HYPOPHILOSOPHY*

By Elijah Millgram

Abstract: *The more obvious forms of corruption are often preceded and explained by the etiolation of a practice: as its participants lose track of the point of their activities, their moral immune system is disabled. The argument is developed via a case study, philosophy itself. After advancing the hypothesis that philosophy is in the first instance the machine tool industry of the intellect—that its task is making the intellectual tools that make the intellectual tools— we consider what becomes of such an enterprise when this objective slips out of focus.*

If you're like me, when you think *corruption*, the first image to come to mind is a montage of gym bags stuffed with cash, illicit zoning variances for pricey hotel-turned-condo complexes, and accomplices about to turn state's witness. (Maybe I've just been too impressed by the spectacular downfall of a former Israeli prime minister.) But not all corruption is obvious and heavy-handed in this way, and here I want to suggest that the ground for, I will say, *crass* corruption is frequently enough prepared by what I will call *refined corruption*.

Aspiring novelists are sometimes told to write about what they know, and that's not just good advice for novelists: moral philosophers discussing misdeeds of which they do not have a good deal of close-up experience generally produce thin and badly-imagined fictions. What I know is philosophy. And so here I am going to try to make tangible that contrast between refined and crass corruption, to do so in a way that will render convincing the more than occasional priority of the former to the latter— and to do all of *that* by considering corruption in philosophy.

For at least two reasons, philosophy is a promising domain in which to investigate the conceptual map of the phenomenon. First, because there is so little money circulating through the discipline, subtler forms of corruption need not be overshadowed and obscured by the flashier and easier-to-discern varieties. And second, philosophy today is a thoroughly corrupt discipline; so the material we want to examine will be available.

That last claim is bound to be controversial, and I am not going to argue for it here; I take it to have the status of an observation. Although the illustrations I am assembling can serve as reminders, once I have identified the form of corruption in philosophy that will be our focus here, I will leave it to my readers to assess the state of affairs themselves.

To briefly motivate that tactical choice: Straightforward and self-contained arguments for the application of a concept normally invoke its definition. But my remarks about corruption should not be taken as an attempt to define the notion. It seems clear enough that it is what Bernard Williams called a *thick ethical concept*, and he pointed out that even getting the extension of such a concept right requires occupying the evaluative perspective in which it has its home; when that is true, attempting to construct a descriptively clean list of necessary and sufficient conditions is generally futile.[1]

I. The Emergence of Philosophy

I will use as my point of entry a recent and insufficiently appreciated discussion of the social dynamics that drive philosophical traditions. Part of that treatment is a story about how they emerge.

With the right institutional framework—roughly, economic support for a class of people who are in the business of defending opinions about something or other, and who have sufficient freedom of maneuver in adjusting and developing positions and argumentative support for them—philosophy can arise out of, it might seem, almost any subject matter: the crude protophysics of the ancient Greeks, the theological disputes of medieval Islam and Christianity, the political and social concerns of the warring states of China, scriptural concerns in India, and so on. As it becomes apparent to participants and onlookers that arguments are not going to settle whether (sticking with just one of these) everything is made of water, air, fire, earth, or numbers, one of the players advances a skeptical view; another player

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[1] He supported that latter claim by working up a case study (of concepts such as "pornographic," in the service of proposed legislation), and it may be helpful to the reader to think of his treatment as a model for the ensuing discussion: I mean to be using corruption in philosophy as a case study, of interest on its own, but one that I hope will make convincing points about corruption more generally. See Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 140ff, and Bernard Williams, ed., *Obscenity and Film Censorship: An Abridgement of the Williams Report* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Williams was appropriating the term from Clifford Geertz, who in turn acknowledged Ryle.

In particular, Williams imagined a legislator writing a definition of, say, "obscene" into law, and asked his reader to anticipate the ways in which the financially incentivized adult entertainment industry would mobilize its ingenuity; we would soon see products which evaded the definition, and were nonetheless obscene. We can expect "corrupt" to resist definition for very similar reasons: any definition, once enacted into a basis for enforcement, would be no more than a challenge; we should not underestimate the inventiveness of those thus motivated to devise unanticipated forms of corruption.

starts to investigate the mechanics of argument, that is, turns to the study of logic; another player responds to the skepticism by looking for a skepticism-resistant anchor—normally, something with the look and feel of the Cartesian *cogito*—and suddenly the debate is recognizably philosophy. The account advanced by Randall Collins has other parts that also merit a close look, but for right now, the sketch of this phase of the process strikes me as interesting and as plausible enough.[2]

I said above that it looked like a philosophical tradition could crystallize out of almost any subject matter, but now that I have recounted the very bare bones of this stretch of Collins, that cannot quite be right. What launches philosophizing is the evident futility of the previous back-and-forth; neither empirical investigation nor *a priori* argument are going to settle the question of which of the four "elements" makes up the universe. In retrospect, these protophilosophical debates were the stuff of late-night dorm room bull sessions, and not anything like science, or even science in the making, and not, on second thought, merely because they weren't going to be successfully resolved. Even the very best philosophizing does not normally establish anything that looks like a result, a theorem that can be taught as uncontroversial fact to novices in the field, and real philosophy does not have whatever *this* problem is. Rather, ancient Greek protophysics was characterized by systematic failures of reference: talk of "the wet" and "the dry," for instance, just wasn't connected up to anything. What comes "before philosophy," to borrow the title of a once-standard survey, looks to us as though it is merely going through the *motions* of thought.[3]

In his extensive treatment of the ensuing traditions, Collins does not discuss the way in which the alchemy that transmutes arguing about nothing into philosophy is so often reversed. But it is remarkable how easily philosophy lapses into debates that are functionally on a par with the futile controversies of ancient Greek protophysicists and their ilk. Too frequently, we do not notice that it has happened, in part because these debates are conducted within institutional frameworks erected or appropriated by philosophy, and in part because the subject matter is inherited from a properly philosophical conversation. The participants are arguing about, as it may be, the correct definition of knowledge or the semantics of the "actually" operator; they seem to be thrashing out the details of the correct consequentialist (or virtue-theoretic, or Kantian) ethics; they seem to be colonizing new topics, such as the grounding relation or the problem of peer disagreement. But they are now engaged in, and let's introduce the term we need, *hypophilosophy*.

