HOW IT WAS

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John Dewey lecture delivered at the one hundred ninth annual Eastern Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 29, 2012.

I

I had intended to take the premed program when I went to Barnard College in September 1946, but two things killed that idea in my first semester. First, you had to take a lot of chemistry, which required memorizing a lot of facts. Second, I had signed on for Introduction to Philosophy. I did so out of mere curiosity, since I had had no idea what philosophy was, and, lo and behold, met Berkeley's Dialogues there. It was certainly very obscure, but all the same, it was the most fascinating work I had ever read. Moreover, philosophy didn't require memorizing anything.

I think the philosophy program at Barnard was on the whole typical of those at other small four-year colleges in the late forties. What was called Modern Philosophy in course listings ended with Kant, though, if memory serves, you could do a reading course in post-Kantian philosophy through Hegel and the ethics course took us through Mill.

Barnard then had a distinguished philosopher visiting or on its faculty (I don't remember which): William Pepperell Montague. He was described to us as a New Realist, though I didn't then have (and still don't have) any clear idea what marked him off from the Objective Realists and the Critical Realists, who were also important figures in American philosophy at the time. I took either metaphysics or history of philosophy with him (I don't remember which) as a sophomore. I vaguely remember having found his course interesting, though the only thing I remember his telling us was that he didn't fancy kissing girls who wear lipstick because it would be like kissing buttered toast.

What I think was less adequate at Barnard than at other comparable colleges was its logic course. Our textbook was W. S. Jevons's *Elementary Lessons in Logic*, which was published in 1870. It was largely devoted to Aristotelian logic, with a couple of chapters on induction at the end. Aristotelian logic is a little more interesting than one might have thought,

given the existence of procedures for reducing all valid syllogisms to the four valid syllogisms of the first figure. (The figure of a syllogism turns on the position of its middle term.) But only a little more interesting.

I should stress that it wasn't because Barnard was a women's college that its logic course was so thin. Barnard was a vigorously bluestocking enterprise and prided itself on the number of professional women among its graduates—as did Hunter College High School, which I had gone to before Barnard and which was then a girls' school. (Hunter later became coed.) So I am led to believe that the members of Barnard's philosophy department simply didn't think philosophy majors needed to be introduced to anything more sophisticated in logic than Jevons supplied us with. Whatever its source, I had cause to regret that gap in my background when I went to graduate school.

Meanwhile, it was my friends who introduced me to the twentieth century in philosophy—to works by G. E. Moore and A. J. Ayer in particular, and then to John Wisdom's dazzling papers on "Other Minds." It was the place of Cambridge in twentieth-century philosophy that led me to apply for a Fulbright scholarship to go to Cambridge rather than Oxford and Wisdom's papers that led me to apply to work with him there.

II

So I went to Cambridge. It was 1950, high noon of ordinary-language philosophy in England.

Some people use that term to refer to philosophy that (roughly) takes ordinary beliefs to constrain the acceptability of philosophical theories. On that construal of it, both Moore and Wittgenstein count as engaging in ordinary-language philosophy. Among the many reasons for welcoming Scott Soames's history of analytic philosophy is its distinguishing radically between the movement that Moore launched and the later movement that Wittgenstein launched.[1] According to Moore, the fact that ordinary beliefs are true is only the beginning of philosophy: the job of the right-thinking philosopher is then to analyze those beliefs—thereby solving the philosophical problems that philosophers have grieved over in the past. According to Wittgenstein, what were thought of as philosophical problems were just confusions about the workings of the relevant bits of language. So the job of the right-thinking philosopher isn't to solve problems, whether by analysis or anything else. His or her job is rather to bring out what the confusions are, thereby not solving, but dissolving, the (only putative) problems.

By 1950, it was the movement Wittgenstein had launched that dominated philosophy in England. His *Philosophical Investigations* wouldn't come out until 1953, but his influence was everywhere. Moreover, the "Blue and Brown Books" were circulating in typescript among the students. It was typical of the period, however, that the students who owned copies insisted that you get permission to read them from the appropriate authority else they wouldn't let you see theirs. The appropriate authority in Cambridge then was John Wisdom.

