American Philosophy: 'Scotch' or 'Teutonic'?[1]

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I

How stands philosophy in the United States now as compared with a century ago? The latter was the era of its emergence onto the international scene, and the time of the creation of the *American Philosophical Association* (founded in New York in 1901, its first meeting being held at Columbia University the following year). The present period is one in which the United States dominates the English-speaking philosophical community and is set to remain pre-eminent. This advancement parallels more general social trends, but it is no less remarkable for its being unsurprising.

In pursuing the question of the character and standing of American philosophy now and then, I do so from a British point of view (though at the time of writing I hold a visiting chair at Georgetown University in Washington). At the outset of the twentieth century Britain was itself the unquestioned leader of Anglo-Saxon thought. Now, however, as in so many areas, the US is the pre-eminent world power. This status brings prestige and various benefits but it also carries responsibilities. In considering the latter I shall recall some virtues of an earlier generation of American philosophers, especially as they were possessed by one who a century ago was seen in Britain, and elsewhere, as representing the best of philosophy in the 'New World'.

Let me begin, however, by recalling older thoughts about America and the pursuit and practice of wisdom as these were

[1] Given as an invited talk to the *American Philosophical Association* in Atlanta, Georgia, December 29, 2001, on the occasion of the centennial celebration of the founding of the *APA*. I am grateful to Professor John Sallis and members of the *APA* Eastern Division program committee for the invitation to give this address. It was written and delivered during a period of tenure as Royden Davis Professor of Humanities at Georgetown University. I am grateful to Georgetown, especially to the Department of Philosophy, for the benefits bestowed by this appointment.

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expressed by two other non-Americans—both, as it happens, *continental* Europeans (a qualification no less significant then than now). The passages will, I am sure, be more familiar to American readers than to British ones. The first comes from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History:*

> Since the original nation has disappeared, or nearly so, the effective population comes from the most part from Europe, and what happens in America has its origins in Europe. Europe has thrown its surplus population to America—in much the same way that in the Imperial cities many fled to subsidiary towns … North America relates itself to Europe in the same subsidiary role. …
>
> North America will be comparable with Europe only after the immeasurable space which that country presents to its inhabitants shall have been occupied, and the members of the political body shall have begun to be pressed back on each other … and so form a compact system of civil society, and require an organised state. …
>
> America is therefore the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself … it is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical lumber room of old Europe.[2]

In the same year that Hegel died (1831), the French Catholic aristocrat Count Alexis de Tocqueville travelled to see the land which the German sometime-Pietist philosopher could only imagine. From the second part of his *Democracy in America* comes the following observation:

> The Americans have no philosophical school, and they care but little for all the schools into which Europe is divided, the very names of which are scarcely known to them. Nevertheless it is easy to perceive … that without ever having taken the trouble to define the rules of a philosophical method, they are in possession of one common to the whole people …
>
> … I discover that in most of the operations of the mind, each American appeals to the individual exercise of his own understanding alone. America is therefore one of the countries in the world where philosophy is least studied, and where the precepts of Descartes are best applied.[3]

[2] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (c. 1820; published posthumously in 1837) trans. J. Silbree [1857] (New York: Colonial Press, 1900).

[3] Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America,* trans. H. Reeve (New York: Bantam, 2000). Vol. II, Bk. l, ch. 1, pp. 511–2.

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I shall return briefly to aspects of this pair of lapidary observations, but for now let them sparkle by themselves.

II

Earlier I referred to viewing American philosophy from a 'British perspective'. It would be more apt, however, to speak of a 'North British' one, since I am a Scot whose permanent academic home is the University of St Andrews. The point of this qualification and elaboration is not to introduce a note of gratuitous nationalism, but to indicate a ground for the particular and strong sympathy I feel for aspects of the American philosophical tradition, aspects of which, as we will see, owe a good deal to earlier Scottish thinkers.

As well as being the centennial year of the *American Philosophical Association,* 2001 saw the centenary of the *Scots Philosophical Club.* As might be imagined, the latter is a very much smaller society (by about a hundredfold: circa one hundred as against ten thousand). The *SPC's* current membership is less than that achieved by the *APA* within its first or second years; but at the point of establishment of the two societies their membership was comparable, both in numbers and in common heritage. (Among the *APA's* founding members were the British-born and educated James E. Creighton of Cornell, G. M. Duncan of Yale, and Alexander Meiklejohn of Brown). Both societies were formed at a time when the populations of philosophers in Britain and in the United States were much smaller, and the great majority were then more concerned with teaching the subject than with original scholarly activity. They were also more socially and intellectually homogenous, both within and between them. Moreover, it was then possible for the active philosophers to read each other's works fairly comprehensively; in part because there were many fewer of them, but also because they were more closely related in subject matter and style, and in their understanding of the status and scope of philosophy itself.

