leaves little room for philosophy as a distinctive discipline having its own subject matter, method, and domain of investigation. As a fourth way in keeping with Berlin’s principle of demarcation for philosophy, we want to consider a conception of philosophy we shall call philosophy as categorial analysis (what Blackburn rather dismissively calls Oxford

²⁰ Williams, xiii

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Berlin himself advocates a rather historicized version of this conception of philosophy. It is also, in a less historicized form, articulated and defended by (among others) Stuart Hampshire. Philosophy, as Hampshire puts it, is centrally concerned with 'the most general organizing notions common to every type of discourse; so they are not the concern of specific positive sciences, but, being to the highest degree general, of philosophy.' The English words expressive of such notions, Hampshire has it, are 'know,' 'true,' 'exist,' 'same,' 'cause,' and 'good.' It is also the case, Hampshire claims, that 'a theory of any one of these notions — a theory of knowledge, of truth and so on — tends to imply or contain a theory of all or most of the others.' And in this way philosophy will tend to be at least minimally systematic. These notions are not only common to every type of discourse, they are also pan-cultural and pan-historical. There could not be a human society without them though there will, at different times and in different places, be somewhat different conceptualizations of them. These governing notions are our most fundamental categories in accordance with which we interpret, understand, and act in the world.

Berlin gives this conception of philosophy as categorial analysis a Kantian though still historicized reading that fits it in clearly with his principle of demarcation. Rejecting as 'doomed to failure' positivistic, Condorcetian, Hobbesian, and Humean conceptions of philosophy which all view what is fruitful in philosophy as science (formal or empirical), Berlin remarks:

Kant [was] the first thinker to draw a clear distinction between, on the one hand, questions of fact, and, on the other, questions about the patterns in which these facts presented themselves to us — patterns that were not themselves altered however much the facts themselves, or our knowledge of them, might alter.

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22 Hampshire, 'A Statement About Philosophy,' 89

23 Berlin, Concepts and Categories, 7
Berlin goes on to say, distancing himself not only from Condorcet, Hobbes, Hume, and the pragmatists, but from Quine, Davidson, and Dummett as well, that 'these patterns or categories or forms of experience were themselves not the subject-matter of any possible natural science.' So there is, after all, some identifiable distinctive feature of philosophy — a feature which does not merely consist in not being a formal or an empirical science. It is the task of elucidating, systematizing, analyzing, and perhaps even criticizing our categories, our fundamental governing notions, and the underlying presuppositions of our thought and action. 'Its subject-matter is to a large degree the ways in which [the items of experience] are viewed, the permanent or semi-permanent categories in terms of which experience is conceived and classified.' Here, with the study of these categories, philosophers could develop an expertise that would justify viewing philosophy as a distinctive discipline. (In the present volume John Passmore comes closest to having such a conception of philosophy.)

Concerning these fundamental governing notions, Kant 'taught that the categories through which we saw [the external world] were identical for all sentient beings, permanent and unalterable; indeed this is what made our world one, and communication possible.' But Berlin remarks:

...some of those who thought about history, morals, aesthetics, did see change and difference; what differed was not so much the empirical content of what these successive civilizations saw or heard or thought as the basic patterns in which they perceived them, the models in terms of which they conceived them, the category-spectacles through which they viewed them. The world of a man who believes that God created him for a specific purpose, that he has an immortal soul, that there is an afterlife in which his sins will be visited upon him, is radically different from the world of a man who believes in none of these things; and the reasons for action,

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 9
26 Ibid., 8

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the moral codes, the political beliefs, the tastes, the personal relationships of the
former will deeply and systematically differ from those of the latter.\textsuperscript{27}

Berlin is being somewhat hyperbolic here. Some philosophers utilize the category God and some do not; some people, though perhaps only in cultures other than our own, may not even have the concept, e.g., know how to use the term ‘God’ or its equivalents in other languages. God was a fundamental notion for Aquinas and it was not for d’Holbach; but these philosophers did not live (\textit{pace} Nelson Goodman) in ‘entirely different worlds,’ for they both shared what Kant and Hampshire regard as the central organizing notions, namely, know, true, exist, same, cause, and good. To communicate with each other they needed these notions. And Aquinas certainly communicated to d’Holbach and, had the time-order been different, it would have gone the other way as well. They would, that is, have been able to understand each other and to argue with each other. Indeed even to argue about God and evil, they would have had to share, as they do share, these organizing notions. There is no reason, to put it minimally, not to believe that these organizing notions are not quite pan-cultural, pan-historical, and pan-human. Of course, different peoples with different \textit{Weltanschauugen} will have, in certain respects, different conceptualizations of these common notions, but they will also share some very general things, namely, such truisms about truth as ‘A person’s belief may be true without his knowing that it is true,’ ‘If it is known that p then p is true,’ ‘Truth and knowledge of the truth are not identical.’ Similar things can be said of truisms about good such as: ‘If something is good then it is desirable,’ ‘Good things, everything else being equal, are to be sought and bad things avoided,’ ‘If something is good then another thing with exactly the same properties is also good.’

There are, by contrast, categories which are relative to a certain culture or historical period, e.g., God or nirvana or field of force or direction of evolution. Moreover, and differently, there are perhaps

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
always cultural and historical readings of culturally and historically ubiquitous categories. But — or else they would not be such ubiquitous categories — they, in spite of their possibly different readings, always have common features or family resemblances as well. Even if (pace Donald Davidson) the scheme/content distinction in some robust form holds, there is no good reason to opt for some robust form of relativism. The above considerations — the Oxford science truisms — are sufficient to show that conceptual relativism, individual relativism, cultural relativism, and historical relativism are not the whole of the story and, because of this, are arguably false or in some other way mistaken. As is clear from his writings on political theory, Berlin would not want to defend any form of relativism. But, in any event, to the extent he wishes to give a completely historicized reading of the categories, his claims are not beyond contestation and they do raise problems of conceptual relativism.

However, whether historicized or Kantianized, or both, his and Hampshire’s conception of philosophy as categorial analysis seems at least to be something that in some form stands and, again, this is an attractive conception of philosophy; such categorial analysis seems to remain, pace Quine, Davidson, and Rorty, a distinctive discipline. But questions still come trippingly to the tongue. First, how does philosophy as categorial analysis differ from philosophy as linguistic analysis à la Ryle, Austin, and Strawson, where philosophy is second-order talk, on their construal of second-order talk, as talk about the talk about the world? Presumably Berlin would want to say, as would R.G. Collingwood and John Passmore, that categorial analysis differs from linguistic philosophy in that categorial analysis seeks to articulate the deep presuppositions that underlie all thought and language. Philosophy does not just chart and classify, or perhaps even chart at all, either systematically

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(Austin) or unsystematically (Ryle), the uses of such philosophically key terms as 'know,' 'true,' 'cause,' 'same,' and 'good.' Still, it should be added, as Ryle stressed, these linguistic philosophers in charting uses of terms, intended to be charting the uses; that is, they were doing something that was, at least in intention, specific language neutral. The philosopher's concern, as they saw it, and rightly, we think, is surely not just with English (except incidentally and instrumentally) any more than any other specific language, but with the uses of related terms (hopefully roughly synonymous terms) in other natural languages, as well as with the uses of English terms. But this is still a second-order task and, on the Collingwood-Passmore conception, philosophers want (or should want) to get at the very presuppositions of that use. Still, there are difficulties here. It sounds profound to talk of presuppositions, but what exactly are we talking about in such a context? What is it for something to be a presupposition and particularly a presupposition of this sort? What are (if there are) the underlying presuppositions of our use of terms or sentences? Is there really any such thing?