Cambridge was purer in its devotion to the leader than Oxford was. Oxford took pride in Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, which had been published in 1949, but it was full of philosophical theses that purported to be solutions to the (putative) problems about the mind that Wittgenstein had taught don't exist. Cambridge would have none of it—Cambridge didn't merely think Ryle's book wrong in letter, Cambridge thought it badly confused in spirit.

I think it a great pity that John Wisdom has disappeared from the history of the period—he doesn't even merit a footnote in Soames's history. Wisdom was always something of a cult figure, though he was much admired by the better-known philosophers of the period such as Austin, but he is no longer even a cult figure. I said earlier that his papers on "Other Minds" were dazzling—indeed, they are brilliant. There are eight papers in the series, and they appeared in issues of Mind from 1940 to 1943. Wisdom does in them exactly what Wittgenstein had said philosophers should do. He starts with the (so-called) other minds problem and then sails back and forth over all of the central areas of metaphysics, bringing out how we do and don't use the relevant bits of language, which bits are like which others, and what confuses us and why. I add that the papers are often witty, and they are rich in clever examples.

His lectures were like them. He was tall and bald and very thin, and his features were thin and sharp; he looked like a crow in the black MA gown that lecturers at Cambridge wore. At the first lecture that he gave that fall, he leaned on the lectern and rubbed his head and thought for a while, and then he finally asked us: "Was it negligence?" A story gradually emerged. Somebody (who?) had left a bucket at the head of the stairs (why?) and somebody else (who?) had tripped over the bucket (why?) and was hurt (how badly?) and so on. Wisdom brought out how the empirical and the a priori were tangled together in the enterprise of answering a question about what might have been an actual event.

Weekly supervision sessions with Wisdom took a lot of getting used to. At my first, he suggested that I give him something I had written as

an undergraduate. "Well," he said at my second session, "I can see that you've read a lot of philosophy." Alas, there was no way in which that could be thought a compliment. My next assignment was to find a page or two, or perhaps a paragraph, of something by, as it might be, Russell and write a little paper on what goes on in it; then I was to read the paper to him at our next supervision session. Wisdom went on making similarly open-ended assignments, week after week. I add that his estimates of my work turned not only on what I wrote but also on whether the choice I had made of pages or paragraph was an interesting choice—I was to learn to tell the difference. That was unquestionably the best teaching that I had ever had.

I earlier described Cambridge as purer than Oxford, but it was of course only the part of Cambridge that I was fascinated by that I was referring to, the part led by Wittgenstein, with Wisdom as apostle-in-chief and Wisdom's students as disciples. Other things—some quite impure—also went on in Cambridge in successive terms in the two years I spent there. C. D. Broad and A. C. Ewing lectured on ethics; if memory serves, G. H. von Wright lectured on deontic logic and R. B. Braithwaite on philosophy of science. Peter Geach gave some lectures on Frege; I greatly regret that I didn't come to see the importance of the issues that Geach lectured on then until many years later. Moore and Wittgenstein were still alive while I was there but did no lecturing that I was aware of.

III

Wonderful as it all seemed, I was in fact reading less and less philosophy as time passed and taking it less and less seriously. Not surprisingly, I didn't do well on my final exams, and I concluded that I wasn't really any good at philosophy. Moreover, the subject didn't seem as exciting as it had when I first arrived in Cambridge. Berkeley's Dialogues now seemed less interesting than they had when I was an undergraduate since I had by now learned that there wasn't any real problem that Berkeley was trying to solve and that what was to be done with his text was just to work out what mistakes about the relevant bits of language were responsible for its obscurity.

So I quit. There was no disloyalty to anything or anyone in doing so since Wittgenstein himself took the view that we should all quit.