One of the great changes effected in the course of the twentieth century, and particularly since the Second World War, is the increase in the number of professional philosophers, especially in the United States. The explanation lies in the enormous expansion of higher education: with more colleges and universities and more graduate programmes. As is the way of these things, enlargement has also brought diversification of the field, as the greater numbers of professionals pursue different interests and try to establish distinctive sector niches. At the same time, however, the style of graduate education, the prestige of certain programmes, and the

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professionalization of the practice of philosophy, (involving individual and departmental peer review, and the proliferation of exclusively academic fora) have led to a high degree of intellectual conformity. This is essentially that of group identification occasionally, but unconvincingly, masked by non-conformist rhetoric and posturing. These various institutional and professional forces have also resulted in a general disengagement from the traditional manner of humane reflection directed towards an educated public.

Related to this is the idea, now voiced by moral philosophers as well as by metaphysicians, that like science, and unlike the arts, philosophy (reconceived along naturalistic lines) now offers the prospect of unmistakable progress in the solution of certain well-defined problems;[4] and with the promise of such progress comes the prospect of professional advancement. It was once common to speak of a philosophical 'calling' and of a life given to its practice, as one might of a life given to literature, theology or to the study of classical antiquity; now it is typical to speak of philosophical 'careers' and of 'research projects'—expressions with which generations formed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would have been uncomfortable, to say the least.

A flavour of the contrast is given in John Dewey's autobiographical essay 'From Absolutism to Experimentalism', in which he recalls his education at the University of Vermont where the teaching of philosophy was influenced by what Dewey describes as 'the still dominant Scotch school'. He notes that 'Teachers of philosophy were at that time, almost to a man, clergymen' (remarking again the predominance among them of 'Scotch philosophy'); and later he writes of how, after a year of private scholarship: 'I decided to make philosophy my life-study, and accordingly went to Johns Hopkins the next year (1884) to enter upon that 'new thing' graduate work'[5]

In comparing the situation of American philosophy today with that obtaining a century ago the most striking differences are the changed conceptions of the nature of philosophy in relation to other fields of enquiry and scholarship, and the changed expectations of its role in education, culture and society. In regard to the latter I have in mind both the expectations held *by* philosophers, and the expectations others may have *of* them. These aspects are, of course,

[4] For a critical discussion of this notion see John Haldane, 'Has Philosophy Made a Difference and Could it be Expected To?', in A. O'Hear (ed.) *Philosophy at the New Millennium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[5] John Dewey 'From Absolutism to Experimentalism' in W. Goetzmann (ed.) *The American Hegelians* (New York: Knopf, 1973) pp. 380ff.

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related. The world takes practitioners as it finds them, and too often it has found philosophers uninterested in the world. The influence of American (and British) thinkers as opinion-shapers in the field of public policy, in the broad cultural sphere, and even in the area of the theory and practice of higher education, has declined throughout the twentieth century. Consider that in post-war Britain, Justin Gosling, Stuart Hampshire, Anthony Kenny, Malcolm Knox, Onora O'Neill, Anthony Quinton, Alan Ryan, Stewart Sutherland, Geoffrey Warnock, Mary Warnock, and Bernard Williams have all been heads of colleges or universities, but that with Lord Sutherland's retirement from the Principalship of Edinburgh University in 2002, Onora (Baroness) O'Neill and Alan Ryan are the only remaining philosopher-cum-educational leaders.

So far as the US is concerned it has been said that John Dewey was America's last public philosopher—and he died half a century ago (in 1952). Certainly outside the academy even America's leading figures exert little, if any, influence. Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty may be the best candidates for exceptions to this last claim; though while, like Rawls, they are read by non-philosophers their readership remains largely within the academy, and mostly among those who take a philosophical view of their own subjects (principally political science and cultural and women's studies).

In general the profession has itself to blame for the want of wider interest in it. Even in the fields of applied philosophy, which is not what the world comes to philosophy for (and which is often perceived to be slight) the use of pseudo-technical formulations hinders rather than helps. In speculative philosophy it both adds to the sense, and furthers the fact of the subject's isolation. Increasingly, though late in the day, these effects are being complained about by philosophers themselves. In a recent article entitled 'The Ontological Turn' C. B. Martin and John Heil lament this situation and offer a similar diagnosis of its causes. They begin as follows:

> Contemporary philosophy of mind, like much contemporary philosophy, has become mired in sterile disputes over technical issues apparently of interest only to professional philosophers. One symptom of the current malaise is the difficulty philosophers have in motivating central themes to outsiders. Attention lavished on possible worlds, the causal relevance of mental content, and supervenience is difficult to justify to anyone who has not been conditioned by an appropriately *comme il faut* Ph.D. program.[6]

[6] C. B. Martin and John Heil, 'The Ontological Turn', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy,* Vol. XXIII, 1999.

