Official APA statement of the lecture series

“The John Dewey Lectures, generously sponsored by the John Dewey Foundation, have been presented annually at each American Philosophical Association meeting since 2006. Each John Dewey Lecture is given by a prominent and senior American philosopher who is invited to reflect, broadly and in an autobiographical spirit, on philosophy in America.”

A Philosphic Travelogue

It is a great honor --and a daunting task-- to be invited to follow Marilyn Adams, Julia Annas and Judy Thomson as a Dewey lecturer, invited to reflect on the history and the trajectory of our profession. They have been steadfast, philosophically generous, true believers in our craft. I have been more peripatetic,-- even more nomadic-- than they were. My philosophic outlook and interests have changed, and then changed again. Perhaps the best way for me to fulfill the charge of the Dewey lectures is to give you something of a travelogue of these journeys, the philosophic convictions and questions that they generated. But it is indeed a strange task, this, to serve as a dowsing rod to track the Zeitgeist, the Zeitgeist of "philosophy in America." Even more daunting is the task of trying to remember what philosophy looked like when one first encountered it, and how philosophy changed as one changed because of it.

It seems to me that philosophy itself --or at any rate, what we unionized, card carrying philosophers call “philosophy” – has changed greatly since I lost my milk teeth trying to chew on it. Contrary to some recent rumors about its futility and its inflated pretensions, philosophy seems to me to be (on the whole) alive and well, returning --both within the academy and in the larger cultural-political world--- to the
actively integrative and outreach roles that would have heartened Dewey. For an inveterate voyeuristic traveler like myself, the range, depth and precision of recent philosophy is dazzling.

My first glimpse of the promises of philosophic reflection came at my parents’ dinner table. They were engaged in endless discussions of Sophocles and Plato, Rousseau and Tolstoi. Like many Europeans of their generation, they did not distinguish academic philosophy from its literary expression; and like many autodidacts, they were infectious enthusiasts, inspired and influenced by what they read. Their enthusiasms extended to American authors. Despite their difficulties with his prose, they were entranced by Dewey. In him, they saw an American version of their own Jewish mittel European conviction that an egalitarian education and a vibrant intellectual community were the best avenues to overcoming the folly and injustice they saw around them. As they saw it, philosophy starts from –and is intended to chart, perhaps even ideally to exemplify-- a conception of a just and liberal way of life. Of course theirs was a sadly naïve expectation. It is not clear how they could have imagined that philosophers engaged in goading one another to develop ever more ingenious solutions to the voters’ paradox would diagnose the sources of injustice, let alone formulate the fundamental principles for sound and fair immigration policies. And yet, and yet, perhaps their confidence in philosophers’ attempts to construct socially responsible theories was well-placed after all. Certainly some post-Rawlsian moral and political philosophers are trying to formulate the policies as well as the principles of a just society. Whether anyone listens or understands them –perhaps even whether they actually listen and understand one
another-- is of course another matter. Setting that problem aside, let’s see where and how we go.

My parents’ perspective on philosophy was reinforced by my accidentally stumbling on Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* in the high school library and --as is the way of adolescents-- becoming enamored of them. Besotted by them as I then was, and only marginally understanding the complexities of their views, I thought that if I understood Spinoza and Nietzsche –if I could find a way of reconciling them—I would feel enough at home in the world to act like a native. Shocked at finding me engrossed in using Spinoza to interpret T.S. Eliot, my Marxist-Trotskyist uncle, Isaac Deutscher and his wife/colleague Tamara insisted that I come spend a summer with them working as their research and getting a proper political education. It took. So much for adolescent philosophy… the kind of adolescent philosophy that remains the undercurrent of a person’s life.

Fast forward to my first encounter with academic philosophy, as she lived and breathed at the University of Chicago. We undergraduates were part of the children’s intellectual crusade. Every course was a philosophy course in disguise. Science was the history and philosophy of science; for physics we were given Newton and Galileo; biology was bits of Aristotle on the *Parts of Animals*, brought up to date by Harvey and Darwin. Mathematics was a bowdlerized version of Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia Mathematica*. Even the history of philosophy was treated as the philosophy of history. I’m embarrassed to remember it now, but like other Chicago words-mongers of that period, I thought that understanding poetry or a work of art meant understanding its underlying assumptions, its basic distinctions and implications. It was all heady and
wholly absorbing. Classes were small; discussions were intense. We were set to understanding the world by interpreting the great philosophic Texts, and to think of science, politics, everyday life through the terms of one philosophic system or another. We believed that philosophy articulates everything that is the case; and that the rest is political rhetoric or ornamentation.

For us, philosophy came in units of complete systems, rather than as answers to isolated questions. Even when they might have come to be experienced as existential conditions, the familiar set problems of philosophy—the problem of free will, the problem of moral luck, the mind-body problem, the problem of other minds—were contextualized, placed within a system of assumptions, distinctions and modes of reasoning. Instead of being treated at face value as if they simply existed out there in the world, available to be encountered by anyone who had a brain, these topics were only treated as arising within specific comprehensive philosophic systems. Dazzled by the exciting headlines of the Great Works of the Canon, we tended to engage in wildly charitable rather than analytically careful or historically grounded interpretations of those Texts. That did not mean that we accepted an uncritical version of philosophical relativism. We analyzed those systems for their hidden assumptions, their evasions and internal inconsistencies. We compared them for patterns of dominant and recessive attention to what they took to be the phenomena. Aristotle might have a robust philosophy of biology, but it would take a great deal of contortion to make his theory of time useful for experimental physics. Hume might have a subtle philosophical psychology but an undeveloped account of the normative power of moral obligations.
Their views were not shown to be wrong or even implausible, but at worst incomplete or cumbersome.

