

PHILOSOPHY MASHED-UP AND IN CRISIS

J. Aaron Simmons models his meta-philosophy of mash-up on the contemporary genre of “crossover” music, which he summarizes as follows:

One of the most popular forms of contemporary music is known as “mashup.” This type of music is quite odd in that its originality is located in its creative repetition and combination of what has gone before while being “performed” by a DJ with the help of a computer. The combinations, or “mashups,” of the songs are done in such a way as to allow the songs to remain identifiable and yet significantly transformed by their having been woven together with other songs, usually from very different genres. For example, a mashup artist might take a well-known rap song and a classic metal hit and put them together in a way that allows listeners quickly to identify the two songs while yet presenting the music as if it were brand new. Mashup is a genre that refuses to recognize the rigidity of genres.¹

A similarly transgressive methodology is then proposed for philosophy, and for philosophy of religion in particular, so that the boundaries of the continental and analytic communities become more porous, their conversations more genuinely dialogical, and as a consequence their ideas and arguments more insightful and challenging. As Simmons states, “mashup philosophy of religion is not only meant to point out sites of resonance [between continental and analytic philosophy], but to open new spaces for constructive thought.”²

A meta-philosophy of mash-up? At first glance: an unseemly mix-up, a confused cacophony, a dog’s breakfast, one might say. The purist and obsessive in me, who likes clear and distinct ideas, clean surfaces and precise boundaries, would rather that separate things be kept separate. But on second thoughts: life breaks in. And life is coloured grey, not black or white, shrouded in mist, in mystery, a Hegelian both/and rather than a Kierkegaardian either/or. That is why in life pigeonholes are only for pigeons.

How did I get so mixed-up in mash-up? In the first part of this paper I will provide a short account of my meta-philosophical journey, indicating how it became increasingly “mashed-up.” But in the second section I want to take matters further and indeed in a new direction. I will contend that, despite the promise of “mash-up” philosophy, this does not address the serious crisis faced by philosophy today. This crisis, although grave and momentous, remains strangely underappreciated within the profession, and so there exists an urgent need to face up to it, address it and develop strategies to overcome it. *A warning*: much of what I say in the latter part of the paper will strike some readers as mistaken, exaggerated, perhaps even unfair and

¹ J. Aaron Simmons, “On Shared Hopes For (Mashup) Philosophy of Religion: A Reply to Trakakis,” *The Heythrop Journal* 55 (2014): 691.

² Simmons, “On Shared Hopes For (Mashup) Philosophy of Religion,” 692.

offensive. I say what I say regardless, based as it is on much reflection and experience in academic philosophy; but, in virtue of my deep love for philosophy, I say it with a heavy, wounded heart. And so I encourage the reader to take it in this spirit.

MY META-PHILOSOPHICAL JOURNEY

Nearly all graduate students of philosophy, both today and in the recent past, undertake their research almost exclusively within one of two philosophical communities: the Anglo-American analytic tradition, or the Continental tradition. (This is not the place for the admittedly difficult task of describing the differences between these traditions, or seeking to substantiate the divide as one that is genuine and substantive.) Without at the time placing much conscious reflection on the matter, I began my doctoral work squarely within the analytic camp. But I was aware of problems from the outset: the exclusion of valuable continental work from the undergraduate curriculum as well as from the debates in analytic philosophy of religion with which I was engaged; the often unfriendly remarks of analytic colleagues about the work of continental philosophers, despite the fact that the former would rarely read the latter; the so-called “exchanges” or “debates” between analytic and continental philosophers (Carnap on Heidegger, Derrida–Searle, etc.), which struck me as a travesty of philosophical dialogue. But I found the courage and freedom to wander beyond the highly guarded territories of the analytic camp only after submitting the dreaded, if not dreadful, beast that goes by the name of “the doctoral dissertation” (an outdated and awful way of developing and assessing philosophical competence, but still in place largely due to the highly conservative nature of tertiary institutions).

