PHILOSOPHY, GLOBALIZATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN SHARON RIDER AND MICHAEL A. PETERS

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Michael Peters (MP): Can I jump in the deep-end (with apologies to Foucault) and ask you to respond to the observation that we are living the end of philosophy and the modern research university (at least as it was inaugurated by the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1811)?

Sharon Rider (SR): That is a very deep question. To begin with, it has to do with the nature of philosophy as a way of life, as a way of thinking that is taught by example, whether it be communicated orally or in writing. In short, philosophy is a primary example of "the unity of teaching as research" that one associates with the name of Humboldt. Now I think that many of us in the humanities have been somewhat shaken in our faith concerning the value of teaching philosophy at a modern, public university. On the one hand, we'd like to think that we're doing some good by showing students the value of trying to think for themselves. *Sapere aude* and all that. And it seems to stand to reason that if you spend a couple of years of your youth hanging around with Kant and Wittgenstein, you might just learn something about what that *can* mean, by way of example. In any case, it certainly does no harm to teach or study philosophy, and it can clearly do some good. But the

heart of the matter is whether or not Socrates was right in thinking that someone committed to wanting the right things and living the right way, will do all such things better if he tries to justify wanting such and doing such things. Bernard Williams puts the question quite nicely in the preface to his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*:

> How could it be that a subject, something studied in universities (but not only there), something for which there is a large technical literature, could deliver what one might recognize as an answer to the basic questions of life? It is hard to see how this could be so, unless, as Socrates believed, the answer were one that the reader would recognize as one he might have given himself. But how could this be? And how would this be related to the existence of the subject? For Socrates, there was no such subject; he just talked with his friends in a plain way, and the writers he referred to (at least with any respect) were the poets.

Furthermore, as university faculty in the first instance, we have a basic responsibility to see to it that our colleges attract and retain students, that the students are deemed "employable" according the criteria dictated by governing bodies from university boards to the EU, that we produce "research" that gets cited in top-ranked journals, that we are successful in grant capture, etc. This set of responsibilities, if not inimical to philosophy as Socrates understood it, is at very least not identical with it. And what do students really retain from studying philosophy at college? To judge from the popular discussions in papers and magazines, they seem to remember only a few of the more colorful aspects of philosophy: that Plato argued that we live in a cave, that Descartes thought we might be dreaming everything, that Kant believed you should tell Nazis the truth about the Jews hiding in your attic if they come to your house looking for them, that Nietzsche thought people were only interested in power, etc. Of course, there's always one or two who take away something more, but that's equally true of mathematics or political science. And it's not easy to predict who will take what. A couple of years ago, I gave an introductory lecture on the Enlightenment. I took up the French, the English and the Scotts, but the emphasis was on the Germans. We took a break after about an hour of Kant. During the break, an Iranian girl came up to me with tears in her eyes, and told me that now she can begin to understand why the Iranian Revolution turned out as it did. No educational quality assessment system in the world, however intricately contrived, can assure or prevent someone from being moved to tears by Kant. But it made me feel that what I was doing was valuable. So I suppose that the issue is not so much what most students get or don't get out of studying philosophy, as an empirical question as it were. It's more the sinking feeling that philosophy has to a far too great an extent become its forms and institutions rather than a way of living and thinking about how one lives, how

we live. I tend to think that serious epistemological questions are always at the same time existential questions for the one thinking about them. That's the point of calling them "problems." What I wonder is if these sorts of problems can be recognized as real problems that someone can have anymore, at least in the west. That one is tempted to retreat into Aurelius' "inner citadel," Hegel would say, says something about the times in which we live. And it seems pretty clear that philosophy and all of the liberal arts are in big trouble (much of it self-induced). I'm not saying that there aren't or will not be people of a philosophical bent, for whom philosophical questions are alive and pertinent. But my sense is that there are fewer and fewer such people, as if our form of life has no time for it. The call of philosophy seems to have grown fainter, barely audible for the most part.