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It is hard not to recognize some truth in this even if one thinks that the use of technical concepts has brought clarity, precision and progress at least to the extent of identifying possibilities. Whether there has indeed been significant progress in the philosophy of mind is a matter about which I have some doubts, though this is not the occasion to pursue them.[7]

III

Over the last century there has been a good deal of traffic of persons, publications and ideas to and fro across the Atlantic; but the general direction of influence and the relative standing of the countries has unquestionably (and, I believe, permanently) changed. Recent British philosophy has been more focused upon the writings of such as Davidson, Dennett, Dworkin, Fodor, Kripke, Lewis, Nagel, Nozick, Putnam, Quine, Rawls, Rorty, Scanlon and Searle, than upon the thought of Anscombe, Berlin, Foot, Geach, Hamlyn, Hampshire, Hare, Mellor, Strawson, and Winch. Dummett, MacIntyre, Wiggins, Williams and Wollheim are exceptions to this catalogue of American pre-eminence, as in younger generations are Blackburn, McDowell, McGinn, Parfit, Peacocke and Wright; but of these all but Dummett and Wiggins have held, or do hold, full or part-time positions in US universities, and only one, viz. Simon Blackburn, is now employed exclusively in the UK.

A hundred years ago matters of influence and standing were very different. Americans looked across the Atlantic to Scotland, England, Germany and France. They were also keen to associate themselves with the intellectual traditions that had given birth to Hume and Reid, Locke and Berkeley, Kant and Hegel, and Descartes and Malebranche. This can easily be seen in the writings of the period. The commonly felt sense of respect, and even of deference, is expressed in the following preface to one of the great American works of a century ago. The writer is William James introducing his Gifford lectures of 1901–02:

> It is with no small amount of trepidation that I take my place behind this desk, and face this learned audience. To us Americans the experience of receiving instruction from the living voice as well as from the books of European scholars is very familiar …

[7] For some elaboration of these doubts see John Haldane, 'The State and Fate of Contemporary Philosophy of Mind', *American Philosophical Quarterly,* Vol. 37, 2000, pp. 301–11.

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> It seems the natural thing for us to listen while Europeans talk. The contrary habit, of talking whilst Europeans listen, we have not yet acquired; and in him who first makes the adventure it begets a certain sense of apology being due for so presumptuous an act. Particularly must this be the case on a soil as sacred to the American imagination as that of Edinburgh …
>
> Let me say only that now that the current, here and at Aberdeen, has begun to run from west to east, I hope it may continue to do so. As the years go by I hope that many of my countrymen may be asked to lecture in the Scottish universities, changing places with Scotsmen lecturing in the States; I hope that our people may become as one people; and that the peculiar philosophic temperament, as well as the peculiar political temperament, that goes with our English speech may more and more pervade and influence the world.[8]

This passage invites commentary in several respects.[9] First, while James bows graciously before his audience I somehow doubt that he was as awed by the occasion as his words may suggest. He was already known and admired in Britain as were other American philosophical writers. Another figure already known was his Harvard colleague Josiah Royce. In fact, in spite of James speaking of 'being the first to make the adventure' (of talking while the Europeans listen) he had in fact been preceded as a Gifford lecturer two years before by Royce who spoke in Aberdeen on the theme of 'The World and the Individual' (the resulting book being famous in its time but now largely forgotten).

The earlier invitation had been issued to James himself, but he asked for a postponement, and then, rather in the style of one declining to review a book, suggested that he knew someone else who would do the job very well. Royce had been educated at Berkeley, Göttingen, Leipzig, and Johns Hopkins, and notwithstanding significant philosophical disagreements James had already advanced Royce's career by securing his employment at Harvard. So the invitation was issued, which Royce accepted with enthusiasm. Not so William's sister Alice, who, upon hearing of this, wrote indignantly to their brother Henry: 'Royce! He will not refuse, but

[8] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans Green & Co, 1902) pp. 4–5.

[9] I was first alerted to some of the issues I now discuss by Peter Jones's article 'William James' in Marcus G. Singer (ed.) *American Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 43–68, to which I am indebted.

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over he will go with his Infinite under his arm ... William overrates him'.[10] She was certainly right about Royce carrying over the Infinite. Born in Grass Valley during the California Gold Rush and subsequently described as that state's 'gift to philosophy', Josiah Royce was formed a neo-Hegelean and developed his own brand of logic-involving Absolute Idealism. A flavour of what he carried under his arm is given by the following characterization of *being* as that is implied in the meanings of ideas:

> ... first, the complete fulfillment of your internal meaning, the final satisfaction of the will embodied in the idea; but secondly also, that absolute determination of the embodiment of your idea as this embodiment would then be present—that absolute determination of your purpose, which would constitute an individual realization of the idea. For an individual act is one for which no other can be sustained without some loss of determination, or some vagueness.[11]

