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Reply to Commentators

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Abstract
Anyone who raises questions about a well-entrenched practice can expect at least some of the practitioners to offer rebuttals. I am grateful to those who view my critique of current analytic philosophy as flawed for taking time to endeavor to correct me. They will surely not be surprised to find me recalcitrant. But I hope they will conclude, as I do, that the present airing of disagreements is profitable.

Keywords Analytic philosophy · John Dewey · William James · Epistemology · Critical theory · Philosophy of science

Nobody is a more distinguished exponent of contemporary analytic philosophy than Timothy Williamson, and his sense of my heresies is the most wide-ranging. He is also characteristically direct in his objections: it is a pleasure to cross swords with him. I must begin, however, by correcting a misunderstanding. At various places in WUP, I chide analytic philosophers for not taking seriously the question of whether what they are doing is worthwhile. Williamson quotes some words from sentences making this charge, and concludes that I am (falsely) presenting myself as the first person to pose the question.[1] But the passages in which the quoted phrases occur are clear: I am not claiming priority in *asking* but pointing to a repeated failure in *answering*. Many people have lamented the narrowness of analytic philosophy. My point is that those whose works are targets do not take seriously the task of showing why what they do is worthwhile.

My goal is not that of making philosophy popular, as if current indifference or scorn for our subject were a disease. Chapter 4 of WUP is devoted to recognizing an important – synthetic – function of philosophy. For two millennia, philosophers tried to provide their readers with tools for making sense of important

[1] Oddly, though, he recognizes that I cite Dewey as a predecessor in this respect.

I reply to the criticisms, questions, and suggestions posed by the four commentators.

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facets of their lives and the world in which they lived. That kind of work continues, although it is much rarer today. Unpopularity is a symptom of philosophy's neglect of a traditional function. Although a much larger population of people are now paid for writing philosophy than at any previous stage in history, we are (largely) failing to give the world what our great predecessors provided.

Williamson neglects my positive conception of philosophy and its role. Hence, he slides into an over-simplified characterization of my position. He insists, however, that I have distorted my target. Analytic philosophy, he contends, is no longer centrally concerned with the analysis of concepts. I agree with him on this point. Today's practitioners have outgrown the original positivist emphasis on analyzing concepts. They do other things too. They try to advance principles, generated from some supposedly special source of philosophical knowledge. My third chapter begins by worrying about conceptual analyses, and goes on to consider what this alternative special source might be (I have not overlooked the evolution of ideas about how analytic philosophy should be done). Given my critique, however, the thought that philosophical knowledge consists in recognizing conceptual truths might look rather more defensible than the currently popular alternative.

Williamson thinks I do better in recognizing the internalism–externalism debate in epistemology. But, in failing to appreciate its significance, I go astray. For, he explains, I have a positive view of Amia Srinivasan, who is a "recent influential contributor on the externalism side". Noting this is irrelevant. Simply because I admire some of Srinivasan's work, must I see all of it as equally significant? In fact, I have a high opinion of the paper on radical externalism Williamson cites. It makes a socially important point: people who sense that someone else has a common prejudice (based on race, sex, or class) can know that, without being able to explain how they know. It would be well if that important insight about knowledge were widely accepted, especially in legal (or quasi-legal) settings.

Williamson's own enthusiasm for work like Srinivasan's seems to have a different educational mission in mind. Philosophy of science, he suggests, is pervaded by internalism. It needs to be reformed, and good externalist articles (like Srinivasan's) can help. Touché. A field I regard as relatively healthy is diseased, and the remedy comes from a part of philosophy I criticize.

Here, I think, Williamson's own failure to take my questions seriously becomes apparent. Philosophers of science have long absorbed the externalist message. Many of us grew up on chicken-sexing, and similar examples. But, as he knows, one enterprise in the philosophy of science is to give an account of the confirmation of laws and theories by evidence. Subjective Bayesianism is the most popular version of this account, even though a significant number of people (including me) accept major objections to it. In casting around for something better, is this part of philosophy aided by any revelations from critiques of internalism? Should we suppose a psychological process, unfathomable to those who undergo it, that would provide theoretical knowledge on the basis of empirical evidence? People who can sex chickens and detect sexists actually exist. Is there some population of scientists who can (or could) move to knowledge of some important part of some scientific theory by similarly opaque procedures?