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[2] Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[3] Henri Frankfort, John A. Wilson, and Thorkild Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy* (New York: Penguin, 1960).

Before we can explain why philosophy becomes so quickly corrupted, and before we can consider how it can be kept from collapsing into the sort of valueless activity that seems to fill up so many journals and hotel meeting rooms, we need to try to put our fingers on the difference between philosophy and hypophilosophy, and that topic will occupy us for the next while.

To give an account of that distinction will be to give at any rate a partial explanation of *what philosophy is*—and it wouldn't do to be too confident about it. After all, philosophers have been arguing with each other over that question as well, ever since the very beginning of the enterprise.[4] So treat what I'm about to propose as a working hypothesis, one that I think is of interest and worth exploring, and which, even if it's wrong, will allow us to develop the ideas about corruption that we're concerned with now. I'll advance the proposal by telling a just-so story.

II. Consistency Regimes

Suppose you're a god, building creatures to inhabit your newly created world—not, however, the omniscient God of the theologians, but rather the kind of god who wouldn't necessarily realize that you needed an Eve until Adam plaintively reminded you. Because you have quite limited powers of foresight, you use the Garden of Eden as your development and testing site, and there you are, with a pair of humans that you've got walking, talking, and performing other basic but crucial tasks successfully. You mean to load one or two more software packages onto the wetware before you introduce them into the wild, and you're going to do it biochemically, via a procedure with the aesthetics of a Cronenberg movie, namely, by having them eat a fruit. What kind of fruit should that be?

If you were the theological God, the one who knows ahead of time what kind of natural and social environments your humans are going to face over the long term, you would no doubt compile a list of positive and negative evaluations to guide them and their descendants safely

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[4] When we are thinking our way through corruption, not just in philosophy but in any domain, we should expect to have to characterize the point of a practice or institution. As indicated by the metaphor, to apply the concept of corruption is to presuppose a functional base state from which the decay is deviation. (In Aristotle's rendering of this way of seeing things, rot amounts to an organism's form losing hold on its matter; more generally, defect requires a species form or the functional characterization of an artifact in the background. Only a living thing, where we understand there to be a way such an organism functions correctly, can become literally *rotten*.) For very interesting related argumentation, see Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), Part I.

The evaluative perspectives involved in practices and institutions are no doubt a good part of what we are led to by thinking of corruption under the heading of a thick ethical concept. For worries about identifying the organizing purpose of an institution—along with a proposal about how to do so that is not compatible with the treatment I will develop here—see M. E. Newhouse, "Institutional Corruption: A Fiduciary Theory," *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* 23, no. 3 (2014).

and productively through their lives. And so you'd arrange to have your humans eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Alternatively, you could work up a list of foolproof rules, borne by the tree of authoritative prescriptions. But as it happens, you're not that kind of god, and who *knows* what your humans will have to cope with down the road?

Here's one device you *have* settled on.[5] Your humans are going to be reasonably good, sometimes even very good, at picking up on and enforcing representational hygiene regimes. That is, your humans have already been built to maintain and extend internally stored systems of representations that drive their behavior, and these hygiene regimes impose global—rather than representation-by-representation—constraints on those systems. The humans feel themselves impelled to adjust the representations, to make them conform to the constraints when they notice them being violated. Some of these constraints the humans will later come to think of as logical (as when having two representations, one of the form p, and the other of the form $\sim p$, in the store of representations counts as a violation), but not nearly all of them. For instance, when someone demands that you verify that your intention is such that everyone in your shoes could act on the same intention, without thereby making you ineffective, that's traditionally classified as a moral requirement.[6] And as we know, for a while some of these hygiene constraints have been budgetary. So you have your humans eat of the fruit of the tree of consistency, and this is very clever of you: noticing and trying to remove inconsistencies can be expected to engender all sorts of strategies that will help them cope with novel, fluid, hard-to-anticipate environments. For instance, when humans are trying to decide which of p- and $\sim p$-shaped representations to delete, they're prompted to *investigate* the question of whether p; when they're trying to balance the budget, they find themselves needing to *reconsider priorities*.

But now your earlier quandary has just reproduced itself: you can't predict what environments and concomitant challenges your humans are going to encounter, or what resources those environments will supply, and so you can't be sure which consistency constraints it will be helpful for them to enforce. Budgets can be very useful, but not until there is currency, and writing, and numerals, and arithmetic, and, for advanced forms of budgeting, spreadsheets; moreover, as the Austrian economists emphasized, if you're going to do accounting, you need markets to generate prices. As you wander around the Garden of Eden in the heat of the day, you realize that you have no idea whether human history is going to produce those technologies. Some of the humans will eventually insist that

the constraints that they call "logical" are written into the metaphysical nature of things (whatever that means, you will one day mutter to yourself); but you, as a not-so-knowledgeable god or demigod, can't discern which of the representational hygiene constraints that reflect deep structural features of the world it will be intellectually and practically useful to enforce. There's only one solution, which is somehow to delegate to the consistency-hungry creatures you're about to release into the ecosystem the task of selecting the consistency requirements themselves. And so you do, by sending them along to eat of the fruit of yet another tree, which we'll get around to naming in just a moment.