This courage and freedom were attained, in part, through the intersection of three factors. First, *the arts* (broadly understood, including painting, theatre, poetry and music) have consistently stood for me as an antidote towards the kind of technical, abstract and overly rational reflection common in philosophy. The reading and writing of poetry in particular was often a “release” during the long and dull years of working on a doctoral dissertation, but I also found in poets illuminating ways of seeing the world that deeply marked my attitudes and sensibilities, without becoming entirely cognizant of such effects till much later. I often wondered, as I waded through dense and dusty analytic tomes, where is the poetry in all this? Far from being vibrant and exciting, much of the work I was reading felt tedious and unimaginative.³ There was not only a lack of style and vision. Poetry, and artistic work more generally, was rarely quoted or explored, except in the most crass and mundane manner (e.g., as material for a thought-experiment, or to illustrate a point rather than as a crucial ingredient in an argument). I further wondered, and still do, why analytic philosophers hardly ever write poems, or do not even write *about* poetry.⁴

³ For a brilliant account and diagnosis of this problem in contemporary analytic philosophy, see David McNaughton, “Why Is So Much Philosophy So Tedious?” *Florida Philosophical Review* 9 (2009): 1-14.

⁴ Alvin Plantinga at one point even admits (though, given the context, it’s not clear whether this is meant to be taken as a piece of factual autobiography): “I am unable even to appreciate any poetry above the level of William E. McGonagall.” (*Warranted Christian Belief*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.50)

It wasn't always like this in English-speaking philosophy, however. Only a dismal lack of historical perspective gives us the impression that this is simply how philosophy is and always was. As Leslie Armour has stated, "the relation [between philosophy and poetry] may be broken now, but throughout the nineteenth century in Britain philosophy and poetry worked together."⁵ The nineteenth-century British idealists, for example, regularly engaged with poetry and drew connections between it and their philosophical views. In an insightful section of his comprehensive *British Idealism: A History*, W.J. Mander observes that the relation between philosophy and poetry was, for the British idealists, "a natural and important relation for, as they saw it, there exists a deep coincidence of *aim* between the ends pursued by these two endeavours."⁶ Mander goes on to explain that for the British idealists,

Both poetry and philosophy seek understanding; they are in the business of knowledge. They seek, moreover, the same kind of truth; to lay bare the most hidden, most profound and most universal principles at work behind both thought and reality. Notwithstanding their many and undeniable differences, at bottom, poets and philosophers are searchers and spokesmen for the same things.⁷

A leader in this regard was Henry Jones, who lectured on *The Immortality of the Soul in the Poems of Tennyson and Browning* (1905) and wrote *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher* (1891), making along the way a significant point that is still salient today: "...to seek for truth in poetry is a protest against the constant tendency to read it for the sake of the emotions which it stirs, the tendency to make it a refined amusement and nothing more."⁸ Poetry, for Jones, was not divorced from truth, as it often is today, but was one of its wellsprings, giving birth to and reinforcing the vision of the (idealist) philosopher. As Jones' contemporary, Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, put it in his Gifford Lectures of 1912-13: "The truth of the poetic imagination is perhaps the profoundest doctrine of a true philosophy."⁹

The second factor which propelled me beyond the narrow confines of the analytic school was my rediscovery of *Wittgenstein*. I can still recall my very first class as an undergraduate philosophy student, where my tutor (Max Bini, who went on to write a magnificent doctoral dissertation on Wittgenstein and Heidegger, years before comparative studies of this pair of

⁵ Leslie Armour, "Poetry and the Philosophical Imagination," in W.J. Mander (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 587.

⁶ W.J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 340, emphasis in original.

⁷ Mander, *British Idealism*, 340.

⁸ Henry Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1891), 8.