Linguistics provides safer ground for Williamson to show how analytic philosophy might aid another area of inquiry. He and I agree that the traffic between philosophy and linguistics is a two-way street. As WUP notes (p.83), J.L. Austin was an important philosopher, contributing much to the understanding of language, and rightly influencing the embryogenesis of theoretical linguistics. Many of the philosophers Williamson mentions – people like David Lewis and Robert Stalnaker – were deeply engaged with developments in linguistics, and read widely in the subject. The figures he cites exemplify just the kind of interaction between philosophy and a special science I find fruitful. Williamson's only mistake here lies in not seeing that he is defending work I applaud, not any target of my criticisms.

The most substantive parts of Williamson's review center on three issues where we have genuine – and interesting – philosophical disagreements. Consider first his concerns about my approach to meta-ethics. I claim that the central task of this part of philosophy is to offer a methodology for moral inquiry. This is to turn away from issues in moral semantics and moral ontology. My basis for doing so lies in taking meta-ethics to arise from the familiar facts of moral disagreement. According to Williamson, these facts prompt people to ask whether "norms and values are in some sense absolute or relative", and debates about moral realism are reasonable responses to that question. On my view, people want something more: namely, whether there is a way to resolve those disputes, to find out which views are correct and which wrong. (How satisfying would it be to learn that there are objective moral truths, but we have no way of fathoming them?)[2] Engaging in Williamson's debate might yield insights into answering the substantive moral questions, but, as I have argued, would-be moral realists offer only the vaguest account of what moral reality might be, shedding no light on how we might discover its features. After decades of inconclusive exchanges, might it not be worth trying a more direct approach? I recommend scrutinizing the history of moral practices, trying to discover how they function and how they change for the better.

Of course, the fact of widespread moral disagreement complicates this enterprise, as Williamson rightly points out. Nevertheless, our predicament is not hopeless. For there are some cases in which a very large proportion of our species will agree that progress or regress has occurred. Moreover, there are strong philosophical reasons to believe that some common ways of blocking full consensus – appealing to religious dogmas, for example – are unreliable ways of conducting moral inquiry (as Kant's *Groundwork* succinctly points out). So, in two previous books (Kitcher 2021, 2022), I try to present a thoroughly democratic (non-dictatorial) methodology for collective moral inquiry. That seems more responsive to the impulses both Williamson and I recognize when people reflect on moral disagreement than the apparently interminable and inconclusive debates about a nebulous moral reality that currently fill many journals.

[2] Bill Lycan's brief for the significance of moral realism invites a similar riposte. Without a method for deciding between different visions of moral reality the questions he thinks a resolution of the realism issue would settle (e.g. is it "just my opinion"?) remain open. Lycan also misreads my discussion of reasons. I believe that moral questions should be addressed by undergoing reasonable psychological processes; I don't think, however, in terms of an ontology of reasons. I propose to do for reasons what Quine did for sakes.

Many philosophical debates in ethics (as well as in other branches of philosophy) proceed by using a method about which I have reservations. Authors present scenarios to jog intuitions, and thus test potential principles. As I understand the process, it may elicit tendencies that have so far remained implicit. Given the reader's biologically and culturally evolved cognitive and emotive equipment, a well-designed story evokes a reaction, and the person arrives at a judgment about the situation. Sometimes this works. People can think themselves into the described situation, becoming clear about what they would feel and do if they were involved in it. Asking yourself what you *would* do is a way of activating a reaction – the blessing or forbidding given by conscience – that assists in discovering what you *should* do.

Some stories allow this imaginative immersion. Some do not. If the departures from everyday life are too great, the psychological equipment fails to mesh with the situation characterized. In consequence, people are non-plussed. They may express their lack of confidence in making a judgment.

That is what my students often do. The exceptions are those already committed to a bit of theory, who apply that bit of theory to generate their answer. Students lacking prior commitments are uncomfortable in answering questions about fat men on bridges overlooking trolley tracks. Am I "doing my students' imaginations an injustice"? I don't think so. I think of myself as listening to what they say.

But perhaps I am guilty of another teaching flaw? Are they reluctant to answer because I have presented the case badly? I used to be much better in obtaining classroom reactions, sometimes even provoking almost complete agreement. The more recent awkward silences and confessions of uncertainty result from my determination not to lead, to allow a genuine test of reactions to proceed.

