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PHILOSOPHY VERSUS THE CONTINENTAL/ANALYTIC DISTINCTION

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ABSTRACT

The distinction between analytic and continental philosophy is not a philosophical distinction. It is a sociological one, incorporating political and psychological dimensions. I shall argue that this distinction is a symptom of, most relevantly, professionalization, and that professionalization excludes philosophy. As a result, the only philosophically meaningful consequence that the analytic/continental distinction has is to alert us by conceptual contrast to what it is that we should concern ourselves with instead. This alternative focus is the a-professional contexts and features of actual philosophy. The analytic/continental distinction usefully points us to these as that to which the specific structure and disciplinary effects of this distinction are entirely irrelevant.

KEYWORDS

ANALYTIC/CONTINENTAL. PROFESSIONALIZATION. UNIVERSITY. HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY.

A school of thought is to be viewed as a single individual who talks to himself for a hundred years and is quite extraordinarily pleased with himself, however silly he may be.

Goethe (1998, p. 14).

1. THE PHILOSOPHICAL MEANINGLESS OF THE CONTINENTAL/ ANALYTIC DISTINCTION

As a great deal of writing on this subject shows, there is no consistent difference between the analytic and continental “groups,” and equally no consistent unified character within them, whether with respect to subject matter, method, or style.¹

Most obviously in regard to the philosophical baselessness of this distinction, it is characteristically maintained by people at best superficially familiar with the work of the other “group,” and often with no real acquaintance with it at all but instead only the received wisdom of their own “group.” Even when its proponents are familiar with both “schools,” however, their experience of the difference can only be a sort of sleight of eye. For philosophy is distinctively characterized by making a novel contribution to what we understand by some area of sense as such; and this means that each individual philosophical framework, with respect to its area of inquiry, establishes meanings which are in some respects incompatible with the correlative meanings of any other framework. That is, each individual philosophical framework, with respect to its area of inquiry, is a fundamentally different meaning system from any other. And this means, first, that individual philosophical frameworks cannot meaningfully be assembled into groups with common features. Second, it means that individual philosophical frameworks are already as different from each other as philosophical frameworks can conceivably be. That is, there can be no more fundamental kind of difference

¹ For examples of a large and growing literature, see Preston (2007); Vanhoutte (2023).

between two “groups” of philosophical frameworks than there already is between each of their individual members.

The proponents of the distinction between these two “schools,” then, see a consistent and specifiable difference only by closing their eyes to (or being misdirected from, perhaps by habituation or, contrariwise, by the fascination of a lingering sense of unfamiliarity or alienness) the many preemptive fundamental differences already in place between both unfamiliar frameworks and the frameworks they are already familiar with.

Noting this characteristic incommensurability is not to say that philosophy needs to be a chaos of disagreement and quests for idiosyncratic originality, with nothing of the nature of a community of shared standards and explorations (see, for example, Rapaport, 2001, p. xv, on this problem in regard to the philosophy-inflected recent state of literary-critical “theory”). Overall communal unity versus overall communal difference has nothing to do with constructive engagement. This is, rather, a matter of working at a sufficient level of depth: that is, of thoughtful self-questioning. In that context, all participants are inherently receptive to what conflicts with their views, and the guideline is not the characteristics of the position they already inhabit but the evocative inflections of the meanings at issue. This might be called the path of the logos. But the outcome of this receptiveness is also, again, no more general unity than it is general difference of position: it is orientation toward more of what is meaningfully evocative.

For that matter, as Gerald Graff (2007, p. xvi) notes, “‘conflict’ and ‘consensus’ are... logically interdependent. To fruitfully disagree about *Macbeth*, say, we need to agree on a vast number of things,” such as the things that identify and constitute *Macbeth*.

As Gilbert Ryle (1954, p. 13) points out, “A live issue is a piece of country in which no one knows which way to go. As there are no paths, there are no paths to share. Where there are paths to share, there are paths; and paths are the memorials of undergrowth already cleared”.

What is meaningfully evocative is by definition meaningful. Established unity and difference of general horizons of thought, and active concern with reference to them, then, are beside the point for constructive thought.² But since what we engage in is meaningful, it in any event inherently involves varieties of unity and difference with other positions. Since, too, there are indefinitely many kinds of meaningful evocation, there are indefinitely many of these varieties of unity and difference with other positions, intertwining and overlapping with each other, as meanings do.