The modern research university in its original conception is based on an idea of science that grew out of a philosophical ideal, one which Husserl describes in "The Crisis of the Sciences as Expression of the Radical Life-Crisis of European Humanity" (Part 1 of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*):

> A definite ideal of a universal philosophy and its method forms the beginning; this is, so to speak, the primal establishment of the philosophical modern age and all its lines of development. But instead of being able to work itself out in fact, this ideal suffers an inner dissolution. As against attempts to carry out and newly fortify the ideal, this dissolution gives rise to revolutionary, more or less radical innovations. Thus the problem of the genuine ideal of universal philosophy and its genuine method now actually becomes the innermost driving force of all historical philosophical movements. But this is to say that, ultimately, all modern sciences drifted into a peculiar, increasingly puzzling crisis with regard to the meaning of their original founding as branches of philosophy, a meaning which they continued to bear within themselves. This is a crisis which does not encroach upon the theoretical and practical successes of the special sciences; yet it shakes to the foundations the whole meaning of their truth. This is not just a matter of a special form of culture – 'science' or 'philosophy' – as one among others belonging to European mankind. For the primal establishment of the new philosophy is, according to what was said earlier, the primal establishment of modern European humanity itself – humanity which seeks to renew itself radically, as against the foregoing medieval and ancient age, precisely and only through its new philosophy. Thus the crisis of philosophy implies the crisis of all modern sciences as members of the philosophical universe: at first a latent, then a more and more prominent crisis of European humanity itself in respect to the total meaningfulness of its cultural life, its total 'Existenz.'

The entirety of Husserl's lifework can be described as an attempt to re-establish philosophy in the ancient sense at the heart of science and culture. Despite his emphasis on the new philosophy as Europe's attempt to radically renew itself, in point of fact, he doesn't fully draw out the consequences of the break with antiquity, in particular with Greek mathematics. He seeks continuity between modern mathematics and ancient Greek philosophy, where there was in fact a radical rupture, since algebra, which was so crucial to the birth of modern science, is fundamentally Arabic-Hindu. By taking Galileo as his paradigmatic example of modern science, he has already assumed the primacy of Euclidean geometry and an ancient Greek ontology. I take Husserl as my example, because his was the last great attempt at a systematic philosophy that would elucidate the meaning of modern science and modern life, whatever one thinks of such a project. The idea of the modern university can be understood as the incarnation of a similar ideal of cultural and scientific self-renewal deeply rooted in a philosophical idea of human reason and its cultivation. Now every ideal says something about what we value and what kind of world and what sort of society we are prepared to build and inhabit, and thus also what we want to change. If one looks at the criteria by which universities and their institutions are assessed, one can't help but notice the complete and total absence of anything resembling the Humboldtian ideal (even the obligatory gestures toward "critical thinking" and "self-realization" are strikingly empty, as if the authors of the policy documents in question actually have no idea what these terms can mean except in some superficial therapeutic, commercial or political sense). So yes, I do think that the demise of philosophy and the deterioration of the university that we are seeing today are intimately linked. But that doesn't mean that philosophy or philosophers can do much about it. As Hegel says in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, regarding the philosopher's desire to "give instruction to what the world ought to be:" "Philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give it. When philosophy paints its gloomy picture then a form of life has grown old. It cannot be rejuvenated by the gloomy picture, but only understood. Only when the dusk starts to fall does the owl of Minerva spread its wings and fly." It seems to me that the best way to understand Humboldt's idea is as pointing out that the old university had become a relic. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, Humboldt saw the need to reform the university, not only administratively, but in its very conception. His reforms were intended to make the university something of use to the *present*. But I would say that the forward-looking reforms were something that Humboldt proposed as a man of action, not as a philosopher.

MP: Does this mean in a Rortyean sense we are living in a post-philosophical culture? Is there a form of the post-philosophical that can take the place Kantian philosophy once occupied? How real are these apocalyptic

tropes? Are they rhetorical flourishes or a deep source of cultural or institutional renewal?