Many analytic philosophers view intuition as a process akin to observation, in which we can acquire data for evaluating philosophical theories. They should recall two important facts about observation. First, confronting people with radically unfamiliar scenes rarely delivers reliable data. Second, observational skills are taught, and the teaching typically draws on a well-established body of information, accepted by a community (Daston & Galison, 2007). We should frame our scenarios to suit the imaginative powers of those we hope to convince; and we should ask if there is enough philosophical common ground to standardize what "well-conducted intuition" might be.

Williamson saves his best line of defense for the end. It consists in pointing out that philosophy sometimes has practical applications that were unforeseeable in advance. He offers two examples. One of these, the use of mereology in classifying engineering components, and thus facilitating the production of cars and aircraft, is less convincing without more detail. In particular, it would be good to know if, besides the value of mereology in increasing the profits of manufacturers, there is any more widely shared social good. The other case, the use of Jaakko Hintikka's pioneering work in epistemic logic to advance theoretical economics and computer science, is more powerful. For it shows how the kind of impact I applaud when it comes from deliberate philosophical engagement with other areas of inquiry can occur, even when the philosopher has no intention of contributing to those fields. There is a genuine challenge here – and it was first made, more than a decade ago, when Martin Kusch raised just this example to me.

Hintikka was a widely-read philosopher, whose interests extended well beyond philosophy. Nonetheless, I'm prepared to agree that his work on epistemic logic was

entirely unmotivated by any interest in contributing to any other cognitive endeavor. Serendipity happens. But what follows from that? Is Williamson running the following Serendipity Argument?

> Sometimes, pure philosophical research has valuable extra-philosophical consequences.
>
> Therefore:
>
> The best collective policy for philosophical research is to encourage people to work on whatever they want.

Does Williamson want to take us to the intellectual equivalent of Friedmanite heaven? A place where laissez-faire attitudes to academic research, including philosophical research, should not be disrupted by misguided concerns about the value of one's favorite ventures?

Although there is some force in the Hintikka example, the version of the Serendipity Argument I have given is surely defective. It cries out for attention to frequencies. If similar cases abound, it supplies one style of justification for laissez-faire (based on an identification of philosophy's function as one of aiding other fields of inquiry). If they are rare, however, and if giving that kind of aid is indeed philosophy's function, then the laissez-faire policy seems unwise.

For there is an obvious danger of Micawberism. We want the beneficial consequences for advancing human knowledge. We let philosophers pursue whatever questions interest them, and hope that … something will turn up. Wouldn't a better strategy be to encourage them to interact with the fields they hope to influence, in just the ways I have suggested?

Sometimes, the division of epistemic labor has given a particular discipline a free hand. That happened to mathematics in the eighteenth century. Early in the preceding century, Galileo had wanted to be known as a philosopher (a *natural* philosopher) rather than a mathematician. His preference reflected the low status of mathematics, partly seen as a tool for engineers, navigators and accountants, and partly as the pursuit of practically pointless, though sometimes entertaining, intellectual games. All that changed when the pursuit of those games delivered useful vocabularies and formalisms (apparently recondite geometrical questions gave birth to the calculus, and to differential equations). Since the late seventeenth century, mathematicians have been given a license to extend their subject as they wished, in a reasonable hope that they would supply resources for new sciences.[3]

Granting that license did not, however, lead all mathematicians to concentrate on the pure parts of the subject. Applied mathematics remained important, and significant parts of contemporary mathematics were purpose-built (probability theory, topology, game theory). Today, at least as much mathematical research is done by applied mathematicians as by pure mathematicians. Moreover, there are signs that pure mathematics is no longer considered as fruitful as it has traditionally been taken to be.[4]

[3] This is recognized in (Wigner 1960).
[4] This surfaces in concerns that Ph.Ds in pure mathematics have trouble finding jobs.

Does pure analytic philosophy have the kind of track record that would earn it a similar license? Are all the unintended benefits obtained in those areas of philosophy that supply (like pure mathematics) new formalisms? These are serious questions for proponents of Serendipity Arguments to answer.

But I don't want to encourage Williamson to address them. For these arguments rest on an overly narrow conception of the function of philosophy. I doubt that he believes in philosophy as the servant of other cognitive enterprises. His citation of serendipity is directed against a position he attributes to me: philosophy must have those kinds of practical effects. That is not my view.