This sort of thing infuriated Russell and he became no less passionate in his opposition to it even as he grew old. In a National Book League lecture delivered in 1946 and entitled 'Philosophy and Politics' he quotes the primary source and is withering in his sarcasm:

> Of [the Absolute Idea, Hegel] gives the following definition: '*The Absolute Idea*. The idea, as unity of the subjective and objective Idea, is the notion of the Idea—a notion whose object is the Idea as such, and for which the objective is Idea—an Object which embraces all characteristics in its unity'. [Russell then continues] I hate to spoil the luminous clarity of this sentence by any commentary, but in fact, the same thing would be expressed by saying 'The Absolute Idea is pure thought thinking about pure thought'.[12]

As Russell well knew, stripped of its grandiose, attention-attracting style, this thesis is just that advanced by Aristotle and subsequently adopted by Aquinas and other Christian advocates of the potentiality/actuality distinction: pure intellect is thought thinking itself.

[10] Quoted in G. W. Allen, *William James: A Biography* (New York: Viking Press, 1967) p. 387.

[11] Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual,* Vol. I (New York: Macmillan, 1899) pp. 338–9.

[12] Bertrand Russell, 'Philosophy and Politics' in *Authority and the Individual* (Boston: Beacon Hill, 1949) p. 91.

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James likewise spoke disparagingly of Hegelean and other 'teutonic philosophy'. He and Russell had their differences, for example, over judgmentss of character (where James revealed himself to be the gentler spirit), over the theses of the *Varieties of Religious Experience* (of which Russell wrote 'everything is good about the book except the conclusions'[13]), and over the importance of formal methods: in a letter of 1908 to Russell, James wrote 'my dying words to you are "Say good-by to mathematical logic if you wish to preserve your relations with concrete realities"'.[14] It is ironic, therefore, that following James's death, a year or so later, the status of being America's best known philosopher settled upon the logic-loving Californian devotee of the Universal Absolute.

This leads to my second comment which is prompted by James's remark about the 'Peculiar philosophical temperament ... that goes with the English speech'. Whatever their differences, James and Russell were appreciative of the classical British empirical tradition and were equally opposed to idealism. That Royce's teutonic metaphysics did not meet with staunch opposition from his Scottish audience is due to the fact that the astringent philosophical styles of Hume and Reid had given way, through a series of transformations, to a Caledonian brand of Hegeleanism. This was associated primarily with the Edinburgh and St Andrews philosopher James Ferrier—author the term 'epistemology' and of its less successful counterpart 'agnoiology' (the theory of ignorance).[15] Ferrier fell under the influence of absolute idealism in Germany which he visited in 1834, bringing back to Edinburgh works by, and a medallion of the not-so-late Hegel.

The most ironic of these developments came at the hands of Sir William Hamilton, Reid's self-appointed chief editor and sometime mentor of Ferrier. As others have done since—as for example in the movement known as 'Transcendental Thomism'—Hamilton

[13] Letter of September 1, 1902 to Lucy Donnelly *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell 1872–1914* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1951) p. 252. On the matter of character judgements, Russell writes of his first mother in law '[it] was a fairly common view [that she was] both a saint and a sage; it was held, for example, by William James. I, on the contrary, came gradually to think her one of the wickedest people I had ever known'. p. 224.

[14] Russell, *Autobiography*, p. 303.

[15] Ferrier's philosophical writings are gathered in *Philosophical Works of James Frederick Ferrier* (eds) Sir Alexander Grant & E.L. Lushington (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1875) reprinted with an introduction by John Haldane (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2001).

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thought to improve realism by accommodating it to Kantian epistemology. It will be no surprise that Reidean realists are as keen to reject Hamilton's 'improvement' as are Aquinian realists to reject that offered by Marechal. Indeed, there is a common thread running through the history of philosophy's oscillations between realism and idealism—which I also see most recently in the wove of Putnam's *Three Fold Cord*.[16]

The thread is spun in the attempt to reconcile direct epistemological engagement with the diversity of epistemic perspectives. In the transformation of Scots realism this emerges with Hamilton's talk of 'the conditioned relativity of knowledge'; in Transcendental Thomism with Rousselot's insistence upon 'the relativity of conceptual judgments';[17] in the American 'Critical Realists' introduction of 'interpretative concepts'; and in Putnam's 'Deweyean Realism' with the idea of ineliminable 'conceptual relativity'.[18] Such a relativism took secure root in Scotland before it had even been planted on English soil; and in the capable hands of Ferrier it had put forth blooms of Hegelean form and proportion. So it was that Royce could feel that in Kings College, Aberdeen he had an audience that understood him. When I add that the Giffords have always been public events attended by town as well as by gown, that may give a sense of how educated a public there was for such lectures, and also how familiar in its broadest features, was Hegeleanism to that audience.