⁹ Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 127. A similar appreciation for poetry is evident in Edward Caird, about whom it has been said: "It was one of Caird's distinctions that he was not afraid to look to a poet, such as Wordsworth, rather than a philosopher, such as Rousseau, for truths about man's spirituality. This openness reflected Caird's suspicion of those who drew a sharp distinction between literature, philosophy and religion." (Colin Tyler, "Caird, Edward," in *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century British Philosophers*, vol. 1, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2002, p.182)

thinkers became fashionable¹⁰) announced that there happens to be a philosopher who claims to have finally solved every philosophical problem. After the class I duly asked him for the name of this mysterious philosopher and then immediately made for the library, where I spent the remainder of the day reading the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Of course, I understood very little. But I was mesmerized, and I knew I had to come to grips with this philosopher, sooner or later. Again, this process truly began only after my doctoral studies, and even then only indirectly, through the intermediary work of philosophers inspired by Wittgenstein. As my main interest has always been the philosophy of religion, it was the work of D.Z. Phillips that I initially took up. I read as much of Phillips as I could (and there is a lot out there!), finding him frustrating and fascinating in equal measure. What attracted me, however, were not so much the answers to problems given by Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians, as the integrity, passion and seriousness with which they worked through these problems. Underlying their work, I discovered a “therapeutic” conception of philosophy as a pursuit that demands the attention and discipline of the whole person. As Wittgenstein remarked: “No one *can* speak the truth; if he has still not mastered himself. He *cannot* speak it; – but not because he is not clever enough yet.”¹¹ I felt, as a result, that I could no longer survive, let alone thrive, on the slim pickings of analytic philosophy. I wanted something more nourishing and holistic, something that held out the possibility of informing and transforming a whole “way of being” (in Pierre Hadot’s sense).

Wittgenstein, I can now see, was only a stepping stone towards someone even further removed from the analytic school: *John D. Caputo*. By the time I completed my doctoral studies, I had read virtually everything written by Alvin Plantinga, early and late (including Plantinga’s own doctoral dissertation and his more popular and less well-known articles). I was thoroughly conversant in Plantinga’s work, and even where I disagreed with him, I greatly admired him for the clarity, rigor and (especially) confidence he brought to the discipline – I emphasize “confidence” because he made it possible for many in my generation to be bold and adventurous in advancing and defending theses (especially theses of a religious kind) that many in the profession regularly dismiss as “unreasonable” or “unfit for intelligent people today.” There is a strong though unrecognized streak of Wittgensteinianism in Plantinga (consider only his indebtedness to O.K. Bouwsma), and this perhaps facilitated my transition to Wittgenstein. But it was Caputo’s short but engaging book, *On Religion* (2001), which converted me to an even more radical way of thinking about philosophy and theology. Caputo himself is not unfamiliar with the analytic tradition (one of his earliest papers is even sprinkled with logical symbolism¹²), which perhaps explains the wonderful clarity of his writing, even when it is suffused with technicalities and his now trademark literary (and often highly humorous) flourishes. As with Plantinga, I ended up reading all of Caputo (and there’s much out there!), from past to present, this naturally leading me to Heidegger and Derrida, to phenomenology and deconstruction, and much else that goes under the unruly banner of “continental thought.” This,

¹⁰ See Massimo Bini, *Language Qua Language: Heidegger and Wittgenstein*, PhD thesis, submitted to the School of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, La Trobe University, 1999.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.35e, emphases in the original.

¹² See John D. Caputo, “Kant’s Refutation of the Ontological Argument,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42 (1974): 686-91.

indeed, was the equivalent of learning formal logic when I was studying analytic philosophy: now the new language I had to master involved the tropes and techniques of a seemingly alien discourse. After many years, and almost entirely self-taught, I managed a degree of fluency in this “language,” and was able to compare it with what I knew about the very different dialect of English spoken in the analytic world.

The result was my 2008 work, *The End of Philosophy of Religion*, a comparison of the methods and styles, the values and goals of the two most prominent schools or traditions within contemporary philosophy. The primary focus, however, was given to the ways in which this meta-philosophical divide has played itself out in the field of the *philosophy of religion*, paying close attention to the contrasting styles of two of the field’s leading practitioners: my long-time companions, Plantinga and Caputo. The conclusion I reached, as indicated in the book’s title, is that philosophy of religion has (or at least should) come to an end. The basis for this conclusion was, in short, the claim that the tools and commitments of the analytic school are irredeemably defective as a way of practicing philosophy – and especially the philosophical study of religion, given that a proper understanding of religious ideas and experiences demands a kind of sensibility and frame of mind that is not suited to the methods and aims of analytic philosophy.