The omission of any discussion of my positive view of philosophy, developed in Chapter 4 of WUP, is the principal flaw in his review. That omission saddens me, for I would expect Williamson to have interesting thoughts about why philosophical classics have been so widely read. My explanation is that these works supply synthetic perspectives of a kind the analytic philosophy he defends no longer delivers. To my mind, that is a major loss. A very large number of extremely talented thinkers, trained to think clearly and rigorously, delve into minute questions which rarely (serendipitously) help people deal with the issues of most importance to them. Many analytic philosophers have lost "the vision thing".

In presenting this view of philosophy and its history, I offer a defense of the importance of philosophy. To be sure, in that defense, I say things that, torn out of their context, could be used to inspire academic administrators to shrink or eliminate philosophy departments. That worries Williamson – and it worries me as well. Yet reform cannot avoid criticism of the status quo. I have tried to phrase my critiques in ways that make it apparent how valuable I take our discipline to be. Being quoted out of context is always a risk, and I would appreciate advice on how to forestall it. From Tim Williamson, or from anyone else.

Michael Strevens has made important contributions in fields that have also interested me. Our research interests are closer, and his objections thus range more narrowly than Williamson's. He begins by deploying my own enthusiasm for Kuhn's approach to science to motivate a parallel between the technical puzzles pursued by scientists and the philosophical investigations that provoke my questions. He is entirely correct in part of this: researchers in almost all natural sciences are confident in holding the questions they seek to answer to be worthwhile. A book asking "What's the use" of their endeavors would be ignorant and impertinent. What's the difference between their situation and ours?

A short answer: the connections between the puzzle-solving and issues that affect the lives of billions. Contemporary science has come a long way from the gentlemen, "free and unconfin'd", of the early Royal Society. People are happy to fund scientific research because, since the mid-nineteenth-century, it's become evident how that research can fuel technology, bringing hitherto undreamed-of benefits.[5] Today's science is embedded in society in ways that today's philosophy is not.

[5] Also, of course, sometimes unforeseen damage. In recognizing how science-shaped technology has caused harm (most evidently in its impact on the natural environment), the public has rightly seen a need for attending to the character of research on some topics, and to probing its "ethical, legal and social implications".

Strevens' opening gambit (refutation by Kuhn) is unsound. As his commentary proceeds, however, he shakes off any reliance on it. His central point is that, like the sciences, investigations in analytic philosophy can be helpful to people.

He develops the point by defending analytic epistemology against my complaints. Philosophers who explore the conditions under which *S* knows that *p* aren't merely engaging in tidying up boundaries (possibly fuzzy, possibly simply unmarked). They are out to "adjudicate hypotheses about the fundamental stuff of knowledge and justification". To introduce the honorific ('fundamental') might suggest argument by persuasive characterization, but Strevens tells us why the honor is deserved. Analytic epistemology has led to "a close examination of a standard for epistemic security that appears to be deeply meaningful to human beings".

The phrases Strevens uses here hint at a benefit that accrues (or would accrue?) to non-philosophers who read the right parts of the corpus of articles descending from Edmund Gettier's influential essay. The benefit, presumably, is some change in psychological attitude, resulting from reading some sentences. Yet, for all the resonance of Strevens's chosen words, this is vague. Who are these readers (or potential readers)? Did they really come to appreciate something they had not recognized before? What exactly was it? Where was it expressed, and by whom?

More details are needed. Early eighteenth-century savants became convinced about the value of pure mathematics because Newton showed them how a new style of formalism could be used to explain and predict the motions of bodies including those of heavenly bodies. Thanks to Leibniz's superior notation for the calculus, and the development of differential equations, physics became equipped with a vast arsenal of techniques. Strevens's claim leaves room for doubt until he has identified the philosophical equivalent.

The interpretation I find most obvious (and here I may misread his intentions) takes the "standard for epistemic security" to be the ideal of certainty. Perhaps, then, the message of analytic epistemology consists in acquainting the potential beneficiaries with the sad truth that the certainty they yearn for is unattainable? But this, it seems, can't be right. Long before Gettier, the American pragmatists had already debunked "the quest for certainty".[6] Furthermore, suspicion of certainty surfaces earlier in Mill and Hume (for example in remarks about proportioning probability to the evidence). Probably in vast numbers of previous people, too.

What other possibilities are there? Could there be some weaker standard people are inclined to adopt, one in need of correction? Or does the ordeal by Gettierology deliver some thesis about epistemic security whose adoption would improve our cognitive lives? I find it hard to credit either of these possibilities. For decisions about when we should rely on various judgments are rightly influenced by appraisals of the evidence (typically dependent on the field of inquiry in which the judgment lies) and also by the costs of potential errors. Moreover, the point about the variability of standards derives not from analytic epistemology but from elementary parts of decision theory.