A third comment arising from James's introduction is that any doubt one may have about the sincerity of his opening words of humble appreciation as he began his own lectures is entirely eliminated when it comes to those passages in which he mentions the Scots philosophers. When he spoke of the Europeans 'talking as Americans listened' he went on to identify 'Scottish, English, French or German representatives of the science or literature of their respective countries'. He was himself of Scots/Irish extraction and this may have coloured his estimate slightly; but it is no doubt true that, as he says, his first philosophical reading was of Scots authors: Sir William Hamilton, Dugald Stewart and Thomas

[16] Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[17] Pierre Rousselot, *The Intellectualism of St Thomas* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1935).

[18] Most recently re-affirmed in Hilary Putnam, 'Comment on John Haldane's paper "Realism with a Metaphysical Skull"', in J. Conant and U. Zeglen (eds) *Putnam: Pragmatism and Realism* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp. 105–8.

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Brown. As Dewey later noted, this was generally the case of people of education in nineteenth century America. Indeed, the influence of the thinkers James mentions, as of the other Scots who Dewey had in mind (such as John Witherspoon, Hugh Blair and James McCosh) upon the development of American philosophy, even into the twentieth century, is still insufficiently appreciated in America and in Britain.[19]

It was members of this broad group who introduced to America the idea that philosophy should be fundamental in College education, and it was this that influenced James to write in *Some Problems of Philosophy* that:

> philosophy in one sense of the term is only a compendium name for the spirit in education which the word 'college' stands for in America; something to be associated with liberal education.[20]

Elsewhere—in 'The Sentiment of Rationality'—he follows the Scots philosophers in stressing the importance of feeling in moral psychology, and (anticipating Merleau-Ponty) in emphasizing the significance of phenomenal bodily consciousness as falsifying the Cartesian form of the division between mind and body. The first of these, and arguably so far as Hume and Adam Smith are concerned the second also, is a central element in eighteenth and nineteenth century Scots moral science. A third element of that tradition, alighted upon by the pragmatists, (and later rediscovered by 'basic belief' philosophers of religion such as Plantinga and Wolterstorff (Calvinists both)) is the place given to *natural belief* as a category in epistemology. Perhaps the best discussion of this is in Peirce's 1905 essay 'Issues of Pragmatism' where he commends the 'Scotch philosophers' for recognizing that 'the original beliefs [are] of the general nature of instincts'.[21]

Other metaphilosophical aspects of this tradition also find expression in James's writings. For reasons of space I simply enumerate four of these:

[19] For some brief essays towards an account of this influence see Elmer H. Duncan, 'Eighteenth-Century Scottish Philosophy: Its Impact on the American West', *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. VI, No. 1, 1975. pp. 131–48; Elizabeth Fowler, 'Some Interesting Connections Between the Common Sense Realists and the Pragmatists, Especially James' in P. Caws (ed.) *Two Centuries of Philosophy in America* (Towata, NJ.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1980) pp. 94–103; and Samuel Fleischacker, 'The Impact on America: Scottish Philosophy and the American Founding' (forthcoming).

[20] W. James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (London: Longman, 1911) p. 6.

[21] Peirce, 'Issues of Pragmatism', *Monist,* 1905, p. 441.

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1) *Belief in the need to master effective modes of expression* A. J. Ayer who faults James for his want of analytical rigour nonetheless writes of his prose as follows:

> There are philosophers, such as Hume and Russell, who have written with greater elegance, but no modern philosopher matches William James in the vividness and range of his imagery or the freshness of his humour.[22]

2) *Belief in the value of the public lecture*. James berates Peirce for neglecting the requirement that, as he put it, 'a lecture must succeed *as such*'.

3) *Belief that the quality of a soul* (to speak archaically but in terms that James would appreciate) *is measured by its practical fruits*. This suggests a Christian influence. It is not, however, the doctrine of salvation aided by works, but the specifically Calvinist one (whose influence is also evident among the Scots philosophers) of salvation by predestined election; good fruits being evidence of that predestination.

4) *Belief in the social role of the philosopher.* In the previous passage Ayer writes:

> But aiming, as he mostly did, at a wider audience than that of his professional colleagues, he was more concerned to present his opinions in a way that would appeal to the imagination than to fortify them against minute criticism.

My fourth comment concerns the set of attitudes which James acquired from his reading of the Scots, which made the Gifford invitation so pleasing to him, and which disinclined him to the German academic tradition in philosophy. I have already quoted him to this effect but the full intensity of his opposition deserves to be registered. In a letter to Schiller in Oxford he writes: '*Vive* the Anglo-Saxon amateur, disciple of Locke and Hume, and *pereat* the German professional'. What he was objecting to here was principally a conception of philosophy as a technical science.[23] In the same letter he writes as follows:

> It is an uplifting thought that truth is to be told at last in a radical and attention compelling manner. I think I know, though,

[22] A. J. Ayer, *The Origins of Pragmatism* (San Francisco: Freeman, Cooper and Company, 1968) p. 175.