The book received a range of responses. Somewhat predictably, there were analytic philosophers who reacted with bewilderment, if not outrage; and there were continental philosophers who were largely sympathetic and complimentary. But there were also others who were not so partisan, and who agreed with many of the details but also expressed reservations, especially towards the main thesis regarding the intellectual and spiritual bankruptcy of analytic philosophy (of religion).

I have come to accept some of the reservations of this latter group, and so I have shifted my position on certain meta-philosophical matters: I now think there is much more value in analytic philosophy than I allowed in the book, and I now see more problems and pitfalls in continental philosophy (especially the postmodern and phenomenological varieties) than I earlier recognized. One might argue that if this is how matters stand, then rather than seeking to put an end to philosophy of religion, as I previously advocated, it is perhaps better to view the situation before us as one of newfound possibilities: much like Simmons’ “mash-up” proposal, perhaps the opportunity that has opened up is one of redirection and renewal, putting to work what is best and valuable from both the analytic and continental traditions while leaving the rest to decompose in the dustbins of the history of philosophy.

I don’t entirely disagree with such a perspective, and I certainly would not wish to discourage attempts at *rapprochement* and creative synthesis. Indeed, my initial plan for the present paper was to sketch a relatively neglected path towards such synthesis, one that travels by way of the theory of truth. The plan, in short, was to “mash-up” the standard understanding of truth within the analytic tradition, where it is almost universally held that truth is something that is borne or carried by linguistic, cognitive or abstract entities such as beliefs, sentences or propositions.¹³ In order to contest this dogma, the resources (concepts, methods and arguments) of both the analytic and

¹³ A case in point is Wolfgang Künne’s *Conceptions of Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), which defends the view that propositions are the primary truth-value bearers.

continental traditions would be deployed, with the overall aim of showing that the truth-predicate may attach not only to linguistic and abstract entities but also to concrete and living beings, as well as moments of silence and musical compositions. This is an understanding of truth rarely endorsed in analytic circles, even though it has deep roots in Western philosophy (consider, e.g., the idealist identification of truth with the Absolute, or Heidegger's view of truth as disclosedness or unconcealment) as well as in religious thought, where the primary truth-bearer is often taken to be a divine or transcendent reality: Jesus, for example, is quoted as saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).¹⁴ Truth, mashed-up in this fashion, might be at least one way of putting into practice Simmons' program of "cross-fertilizing" the discourses of the analytic and continental communities. But laudable as such proposals may be, I want to claim that the current institutional and political climate has created meta-philosophical challenges of a far more serious nature that demand our urgent attention.

THE CRISIS IN PHILOSOPHY

For there is a crisis in our midst that continues to go largely overlooked by the profession, and it is a crisis not merely of a philosophical nature, but one that is essentially "meta-philosophical," marked by and originating in developments of a political, economic and broadly socio-cultural kind. To go looking, therefore, for ways in which seemingly disparate philosophical styles and schools (such as those of the analytic and continental traditions) could be brought together in closer or more productive dialogue, although a worthwhile endeavour in itself, cannot be prioritized ahead of the greater meta-philosophical tasks we face today. One might even say that seminars, conferences, special journal issues and books dedicated to *internal* matters of reconciliation amongst disputing parties are yet more fiddling while Rome is burning: ignoring the grave dangers emanating from *outside* these philosophical debates. This has created an *other*, and more pernicious, meta-philosophical divide: not one between opposing philosophical methodologies, but one that divides those who are conscious of the crisis and seek to overcome it from those who blindly or intentionally perpetuate it.