[6] Dewey's *The Quest for Certainty* was published in 1929. But James had already undercut the ideal in *Pragmatism* (1907); and Peirce's early anti-Cartesian essays stem from 1868.

Epistemology is important. Its principal task is to understand and to improve methods of inquiry across a wide variety of domains. That task is undertaken by people who work in the domains of inquiry, and by philosophers who assist them in their methodological investigations. There are vital branches of philosophy that engage closely with the stuff of knowledge-seeking, in some particular domain, that consider, for example, how collective inquiry might best be organized or how we can track causes or why the natural sciences have been so successful. Michael Strevens has been a prominent contributor to these ventures. But I remain unconvinced that the analytic epistemology he prizes has anything useful to offer.[7]

I am extremely grateful to Bill Lycan for his reflections on my book. Among all the people who have challenged WUP, he seems to me to have offered the best critique. Not just because he sees very clearly what has concerned me about the current state of analytic philosophy. Additionally, because he has articulated better than anyone else what lies behind the common resistance to my views.

Williamson appears to adopt a *laissez-faire* approach to philosophical research: philosophers are entitled to pursue whatever questions happen to interest them. Strevens, however, believes in a standard to which philosophical inquiry ought to be held: it should deal with the "fundamental stuff" of important concepts (the concept of knowledge, for example); I think his example leads him astray. Lycan invokes the same honorific. He sees philosophers as wrestling with "fundamental" questions. They are driven to this exercise: they "can't not" do it.

Lycan surely doesn't see this compulsion as an addiction or disease. He recommends indulging it, rather than trying to provide therapy for the unfortunate victims. Even though they are forced into difficult exertions, they deserve encouragement. For those exertions are valuable.

Fallibilist that he is, Lycan would allow a sad possibility: someone suffering this compulsion might be mistaken, devoting a lifetime to tackling questions that only *appear* to be fundamental. Appreciation of that possibility should lead him to inquire what makes questions fundamental and what benefit answers would bring.

In pursuing this inquiry, it's helpful to recognize that people talk about "fundamental questions" in many domains of inquiry and of life. For more than a century, chemists have seen questions about the distribution of electrons within atoms as fundamental. In trying to understand the continuity of the reals, Dedekind took the fundamental question to be "What is a real number?" Marx saw questions about social class as fundamental to understanding socio-economic change. Many later economists have posed "fundamental questions" about economic equilibria and the conditions under which they obtain. Marriage counselors pose "fundamental questions" about the requirements for marital happiness. The list could go on and on.

As it figures in many domains, the concept of a fundamental question is typically introduced with respect to inquiries already recognized as valid. Chemists want to understand why elements combine as they do: what lies behind valences?

[7] Strevens closes by gently teasing me about my work in the philosophy of literature. He asks how my critique of philosophy squares with finding value in the writings of James Joyce and Thomas Mann. A cryptic answer was already given in (Kitcher 2013). The role of literary works in developing self-understanding is explored at much greater length in Chapters 8 and 9 of (Kitcher 2022).

A new question is hailed as fundamental because answering it promises to advance investigations already under way. Sometimes the fundamental question is viewed as strictly necessary: without answering it, our progress will be blocked. At other times it is taken as a helpful stepping stone: we shall be more likely to advance if we can resolve it.

If this cursory survey of how other inquiries pick out "fundamental" questions is right, it's easy to see why tackling fundamental questions is a good idea. It aids other inquiries. Does this apply too in the philosophical case? If so, what are these other inquiries, and how do they arise?

Lycan may view philosophy as different. It has no bearing on other forms of investigation. The value of answering a philosophical question is intrinsic. When you have found a resolution that satisfies you, you enjoy a distinctive pleasure – perhaps, as Aristotle claims at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* the highest pleasure available to humanity.[8] Reaching that state is valuable whether or not any further benefit trickles beyond you into the lives of others.[9]

To take that view would pose a puzzle about the history of philosophy. Why have non-philosophers avidly read philosophical writings? Were they simply hoping to share the refined pleasures of solitary contemplation? I think not. What moved them was a sense of philosophical questions as fundamental in just the way that term is used with respect to other inquiries and domains of life. Philosophical questions are fundamental because of the light they might shed on other issues. Some of these questions arise within particular fields. Indeed, when practitioners in a field pose a "fundamental" question, they sometimes characterize it as "philosophical"; moreover, investigation of it may combine their efforts with those of philosophers who are steeped in the field, in ways WUP commends and Lycan acknowledges in his remarks about the study of consciousness.