We left many questions unasked. Is there a system-neutral way of describing the referents of philosophic systems? Are the grand philosophic systems in principle mutually translatable? Can they provide criteria for evaluating ordinary beliefs and practices? What are the relations among the manifest, scientific and philosophic images of the world? What’s an image of the world anyway? We were not equipped to discuss such questions, let alone consider whether they might be ill-formed. Addressing them set the “to do” tasks for my cohort of Chicago undergraduates, many of whom became anthropologists or philosophers. Although some of our most brilliant friends paid serious attention to Leo Strauss, some of us were put off by what seemed an esoteric, authoritarian, exclusionary cult. Besides offending my Deweyian sensibilities, he and his coterie presented a threat to any fantasies of intellectual independence we might have. I, for one, feared that I would get trapped in the Cabbalistic labyrinth of ingenious Straussian interpretations of Spinoza and Hobbes and never emerge alive.

Not surprisingly, we were not sensitive to the shortcomings of our virtues. Since there were no majors-- all our courses were required --, we were not encouraged to specialize, to become responsible for a field which we would take as our own. We may have learned to parse and defend what passed for the canonic historical texts, but we had little interest and much impatience with most of the philosophic work of our own time. No Heidegger and no Wittgenstein. If we considered contemporary work at all, it would be seen as eclectic variations on themes from the Old Masters. A little bit of Aristotle here, some Kant to help prop up an argument there. Nor did we put our
authors in their historical and cultural contexts, contexts that would—and should—have also brought us the major works of Islam and Asia. Still, however limited and parochial, however politically blinkered it might have been, the Chicago curriculum and outlook seemed to me then—and seems to me still—to have been a good starting point. Those Texts -- the works of Plato and the Boys—were, after all, varied, far-reaching and formative.

When I graduated, it never occurred to me to do anything else but to continue studying philosophy. Since in those days a Chicago undergraduate education in philosophy essentially stopped after Bradley, I thought I’d better find out what contemporary philosophers were now actually doing. So it was off to London—to Kings and University College—to sample what seemed the best and the latest forms of philosophy. It was a shock. Ayer—dapper in thought and even more dapper in manner—presided over philosophy at UCL, defending *Language, Truth and Logic*. It was the height of the transition from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, from logical positivism/logical empiricism to linguistic and conceptual analysis. Seminar discussions were focused on Ryle, Austin and Wisdom, against the background of Wittgenstein as filtered through Cornell and before Anscombe's transformative *Intention*. Instead of digging within the texts to interpret them, the London philosophers were setting off on their own to explicate the phenomena, as expressed in ordinary language and ordinary practices. At first, still immersed in Chicago ways, I found it hard to believe that these very clever philosophers were really engaged in sorting out the various uses of “if” and “can.” I was all admiration for the subtleties of the English language, for distinctions that might be drawn from its usages; but the philosophic import and justification of fine-tuned
linguistic sensibility initially escaped me. It wasn’t that I thought all that was rubbish. It was rather that I wasn’t sure how to understand what it was. To a Chicago undergraduate used to august theories as the mark of *echt* philosophy, appeals to ordinary usage seemed to issue in remnants of unexamined stock maxims, Nanny’s proverbs, popular songs and sermons, all of them more parochial than anyone could reasonably hope. From that point of view, it seemed to me that today’s linguistic sensitivity would be tomorrow’s anthropological study of common speech patterns. What's more, I was deeply concerned about what seemed to me the political implications of grounding philosophy in the analysis of what people ordinarily tend to say. Whose ordinary speech? I didn’t hear much Cockney (or Jamaican English) among the London philosophers, let alone among those at Oxford or Cambridge. Remembering my parents’ hopes for philosophy, I wondered where we would find serious and responsible diagnoses and critiques of the biases and injustice that might be embedded in ordinary language. It seemed to me that it would be a matter of philosophical moral luck to find the basis of these critiques within the common culture.

Then two things happened and they seemed to pull me in opposite directions. First, as a result of being exposed to these exercises in linguistic and conceptual analysis, I began to go native. Becoming immersed in the local philosophic idiom, I acquired a taste for what looked like clear and straightforward, apparently truth-transparent and uncluttered philosophy. The Old Masters started looking more inscrutable than I remembered. Having lisped Plato and Aristotle as a Chicago undergraduate, I began gradually, almost without noticing, to start talking in late Wittgenstein, Ryle or Austin without fully understanding the important differences among them. As a Chicago
undergraduate I tried to save theories—any theory would do—; in London, I began to turn to ordinary speech to resolve—or dissolve— the puzzling pronouncements of traditional philosophic theories. I began to use some of the tricks of the trade, largely phrased in heuristic questions and strategies: What’s the presumed contrast? What are the counter-examples? What work are the various distinctions doing? The accepted motto was: Disentangle and analyze hidden ambiguities and obdurate philosophic puzzles would disappear.

I wasn’t converted to London ways doing philosophy because I became convinced by any London arguments, or because I was impressed by the success of a different model of investigation. Rather: that approach—the head-on apparently unencumbered analysis of what passes for good sense expressed in ordinary speech and practices—became the air I breathed. I acquired early linguistically-oriented analytic philosophy the way one learns a language, by total immersion. Now, much later, reflecting on the Berlitz method of acquiring a philosophic idiom and outlook, it seems to me that this is indeed how one—how we all, both as philosophers and as civilians—acquire our beliefs, what we think of as our basic intuitions, --the vocabulary and categories, the canon of ‘topics’-- in just the way we learned our first language and what passes for good manners. We acquire our basic argumentative strategies and the substantive philosophic premises that they embed—almost without noticing. Once we find ourselves working within a system --whatever it might be-- questions of evidence and justification would naturally arise within the terms of that system; and, with luck, be answered within the scope of the system. The Grand Canonic Philosophic Systems were large enough, comprehensive enough to be plausibly self-validating in their own terms.
This seemed all the more reason to be concerned about whether even critically sophisticated intuitions embedded as responses to “What would we say----?’ might inject politically conservative strands into apparently politically innocent philosophy.