But, first, what I have been calling a "crisis" needs to be properly identified and described, even if in a somewhat sketchy manner. It is a situation quite familiar to academics nowadays; I like to call it "the New Order in higher education," one that has overtaken and revolutionized many aspects of university life (in much of the Anglo-American world, at least). This "brave" New Order is considered one of the consequences, or casualties, of "neoliberalism" – a term, usually used pejoratively, referring to a varied set of economic and political principles and practices that have come to form over the past thirty or so years the dominant ideology in much of the West. Briefly put, these principles include *free trade*: the untrammelled movement of capital, goods and services, thus maximizing free enterprise and competition;

¹⁴ I defended such a conception of truth in "Truth, or the Futures of Philosophy of Religion," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 74 (2013): 366-90. In that paper, however, the defence was predicated principally on Continental and theological sources, whereas it would be interesting to see how far traditionally analytic methods could take one along this route. In this context it is useful to consult Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 59-63, which advocates "a tolerant attitude about truth bearers," holding that "there are no restrictions *in principle* on what kinds of entities can possess truth or falsity." (p.59, emphasis in original)

the rule of the market: authority ultimately rests with the “market,” which is thought to balance itself through the pressures of market demands (the “self-regulating market”); and *privatization and deregulation*: the privatization of the public sector (e.g., health care, education, railways, communications), combined with minimal government interference and regulation of the economy. Underpinning these principles is an *economic rationality* (or, as it has come to be called, “economic rationalism”), where all forms of rationality are collapsed into economic ways of thinking (e.g., cost/benefit analyses). This is the view that there is no longer any viable distinction between the economy and society: everything is economic, in which case values or ethical notions (such as justice, goodness, responsibility, nobility and love) are either abandoned or redefined in market terms. What counts is what can be counted, and so value reduces to calculations of wealth and productivity. It is this reduction of value to economic value that is the most distinctive aspect of neoliberalism, and what sets it apart from “laissez faire” or classical liberal economic theory.

Given that the reach of neoliberal economics is intended to be wide-ranging and indeed global, it is no surprise to find higher education falling under its sway.¹⁵ Education, like any other human pursuit, is valued to the degree that it benefits the economy and contributes to the competitiveness of that economy (and so we have the creation of the “knowledge economy”). But the application of neoliberal principles to the higher education sector has resulted in dramatic changes to the economics, structure and priorities of the sector. One commentator, speaking of the significant shifts neoliberal policies have brought about in universities in Australia, identifies “a culture of research audits that promote instrumental knowledge, teaching audits designed to promote ‘skills’ rather than specific content, and various league tables pitting colleagues and institutions against each other in a form of academic Darwinism.”¹⁶

An auditing culture has thus arisen, involving the detailed control, monitoring, regulation and quantification of the work of academics through “quality assurance assessments”: e.g., the Research Excellence Framework, or REF (formerly the Research Assessment Exercise, or RAE), which has exercised great influence over the work and careers of UK academics; and the performance assessment regime known as “Excellence in Research for Australia” (ERA), which first took effect in 2010. The emphasis on performance assessment is part of the wider marketization of higher education, with universities becoming increasingly business-like and market-driven. This is evident on many levels, not only in new (market-based) accountability structures, but also in the emergence and dominance of

¹⁵ The literature on the impact of neoliberalism on higher education is extensive. See, among others, Dave Hill, “Global Neo-Liberalism, the Deformation of Education and Resistance,” *The Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies* 1 (2003): 1-28; Simon Marginson, “Competition and Markets in Higher Education: A ‘Glonacal’ Analysis,” *Policy Futures in Education* 2 (2004): 175-244; Mark Olssen and Michael A. Peters, “Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism,” *Journal of Education Policy* 20 (2005): 313-45; and Daniel B. Saunders, “Neoliberal Ideology and Public Higher Education in the United States,” *The Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies* 8 (2010): 41-77.

¹⁶ Simon Cooper, “Academic Darwinism: The (Logical) End of the Dawkins Era,” *Arena Journal* 28 (2007): 114. The consequences of neoliberal policies on higher education in Australia are examined in depth in John Biggs and Richard Davis (eds), *The Subversion of Australian Universities* (Wollongong: Fund for Intellectual Dissent, 2002).

managerialism and the changes this has effected in systems of governance. Given the focus on the capitalistic goals of competition and efficiency, more power is accorded to management, thus replacing the traditional pattern of faculty self-governance. The result has been the creation of distance and distrust between management and faculty, and a sense of loss of agency and control amongst faculty. In step with this managerialist and corporate model, utility and revenue generation are given greater prominence, this fostering the commodification of reason and the commercialization of the results of scientific inquiry.

