

Why Is So Much Philosophy So Tedious?

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Deciding on a topic for the Presidential Address is no easy task. There seem to be a number of models. First, the light philosophical pastiche – the philosophical equivalent of a soufflé. Not only has that been done before¹, but I could not think of a subject. Second, the standard philosophical paper, focusing in tightly on some tiny part of the picture – but there are plenty of those around (too many, as I shall later argue!) and, in any case, a Presidential Address appears to demand something special. Third, the philosophical world-view, panning back to get the whole picture. That might better fit the special nature of the occasion, but it is beyond my skill to outline the big picture in a small compass. Fourth, the humorous after-dinner speech, full of wit, satire, and repartee. My predecessor, Greg Ray, delivered the perfect example last year, and one cannot improve on perfection. So that leaves what we might call the broad rumination, the reflective musing on the state of the discipline. The style of pondering whose generic title might be: *Whither Philosophy?* This genre is beset with dangers, as Greg so wittily showed us. It is hard to avoid being pompous, vacuous, or fatuous – or even all three at once. But I'll have to risk that.

I had been wondering for a while why I find a good deal of contemporary philosophy so tedious when someone drew my attention to a column by Jo Wolff (Head of the Philosophy Department at University College London) in a British newspaper. It begins:

Why is academic writing so boring? I am impatient by nature, easily irritated, and afflicted with a short attention span. That I ended up in a job where I have to spend half the day blinking my way through artless, contorted prose is a cruel twist of fate. But the upside is that it gives me plenty of opportunity to reflect on why reading academic writing is so often a chore and so rarely a joy. Of course it is one of our more valuable chores. I tell my students that one reads academic work not for the pleasure of the moment but for what one comes away with. But still, a few moments of pleasure from time to time doesn't seem a lot to ask.²

He suggests that this is because, in literature, the narrative structure is only gradually revealed to the reader, creating tension.

He concludes:

At least in my subject, we teach students to go sub-zero on the tension scale: to give the game away right from the start. A detective novel written by a good philosophy student would begin: "In this novel I shall show that the butler did it." The rest will be just filling in the details.³

And here lies the rub. Academic writing needs to be ordered, precise, and to make every move explicit. All the work needs to be done on the page rather than in the reader's head. By contrast, good literature often relies on the unsaid, or the implied or hinted at, rather than the expressed thought. But as we tell our students: you will only get a mark for it if it is written down, however obvious, and however infantile it seems to spell it out. Such discipline applies all the way through, as the pressures of writing for peer-reviewed journals are much the same. To call a paper "thorough" is high praise.

Professional academic style, then, is formed early on, and reinforced thereafter. It is rather hard to escape the conclusion that academic writing is boring because academics wouldn't have it any other way. I'm going to be marked down, though, for not saying that at the start.

I agree with Wolff about the phenomenon, but I don't think the diagnosis is complete. We need to dig deeper. To begin with, Wolff in fact offers two diagnoses. The first is the lack of the element of surprise in philosophy. Although there is such a lack, that does not seem to be the locus of the problem. It is not the presence of surprise that keeps good writing from being tedious. Surprise may indeed be essential in mediocre detective stories, but not in other forms of literature. Who reads *Pride and Prejudice* to see if Elizabeth Bennett will marry Mr. Darcy? Who indeed seriously wonders, even on first reading, whether she might not? And the best detective stories – such as those of Conan Doyle or Dorothy Sayers – can survive re-reading. In philosophy, Plato's early dialogues would surely not be less enjoyable if they carried up front a warning to the reader: This dialogue ends in aporia.

The second diagnosis – that we train people to spell everything out in mind-numbing detail – seems to me closer to the mark. But on its own, that need not induce boredom. Take the writing of one of my philosophical heroes – C. D. Broad. Broad does not shrink from spelling out all the possibilities. This method reaches its apotheosis in *Mind and Its Place in Nature*, where he lists "seventeen different types of metaphysical theory on the relation between Mind and Matter" and

proceeds to analyze them.⁴ Yet I don't find Broad boring. He never loses sight of the important issues, and his many distinctions are significant and illuminating. Although Broad pays close attention to the trees he never loses sight of the wood.