SR: I was at first surprised by this question, since I hadn't actually intended my response to strike an apocalyptic tone, or even a nostalgic one. I think that we have to distinguish between an institutional crisis and an intellectual or spiritual one. They're intimately connected, of course, which was one of the things I tried to describe in my last answer, viz. that philosophy as a spiritual activity can't survive in a vacuum. Actually, I would think that philosophy as an institution – its organization and activities – will likely look pretty much the same in fifty years. True, it will disappear from colleges and universities whose governing bodies are inclined to invest in "employability," i.e. professional degree programs that attract and retain students. But in small liberal arts colleges that serve the elites as well as in major research institutions, philosophy will continue to carry on and muddle through, although at public institutions presumably in more commercially viable forms: they'll offer courses in "decision theory and risk-analysis," value theory, theories of science, "critical thinking and argument," as well as a host of ethics courses preceded by a word or prefix ensuring societal relevance ("business ethics," "biomedical ethics," "engineering ethics," etc). At the most elite private universities, part of the cachet will be that the kind of high culture that is associated with studies in Latin and Shakespeare and Kant can be offered and obtained. Students at places like Harvard and Yale will go on to med school and law school or prestigious MBA-programs, and a background in the liberal arts will not only look good on their resumés, but might very serve them well in their lives and even in the exercise of their professions (Someone engaged in high-level politics or administration who has studied Macchiavelli in depth, for example, has an advantage over someone who hasn't). But for the rest of the population, philosophy has the status of arcane academic ritual; it's not something that you pay good money for if you don't have lots of it. If you have such inclinations, you listen to Michael Sandel's MOOC lectures for free on the weekend, after a long week of "real" studies. I imagine that "research" in philosophy will also continue to be funded, although increasingly in collaboration with more practical disciplines: philosophers will work together with psychologists in cognitive science projects, say, on group decision-making; or they'll join forces with economists to work out models for prioritizing in health care; even urban planners can make use of certain kinds of logical formalization in transportation logistics, etc.

Now this development, it seems to me, is not a radical break. It has been going on for at least a hundred years, and can be seen as a natural, almost inevitable, consequence of the developments that fall under the term "modernity." Modern, rationalist thought since Descartes has led, among other

things, to the replacement of religious thinking with scientific thinking, which in turn has been replaced with "research," and now, with "innovation." But "research," by which I mean specialization, i.e. a goal-directed, planned, collective activity for investigation and control, is an extremely modern idea. An even more modern idea is the idea of science as innovation, that is, an activity the purpose of which is direct utility, in particular economic utility, through the commercialization and dissemination of new findings and applications. Given this development, it is also natural that the cultivation of a broad, enhanced capacity to make use of one's own understanding and thus to become more capable of sound, independent judgment, will have to cede its place at the university to training in specific methods and procedures for achieving concrete results and skills, which, in turn, will be rationalized into an efficient mechanism for imparting and instilling in the workforce whatever competencies and skills are needed at the time by industry and commerce. And this development encompasses all subjects taught at universities, including the discipline called philosophy.

What I want to say is that there is another idea of philosophy than "training in critical thinking" as understood by the industrial-educational complex. And this idea has always been somewhat regarded as somehow suspect and subversive, enigmatic, even ridiculous. But due to the "inefficiency" of the university as a machine for processing and delivering "intended outcomes," as it's so eloquently described in the higher education literature, it was permitted to exist. As an idea, it's difficult to describe without sounding pretentious or mystical, especially since the idea has taken such different forms since Plato. But formulations such as "philosophy as a way of life" (*vita contemplativa*), philosophy as "work on oneself," philosophy as "the search for truth," etc. are expressions of the idea that I'm talking about. And what I want to say is that this idea has been decisive for all so-called "progress" in western thinking, especially scientific thinking. It's an idea of philosophy that is not identical with the discipline and its institutions, but rather has very often been at odds with it. It's rather an *attitude* or a *stance* where a certain kind of uncompromising demand for intellectual satisfaction creates friction when confronted with demands for utility or general acceptance. And this stance, this logical and moral requirement which the individual places on himself, is at least as much a part of philosophical *Bildung* as the various theories, concepts, standard problems and alternative solutions that make up the "stuff" of philosophy, and is ideally its final result as well. Philosophy in this sense can be described as "asking good questions for good reasons," or to paraphrase Kant, putting what one has learned and one's own inclinations to think a certain way before the "tribunal of reason," or, to put it another way, taking oneself seriously as a thinker, respecting and following up on one's doubts and hesitancies.