2. PROFESSIONALIZATION AND THE ANALYTIC/ CONTINENTAL DISTINCTION

I want to focus on a particular sociological factor establishing the analytic/continental distinction and its weight, that of professionalization. It is only one of many relevant factors, although I think it would be enough on its own to account for the insistence on the analytic/continental distinction. It is, of course, in a reciprocally reinforcing relation with, for example, commodification of the educational “package,” standardization as the means of establishing accountability, and quantification of assessments and outcomes (see, for instance, Lucas (1994, p. 268-271). But it has the illuminating additional significance as against other factors that, where they displace philosophy by indifference to it, what professionalization means directly entails the elimination of philosophy.³ Openness to fundamental question is constitutive of philosophy. But professionalization cannot maintain in possible question the

² Randall Collins (1998, p. 522) comments on our current academic situation that the structural issue is “loss of a center of intersecting conflicts, loss of the small circle of circles at which our arguments can be focused. It is not a center of agreement that is lacking: creative intellectual periods never had that. What is lost is a nexus where disagreements are held in tension”.

³ Gerald Graff (2007, p. 5) points out that blaming professionalism as such is misleading in that it disguises the fact that professionalism takes “specific forms . . . which . . . need not be the only forms possible”. But whatever its form, if it becomes too much the overriding principle of the relevant discipline, it excludes philosophy. In fact, too, it becomes equivalent to a commitment to professionalism as such. This is what has happened.

premises of its own organization and procedure. If it did, it could not get under way. That is, professionalization excludes part of what constitutes philosophy.

But professionalization is also part of what establishes the analytic/continental divide. This means that the same professionalization which establishes the analytic/continental divide also makes it irrelevant to philosophy, and consequently makes its negotiation irrelevant to philosophy. In fact, it makes attention to this divide which treats it as if it were relevant to philosophy into an immediate categorical expulsion of philosophy.

We do have a discipline we can and sometimes do call professional philosophy. Most of what we think of as philosophy occurs in this form. But professional philosophy is not remotely philosophy as philosophy is practiced by its great exemplars, the ones who form the backbone of what is purportedly studied by professional philosophy. Professional philosophy does look like philosophy, and it often explicitly states the same fundamental commitments that philosophy does; but it is missing the fundamental ingredient which ultimately differentiates philosophy from dogma. As Julián Marías puts it, philosophical writings which are

directed . . . to the “philosophers by profession” . . . “must conform” to . . . a form that will gain them admittance to an academic world that has fixed certain standards of “rigor” and “scholarship” . . . These demands . . . are usually somewhat simple-minded . . . certain requisites are commonly considered ineludible . . . that . . . the philosophers who are being studied themselves never observed . . . The reason for all this is that today the “technical” public is not . . . “philosophers” but . . . “professionals in philosophy.” (MARÍAS, 1971, p. 49-50)

That is, these professionals are not only “not... the *creators*, who have never been more than a handful of individuals”; they are not even those for whom philosophy, although not “the medium in which and by which they live,” is “their way of living, in the sense that they rethink philosophical doctrines from within and make of them a genuine reality of their own intellectual life” (MARÍAS, 1971, p. 50).

Ryle, again, offers this word

I think it is worth while to take some pains with this word 'category,' but not for the usual reason, namely that there exists an exact, professional way of using it, in which, like a skeleton-key, it will turn all our locks for us; but rather for the unusual reason that there is an inexact, amateurish way of using it in which, like a coal-hammer, it will make a satisfactory knocking noise on doors which we want opened to us. It gives the answers to none of our questions but it can be made to arouse people to the questions in a properly brusque way (RYLE, 1954, p. 9).

Professional philosophy, in other words, is really a form of doxography. Unlike doxography honestly so called, professional philosophy focuses primarily on elaborating and refining the doxa rather than simply laying it out and explicating it; but its commitment is first and foremost to the doxa and not to its rethinking. It is a collection of sub-industries of discussion-production which take certain starting points unquestioningly for granted and refuse to engage with any thought which does not likewise take the fundamentals of those topic-areas for granted.⁴ James Ogilvy (1992, p. xv) wrote thirty years ago that "Tenure was once a means toward the end of protecting non-conformity; now it has become an end in itself, to which the means are conformity – conformity to the confines of disciplinary specialization". This state of affairs has become massively consolidated since.