[23] According to Schelling's lecture of 1827 'Ueber den nationellen Gegensatz in der Philosophie' (On the National Opposition in Philosophy) the true 'scientific' speculative and systematic philosophy is German; see F. W. J. Schelling, *Samtliche Werke* (Cotta) Vol. X, pp. 193–2000.

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> how the attention of many will find a way not to be compelled—their will is set on having a technically and artificially and professionally expressed system, that all talk carried on as yours is on principles of common-sense activity, is as remote and little worthy of being listened to as the slanging each other of boys in the street as we pass. Men disdain to notice that. It is only after our (i.e. your and my) general way of thinking gets organized enough to become a regular part of the bureaucracy of philosophy that we shall get a serious hearing. Then, I feel inwardly convinced, our day will have come.[24]

James's mention of the 'bureaucracy of philosophy' sounds ironic, but I presume that what he means by it is only broad acceptance as measured by reading and teaching among professors and students of the discipline. Like Russell and the British realists, James's hostility to German philosophy was not just to its manner and theoretic pretensions. He also objected strongly to the doctrines of Absolute Idealism. In particular, he wanted to eliminate any scope for Hegelean concepts in the 'new' psychology he and others had been developing. In the work *A Pluralistic Universe* (which had been given as lectures in Oxford in 1909) he quotes and glosses a certain amount of Absolute Idealist metaphysical psychology-cum-psychological metaphysics, and he rejects it fairly passionately.[25] Recognizing, however, that this is inadequate in a philosophical context he acknowledges the need for something more dialectical:

[24] William James, 'Letter to Schiller' 1902, *Letters* Vol. 1.

[25] At one point in *A Pluralistic Universe,* op. cit., pp. 53–4, James quotes at length from an essay by Henry Jones which was published in the *Contemporary Review* in 1907:

> For many years adherents of [the idealist] way of thought have deeply interested the British public by their writings. Almost more important than their writings is the fact that they have occupied philosophical chairs in almost every university in the country. … Carlyle introduced it, bringing it as far as Chelsea. Then Jowett and Thomas Hill Green, and William Wallace and Lewis Nettleship, and Arnold Toynbee and David Ritchie … guided the waters into those upper reaches known locally as the Isis [to Oxford]. John and Edward Caird brought them up the Clyde [to Glasgow], Hutchinson Stirling up the Forth [to Edinburgh]. They have passed up the Mersey [to Liverpool] and up the Severn [to Bristol] and Dee and Don [to Aberdeen]. The pollute the bay of St Andrews and swell the waters of the Cam [Cambridge], and have somehow crept overland into Birmingham. The stream of German idealism has been diffused over the academical world of Great Britain. The disaster is universal.

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> abstract emotional appeals of any kind sound amateurish in the business that concerns us. Impressionistic philosophizing, like impressionistic watch making or land surveying is intolerable to experts. Serious discussion of the alternatives before us forces me, therefore, to become more technical.[26]

There is in this something of an element of regret, but the more important point is that James had arrived at a view of the general character of a position on the basis of habituated good judgment and any 'technical' demonstration is secondary to that. This is 'prejudice' only in the sense of pre-judgment. It would be as wrong to suggest that James is not in a position to judge the character of the whole until he has worked through the detail, as it would be to maintain that one was not in a position to make a moral judgment until one had done the relevant abstract philosophy, or assembled a case sufficient to secure conviction in a court of moral law. This is just the sort of thing that James recoiled from and which he feared threatened the development of philosophy in America.

IV

A century on where do we stand? One comparative approach would be to explore in detail the contents of the leading academic publications then and now. There is not the space to do so here, but nor, I think is there the need, for even a brief inspection suffices to reveal a number of obviously significant points. If one looks first at *Mind,* Vol. IX, 1900, one sees that the authors include Bradley ('In Defence of Phenomenalism in Psychology'); McTaggart ('Hegel's Treatment of the Categories of the Idea'); Moore ('Necessity') and Sidgwick ('Criteria of Truth and Error'), with other contributions from the logician MacColl ('Symbolic Reasoning') and Schiller ('On the Conception of Change in Aristotle')—both figures deserving to be re-read in the twenty first century.[27] In the following year's volume (X, 1901) we find Bradley again ('Some Remarks on Conation'); two essays by Russell ('On the Notion of Order' and 'Is

[26] William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909).

[27] MacColl defined the notion of strict implication two decades before C. I. Lewis and devised the first modal system in modern logic. Happily the task of due appreciation is under way thanks to the *MacColl Project* pursued jointly by the philosophical institutes of Greifswald University Germany and the University of Oslo, Norway. One product of this project is a journal special issue on MacColl see *Nordic Journal of Philosophical Logic,* Vol. 3, No. 1, 1998.