Now if you think about the idea that I just sketched, it's obviously not a very rational model for the efficient manufacture of products, patents and workers with specialized skills. To the contrary, it would seem to stand in the way of such efficiency. In that respect, I find it difficult to see how philosophy in the deepest sense can thrive in the formal institutions of our current culture. Having said that, is it really a catastrophe for culture and science that philosophy as an institutionalized academic discipline with its own departments and journals and prizes and book series has been relegated to just one minor part of the global (i.e. monocultural) educational-industrial complex? When you speak of renewal, I can see only two possibilities. One would be revolution, but that sort of major cultural upheaval can't be predicted or even really envisioned in any sensible way. The other is secession, and that *is* a possibility. In other words, if the authoritarian capitalism embodied by the implementation of NPM in education becomes so monolithic that "resistance is futile," then there's always the alternative of opting out, of finding or creating other venues for philosophical reflection, discourse and interchange. And who knows? Perhaps such an innovation could become a historical success story in the same ways as the Humboldtian University (RIP).

MP: Interesting. There is much in your response that could take us in any number of directions but I am going to duck any comment and ask you to provide some autobiographical response in terms of your own philosophical education and also which philosophers you find most appealing to your own sensibilities. Is philosophy a form of autobiography? I suspect that an answer to these questions might also gel with your previous responses.

SR: There's a wonderful passage from Collingwood's *Essay on Philosophical Method* in which he makes just this point about philosophy and what you're calling autobiography. He describes philosophical work as "a poem of the intellect," where what is expressed in writing "is not emotions, desires, feelings, as such, but those which a thinking mind experiences in its search for knowledge; and it expresses these only because the experience of them is an integral part of the search, and that search is thought itself." But he also sees philosophical prose as similar to historical writing in important respects having to do with how language is used, while at the same time he also sees a decisive difference. While historical writing is addressed primarily to a reader, "every piece of philosophical writing is primarily addressed by the author to himself." His point is that the philosophical writer is trying to get clear on something. So while a good historian won't bother the reader with whatever difficulties, confusions or uncertainties might have stood in the way of his work, the philosopher worth reading must necessarily confess his lack of understanding in order to show how he went about coming to grips with it. The best philosophers, in Collingwood's view, are the ones who are prepared to admit that they are in the same state of darkness and

confusion as the reader. He says that whereas we "consult" a historian's work, we "follow" the reasoning of the philosopher: that is, we try to understand what they think and to formulate for ourselves how and why they came to think it. I sympathize deeply with this view of what serious philosophical writing looks, and it guides how I read and teach philosophical texts.

So to answer your question, I can begin by saying that I rather like Collingwood, who has taught me a great deal about how to think about the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history, even if I find him problematic when he's in his most Idealistic modes. But I can't say that he has a stronger influence on my philosophical development than a number of other philosophers. I take different things from different thinkers, depending upon what problems I happen to be grappling with. I disliked Kant as a young woman, but realized in my mid-twenties that he was probably the philosopher whom I held in highest esteem, whatever misgivings I had about his rationalism. He's done more good than damage to philosophy and science, which is not something that one can say about all philosophers. And the critical tradition and form of reflection that he initiated, from Hegel and Marx through Nietzsche and Weber and ultimately to Foucault, is probably where I find myself most at home. I have been influenced by Wittgenstein (who perhaps belongs to a somewhat different strand in Kantian thinking) and a certain form of Wittgensteinianism, but I wouldn't say that my writing or teaching belongs to that tradition. My undergraduate and graduate studies were actually focused mostly on Plato and Aristotle, which is as good a ground as any, to say the least, for learning how to think philosophically.

But I should say that part of my intellectual biography is related to my never feeling that I belonged anywhere. Philosophy is, for me, as I said, work on oneself, even if that work is necessarily a kind of discussion with others. I would never deny the absolute necessity of a social context in which questions arise, wherein they have meaning. In order for there to be thinking, there must be something to think about, and that requires more than one thinker. But if one believes that philosophy is possible, which I do, then one acknowledges that it can't be reduced to collective standpoints and intellectual positions. Another way to put the point is to say that the grammatical distinction between the first and the third person captures a basic truth about human experience. When you're thinking about thinking, your personal foibles and idiosyncrasies sort of dissolve for an instant. You become for the moment Fichte's "pure I," so to speak. As I understand it, the achievement of this state was one of the singularly most important goals of the ancient philosophical schools. One of the reasons that I have become so engaged in questions concerning pedagogy and the state of education is that I see a value in teaching students how to think in such a way so as not to be enslaved and demeaned by popular opinion, political cant, prejudice dressed up as ideas, their own private interests and personal weaknesses, the rhetoric of the power-

ful and the lure of pleasure and convenience. I believe that education can, in principle, play this liberating role. It certainly did for me. I do not mean by this that philosophy will make you happy. But it can help you see clearly and get things straight, which has its own satisfactions, or, as Aristotle might say, is something worth having in and for itself.