Wolff suggests that it is not the content of philosophical writing that is at fault, but only the style. Recall that he still finds reading academic philosophy worthwhile. "It is one of our more valuable chores. I tell my students that one reads academic work not for the pleasure of the moment but for what one comes away with." I wish I could agree. If only it were *always* just the style, and the content was nevertheless valuable. Sometimes, of course, it is only the style that is at fault. Here's one of my favorite examples from someone who is normally a master of style – Bernard Williams. In his book on Descartes, Williams uses the word "situation" a dozen times on one page, the highlight being the following:

Confronted with an apparently bent stick, experience of refraction-illusions can put me on my guard – it is a special feature of the situation that it is an apparently-bent-stick situation, i.e. possibly a refraction-illusion situation. But since I can dream anything I can perceive, any situation, so far as its apparent constituents are concerned, could be a dream situation.⁵

Such inelegant writing is not what concerns me; it could easily be rewritten without loss of content. But style and content are often inseparable. The prose is flat, dull, and unimaginative because the thought is flat, dull, and unimaginative. I'm afraid that too often I find reading philosophy not only tedious, but a *valueless* chore. Unlike the genial and upbeat Jo Wolff, I come away with nothing, except feelings of frustration and irritation. This might be merely a sign of the increasing crankiness, and hardening of the cerebral arteries, that sometimes comes with age, but I think not. Now and again I come across a gem that reminds me how vibrant and exciting philosophy can be.⁶

There are, of course, a number of deplorable styles of philosophical writing. I'll outline a few, before focusing on the one that concerns me most. We might call the first "Oxford Obscurantism." The purpose of this style of writing is to impress readers with one's erudition and profundity. Never say something simply if it can be dressed up in contorted and tortured prose. Prime exemplars are Dummett, Peacocke, and in some veins, McDowell. It is not that they have nothing cogent to say – although it is sometimes hard to tell.⁷ It is just that they will not condescend to descend from their god-like sphere to the level of mere mortals and tell us plainly what they mean. Not that I should complain. I made my first mark in philosophy by translating McDowell's thought into English – but why couldn't someone have taught him English in the first place?

Secondly, there is the Soporific Style. Here the recipe is to take some genuinely interesting issue and expatiate on it at tedious length in a series of near platitudes, in a manner that drains it of

interest. I once agreed to review a book simply because of its intriguing title, *Moral Wisdom*. Here's one paragraph (characteristic of the style of the whole book) summing up the author's conclusions to date:

Moral wisdom is composed of the conception of a good life and the knowledge, evaluation, and judgment required for living in accordance with it. The knowledge is of good and evil as they affect ourselves and of the conditions, permanent and changing, that form the context within which we must do what we can to live according to our conception of a good life. The objects of our knowledge of good and evil are thus our character, permanent adversities, and the possibilities and limits set by the historical, social, political and economic realities surrounding us. The evaluation involves viewing particular aspects of our character, the actual contingencies, conflicts, and evil we face, the concrete opportunities we have, and the specific restrictions placed upon us in the light of our conception of a good life.⁸

This is not very gripping stuff, and the point could be made more clearly, simply, and forcefully, in about one-tenth of the words.⁹

Yet a third style we might call Slapdashery. Here the author is genuinely engaging with important and serious topics, shows lots of imagination, throws ideas out at amazing speed, but doesn't stop to define terms, or worry about such niceties as making oneself clear, or even removing contradictions. The message seems to be: what I have to say is so important that I haven't got time to worry about trifles like making myself clear or being consistent. An excessive absorption in Kant's moral philosophy sometimes seems to produce this effect.¹⁰ Maybe Slapdashers have something valuable to say – but, again, it is hard to tell.

The final style I want to look at is what we might call "Professional Technical." (This is, I suspect, the style to which Wolff was referring.) Here the writer sets out the problem with great clarity, is familiar with *all* the literature in the field (at least all the literature published in the last few years¹¹), canvasses all the alternatives, and produces a technically clever solution to the problem. Well, what could be wrong with that, one might ask. Haven't you just been complaining about insufficient clarity and rigor? Will nothing satisfy you?

Don't get me wrong. I'm all in favor of clarity and rigor. Some of my best friends are in the Society for Exact Philosophy. My concern is that some papers are all form and no content. Fine distinctions are, well, just fine, provided that all this technical wizardry is put to use in the service of answering a question that is worth asking or solving a problem that is worth posing. This is not always so. Here's a quotation that articulates part of my complaint.