What actually appears to be done in categorial analysis is the giving of an elucidation — a putatively perspicuous representation — of the functioning of such key terms, and sometimes, by breaking the second-order restriction as construed by philosophers such as Ryle, the making of substantive, i.e., factual or normative claims of a very general sort concerning knowledge, causation, goodness, and the like. In addition to making hopefully perspicuous representations of the uses terms, he is advancing factual claims and normative claims of a very general sort concerning, to take key examples, knowledge, causation, and goodness. But with the factual — or so at least it appears — he is back in the domain of empirical science, and has broken Berlin's own demarcation principle. With the normative he has something which has whatever warrant the normative can have: something Berlin's demarcation principle leaves wide open. (We return to that question about normativity in our Afterword.)

If we speak of a critical analysis or a rational reconstruction here, we need to know where our criteria of criticality or rationality come from. On what are we relying here? Must we have categories of categories of categories? What, at such a level, is the basis of our criticisms or the
grounds for our critique of the categories or our governing notions? Can a ‘critical analysis’ of our categories come to anything other than a clear and connected description of our categories? What is it to get a critical purchase on our categories, the fundamental governing notions of science and our common life (our life-world)?

It looks very much as if both Quine and Wittgenstein are right: Quine in saying that we must finally just acquiesce in our mother tongue, and Wittgenstein, in saying that when pushed we rely only on description, assembling reminders for particular purposes about our uses of our language. And, as we noted in talking about linguistic philosophy, again we have, or so at least it seems, lost the claim to autonomy that both Berlin and Hampshire seek. We have nothing here that is not checkable by an empirical science of linguistics or something else plainly empirical that can, in theory at least, if it comes to it that we really need theory here, be better done by linguists than by philosophers.

But even if Oxford Science is possible, and even if it constitutes a distinctive philosophical contribution to knowledge, there remains as well Richard Rorty’s point that a general theory of truth, knowledge, causality, or goodness and the like is not something about which philosophers or anyone else is likely to have anything interesting or significant to say. Indeed it is not likely that there is on such a general level anything significant to say about such matters. It is not, of course, that there are not interesting and demanding questions concerning our knowledge, or lack thereof, though they tend to be rather specific questions about what the truth is concerning some relatively specific matters. We have in mind such questions as ‘What were the reasons for the Americans’ and their allies’ going into the Gulf War?; ‘Is Noam Chomsky’s alternative account of that closer to the truth than the official account?’ Similar things obtain for our normative questions. That goodness is what answers to interests, whether true or false, is not very illuminating. It is not questions about what it is for something, anything at all, to be good that are significant but questions about what constitutes a good performance of Brahms’s late quartets or what, in a society such as ours, good relations in a family are or whether a given society is a good society or not or questions about the canons of good procedures of inquiry in the social sciences and the like.
These questions are, or can be, vital and taxing questions with not infrequently very contestable answers and (pace what Rorty sometimes says) it is not evident that social scientific theory cannot sometimes be important here. But they are more or less specific questions or at least questions of considerably less generality than the standard philosophical ones, and they tend to be, indeed perhaps always are, domain specific. But they are not standardly regarded as even being philosophical questions at all. Dewey tried to reverse this and make such more specific questions the questions of a philosophy reconstructing itself. But the tradition went happily along paying little heed to what Dewey said. (Rorty’s and Putnam’s fate may be similar. The weight of tradition is very great.)

Even if we can, practicing Oxford Science, give correct answers to questions of what is knowledge, truth, or goodness in general, this does not tell us very much — or so Rorty’s argument goes; it does not give us anything sufficiently substantial on which to build a fruitful theory. To be told that for something to be true it must be so or that it must correspond to reality or, alternatively, that it would be agreed on by all competent inquirers at the end of inquiry (whatever that is) is not telling us very much. And it is not clear in what contexts such remarks would be enlightening beyond dispelling some philosophical confusion, where someone, held captive by a certain image, fails to understand how ‘true’ is used or forgets, obsessed by a certain picture, his own pre-analytic understanding of ‘true’ that allows him to operate with it, though not upon it, normally without any difficulty. Someone, forgetting the difference between justifiably believing something to be true and its being true, comes to think that truth is coherence, ideal coherence, or what is rationally acceptable. His philosophical perplexity is broken by making him see how we actually use ‘true’ and something of why we use it in the way we do.29 Similar things could and should be said about knowing and valuing. We do

not learn very much when we learn that knowledge is justified true belief or that it is gained by reliable methods (if indeed either is true). Nor would we be enlightened if we came to understand that goodness is not a non-natural property or relation, or (for that matter) a natural one, such that good is what answers to interests or furthers survival or the like. A theory of truth or a theory of knowledge or a theory of value, unlike a theory of electricity or genes or group solidarity or class, does not yield anything more than rather vague truistic generalities. It does not enable us to predict, retrodict, and control or, for that matter, to comprehend anything more deeply. And it does not yield significant causal explanations or give us canons of criticism to assess scientific claims about the ozone layer or the pollution level in the Great Lakes or claims about the likely political direction that the nations of the old Soviet Union will take or claims about the adequacy of present-day experiments concerning human aggression or whether the present system of tenure in Canadian universities is a good one or whether tenure ought to be abolished and the like. Philosophical theories, or any other kind (if such there be) of general theory of truth, knowledge, and value, seems to have little if any value. (Here, for all their similarities, is a place where Davidson and Rorty crucially differ. Davidson still thinks [hopes?] there may be gold in those hills; Rorty doesn’t.)

Even if Oxford Science is possible, it is not clear that it has much, if any, point. Such Rortying, as we have articulated in the last few pages, may be too extreme. But it needs a careful examination, not a scoffing dismissal. In the hostile, knee-jerk reactions of many philosophers here there may be some anxiety showing.

VI

The conception of philosophy as categorial analysis articulated by Berlin and Hampshire is, in some form or other, pervasively held in modern and contemporary philosophy. But, as we have seen, it is not without difficulties. Moreover, even if it can meet the above objections, answer the above queries, and dispel the above perplexities, it still runs straight into Davidson’s powerful arguments against what he calls the third dogma of empiricism: the scheme and content dichotomy. We have what (roughly) Kantian philosophers have variously called governing notions, categories, metaphysical models, concepts, structures, on the one hand, and the data of experience on the other. These categories, models, structures, and the like enable us, the Kantian conception has it, to perceive, interpret, arrange, and classify the data of experience. This is what Hilary Putnam ridicules as the cookie-cutter metaphor of knowledge and understanding. Philosophy which, on this account, is to be a non-empirical discipline investigates the categories and empirical science the content. The data are subjects of scientific hypotheses, predictions and retrodictions, places where hypothetico-deductive procedures are deployed. But, as Berlin puts it, ‘the basic categories in terms of which we perceive and order and interpret data ... are not themselves subjects for scientific hypotheses about the data which they order.’\(^{31}\) These categories are philosophy’s most fundamental domain and subject matter. It is because of this that philosophy is taken to be so fundamentally different from sciences.

It is this deeply entrenched (at least since Kant) philosophical picture that Davidson, and Rorty following Davidson here, want to reject not just as false but as incoherent. Davidson’s conceptualization and argument, articulated in ‘The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’ and elsewhere, is too well known to require exposition.\(^{32}\) Conceptions of

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\(^{31}\) Berlin, *Concepts and Categories*, 162-3

form and content are, of course, very old, going back at least to the Greeks, and in some forms they are perfectly benign and indeed useful. For us, one source of their plausibility is in thinking of how different geometries map the earth in alternative ways. We can characterize the earth differently using these different geometries and we can depict their differences, compare them, and assess from various points of view their merits and utility. We can even say, with a little exaggeration, that we see the earth differently with these different geometrical spectacles.