And this brings me to my last point: the role played by my teachers. My becoming an academic philosopher is largely the consequence of a series of chance "meetings with remarkable men." I have had the exceptionally good fortune to stumble, due to no forethought or intelligence on my part, into the hands of real thinkers. My first teacher in philosophy, Ken Dove, aside from being a gifted philosopher and original scholar, or perhaps because he was these things, had a keen eye for his students' strengths and weakness, not merely with regard to how clever they were but in terms of their character. So, for example, I had an artistic, rebellious, bohemian side that I rather coddled because it made me feel, well, "interesting." I wanted to write my honors thesis on Nietzsche, but Dove, quite rightly, saw this choice as symptomatic of certain tendencies in my thinking that rather needed to be reigned in and disciplined. I ended up writing my thesis on Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*.

In graduate school, I studied for Alphonso Lingis, whose style of philosophizing can only be described as living art, David Lachterman, who raised scholarship and commentary to the level of genius, and most especially Stanley Rosen, who was my advisor and mentor. I can't imagine a more inspiring, challenging (and discombobulating) concatenation of thinkers to try to follow. Rosen in particular was essential to the forming of my character as a thinking human being. He was quick-witted, had no time for pretense and nonsense, but at the same time he was a deep, passionate and yet careful thinker. He was also one of the funniest men I ever met. He had a fantastic ability to impart fundamental insights in a way that could knock you off your chair (he often remarked that a certain kind of laughter is characteristic of philosophers). And he also stressed the importance of character, of the character of thinking (although he never thematized it as such, as I recall). It was through him that I got to know Jacques Taminiaux, who was my advisor when I was at Louvain. This is another very serious scholar who, for all his European charm and cultivation, talked straight, said what he meant and meant what he said, and clearly had a mission in his philosophizing. Finally, when I arrived in Sweden I met someone who fundamentally altered my way of seeing things. Sören Stenlund, my dissertation supervisor, began his career as a logician and a philosopher of mathematics, and was highly regarded both nationally and internationally for his contributions. But after a number of years, his philosophical frustration led him to look back into the history of the development of logic and mathematics and philosophical thinking about them: first to Frege, then to Kant, then to Descartes….In the end, his think-

ing came to be deeply influenced by Wittgenstein, at a time when Swedish philosophy was somewhat narrowly confined to Anglophone analytic philosophy. Stenlund's seminars were a kind of subversive activity in the academic climate of the day, and they attracted a wide range of dissidents, refugees and exiles from different fields and departments: not only philosophy, but also mathematics, the history of ideas, linguistics, comparative literature, etc. There was no explicit aim to achieve "interdisciplinarity" for its own sake, or "to create a forum for transdisciplinary dialogue." We were just a group of people trying to help each other come to grips with our problems (as thinkers). Stenlund's seminar was a kind of asylum in both senses: a shelter from persecution for our ideas (from our perspective) and a loony bin from the viewpoint of more mainstream academics. We had to put up with derisive remarks about the "cult of der Heilige Ludwig" and so forth, but it really didn't matter to us. Stenlund taught us not only, or even primarily, through his teaching, but really through his example, how to be honest with, and responsible to, ourselves as thinkers, very much in the spirit of Kant. I really cannot begin to assess what those years under his tutelage meant to me as a human being (and necessarily therefore also as a student and teacher of philosophy). I mean that quite literally. A number of years ago, I had an idea for a paper about the history of philosophy and I recalled that I had read a very insightful article by a Swedish turn-of-the-century philosopher named Hans Larsson. I found some notes that I had taken years earlier on the Larsson piece, and wondered what in the world had led me to read it in the first place. The notes were an interpretation of the text that expressed just exactly what I wanted to say, but I couldn't recall what stimulated me to write them. Given the tone and "feel" of the notes, I figured that I must have been inspired by something that Stenlund had said or written, so I asked him if he could give me the reference to where I had found it. But Stenlund said that he had never read Larsson, or if he had, very little and a long time ago, and he certainly hadn't written anything about him. This seemingly trivial occurrence struck me as quite telling. What it tells me is that in certain respects, I cannot distinguish my own thoughts as "mine." Recalling now what I said with reference to Collingwood, it makes perfect sense that, in some sense, I can't actually separate my own way of thinking from my earlier attempts to figure out what Kant or Weber or Stenlund or Rosen meant. There is no conflict between thinking for yourself and thinking through others; the former presupposes the latter. It all becomes part of you. And that's the point of *Bildung*. Philosophy isn't first and foremost some kind of knowledge that you "possess." It's not something you have or even do, it's rather a way of characterizing a certain form of life of the mind.

