Philosophy dedisciplined

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Abstract   This essay offers a critique of disciplinary philosophy, the dominant form of academic philosophy in the United States and elsewhere across the twentieth century. It argues that disciplinary philosophy represents an aberration compared to the main tradition of two thousand years of Western philosophy. It describes the characteristics of a dedisciplined philosophy, and emphasizes that dedisciplining philosophy requires attention to be paid to the linked institutional and theoretical elements of philosophy. The essay bases its argument in part on the results of a survey sent to more than 500 philosophy departments across North America in the summer of 2010.

Keywords   Twentieth century philosophy · Disciplinarity · Interdisciplinarity · Institutional change

> The ruinous authority of experts […] was McLuhan's lifelong theme.
> (Marchand 1998)

Innovative times can raise uncomfortable questions. Take the case of the US military and its fleet of drones. From a total of less than 50 in 2002, the United States military has more than 7,000 unmanned aircraft in service today (Singer 2009). Drones flying over Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen collect intelligence and eliminate combatants, while being controlled from air-conditioned control rooms 8,000 miles away. Drone technology highlights the high tech and asymmetrical nature of modern warfare. It also opens up new questions. The soldier who drops a smart bomb onto a target on the other side of the planet—when he goes to his daughter's soccer game that evening, is

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he still a combatant? What of the computer engineer in Palo Alto who designed the software that makes such precision bombing possible?

Technoscientific advance is perhaps the single greatest generator of such questions today. It affects our political system, our economic relations, the health of the natural environment, even our own minds and bodies (Allenby and Sarewitz 2011). Instant access to the world's information (Google), frictionless global communication (Skype), and multiplying individually sourced narratives (Web 2.0) are reshaping the nature of knowledge. Which in turn promises to reshape every other aspect of society.

The questions being raised are often philosophical, going to the heart of what it means to be human, how we relate to one another, and what our fate will be; and whether the seemingly stable conceptual distinctions that have governed our lives for so long—the distinction between soldier and civilian, or natural and artificial—are still relevant today. Moreover, the philosophical points are often cryptic, and mistakenly taken for scientific or economic questions.

And so our public discourse would be improved by philosophical reflection. Moreover, in a time of tightening budgets such questions present philosophers with the chance to make a case for our continued, indeed increased societal relevance. My point, however, is not simply that philosophers should take on the role of public intellectual, as welcome as that would be. Rather, my argument is that philosophers need to become active *participants* in ongoing debates on policy problems, working on the project level with scientists, engineers, policy makers, public agencies, and community groups. Philosophers need to get out of the study, and into the field (Frodeman 2010).

The argument below elaborates on these claims. Arguing that twentieth century philosophy has been unhealthily insular, I call for the dedisciplining of philosophy. And I emphasize the linked theoretical and institutional nature of the shift toward a dedisciplined philosophy. This argument especially highlights the need for changes in the institutional expressions of philosophy. The institutional status of philosophy— e.g., its functioning as a *discipline*—was the great blind spot of twentieth (and now twenty-first) century philosophy. This is part of what has led philosophy, potentially the most relevant of subjects, to become a synonym for irrelevance.

The argument here, made historically and conceptually, will be complemented by a summary of the results of a survey concerning the state of philosophy. In the summer of 2010 my research group created and sent out a survey instrument to more than 500 philosophy departments across North America. The survey sought information on three crucial institutional aspects of philosophy in the early twenty-first century: funding, faculty responsibilities, and curriculum.

The question is in part a matter of scale. Long accustomed to operating at the micro scale (the isolated philosopher) while dreaming of the macro scale (the philosopher king) the opportunities before us lie on the meso scale, in being what might be called the philosopher bureaucrat. I grant that this is a term that few will find inspiring. Who dreams of their child growing up to be a bureaucrat? But 'philosopher bureaucrats' (or whatever other name you choose instead) represent a signal opportunity: philosophers who work at the institutional level, in the public and private sectors, on live problems, in real time (Frodeman 2007; Frodeman et al. 2012). The opportunities range from the local to the international. In the case of the team that I am part of, we have

practiced a kind of inter- and transdisciplinary, and thus dedisciplinary philosophical research for the last 15 years. We have helped public agencies in the United States and abroad address problems surrounding acid mine drainage, climate change, the 'broader impacts' of science, the peer review of grants, and the epistemological and political issues surrounding natural gas drilling.[1]

This essay, then, explores a missing element of twentieth century philosophy. Whether through insufficient creativity, or failure of will, twentieth century philosophy misapplied itself.[2] Twentieth century philosophy overwhelmingly functioned as a discipline—as a regional ontology in principle no different from any other discipline across the academy. In so doing it produced a great deal of interesting philosophical work. But it also missed crucial opportunities, such as being the integrating element across the disciplines, and engaging in a policy-oriented philosophical practice.

Finally, a word about the geographical scope of this argument. My experience is largely based in the United States; and the survey we created limited itself to philosophy departments across Anglophone North America, for reasons of time and cost. This essay thus focuses on the situation in the United States. But with proper adjustments the points made here should have wider salience.

1 The status quo ante

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche describes the dilemma facing philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century:

> The dangers for a philosopher's development are indeed so manifold today that one may doubt whether this fruit can still ripen at all. The scope and the tower-building of the sciences has grown to be enormous, and with this the probability that the philosopher grows weary while still learning or allows himself to be detained somewhere to become a 'specialist':–so he never attains his proper level, the height for a comprehensive look, for looking around, for looking down. Or he attains it too late, when his best time and strength are spent—or impaired, coarsened, degenerated, so that his overall value judgment does not mean much anymore. It may be precisely the sensitivity of his intellectual conscience that leads him to delay somewhere along the way and to be late: he is afraid of the seduction to become a dilettante… (Nietzsche 1886, p. 134)

These words, written in 1886, read ironically today. The challenges faced by anyone who seeks the "height for a comprehensive look" has grown by orders of magnitude. We are awash in a vast sea of knowledge.