Yet most of the questions philosophers hail as fundamental are not like this. They belong to no particular field of inquiry or domain of life. Rather they emerge from reflection on a broader sample of inquiries or aspects of experience. In the history of philosophy, thinkers have moved among particular disciplines, considering lots of things from lots of angles. They have distilled questions and formulated concepts in an attempt to make sense of a range of phenomena. Their "fundamental questions" are posed in order to help with issues that arise all over the place. To recognize this is to see philosophy as a synthetic enterprise, one that tries to make sense of how things fit together. It is to return to William James and appreciate the value of philosophy in refining the inchoate human conception of the world and our place in it.

Lycan is, I believe, correct to think of philosophy in terms of the pursuit of fundamental questions. His response to WUP does not provide a precise account of what makes a question fundamental. If he remedies that deficiency, he should be led

[8] Although someone possessed by the curiosity Lycan describes may always be unsatisfied, wondering if the answer obtained is satisfactory – perhaps that is another part of the psychological condition?

[9] In quoting Dewey on "a sentimental indulgence for the few" (and in using similar pejorative characterizations) I had this picture firmly in mind. I conjecture that people like me, who come from families in which education has previously stopped in the early teens, will be more concerned that people who live comfortably, pursuing whatever interests them, should do more than achieve such "intrinsic values".

towards the positive account of philosophy (synthetic philosophy) WUP proposes. Or, at least, something like it. He has identified the core issue that divides me from my critics. When he thinks it through, I hope to welcome him to the dark side.

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us[10]

During the twenty years when the concerns expressed in WUP were gestating, my doubts about the practice of contemporary analytic philosophy were reinforced by frequent interactions with scholars from other academic disciplines. Those people served as the "Pow'r" Robbie Burns invokes in his poem addressing a louse; and I hope they have freed me, rather than led me into "mony a blunder". More recently, I have benefited enormously from interactions with philosophers who selectively use analytic techniques to develop ideas in a different philosophical tradition: besides my colleagues, Fred Neuhouser and Axel Honneth, I have learned much from Rahel Jaeggi. In Burnsian spirit, I'm tempted to say that, if she did not exist, we would have to invent her. Fortunately, she does exist and her books (Jaeggi 2016, 2018) testify to the fruitfulness of a synthesis between Critical Theory and carefully selected bits of Anglophone philosophy.

Jaeggi is sympathetic to the project of WUP. Nevertheless, she is attentive and insightful about ways in which my worries about analytic philosophy can be misunderstood. In light of her comments, I want to endorse some of her suggested strategies for rephrasing, and also note a few places at which our emphases may differ.

I chose my title because it formulated a question spurred by two different attitudes. The naïve questioner wants to identify what works of philosophy are good for; others (perhaps more frequently) pose the question rhetorically, as a sweeping dismissal of the subject. The latter think philosophy useless, and so I introduced a dangerous word: 'use'. Consequently, it's easy for readers to attribute me an over-utilitarian demand. Jaeggi corrects my usage. Philosophy doesn't have a use, in any ordinary sense. Yet, she suggests it should "make a difference". That correction captures my intentions, although I would go further. Not simply a difference, but a *positive* difference. And here, I think, it isn't unreasonable to talk of the benefits philosophy brings.

Who benefits? Individual people. Human lives go better because philosophical works deliver ideas, concepts, perspectives enabling readers to understand better, to recognize what is valuable, to clear up perplexities and confusions. Socrates aimed to produce changes of these kinds in his interlocutors, and, from Plato on, his heirs have sometimes achieved the effects he hoped to produce. (The philosophical schools of the ancient world were, of course, set up to teach a select group of people – high-born men – how to live.) Jaeggi, however, worries about viewing the impact of philosophy in these terms. It strikes her as too individualistic; and, I confess, my own writings have sometimes suffered – as she has astutely pointed out – from over-ambitious methodological individualism.

[10] Robert Burns "To a Louse".