Universities are therefore expected to perform much like corporations, with the aim of being profitable and productive, especially productive in servicing the technical and vocational needs of industry and government. The pursuit of truth becomes tainted by the pursuit of profit, as resources and support are redirected towards revenue-raising disciplines, while the liberal arts (including philosophy) are compelled to justify their continued existence, even though disciplines such as philosophy were once considered the very foundation of the university. Pressured to become competitive, or seeking simply to stay afloat, philosophers and their departments are resorting to dubious strategies such as the hire of “fly-in/fly-out” professors: these are highly distinguished scholars who are enticed to fly in to another, usually overseas, university for short stays, and are handsomely remunerated as long as they agree to hand over their publication lists to that university. In this way the university effectively purchases the research of these professors, and so boosts its chances of climbing further in one of the many university or discipline-specific “ladders” or ranking systems (which are structured much like sporting competitions).

A further aspect of the New Order I wish to highlight is the “publish or perish” ethos it has encouraged. Working within a competitive results-driven environment, where publications (or, more precisely, the knowledge enshrined in publications) becomes the equivalent of “capital,” academics are faced with great pressure to publish (and to publish with the most prestigious journals and presses) in order to meet preset “targets” or “key performance indicators” such as tenure and promotion, or so that their departments may secure increased government funding or a higher ranking relative to other departments or institutions. The unfortunate, even perverse, side-effects of this new publishing regime are many and well-known to academics, including philosophy professionals. Consider, for example, the proliferation of academic journals, which seem to exist simply in order to lengthen the CV’s of academics. As Adam Briggie and Robert Frodeman have recently noted, “Philosophers produce an increasing amount of material, but it is far from clear who is reading that work. Most of it is cited sparsely, if at all. Indeed, the chief function of this research seems to be to provide criteria for deciding whether the authors are worthy of tenure.”¹⁷ This increased output has not only dwindled readership numbers but has

¹⁷ Adam Briggie and Robert Frodeman, “Wanted: A Future For Philosophy,” published on the website of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 16 July 2014: http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2014/07/16/wanted-a-future-for-philosophy/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en. Briggie and Frodeman end their short but incisive article with the following foreboding comments: “Something is out of joint: Overworked and underpaid graduate students are taking on major teaching responsibilities, apparently at least in part so that parents can get a discount on tuition, and professors can produce books and articles of dubious societal value. If we love philosophy and the humanities, we need to address those concerns before someone less sympathetic does it for us.”

also drastically forced down acceptance rates in some journals to as low as 5-10%. Further, publications in many areas (philosophy included) are becoming increasingly specialized, with the result that connections are rarely made in any direct way to the public interest and to issues of personal meaning. Another, and more serious, consequence of the pressure to publish is that it places great strains on academics' already imbalanced work/life ratio, driving them to work exorbitant hours (which, in a self-defeating way, may well result in a loss of productivity). Levels of stress and anxiety are only compounded when other work conditions are taken into account, such as high teaching loads and the increased precariousness of academic positions due to the rise of casual and short-term contracts. These factors combine to place the very well-being of academics at risk, jeopardizing their relationships with friends and family, as well as their physical and psychological health – a problem regularly passed over or downplayed not only by management but also by faculty who, in the rush to get ahead, have imbibed and indeed embraced the New Order.¹⁸

It is worth highlighting this last point: not everyone feels disenfranchised or actively opposes the new regime in higher education. There are many, philosophers among them, who support and promote it, and even more who silently acquiesce, not wishing to place their careers and finances at risk (especially after investing so much of their identity and self-worth in their career).¹⁹ Particularly problematic is the new wave of (what I like to call) “Young Turks”: this stellar group of scholars, in all disciplines (including the humanities), have outdone previous generations in terms of productivity and achievement. In the ruthless climate created by a saturated job market and fierce competition for grants, tenure and promotion, it is not uncommon to see relatively junior philosophers with lists of publications, presentations and awards that would have been the envy of established and prominent professors a century ago. This, I must emphasize, is not to cast blame or aspersions on any individual, especially given the increasing pressure on those in the early stages of their career (and even doctoral students) to conform to and internalize the new measures of “success.” I should know, for I was one of these young guns myself, until I could no longer continue compromising my work and values. And I am not alone: a widespread malaise and cynicism has set in amongst academics, many of whom are looking for ways out of the ivory tower, even after achieving tenure (some,