Nietzsche's remark, however, has elicited little response within the philosophical literature. The philosophical community has responded to the massive growth of knowledge by embracing Adam Smith's division of labor. Overwhelmingly, philosophical

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[1] Accounts of this work can be found at our website, www.csid.unt.edu.

[2] The term is used deliberately. There is not space to make the argument now, but the twentieth century tradition of applied philosophy, rather than being an exception to my claims, exemplifies the problems discussed here.

work today consists of the work of specialists—intricate analyses that make incremental additions to the literature within one or another philosophical subfield, written in prose understandable only to disciplinary peers.

Consider a sample of titles (all since 2005) from three prominent philosophical journals:

Philosophical Studies

- exemplarization and self-presentation: Lehrer and Meinong on consciousness;
- why Parfit did not go far enough; and
- person-affecting views and saturating counterpart relations.

Philosophical Review

- accuracy, chance, and the principal principle;
- on the supposed inconceivability of absent qualia functional duplicates—a reply to Tye; and
- epistemic invariantism and speech act contextualism.

Journal of Philosophy

- intrasubjective intentional identity;
- the subtraction argument for metaphysical nihilism; and
- actualist essentialism and general possibilities.

None of these titles are understandable to members of the educated public, or even to a PhD outside the field of philosophy. (Indeed, with a PhD in philosophy, the majority of these titles are obscure to me.) This is one indication of what it means for philosophy to have become a discipline. Compare the situation with that of another field, such as chemistry. Chemistry is a limited domain—a regional ontology—filled with technical work. It is reasonable that most of us will not be able to decipher the papers in a leading journal. Not everyone can, or should be, a chemist. But everyone is faced with philosophical questions across the course of their life—a fact that should be reflected in leading philosophy journals.[3]

To be clear: I am not suggesting that the work of specialists should not count as philosophy. But it is philosophy of a particular, disciplinary type. If it is to be true to its historical self-understanding, philosophy must consist of roughly equal parts internal and external thinking—in-house conversations, *and* comprehensive accounts of issues shared with those outside the disciplinary philosophical community. The two elements complement one another; each element strengthens the other. In contrast, the dominance of disciplinary philosophy is indicative of a failure that is itself philosophical in nature.[4]

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[3] In an article he wrote for *Newsday* titled "Has Philosophy Lost Contact with People?" W.V.O. Quine notes: "think of organic chemistry; I recognize its importance, but I am not curious about it, nor do I see why the layman should care about much of what concerns me in philosophy." I am indebted to Douglas B. Quine for this citation.

[4] My point, a general one, admits of a number of exceptions, some of which I will discuss below. But these exceptions, to the degree that they *are* exceptions, do not affect the fact that the disciplinary nature of philosophy has not itself been a topic of twentieth century philosophical reflection.

2 The history of a prejudice

How did disciplinary philosophy come to be the unquestioned standard for the field?
From the founding of Harvard College in 1636 until the late nineteenth century, college
education was rooted in the liberal arts. Men attended college as part of an accultura-
tion process that prepared them for roles in the upper echelons of society. Vocational
training, whether in medicine, the church, or the law, was fundamentally philosophical
in nature. Scientific training—such as it was; there were no experiment-based clas-
ses—consisted of natural philosophy, a speculative field that sought to reveal God's
purpose by studying the world he created.

Such an education grew increasingly inadequate in post-Civil War America. The
United States was industrializing, cities were growing, and railroads and telegraphs
were creating a national market for goods and information. Society needed people
trained in business and the mechanical arts, which were themselves becoming increas-
ingly scientific in nature. In the midst of the Civil War the Morrill Act (1862) gave
federal land over to states to establish "land grant" colleges—the first were Michi-
gan State and Penn State—that focused on the teaching of science, agriculture, and
engineering.

This was a shift from higher education's historic core of the liberal arts. Such schools
may have been dismissed as 'cow colleges' by those at elite institutions, but this did
not hinder the latter's movement in the same direction: Dartmouth founded the Tha-
yer School of Engineering in 1867, Columbia established the Mechanical Engineering
Department in 1897, and Harvard created its Business School in 1908.

Philosophers reacted to the late nineteenth century redefinition of the social role of
knowledge in the same way as every other type of academic: management by subdi-
vision of tasks. But by doing so, philosophy walked away from its Socratic heritage.
Once involved with citizens from all walks of life, posing questions while rejecting
professions of expertise, philosophers now subdivided their tasks and wrote specialist's
tracks for one another. (Thoreau anticipated the shift: "There are nowadays professors
of philosophy, but not philosophers.") Communication with non-professionals became
a sign of a lack of seriousness. The translation of philosophical concepts to different
contexts was considered the 'dumbing down' of material for the unlettered.

Periodic attempts to break out of these confines failed to take institutional hold: in
the US, commentary on larger societal questions were discouraged, first by World War
II and then by the chill of the Cold War (Reisch 2005). Punished for questioning politi-
cal norms, American philosophers instead made a virtue of public silence (McCumber
2001). Serious philosophizing meant weaving recondite arguments within scholastic
debates.

Today we can spot signs of change. Prominent philosophers call for philosophy to
be turned "inside out," challenging the decades-long fascination with the philosophi-
cal equivalent of an "ornamented *Quadruple Tremolo 41* with an extra trill" (Kitcher
2011). In 2010 the *New York Times* launched a blog called *The Stone* that features short
philosophical essays directed toward a literate audience. A number of recent confer-
ences have been held in the US and elsewhere on the question of the public role of
philosophy, including the New Practices of Philosophy and the Engaging Philosophy
conferences in March of 2011 and the Public Philosophy Network meeting in October

of 2011.[5] And one can point to signs of institutional change—at the School of Public Policy at Georgia Tech, where philosophers are part of an interdisciplinary faculty; at ethics institutes such as the Center for Global Ethics at George Mason University and the Rock Ethics Institute at Penn State; in the Department of Philosophy and Religion Studies at the University of North Texas, where professors with PhDs in fields other than philosophy form part of the department; as well as at Arizona State University, which has philosophers scattered across the campus.