Although it took some time to sink in, the second thing that happened from having become immersed in the London philosophy of the early-fifties, was that I began to think that investigations into ordinary usage constitute a new form of the first few stages of a Socratic dialogue, attempts to tease out ordinary beliefs and practices, all of us trying to carry on without a Socrates to direct the discussion towards a critical analysis and a revised understanding of the phenomena. It now seems to me that both Socratic dialogues and analyses of the intuitions embedded in “what we would say and do” are early moments in a process of attempting to reach reflective equilibrium about Whatever. Starting with ordinary beliefs or intuitions, expressed in ordinary linguistic usage, we trust that the process of attempting to integrate critiques of unjust social practices—as it were Cockney coming to London Philspeak—could provide what corrections we can absorb. Of course this trust involves complex bootstrap political changes and negotiations. Cockney is only likely to become part of London Philspeak if Eastenders start attending seminars at UCL and Kings. And that is only like to happen when radical critiques of social injustice have already been heard. But what else can we do? That’s where we are, our starting point. The trick is, to keep the extended Socratic dialogue going, trucking towards a critically reflective equilibrium to include justified critiques of unjust or unwarranted practices, whatever they might be.
But I am getting ahead of myself. As you can see, reflections on what I learned in London left me more than a little befuddled. So after a year in London, I decided to return to home ground to continue graduate school in the States. Because the Yale graduate program of that time looked diverse, rigorous and comprehensive, I decided to go to Yale. ..and so, back to the sheltering focus on the history of philosophy. Different as Yale was from Chicago, it was similar in providing a return to the loftier moments in the history of philosophy. Hendel presided over Hume and Rousseau; Brumbaugh over Plato and Aristotle; Schrader did Kant; John Smith did American philosophy; Paul Weiss used Peirce and Whitehead to develop his own versions of Being and Becoming. The blessed Peter Hempel was still there, so there was a sense of the liveliness and timeliness of the working out an American improvisation on Vienna.

I set myself to write a wildly ambitious dissertation, “Self-Reference and The Theory of Error.” I intended to compare Descartes’, Hume’s and Bradley’s theories of error with their polemical practices in philosophic argumentation, using them to sketch the formal conditions for self-referential consistency. Retrospectively, it should not be surprising that I would suffer a crisis of trust in philosophy. I lost my bearings about the point of what we were trying to do: the hyper-detailed minutiae of metaphysical and epistemological arguments began to seem more frenetic than illuminating. Were we really trying to map the basic ontology of the world, as it might be composed of substances, or events or states of affairs? Were we reading Descartes and Spinoza to find out how many substances there are, one, or two or maybe three? Really? What kind of truth—if it was truth-- were we trying to find? Conceptual science fiction is fun, of
course, but its claims to be the ultimate table of contents and plot of The Real began to seem somewhat inflated, to put it mildly. In any case, I wanted more gossip about human beings, I wanted to understand how our commitments to nobility, rationality, and morality fitted with our absurd but manifest failings in those departments. So –still acting like a book besotted Chicago undergraduate-- I took myself off to Stanford to study comparative literature. Since Donald Davidson was at Stanford, I dropped in to hear him, hoping to find that good philosophy might still be being done. Well, of course that did it: even the most sophisticated literary analysis looked limp and anemic in comparison to Davidson’s high serious precision about anomalous monism and the indeterminacy of translation. There seemed no way to escape the unsettling philosophical questions about the self-referential character of the meaning of meaning or the truth about truth –whatever those might turn out to be … , so back I went to Yale to finish my thesis and to look for a job in philosophy.

In those days, Yale was not hospitable to its women students. Eminent philosophers though they were, our faculty were unable to take women philosophers seriously. We were lucky if our advisors bothered to read our papers and dissertations. There was no question of their helping us to find jobs. At best our faculty treated us as charity guests at a formal tea party, lucky to have the privilege of having been invited within the Inner Sanctum to witnesses its rituals. The zeitgeist was not yet ready for a Sally Haslanger to diagnose its metaphysical and political myopia, not yet ready for a Miranda Fricker to analyze its pervasive biases. Nor did our Marxist–Leninist friends and our left-liberal allies help us to challenge those practices. Many of us became active in the civil rights movement without realizing that our doing so might also require liberating
the parts of Sterling Library that were—yes, can you believe it?—closed to women. While the demeaning condescension of our faculty was profoundly and permanently debilitating, it was also a great subject for farce. We women philosophers formed something of a comedy group, exchanging war stories about the gender blunders of our distinguished faculty. Although we had fun satirizing their bumbling chauvinism, we regretted losing our respect for them as philosophers, not to mention for ourselves as future philosophers. Sadly many of us dropped out of philosophy; but enough of us were so besotted with philosophy that we stayed on and tried to help one another get jobs.

By sheer luck I eventually did get a job, a wonderful job at Rutgers. There, in the congenial community of my Rutgers colleagues, and with access to the activities of the Princeton department, I recovered my sense of the viability of philosophy, its breadth and strength. I could teach a course in ancient philosophy to undergraduates and talk Londonese with colleagues.