III. Higher-Order Consistency Regimes

Now, what will it look like, when they get around to doing what you've set them up to do? The humans are receptive to the invitation to adopt new and even rigorous inferential hygiene regimes, and so a character who goes around proleptically insisting on them, in the course of demanding that people explain and justify their practices, is likely to get uptake. He might even give rise to a highly formal spectator sport, as one speculative account of the shorter Platonic dialogues has it.[7]

Flagging an issue to which we'll return, here's what that "proleptically" was about. The term marks the peculiar register in which parents sometimes tell their children that good boys and girls like them brush their teeth—that is, the attempt to realize the desired outcome by anticipating it in a description. The character we started to imagine a moment ago, who in some ways looks a great deal like Socrates as Plato represents him, acts as though his novel and thus unfamiliar demands for consistency were what consistency *already* required: as though this were what consistency just *was*. That's misleading; to reiterate, someone can always make up another way to be consistent. Trivially, it's important nowadays for one's spelling to be consistent, but back in Shakespeare's time, it didn't used to be. These days, decision theorists will describe your preferences as inconsistent if they can't be represented by a von Neumann-Morgenstern utility function; this is historically recent usage. Jewish dietary law sorts foods into different classifications (dairy, meat, and neither), and requires that meals containing an item in one of the former two classifications not contain items from the other. As Ian Hacking and others have documented for us, the notion of probability that we take for granted today—and so, the requirement that probability assignments be consistent—is of recent provenance.[8] So why the perennial temptation, one to which philosophers regularly succumb, to think that something or other is what consistency just *is*?

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[7] Gilbert Ryle, *Plato's Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).
[8] Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Let's return to the question of how your humans are supposed to do an intelligent job of selecting consistency regimes. If you've done your part especially cleverly, you might have coded into the final fruit plate the impulse not only to impose consistency regimes and rethink representations and the practices that depend on them when those regimes are violated, and not only the impulse to invent and adopt new ones, but also the impulse to systematize *those* consistency regimes as systems of representations, and to impose appropriate consistency regimes on *them*. That is, you might set them up to reify their representational hygiene regimes into theories, which they can then investigate, and which may prompt them to reconsider their priorities—and among which they can then intelligently choose.

Some of these theories will be familiar to philosophers today as logic, but those will normally be accompanied by ancillary theories as well. For instance, inferential consistency regimes that mark successful representations as true or as knowledge will invite theorizing about these statuses; inferential hygiene requirements that constrain credences will invite theorizing about probability. And it is not only this sort of tag for a step in an inference that will attract theoretical attention. For example, looking down a bit later on your creatures, you notice that one of them has invented just such a requirement: a Principle of Noncontradiction, applied to predicates, on which one and the same thing cannot be, in the very same respects, both F and $\sim F$.[9] This version of inferential consistency, so different from the propositional consistency constraints you had been imagining, needs its users to demarcate its scope of application, namely, the things that can't have those incompatible predicates. (For instance, that Principle of Noncontradiction will only be usable if what it is applied to has edges, that is, places where it stops; otherwise, it is all-too-easy for me to be, say, both pale and not pale—because I'm tanned, *over here*, where we would normally say *I* am, but pale *over there*, where we would normally say *you* are.) That is, consistency regimes of this sort generally involve developing additional intellectual accessories—in this case, scopes of application of a principle—which themselves become subject to further consistency regimes. And, sure enough, the inventor of this particular Principle, you admiringly notice, does develop a theory of the scopes of application of his Principle; he calls the most important of these *ousiai*, which we render as "substances," and his successors spend north of two thousand years arguing over whether a theory of those intellectual accessories can itself be consistent.

By now, you've no doubt figured out what we're imagining you serving to your creations before you expel them from the Garden of Eden. They will be made to eat of the fruit of the tree of philosophy.

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[9] Aristotle, "Metaphysics," trans. W. D. Ross, in Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), at IV 3–6; for background discussion, see Vasilis Politis, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle and the Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 2004), chap. 5, and Paula Gottleib, "The Principle of Non-Contradiction and Protagoras: The Strategy of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IV 4," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1995): 183–98.

IV. Theories of Nothing

Philosophy, then, on the picture that is emerging from our creature construction argument, is centrally the enterprise of inventing, rethinking, revising and, when appropriate, replacing consistency regimes.[10] So now let's anticipate what will happen when that focus is lost.

We can suppose that by this point there is already a patchwork quilt of theories in place, both about inferential consistency itself and the intellectual accessories involved in such a hygiene regime. There will have been ongoing efforts to adjust them to conform to second-order consistency regimes; these present as attempts to figure out what the correct theories of statuses and intellectual accessories like truth, knowledge, substances, and so on are. But such constructs are contentful only insofar as they are part of a very practical enterprise: an ongoing inference management program (or more broadly, a program of representational hygiene management).

Units of currency, like dollars or euros, are analogous constructs, used in financial accounting procedures; grades—I mean, the sort of grades a teacher gives out in a classroom—are similar constructs used in ongoing processes of assessing academic performance. Imagine that somehow theoreticians managed to forget these very concrete facts: that they came to spend their time arguing about what a dollar *really was* (*metaphysically* really was: if you remember your history of economics, think bimetalism), or about what philosophical theory of grades was in reflective equilibrium with widespread intuition. The moment this happens, a perfectly reasonable theoretical activity, one that has to do with imposing consistency on, respectively, resource allocation decisions and pupil assessment, has turned into the theory of *nothing*.[11]

And in just that way, when the practice of evaluating and redesigning consistency regimes lapses—because philosophers come to take their logic and other such matters for granted, or for whatever other reason—the exercise of projecting those consistency regimes into theoretical form and imposing further consistency requirements on them slips into hypophilosophy. Detached from the will to rethink one's intellectual and practical ground rules that gives those theoretical constructs their life, what looks like metaphysics, like philosophy of language, like metaethics, and like epistemology . . . is suddenly the theory of nothing.