Philosophers in the Kantian tradition generalize this from the earth to the universe, to everything that is or perhaps even can be, to the full range of the data of all actual and possible experience. That conception of content gets labelled variously as the sense-manifold, the given, the blooming, buzzing confusion of uninterpreted sense experience, stimulus meaning, and the like. The content, which the scheme supposedly schemes, is the totality of the undifferentiated data of our experience, actual and possible. It is the unformed dough which the cookie-cutter in some determinate way forms and thus renders intelligible. Kant, Kantians, Nelson Goodman, and Berlin, among others, believe that it is not possible to think, understand, comprehend without categories or models. A conception of just being "face-to-face" with the facts will not bear criticism. But Berlin, who puts the matter thus, also speaks, as do most scheme-and-content philosophers, of 'direct confrontation with the concrete data of observation and inspection' and he asks questions about how various models (categorial spectacles) distort or match with reality. On the one hand, we have to hold content and form apart and see how they match up and, on the other hand, we cannot do so since there can be no being just face-to-face with reality. Whatever may be true about conceptions without perceptions being empty, perceptions without conceptions are blind.

33 Berlin, Concepts and Categories, 158
34 Ibid., 156, 158, 160
However, the analogy between alternative geometries and the competing, alternative, more ubiquitous schema does not hold. In the case of the various geometries and the earth, we have, apart from these geometries themselves, independent access to the earth so that we can make comparisons — see in some way how well the geometries match up with the earth — and test, in a rather straightforward way, for distortion. But we cannot hold the undifferentiated unconceptualized data of our experience apart from our scheme and see how the two match up. We have no independent access to either scheme or content so that we can compare them and test how well they match or how much the scheme distorts, or see how the scheme models or interprets or categorizes the content. The whole picture, Davidson claims, is incoherent. Moreover, it assumes representationalist conceptions which generate notions of conceptual relativism and global skepticism which are without sense.\textsuperscript{35}

It is tempting, after studying Davidson’s arguments about the third dogma of empiricism, to conclude that he has shown — proved — that the Kantian scheme/content distinction is incoherent. But a lot in philosophy hangs on the soundness of Davidson’s arguments. In the case of metaphilosophy, it is of crucial import, for, if on the mark, it completely undermines the broadly Kantian conception of philosophy we have been discussing. It undermines a key distinction that Berlin, Hampshire, Goodman, and many others who are not Kantians (Schlick, Ayer, and C.I. Lewis, for example) either explicitly make, or implicitly assume and rely on in their philosophical argumentation and in their articulation of what philosophy is. Indeed, the scheme-content distinction may be crucial for how they flesh out their conception of the demarcation of philosophy from other activities. For their views to be viable they must be able coherently to conceive of philosophy as a non-empirical yet non-formal discipline, not concerned with a critical examination of what exists, has existed, or will exist, but concerned only with the way in which items of our experience are modeled, the

\textsuperscript{35} Davidson, ‘The Myth of the Subjective,’ 159-81 and Rorty, Objectivism, Relativism and Truth, 1-17, 151-72
ways in which our experience is viewed, 'the permanent or semi-permanent categories in terms of which experience is conceived and classified.' If Davidson is right, such conceptions make no sense, for there is no way of coherently holding experience apart, as something which science empirically studies, from our categories, as supposedly something which philosophy non-empirically studies. Presumably the study of the a priori concepts (concepts indispensable for our understanding) is a study which is itself a priori, or at least, in being non-empirical and non-calculative, is purely reflective. But this very picture, Davidson claims, is incoherent.

However, we will resist such strong claims for Davidson’s account, not because we think they are false, but on at least two other grounds. First, we have a general wariness about speaking in philosophy of something being proved, demonstrated, shown, established. Waismann’s remark about theorems proved in philosophy is salutary and indeed he makes us feel the force, as Ryle does as well, of his claim that philosophers are not, or at least should not be, if they understand what they are about, in the business of proving anything. Yet this, as is typically the case in philosophy, generates its own perplexities. Philosophers argue, don’t they? And, if they argue, and they are serious about their arguments, they must in some sense be trying to prove what they argue for. But at a minimum there seems to be at least something absurd about philosophers speaking of publishing the established results of their research or their investigations. This makes sense in both the empirical and the formal sciences (though it might cause raised eyebrows in sociology and psychology), but not in philosophy. Here is a place, whatever we want to say about the demarcation problem, where philosophy seems plainly to be different from science.

36 Berlin, Concepts and Categories, 9


Second, Davidson's arguments and his claims about the third-dogma have not gone uncontested by able philosophers, e.g., Ian Hacking, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Nicholas Rescher. To be skeptical about their arguments and conclusions, even to the point of being thoroughly unconvinced by them, is one thing; to simply set them aside and say that broadly Kantian conceptions of philosophy as categorial analysis have been decisively refuted by Davidson is another thing. This is not to deny that greater plausibility could go to one account over the other. But philosophy is not the sort of thing where we can publish a list of the results established, yearly, or every decade, or even ever. Some think this is the disgrace of philosophy, others its glory. But, disgrace or glory, it seems to be true, some philosopher's scientific self-images to the contrary notwithstanding.

VII

We will turn now to another conception of philosophy common to scientific realists and to philosophers as diverse as Dewey, Quine, and Davidson. With them a thesis, or in some cases just an assumption, common to all the conceptions of philosophy discussed above, is rejected: namely, the thesis (the assumption) that philosophy is an autonomous discipline or activity distinct from the sciences. Rather, the entire framework (if that, after Davidson, is the right word here) is naturalistic, and philosophy is taken to be continuous with science.

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There is, the claim goes, no break, but only differences in degree between philosophy and science (the rest of science) and between science and what is non-mythological in common sense. There is no significant analytic/synthetic distinction. In a broad sense all knowledge and warranted belief is empirical. This is sometimes even extended, paradoxically, to logic and mathematics. Philosophy is not conceived as something belonging to a separate sphere and there is, they believe, no demarcation problem.

Such naturalistic philosophers can consistently reject the idea that philosophy is an autonomous discipline and still accept (assuming for the nonce it is coherent) the scheme/content distinction and as well (though this is an independent matter) regard philosophy as fundamentally the examination of the categories. That is to say, they could accept the Berlin-Hampshire articulation of what philosophy is (i.e., the study of the categories) while rejecting that it is a non-empirical study distinct from science. They would not, however, use that distinction to demarcate philosophy from science or for that matter from the rest of culture, but would see philosophy as something which examines our fundamental categories but does so in a scientific and empirical manner. The examination of categories is philosophy's distinctive job, its central role, in a division of labor within science. We do not say, or even give to understand, that they would have to or even should conceive philosophy in that way, or as being exclusively that, but that they could do so without rejecting their naturalistic orientation. Quine, for example, accepts the scheme/content distinction and is criticized by Davidson for remaining captive to the third dogma of empiricism, while Davidson, of course, though accepting a generally similar naturalistic and holistic framework, rejects a third dogma, having treated the very conception of it as the third dogma. But for both of them, as distinct from Berlin and Hampshire, Ayer and Strawson, or Carnap and Hempel, philosophy is not something distinct from scientific empirical investigation — something which is a priori — but is continuous with the rest of science, simply being its more abstract side.

In an interview with Bryan Magee screened by the BBC in 1978 but taped between 1975 and 1977, Quine expressed his conception of what philosophy ought to be in a very straightforward way:
Magee: What do you regard as the central task, or tasks, of philosophy?

Quine: I think of philosophy as concerned with our knowledge of the world and the nature of the world. I think of philosophy as attempting to round out "the system of the world," as Newton put it. There have been philosophers who thought of philosophy as somehow separate from science, and as providing a firm basis on which to build science, but this I consider an empty dream. Much of science is firmer than philosophy is, or can ever perhaps aspire to be. I think of philosophy as continuous with science, even as a part of science.