I came to think that teaching philosophy is essential to doing it well. Our students—especially students in introductory courses—keep us honest. They remind us why we do philosophy and what it is about. There, at Rutgers, I encountered the amazing diversity of American students, the vitality and variety of their interests and priorities. In my course on “Applied Ethics,” there were students from the Newark inner city, children of hard scrabble chicken farmers from the New Jersey Pine Barrens, sons of public accountants and daughters of politicians. Most of us had never encountered one another’s like before. Here was the American version of Eastenders coming to University College London, speaking Newarkese to a faculty educated at Yale and living in Princeton. We were initially all shocked and sometimes actually shell-shocked to
discover what life looked like on the other side of the fence. It was the late sixties and many people—both those in the inner cities and those from the suburbs—were beginning to realize how angry and afraid they were of one another. We didn’t do “isms” in these seminars. We discussed fundamental ethical problems as they arise in the course of a life, as seen from the point of view an agent and from the point of view of social policy: what moral problems arise in childhood and within the family? In schools and universities? Within the work place? With friends and colleagues? In distributing the goods and burdens of civic life? In facing disease and death? In that context, our reading of the usual Great Texts in Moral Theory came alive, germane. We could see what might be at stake for us in the differences among them, what difference it would make to be Mill rather than Kant in choosing a profession or designing a university curriculum, Hobbes rather than Aristotle in constructing basic political institutions. Those seminars—the privilege of teaching those courses, trying to become a Socratic participant-observer rather than a distant lecturer—have remained as the touch-stone of any work I try to do in moral and political theory.

Besides the good fortune of rediscovering philosophy by teaching, being at Rutgers at that time also meant belonging to a collegial intellectual community. We were actively and constructively interested in one another’s work, however distant it might be from our own. We wandered in and out of one another’s offices discussing obscure passages from the course assignment of the day. We so trusted one another that we were able to air our fledgling, half-baked ideas and papers to one another for comments. “Doing philosophy” became an open-ended Socratic discussion, an activity whose aim and fulfillment was not only expressed in the works we might produce, but in the very activity of thinking together. Long, spirited discussions
with colleagues made my vague philosophic hunches about personal identity and self-deception more specific and determinate, more sensible in all the senses of that elusive term. It wasn’t just a matter of having to defend my views by finding ways of responding to their objections. Nor was it matter of becoming convinced of their views or of importing some of their arguments into mine. We continued to disagree. It was rather that the point of their distinctions and counter-examples became part of the constitutive content of what I came to believe. It seemed to me that engaged as we were in our persistent discussions and controversies –sometimes precisely because of them-- we became co-authors of one another’s papers. I became suspicious of radically individualistic models of philosophic thinking, expressed in the locution we hear so frequently, “According to me,… p implies p” Philosophic thinking began to seem more like the intricate process of collective decision making than like high school debates or arguments before the Supreme Court. The practice of modeling our discussions and arguments on scholastic disputations and an adversarial legal system with winners and losers now seems misleading to me. Philosophic arguments may be more illuminatingly understood as attempts to flesh out, to specify the details --the ramifications and significance-- of our views, rather than as a structure of premises, distinctions and considerations leading to detachable conclusions. Explaining a view -- explicating its implicit motivation, articulating the details of its import and consequences, showing what work it does -- is, after all, a form of demonstration. [Endnote: See Robert Brandom, Making It Explicit, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1994]  Reflecting on this, my old Chicago instincts came into play. It now seems to me that it takes a system -- a social as well as a philosophic system-- to substantiate a philosophic conclusion. [End note: See Tyler Burge’s ground breaking “Individualism and the Mental” Midwest Studies in Philosophy 4, pp. 73-121. More recently, Anthony Laden has extended the view to attempting
to use informal conversation as a model for the process of reasoning. See his *Reasoning: A Social Picture* (N.Y.: Oxford Press, 2012). In a different vein, Michael Tomasello has illuminatingly placed the conditions of thinking within the normative practices of coordinated, cooperative social interaction. See his *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

It would have been comforting—perhaps even pretty—to suppose that the continuity of philosophic discussion is, as Dewey thought, self-corrective, essentially both politically and epistemologically progressive. But reading Tom Kuhn, Foucault and Ian Hacking made it increasingly difficult to sustain any confidence in the steady, if erratic progress of philosophy that I might have had. In any case, introducing sociability into philosophic discussions cannot protect us from wandering into blind alleys or emerging with weird outcomes. But what else is new about doing philosophy…or for that matter, about decisions of the Supreme Court?

It was the late sixties and there were protests, riots and burnings in the New Jersey inner cities, and even in Rutgers itself. Some of us began to reconsider the University’s relation to the larger society and culture—a relation we had taken as straightforward, benign, without hidden power agendas. We had somehow failed to notice that the students, faculty and administration were virtually entirely white. We awoke from our protected and self-protecting slumbers. Before Rutgers became the State University of New Jersey, it had been modeled on a relatively small Ivy League college. The turmoil of the sixties prompted the New Jersey Legislature to realize that something had to be done to enlarge and redirect some of the aims of the University. They decided to add a college within the University, one designed for a more diverse, and often unprepared student body. They created Livingston College, put it on the other
side of the Raritan from New Brunswick and appointed Ernest Lynton as its Dean. His task was to construct a College that would be the New Jersey version of the City College of New York. Lynton had been a physicist; he was a bold and original intellectual given to asking basic philosophical foundational questions. I was asked to serve on the faculty Planning Committee charged with formulating the educational objectives and curriculum for the College. We were given complete latitude, told to address the central philosophical issues of education: “Who should be educated in what, for what and by whom, with what sort of governance, for whose benefit…and with what conception of benefit?” Perhaps because these questions were detached from the actual economic and political constraints of the time, we remained naïve about the relation between philosophy and policy, between the faculty of a State University and the State Legislature. However searching and radical the Planning Committee for Livingston College was prepared to be, we still took it for granted that our administration represented us—and our goals—to the Legislature. It took some years for us to realize that—at least in New Jersey at that time—State politics and finances controlled State education, with only a token regard for the faculty’s searching reflections on the philosophy of education. It has taken an even longer time to realize that University administrators have gradually become hostage to the politics of economic pressure. Many of them are no longer members of the faculty, one of us. iii [endnote iii: A Provost of Boston University—it could have been any University—recently informed the faculty that salaries and promotions would be merit based…as reflected by competitive market values. The effects of such policies on faculty relations to the University—and sometimes to one another—have of course been devastating. For example, on the reliable authority of a sympathetic Dean, we were able to discover that full-time faculty salaries in the philosophy department in 2012-2013 ranged from $ 50,000 for a heavy 3-2 course load to over $ 200,000
plus generous subsidies and research funds for a 2-2 course load and the privilege of offering research related courses. See [http://www.bu.edu/apfd/compensation/](http://www.bu.edu/apfd/compensation/). (The salary section of this site has recently been censored. )]