So far, however—as the survey results discussed below will relate—this movement has not penetrated the institutional heart of the discipline. PhD programs are not being redesigned to include training in how to write NSF grants. There are few if any undergraduate or graduate courses that train students to work at the project level with non-philosophers. And there is little or no philosophical literature that explores how our standards for philosophical excellence need to adjust to different audiences and circumstances. Nietzsche's question—whether a conceptual space exists between those who "lose themselves in wretched nooks and crannies," and dilettantism—goes unexplored.

3 Practical dangers, theoretical limitations

The problem is larger than the dominance of recondite philosophical arguments directed toward 'insiders'. The inevitability of a disciplinary approach to philosophy is not only an abdication of something like half of our philosophical legacy—think of Socrates, Bacon, and Leibniz as just a few of the philosophers who took their thinking out into the world. It is also dangerous to our future. Higher education is on the cusp of major transformation, driven by the defunding of the public university, technological innovation, and changing societal expectations. Cost overruns, privatization, and the Internet are undermining the twentieth century model of higher education.

The changes to come are ones that humanists are not going to like. For instance, Governor Perry of Texas has recently called for the creation of a four year undergraduate degree that costs no more than $10,000, using a mixture of 'blended' (classroom plus online) education (Chronicle 2011). At Texas A&M, professors are now given a bottom-line value where their salaries are compared against how much research money they generate and how much revenue they bring in from teaching (Patal 2010). Nor do the examples only come from Texas. In the face of severe budget cuts the President of the University of Nevada proposed closing the philosophy department. (An updated plan calls for merely removing all non-tenured professors in philosophy, anthropology, and sociology, in lieu of the elimination of philosophy; Etchison 2011) And the president of Howard University has recommended shuttering its philosophy department.

Of course, these problems do not only bedevil philosophy. When states such as Pennsylvania threaten to cut appropriations by 52 % at their flagship institution (Penn State) the axe must fall somewhere (Central Daily Times 2011). Arguing for the inher-

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[5] In the UK and Europe this trend is further along, exemplified by *The Philosopher's Magazine* and *HowTheLightGetsIn*, an annual philosophy and music festival in Wales.

ent value of philosophy will provide protection at elite institutions, even if at the cost of theoretical renewal. But publicly funded universities need to provide a better account of what philosophy and the humanities contribute to society.

The challenge is at once theoretic and institutional. Institutionally, any philosophy program that struck out in a new, dediscic... new, dediscic... new, dediscic... new, dediscic direction would face the challenge of whether it could place its graduates. Of course, this is mostly an issue for PhD programs; undergraduates are less likely to hurt by curricular innovation. But concerns about the job market are misplaced. There are now hundreds of applicants for the typical position in philosophy; what would be lost by experimentation?

Like their predecessors, twentieth century philosophers prided themselves on their tradition of radical doubt. But they failed to ask questions about the institutional home of their thinking, the concept of the "department." Departments have been treated as a natural kind, with no thought being given to how departmental life shaped research priorities or how other institutional arrangements might spur other types of philosophical inquiry. Writing philosophy papers for other philosophers, and living in departments was (somehow) the natural order of things. In French, *départir* means to divide: departments divide knowledge into discrete bundles. In framing knowledge in terms of disciplines, universities assumed that the connections *within* an area of knowledge were more essential than the connections *across* areas of knowledge, or between knowledge producers and the larger society. But a central role of philosophy has always been its function as the integrating element of thinking.

These arrangements remain a blind spot. One might think that Cohen and Dascal's 1989 collection of essays on *The Institution of Philosophy* would broach questions about the institutional status of the field. But the book fails to even mention the institutional arrangements of philosophy (!). Instead, it addresses the theoretical implications of post-modern critiques of philosophy. Similarly, in the introduction of his 2007 volume *The Future for Philosophy,* editor Brian Leiter raises the "meta-philosophical" question of what one does when one is "*doing* philosophy." It turns out, however, that doing philosophy means "*doing* philosophy of mind, language, and science, as well as ethics, epistemology, feminist philosophy, and the history of philosophy" (emphases in the original). A new social role for philosophy is not even contemplated.

This disciplinary commitment, established at the turn of the last century, was little remarked upon even at the time. American philosophy in 1900 was in a confused and marginal condition. The natural sciences were flourishing, and the social sciences were successfully establishing themselves within the academy. Philosophers were unsure of their place within the university—or whether they had any place at all. When the American Psychological Association was formed in 1892 it included a sizable segment of philosophers. But by the end of the century psychologists had found philosophers to be insufficiently scientific, and expelled them (Bordogna 2008).

In response, in 1901 philosophers formed the American Philosophical Association. This second APA faced the question of how to define the professional status of philosophers. There were a number of options. Philosophers could be synthesizers of academic knowledge, offering a global perspective on knowledge. They could be formalists, providing the logical undergirding for researchers across the academy. They could become disciplinary specialists who focused on distinctively philosophical problems in ethics, epistemology, aesthetics, and the like. They could be interdisciplinary

and transdisciplinary generalists who sought to translate insights to other branches of the academy and to the world at large. Or they could be a non-positivistic version of the social sciences, addressing the ethics and values dimensions of societal problems.

All of these positions were in play at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. What wasn't debated, however, was whether this metaphilosophical question should itself be institutionalized within philosophy. There was little sense that a debate between these different positions was a necessary *philosophical* discussion that should be continuously revisited, for the health of both the profession and society.

In the event, the specialists and the formalists triumphed. This despite the complaints of as respected a thinker as William James. James served as president of both the American Psychological Association (in 1894) and the American Philosophical Association (in 1906). In his 1906 presidential address, "The Energies of Men" James offered a vision of philosophy that included space for public concerns as well as those of philosophical specialists (Bordogna 2008):

> Every one is familiar with the phenomenon of feeling more or less alive on different days. Every one knows on any given day that there are energies slumbering in him which the incitements of that day do not call forth, but which he might display if these were greater. Most of us feel as if we lived habitually with a sort of cloud weighing on us, below our highest notch of clearness in discernment, sureness in reasoning, or firmness in deciding.