MP: You provide a complicated genealogy and network of influences but at the same time unequivocally locate yourself. Can I focus on one aspect of these linkages and settle on the question of nihilism. I know that Rosen has

devoted himself to this question (as many philosophers in the critical tradition have). Heidegger's focus on "The History of European Nihilism" in his Nietzsche study seemed to me at the time the most perspicacious set of observations I had read. Certainly, many of the philosophers you mention, both dead and alive, have defined themselves in regard to this question. Where do you situated yourself? On what axis? I would also like to hear something more about Stenlund and why/how work in the philosophy of logic and mathematics became important for you.

SR: I think that I can best answer the first question by beginning with the second. The philosophy of logic and the philosophy of mathematics, as areas of academic specialization, are not of any particular interest to me. But they were of interest to Kant and Husserl, Wittgenstein and, most importantly for me, to Stenlund. Stenlund's Wittgensteinianism is very particular to him, just as Rosen's Platonism is in many ways very much an expression of Rosen's philosophy. Stenlund taught us how to see which problems really are problems, and to distinguish them from problems arising in and through a certain technical apparatus or theoretical framework. In this sense, the philosophy of language as he taught it was much more than a branch of philosophy; it's rather a way of thinking. To take an example of a problem in the philosophy of science and philosophy of mathematics that is equally a problem in the philosophy of language, consider the idea that certain statements are unintelligible given the science of a certain epoch, but can become intelligible as science develops. So for instance, we could not understand the statement "there is a triangle whose angle sum is greater than 180°," but now, due to the advent of non-Euclidean geometry, the statement is meaningful. It is tempting to think that the same must also hold true, by analogy with the geometrical statement regarding the angle sum of the triangle, for a statement such as 2+2=4, i.e. that in the future it is possible that there would be exceptions to the truth of the statement 2+2=4. If this were the case, then even truths that we call "conceptual" are subject to historical revision, which would *seem* to open the floodgates of relativism. But we find in Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics a distinction between uses of the rules of calculation (say, 2+2=4) and statements made in ordinary language (such as "there is a triangle the sum angle of which is greater than 180°"). While we certainly can and do use calculations meaningfully and usefully both in scientific research and everyday life and talk about them in ordinary language, the calculations themselves are not "statements" or "propositions." Whereas to say "there is a triangle who angle sum is greater than 180°" in everyday language is to say something *about* geometry, to say that 2+2=4 is just to add. Obviously, I can't go into the details here, but what I want to draw attention to with this example, is that it is not primarily of interest for mathematicians, but rather to philosophers, people who worry about things like the

corrigibility of conceptual claims. And this kind of problem shares a family resemblance with a host of problems that one normally would not associate with logic or science (historicism, social constructivism, linguistic relativity, etc.). And the solution, for Stenlund, is not to theorize more, to embrace one position or another (foundationalism or anti-foundationalism, realism or anti-realism, etc.) but to go back to the initial problem that provoked one to start theorizing to begin with. To take another example, he remarked on occasion that the philosophically interesting thing about an infinite regress is not how to get out of it, but how you get into it in the first place. Stenlund, following Wittgenstein, using very basic examples and crisp, austere prose, can bring a philosophical claim that looks like an insoluble theoretical enigma *back home*, back to where it actually does its work, when it's not, as Wittgenstein says, "on holiday".

And this brings me back to what I said about the "character" of philosophy earlier. Stenlund comes from the sparsely populated northern reaches of Sweden, far from anything resembling academic or cultural centers. At the time he grew up, very few people in his surroundings continued their education on to high school, much less to graduate school. He was never fully "at home" in academic life. He's a philosopher not out of ambition, socialization or vanity, but by character. I think he was always more contented when he was out fly-fishing, moose-hunting and planting potatoes, but he also needed people to talk to about what was on his mind, and what was on his mind happened to be problems that we academics categorize in specializations called "logic," "philosophy of language," "philosophy of mathematics," etc.