I tried advertising when I got home to New York. I began with a job as a copywriting trainee at J. Walter Thompson—I became fairly good at writing ads for My-T-Fine Chocolate Pudding and Fleischmann's Active Dry Yeast. But only fairly good, not very good, because writing lively ads turned out

to require a talent I discovered that I didn't have. (Academics harbor the idea that they could conquer the business world and make fortunes if their love of their subjects didn't keep them poor in academe. For most of us, nothing could be further from the truth.)

After drifting to other advertising jobs, I met a man at a party who was in search of a ghost. He was full of ideas about how to overhaul the American public-school system, but they were a great clutter, and he thought he needed someone to organize them into a book for him. That, anyway, seemed to me to be something I could do reasonably well and would certainly prefer to advertising, so I signed on for a trial run.

Ghosting isn't a nine-to-five job: you can do it as well at midnight as at noon. So I thought I would sit in on a midday philosophy course at Columbia just to see how philosophy sounded after my something over two years since Cambridge.

IV

It sounded terrific. I had had the great good luck to opt to sit in on John Herman Randall's yearlong course on the history of philosophy. It made me finally take seriously something that had all along been obvious enough: if philosophers' worries all issue just from their misuse of the relevant bits of language, then it would be amazing that the bits of language misused by those of one generation, who wrote in one language, just happen to be roughly translatable into the bits of language misused by those of a different generation, who wrote in a different language. (In English: matter, time, space, cause, person, mind, knowledge, good, and so on.) No doubt there were several possible ways of explaining those similarities among philosophers. I took them to suggest, and finally to show, that philosophers across time and language are engaged in a common enterprise—that they are trying to solve the same problems and facing the same difficulties in solving them. I am sure that that wasn't what Randall intended us to conclude. Similarities among philosophers of course mattered to him, but what he again and again drew our attention to were differences, among others, the differences due to advances in science. I didn't care about the differences. What mattered to me was the shared problems—and it didn't take long before I realized that nothing interested me anywhere near as much as they did.

So I thought I would have another go at philosophy: I applied for a place as a regular graduate student at Columbia. I can't think why the department accepted me as a full-time student, given my lack of success

at Cambridge, but incredibly, they did. So I ceased being a ghost and came back to life.

V

It was then that I first met active, as opposed to history-book, discrimination against women. I hadn't met any at Hunter or Barnard, of course, and I hadn't really had cause to notice any at Cambridge. (The English seem to have been far more relaxed about the presence of women in universities than Americans were.) The then chairman of the Columbia philosophy department said when I applied for admission that he hoped I would enjoy doing philosophy for its own sake because I mustn't suppose I could ever get a job as a teacher of philosophy. He said that philosophy departments don't hire women except as secretaries, and a fortiori, that Columbia wouldn't support my candidacy for a teaching job. Many women have described the insults they had to become accustomed to in academe; mine were like them. I mention only how long even the most overt discrimination lasted. I had occasion to need a temporary job in the Boston area in the mid-sixties, some years after I had received my Ph.D., and I had asked a friend of my husband's and mine who was then a member of the Harvard philosophy department whether he thought I could get some TA-ing to do for his department. Our friend said no—his department wouldn't entrust its undergraduates to women, even as TAs.

VI

Still, it was delightful to be a graduate student again in the mid-fifties.

Columbia's philosophy department was largely divided between those who worked in the history of philosophy and those who worked primarily with Ernest Nagel in the philosophy of science. (The New, Objective, and Critical Realists had disappeared by then.) I plainly wasn't going to concentrate anywhere in the history of philosophy, and though I took all the courses that Nagel offered, and he would later agree to chair my dissertation committee, I equally plainly wasn't going to concentrate anywhere in the philosophy of science. (For better in some ways and worse in others, I remained a former student of John Wisdom's.) What was so delightful about being at Columbia then, and what I learned most from, was the informal talk—with my contemporaries, Arthur Collins and a graduate student from Greece, Costas Politis, and with two of the junior faculty members, Arthur Danto and Sidney Morgenbesser.