Rather than an account of the most recent advances in academic philosophy, James' talk offered a philosophical account of an existential challenge faced by all of us. James' talk mixed philosophy and functional psychology, technical points with general concerns. But James' account, while noticed by the literate public, fell on deaf ears professionally. He was unable to slow the drive toward disciplinary expertise. Philosophers abandoned what James called 'general philosophy' for an exclusive focus on 'technical philosophy.' Frustrated with the "bald-headed and bald-hearted" younger philosophers who surrounded him, James sought to embody instead an inter- and transdisciplinary approach to philosophy, crossing borders both between disciplines, and between the academy and society at large. In effect, James offered a fundamental ontology of philosophy itself. But his choice put him at odds with a philosophical community seeking to expel philosophical dabblers and secure its autonomy behind walls of expertise.

James' Presidential address implicitly posed metaphilosophical questions. Across the twentieth century metaphilosophy mainly consisted of an occasional review of the work plan for the core areas of philosophy. I hope to have made it clear that for both philosophical and pragmatic reasons, metaphilosophy today needs to include reflection on, and practical experiments in, the relationship of philosophy with society. This means working out the theoretical and practical details of: how philosophers work with and write for non-philosophers; the pluses and minuses of housing philosophers (and humanists) in different departments, companies, and public agencies; and the means and methods for philosophical case-work in the public and private sectors. Linking the theoretical and institutional aspects of our work, and expanding our philosophical

home beyond the department, should cause philosophers to revise what they think about, in what venues, with what outputs, at what cost, to what standards of rigor, and for what audiences.

There is of course a tradition of philosophers who have acted as public intellectuals. John Dewey spent two years (1919–1921) traveling and lecturing in China, and along with Albert Einstein and Alvin Johnson was a member of the International League for Academic Freedom. More recently Richard Rorty, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Cornel West have filled the role of public intellectual. But the philosopher qua public intellectual fulfills only a small part of what philosophers can do out in the world. And serving as a public intellectual implies little or nothing about the theoretical questions that surround bringing philosophy into the world. These theoretical dimensions include a rethinking of what counts as expertise, rigor, and excellence. Our understanding of philosophical rigor should be responsive to parameters such as the need for timeliness, sensitivity to context, and rhetorical skill in communicating with multiple audiences. This also implies that we could rank philosophy departments on measures other than publication counts in philosophy journals—such as by the number of grants awarded, students employed as philosophers in the public or private sector, or mentions in the press.

Granted, dedisciplining philosophy has its dangers. By moving about in the larger world, philosophy could compromise its function as social critic, or become captured by powerful interests. Or in speaking truth to power, we could be forced to drink hemlock (or more likely today, cause a program to be defunded by an outraged state senator). But such concerns simply highlight the need and the opportunity for new philosophical work, in that each of these problems are *philosophical* problems. In any case, clinging to the status quo in the name of academic freedom and philosophical rigor is not only unsustainable. It is also irresponsible. Philosophers, like any professional group, have an obligation to serve the community. We need to embody our own professional code of ethics.

4 Philosophy of/as interdisciplinarity

Working with members of other disciplines, and with those outside the academy, means that philosophers practice an inter- and transdisciplinary approach to knowledge. Of course, talk of interdisciplinary has been the rage for two decades now. Contemporary discussions of interdisciplinarity typically turn on the question of identifying the proper methodology for integrating across the disciplines (e.g., Repko 2008). But this is a distraction: 'interdisciplinarity' should be seen an indicator. It is a yet-unfulfilled signal of the fact that the twentieth century approach to managing knowledge is breaking down. Disciplinary knowledge has become the victim of both its failures and successes: on the one hand too obscure and impotent, and on the other too culturally powerful to remain depoliticized (Frodeman 2011). The age of inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge will be one where the connections between knowledge production and uses will be at the center of academic life.

It is difficult to resist the gravitational pull of the disciplines. Within interdisciplinary studies, concerns with demonstrating that interdisciplinary work is theoretically

rigorous has led to the afore-mentioned focus on questions of methodology. The irony is that this focus has occurred at the same time that the philosophical community has largely abandoned the search for a scientific method, i.e., the demarcation problem that once so troubled philosophers of science. The result has been 'disciplinary capture'—the tendency of even avowedly post-disciplinary research (in e.g., science and technology studies, policy studies, and now research into interdisciplinary) to devolve into another regional ontology with another new breed of experts.

To combat this tendency it helps to hold onto the difference between the philosophy *of* interdisciplinarity and philosophy *as* interdisciplinarity. The philosophy of interdisciplinarity denotes a domain of specialists who address questions such as whether 'interdisciplinarity' carries any distinctive epistemic content and whether there are distinctive interdisciplinary objects such as consciousness (Schmidt 2010). The philosophy of interdisciplinarity treats interdisciplinarity like other 'philosophies of x'— an area for experts, whose work will over time result in a scholarly, peer-reviewed literature, workshops, conferences, journals and the like.[6]

In contrast, philosophy *as* interdisciplinarity involves a theory and practice directed toward developing an inter- and dedisciplined approach to philosophizing. It begins in practice, with philosophers working as part of a team with scientists, engineers, and policy makers, community groups and NGOs. It begins with problems in the world as defined by non-philosophers. And it is unapologetically ameliorative in nature. Rather than searching for a 'solution,' it seeks to make situations better than they were before.

Philosophy as interdisciplinarity also raises a distinctive set of theoretical—better said, metaphilosophical—questions for philosophers. Of course philosophy should strive to be rigorous; but beyond disciplinary walls philosophy must also be timely, rhetorically appropriate, and cost-effective. What happens to our notion of (disciplinary) expertise in post-disciplinary circumstances? What counts as appropriate rigor when we must strike a balance between depth of analysis, cost, timeliness, and societal relevance? Call it field philosophy, on analogy with field science rather than lab science (Frodeman 2010).

True to its Socratic roots, dedisciplined philosophy is epistemologically modest in character. Philosophy becomes interstitial and ameliorative in nature. Rather than 'fixing' problems, it seeks to make them a little more manageable. Dedisciplined philosophy does not ignore theoretical questions; this essay, for instance, counts as a work of theory. But its theory is rooted in and always returns to a philosophical practice out in the world, a world that makes its own demands on philosophy.