Now let's look at the problem of nihilism in light of what I just said. Back in the days when I studied for Rosen, the problem of nihilism was something that was talked about a great deal by the graduate students. We read books on the theme, and, as a matter of fact, I once again was set on writing a dissertation on Nietzsche (which was never realized either). But one of the things that happened to me when I met Stenlund, was that I started asking different questions. It's not that the question of nihilism ceased to be a problem for me, but it became a different kind of problem. We can certainly gain a better understanding of our present condition by reading Nietzsche, Heidegger and Kierkegaard. But there is a tendency to intellectualize the problems by starting with their philosophical, artistic or literary expressions and terms, rather than with *our problems*. So, for example, it seems to me that Wendell Berry has a good point when he emphasizes the intimate relationship between work (economics) and values (religion), where the latter is not seen as "mere ideology" superimposed on real material conditions, but where values and beliefs are truly part and parcel of a way of living in and being engaged in the world. And in this sense, it's no accident that Christianity started losing ground at the same time as farmers quite literally started losing

ground. Industrialization de facto deprived people of *meaningful* livelihoods and relations to their homes and neighbors. It uprooted entire regions, and left the former inhabitants rootless wanderers whose work and whose environment were utterly alien to them. So the religious way of life disappeared when the most self-evident values of care for the land, fidelity toward one's family, responsibility toward one's neighbor, etc. disappeared. Of course, there are neighborhoods in large cities (I grew up in one in New York), but the sheer multiplicity of life forms in such places makes it impossible to regard everyone on your block as "your neighbor" as you would if you were dependent upon each other for your livelihoods. I think that this is one way to understand why immigrant youths in London and Stockholm are susceptible to radicalization and rioting. In the global information society, they have nothing: no sense of home, no sense of what to hope for. Whether or not one understands the rioting as political, one ought to take seriously the intensity of the ennui which gives rise to them. If you set fire to your uncle's car and tear down your little sister's preschool merely because you have nothing to do, then it's because it doesn't seem to matter much what you do. So whether or not one chooses to see it in terms of ideology, it is political insofar as it arises in and out of a polis that is not working, that is, in which people reside without belonging. And religious radicalization, like other populist and fascist movements we are seeing gain steam, is to my mind a grasping at what looks like a promise of meaning and belonging. The modern project is, among other things, one of trying to create institutions (such as the nation-state) that will serve as a substitute for the lost intimacy with and reliance on one's neighbors and local surroundings. I'm helplessly modern and rationalist in my inclinations, by which I mean I tend to look to government regulation and public ownership as the only viable solution to today's societal ails, but I do recognize that the loss of the "natural autonomy" of the self-subsisting community is the price we pay for the formal autonomy bestowed upon us by citizenship in post-industrial liberal democracies.

And, in that sense, anomie or nihilism or disenchantment or leveling or whatever you choose to call it is not just a question of the quietus of God as ground and guarantor of morality; it's a matter of absolute concrete loss. It seems to me that whatever inspiration and insight we derive from reading Weber or Nietzsche, which, in my case, is inestimable, we have the right and the duty to start afresh from where we stand today and not satisfy ourselves with meditations on what others have said before us. As Nietzsche says, one repays one's teachers badly by remaining a pupil. I suppose one could say that in this respect, I'm sympathetic to the idea of analytic philosophy (or pragmatism, for that matter) as it was originally formulated: to start with problems, not with texts. Unfortunately, Anglophone academic philosophy today has by and large developed into just the sort of dogmatic scholasticism that it was originally intended to supplant, with the difference that its questions

tend to be more technical and less relevant for issues of profound human concern, such as nihilism.

MP: Ok, I'm learning a lot and I like what I hear. I'm aware of length so I am going to ask a final set of questions. Can you describe the projects you are currently working on and what you think are the most important questions determining the future of philosophy?