There's a distinctive look and feel the slide into hypophilosophy can have, one having to do with the way that philosophy differs from many

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[10] For discussion of creature construction arguments, with exemplars, see Paul Grice, "Method in Philosophical Psychology (From the Banal to the Bizarre)," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 48 (1975): 23–53, as well as Michael Bratman, *Structures of Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), *passim* and esp. 49f.

[11] Rather similarly, John Rawls, in "Two Concepts of Rules," *Philosophical Review* 64, no. 1 (1955): 3–32, points out that there are only strikes, bases, home runs, and so on within a game of baseball. If you start working on a theory of bases, fouls, etc., only without the baseball, you will be developing a theory of nothing.

other intellectual disciplines. A former colleague once remarked to me on the nearly opposite ways in which the term "philosophy" is used inside and outside the field. When a layman announces that his philosophy is such and such, he means that he is informing you of convictions he is not about to rethink; whereas it is no coincidence that philosophers do not use the phrase "my philosophy is," for what a philosopher properly does is rethink his convictions. Philosophy corrupted, although its practitioners will not use the giveaway words, could for the most part be prefixed by that *my philosophy is*. Whether or not the contrast is as cut and dried as this, we've put ourselves in a position to entertain an explanation for it.[12]

Philosophy, we are allowing, is in the first place the enterprise of developing and assessing consistency regimes—which we noticed can take the form of arguing about substantive theses, when the consistency requirements are put in material mode. Because such consistency regimes govern your reasoning, there is nothing more intellectually basic than they are. This means that when you assess them, design alternatives to them, and invent novel inferential hygiene regimes, there's no firm ground to stand on: nothing you can simply take for granted. This means in turn that, at least when engaging the central subject matter of philosophy, you are always in the mode of Kuhnian revolutionary science. What characterizes so-called normal science, in Thomas Kuhn's description of it, is reliance on a toolkit of stable inferential techniques; these make up much of what he famously called "paradigms." Among the academic disciplines, philosophy is unusual in that there is no normal-science phase, nothing that can *just* be the workmanlike activity of theory construction and application. Because what is being revised is that basic inferential toolkit, philosophy *normally* requires the intellectual posture appropriate to scientific revolution.[13]

And this is why adopting the posture of normal science ("we're on the right track, we have results, but we 'must do better'") is a reasonably

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[12] Is it that cut and dried? After all, sometimes the layperson *does* change "his philosophy," and there are a great many philosophers who defend views that they will not consider abandoning under any circumstances. But the status of the layperson's "philosophy," as a fund of convictions on which he draws in addressing other issues, remains even if the fund experiences some churn, and defenders of their theoretical fortresses, even if they do not change their minds, are in any case supposed to defend them.

[13] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). But can this be right? Surely getting to the bottom even of a proposal for the revision of a consistency regime will require seeing what it amounts to when it is fully realized; if the proposal is sufficiently ambitious, no one person will be capable of getting to that point; so it will be necessary to develop the proposal cooperatively, which means having philosophers who work within it, thus treating it as Kuhnian normal science.

Something of the sort is no doubt necessary, but when the participants cease to be self-aware about the enterprise—when they forget that the point is assessing and debugging the consistency regime itself—the track record shows, or so it seems to me, that their achievements turn out to be unsuitable for the purpose. And the usual sorts of training for normal science—learning to accept the dictates and methods of your philosophical school as given—are not conducive to self-awareness.

reliable symptom of the lapse into hypophilosophy.[14] I began by suggesting that corruption isn't always about money, self-interest, and breaking the rules, and also that considering the state of philosophy would help us see what else corruption might amount to. If we are on the right track, the refined and often explanatorily prior form of corruption involves, adapting now a term improvised by John Austin, *etiolation*: your intellectual activities becoming disengaged from their objects in a way that drains what you say of the content it formerly had. If you move the gearshift into neutral, disengaging the engine of your car from its driveshaft, and then start revving the engine, turning the steering wheel and slamming on the brakes, you are only *pretending* to drive, and hypophilosophy is very much like that: it is *Pretend Philosophizing*.[15] Practices and institutions normally require their participants to internalize local standards, priorities, guidelines, and ideals. Corruption is naturally taken to involve betrayal.[16] So here we can remind ourselves that one can betray not only persons, one's country, and the like, but also those ideals and standards—and do so by hollowing out the activity that they govern.

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[14] That line is the title of Timothy Williamson, "Must Do Better," in Patrick Greenough and Michael Lynch, eds., *Truth and Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 177–87. Now, it would have been premature for Socrates to insist that philosophy was not going to succeed in producing theories that counted as established results. But we have an up-of-two-thousand-year track record that he did not, and it now looks to be the conclusion of a well-supported induction that philosophy shares with hypophilosophy not just an apparent subject matter, but this inability. So the point of doing philosophy cannot reasonably be to arrive at those theoretical conclusions.

I have previously attempted to account for the track record on the assumption that philosophy is an attempt to solve discovery problems; see Elijah Millgram, "Relativism, Coherence, and the Problems of Philosophy," in Fran O'Rourke, ed., *What Happened in and to Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2013). Here I am taking a different tack, and developing the thought that the enterprise is addressed to invention problems. Notice that when we observe a succession of what we understand to be intellectual tools, we should not conclude that the ones that have been discarded did not serve their purpose perfectly adequately in their own day. Analogously, when the carriages were replaced by automobiles, the carriages were not *refuted*.