In the early days of the research university there was a certain efficacy to be drawn from disciplining knowledge; some problems can be treated as discrete in nature. The elimination of smallpox is a good thing, even if it did lead to a number of unanticipated consequences, not all of which were desirable. The problem lies in confusing relatively small-scale, deterministic results (eliminating smallpox) with the utterly unpredictable and uncontrollable larger-scale effects of such actions, such as increased resistance to antibiotics, or an explosion in human population (Allenby and Sarewitz 2011).

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[6] See the 2009 formation of PIN, the Philosophy of/as Interdisciplinarity Network, at http://pin-net.gatech.edu/.

Disciplinarity and expertise are thus increasingly dubious in a complex, imbricated, and non-linear world. Problems do not fit within well-policed boundaries. In *Adapt* (2011), Tim Hartford cites the results of a study of expert prediction of socio-political events. The conclusion reached by the study was not that education is worthless; researchers did better than a control group of undergraduates. But "predictions about Russia from experts on Russia were no more accurate than predictions about Russia from experts on Canada" (p. 7). Expertise, it seems, has limits beyond which it is pointless, or even counterproductive. Distance and perspective can be more relevant than mastery of details.

But such points threaten the architecture of modern knowledge production—and the political discourse that it legitimates. If knowledge is fundamentally disciplinary, that is, technical in nature, then the political realm can appeal to scientific conclusions as decisive and objective facts that politicians have no choice but to follow. (They can also, as Sarewitz 1996 notes, continue to fund science with the objective of putting off hard political decisions until 'the facts are in'.) But when problems cannot be disciplined the cult of expertise is exposed. Academics lose their unquestionable claim to authority, and politicians lose their ability to hide behind science. The conclusion to draw is not that everything becomes a matter of subjective opinion as we lose ourselves in epistemological and cultural relativism. The loss of an easy distinction between facts and values, experts and laypeople, at least for many topics, means that we are going to have to think "from probable premises to conclusions that are no better."[7] To put the point in another way, we have to face up to the fact that societal challenges are often deeply philosophical in nature.

5 The survey

If we want to imagine a different, more institutionally aware future for philosophy, it would help to have data on the current state of things. A survey would offer a means for grounding reflections in empirical data. And so in 2010 our research team created a survey to collect information on topics of interest to the philosophical community and to academics generally. We sought data on the institutional status of philosophy that other entities (e.g., the American Philosophical Association, the Directory of American Philosophers) had not gathered concerning tenure, funding, and the growth and diminution of fields within philosophy. The survey was designed and disseminated by the Center for the Study of Interdisciplinarity (CSID) at the University of North Texas. CSID research focuses on two themes: developing a theory or philosophy of interdisciplinarity, and exploring the dedisciplining of philosophy in the twenty-first century.

In 2005, the State of Texas approved the application of the Department of Philosophy and Religion Studies at the University of North Texas for awarding the PhD degree. At that time I was the chair of the department. Well aware of the dismal job market, we sought information on the state of graduate education in philosophy across the US. This was in part to help in the design of our new PhD program, but also to

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[7] The quote is from Aristotle's *Nicomachian Ethics*, Book 1, Chapter 3.

further our examination of the institutional aspects of philosophy. Over time we had
collected a large amount of information about the state of the discipline via personal
contacts, conversations at conferences, and the like; but we needed information that
rose above the level of anecdote. In 2008 I stepped down as chair to be the found-
ing director of CSID. With the hiring of social scientist Steven Hrotic within CSID in
2009 we had the skills needed for creating a survey. (For a more detailed accounting of
survey results, including an account of survey methodology, see Hrotic forthcoming.)

Overall, the questions we posed in the survey were directed toward understanding
the disciplinary versus the interdisciplinary nature of philosophy today. We wanted to
learn something about the degree to which philosophy might be inter- and dediscipin-
ing in the face of various pressures. The process of dediscipining could show itself
in a number of ways—for instance, in the development of new courses, in working
with other disciplines, in applying for sponsored research at public science agencies,
or training undergraduates and graduates to work outside professional philosophy.

The survey was sent to 568 departments (94 with graduate programs, 474 without)
across Anglophone North America in the late summer of 2010.[8] 209 departments
responded. We ended up with 177 usable responses (39 from graduate programs, 138
from undergraduate-only programs; some did not finish the survey), a response rate
of 31 %.[9]

Survey questions group under three headings: funding, faculty composition and
responsibilities, and curricula are as follows.

5.1 Funding

The survey posed two questions about budget trends. The first asked how financial sup-
port at the respondent's institution had changed in the past decade. The second asked
whether pressure for attracting outside money or sponsored research was manifesting
itself in philosophy departments.

As state support for higher education has dropped (e.g., in the University of Col-
orado system, the state in 2012 supplied 5.7 % of the budget), money from federal
sources such as NSF and NIH has become an increasingly important source of rev-
enue. Ironically, it is far from clear that the funds provided for overhead or 'indirect
costs' cover the actual costs of research (Newfield 2009). What's more, the pursuit of
sponsored research can be a zero sum game, as state appropriations are reduced to the
same degree that federal support increases. Finally, given a growing federal budget
crisis, it is unclear how long costs can be shifted to the federal government.

Despite the high profile cases discussed above, we were surprised to find that as a
whole philosophy seems to have thus far significant avoided budget cuts. Participants

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[8] Simply deciding where to send the survey presented a challenge, since "philosophy" can describe a diverse
group of academic departments (e.g., 'philosophy and history departments; 'humanities' departments'). By
one measure, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 7,001 undergraduate degrees were
awarded in philosophy in 2007–2008. Over the same period 1,179 graduate degrees in philosophy and 1,335
in related fields were awarded. By another count (Fiegener and NSF 2009), 423 individuals gained a PhD
in philosophy in 2009.