The Humean project [following David Lewis] is very seductive: one is given a delimited set of resources and set the task of expressing truth conditions for some class of propositions in those terms. To win the game is to get the truth conditions to come out in a way that is, largely, intuitively correct. Proposed solutions can be counter-examined, counter-examples can be reinterpreted, intuitions can be bartered off against each other. If a proposed analysis fails, there is always the hope that one more widget, one extra subordinate clause, can set things right again. No end of cleverness can be deployed both on offense and defense.¹²

It's that last sentence that encapsulates what bothers me: "No end of *cleverness* can be deployed both on offense and defense." Cleverness should not be confused with significance. Subtlety and ingenuity are enormously valuable, but they are only *instrumentally* so. They are valuable only if they are put to use in the service of answering questions that are worth asking, defending theories that are worth defending, and so on. *Mere* cleverness has about as much value as a conjuring trick. A former colleague once told me that, in his view, philosophy is rather like solving crossword puzzles. I was appalled. (He has since seen the light, by the way.) If philosophy is no more than a pyrotechnic display of ingenious argumentation, then Callicles was surely right when he chided Socrates and told him that philosophy was a fine activity for a youth, but a disgraceful one for someone of mature years. A life devoted to solving crossword puzzles has little to commend it – and certainly does not deserve public subsidy. We should reject this conception of our discipline. Philosophy can and should deal with important issues. It should enable us both to understand our place in the world and to live in it. And yet what troubles me is that the structure of our profession is in danger of encouraging the production of work that is indeed competent, professional, subtle, and technically clever, but which adds little, if anything, to the sum total of human knowledge worth having.

How does the structure of the profession have this effect? Philosophy is now a vast industry. There are a large number of job vacancies but a much larger population of graduate students. How to get noticed? A graduate student once put it to me this way:

Everyone wants recognition and all the benefits that come with it; such recognition is a scarce resource; and therefore competition sets in. Central to every competition is score-keeping, and, crucially, scores are what administrations and hiring committees seem forced to rely on for distributing the recognition and benefits. [. . .] Cleverness in print simultaneously provides an easy means of evaluation and satiates – for a time – the desire for adrenalin. Perhaps we've reduced philosophy to intellectual sport at the expense of searching for truth.

That's the worry. But even if that worry is exaggerated, everything in the first half of our professional lives – the need for employment and then for tenure – encourages us to get something published, and everything discourages us from waiting until we have something really interesting to say. And the pressure to publish gets pushed forward earlier and earlier. That inevitably favors writing the paper that adds just one more widget, just one more subordinate clause, over writing the paper that makes a thoughtful or even profound contribution. And, if we wish to be noticed, what better way than by propounding some outrageously implausible thesis and then defending it with considerable ingenuity? So the search for truth is indeed likely to be a casualty.

After I had written this, I discovered I was not alone – which is always comforting. I had been anticipated with wonderful clarity and brevity by John Heil in his preface to *From an Ontological Point of View*:

The professionalization of philosophy, together with a depressed academic job market, has led to the interesting idea that success in philosophy should be measured by appropriate professional standards. In practice, this has too often meant that cleverness and technical savvy trump depth. Positions and ideas are dismissed or left unconsidered because they are not *comme il faut*. Journals are filled with papers exhibiting an impressive level of professional competence, but little in the way of insight, originality, or abiding interest. Non-mainstream, even wildly non-mainstream, conclusions are allowed, even encouraged, provided they come with appropriate technical credentials.¹³

There is another reason why so much philosophy appears to engage with trivial problems. The most fruitful and productive work in any one area of philosophy shows an awareness of, and an engagement with, other and wider issues in philosophy as a whole. Narrow specialization can foster a blinkered sterility. But the explosion in published material, and the need to be *au fait* with the very latest material, leaves little time for a broader view.¹⁴ Easier and quicker to fidget with the latest widget. Further, too much reading can stultify original thought. How tempting it is to respond to the latest epi-cycle in a fashionable debate, and how difficult to re-examine the issue *ab initio*, or to come up with a new angle, or even a new problem.¹⁵ At the beginning of his excellent paper on moral sense theories in ethics¹⁶ (which, incidentally, contains more perceptive remarks about dispositional theories in ethics than all the articles published in the last thirty years) Broad says that he spent the long vacation (four months) reading Richard Price's *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, and that his paper was the fruits of his thinking about that work. Note that Broad read *one* book in four months; it was a classic text, not the latest article in *Mind*; he thought carefully through the issues

that Price raised; the results were not a commentary on Price but a direct engagement with central issues. He sums up this approach in *Five Types of Ethical Theory*:

It appears to me that the best preparation for original work on any philosophic problem is to study the solutions which have been proposed for it by men of genius whose views differ from each other as much as possible. The clash of their opinions may strike a light which will enable us to avoid the mistakes into which they have fallen; and by noticing the strong and weak points of each theory we may discover the direction in which further progress can be made.¹⁷

There is now so much to read that “keeping up with the *current* literature,” could occupy every waking moment.¹⁸ But to what end? Do we really want to create a profession where, to get recognition and to advance one’s career, one *has no time to do anything except philosophy*? That is not good news for philosophers. It is neither sensible nor humane to encourage this work-centered monomania in anyone.¹⁹ Moreover, it is inimical to one of the traditional justifications of philosophy that sees it as a reflection on life, a discipline that trains you to understand the world in which you live better and so enables you, and others, to live better. But we are in danger of abandoning that conception and leaving professional philosophers no time and no incentive to put that wisdom into practice, to engage in other worthwhile activities. Is philosophical training a preparation for doing philosophy, *and nothing more*? Do we want to grow corn to raise hogs, to make money, to buy more land, to grow more corn, to raise more hogs? Nor is this degree of absorption in philosophy good for philosophy itself. It is (predominantly) a liberal discipline, and the best philosophy (especially in my own subjects, ethics and the philosophy of religion) is enriched by a wide, reflective, and imaginative experience of literature, politics, art, and science.²⁰

Good people are being driven out of the profession by this ethos.²¹ Here is the testimony of one philosopher, David Garrard, whose work I have been familiar with from the time he was an undergraduate. His writing was as profound, vivid, and exciting as any I have seen from a young philosopher. After graduate work at Oxford, he reluctantly decided that academic philosophy was not for him. I asked him to tell me why. Here is his very telling reply:

I suppose I felt that in Oxford at least (a) the ethics-aesthetics end of the subject tended to be seen as a bit second-rate, something you’d only do if you didn’t have the mental agility to cope with logic & language or metaphysics & epistemology, and that (b) people’s sense of what philosophy was for and how it should be conducted relied heavily on a highly technical, non-humanistic, mathsy-science model: “This is a problem-solving discipline; here are the

problems, here are the sub-problems, here are the sub-sub-problems; our task is to find a cut-and-dried solution that will resolve as many as possible of the problems all at once, or else to tweak our understanding of some set of problems in such a way that a cut-and-dried solution becomes available.”

I'm not averse to that take on the subject, which may be as good as any other, and which can be great fun to engage in. But it isn't really mine, and – especially in ethics – it tended to feel like a game of skill rather than a real inquiry into the human condition: the carefully circumscribed rules of the game allow dazzling (and peer-respect-earning) displays of ingenuity to go on undisturbed by doubts as to what exactly these “problems” amounted to, or by the intractable confused *Lebenswelt* out of which they arise. It would be all right if the cut-and-dried approach to the subject were just understood as one among others, but while the culture among the graduate students could be enormously intellectually stimulating, you either played the game by those rules or missed out. Bits of extra-philosophical discourse were allowed in only in order to be broken down into logical atoms and reconstructed in some technically acceptable form, and attempts to insist in a “literary” way on the irreducible this-ness or that-ness of some aspect of experience, or on the pursuit of wisdom rather than analytical insight, tended to be seen as a little embarrassing and pretentious. If your whole philosophical project was clearly of that kind, you certainly weren't ostracised, but you might well be regarded with a certain vague pity as someone who'd given up their chance of making a contribution to the subject. Also as someone who'd never get a job – but don't get me *started* on who-refereed-whose-paper philosophical careerism!

The above is inevitably a caricature. I also realise that many of these shortcomings (if they are shortcomings) are just the inevitable result of any activity's becoming a professionalised part of the bread-and-butter working world. But I suppose I feel that if *philosophy* can't use its own resources to overcome the innate tendency to narrowness and smugness that besets all academic discourse, there's not much hope for the rest of the academy; and it's a bit depressing to find that the vivification of the intellect – rather than just the intellectualisation of life – just isn't part of the culture even at the traditional epicentre of the subject. Oxford still has a reputation as somewhere that intelligent people come together to pursue some Forsterian ideal of human wholeness, and if the philosophy department doesn't see itself as any part of that project, something must have gone wrong somewhere.