Magee: Well, if it's continuous with science, and even a part of science, how does it differ from the rest of science?

Quine: Philosophy lies at the abstract and theoretical end of science. Science, in the broadest sense, is a continuum that stretches from history and engineering at one extreme to philosophy and pure mathematics at the other. Philosophy is abstract through being very general. A physicist will tell us about causal connections between events of certain sorts; a biologist will tell us about causal connections between events of other sorts; but the philosopher asks about causal connection in general — what is it for one event to cause another? Or again a physicist or zoologist will tell us that there are electrons, that there are wombats; a mathematician will tell us that there are no end of prime numbers; but the philosopher wants to know, in more general terms, what sorts of things there are altogether. Philosophy seeks the broad outlines of the whole system of the world.

Magee: Do you include in its field of concern, or do you exclude from it, the age-old questions about how the world got here in the first place, and how life began?

Quine: I exclude these from philosophy. How the world began is a problem for the physicist and astronomer, and of course there have been conjectures from that quarter. How life began is a problem for the biologist, on which he's made notable progress in recent years. Why the world began, or why life began — on the other hand — I think are pseudo questions, because I can't imagine what an answer would look like.

Magee: You think that, because there is no conceivable answer to these questions, they are meaningless questions?

Quine: Yes. 40

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40 We are quoting from Bryan Magee's extended conversation with Quine. This BBC text is printed in Bryan Magee, Men of Ideas, 143-52. The passage cited is from 143-4.
Here, as we initially remarked, Quine is not trying neutrally to describe philosophy but to say what it ought to be. As is well known, Quine, unlike Berlin or Hampshire, has little concern for the history of the subject. Physicists, to get on with their subject, need not study Newton or Maxwell, so why should philosophers bother with Aristotle or Kant? Quine’s assumption seems to be that they shouldn’t if they are really interested in philosophy. He has said somewhere that interest in philosophy is one thing and interest in the history of philosophy is another.

However, looking at Quine from the inside, and that above comment about the history of philosophy aside, we should also note that while Quine makes use, though simply as a device to facilitate argument, of what he calls ‘semantic ascent,’ and so takes the linguistic turn characteristic of all analytic philosophers, his actual concern is with first-order matters, namely the world. Philosophy, on his conception, is concerned with knowledge of the world and the nature of the world and only instrumentally with talk about the talk of the world. Philosophy, as he has repeatedly argued, is continuous with science. There is no viable First Philosophy as somehow distinct from science and as providing a firm basis on which to build science. He rejects as an empty dream the conception of philosophy of a critical rationalist such as Brand Blanshard which sees philosophy as going beyond and completing science, providing a criticism of science, and a firm a priori grounding for science, so that science finally could be put on a through and through rational basis.

Quine sees ‘the sharp demarcation of philosophy from science, respected by both the logical empiricists and the philosophers of

41 Ibid., 148
42 Ibid., 151-2
ordinary language,' as a thing of the past. He speaks of philosophy as continuous with science and, as we have seen, even as a part of science. But within science, that part of science that philosophy is — as we have also seen — is 'at the abstract and theoretical end of science.' It is said to be abstract through being very general. It tells us about causal connection in general, about 'what sorts of things there are altogether.' In it, as in what Quine calls naturalized epistemology, 'logical analysis looms larger than in the other branches of science.' But what is involved here is not very clear. Some mathematicians, physicists, and economists engage in logical analyses and in as close and as intricate forms as any philosopher does. It is not (pace Quine) the case that scientists are just after results. As Quine surely knows better than most (after all, he started out studying mathematics), mathematicians try very hard to prove (really demonstrate) theorems. There is — that is the nature of the game — no result without the demonstration. Similar things are true for considerable stretches of micro-economics. But mathematicians and economists sometimes succeed in proving theorems. Quine does not take up Waismann's challenge to list the theorems proved in philosophy. Philosophy seems at least to be after something else, something rather less rigorous than being in the theorem proving business.

From naturalized epistemology, Quine leaves us with some illustrations of what he thinks philosophers should be doing. 'Such epistemologists might trace logical claims from bundles of scientific

44 W.V. Quine, 'Words Are All We Have to Go On,' Times Literary Supplement (July 3, 1992), 8
45 Quine in Magee, 142. To think that philosophy is more theoretical than chemistry, biology, or economics is to reveal what a fragile grip philosophers not infrequently have on reality.
46 Ibid., 143-4
47 Ibid., 144
48 Quine, 'Words are All We Have to Go On,' 8
laws or hypotheses to observations by which they would be tested.\(^{49}\) Such a specialist in ‘logical connections’ might, by carefully practicing logical analysis, bring rewarding illumination by showing ‘that some respected little law is just a tautology following from arbitrary choices that have been made elsewhere in the theory’ or, alternatively, ‘reveal that some hypothesis moot and worrisome makes no logical difference and can be dropped.’\(^{50}\) But, Quine hastens to add, these are the ‘dreams of the new epistemologist.’\(^{51}\) No one has actually done this. But they are, he claims, something that philosophers could accomplish and, if they did, that would be something that would provide genuine illumination.

However, Quine does claim that naturalized epistemology has actually turned up ‘one accomplished fact’ of considerable philosophical import.\(^{52}\) What he has in mind is this. Naturalized epistemology has to do with the relation that theories bear to sensory evidence or neural intake. It turns out that ‘objects figure only as neutral nodes in the logical structure of the theory ... any objects correlated with them one to one would fit the evidence as well.’\(^{53}\) But this is hardly a theorem proved by ‘new epistemologists’ utilizing the new epistemology or by anyone else and it is unclear what it would be for this assertion of Quine’s to be shown to be true by logical, linguistic, or conceptual analysis. It might, à la Berlin and Hampshire, be a model. As such perhaps it might even be a more perspicuous representation of the relation of theory to observation than the other models: the other ways of construing what is going on. But that would hardly warrant the claim that we have, to use Quine’s phrase, ‘an accomplished fact’ here. And it is hardly a part of science that has been established as a well-confirmed or even as an ill-confirmed empirical

\(^{49}\) Ibid.  
\(^{50}\) Ibid.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid.  
\(^{53}\) Ibid.
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hypothesis, for presumably, given its generality, it would be presupposed by any hypothesis we would frame and attempt to confirm or infirm. It would be a way we would choose to characterize or represent, perhaps a perspicuous way to represent, the hypothesis, but it could not on pain of circularity just be assumed that this is how the hypothesis — as a hypothesis about the relation of theory to observation — must be characterized. So it looks like (going back, at least seemingly relevantly, to what Quine calls the old outdated 1950s stuff of logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy) neither of the two established instruments of knowledge (experimental investigation or formal science [logic or mathematics]) establishes or warrants belief in Quine’s alleged epistemological fact. If it is known to be true, it is known by some of the anomalous procedures that autonomists (people such as Berlin or Hampshire) thought to be distinctive of philosophy, distinguishing it from science, both empirical and formal.