¹⁸ For an excellent account of the harmful personal costs of the New Order, too often relegated to secrecy and silence, see Rosalind Gill, “Breaking the Silence: The Hidden Injuries of the Neo-liberal University,” in Róisín Ryan-Flood and Rosalind Gill (eds), *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process* (London: Routledge, 2010), 228-44.

¹⁹ Speaking from personal experience as an academic over twenty-five years, Richard Hil, in his enlightening *Whackademia: An Insider's Account of the Troubled University* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2012), notes that:

It wasn't so much the drudgery of the business model that irked me – I found its application to the universities bemusing, mainly because it was administered so amateurishly. More disenchanting was the fact that many of my colleagues seemed so eager, or so easily resigned, to embracing it. I was constantly struck by how fellow academics in the arts and social sciences could teach courses involving ‘critical reflection’, yet remain so reluctant to apply such intellectual processes when confronting the questionable rationalities of today's universities. (pp.12-13)

ironically, preferring the working conditions of private industry to the current higher education system).²⁰

The meta-philosophical challenges raised by these changes in higher education might be put as follows: What type of philosophy will it be possible to pursue in a university setting? What connection will academic philosophers have with the rich legacy bequeathed to them by the luminaries of the past? Philosophy, like anything else, is shaped to a large degree by the social and historical forces in which it is situated; but given the nature of these forces in our times, what was described earlier as “neoliberalism,” and the university sector’s capitulation to them, can philosophers working within this sector continue to produce work of a *genuine* philosophical nature? I suspect that many philosophers are likely to balk at the use of a term like ‘genuine’ in this context, especially those who are committed to an overly technical and theoretical conception of philosophy that has relinquished its vocation of seeking existential understanding and wisdom. Robert Solomon bemoans this loss in his book, *The Joy of Philosophy: Thinking Thin versus the Passionate Life*. Philosophy today, he argues, has largely lost its way, replacing the joys of imaginative speculation, passionate engagement, vision and openness, with a tribal mentality that seeks to preserve its legitimacy by means of inaccessible jargon, an adversarial style of proof and refutation, and a narrow focus that invariably excludes the “perennial problems of life.” Solomon even goes so far as to say that “philosophy has all but disappeared in the best universities in America.”²¹ This, as Solomon observes, is not only a problem in the analytic tradition; the divide between ‘*sophia*’ and ‘*philosophia*’ now cuts through the analytic and continental neighbourhoods, heavily populated as both are by Young Turks.

Identifying the crisis is not enough. Solutions must also be found, or at least canvassed. In my most recent reflections, I have looked to the worldwide Slow Movement as offering a model for reforming current philosophical practice, my own included. The goal here is the cultivation of a meaningful and multi-dimensional life, attained by *slowing down*, no longer capitulating to the obsessive busyness of the academy, but becoming more patient, mindful, thought-ful, care-ful and attentive in relating to our environment – and not only to the natural environment and other people, but also to the books and ideas we write and discuss. A further and much-needed countervailing force within contemporary (academic) philosophy is *an ethos of humility*, an attitude of reserve, discretion and understatement, giving one’s work a quiet and gentle resonance, in opposition to the force and aggression that comes with willfully seeking to “win” an argument, make an impact and position oneself as a specialist in an increasingly narrow

²⁰ A case in point is Zachary Ernst, a tenured associate professor of philosophy at the University of Missouri, who recently resigned from his academic post to work as a software engineer (see his account, “Why I Jumped Off the Ivory Tower”: <http://zacharyernst.blogspot.com.au/2013/10/why-i-jumped-out-of-ivory-tower.html>). This seems to be a trend on the rise. See, for instance, Rebecca Schuman’s “‘I Quit Academia’: An Important, Growing Subgenre of American Essays,” published in *Slate Magazine*, 24 October 2013: http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/10/24/quitting_academic_jobs_professor_zachary_ernst_and_other_leaving_tenure.html. See also Helen De Cruz’s fascinating interviews with philosophers who have decided to abandon academia: <http://www.newappsblog.com/2014/06/philosophers-who-work-outside-of-academia-part-1-how-and-why-do-they-end-up-there.html>.