An even greater piece of good luck for me came when the chairman of the philosophy department at Barnard, Joe Brennan, offered me a teaching

job there. The chairman of the Columbia philosophy department had evidently forgotten about the existence of women's colleges, even the one right across the street, and a fortiori had forgotten that women's colleges made serious efforts to see to it that women were well represented on their faculties. (Many women of my generation, in many fields, had good reason to be grateful to the women's colleges.) The older members of Barnard's department, who had been my teachers only a few years ago, had by now retired or died, and the chairman was in process of rebuilding.

VII

Nothing could have been happier. I hadn't realized how much I would enjoy teaching philosophy. That I did was partly due to the fact that my students at Barnard were smart and enthusiastic. It was also due to the fact that teaching required taking stands on philosophical issues, or justifying one's inability to take them, and then defending oneself against objections from students—discussion and argument, week after week, all term long. I loved it.

A way of understanding what philosophy is came to seem to me increasingly plausible. I had already come to think that philosophy consists in a battery of problems; back at Barnard again, I came to think that the main, central problems consist in efforts to explain what makes certain pre-philosophical, or nonphilosophical, beliefs true. Which beliefs? Philosophers differ in their interests, but the ones that have interested philosophers, generally, in generation after generation, are those that we rely on in ordinary life. Not surprisingly, it was Moore, not Wittgenstein, who struck me as the leader. (I suspect that I could have said Aristotle instead of Moore.) I still think that way of understanding what philosophy is is roughly right.

VIII

But only roughly, since so much in it is unclear. For example, which nonphilosophical beliefs are such that a philosopher tries to explain what makes them true? Moore had invited us to take the beliefs to include that there are living human bodies, which have been in contact with or near the surface of the earth since they were born, that some events had occurred before others, and that there are human beings like oneself in having experiences. But that is an awfully short list. For one among many examples of missing kinds of proposition, there is nothing normative on the list, and, in particular, no moral directives to the effect that such and such a person ought or ought not do such and such.

I hadn't been interested in ethics until I started teaching, except as a minor branch of metaphysics. But I had to become interested in it, and quickly at that, because as the junior member of the Barnard department, I had to teach the 9 a.m. class on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, which happened to be Introduction to Philosophy. It was then that I began to wonder why there weren't any moral directives on Moore's list. It seemed to me clear that there are moral directives that are as obviously true as that there are a lot of living human bodies currently near the surface of the earth.

I was pleased to find that question about Moore's list in Soames's history because my first published paper (in 1958) was an effort to show that some moral directives do belong on Moore's list. Unfortunately, while I still think the question first-rate, my effort to answer it then was really pretty bad.

Mainstream ethics in the late fifties was wholly metaethics. For example, Hare's *The Language of Morals* had come out in 1952, and that and other efforts to accommodate expressivism in some way, or to rebut it, were widely discussed.

Ten years later, mainstream ethics began to look very different: there was a dramatic turn in what could be done by academic philosophers under the name "ethics." The turn was due to the Vietnam War, which affected campuses across the country. Many moral philosophers came to believe that they had been at fault for failing to take concrete moral issues generally as seriously as they should have. Philosophers interested in ethics began publishing papers on topics that the standard philosophy journals had never published papers on before—we wrote on topics such as abortion, just war, the right to privacy, self-defense, and affirmative action and preferential hiring and the rights of women and minorities more generally. It was remarkable! Much of that material was at first published in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, which was founded by Marshall Cohen in 1971: it invited lawyers and political theorists to join moral philosophers in dealing with concrete moral issues and was an immediate success.

My impression is that by the mid-eighties that enthusiasm for attending to concrete moral issues had begun to abate. Such material continues to be published of course, in many other journals as well as in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. But my impression is that the new moves that were being made in ethics by the mid-eighties were largely moves in metaethics. I had myself begun to find legal theory and the theory of rights of particular interest.

IX

By that time, I had married an English philosopher, James Thomson, and we had moved to Boston and to positions at MIT. MIT had decided to develop a graduate program in philosophy in the early sixties—funds were available, and expansion was common in many fields in universities across the country. James was invited to join in 1964, and when MIT discovered that what it had described to us as a nepotism rule was really only a nepotism policy, I was allowed to join in 1965. (MIT quietly shelved that policy in the coming years.)