[9] The survey can be accessed at http://www.csid.unt.edu/files/CSID_PHILsurvey_2010.pdf.
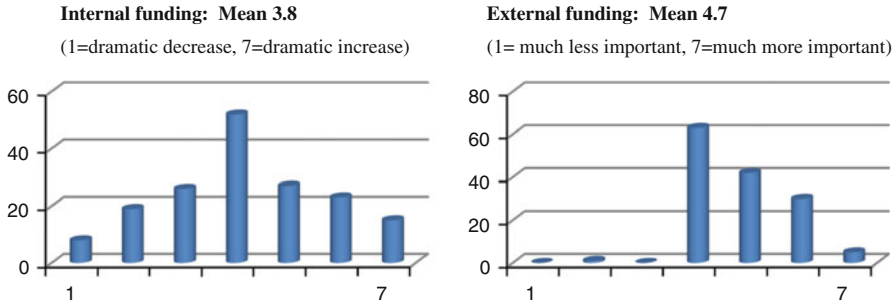
Internal funding: Mean 3.8

(1=dramatic decrease, 7=dramatic increase)

External funding: Mean 4.7

(1= much less important, 7=much more important)

Fig. 1 Funding trends over the previous 10 years. Number of respondents on the *y*-axis and their assessment on the *x*-axis
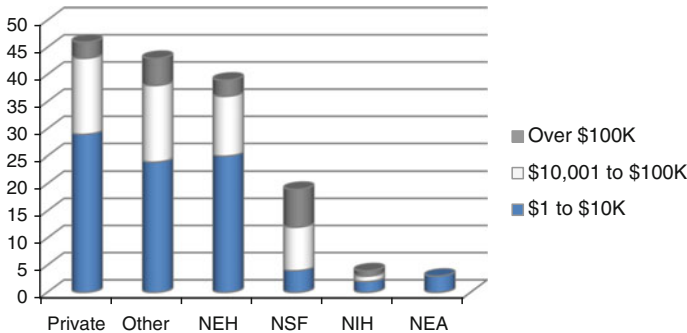

Fig. 2 Of the 177 responses, the number of philosophy departments who receive grants, by agency and amount over the previous 10 years

report that internal funding has remained generally constant (i.e., the graph expresses a bell curve across the seven categories from 'dramatic decrease' to 'dramatic increase'; see Fig. 1). Secondly, pressure for attracting external funding has clearly increased (Fig. 2).

Despite additional pressure to pursue sponsored research, there is little evidence suggesting that it has thus far translated into a higher numbers of grants. Over half (51%) of the philosophy departments that responded received no external funding. Less than a third received any significant (more than $10,000 annually) external financial support (see Fig. 2). A minority, however, receive substantial external support, and a small number of departments (5–10) have grants of $100,000 or more.

The most common sources of external funding are "private funding agency" and "other funding source," (e.g., donors or endowments). This is followed (in descending order) by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The number of departments with NSF funding is low: only 19 of 177 departments, or 11%, compared to 46 (or 26%) who receive grants from private sources. The average NSF award is relatively high: 7 departments received awards of $100,000 or more, including two with grants of more than $250,000. In comparison, none of the departments who participated in this research received an NEA grant of more than $10,000.

Philosophy departments did predict increased application rates over the next decade for all six sources of agency funding listed, especially for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH): 61 % have applied in the past decade, and 70 % say they will apply in the next. This highlights an opportunity that is being missed. The National Science Foundation (2010 budget, $7.4 bil) offers numerous funding opportunities on the broader impacts of scientific research. For philosophers interested in interdisciplinary research combining epistemology, ethics, values, science, and policy concerns, the opportunities at NSF dwarf those at the NEH (2010 budget, $146 mil, a 50th of NSF's budget).

5.2 Faculty composition and responsibilities

Paralleling worries about funding are concerns about whether universities will be forced to reduce tenure track positions. Overall, since 1970 universities have come to increasingly rely on lecturers, adjuncts, and graduate students to carry the departmental teaching load. Reflecting on this trend, some writers (e.g., Taylor 2010) envision the end of tenure, pointing out tenure is already a thing of the past for the majority of those teaching in higher education. Already 65 % of academic positions are non-tenure stream, a number that has been steadily growing for years (JBL Associates 2008).

Our survey thus asked participants about changes in faculty composition over the last 10 years (Fig. 3).

While participants reported roughly the same numbers of faculty in every category (tenured, tenure-track, lecturers, adjuncts, and graduate students with teaching duties) compared to ten years ago, surprisingly there was some evidence of growth across the
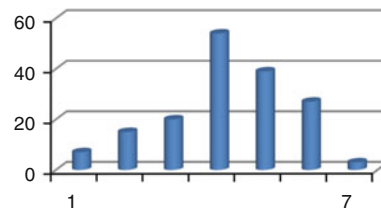
Tenured faculty: Mean 4.2
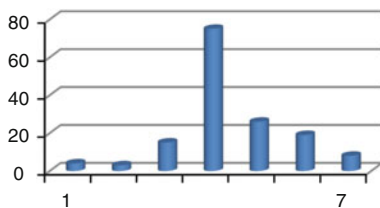(1=dramatic decrease, 4 =same, 7=dramatic increase)
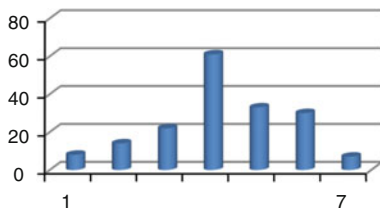
Tenure track faculty: Mean 4.2
(1=dramatic decrease, 4=same, 7=dramatic increase)

Adjuncts: Mean 4.4
(1=dramatic decrease, 7=dramatic increase)

Lecturers: Mean 4.3
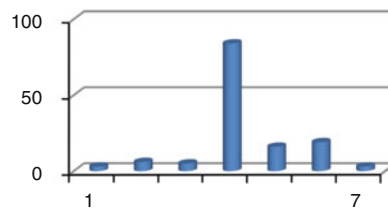(1=dramatic decrease, 7=dramatic increase)

Fig. 3 Changes in faculty composition over the last 10 years

Table 1 Faculty
cross-appointments

#	Department	#	Department
10	Women's/Gender Studies	3	Medical/Health
9	Classics	3	Languages
8	Political Science/Government	2	African American Studies
8	Psychology/Cognitive Sci.	2	Bioethics
5	English/Literature	2	Biology
5	Environmental Studies	2	Computer Science
4	Law	2	Jewish Studies
3	Business/Management	2	Social Science
3	History	2	Linguistics

board, in tenured, tenure track, adjunct, and lecturer positions. Despite the high profile closures mentioned above, cuts do not seem to have yet hit the majority of philosophy departments. Indeed, compared with general trends of the last 40 years, philosophy departments represent an anomaly.