Reflecting on these experiences eventually prompted some of us to produce an anthology of essays on the moral and political role of education, largely construed, treating a political system as itself an educational system, one whose institutions transform individual subjects to public citizens. We remained convinced that a political system is only as good as the education it envisages and offers its members; and that a community that fails to integrate a robust, socially astute educational system cannot hope to be viable, just or sustainable. As the Old Masters from Plato to Mill knew, political philosophy remains incomplete without a robust theory of education. The implications of this recognition for contemporary graduate education in philosophy are far reaching: instead of being consigned to Schools of Education, the philosophy of education needs to be responsibly developed and integrated within psychologically sensitive social and political theory. [endnote iv: *Philosophers on Education* ed. Amelie Rorty (London: Routledge, 1998.) ]

Meanwhile in the course of teaching the history of philosophy at Rutgers, I found myself wanting books that did not yet exist, books that I hoped would be useful to both students and scholars in the history of philosophy. At Rutgers as in London, the focus of the action was on Doing Philosophy. The history of philosophy appeared in footnotes and bibliographies. To be sure, graduate students were reading Kant along with Strawson and some colleagues were reading Hegel’s Phenomenology, as if it were philosophic porn needing to be covered by discreet brown paper wrappers. And of
course, all along, Vlastos was articulating the hidden agendas and assumptions of Platonic dialogues and Maurice Mandelbaum was doing serious intellectual history. But still, all in all, it was uphill work to justify spending a lot of time on Hume instead of straightforwardly analyzing the logic of imperatives, face to face as it were. Wanting to connect the University of Chicago to London, the history of philosophy to the practices of contemporary philosophic analysis, I asked friends and colleagues to edit volumes of essays in which they introduced Aquinas, Descartes, Kant et al. as participants in current debates on the most pressing issues of contemporary philosophy. Doubleday-Anchor published 36 volumes all in all, ranging from Vlastos’ anthologies on Plato to Schneewind’s collection of papers on Mill and Wollheim’s on Freud. Those books -- ancestors of the Oxford Studies, the Cambridge Companions and Guides, and the Blackwell Guides--- were, I believe, good for their time, genuinely useful to students and scholars alike. Looking back on those projects, I now find them surprisingly somewhat dated. They belonged to the “read and raid” school of interpretation, that slides over the profound differences in the significance and contexts that spurred the work of our predecessors and those of our contemporaries. Contributors tended to supply what they saw as missing premises in their subjects’ arguments with considerations and distinctions that their subjects might not have been ready to understand and might well have rejected if they could. In undertaking such projects again, we would almost certainly include more history in the history of philosophy, and hold off a bit on the temptation to provide new arguments for what we take to be the conclusions of our predecessors, whose questions and preoccupations were often radically different from ours. We might find our own
agendas enriched, made more subtle by trying to understand our ancestors in their own terms.

In the course of working with the editors of this series of anthologies, I came to believe that we can’t do interpretive historical scholarship without doing sophisticated and critical philosophy; nor can we do straight philosophy without also having some understanding of its history. Doing the history of philosophy requires a great deal of philosophically astute and imaginative detection. At its best, it involves the ability to chart the perspectives, concerns and inference patterns of minds very different from our own. And it is not only a matter of tracing the continuous transformation of this or that ‘idea’—as it may be shifting conceptions of equality or freedom, of the emotions or the imagination – it is also true of the notion of what’s involved in the very activity of doing echt philosophy. It was this conviction --the conviction that the standards of kosher philosophy have a complex history-- that prompted me to edit an anthology of reflections by philosophers from Plato to Appiah and Arendt on what they thought we might be doing, as philosophers. ³ [endnote: The Many Faces of Philosophy ed. Amelie Rorty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003]

But if doing the history of philosophy at any time requires engaging in (whatever passes for) straight philosophy, doing philosophy straight on, face to face as it were, also requires knowing something of its transformative history. Santayana was surely exaggerating when he said “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Yet we are likely to repeat the endless and apparently intractable controversies about the conditions for autonomy unless we understand the historical contexts of the problems that different conceptions of agency and reason were designed
to resolve. And we are unlikely to see what is at stake in controversies about whether compatibilism resolves the free will problem without being sensitive to the historical context in which conceptions of causation, voluntary action and the will were introduced to do the specific work of another era. Understanding our philosophic history is not merely a matter of pleasurable pedantic antiquarianism, finding a rare jewel in Spinoza or a rusty but serviceable key in Kant. The details of that history are latent in our own apparently innocent philosophic intuitions. Because different moments in that history import distinctive agenda, our own intuitions are often likely to be in tension with one another. This is, I believe, the source of much of the polemical fervor of competing contemporary intuitions about (for example) the role of autonomy in moral choice or about whether reasons can be causes.