Since this unself-questioning compartmentalization into sub-industries is the basis of professional philosophical activity, it sets up the conditions for insisting on the analytic/continental divide in the form this insistence has taken. This insistence needs no knowledge of the other "group," only some immediate impression that the other group is not participating in the particulars of what we are doing in our sub-industries. It also needs no establishable unifying characteristics beyond this, on either side. "They" are not

⁴ As, for example, Jacques Derrida (1999 [1992], p. 410) said of the objectors to his honorary degree from Cambridge, who were evidently thoroughly unacquainted with the content of his work, "I think these inquisitors confuse philosophy with what they have been taught to *reproduce* in the tradition and style of a particular institution". For a careful Derridean discussion of this "affair," see Gildea (2020).

doing what our sub-industries do, and so they are uniformly not us. And although each of “our” sub-industries has different fundamental commitments, they are unified by the currently unquestioned character of those commitments, since their unquestioned status in each case also involves taking into no current consideration the existence of the conflicting commitments of our other sub-industries, past, present, or future.

This is not to say that we cannot do genuine philosophy within the exclusive confines of either analytic or continental philosophy. But it is to say that we cannot do so if guided and constrained by the idea that this choice of context reflects the general philosophical merit of the one medium over the other, rather than, say, reflecting personal comfort with that particular set of paintbrushes, or the momentary suitability of a certain kind of vocabulary and syntax to a certain approach to a certain kind of problem. All the more so, we cannot do genuine philosophy if we are working within the confines of a professionalized academic sub-industry within one of these “traditions.”

Dovetailing with the sociological factor of professionalization in establishing the insistence on the analytic/continental distinction are the less historically contingent psychological factors of the need for existential certainty and the need for belonging. Both of these psychological needs are accentuated for philosophers, whose discipline is to allow for fundamental uncertainty,⁵ while this in turn also makes for an alienated relation to the more intellectually settled community at large. But the unquestioning indulgence of these needs too is essentially opposed to the questioning spirit of philosophy.

⁵ So, for example, José Ortega y Gasset (1969, p. 27) writes that “metaphysics consists of the fact that man seeks a basic orientation in his situation. But this assumes that man’s situation—that is, his life—consists of a basic disorientation.” Because this concerns the person’s life as such and so as a whole, this disorientation is “a total and fundamental dislocation; that is to say . . . his life . . . in itself *is* disorientation, is being lost”.

3. THE UNIVERSITY, PROFESSIONALIZATION, AND THE ANALYTIC/ CONTINENTAL DISTINCTION

As it happens, professionalization has irreversibly taken over universities. I say “irreversibly,” because this is not an academically motivated option, but a necessity in the light of current social ideologies and economic realities, world-wide. Students are consumers and must get what they paid for. Insight, whose achievement is not guaranteed, must therefore be replaced by information, whose acquisition is more so. More than this, the information must inevitably be tailored to a level where its grasp is definitely guaranteed, otherwise the customer will be dissatisfied; and they will be rightly so, since they did not receive the product they paid for. Professionalization is the responsible way of conducting this kind of streamlined contractual transferral of goods. As a result, it overrides any other values and corresponding forms of procedure of the university.

On the professorial side, in a situation where nearly half of PhD graduates in the Humanities do not get the kinds of academic jobs for which they have been trained over many long years, too, “the anxieties over placement and tenure, do not encourage iconoclasm... The academic profession in some areas is not reproducing itself so much as cloning itself” (MENAND, 2010, p. 153).

I have noted that philosophy essentially involves an exploration of depth of meaning and that this meaning in turn inherently involves its own, particularized connections of unity and difference with other meaning. That is, philosophy has nothing inherently to do with, for example, meeting a pre-existing communal question or need, or with carrying out or building on a collective inheritance of thought. Or, rather, while all thought cannot help but carry out this kind of inheritance, the goal of carrying it out, what it means to carry it out, cannot be pre-set. This goal and meaning too must be rethinkable, and consequently carrying out the original goal cannot be a necessary part of

what it means to pursue that inherited thought.⁶ (Although it can happen to be the “whim” of the pursuer to do so, in Emerson’s (1941, p. 135) phrase.)⁷ As a result, deep thought, such as that of philosophy, cannot proceed and cannot be taught under the serious constraints of any institutional or formulable setting. Among other things, philosophy is precisely what questions such formulae of meaning and thought, and so without the freedom to do this and mean it, it is, again, not philosophy. The professionalized university is an extreme form of that kind of pre-formulated setting. It therefore wholly, or almost wholly, excludes philosophy.