We have a choice. Academics are one of the few professions that still have some capacity to set their own agendas and determine what they think is best for their profession. If we are all swamped by the never-ending stream of widget-fidgeting, we have only ourselves to blame. *We have done it to ourselves.*

What to do? It's hard to say – and easier (and more fun) to whinge. But if we are serious about allowing philosophers time to think and mature before they publish we perhaps need to start with that “time-honored” institution, the PhD dissertation. Is this the best training for *every* student? Clearly, it is right for some, but it carries dangers. First, it requires that students spend two to three years on a research project at a time in their career when they are probably least capable of making best use of that time. Few of us come up with really interesting and original ideas in the early years of our careers. Much better, and more productive, to have that time set aside at a later stage in one's life. Second, it can encourage early ossification – you become known for having a certain line on problem X, and it is then simpler to carry on with that line, because it has served you well. You cling to the comfort blanket of your “research program.”²²

We have short memories. The doctoral dissertation is not in fact time-honored. The PhD did not become a uniform requirement for a job in philosophy in the UK until the mid-1970s. C. D. Broad had some characteristically trenchant observations on its introduction in the 1920s:

Spinoza was offered the professorship of philosophy at Heidelberg on highly favourable terms by Karl Ludwig of the Palatinate, a very enlightened prince. He refused on the double ground that he would be certain sooner or later to get into trouble for religious unorthodoxy and that he did not want to have to interrupt his own work by formal teaching. It is to be feared that Spinoza would not have been enlightened enough to appreciate the beneficent system of the PhD degree, introduced into English universities as a measure of post-war propaganda, whereby the time and energy of those who are qualified to do research are expended in supervising the work of those who never will be.²³

It is possible to be a good philosopher without having a PhD. Leading philosophers in ethics who lack this qualification include: Williams, Wiggins, McDowell, Foot, Dancy, and Parfit. It doesn't seem to have done them any harm; I doubt they would have been any better if they had written a dissertation.

Nor, I contend, is it necessary to publish early and often to be a good philosopher who has an important contribution to make. As an undergraduate I was incredibly fortunate to be taught by very good philosophers who thought a great deal, published little, and devoted a great deal of time to exploring philosophy with their students. Back then, people only published if they had something

to say – and the advancement of their careers depended, not on the length of their CVs, but on their reputation and the quality of their minds.²⁴ Not publishing early is not a hindrance to having a productive publishing record later. Jonathan Dancy published little for nearly a decade, and Donald Davidson was another late starter. Neither would have flourished under the present tenure system.²⁵ Tinkering with tenure is a notoriously tricky issue that cannot be discussed here, but the emphasis it places on early publication for the sake of publication is often damaging to the development both of the discipline and of the individual practitioner.

Someone might respond that the current system leaves room for the more relaxed and reflective style of doing philosophy that I advocate. Once the neophyte is tenured, she can do all the things I advocate. So we can leave well alone. I don't think that is true, for at least two reasons. Firstly, as we have seen, we are in danger of driving away long before this stage the very people who have the temperament and aptitude to take the approach to philosophy I am advocating. Secondly, we are creatures of habit. Why suppose that, after ten to fifteen years of competitive success in an environment in which he is pressured to publish speedily and often, a tenured professor will transmogrify, like a butterfly emerging from its restricting chrysalis, into someone who shapes his career and measures his success by quite different standards?

Presidential addresses are meant to have lighter moments, and I don't want to end on a solemn note, even though the subject is a solemn one. So here, partly in earnest and partly in jest, are a few modest proposals:

1. The number of pages anyone is allowed to publish per year will be strictly limited (perhaps, for those familiar with the Philosophical Lexicon, to 0.01 of a Rescher). That will force people to decide what is the most important thing they wish to say, and what is the most succinct way of saying it. If this seems unduly harsh, we could allow the academic equivalent of "carbon-offsetting" where those who insist on publishing buy pages from those who temperately desist.²⁶
2. Graduate students who have completed all their course work with distinction may petition the department to allow them to proceed to a Dissertation provided: (a) that they can satisfy two medical practitioners that they are of sound mind, and (b) they can convince their committee that the world will be the loser by their silence.
3. Readers will regard with suspicion, rather than admiration, books whose dust jackets proclaim that the writer is the author of *numerous* books and articles.
4. There will be an annual prize, called the Edmund Gettier prize, awarded to any philosopher who meets two conditions: (a) she has only published one article, and (b) it has changed the discipline.