In attempting to fulfill my obligation as a Dewey lecturer, “invited to reflect, broadly and in an autobiographical spirit, on philosophy in America,” I must interrupt my travelogue, and take a brief detour. The history of American philosophy has of course been marked by what has come to be called ‘pragmatism.’ My discomfort with ‘isms’ is as strongly pronounced here as anywhere. It seems to me that the currently canonic list of American pragmatists --the fathers (Peirce, James, Dewey) and the sons (G. H. Mead, Charles Morris, C.I. Lewis) and now the grandchildren (Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Robert Brandom and Cheryl Misak, among others)—have little in common. Each has had quite a different agenda, a different focus. Some were primarily interested in a theory of truth, others in a theory of meaning, still others in a method of inquiry. Peirce thought of himself as analyzing the logical structure of scientific inquiry. On reading what he saw as James’ psychology of belief, he declared himself a
pragmaticist rather than a pragmatist. Dewey explored the social dimension and norms of experience, and applied his version of pragmatism to aesthetic experience and to educational practices. Richard Rorty found traces of pragmatism in Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Although his discussions with Davidson and Putnam took a somewhat polemical form, he seemed to be trying to convince them that –if they but knew it-- they actually were allies, Rorty-pragmatists in disguise. In another recent twist, Anthony Appiah claimed Hans Vaihinger as a pragmatist in his 2013 Carus lecture. We might well wonder whether Peirce or even James would sign on to these versions of outreach pragmatism.

There are of course many more examples of the striking diversity of the agenda and motifs of ‘American pragmatism.’ Although there are vague, general themes that could be attributed to at least some pragmatists – an empiricist flavored naturalism, an attempt to link formal epistemology with philosophical psychology and with an experience-based value theory that has normative impact--[, much the same empty formulae can be attributed to a host of philosophers who would shudder at being considered pragmatists. I once thought I understood and championed the pragmatic turn in American philosophy, but now, I confess that I don’t understand it any more than I understand any other ‘ism,’ taken as a set of doctrines abstracted from a heterogeneous group of philosophers.][vi] [endnote: See Pragmatic Philosophy, ed. Amelie Rorty (N.Y. Doubleday-Anchor, 1966 ; and Richard Bernstein, The Pragmatic Turn (N.Y. : Polity Press, 2010) Ch. 9, pp. 200-216 for a surprisingly harsh critique of late pragmatism.]

In the same contrary spirit, I am afraid that for all my admiration for Peirce, James and Dewey, I don’t believe there is such a thing as ‘American philosophy,’ any
more than there is a distinctive Swiss or Brazilian philosophy. To be sure, philosophers are often tribal; and we are sometimes parochial, but hardly along national lines. In the twenties and thirties, American philosophers went to Berlin and Vienna to study; after World War II, some went to Great Britain while others went to France. European wars brought hosts of émigré philosophers –Carnap, Reichenbach, Hempel-- to the States, where they exerted an immense influence. Much later, and in a different spirit, Hubert Dreyfus introduced us to Heidegger and Thomas McCarthy brought Habermas and the Frankfurt School to the United States. vii [endnote: See McCarthy’s The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas (MIT Press, Hutchinson Press, 1978); and his Critical Theory (Basil Blackwell, 1994), co-authored with David Hoy.] Because David Hoy worked tirelessly to help us understand Foucault, Derrida, and Levinas, contemporary Continental philosophers have in principle become accessible even to the hardest core anglo-American analytic philosophers. viii [endnote: See especially his Critical Resistance: From Post-Structuralism to Post-Critique (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005) ] Even when we dissociate ourselves from them, we can recognize these European philosophers as distant cousins and can usually distinguish them from the real charlatans.

And yet, on the other hand, despite my distrust of all forms of American exceptionalism, it seems to me that there is such a thing as an American spirit in doing philosophy, an American way of engaging in it, no matter who is doing it, native or émigré. It’s a ‘can do’ attitude, a way of engaging in philosophy by formulating problems and solving --or resolving-- them. Even in interpreting The Old Masters, we tackle Plato’s Third Man Problem or Hume on the Problem of the Existence of the External World. When Europeans ‘problematize’ a familiar topic in philosophy --say,
whether death is to be feared, or whether some forms of injustice are morally permissible in what passes for a just war—they intend, for the most part, to call attention to the problem, to reflect on it, to experience it, even to brood on it as human problem—rather than to find a formula for solving it.

Now, with these brief reflections on pragmatism and American philosophy behind me, I can return to my travelogue. During my time at Rutgers, the Princeton department was an exciting and hospitable center of philosophic activity. Under the imaginative and far-sighted chairmanship of Gregory Vlastos, the department hired Stuart Hampshire, Tom Nagel and Joel Feinberg Alasdair MacIntyre, David Pears, David Wiggins, Bernard Williams came on visiting appointments. Now that was something else. At last I found philosophers—great philosophers, it seemed to me—of sensitivity and intelligence who understood how things are without moving to formalize or idealize the phenomena. These philosophers were engaged—each in his own distinctive way—in trying to understand the phenomena as it lives and breathes without first sucking all the contingency and chance out of them. Like Isaiah Berlin, who greatly influenced many of them, these were philosophers who travelled and knew a lot of history, who read novels and looked at paintings and listened to music and thought about politics, philosophers for whom there was no distinction between their lives and their philosophic thinking.