This is an occasion to notice also that the observations we used to launch our discussion evidently need to be qualified. As a matter of history, philosophy seems to arise, again and again, out of, as people used to describe *Seinfeld*, a show about nothing. But now that we have identified the primary role of philosophizing as the development and assessment of consistency regimes—that is, the management of inferential hygiene requirements—we can explain the character of those occasions by invoking a rule of thumb, that science tends to appear late on the scene, after philosophizing itself has become entrenched. The various special sciences generate and rely on their own consistency regimes, which then come to need all of the services that philosophy is in the business of supplying. Thus we find William Whewell's *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (London: John W. Parker, 1847), an early example of philosophy of science as we know it, in which the conceptual and methodological problems of the sciences are an occasion for philosophizing that—with a little squinting—looks like someone trying to understand and critically reconstruct their evolving consistency regimes.

[15] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edition., ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 22, 92n, 104, 122; the gearshift metaphor can be found in Michael Thompson, "What Is It To Wrong Someone? A Puzzle about Justice," in R. Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler, and Michael Smith, eds., *Reason and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 333–84.

[16] I'm grateful to Frank Buckley for pressing this point.

V. Why Does it Keep Happening?

Alasdair MacIntyre has famously compared the state of our moral discourse to the pseudoscientific language of a futuristic dystopia in which science has undergone generations of suppression-by-bookburning. "What we possess," he suggested, "are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived."[17] The refined type of corruption for which I am using hypophilosophy as an icon consists in this sort of disconnect from context and the consequent hollowing out of an activity—which seems to go on, just as before, while no longer being *about* anything.

Why does philosophy become corrupt so *easily*? If I am right, philosophy is inferential engineering, but other somewhat similar engineering enterprises—think of what is involved in designing the rules of the road—don't seem to engender the sort of confusion we have been considering: no one imagines that "right on red" is a nonnatural normative truth, that is, a special sort of invisible fact. Nevertheless, the historical record suggests that, when it comes to philosophy, this shift has occurred not just once, but repeatedly. The most visible indicator is disciplinary revolt: to mention only two recent examples, our own founding fathers, the logical positivists, articulated their dissatisfaction with their Hegelian predecessors by describing their output as literally nonsense; the Cartesians dismissed their scholastic predecessors as engaged in merely verbal quibbles. We have all been taught the objections to the logical positivist criterion of meaning, and that contributes to our thinking of their move as in the first place technical. But it must have been, as it was for the Cartesians, something on the order of an observation. The German idealists, like the scholastics, had at one point been thoughtful, penetrating philosophers; so the recurring complaints, usually couched in metaphors of emptiness or hollowness, or as charges of triviality, witness that philosophy has again and again been corrupted into hypophilosophy.

Although those revolutionaries noticed the corruption themselves, we shouldn't suppose that the predecessors whose endeavors they so brutally dismissed thought they were engaging in Pretend Philosophy. In his *Attack upon 'Christendom'*, Kierkegaard bewails the state of religion in Denmark: a country full of churches, which are filled with churchgoers, who have been baptized into the Christian religion, in a country whose official, established religion is Christianity—and despite all that, a country that contains vanishingly few Christians.[18] Kierkegaard does not mean, as someone might today, that the government is providing unneeded services to a now-secular population; in the Denmark of his time, almost

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[17] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 2.

[18] Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon 'Christendom'*, 2nd ed., trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

everyone took himself to be a practicing believer. Rather, he is reminding us that you can think yourself to be a Christian, and go through the motions of Christianity, even though your faith has been entirely lost, leaving behind ossified institutional and behavioral remains that we could, varying the vocabulary we have started to use, call *hyporeligion*. Philosophy is evidently like *that*: there is no presumption of what in philosophy of mind gets called "first-person authority" with respect to whether you are philosophizing: unlike the crooked mayors whom we imagined furtively taking money under the table, most hypophilosophers don't know that what they are doing is corrupt, and they don't think they have anything to hide. Refined corruption is usually anything but furtive. But then, how is that possible? How can you lapse into hypophilosophy unawares?

A few turns back, we noticed that novel consistency regimes tend to be advanced in a proleptic register: as though the new proposal were what consistency already just *was*. You, as the god or demigod of our creature construction story, might have anticipated that. Suppose you had thought it would be best to send your humans out into the world equipped anyway with a starter set of consistency conceptions, the ones you would likely hand out being those you guessed the creatures would need first, to get by on for long enough to start developing their own. (And if you weren't going to bequeath them any yourself, then necessity would turn out to be the mother of invention, and the ones they were going to need first would be the ones they would manage first—or not at all.) Suppose that among those would be consistency checks suited for mundane facts about what philosophers have gotten in the habit of calling medium-sized dry goods, that is, suited precisely to descriptions of items that are already *just there*.

Then when the time came to consider and assess novel consistency regimes, along with their intellectual accessories, and so to reify them into a form that could be checked for consistency, your creatures' default would be to leverage that earlier investment in factual consistency, by casting the representation of the hygiene regime as a description of mundane fact. But the ensuing practical benefits of doing it that way come with costs—in the first place, a hard-to-override tendency to think of consistency, truth, knowledge, probability and so on as things that are just the way they are.

In addition, there was history that promoted this way of construing the philosophical subject matter; here I will only consider the relatively recent past, however.