The new philosophy graduate program was to fit its surroundings at MIT: it was to have philosophy of language, logic, and science at its heart. That is what had attracted James from the outset. I came to realize its advantages for me only gradually, but it didn't take very long for them to become clear. My interests had been divided between metaphysics and ethics during my years at Barnard, and they continued to be divided in that way at MIT. My work in both areas greatly benefitted from discussion with James and with those who joined the program as the years passed—I thank the graduate students as well as the faculty members that MIT has been lucky enough to attract.

X

Many philosophers say these days that nothing new has happened in philosophy in recent years and that philosophers are just marking time. I would be clearer about whether to agree if I were clearer about what they take to be missing.

My impression is that the major moves in philosophy have always issued from the development of a new meta-philosophy. The great figures of the past, such as Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, and Kant, didn't just produce new theories in one or other of the subfields of philosophy, such as metaphysics or epistemology or ethics. They produced new ways of doing philosophy, the use of which yielded, or anyway created space for, new theories in several subfields. And it might be that there won't be any more such moves. Philosophers specialize nowadays. Hardly anyone is really at home in philosophy across the subfields—keeping up with developments in one subfield is just about a full-time job. It is arguable that that isn't due, or anyway isn't wholly due, to the fact that so much progress is currently being made in the individual subfields. Progress certainly has been and is being made in the subfields, but it is arguable that the specialization is at least in part due to the explosion of publication in philosophy due to the fact that publication is nowadays not only required for getting tenure,

but advisable for getting a tenure-track job to begin with. Demand then generates supply, and journals proliferate.

Whether or not it is right to think that there won't be any more major moves in philosophy, that is, any more large-scale cross-subfield moves, there will surely be more moves within the subfields. The moves within subfields are most often made by a philosopher who finds an interesting new problem. Perhaps a philosopher draws attention to something that hadn't been noticed or had been noticed but hadn't been taken seriously before, as, for example, Goodman did when he drew attention to the fact that the data that support the claim that all emeralds are green are translatable into data that equally support the claim that all emeralds are grue. Or as Williams and Nagel did when they drew attention to moral luck. A great many moves of this relatively narrow kind were made in the last century, and many of them are lovely—not merely in themselves, but also in the fact that attention to them brings out the need for new theories.

Second, less common, are the new theories themselves—for example, Rawls's theory of justice, and Stalnaker's and Lewis's analyses of counterfactuals.

It is largely works of those two intra-specialty kinds—the new problems and the new theories—and the literature they generate, that fill all those journals. I don't see any good reason to think that the sources of works of such kinds are drying up. Thus, it seems to me that but for the shortage of jobs in philosophy that generated that explosion of publication, the condition of philosophy nowadays is pretty good. Nevertheless, it is a pity that something more general is missing. I am going to take the liberty of describing something I would like to see done.

XI

Let us go back to Moore's list. I mentioned that moral directives—among propositions of many other kinds—are missing.

Here is an example that is familiar from the literature: we ought not kill one person to save five. Or a bit more careful: we ought not kill one bystander even if we would thereby save the lives of five bystanders from being killed by someone else. I think that belongs on Moore's list because I think it obviously true.

I will call those of us who think it obviously true the Believers. There are philosophers who think the Believers mistaken. On their view, if we are so

situated, then we ought to kill the one bystander. Those philosophers are of course the Consequentialists.

The interesting fact isn't just that Consequentialists disagree; it is that they have a reason for disagreeing, a reason of an important kind: they have a plausible theory that yields that we ought to kill the one bystander and, indeed, explains why we ought to. Their theory says that what a person ought to do is what would maximize goodness. And they add that, other things being equal, we would in fact maximize goodness if we killed the one bystander, for four fewer will be killed if we do than if we don't.