Quine responds about his naturalized epistemology investigations that he couldn’t care less whether we call such investigations philosophy or animal ethology. ‘Who cares,’ he remarks, ‘if the fence is down.’\textsuperscript{54} But Quine sets great store in science and logic and it looks like the established procedures of neither will establish what Quine claims to be an accomplished fact. Quine might say in response, following Putnam, that it is not only philosophy which cannot be usefully demarcated from other activities, but science as well. Putnam, we should remind ourselves, does not think that we can usefully demarcate science from non-science. There is not, Putnam asserts, ‘really an agreement in our culture as to what is a “science” and what isn’t.’\textsuperscript{55} ‘Science,’ Putnam believes, is ‘simply a term for the successful pursuit of knowledge.’\textsuperscript{56} (Of course, we leave dangling here what a

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} Hilary Putnam, ‘The Philosophy of Science,’ conversations in Magee, \textit{Men of Ideas}, 202

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
successful pursuit of knowledge would come to. Moreover, on such a way of viewing things, if we gain some knowledge about what good poetry is or what a good or humane society is, then it would automatically become scientific knowledge. This sounds like a kind of conversion of these things into science by stipulative re-definition. Indeed it is something which sits badly with other things he says, particularly in his *Renewing Philosophy*.) Presumably Quine would not be that latitudinarian about science but even if he would, and would then retreat not to science *sans phrase* but to physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, and logic as the sole repositories of genuine knowledge — his scientism coming fully to the fore — he could not then plausibly make his claim about his accomplished fact for it is not something that has been established by these hard, genuinely scientific disciplines. His new naturalized epistemology would simply be left with the rest of the anomalous mess (some now called ‘science’) of activities — activities that he would not regard as repositories of genuine knowledge. Whether we call these ‘soft-endeavors’ the rest of science or philosophy doesn’t matter much on such a conception. Either way they are decidedly soft in a way in which Quine would not approve. Putnam here is very different.

There is another side of what Quine takes philosophy, properly done, to be which merits attention. We quoted Quine as saying that ‘philosophy is abstract through being very general.’ Philosophy ‘seeks the broad outlines of the whole system of the world.’ It seeks ‘to know in more general terms, what sorts of things there are altogether.’ Contrast this now with Berlin’s characterization of philosophy, previously discussed, in which philosophy ‘is not an empirical study: not the critical examination of what exists or has existed or will exist.’ That, Berlin has it, is the subject matter of the experimental

57 Quine in Magee, 143
58 Ibid., 144
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 139
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sciences. Moreover, philosophy’s ‘subject matter is to a large degree not the items of experience, but the ways in which they are viewed, the permanent or semi-permanent categories in terms of which experience is conceived and classified.’ There is, between Berlin and Quine, of course, and as we have seen, the clash over whether philosophy is an empirical study. For Quine there is nothing else for it to be. But still for Quine, philosophy in being general makes inquiries into the sorts of things there are and into the broad outline of the whole system of the world. It doesn’t go in for examining, except illustratively, the particular items of experience, trying to determine what particular things exist, what particular physical or biological laws there are, what particular causes there are. Rather, he is concerned with what sorts of things exist, what it is for one event — any event you like — to cause another, and this requires an examination of what is an event and how it differs from a state or disposition and the like. The generality Quine concerns himself with is about sorts of things and would include an examination into what it is to be a sort and the like, and what it would be like to speak of the ‘broad outlines of the whole system of the world.’

But now the distance from Berlin begins to be less, except in idiom, or, perhaps better put, the difference dims. Or so at least it appears. Neither thinks that philosophy, like physics or anthropology, tries to determine what particular things exist: whether there really are neutrinos or germs or social classes or peoples who cannot count beyond five or whether frustrated people tend to respond with aggression. Neither Quine nor Berlin tries to determine what laws of physics, biology, or geology are true and neither, quite rightly, would be caught dead speaking of ‘the laws of philosophy.’ Philosophy, they know very well, is not that kind of business. It is, moreover, not clear in asking what a cause is, a number is, what mind is, a process is, that we are doing anything very different (aside from speaking in the material model) than doing what Berlin and Hampshire refer to as

61 Ibid.
concerning ourselves with the categories in terms of which what is experienced or claimed or believed or felt can be conceived and classified. Quine believes this to be an empirical inquiry, and Berlin denies that it is, but, as we have just seen in discussion of a claim in Quine’s naturalized epistemology, it is not very clear what it means here either to assert or deny that it is an empirical claim rooted in an experimental or other empirical inquiry. (The at least verbally important difference between Berlin and Quine about what philosophy is begins to have the look of what therapeutic linguistic philosophers, e.g., John Wisdom, took to be a philosophical perplexity: a matter that is, or should be, up for dissolution rather than rational adjudication with some genuinely substantive matter there to be resolved.)

It is also the case, in spite of the crucial similarities between Wittgenstein and Quine that Putnam and others have rightly pointed to, that Quine, on occasion, says some very un-Wittgensteinian things that make him, his denials to the contrary notwithstanding, sound as if he is doing First Philosophy in the grand old style, only that, like d’Holbach, he is coming down on the materialist side rather than the idealist, dualist, or Aristotelian side. In his extended interview with Magee, Quine asserts:

I’m on the materialists’ side. I hold that physical objects are real and exist externally and independently of us. I don’t hold that there are only these physical objects. There are also abstract objects: objects of mathematics that seem to be needed to fill out the system of the world. But I don’t recognize the existence of minds, of mental entities, in any sense other than as attributes or activities on the part of physical objects mainly persons.62

Quine here does not have any of the wariness of Wittgenstein, any sense of the craziness of trying to make the denials of Quine’s assertions, and with it the craziness of thinking there could be doubt — that we could even understand what it would be to doubt — that physical objects are real and that there are things that exist externally and independently of us, as if physics or biology, or any scientific

62 Ibid., 144
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inquiry at all, might consider whether this was so and finally, after much careful investigation, conclude that nothing really exists externally or independently of us. Quine, unlike Wittgenstein, seems not to sense the bizarre incoherence of that.

Putnam not only points to Quine’s similarities with Wittgenstein but with the logical positivists as well. He wrote an essay about Quine which he entitled ‘The Greatest Logical Positivist.’ He points out there how Quine, in the very spirit of positivism, cleans up the errors of positivism. In fine positivist fashion, Quine rejects the ‘questions’ why the world began or why life began as pseudo-questions and explains (pace Thomas Nagel) that they are pseudo-questions because there is no conceivable answer to them. Because they are so unanswerable, they are meaningless pseudo-questions. But it never seems to occur to Quine to seriously consider whether ‘Are physical objects real?’; ‘Do abstract objects actually exist?’; ‘Does anything exist externally and independently of us?’; ‘Is there a real?’; ‘Are there minds as distinct from bodies?’ might, as well, all be such pseudo-questions. It certainly is unclear what we are asking when we ask them and what we would or even could take as answers. How could we, without begging the question, prove to someone that physical objects actually exist or that there is anything that exists independently of him or in complete independence of minds? Talk of proof or disproof, if we insist on being literal or bloody minded, seems insane. Anything we could give as evidence for there being other minds or physical objects would be less certain than the fact that there are stones (and thus physical objects) and that when you read this and reflect on it you are thinking and thus there are minds including other minds than the minds of the people composing this. We might, of course, want to understand better what it means for there to be ‘physical objects,’ ‘thoughts,’ ‘feelings,’ ‘causes,’ ‘events,’ ‘knowledge,’ and the like, but this is the second-order activity, the Rylean-Berlinean activity, that Quine does not want philosophy to be.

63 Hilary Putnam, Realism with a Human Face (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1990), 260-77. See Quine in Magee, 145.
There is the further question, raised by Rorty, and mentioned earlier in our discussion of the Berlin-Hampshire conception of philosophy, whether anything we could say, philosophical therapy aside, of such a general order can yield answers of much interest, of much explanatory value. This would seem at least to hold for such general questions about what it is for one event to cause another, what it is for a statement or a sentence or belief to be true, or what it is for someone to know something. And it would hold equally whether they are treated as a second-order or first-order questions or some mélange or whether the very relevance of the distinction is denied.