During the Enlightenment and its immediate aftermath, what crystallized into the profession of philosophy as we currently know it was the battleground of an ideological war. Spinozists attempting to undercut the legitimacy of the established institutional structures were resisted by an emerging professoriat whose sponsors had a use for a moderate Enlightenment ideology, one that was up-to-date enough to be creditable, yet which would still underwrite the extant churches, monarchies,

aristocracies, and so on.[19] Because the point of the ideology-for-hire was to insist that the already-entrenched institutions were nonoptional, metaphysics, moral theory, and all the rest had to be presented as a theory of *how things were*: as a straightforward matter of fact. After all, ways of doing things, and devices for doing them, have alternatives. So an academic philosopher who positioned himself as being in the intellectual machine-tool industry (that is, as making the intellectual tools which are used to make intellectual tools: in my view, the real business of philosophy) would have been thereby unemployable.

Finally for now, proper philosophy is *difficult*. The intellectual task on its own is hard enough for a few generations of philosophers of science to have been at a loss when the time came to explain how it could be managed rationally.[20] But it is also *emotionally* difficult, and our just-so story gives us a way of explaining why. If in the course of staffing your development and testing facility, you had made the mistake of hiring an over-eager serpent as a lab assistant, and that lab assistant had made the mistake of convincing your humans-in-preparation to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, your humans would have ended up going out into the world running incompatible software packages: one of them providing a fixed and affectively entrenched system of evaluations, and the other, a suite of applications meant to allow the development and revision of, among other things, systems of evaluations. We inherit, not from a talking snake but from our evolutionary and older cultural history, preloaded responses that are tantamount to such an entrenched system of evaluations.[21] So philosophy done right is bound to be experienced as an inner struggle.

Perhaps there is more to the story. But whatever the full explanation, philosophy is for the most part taught today as an enterprise that produces theories about matters of fact. Students are exposed to a run of failed theories, and are made adept at the ins and outs of a number of theories that seem to be still in the running. (There are occasional exceptions, in Wittgenstein-influenced pedagogy, for instance.) And so it is not as though we all started out knowing what philosophy was about, and *then* were corrupted; rather, we were almost all of us raised into hypophilosophy.

The citizens of Kierkegaard's Denmark knew that they were Christians, because it said so on their birth certificates, and our academic professionals know that they are philosophers in almost the same way: they have PhDs certifying that they are competent researchers, they are employed as

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[19] See Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[20] Kuhnian paradigm shifts were famously said to be irrational, and Menachem Fisch and Yitzhak Benbaji, *The View from Within* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011) is a recent example of philosophers struggling with the problem.

[21] For one partial description of the workings of those preloaded responses, see Daniel Kelly, *Yuck! The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

professors of philosophy, they go to philosophy conferences, they publish ever more journal articles in philosophy journals—and throughout, as though there was a storehouse of accumulated philosophical results that could be disseminated, archived, and recited to students.[22] Of course in all of this there need be scarcely any philosophy at all. But we shouldn't think of the pervasive corruption of philosophy as merely moral failure on the part of its practitioners. For a long time now, hypophilosophy has been our original sin.

Specialists in more established subfields of philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, and the like—are sometimes inclined to ask of less established subfields—feminism, history of ancient Chinese philosophy, bioethics, and so on—why what they are doing is *philosophy*. These questions are heard as dismissive in large part because the burden of explanation is presumed to be asymmetrical, falling exclusively on the latecomers. But if I am right about the prevalence of hypophilosophy, *everyone* who means to do philosophy owes an explanation of why what he is doing is philosophy. That means first of all giving a well-motivated characterization of what philosophy *is*. Familiarity does not count, and no one is exempt; we have seen why work in metaphysics and related areas is especially likely to prove to be no more than hypophilosophy.

VI. Tethering

Philosophy as I've just described it is ruthlessly practical; it is driven by the needs of logic, understood as an engineering science. If this is not going to be misleading, I need to acknowledge that philosophy can also be playful; it can be advanced and regulated not just by the imperatives of the clients of inferential hygiene regimes but by autonomous philosophical aesthetic sensibilities; it can take on problems and approaches to them that have no obvious practical payoffs.[23] To explain how, and how we can allow all of this and still retain the distinction between philosophy and hypophilosophy, I'm going to lean not on a just-so story, but on analogy and metaphor.

I suggested earlier that units of currency are artefacts of a representational hygiene regime, and that they belong in the same broad family

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[22] If philosophy is, as I take it to be, an engineering science, shouldn't it be possible to certify practitioners, processes, and products? That's trickier than you might think. While one can study the inferential engineering techniques currently in use, as well as past devices that have been superseded by newer ones, if philosophy really is always properly conducted in the mode of Kuhnian revolutionary science, its practice cannot be routinized. And when a practice cannot be routinized, such certifications have very modest value.

[23] And we should have anticipated this. Creature construction arguments resemble state of nature arguments in many respects. Now, when you are convinced by a Hobbesian argument that security functions are legitimately provided by the state, you should not conclude that when you examine actually existing states, they will provide *only* security.

of metaphysical constructs as Aristotelian substances. So let's return to money, which is often enough explained by way of its own just-so story. That story's state of nature is a barter economy, in which goods are directly exchanged one for another; a litany of inconveniences is recited, and then we are told of the stroke of brilliance in which a particular commodity is designated as the medium of exchange. And so we are supposed to conclude that the point of currency is to facilitate the exchange of goods: the currency in your possession represents the extent to which you have a claim on the socially available goods.

Money absolutely serves that need, but in more advanced economies, that cannot be all it does, and here is an easy way to see that. Our lives are immediately affected by the flows of amounts of money that are far too large to exchange for anything available to walk away with. (The debt burden of a sovereign state will occasionally be larger than its GDP, which means that not all of it could even in principle be exchanged for tangible goods and services, all at once; that means that what those financial instruments represent cannot be the available tangible goods and services.) Other functions, such as the efficient allocation of capital, are being served.[24] But I am the last person to suggest that all the activities of our hypertrophied financial sector can be accounted for in terms of some practical function or other.