We also asked questions about what was expected of philosophers. Were their responsibilities confined to the philosophy department? To what degree did their activities range further afield? Chairs were also asked to summarize current criteria for tenure and promotion.

46 % of our respondents have at least one faculty member with a cross appointment. 9 % have more than two. Of the cross-appointments reported, approximately 20 % indicate either a subject that may sometimes be included within philosophy departments (e.g., classics, religion) or a broader division inclusive of philosophy (e.g., humanities, liberal arts). The most common cross appointments listed are, in decreasing frequency (Table 1).

Interdisciplinary connections are thus mostly local, in fields closely related to philosophy. There were no reported cross appointments with chemistry, physics, or with any of the branches of engineering, or with communications, and only tangential connections to policy (e.g., "political science"). That is, there was no evidence of wide cross-disciplinary efforts to connect philosophers with researchers in other colleges to help with the ethics and values dimensions of their work.

Participants were also asked to rate the importance of ten different criteria for faculty promotion on a 5-point Likert scale. As expected, teaching and publishing were the two most important criteria. The ability to attract funding and applied research ranked at the bottom, below mentoring, publishing outside philosophy journals, interdisciplinary experience (see Fig. 4).

While university pressure to attract external funding was mentioned, and some departments have been successful in attracting funds,[10] others claimed the pursuit of grants "has not proven workable for philosophy." Several departments describe funding as increasing in importance for tenure, but also report "there is controversy
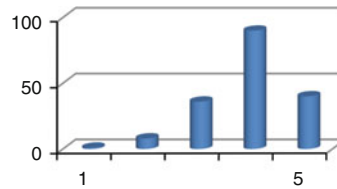
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[10] In the Department of Philosophy and Religion Studies at the University of North Texas sponsored research has increased by two orders of magnitude over the last 10 years.
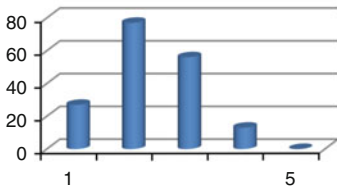
Teaching: Mean 4.5
(1=not relevant, 3= considered, 5=extremely important)
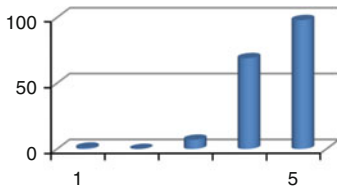
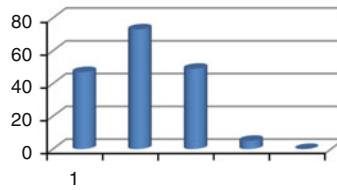**Publishing in philosophy journals: Mean 3.9**
(1=not relevant, 3=considered, 5=extremely important)

Applied research: Mean 2.3
(1=not relevant, 5=extremely important)

Ability to attract external funding: Mean 2.1
(1=not relevant, 5=extremely important)

Fig. 4 Relative importance of tenure criteria

about how much external funding should count, probably because there are so few opportunities in philosophy."

Participants also indicated that tenure criteria have remained about the same for the past decade. For undergraduate departments teaching was the single most important criteria; many participants prefaced their answers by emphasizing that, whatever other changes may have been made, teaching remained most important. The most common response was to report the increased importance of scholarship, including research and publication.

Finally, we asked participants how stable these criteria have been. Of those that responded, 58 % described changes in the tenure promotion criteria. However, there was no broad pattern evident in these responses: four describe Service as more important, three describe it as less; three said the importance of Teaching has gone up, four said it has gone down.

5.3 Curricula

Is the next generation of philosophers being trained in ways that respond to the changing landscape of twenty-first society? Are new areas of philosophy being developed, as represented by faculty appointments? And what can we infer from the career component of curricula, in terms of what one can 'do' with a degree in philosophy?

The survey asked "How strongly represented are each of the following fields in your current tenure-stream faculty?" Participants were given a list of eleven commonly accepted subfields of philosophy, and were tasked with rating how well represented each was in their faculty using a seven-point Likert scale. A second, open-ended question asked how the fields represented had changed over the previous decade.

Table 2 Importance in graduate and undergraduate curricula

1st	Combining philosophy with experience in other disciplines
2nd	Discussion of role of philosophy in contemporary society
3rd	Actively collaborating with other departments
4th	Advice for a career in academia
5th	Advice for a career in the private sector
6th	Advice for a career in government
7th	Combining philosophy work with experiences outside academia
8th	Formal internships
9th	Training on applying for grants

The majority of participants (61 %) did not list any new courses; of the ones that did respond, as with tenure promotion criteria there was no overall trend (say, toward applied ethics, or interdisciplinary courses).

Another section of the survey asked about curricular elements that were dedicated to developing career possibilities. What are students being told that they can 'do' with a degree in philosophy? For example, students could follow a traditional teaching/disciplinary research trajectory; but philosophy students might also pursue external research funding opportunities, work with different disciplines, or seek employment as a philosopher outside of academia altogether.

Nine possibilities were considered. These are shown in Table 2 in decreasing order of reported prominence.

Survey results show that importance correlates with academic work: combining philosophy with other disciplines is more important than experiences outside academia; advice on academic careers is more common than advice on possible government careers. Note, however, that all of these were relatively unimportant: experience with other disciplines, though first on the above list, had an average score (Mean=4.5) just above the mid-point (4 = "about half of students encounter this") on the survey's 7-point Likert scale—below "required" (7 on our scale) and "strongly encouraged" (6).