Quine also says that the ‘natural scientist, the physicist’ rightly ‘insists on a closed system, on there being physical causes, physical explanations in principle for the physical events. He allows no place for the incursion of influences from outside the physical world.’ It is also true, he readily agrees, that an individual’s decisions will affect his movements. But given the truth of the above natural science picture of the world (something Quine takes to be plainly true), then it ‘would seem that a person’s decisions must themselves be activity on the part of a physical object.’ Quine asserts another basic principle which he does not take as just a way of modelling our world but as something which he would ‘find uncongenial’ to reject ‘because the successes in natural science have been such that we must take its presuppositions very seriously.’ The principle is, he says, ‘a basic principle of physical science’ and presumably, though he does not say that, it is true and either known to be true or reasonably believed to be true. The principle in question is ‘that there is no change without

64 Quine in Magee, 145
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid. Here we must also ask what are its presuppositions and what are their status? See here Nielsen ‘Is “true philosophy” like “true art”?’ Philosophical Exchange, (1993-4).
67 Ibid.
a change in the distribution of microphysical properties over space. If we take physics seriously — and is there any plausible alternative? — we believe that it is known to be true, or at least is justifiably believed, by people who know something about physics. For such people, it has a high degree of rational warrant. But suppose someone — call him a wild metaphysician, if you will — says that no one, physicists included, knows this basic principle to be true. It does not seem that it could be shown to be true by logical analysis or by any formal procedure and, if treated as a very high level hypothesis of physics, it is entirely unclear what could infirm it, what would be taken as even a weak disconfirmation of it, to such a degree that physicists, or anyone else, should say, if those things obtained, that we should abandon it. It looks like it is quite untestable, perhaps even in principle untestable (assuming tendentiously that the latter notion makes good sense).

Even if we go holistic, as Quine certainly would, and do not try to confirm statements in isolation, questions of confirmation and infirmation still arise, though here very indirectly for that principle is a very central matter in our web of belief and perhaps this is all Quine needs. However, if we remain dissatisfied here and if we say instead, abandoning questions of confirmation and disconfirmation, that we should take it as a basic scientific presupposition, we can ask why should we regard as true or otherwise accept this presupposition? It is not clear what would be a satisfactory answer to that beyond saying, as we did above, that it is a very central element in our web of belief. We say that accepting it is accepting something very deeply embedded in our thought, something we must just accept and act in accordance with if we would do science or accept the scientific point of view. But then we can in turn ask why do science or, more plausibly, why accept the scientific point of view as authoritative in all domains when we are searching for the broad outlines of the whole system of the world? Perhaps, to make room for God or nirvana, we would want

68 Ibid.
to go beyond that closed system. How are we to show that such wishes are illusory or senseless without some question-begging?

Suppose Quine could be brought to accept Rudolf Carnap's strategy of taking such questions as questions external to the framework and, as such external questions, as questions to be settled pragmatically. Putting aside the issue of this being a plain acceptance of the third dogma, for Quine would also, rightly or wrongly, accept the third dogma, let us ask the following questions here. Suppose it is said that questions external to the framework, including such questions about our very fundamental framework, should indeed be treated pragmatically. But then a Theistic philosopher (say a Richard Swinburne, William Alston, or Alvin Plantinga) can argue pragmatically for his theistic principles and framework too. Materialism, he will say, would make belief in God impossible and without belief in God our lives would be impoverished. If in turn it is responded that considerations of simplicity should rule out such a response, it also could, going around again, be countered that the rule is that we are not to multiply conceptions beyond need (necessity) and that there is plainly a need — a moral necessity — here, namely to avoid the impoverished life that goes without belief in God. We certainly do not want to suggest that argument — and argument on pragmatic grounds — should, let alone must, come to an end, here. Quite to the contrary: some of the crucial rough and tumble arguments about religion (whatever their philosophical status) begin here. But perhaps enough has been said to see that Quine owes philosophers who are thinking about very central metaphilosophical issues something of an explanation of how his claims here could be established by philosophical or otherwise rational


70 Such rough and tumble arguments, along with a few more refined, occur in Nielsen, Ethics Without God (Buffalo: Prometheus Press 1990); Nielsen, God and the Grounding of Morality (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1991); and Nielsen, Philosophy and Atheism (Buffalo: Prometheus Books 1985).
argumentation. It is not clear that his resting place is the resting place that just must be accepted by any reasonable person or even by any reasonable person lucky enough to have a good scientific and philosophical education in the developed societies of the twentieth century.

There is, it should be added, something rather strange about Quine’s approach to such issues. He says in his discussion with Magee, conventionally enough, that ‘philosophical issues often challenge the basic structure of our system of the world.’ But Quine’s do not; rather, with his metaphysics and ontology within the limits of science alone, he celebrates it. There are in his ontology physical objects, construed as the ‘content of any portion of space-time, however scattered and abstract objects, namely sets and classes.’ And this departure from nominalism on Quine’s part is only done reluctantly to account for mathematics as a necessary tool in doing science. Without it modern science is impossible. But that — these physical objects and abstract objects — is all there is for Quine. And, as we have seen, Quine does not argue for it or show us how we could argue for it, but just asserts it, as what a reasonable person with good philosophical and scientific training would accept in the twentieth century. It is not that we think Quine is wrong in being a materialist. In fact, we think something like this ourselves. But so thinking certainly is not in our time a challenge to what is taken to be the basic structure of our system of the world but simply cheering for it or perhaps running advertising for our scientific world perspective.

Such issues lead to the charge, made by such otherwise sympathetic philosophers as Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty, that Quine’s philosophy is scientistic, where to be scientistic is to believe that what science (perhaps even natural science) cannot tell us, humankind cannot know, or even rationally believe. And this, Putnam and Rorty, and a lot of other people as well, take to be a claim which rests on a mistake. If, to flesh this out, scientism is taken to be the doctrine that in

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71 Quine in Magee, 151
72 Ibid., 150
matters of practical reasoning or normative matters there can be no knowledge or justified belief, then it is very implausible indeed. It may be no more than a deep seated and rather pervasive bit of twentieth-century ideology, as Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas have argued. That it is wrong to torture people just for the fun of it, that it is evil to sell children or allow them to be seized (as is done now) so that their bodily organs can be taken to organ transplant banks, that it is evil to allow them to be adopted so that they can be sexually abused are things we plainly know to be true. If an error theory or a non-cognitive theory that we adopt leads us to deny this, then, as Bertrand Russell clearly saw, we must go back to the drawing board and revise our theory until it comes out so that we can say that we do know these things to be so. Quine, as far as I know, only once wrote on ethics and he came out with a rather naive form of subjectivism. If scientism rejects that there can be anything like practical reasoning or normative knowledge, then it does rest on a mistake. It simply accepts boldly a fourth dogma of empiricism and a pervasive bit of twentieth century ideology.

However, ‘scientism’ can have a more constrained meaning, and perhaps a perfectly benign meaning, where Quine, Russell, the logical positivists, and Dewey can all quite properly be said to be scientistic. Crudely, and in a way perhaps mistakenly, because of mathematics, scientism could be taken to be the belief that all facts are physical facts. This could be refined, as Quine does, into an ‘identification of facts of the matter with the distribution of microphysical states.’ A physical object for Quine is the content of any portion of space-time, however

73 Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press 1964) and Jürgen Habermas, Toward a Rational Society (Boston: Beacon Press 1970), 81-122


75 Putnam, Realism with a Human Face, 301. For Dewey, ‘physical fact’ would have to have a broader construal than Quine gives it such that social facts would be a subspecies of physical facts.

76 Quine, ‘Reply to Putnam’ in Lewis Edwin Hahn and Paul Arthur Schilpp, eds., The Philosophy of W.V. Quine (La Salle, IL: Open Court 1986), 429
scattered. Physical objects are, for him, fundamentally distributions of microphysical states. The real facts of the matter are the distributions of the microphysical states that there are. That is the real furniture of the universe. Nothing else is firmly real, though this, as Quine admits, leaves mathematics in an anomalous state. 77 (He, no more than Putnam, will go conventionalist and instrumentalist here, though this is not an unreasonable option for the philosophy of mathematics.)