²¹ Robert Solomon, *The Joy of Philosophy: Thinking Thin versus the Passionate Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13.

subdiscipline.²² Maurice Blanchot is well known for exemplifying the ethos of humility to the point of anonymity and invisibility in his own life and work – for example, few photographs of him can be found and there are no published accounts of his life. It has been said of Blanchot that, “From the outset, his journalism was predominantly anonymous: he never became a ‘signature’ on the *Débats* [i.e., the *Journal des Débats*]. Indeed, as he became established, the number of articles bearing his signature dwindled to nought.”²³ Blanchot in this respect recalls Kierkegaard’s method of “indirect communication,” where the common (and hence predictable and boring) philosophical style of abstract pronouncements in a single *ex cathedra* voice is replaced with more engaging and complex works of a literary, multi-perspectival nature. For Kierkegaard, this involved the use of various pseudonyms – could one imagine a philosopher today publishing their work under a pseudonym? How would this help them and their university scale the rankings ladder?

The decisive meta-philosophical question therefore becomes whether or what type of philosophy can be practiced in a university sector that has uncritically adopted the capitalist logic of the private business industry. Will it be possible, for example, for philosophy to be undertaken in a slower tempo and humbler mode? And if such forms of philosophy continue to be excluded as not consistent with the model and mission of the neoliberal university, then what will become of both philosophers and the university? It may well be that the former will be compelled to rethink their role and future in the latter, particularly if the conditions faced by Hegel’s generation, as recounted by Terry Pinkard, come to light again:

At the time [i.e., the late eighteenth century], universities had a particularly low standing in Europe, being seen by many as outmoded institutions staffed by tenured professors teaching outmoded knowledge and populated by students who cared only about getting as drunk as they could. Better, it was thought, to abolish these medieval holdovers altogether and replace them both with more vocationally minded institutes to teach the students useful knowledge and to set up the equivalent of research institutes (like the various royal societies) for people to pursue new theoretical knowledge.²⁴

²² In this context, I was horrified to recently find the following comments in a review (by a distinguished philosopher at that: D.H. Mellor) of a book I co-edited, *A Companion to Philosophy in Australia and New Zealand*: “The first response to my first talk in Australasia, in 1975, to RSSS philosophers at the ANU, was ‘That’s the most f**kwitted argument I’ve ever heard’... That’s the way to do it, I thought, and still think, as David Lewis and many others have done: blunt debate without much posturing or point-scoring; respect for argument, but not for status or reputation.” (*Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 89 (2011): 747) It is astonishing that the reviewer regards such egalitarianism in philosophical discussion as necessitating an aggressive and adversarial style.

²³ Michael Holland, Introduction to *The Blanchot Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 4.

²⁴ Terry Pinkard, “Hegel: A Life,” in Frederick C. Beiser (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27. In today’s overly busy and bureaucratized universities, however, the caricature of the drunken student is quickly becoming just that: a caricature; such types, together with that of the eccentric professor, are more likely to be regarded nostalgically as vestiges of an academic era where there was greater room for difference, strangeness, enjoyment and pleasure. See Richard Hil, *Whackademia*, 81.

Those who don't know or care about history are doomed to repeat it, and it seems that this is precisely the fate of today's university administrators and so-called "professional" philosophers. But philosophy need not be, and historically has never been, confined to any one institution, let alone that of the university: Hegel himself was not dependent upon a university appointment when writing his three-volume *Science of Logic* (1812-16), and earlier greats such as Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz never held a university post at all. It is necessary again, perhaps even more so today, for philosophers to explore the possibilities and advantages of practicing their craft outside of traditional institutional boundaries. This may well be philosophy's only remaining hope from being institutionalized to such a degree that it is entirely "mashed-up," in the worst imaginable sense.

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