It'll never happen. But one can dream.

Notes

¹ Russ Dancy, for example, whipped up a delicious concoction in 1995.

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2007/sep/04/highereducation.news>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ C.D. Broad, *Mind and Its Place in Nature* (Kegan Paul, 1925) p. 607.

⁵ Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Penguin Books, 1978) p. 52. Actually, this passage is saved from tedium because it is so splendidly ugly and ungainly. It made its way into a British satirical magazine, *Private Eye*, in a column entitled "Ongoing Situations: With Meaningful and Viable Scenarios at this Moment in Time."

⁶ I still remember nearly forgetting to get off the bus at my bus stop while reading Philip Stratton-Lake's 'Reason, Appropriateness and Hope: Sketch of a Kantian Account of a Finite Rationality', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol.1 (1), 1993, pp.61-80. Another paper I could not put down was James Lenman, 'On Becoming Extinct', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 83, 2002, pp. 253-269. What is especially exciting about both papers is that they are imaginative, original, and tackle a question that has a manifest impact on our view of the world and how we should live.

⁷ Peter Strawson, was not as big a sinner as these, but he had his moments. When I was a graduate student of his I asked him to explain his exegesis, in Part Two, Section II, of *The Bounds of Sense* (Methuen, 1966) of Kant's Transcendental Deduction (an exegesis which one fellow graduate student described as explaining the obscure by the more obscure). After several highly uncharacteristic hesitations, stumblings, and uncompleted sentences, this famously urbane and polished speaker looked straight at me and said "When expounding complex transcendental arguments it is very easy to make a balls-up".

⁸ John Kekes, *Moral Wisdom and Good Lives* (Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 73.

⁹ Here is an attempt (which is admittedly neither elegant nor gripping) that I don't think leaves out anything of substance:

Moral wisdom consists in knowing what a good life would look like. That requires understanding and evaluating correctly both ourselves and the world in which we live.

¹⁰ The writings of Christine Korsgaard are an example. They display a maddening mixture of clarity and confusion, of rigor and carelessness, of insight and obtuseness. Here's one example. "Kant saw that we take things to be important because they are important to us – and he concluded that we must therefore take ourselves to be important" (*The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 122.) This is a stunning non-sequitur which, I trust, is to be attributed to Korsgaard's carelessness rather than Kant's confusion.

¹¹ Knowledge of the history of philosophy is often looked down on by expositors of this style. I once heard a paper by Naomi Eilan in which she talked about Ned Block's problem. I was impressed, since it is rare to discover a new problem. (In the Twentieth Century, Goodman and Gettier spring to mind.) But my admiration for Ned Block's achievement was somewhat diminished when I realized that the issue she was discussing had a long history that stretched back at least to Leibniz.

¹² Tim Maudlin, *The Metaphysics within Physics* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

¹³ John Heil, *From an Ontological Point of View* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. vii.

¹⁴ The culture of the profession also sometimes militates against breadth. When Jonathan Dancy first visited the States he was asked, "Which are you: an epistemologist or a moral philosopher?"

¹⁵ Jonathan Dancy gave me the following excellent advice when we were both learning how to write papers: Read a couple of important papers on each side of a debate and then start thinking independently.

¹⁶ 'Some Reflections on Moral-Sense Theories in Ethics', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, XLV, 1944-45.

¹⁷ C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930), pp. 1-2.

¹⁸ We sometimes forget that it is possible to be current without being worth reading, and worth reading without being current.

¹⁹ I think this problem is particularly noticeable in the USA, where the culture admires those who work to excess. This is a phenomenon which puzzles the European. Over-working to the point of exhaustion is something in which many Americans take pride, rather than being ashamed of it, or at least regarding it as something to be regretted.

²⁰ One of the best graduate students I ever had did a Master's thesis on David Wiggins's ethical theory. He and I spent a great deal of our time together discussing the novels of Iris Murdoch, material on which he drew in constructing his thesis.

²¹ I was almost tempted to write "sane people." The amazing thing is that there are still sane and well-balanced philosophers in a profession whose demands are so unbalanced.

²² There's a case for banishing this concept, which is inappropriate for philosophy. Good ideas in philosophy often occur serendipitously.

²³ *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 4.

²⁴ One article, indeed one conversation, can be sufficient to reveal the quality of someone's mind.

²⁵ Nor, incidentally, would I – the latest of late starters.

²⁶ Not to mention all the trees that would not have to be pulped.