Suppose the philosopher's scientism, while not leading her to deny truth or at least warrantability in normative matters or in logic and mathematics, is such that the philosopher will go on to say, against the more complete holism of Putnam, Goodman, and Rorty, that it is important to delineate facts of the matter — what really there is in the world — and that they are distributions of microphysical states. That seems to be what, most centrally, Quine's actual scientism comes to as can be seen in the final paragraph of his response to Putnam.

Finally I should like to clarify what Putnam and others have called my scientism. I admit to naturalism, and even glory in it. This means banishing the dream of a first philosophy and pursuing philosophy, rather as part of one's system of the world, continuous with the rest of science. 78

Here he is like Russell and Carnap, Carnap's acceptance of analyticity aside. Suppose, Quine speculates in a passage following the above quotation, we got some wild phenomena — say, that observationally and experimentally 'telepathic effects were established beyond peradventure' — physics still would not, Quine has it, totter. We should not drop the belief that there is no change without a physical change; rather, physicists, as Quine puts it, would have 'to go back to the drawing board and have another try at full coverage.' 79 Moreover, it is the physicist's business, and her business alone, to go for full coverage here. There is no justification, Quine maintains, for going to the metaphysician, the theologian, the psychologist, or any

77 Ibid., 430
78 Ibid., 430
79 Ibid., 431
other branch of science. *It is finally physics which ascertains what there is.* Certainly, on Quine’s view, philosophy does not and cannot do so.

Putnam and Rorty are much more historicist. We are finally, they would say, just acquiescing in what our scientific culture generally takes to be the best way of coping with things.\(^8^0\) This acquiescing would be quite foreign to people, including sophisticated philosophers (Oc-

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\(^8^0\) Rorty’s views are well known and well documented here. For a brief but forceful recent statement of them, see his *Pragmatism as Anti-Representationalism* in John P. Murphy, *Pragmatism from Peirce to Davidson* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1990) 1-6. Concerning Putnam, we should remark that the thoroughness of his rejection of scientism, his increasing distance from the analytic tradition and the linking of his historicist conception of how to proceed in philosophy with the work of Wittgenstein and Dewey, place him, his own views to the contrary notwithstanding, very close to Rorty. Putnam thinks there is a greater distance than there actually is between them because he mistakenly attributes to Rorty a relativism and a Derridean lightmindedness about truth. But Rorty, arguably, never was the former and has grown out of an earlier pragmatist account of truth. (What Rorty says of Putnam about his continued self-critical development — his not staying put, fixated in, and defensive about old positions — is exactly true of Rorty himself.) Rorty now goes disquotationalist about truth and he, as much as Putnam, rejects relativism, although, like Putnam, he believes no God’s eye view of the world, or even (*pace* Bernard Williams) an Absolute conception of the world, is possible. So, like Putnam, he is historicist, but *historicism is not relativism*. The differences that remain between Putnam and Rorty are over Putnam’s epistemological theory of truth, his belief in a need for a *theory* of truth, rationality, and normativity, and his belief in the explanatory power of normative properties. Here it appears to be the case, or so it seems to us, that Putnam stands himself in need of some Wittgensteinian therapy. (Psychoanalysts sometimes go back for renewed therapy themselves. Why should not the same thing be true for conceptual therapy?) See Rorty, ‘Putnam on Truth’ and Rorty, ‘Life at the End of Inquiry,’ *London Review of Books* 6: 14-15 (August 2, 1984), 6-7. For Putnam’s powerfully articulated Deweyian-Wittgensteinian non-scientistic, non-reductive naturalism, see his *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1992).

Since this note was first written, this discussion has been further significantly extended by both Putnam and Rorty. See Hilary Putnam, ‘Truth, Activation Vectors, and Possession Conditions for Concepts,’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (1992) 431-37; and Richard Rorty, ‘Putnam and the Relativist Menace,’ 443-61.
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cam or Scotus, for example), in the Middle Ages. (We would add that there are people like that around now.) Putnam and Rorty have it that neither the philosopher nor anyone else has grounds for standing back and critically assessing such fundamental assumptions of her culture. We have, the historicist claim goes, no grounds to stand on here. There is no way of proving or otherwise establishing this naturalism of our scientific culture; it is just where the buck stops for us children of the Enlightenment. But their views are not only historicist in the way Quine's are not; their naturalism is not scientistic. They do not think that there is, or even could be, such a thing as the one uniquely true description of the world and that physics or an ideal physics or anything else gives it. Rather there are many different descriptions, given for many different purposes, and, where they, relative to one or another of these purposes, enable us successfully to cope we can reasonably take them for true.

Traditional philosophers will not acquiesce in either Quine's scientism or Putnam's and Rorty's historicism. They will say that the real metaphysical and epistemological issues start where they leave off. Rorty and Putnam in turn would challenge the traditionalist to show how they could reliably fix beliefs in those areas where they would return to something like First Philosophy. Is either 'Is there an external world?' or 'Are there other minds?' any less a pseudo-question than 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' Moreover, if none of them is a pseudo-question, then what would it be like to answer them? We seem at least to be at a loss here.

However, coming back on the dialectical swing, whatever we say here, things are very problematical. But that notwithstanding, it surely does not seem to be dogmatism on Quine's part to say that 'much of science is firmer than philosophy is, or can ever perhaps aspire to be.' That is just firm common sense and in a non-philosophical sense, realism for people standing where we stand now. (The last qualification catches some of the truth in historicism.) If that is scientism then scientism is a reasonable attitude to take towards our

81 Quine in Magee, 143
fixing of belief and our claims to knowledge of matters of fact. It is not a bit (pace Marcuse and Habermas) of scientistic ideology.

If, in turn, it is responded that this is to take a rather fideistic attitude toward science, then it should be replied that the history of cultural experience in the last few hundred years has shown us, as Peirce and Dewey argued, that science is rather better at coping with the ascertaintment of fact than any other practice and that it is often not unimportant for us to ascertain what are the facts of the matter. That is not all that coping comes to, hence the reasonability of rejecting the broader construal of scientism, but it is an important part of what it comes to and it is enough to banish metaphysics and First Philosophy, something that Putnam and Rorty do at least as resolutely as Quine.

It seems, to sum up, that a 'scientific philosophy' such as Quine's, or for that matter, in very broad outlines, Russell's, Hans Reichenbach's, J.J.C. Smart's or David Armstrong's, has its attractions. It seems, where consistently pursued, to involve a rejection of metaphysics and the conceptions of First Philosophy. That that is all to the good is something that will widely, but by no means universally, be believed. (After all, we have a deeply scientistic culture at least among relatively educated strata of our society.) But it is less welcome news to recognize that 'scientific philosophy' itself rests on claims that are anomalous with respect to justification. It is not clear that it is, everything considered, an advance over the conception of linguistic philosophy of the 1950s represented in our discussion by Berlin and Hampshire, but, with inessential variations, widely accepted and practiced in the heyday of logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy. But, as we have also seen, this conception of philosophy also has its own problems. So what is philosophy and what should it be? Perhaps

82 Nielsen, 'Peirce, Pragmatism and the Challenge of Postmodernism,' Transactions of the Peirce Society (forthcoming). If a holism such as Davidson's or Rorty's compels us to drop all talk of 'facts of the matter,' then there is something wrong with such a holism. See here Quine, 'Let Me Accentuate the Positive,' Malachowski, Reading Rorty, 11-119; and Quine, 'In Praise of Observation Sentences,' The Journal of Philosophy 90 (1993) 107-16.
Putnam is right in believing that ‘analytic philosophy ... has come to
the end of its own project — the dead end, not the completion.’ But,
to say nothing of Hume, Kant, and Comte before it, it has wreaked
such havoc on conceptions of First Philosophy that there seems at
least to be no profitable return here to the ancient regime. So how
should we now conceive of philosophy and its central task (if it has
one) or should we accept some form of anti-philosophy philosophy
and set the whole project aside, wishing for a post-philosophical
culture?