We did find that undergraduate curricula in departments without a graduate program are more focused on the role of philosophy in contemporary society. When a department includes a graduate program, students' attention is directed towards academia; in undergraduate departments, students are more encouraged to situate themselves in the world outside academy. And even while graduate programs receive the lion's share of external funding, "training on applying for grants" is a nonexistent part of graduate curricula.

6 Conclusion

In 1879 G. Stanley Hall published an article in *Mind* on "Philosophy in the United States." Founded in 1876, *Mind* is on some accounts the first philosophy journal in the English-speaking world. The article was part of a series reviewing the state of philosophy in Britain, France, Germany, and America. Hall was a student of William James

who would eventually become the first president of Clark University. His essay offers a report on the "nearly 300 non-Catholic colleges" across the country. He describes 200 of them as so theologically driven as to reduce philosophy to the "rudimentary and medieval…. less than half a dozen colleges or universities in the United States where metaphysical thought is entirely freed from reference to theological formulæ" (Hall 1879).

The landscape of higher education was vastly different in 1879. But Hall's account shows that a disciplinary notion of philosophy was already taking hold. He surveys the state of the various specialties of philosophy (ethics, "theory of the syllogism," aesthetics, "mental philosophy", i.e., metaphysics and philosophy of mind, including Kant), and describes the leading professors at the leading institutions. There is no discussion of the place of philosophy in society or of the different roles philosophy could play in culture.

The state of North American philosophy circa 2010 is a straight-line extrapolation from 1879. Our survey results document the continuation of the status quo rather than this being a time of innovation in research, teaching, or social involvement. This is in part seems the result of the lack of external drivers. University funding for philosophy does not appear to be in decline; at least in the case of our respondents there even appears to be a slight increase in the number of faculty positions in philosophy. Tenure is fading from the scene generally, but we found no decline in tenure positions in philosophy over the last 10 years. To date, philosophy departments feel only marginal pressure to develop new revenue streams, or to change the nature of their training. There is no discernable culture of curricular innovation or new types of philosophical engagement. Despite some high profile problems, the picture is one of overall stasis.

Stasis can be taken as a sign of long-term stability; or it can be the marker of a sclerotic discipline unwilling or unable to adapt to changing circumstances. The survey did not canvas for changes in salary over the last 10 years, or ask after changes in class size, two areas in which there are signs that conditions are worsening. The job market in philosophy remains abysmal, but it has been so since the 1970s, and thus has become the new normal. Conditions—financial, political, intellectual—may be marginally improving, or perhaps getting worse, but any such changes are occurring at a rate slow enough to suggest that there is no immanent sense of crisis within the profession.

This seems remarkably shortsighted. To explain why, consider the following anecdote.

In 1990 I quit a tenure track position in philosophy. With no real plan of what to do next, I moved to Boulder, with a vague idea of writing a phenomenology of hiking the Grand Canyon. In preparation, I took some geology courses at the University of Colorado. Studying stratigraphy and sedimentology seemed freeing, poetic, and deeply philosophical. Geology is hermeneutics in the field: sedimentary rocks are palimpsests, oceans laid on top of deserts on top of mountains, invisible landscapes that inhabit our lives in hidden ways.

I ended up in the masters program in geology. But I soon discovered that the grand traditions of nineteenth century field geology were dying. The recession of the late '80s had hit the field hard. Colleges were closing geology majors across the country. Moreover, the field was going digital, turning to satellite imagery and remote sensing,

developing GIS maps in computer labs rather than drawing maps in the shade of a cottonwood tree. I remember the shock in my geological colleagues' voices as they discussed the shutting of entire geology departments. Geologists couldn't believe that long-established programs could be so easily cast aside for reasons of technological innovation and budget.

Could philosophy experience a like fate? It should be clear that higher education is on the cusp of massive change. The cost of higher education now rises faster than health care costs (Weissman 2012), at the same time that new technologies raise the possibility of radically reducing the cost of providing an education. In the spring of 2012 MIT and Harvard announced plans for creating an online platform to create MOOCs—massive open online courses that freely offer courses from both universities. This platform will include both engineering and humanities courses; for the latter, "essays might be graded through crowd-sourcing, or assessed with natural-language software" (Lewin 2012). What will happen to State U when these elite institutions find a way to 'monetize' these course offerings?

Philosophy, and the humanities in general, need alternatives to the Harvard model of education. Let elite institutions pursue disciplinary philosophy in a twentieth century manner. But let us also develop new models of philosophy for the distinctive challenges we will face in the twenty-first century. Philosophers working at state universities have distinctive responsibilities to their fellow citizens—not to pander, but to critically address topics that touch their lives. Philosophy will never become entirely practical; there should always be spaces for interior contemplation. But by addressing societal concerns we will find new opportunities for our contemplative nature to spread its wings—while discharging our ancient role as societal gadfly.

I have sought here to make a two-sided argument—that we should dediscipline philosophy for both pragmatic and theoretical or philosophical reasons. The fact that academic philosophical culture is not in clear decline does not change the overall state of higher education. Public funding continues to decline, tuition still rises at an unsustainable rate, and the industry is still susceptible to radical innovation via distance education, where degrees can be offered online at a fraction of the cost. Given these conditions, there are quite practical reasons to experiment with new ways to philosophize. Philosophy departments could pursue a no-regrets strategy, where they vie with one another to be as distinctive and inventive as possible, rather than all striving to become the philosophical equivalent of Harvard or NYU.

I do, however, find the theoretical reasons for dedisciplining philosophy even more compelling. Philosophy, and the humanities generally, should never have become disciplines. The research university should never have embraced, or enforced, a one-size-fits-all ontology. To speak with Heidegger, disciplines embody a regional ontology, with each working within unquestioned boundaries. But philosophy and the humanities need to shuttle between regional and fundamental ontology, detailed research and meta-theoretical questions. Rather than only practicing puzzle solving within established boundaries, the humanities are defined by the questioning, redrawing, and erasing of boundaries. Disciplining knowledge meant that larger questions of the whole, of goals and ends, were set aside. A merely disciplined philosophy, where philosophers primarily work with and write for other philosophers, is in the end no philosophy at all.

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