Her insight here consists in recognizing that the benefits to individuals are sometimes indirect. They are products of recognizing the deformations of lives by pathological social structures, and subsequently replacing diseased institutions with healthier ones. Perhaps this is frequently the case with the major valuable effects of philosophical writings. Yet I do not think it is always so. A philosophical text may speak directly to an individual, inspiring a change in perspective. That was apparently the case when Goethe read Kant, and when Thomas Mann read Schopenhauer. I struggle to escape the tendency to lapse into an automatic emphasis on the individual; as I read Jaeggi's essay, I'm tempted to advise her to be aware of her counterpart proclivity for overemphasizing the social. We both need a constant reminder: not one rather than the other; potentially, either or both.

She is entirely correct to stress the philosophical value of exposing new problems. WUP should be freed from its occasional tendencies towards the narrow pragmatism of only scratching where it itches. One of the great achievements of the classics of western philosophy is their awareness of "latent problems" and their explicit identification of questions that need to be addressed. Since I see many species of human progress not in terms of increasing proximity to a long-term goal, but as (typically partial) efforts in overcoming problems, a central question for me is to describe how genuine problems are identified.[11] Philosophical diagnoses sometimes respond to the complaints people actually express ("the cries of the wounded", in William James's eloquent phrase). In many instances, the pre-philosophical expressions are unfocused or misdirected, and philosophical recognition is already an advance through its explicit and relatively precise definition of what is problematic. Like Jaeggi, I see some genuine "latent problems" as arising where there is no prior protest (no itch, no wounded cries). After the philosophical diagnosis, however, it becomes possible to recognize some unsatisfactory facet of the prior state, some prior sense of perplexity or of something dimly amiss.

I don't pretend that these remarks provide an adequate account of what I take to be a significant species of philosophical contribution. Further clarity is only likely to come, in my view, from a careful analysis of historical examples. Even in the absence of precision, however, it seems uncontroversial that both social progress and individual advances in self-understanding have resulted from the diagnostic work of philosophy. Jaeggi's return to my musical analogy is in full accord with this point. For, as I have argued elsewhere, music, like other arts, can contribute to our increased understanding of who we are and how we aspire to be (Kitcher 2022, Chapter 8).

WUP opens with a distinction between core and periphery in order to question the traditional understanding of its significance. My later efforts to describe and recommend an important genre of philosophical work, synthetic philosophy, lead me, however, to abandon the distinction (p.147). There are several kinds of valuable philosophy, including public philosophy, philosophy in dialogue with other disciplines, as well as the systematic explorations yielding new perspectives for individuals and for societies. Just as it is folly to hail metaphysics as the true core, so too I oppose

[11] I discuss this issue at some length in Chapter 1 of (Kitcher 2021).

the idea of installing any other branch, even ethics or social philosophy, at philosophy's center. Giving up the distinction will, I hope, foster a wider appreciation of the varieties of worthwhile philosophy.

Some valuable ventures are highly technical, consisting of "basic research" whose immediate impact is hard to discern. Here too, Jaeggi and I are in harmony. Yet, for both of us, it is important to make the potential impact clear. I shall close by elaborating this point.

Is WUP in the business of telling my fellow philosophers what to do? Am I presenting a "moral prescription" for my profession, commanding my high analytic friends to "stop it now"?[12] No. As I noted at the beginning of this response, I want to induce analytic philosophers to pose a question and to work through it seriously. They should ask themselves what is the value of the articles and books on which they labor with such high intelligence and dedication. I am inviting them to a project of self-examination. How that ends is up to them.

Williamson begins with a story Aristoxenus told about Plato, identifying me as on the side of those who found nothing valuable in a lecture about the Good. I am supposed to have no time for any technical work in philosophy. That is not my view. Sometimes, a highly technical body of work can bear on important questions, as in the case of Kant's Critical Philosophy (noted in my Précis). If Plato engaged in similar explanations, his audience were wrong to leave. Or perhaps he skipped any attempt at motivation. If so, there was a pedagogical failure and, in consequence, both he and his audience suffered intellectual losses. Plato should have explained why he connected the abstract questions about numbers with the ethical issues his audience had come for. They could then have debated whether the alleged links were sound. Everyone might have learned something – but they would have done so only if they had pursued the topic more thoroughly than Williamson and Strevens do with respect to their proposed examples of valuable philosophy.

The Plato we know from his writings is very skilled at this type of connecting work: think how Socrates leads his victims from everyday questions to abstract matters. I recommend that analytic philosophers emulate the Plato of the Dialogues rather than the character who appears in Aristoxenus's story.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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[12] Lycan uses these terms, although he does not go so far as to accuse me.

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