VIII

We will close by stating and discussing a claim which is germane here.
It was made by Richard Rorty, an anti-philosophy philosopher if
anyone is, and a key player in the last wave of metaphilosophical
discussions. Rorty writes in ‘Habermas, Derrida and the Functions
of Philosophy’ that discussions about ‘the nature and function of phi-

83 Putnam, Realism with a Human Face, 51
84 Nielsen has argued that in his After the Demise of the Tradition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1991) and in the following articles: ‘Reconsidering the Platonic Conception of Philosophy,’ International Studies in Philosophy (forthcoming), ‘Jolting the Career of Reason: Absolute Idealism and Other Rationalisms Reconsidered,’ The Journal of Speculative Philosophy (forthcoming), ‘How to Proceed in Philosophy: Remarks after Habermas,’ Theoria (forthcoming), ‘What is Philosophy? The Reconsideration of Some Neglected Options,’ History of Philosophy Quarterly (forthcoming). Rorty, who regards logical positivism as in effect a retrograde and reactionary philosophical movement — he was not complaining about their typically liberal or radical politics — also remarks: ‘... the positivists were absolutely right in thinking it imperative to extirpate metaphysics when “metaphysics” means to give knowledge of what science cannot know. For this is the attempt to find a discourse which combines the intersubjective security of objective truth ... with the edifying unjustifiable but unconditional moral claim’ (Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1979), 384).
losophy’ are pointless, for the subject is a pseudo-topic. This would seem — and indeed it comes strangely from Rorty — to be giving us to understand, and indeed rather plainly, that metaphilosophy itself is a pseudo-topic. Rorty remarks:

“The nature and function of philosophy” is a pseudo-topic, as much so as “the nature and task of the novel.” Talk of “the end of philosophy” is as easy, but as empty, as talk of the “end of the Novel.” The term “the novel” by now covers so many different kinds of things (from Tristram Shandy to Gone With the Wind, from Lolita to Malone Dies, from Oliver Twist to The Executioner’s Song) that everyone knows that “the death of the novel” means no more than “the death of a kind of novel.” The same cynicism should be felt about announcements of “the end of philosophy” which typically mean something like “the end of metaphysical system-building” or “the end of empiricism” or “the end of Cartesianism.” No definition of “philosophy” can cover Carnap and Rawls, early Hegel and late Wittgenstein, Derrida and Habermas, and still isolate something coherent enough to have an “end.”

This anti-essentialist claim of Rorty’s is, we think, realistic and right, and should, as Putnam has argued, be applied to science as well. Philosophy has been many different things, and even contemporary philosophy, when viewed cross-culturally, say, in Canada and United States, Germany, France, South America, Pakistan, India, China, is a tower of Babel. Even within the tradition of analytic philosophy the differences are radical. Contrast not only Carnap and Rawls, but David Kaplan and Charles Taylor, Alvin Plantinga and Stanley Cavell, Richard Jeffries and Alasdair MacIntyre, Saul Kripke and G.A. Cohen. There is little point or even possibility — or so at least it seems — in seeking out something in common, or some cluster of things in common, that they all do or think or assume in virtue of which we call them philosophers or even analytical philosophers. There doesn’t seem to be any one task or cluster of tasks that it is philosophy’s to

85 Rorty, ‘Habermas, Derrida and the Function of Philosophy,’ Revue Internationale de Philosophie (forthcoming)

86 Ibid.
perform. And the same obtains for method, techniques, and subject matter.

Yet it is Rorty, perhaps more than anyone in recent history, who has fuelled talk of ‘the end of philosophy’ or of a ‘post-philosophical culture’ or of a ‘transforming of philosophy.’ He is arguably the central figure in what we have called anti-philosophy-philosophy. What he has sought to do is perfectly consistent with his above claim. He has sought, much to the irritation of many, to bring an end to the tradition of philosophy, where philosophy is taken to be an autonomous discipline articulating metaphysical, epistemological, and ethically foundationalist claims. Even more generally, he has argued against taking philosophy as something on the secure road to science, either in Quine’s sense of something being continuous with and indeed a part of science, or as an autonomous disciplinary matrix with subjects like epistemology, the philosophy of mind, theory of action, philosophy of language, ethical theory, philosophy of logic, and the like, firmly fixed in a disciplinary matrix. 87 He has, aligning philosophy more closely to literature and distancing it from science and logic, sought to reconceptualize philosophy into a new rather conversationalist pragmatism without pragmatism’s traditional stress on the import of scientific method. 88 For him, pragmatism is a kind of discursive James and Dewey without the Peircean claims, echoed later by Ernest Nagel and Sidney Hook, about the centrality of scientific method. He wants philosophy, free of any claims about philosophical knowledge, theories of truth, or claims to a distinctive method or subject matter, to come to grips with human problems (the problems of life) and to carry on the task, more in the fashion of Matthew Arnold or Ralph Waldo Emerson, than of Spinoza, Kant, or Hegel, of trying to ascertain how things hang together, and to consider how we should react to their hanging together, to make a little more reasonable sense of our lives.

87 Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism, 211-30. See also his Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature), particularly 384-5, 389-90, 392.

88 Rorty, Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, 65-77
This kind of de-transcendentalized philosophical activity Rorty does not see as coming to an end or being at all problematical, though more radical postmodernists, e.g., Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard, do. But he does not see how this kind of philosophical activity could be a disciplinary matter, something that there could be an expertise in. He does not see it as something concerning which we could set on a long and arduous course of study to give us a 'mastery of the field.' Philosophy, on his view, can neither be a science (formal or empirical or both), a super-science, a theory of analysis, or a distinctive form of knowledge. His claim is that it can't be these things and that this itself is a good thing. Philosophy, in the various distinctive forms of the Western tradition, is, he believes, coming to an end; and he further believes that this is not something to be regretted. This is thought by most philosophers to be a far too extreme view. Indeed, some claim it is an irresponsible view. Philosophy, many believe, is in various ways problematic, but not that problematic. Philosophers are not reduced to just being reflective about the problems of life and to the effort to try to make a little more coherent sense of them. Some will deny that that is even in the province of philosophy at all. But, whatever they say about such a Deweyian conception, most think that there is a coherent cluster of disciplines or practices here that can be learned and that they have some important role to play in our intellectual and perhaps more generally in our cultural life. (In the present volume, Francis Sparshott articulates this view with sophistication and depth.)

We have seen something of the problems that attach to some of the most influential attempts to articulate a conception of philosophy in the analytical tradition. We have sought in this introduction to convey something of a sense of the range of issues that arise here and something of how many loose ends there are with an eye to setting the stage for the essays in metaphilosophy we have collected together. We have in this volume a cluster, in many and varied ways, of diverse

89 Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 211-30
essays by a number of distinguished philosophers who try, directly or indirectly, to say not what the task of philosophy is — there is no such thing as its task — but something of what they take to be good ways of proceeding in philosophy and of conceptualizing what we are, or at least should be, doing when we do philosophy.

It is now time, perhaps high time, to let them speak for themselves. But we will do well in reading them to ask how they fit in (if they do) with the metaphilosophical traditions we have discussed; how they push the subject along; avoid or overcome (if they do) the difficulties of their predecessors; conceptualize or reconceptualize questions concerning what philosophy is, and what its proper method, scope, and subject matter are; and to what extent they refute, render implausible, defuse, or deepen what we have, perhaps tendentiously, called anti-philosophy philosophy.