I do not think the university has ever been a suitable setting for practicing or teaching philosophy.⁸ Like all institutions, it is largely made up of

⁶ So the success of philosophical practice has to do neither with a context of a “community of shared standards,” as Rapaport (2001), quoted above, suggests nor with a future continuity of, say, “a collective task left undone,” as François Cusset (2008, p. 323) complains of in the recent generation of French philosophers. Which is not to say that the comments they make on the basis of these concerns are not true and crucial for understanding the scholarly situations they describe, but it is to say that their truth does not arise from anything crucial for deep thought as such.

⁷ “I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation” (EMERSON, 1941, p. 135).

⁸ Even in the university’s late medieval beginning, while it “served as an oasis of intellectual freedom in an age profoundly suspicious of the slightest taint of heresy” (LUCAS, 1994, p. 68), it did not have “much of the notion of liberal learning for its own sake” but “was first and foremost a professional school for a select few discrete professions” (LUCAS, 1994, p. 67).

For that matter, as D. W. Hamlyn (1992, p. 6) points out, up to and during the first two centuries of the modern period, “universities . . . do not figure to a great extent in the history of philosophy . . . The main philosophers of [the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] were individual scholars who relied on the patronage of a variety of persons and institutions” (my insertion). This minor role of the universities was also still true of some Western countries in the nineteenth century, including the United States and England (not Scotland, where philosophy flourished in the universities already in the eighteenth century; (e.g., HAMLIN, 1992, p. 76, 86-87, 92-93, 124)).

Lucas (1994, p. 67) adds to his comment on the medieval university that “the modern university,” in its emphasis on “careerism and occupationally relevant instruction . . . probably has come to resemble its medieval forbear to a greater extent than ever before”. It seems, however, that the modern university has come to lose even the medieval degree of freedom from either the constraints of conventional thought or the condemnation of heresy, and in the modern case whether the heresy is progressive or conservative.

Bill Readings (e.g., 1996, p. 14-15) argues that the modern university is shaped by the German Idealist idea of the university, understood initially as under the regulation of philosophy, as a unifying guardian and inculcator of national culture. But, unless we accept the idea that philosophical reason necessarily entails the exclusive legitimacy and social adequacy of the European early nineteenth-century republican nation-state, I think this confirms my point

conformity of procedure and regularity of aim and outcome. The only thing, I think, which the university ever provided that was suitable to the practice or teaching of deep thought was the looseness of its institutional structure, which occurred relevantly only for a relatively brief period. This looseness made for wider or narrower interstices in which deep thought could happen and proceed. This form of administrative looseness was a feature of the university beginning only toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the rise of the research university (see, for example, Graff (2007), chapters 2-4). But the university's current degree of managed professionalization has made whatever looseness remains negligible with respect to providing for the possibility of deep thought.

Bill Readings argues instead that the university, precisely in and because of its condition as the ruination of the modern model, can serve as a site for thinking with a different type of focus from that of the modern university. He writes, for example, that "the loss of the University's cultural function opens up a space in which it is possible to think the notion of community otherwise, without recourse to notions of unity, consensus, and communication" (READINGS, 1996, p. 20). I think that this confuses part of what is currently needed in thinking, and which the condition of the university as a symptom of contemporary society indicates is needed, with what the university's condition enables or even allows. My own argument is that the university now actively and thoroughly prevents any kind of serious creative or critical thinking, whether premised on communal coherence or not.

I think, too, that we need not be so restrictive as to the kind of thinking which is currently either possible or needed. I have suggested that meaningful thought provides its own context of unity, and this would involve its own contexts of communication and consensus too.

about the university as historically a suitable setting for philosophy. (This German Idealist view is not Readings' own concern; I shall return to his view in the text.)

Because of the thoroughly professionalized condition of the university, then, philosophy can no longer take place under the auspices of the university.⁹ Unfortunately or not, this also means that any philosophical correction of what is involved in the analytic/continental division will not and cannot take place in or be relevant to what happens in the universities.

4. WHAT THE PHILOSOPHICAL IRRELEVANCE OF THE ANALYTIC/ CONTINENTAL DISTINCTION POINTS US TO

Philosophy, then, only occurs in the absence of the kinds of set parameters for thought and the pre-suggested potential paths of exploration set up by commitment to or concern with such perceived traditions as analytic and continental philosophy. Concern with the perceived commitments of such schools as analytic and continental philosophy, then, is an obstacle to doing philosophy.