It was, in part, because of their influence that I came to be interested in the seamy side of the philosophy of mind and its constraints on high minded ethics. MacIntyre made us sensitive to the connection between politics, ethics and education. Hampshire charted the connections between the philosophy of mind and Freudian theory: he set us to look for the hidden patterns and dynamics of thought and action.
Tom Nagel’s papers on sex and war made it possible to bring any and every topic under close philosophic scrutiny; his analyses of objectivity and subjectivity made us sensitive to ineliminable tensions in our basic philosophically-laden attitudes. Those philosophers provided a counter-balance to moral theories devoted to the edifying principles of rational --that is, reason-guided, reason-guiding-- agency. It seemed to me that however subtle contemporary accounts of the connection between moral principles and rational agency might be, they are --even at their best-- radically incomplete. Why, we might well wonder, is all this attention to morality appropriate, even necessary? After all, medieval and post-Enlightenment moralists and moral theorists thought it necessary to supplement their edifying moral theories --theories that chart virtues, rules or principles-- with attention to the dark side of standard issue human psychology. They analyzed the varieties of resistance and conditions that make morality a project in the first place, and a very difficult project at that.

So, inspired by the likes of Hampshire, Williams and Nagel, I began to think and to write about the apparently irrational, unwholesome side of the activities of the mind. I wanted understand why we are so chronically prone to fearing death, to akrasia self-deception, and to apparently unsavory emotions like jealousy and resentment, phenomena that, from the point of view of high rationality and morality, seem not only irrational but self-destructive. I was not only interested in explaining these familiar, common motions of the mind --as it were naturalizing them—but also in rehabilitating, or rather reclaiming them-- by showing that their sources lie in the very activities that constitute rational and prudential thinking. It seemed to me that besides occasionally serving us well, these conditions are byproducts of the very processes of productive and
prudential reasoning. I wanted to see if Kant’s insight that being rational also brings susceptibility to the predictable diseases of rationality also applies to the patterned foibles of ordinary mundane reasoning. Were we to try some form of lobotomy to ensure avoiding those diseases, we would cut ourselves off from the very conditions that make rationality possible. So began the explorations of supposedly ‘deviant’ or ‘fringe,’ seamy activities of the mind, e.g. self-deception, akrasia, apparently self-destructive emotions. Instead of simply treating these suspect attitudes and activities as irrational and subversive threats to responsible agency, we also wanted to understand why they are so pervasive and persistent. I explored their contributions to psychological and social functioning – their intellectual fecundity, their promoting concentrated attention, their roles in fostering cooperative activity. I wanted to find ways to integrate rationality with other basic protective and expressive human functions/activities. In addition to editing a multi-disciplinary anthology on the emotions, I again turned to friends and colleagues to help explore these allegedly irrational or defective attitudes and activities. We edited volumes on self-deception and on the assumptions of identity politics. ix [endnote: Amelie Rorty, ed. Explaining Emotions (Berkeley, University of California, 1976); Brian McLaughlin and Amelie Rorty, eds. Perspectives on Self-Deception (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1988; Owen Flanagan and Amelie Rorty, eds. Identity, Character and Morality (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990). Somewhat later, I put together an anthology, The Many Faces of Evil, (London: Routledge, 2001), tracing the history of conceptions of moral failure from sin and evil, to vice and malice, then to waywardness and socio-pathology.]
It was also around this time—the early seventies— that Derek Parfit’s seminal essay, “Personal Identity,” generated discussions that extended from metaphysics to moral and political theory. In hopes of distinguishing—and then cross-pollinating—some of the issues at stake in the many controversies surrounding the analysis of the concept of personhood, I edited an anthology tracing disagreements about the unity or the modularity of the self, about its diachronic or episodic character, about the scope and limits of its responsible agency.\(^5\) [endnote: Derek Parfit, “Personal Identity,” *Philosophical Review* January, 1971; and Amelie Rorty, ed. *The Identities of Persons* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003)]

As usual, my own inclination was conciliatory and non-committal, downright evasive. It seemed to me then—and it seems to me now—that many of the controversies are negotiable, that distinguishing the questions and issues at stake would allow us to see in what sense—in what contexts—the agent-self is unified and continuous and in what sense it might not be, in what sense it has a nature or ‘essence’ and in what sense—in what contexts—the self might be thought to choose or construct its ‘identities.’ Following through on that conciliatory mode, David Wong and I later co-authored a paper distinguishing aspects of identity and agency, particularly as they might have distinctive implications for moral and political theory as well for identity politics.\(^{xi}\) [endnote: (“Aspects of Identity and Agency,” *Identity, Character and Agency*, ed. Owen Flanagan and Amelie Rorty (MIT Press, 1990) pp. 19-36)]

Reflecting on the trajectory of my work, I began to see that—besides a contrarian taste for film noir and for exploring the dark side of the mind—there is a leitmotif, running through my travels, a theme that runs back to my trying to
preserve the respective contributions of Chicago and London, of philosophy and the history of philosophy, exploring the functional good sense of what allegedly violates the conditions of strict rationality (whatever that may be.) In the course of my philosophic travels, I encountered a set of arguments that seemed to force some sort of radical choice in theory construction: as it may be, mind numbing presumptive polarities between realism and anti-realism in metaphysics, between deontology and consequentialism in ethics; between subjectivity and objectivity in aesthetics; reason and emotion in the philosophy of mind; hard core naturalism and constructivism in political theory; egalitarianism and libertarianism in social theory. Where most colleagues tended to choose one or another conceptual side and identify with it, fortify it, treat it as primary, showing that (as the British used to say) “it wears the pants,” I move to my default stance as a visitor with a strong disinclination to enter into local battles. My first—perhaps anxious—philosophic instinct is to think that disagreement is a mark of misunderstanding. Faced by entrenched controversies between philosophers who dig in their positions and resist attempts at negotiated resolutions, I find myself asking, “Are you guys in this just for the fight?” Instead of taking sides on allegedly opposed “isms,” radical dichotomies or polarities, I typically try to apply the mediating strategies and techniques of arbitration and reconciliation, marked by a frequent use of “On the one hand,/on the other hand.” That reaction became a pattern, an intellectual habit of attempting to preserve rather than overcome the philosophic ambivalence that follows from having internalized radically different outlooks.