The Believers, of course, think that the Consequentialists' theory not only isn't plausible but is false. But they have no plausible theory that yields that we ought not kill the one bystander and explains why we ought not. The literature contains lots of efforts, none convincing. The Consequentialists take considerable comfort in that fact. They say that the Believers' lack of a plausible theory shows that their belief is a mere intuition, which may be just a residue of "arbitrary and obsolete tradition."[2]

The fact that the Believers have no theory that would explain what they take to be a moral fact really does seem to weaken their case against Consequentialism. And isn't it right that it should? Eddington said somewhere that we should never trust the result of an experiment unless we have a theory that would explain it. A very attractive principle!

Eddington was talking about the sciences, of course, and not about philosophy, and there is a substantial literature on the role that scientific theories play in our understanding of the world around us. Philosophy is an armchair enterprise, and the role that philosophical theories play in our understanding of the world around us is arguably very different from that which scientific theories play. It is certainly plausible that philosophical theories play an important role in our understanding of the world around us, and it would be very welcome to hear about how they do from some contemporary philosophers. Why, after all, do we all work so hard at trying to solve philosophical problems and construct philosophical theories? (Why didn't we become physicists or anthropologists?)

I add that answering that question is the more difficult when we remember that the availability of a philosophical theory doesn't always play the evidential role that Consequentialism seems to play. Timothy Williamson recently drew attention to the fact that Gettier overturned the then most popular theory of knowledge overnight.[3]

According to that theory, for a person to know that p is for the person to have a justified true belief that p. What could be more plausible? Here is an example of the kind of case Gettier drew attention to. Alfred sends us excellent faked evidence that he is now in Paris. We therefore believe he is in Paris. We therefore conclude that he is in Europe. He is in Europe, but in Rome, not Paris. So while our belief that Alfred is in Europe is a justified true belief, we don't know that he is in Europe. Just about everyone agreed that Gettier had thereby refuted the justified true belief theory of knowledge. Nobody then had, indeed nobody now has, a more plausible theory of knowledge. Yet nobody said, "Listen Gettier, your lack of a plausible theory of knowledge shows that your belief that we don't know that Alfred is in Europe is a mere intuition, which may be just a residue of an arbitrary and obsolete tradition."[4] Why did Gettier come off so much better in his attempt at refuting the justified true belief theory of knowledge than we Believers come off in our attempt at refuting Consequentialism?

Is that difference due to the fact that Consequentialism is a normative theory whereas the justified true belief theory of knowledge is not? And thus that some version of expressivism must be right? I doubt it.

Producing a putative counter-case certainly doesn't always refute a plausible nonnormative philosophical theory. So why some theories and not others?

In sum, there are two questions I would welcome seeing work on. First, there is the question why we care about philosophical theories—what have we got when we've got one? And connected, second, why do some philosophical theories seem safer against counter-cases than others do? (I doubt that the first question can be answered without answering the second.) Both of the questions are meta-philosophical. Encouraged by Williamson and others, there is already the beginnings of a contemporary literature on meta-philosophy, and I greatly hope there will be more. I also hope that some Believer will be able to produce a plausible theory that yields that, and explains why, we must not kill that one bystander, and I also hope that some epistemologist will be able to produce an acceptable theory of knowledge. There is no incompatibility in hoping for good philosophy as well as for good meta-philosophy. But I think it pays to stress the value of meta-philosophy nowadays since we seem to have lost sight of it. There is certainly room for progress to be made on it even if we aren't going to be lucky enough to be granted another Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, or Kant.

NOTES

1. Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

2. Alan Strudler and David Wasserman, "The First Dogma of Deontology: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing and the Notion of a Say," *Philosophical Studies* 80 (1995): 51.

3. Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

4. Well, hardly anybody. I thank Richard Holton for drawing my attention after the APA session to Brian Weatherson's saying something very like it in "What Good Are Counterexamples?" in *Philosophical Studies* 115 (2003): 1–31. I thank him for drawing my attention also to Jennifer Nagel's "Epistemic Intuitions," *Philosophy Compass* 2, no. 6 (2007): 792–819, which contains a survey of the different positions that epistemologists have taken in recent years about epistemic intuitions and their relations to epistemic theories.