For the same reason, this kind of concern is equally an obstacle to teaching philosophy. It is so both with respect to establishing philosophy's appropriate focus and with respect to addressing the nature of working with that focus, including addressing the very demanding emotional and intellectual challenges and rewards which that work involves.

⁹ For a detailed account of the professionalization of the university and its consequent exclusion of philosophy, see, for example, Robert Hanna. As he summarizes this part of his discussion, "we critically postulate that philosophy is really possible only *outside* the professional academy" (HANNA, 2021, p. 364).

Hanna introduces this summary by discussing Kant's view of the "School" philosopher. Kant argues that the "School" philosopher, in contrast with the real philosopher, does not think from the start on the basis of the principles of reason but bases their thought on a philosophical system they have learned. Consequently, the "School" philosopher "has formed his mind on another's" and "knows and judges only what has been given him" (KANT, 1929, A836, B864). This philosopher therefore does not genuinely do philosophy. There has been a misleading shift in the relevant meaning of "school," and Kant in fact argued that real philosophy was nonetheless possible in the university context. Hanna thinks this was false even in Kant's time. Either way, however, things have changed very greatly. And while the adherence to specific individual philosophical systems entailed in Kant's term does not really fit the contemporary world of sub-industries, the characteristic analogous absence of any questioning of the fundamentals which underpin the sub-industries does hold.

The philosophical significance of the persistence of the analytic/continental divide, then, is that in contexts where this divide has meaning, philosophy is not taking place. The other side of this coin is that to do and cultivate philosophy, we need to direct ourselves to contexts where that divide has no meaning other than, perhaps, that of a sociological illusion, or, more precisely, where it cannot have any other meaning.

On the negative side, this means, given the broader context I have sketched, steering ourselves away from attempting to do or teach philosophy in institutional academic contexts. These contexts include, for example, the university, conferences where the other “tradition” characteristically meets resistance or needs to struggle for a receptive hearing, and journals whose readership is committed to one “tradition” as more exemplary of philosophy than the other. It also means steering ourselves away from conversations in which this resistance or struggle strongly occur.

Certainly, we can engage in these events and conversations potentially without any disservice to anything; but we cannot engage them as a medium for philosophy without wasting our time and possibly disillusioning ourselves, and without contributing to the already solid entrenchment of the appropriation of philosophy by a practice for which philosophy in fact does not exist.

On the positive side, in both doing and teaching philosophy, the import of the philosophical irrelevance of the analytic/continental divide is that we need to direct ourselves in different ways toward specifically non-professional contexts.

To be clear, this is not to say that we can get altogether away from conventional and institutional norms. It is not even to say that it would be desirable to do so if, *per impossibile*, we could.¹⁰ We ourselves and thinking itself are partly made up of such norms, and they are therefore part of what we as

¹⁰ For an illuminating deconstructive account of this point, with a focus on the necessarily ambivalent relationship between philosophy and universities, see Wortham (2006).

philosophers most want to explore and work with. But there are meaningful distinctions between degrees of ossification and of flexibility. For instance, philosophy cannot be undertaken to a satisfactory extent if one is a full-time worker in a busy department of a micro-managed department store; or, which comes to the same thing, a teacher or a researcher in a typical contemporary university.

Substantial elements of cultural takens-for-granted, then, and, for that matter, of standardization, routine, and even professionalism or something like it, are not only necessary to any effective philosophical practice but are part of the depth and richness of the practice and content of that kind of thought. But these conventional elements need to be practiced in the spirit of the philosophical questioning, and not the other way round.

Since non-professional and non-institutional contexts are by definition not formulable, perhaps the best way to convey what they refer to is to give a sketch of some central aspects of philosophy as genuinely practiced. This should help to make clear what is concealed from view by the elevation to philosophical status of a pre-given, institutional constellation like the analytic/continental divide.

This should also help to make clear the damage that this elevation causes through the consequent obliviousness to those aspects of philosophy which it institutes. This damage occurs, again, to both the understanding of philosophy and to its teaching.