Nonetheless, the pirouettes and tsunamis of high finance are intimately bound up with the functionality exhibited by that familiar state of nature argument; I will call the relation *tethering*. At any point in time, not all of the money can be exchanged for goods. However, if one day it happens that my dollars no longer purchase a cup of coffee (or if not coffee, then various other goods that are not themselves financial instruments), the dollars will no longer be money, and even if our financial institutions continue to trade complex instruments on intellectually fascinating markets, they will no longer be engaged in finance, but rather (we can say) in *hypofinance*.

Like finance, philosophy is tethered to its original and fully practical uses. Not nearly all of the activity of a developed philosophical tradition is to be explained directly as serving the engineering of novel logics and analogous consistency regimes. But once the connection to its tether is lost, just as what looks like money degenerates into merely ornamental slips of paper, and just as what looks like banking turns into no more than ritual, so philosophy just as rapidly becomes hypophilosophy.[25]

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[24] For various roles played by currency, see Robert Townsend, *Financial Structure and Economic Organization* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[25] How is the discussion of hypophilosophy itself philosophy? It does seem to be fairly closely tied to the central philosophical enterprise, but it too can engender activities that count as philosophical only by way of being tethered to matters of inferential hygiene.

VII. From Refined to Crass Corruption

When considering crass corruption, the cynics by and large think that the explanation for it is obvious: officials taking money under the table and so on are motivated by self-interest. For my own part, I don't think that the cynics are nearly cynical enough; having a coherent conception of one's self-interest, and a personality integrated enough to act on it, is an achievement, and an all-too-infrequent one. To see what alternative explanation might do, let's turn to the connection between refined and crass corruption within philosophy.

As I mentioned at the outset, there isn't a lot of money circulating in the discipline, and so crass corruption takes low-key forms. For instance, academic institutions monitor their employees' publications, and the methods used to assess outputs are inevitably crude; they amount, in the first place, to counting. And so over the past two or three decades, it has become routine to see faculty publishing what is *almost* the same paper, again and again and again, or alternatively, slicing the content of a single substantial article into as many just-barely-publishable pieces as possible. And it has become normal to describe the size of the pile of publications as the academic's "productivity."

Again for instance, academic philosophers for the most part sign on to the pretense that their "research funds"—discretionary accounts spent, in my experience, predominantly on conference travel—actually are used for *research*. Now, I understand that in the sciences, conferences can be where the breakthroughs happen. But within the humanities, that is quite unusual; as far as both institutions and individual recipients are concerned, what is being paid for is publicity: the conference-goers are networking, they're padding their CVs, they're giving their home universities the equivalent of media exposure . . . but they're not *figuring or finding new things out*.[26] These are examples of those little misrepresentations that everyone knows about and nobody mentions, and they are what crass corruption looks like in academic philosophy.

In cases like these, money changes hands (albeit only eventually, and in smallish quantities). But crass corruption does not always involve a financial payoff. Academics spend a good deal of time reviewing one another's work; when referee reports enforce a party line, they are corrupt. Or again, in far too many American universities, department budgets have come to be driven by course enrollments. Even when the money isn't being paid

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[26] However, there are noteworthy exceptions, and moreover, there are various legitimate functions that conferences can serve. They can be commitment devices: if you are editing an anthology, and you want to ensure that the contributors write something by a given date, you can invite them to present their drafts at a conference scheduled on that date. So-called affinity conferences can provide moral support. And they can be an occasion to field-test the robustness of a position: faced with objections, does it contain the resources to generate responses to them?

out to *you*, it turns out to be very hard to refuse to teach a philosophically worthless but popular class; who can bring themselves to fire the TAs, cancel the speaker series, and stop buying copy paper? Or again, at those times in the rhythm of the school year when we academics find ourselves looking at stacks of several hundred letters of recommendation, the impression that the vast majority of them must be dramatically misrepresenting their recommendees becomes overwhelming; the pile, rather than any individual missive, conveys both pervasively corrupted judgment and a morally lax collective response to badly structured incentives. Or again, citations are too often tit-for-tat arrangements, attempts to curry favor with those higher in the pecking order, or a means of placating potential reviewers. To engage in or to overlook these little dishonesties is to be a participant in the crass form of corruption that pervades academic philosophy today.

And if we look at the discipline, we can make out how the crass form of corruption emerges from the refined sort. Human beings are not only consistency-hungry; they are, for reasons I will not try to reconstruct with another just-so story here, *metric*-hungry. They tend to experience metric-chasing as the pursuit of success, and so motivation by metrics is often confused with self-interest. But the difference is straightforward enough: the clear-sightedly self-interested person can explain why tracking the metric serves his coherently conceived self-interest, and I have already suggested that this is all too rare. When people lose the thread of what they are doing—when they stop understanding its point—they tend to default to tracking whatever metrics happen to come to their attention.

Thus, in professional philosophy, you see academic behavior driven by productivity metrics—more or less, publication counts, impact ratings, and the like—by institutional rankings, course enrollments, and even student evaluations. Enormous effort is expended on all of this, even when the metrics are understood to be badly constructed, and even when (as is the case with student evaluations, in many institutions) neither positive nor negative outcomes produce any further result in a faculty member's life.[27]

If philosophers had a lively awareness of the point of philosophizing—of what the enterprise is *about*—then it would be obvious to them that much of this sort of metric-chasing is in the first place a way to look busy. But when philosophy has been etiolated into hypophilosophy, and when someone no longer understands the point of what he is doing, he is liable

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[27] For discussions of why one widely used productivity assessment tool makes no sense, and of the Leiter Report—a very influential ranking of philosophy departments—see Elijah Millgram, *The Great Endarkenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 44–48, 271f. An internal study of student evaluations at my own institution determined that they assess courses on only one dimension, UX (user experience, roughly, the aspect of an interface that Apple is famously good at); but this has not led to any change in the way that student evaluations are deployed, or the attention they receive from students, faculty, and administration.