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Position in Time and Space Absolute or Relative?'); Sidgwick, now posthumously, ('The Philosophy of T. H. Green') and Seth ('The Ethical System of Henry Sidgwick'). By comparison the corresponding volumes of the *Philosophical Review* offer the following highlights: Vol. IX, 1900: Dewey ('Some Stages of Logical Thought'); Mead ('Suggestions Towards a Theory of the Philosophical Disciplines'); and Perry ('The Abstract Freedom of Kant'); Vol. X, 1901 contains Creighton ('Methodology and Truth'); Seth ('The Utilitarian Estimate of Knowledge'); and Woodbridge ('The Dominant Conception of the Earliest Greek Philosophy'). It is worth noting a propos the matter of Scottish influence on American philosophy, that as well as publishing in both journals James Seth of the University of Edinburgh was a 'co-operating' editor of the *Philosophical Review*.

In general as between all four volumes there is first, a great deal of history of philosophy, more so than in their sum for the corresponding years a century later, though while *Mind* in recent times set its face against the history of the subject, the *Philosophical Review* has become the exception among the leading English-language philosophy journals in giving extensive space to it. Second, the four volumes also contain a good deal more of what would now be regarded as empirical psychology, that being especially so with *Mind* which had been founded to cover psychology along with philosophy (as was the later established *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*). Likewise the two were later to narrow their scope as psychology separated off as a distinct discipline. Third, there is an evident sense of the emergence of 'pragmatism' as a philosophy authored in the United States and which deserves serious evaluation. The volume of *Mind* for 1900 contains a paper by W. Caldwell bearing the title 'Pragmatism' a precis of which by N. E. Truman also appears in the *Philosophical Review* in the following year. It will be enough, I think, if I quote the beginning and end of Caldwell's (somewhat patronising) account:

> There has recently appeared as one of the publications of the University of California (a society whose activity has already resulted in publications of value to philosophy) a pamphlet by Prof. James, entitled *Philosophical Conceptions and Philosophical Results,* that has 'the uncommon merit of being its authors chief or only express treatment of the question of philosophical method' [quoted from the *Philosophical Review* announcement]
> …

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> Pragmatism, then, looked at broadly, is simply the expression, in a phrase, of many important tendencies of the science and the criticism and the practice of our day. It requires however the Criticism of the Categories and the Theory of the Ideas (as interpreted by Aristotle and the Metaphysics of Evolution) [here the author gives obscure references to Plato and to his own work on Schopenhauer] to give it form and reality.[28]

For those in need of it, Truman's gloss on Caldwell is that:

> Pragmatism must make some important assumptions: a unity of the self with the universe; a criticism of human needs; and a criterion of consequences. It [being] unfortunate that Professor James does not connect the principle with its theoretical basis.[29]

These are reasonable points to raise, perhaps; but what I would emphasize is the note of pressing seriousness. The atmosphere in these early volumes suggests a pair of campaign headquarters in which the oppositions are being given very serious assessment in preparation for a strategic response. British and American philosophy now no longer stand in that antagonistic, or at least defensive posture towards one another. The situation is rather the inverted Hegelean one in which Britain stands close to being a subsidiary city to Imperial America (as a comparative review of current leading British and American journals would easily show). Setting aside political and psychological questions, whether that is good or bad, or neither, depends in large part on the character of contemporary American philosophy

V

Writing in brief and impressionistically, though not, I hope, superficially, my own sense is that things are not as they could or should be in Hegel's land of the future. His observations were penned at a time when America was largely uninhabited and he looked forward to a condition that has long since been realized. For good or ill America is not just a collection of civic communities, it is a state. The deeper question is whether it has ever achieved, or if it once did whether it has now lost, the status of being a comprehensive civil *society*. My own estimate is that if it ever was one it is no longer so —a fact obscured by the dominance and extension of American markets and media.

[28] W. Caldwell, 'Pragmatism', *Mind,* Vol. IX, 1900, 433–56.
[29] Op. cit., 205.

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If America is not just an idea but a political entity, and perhaps a network of regional societies, then the issue to be considered is what role American philosophers may have outwith their narrow professional niches. It is at odds with the spirit of James, Dewey and Peirce—as it is, indeed, out of keeping with the spirit of Mill, Bradley or Russell—to pursue philosophy as if it were an empirical science whose results might be, but certainly need not be of speculative interest to non-practicing fellow citizens. The tradition out of which American philosophy grew—the 'Scottish tradition'—was one in which it was assumed that every person had good reason to know the truth about reality and the place of human kind within it.