The relevant focus on non-professional contexts means recognizing and, in teaching philosophy, making explicit that philosophy, including the philosophical study of existing philosophies, occurs in and with reference to those moments where the questionable character of current sense, and perhaps of sense as such, becomes established and evident. These moments are where, consequently, the existing foci, insights, and technical language of philosophies and schools of philosophy cannot be the guides. Either they themselves participate in the problem in that they presuppose the sense whose

questionable nature has only now become evident, or the problem does not exist in the terms of the sense they are capable of making and so it cannot be formulated or addressed in those terms. Those moments are where philosophy, certainly at its richest or truest, occurs, and – given, of course, the preparation and setting of sustained careful thought – are perhaps even the only places where it directly occurs. These moments therefore need to be the priority of focus in exercising and teaching philosophy.

These moments are a matter of not knowing how to make sense, of having lost our bearings with respect to the sense on which what we might say turns. Consequently, we need metaphors here not of scholarly and discursive expertise and fluency but of being disoriented, lost, blundering around, and falling about. Correspondingly, since in this situation we do not know how to make proper sense even of what the problem is or what we are looking for, the only way we can develop a currently unavailable form of sense is to hit upon it partly accidentally. We need to be open to its impressing itself upon us in some unforeseen way. All we can do, then, is to flail about until that happens. But this undirected floundering is precisely what is suited to keeping us open to unexpected discoveries.

This problematic relation to relevant sense is the source of the philosopher's characteristic combination, even after having come to their solutions, of carefulness about specifying their meanings very narrowly together with a reservation of uncertainty about whether even those extra-specific meanings are adequate. It is part of consistent philosophy to have an ongoing acknowledgement that we might have made a specifically conceptual error: that is, that we might not be making sense, or not the sense we think we are making. As a result, the mistakes we are liable to make and sometimes do make as philosophers are not merely errors of fact or ignorance, but are the worst and most incompetent kind of mistake: the failure to make appropriate sense or even to make sense at all.

In working with this philosophical moment, there is a phase of not knowing how to make sense and then a phase of recovering and learning from having failed to do so. Both of these phases are very challenging to our sense of competence and to our sense that there is a point to what we are doing. Consequently, both in exercising and teaching philosophy, we need to make acknowledgement of these aspects of the experience central. In the case of teaching, we need to do this in order, on the one hand, to reassure our students that there is nothing wrong with them: that the experience is what is to be expected and that they are not alone in having it. And we need to do it, on the other hand, in order to help them to see having this experience as the achievement of thought it is, the result of having rigorously established a limit of current sense. We need to do it, too, to help them learn how to manage the experience, and in particular to manage it as the positive medium of further achievement in insight.

We need to teach our students, then, how to take pride in the achievement and skills that, in this context, not knowing how to proceed or even what we are talking about comprises.

In the exercise of philosophy, too, we ourselves need and can benefit from all of these reassurances and forms of perspective.

Some of these reassurances also address the psychological needs I have mentioned as motivating people to avoid genuine philosophy: the need for existential certainty and for belonging. These reassurances do not provide for existential certainty and straightforward community; but they do provide confirmation and community in the recognition of sharing the same source and form of uncertainty and of attendant awkward relation to the community at large.

We might compare this aspect of the process of philosophizing to walking on a mountain path full of slippery pebbles: we *will* slip and very likely fall, but taking every step slowly and carefully helps to manage and recover from the slip when it happens. Reducing ourselves to these precarious and

embarrassed states and then managing them are the primary epistemic and methodological virtues of philosophy.

Because, as I have argued, philosophical insights can only come at least partially by accident, the contexts in which they occur are at least in part only tangentially related to the inherent sense or logic of those in which the problem arose. As a result, some of the most likely contexts for philosophical insight are those which are at least partially detached from relevant consecutive thought itself, but where we are also not too focused on something in particular to allow stray thoughts and impressions in. As I have noted, just the experience of being unable to make sense which philosophical investigation brings us to is itself one such context. But other contexts of this kind are also the in-between moments when, say, we are walking or driving from one place to another, or waking up or going to sleep, or showering, or brushing our teeth.

In teaching philosophy, it is not that we need to alert our students to pay attention to those moments in particular, though this should be good too. It is, rather, that the fact that these moments spontaneously occur and work as such resources is confirming of and illuminating about the presentation I have been recommending of philosophy as a different kind of achievement: one in which, rather than being hunters, we are practitioners of receptiveness to a gift. That is, we are practitioners of receiving what we have not earned and have no good reason for attaining.

As Emerson summarizes,

You cannot with your best deliberation and heed come so close to any question as your spontaneous glance shall bring you, whilst you rise from your bed, or walk abroad in the morning after meditating the matter before sleep on the previous night. Our thinking is a pious reception (EMERSON, 2000, p. 264).

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