So I am now trying to finish a book called *On The Other Hand: A Plea for Ambivalence.* I want to show that despite its shortcomings, despite the
fact that it can sometimes block reasonable and effective action, at least some forms of ambivalence are appropriate, often responsibly truth-sensitive and worth preserving. Since the sources of ambivalence often lie in our cooperative and collaborative relations, the resources for addressing—if not solving—them are also to be found in shared deliberation and active collaboration. Even when choice seems inescapable, the considerations for the rejected alternatives should remain active in the space of the person’s reasons and values. I’ll be exploring the role of the imagination within effective practical reasoning…and trying to investigate the constraints required to make its exercise epistemically responsible. Because I think the skills of preserving appropriate ambivalence can provide models for addressing conflicts in the public sphere, I’ll argue that they are among the civic virtues.

So here we are now. Technologized as it has become, the contemporary philosophic scene nourishes my insatiable desire to hear the latest philosophic news and explore the latest philosophic novelty toys. If technology changes social relations, it also changes philosophy. Taken all in all, it has become more refined and worldly. Internet access to JStors, to the Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, to Phileverything (Philpapers, Philevents, Philjobs, Philbibliographies and we may hope Philcoursesyllabi) have made it possible to become professionally sophisticated. All these avenues of communication have extended the scope of our Socratic discussions and collaborations with colleagues in Australia, Brazil and Finland. European and Anglo-American political theorists, economists and political historians substantively incorporate one another’s work. Cosmopolitan intellectuals among us—philosophers like Ronald
Dworkin and Tom Nagel, Avishai Margalit and Sari Nusseibeh—represent philosophy in the public sphere. This transformation of philosophic access and communication is exhilarating.

On the other hand, philosophy has become increasingly professionalized and specialized. With some very significant exceptions, most of us write articles that we hope to weave—or at least collect—into books. While those articles and books often have engaging outreach titles, their focus—and so their audience—has also tended to become narrow. While this means that discussions become more refined, precise and even elegant, it also makes them more decontextualized and deracinated, we might even sometimes say unreflective. It may be easier to be in touch with the members of our gang, but although the Notre Dame Philosophical Review and PhilEverything have enabled us to recognize philosophers on the horizon, we tend to find it difficult to understand them. (“We have technical terms; they have jargon. We have arguments; they are just free-associating. We are clear; they are opaque.”).

While we have helped our graduate students absorb the benefits of the new high tech sophisticated professionalism, we have not encouraged them to become genuinely cosmopolitan, even when we earnestly urge them to think for themselves. Let’s face it, as it stands, we are using them to clone ourselves. Without showing them the constructive roles that philosophers can play—that they have historically played—in the larger world, we are essentially training them to continue and collaborate in our work. That’s all very well, there’s nothing wrong with that. But in the course of doing so, we have also narrowed and limited their sense of the constructive, genuinely satisfying contributions they are capable of making. In truth, their circumstances are far more straightened than
ours had been. Only a percentage of them—and not necessarily the best and the brightest among them—will succeed in finding academic jobs comparable to ours. We need to help them see that there is life in a world beyond the confining protection of the academy, a world where their philosophic talents and training could flourish. Philosophe...
I am grateful to Minda Rae Amiran, Matthew Carmody, Ronald de Sousa, Robert Frederic, Genevieve Lloyd, David Lyons, Jerome Neu, William Ruddick, Richard Schmitt and Mitchell Silver for helpful comments on early drafts of this paper and to Catherine Elgin and Lydia Goehr for their contributions to its discussion at the APA session where it was delivered. For fellowships that made my intellectual travels possible, I am also grateful to a number of research centers and foundations-- the Stanford Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, The Woodrow Wilson Center, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Kings College Cambridge, the Simon Guggenheim Foundation, The Institute for Advanced Study, and the National Humanities Center. It has been my privilege to have been invited to give lectures and to participate in conferences here and abroad. These occasions brought encounters with remarkable philosophers, devoted teachers and scholars whose reflections and conversations have been heartening and nourishing. Many friends and colleagues generously contributed advice and essays for the anthologies listed in the notes that follow. In truth, we have collaborated in the work that has emerged from our lively and on-going discussions.

ENDNOTES


\(^{ii}\) See Tyler Burge’s ground breaking “Individualism and the Mental” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4, pp. 73-121. More recently, Anthony Laden has argued that informal conversation provides an appropriate model for reasoning as a dialogic process  (*Reasoning: A Social Picture* (N.Y.: Oxford Press, 2012) and Michael Tomasello has placed the conditions of thinking within
the normative practices of coordinated, cooperative social interaction. (A Natural History of Human Thinking (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014)

iii A Provost of Boston University—it could have been any University—recently informed the faculty that salaries and promotions would be merit-based… as reflected by competitive market values. The effects of such policies on faculty relations to the University—and sometimes to one another—have of course been devastating. For example, I have it on the reliable authority of a sympathetic Dean that full-time faculty salaries in the philosophy department in 2012-2013 ranged from $50,000 for a heavy 3-2 course load to over $200,000 plus generous subsidies and research funds for a 2-2 course load and the privilege of offering research related courses. See http://www.bu.edu/apfd/compensation/. (The salary section of this site has recently been censored.)


Philosophers have become journalists, systems analysts, organization ethicists (for hospitals, media, NGOs), congressional aides, poets, art and literary critics, attorneys and judges, investment counselors, editors and publishers. Many organizations advertise employment opportunities for applicants with advanced degrees in the humanities. (See Google listings for “Non-Academic Jobs.” See also [http://www.apaonline.org/?page=nonacademic](http://www.apaonline.org/?page=nonacademic); [http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/tipsheets/non-academic-career-options-phds-and-mas](http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/tipsheets/non-academic-career-options-phds-and-mas)