Certainly at its root that tradition was Christian, but Hume was an agnostic (a deist, or an atheist), as was Smith, as was Ferrier, and so on into the period when Royce and James came to deliver their lectures. The question, therefore, is not: do you have to believe in God to think that philosophy should be presented in a form in which the educated public should be able to understand it? but rather: do you really think it is of an order of general interest and importance to warrant addressing it to the world? There is no doubt whatsoever that James supposed this to be so (as did Royce, Dewey and Peirce), and this belief informs the metaphilosophical commitments I enumerated earlier, and which those others would at least have aspired to, and, in some cases, conspicuously achieved.

Hegel looked to America to develop a philosophy, and De Tocqueville thought he already saw one in operation throughout the land. For all that professional philosophy has berated foundationalism, and for all that the natural formulation of pragmatism may seem to be coherentist, there is indeed, I think, a general tendency in American thought to seek out and build upon secure foundations. Whether that is a philosophical mistake is something that only philosophy can show, And if it is not a mistake, then philosophers in America should look for opportunities to celebrate this good sense. The truth, however, is that professional philosophers in North America have, for all the pages and conferences of applied philosophy, become largely detached from the wider educated public. This is a serious matter that has no easy or sure solution. There is, however, a clue in the history of American education as James and others in his time understood it. That is to give special attention to the place of philosophy in undergraduate education in the hope that this will re-establish the character and importance of the discipline in the minds of the general educated public. Currently fewer than one percent of undergraduates in American colleges and universities major in philosophy, a fact not unconnected with contemporary academic styles.

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Ironically the growth and aggrandisment of what Dewey termed 'graduate work' has produced a professional culture in which the places that really matter the most for the intellectual health of civil society—the liberal arts and other undergraduate colleges—are seen by aspiring professionals to matter less than the places which, in their scholastic introversion and self-absorption, fill their waking dreams, viz., the research-led universities.[30] It is a further irony that of the cultural institutions upon which the educated public draws for ideas and values these latter are of least importance. And since it is through that public's interests and efforts that American society is sustained, academic philosophers would do well to reconsider their position, if only as a matter of prudence.

Philosophy students sometimes learn how in ancient Athens the legend inscribed on the entrance to Plato's academy was '*Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here*'. I offer an alternative inscription for the portals of graduate schools:

> *With regard to the latest and best research, as that is validated by the Philosophical Gourmet Report, and in the United Kingdom by the national Research Assessment Exercise, remember that even this will pass away—probably within a ten to twenty year time frame—and that neither during the period of its prominence nor during that of its retreat will it engage the minds of your educated fellow citizens*

To this an ironic student might well respond with the words of Max Beerbohm 'How I wish I could keep up with the leaders of modern thought as they pass by into oblivion'. It is, however, as much a matter for proper concern as for wry amusement that professional philosophy now so often aspires to do no more than impress itself. A century on from 1901–02 that is an unfitting realization of the promise offered by the likes of William James. Happily it is not the only story to be told of a century of American philosophy; even happier if the present century also fulfilled the British-inspired Jamesean hope. Speaking figuratively, American philosophy faces a choice of preferred identity. Is it to be 'teutonic', i.e. abstract, esoteric, remote, speculative and technical, working from idealized

[30] In the essay from which I previously quoted, Dewey writes that

> It is a commonplace of educational history that the opening of Johns Hopkins University marked a new epoch in higher education in the United States. We are probably not in a condition as yet to estimate the extent to which its foundation and the development of graduate schools in other universities, following its example, mark a turn in our American culture.

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forms of the real towards the human, and never quite reaching it, or if having done so finding not much there of philosophical interest? Or is it to be 'Scotch', i.e. a mode of reflection that stays close to the language of common experience, and when drawn to the metaphysical prefers the descriptive over the revisionary? Or can it perhaps fulfil Hegel's hope and fashion a new synthesis—be it a non-Hegelean one? I leave these questions for American philosophers to answer; but in light of our subsidiary relationship to American thought I also ask British practitioners to consider the same issues. What is at stake, after all, is nothing less than the place of philosophy within western civilization.

Finally, it is in the spirit of the foregoing that I should emphasize that these appeals are addressed to philosophers conjointly, and to rising as well as to established generations. The necessity of common and intergenerational labour was well-expressed a century and a half ago by a Scot who was once widely read and admired on both sides of the Atlantic. The writer is again Ferrier, writing now not from the special position of Hegeleanism but from that of humanistic philosophy generally:

> [T]he history of philosophy repairs any injustice which may be done to philosophy itself ... The great problems of humanity have no room to work themselves out within the limits of an individual mind. Time alone weaves a canvas wide enough to do justice to their true proportions; and a few broad strokes is all that the genius of any one man, however gifted, is permitted to add to the mighty and illimitable work.[31]

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[31] James Frederick Ferrier, 'Berkeley and Idealism' [1842] in *Philosophical Works,* Vol. III. pp. 292–3.

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