to be driven by the need to list activities on an annual report. And once everyone around you has likewise forgotten what the academic enterprise is really about, and they track those same metrics too, such activities contribute to your visibility and your department's standing, support your case for promotion, and so on: that is, your institution will reward you for chasing the metric, and penalize you for abjuring it.[28]

But now, once it seems to you and to everyone around you that a publication is a publication is a publication, why not do what you will be financially or politically rewarded for doing? If a conference is a conference is a conference, why *not* spend your institution's money on travel to exotic locations, plush accommodations, and fine food? Once you have lost sight of the difference between learning philosophy, on the one hand, and, on the other, enrollment formulas, student feedback forms, and six-year graduation rates, why *shouldn't* you be teaching (or rather, "teaching") whatever will fill those seats and allow you to credential your undergraduate customers?[29] It's not like refusing to do so would be a choice that someone engaged in an etiolated activity is in a position to explain to himself, let alone to others. At this point, even though by the lights of the larger world what we are considering is small change, we have gotten to corruption very much as the man in the street tends to think of it. Once a philosopher no longer has his mind wrapped around what philosophy is really about, he is, morally speaking, a deer in the headlights.

To watch the trundling social machine of the academic philosophy industry is to be spectator to a medium-sized human tragedy. Put to one side those participants who became professors merely because it looked like a ticket to a respectable middle-class career, and who have gotten more or less what they wanted. Then the normal path into the field begins with a startled encounter with genuine philosophy—more often than not, imaginatively recognizing it from its fossils—and the decision to

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[28] Metric-chasing can also be fostered by a sense that one's devotion to philosophy has become quixotic. When one is being managed by administrators who are themselves metric-driven, who don't understand the why and wherefore of the activities they are supervising, and who out-and-out don't care about the internal demands of one's discipline, it can be enormously hard to sustain purity of heart.

[29] I rather expect that analogous considerations are in the background when academic administrators make the personally convenient sorts of choices cataloged by Benjamin Ginsberg in *The Fall of the Faculty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Deans chase metrics for the same reasons that faculty do: in the first place, they have somehow *forgotten* what the real business of a university is.

If hypophilosophy is our original sin, philosophy corrupted does not require venal practitioners: the academic rushing into print and doggedly showing up at conferences may be genuinely trying to get a hearing for what he thinks is his discovery. But if I am right, etiolation will tend to make professors responsive to other incentives; the hands-on experience of would-be argument, when the domain is the theory of nothing, encourages what Susan Haack calls "preposterism"—roughly, publishing come what may, without regard for or attention to truth. (Susan Haack, "Preposterism and Its Consequences," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13, no. 2 [1996]: 296–315.) To be sure, in any particular case, a philosopher's motivations can be hard to decipher.

make that a large part of one's life. And somehow, in the course of being inducted into academic philosophy, these hopeful students, who are betting their entire working lives that philosophy is worthy of that level of commitment, get corrupted into producers of hypophilosophy. Somehow they lose track of their initial recognition, they forget what it was that had made that huge gamble seem to make sense, and they end up burning through their years on earth doing the sort of futile theorizing that might as well be the debates of the Presocratics.

Accordingly, our alerting ourselves to the corrupt state of the discipline should set one kind of reform agenda. But right now we are considering philosophy as perhaps a representative instance, one that we are hoping will teach us something about the etiology of corruption more broadly. So how general are the lessons we can take away from our close-to-home case study?

That's a complicated question. On the one hand, I don't want to suggest that understanding the point of a practice or enterprise or institution is enough to guarantee your—or its—integrity. But on the other, it does seem plausible that *failing* to keep hold of that understanding close to guarantees that one's actions will be guided by something else. On the one hand, for reasons we have considered, the grip of the participants in many other activities on what the missions of their various practices and institutions are is likely to be less evanescent than our own. On the other, it would be a mistake to underestimate how easy it is for even the most straightforward and even explicitly declared aims and purposes to slip out of someone's awareness. A great many people took their jobs because they needed a job, not because they had become invested in what the job was about. Quite a few organizations these days have mission statements; do you know what yours is? And doesn't so much as having a mission statement tell you that you live in the kind of bureaucracy whose inhabitants are already just going through the motions?

Earlier on, I suggested that by and large we're not cynical enough about self-interest. Thinking over where we have gotten, we can expect that a great deal of what at first glance seems to be self-interested behavior is nothing more than distracted metric-chasing by corrupt—*refinedly* corrupt—individuals; that should prove to be the case even when the socially-available metric is how much money one is accumulating or spending.

Now, to be sure, you do find actors who *are* motivated by self-interest: inside and out of academia, we all recognize the ruthlessly focused self-serving players. (Again, they are the ones who ignore the indicators that they see are unconnected to anything further that they really care about.) And especially in somewhat more Hobbesian environments, these actors can be real threats to those with whom they interact. So perhaps it will be a relief to notice that corruption is just as much a threat to the self-interested approach to life as it is to any other endeavor. As Kant noticed, a conception of one's own benefit, one that is concrete enough to

be action-guiding, is ineluctably elusive.[30] And as the would-be prudent prove unable to keep it in focus, and as their attention wavers, their prudence collapses, frequently enough, into hypoprudence; typically, they come to substitute one or more metrics for their genuinely selfish concern. Self-interest, it seems to me, is as easily corrupted as philosophy itself, and that is why we shouldn't expect it to be nearly as pervasive a driver of corruption as both common sense and economists suppose.

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[30] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1785/1981), Ak. 399.