SR: I'll start with the second theme. I think that it's up to each of us to consider what we take to be the most pressing issues. So I can't say what the most important questions determining the future of philosophy are, but I can say what sorts of things have occupied my own thoughts. For one thing, I actually think that philosophical questions concerning the individual's relation to the collective, between subjectivity and objectivity, between the first – and third-person perspective, etc. can and should be articulated and worked out in terms of our present condition. I remember how deeply effected, disturbed really, I was by a passage in Sebastian Haffner's diary, where he describes how *comfortable* it was to be relieved of the duty to think, to take responsibility for one's thinking. He tells how the Nazi indoctrination camps for the Reich's younger public servants effectively deprived them of the capacity to notice what was happening to their very self-conception. Roughly translated, the passage said something like:

"And I? I notice that I haven't had any occasion recently to use the word "I" in my story. I have alternated between third- and first-person plural: the first-person singular has had no occasion to confess itself. This is no coincidence. It was a point – perhaps the main point – in what happened to us in the camp, that each and every individual played no roll; he was disconnected and out of play; he didn't count. […] What one was and thought "privately" and "actually" was indifferent and put aside. […] Companionship takes from the human being responsibility for himself, before God and before his conscience. He does what everybody does. He has no choice. He has no time to reflect […] It is said that the Germans have been enslaved. That's only partially correct. They are at the same time something else – something much worse – for which there is still no word. They have been "companionated."

It seems to me that we too, despite all the rhetoric of self-realization and individualism, have been "companionated." We can choose between hundreds of cable stations and 14 kinds of bagels, and even as professional philosophers, for example, we can select among a plethora of theories, positions and isms to justify, espouse, develop or promote. But there is little room in public discourse for deeper deliberation and judgment regarding what is worth choosing, or how we should go about deliberating. It should be obvious that I think that this is a very unfortunate state of affairs, if true. So how does that fit together with my paean to the local community in my answer to the previous question? After all, as I said, the modern project has been one of

liberating the individual, through education and the rule of law, from the claustrophobic superstition, prejudice, and stagnation that characterizes traditional, tightly knit communities. Here I see a parallel between two kinds of community, traditional and democratic, and two senses of collegiality. In the sense for which it's often attacked, the latter is essentially institutionalized cognitive cronyism. And there are plenty of professors who seem to think that laws protecting academic freedom and autonomy guarantee their right to do anything they please, or, alternatively do nothing at all. But there's another sense of collegiality that is something entirely different. It is the notion that the teachers and students that comprise the university constitute a community in which each and every member has rights and obligations to the other members insofar as they all serve the goals of science, scholarship and humanity by increasing its common store of knowledge. Now the latter form requires individual thinking and judgment openly put before the scrutiny of the members of the community. The former, on the other hand, is "private" in the sense that it's based on personal interests and collective agendas not belonging to the meaningful flourishing of science as such, but to the "group," one's "companions."

There's a fair bit of confusion regarding what subjectivity is, but a common prejudice is to associate it and related terms, such as judgment, with the personal, the private, the psychological, the contingent. We have lost the idea of the subjective as the name for the activity that occurs every time a thought is thought, an action is intended, an idea is comprehended. But as soon as one makes this point, the tendency today is to counter with descriptions of how the subject is constituted by common concepts and a shared language, social structures, inherited representations and entrenched institutions, such that all our thinking is always already first and foremost a product. I don't want to deny the value of examining our way of life from this perspective, but I do think that there's an exaggerated, even metaphysical, faith in what is essentially a generalization from certain idea-typical investigations that blinds us to the complexity of what it means to think, to know, or to value. I rather like how the American sociologist William Whyte formulated the problem. He wrote: "One can study something without deifying it, and the recognition that a society can be all-embracing doesn't require the belief that it should be." Even if historical, ethnological, and sociological studies show the actual, practical primacy of collectives, it can never show that this ought to be the case, or that this state of affairs is beyond all reflection or revision. And to reflect upon the conditions for the possibility of certainty, universality, justice and so forth is what philosophy is supposed to do. But I fear that that idea of philosophy as always starting afresh, or "radically beginning", as Husserl would say, isn't taken very seriously anymore. One reason for this, to my mind, is that professional philosophers have been "companionated"; our self-conception is a far cry from a Fichtean community of

scholars in the service of humanity whose personal self-interest is fulfilled in the immortality of scientific and social progress. So I suppose that my answer to the question of what issues will determine the future of philosophy, would be self-scrutiny. We need to sincerely and resolutely take a close, hard look at what we're doing (the papers we write, the conferences we attend, the courses we teach, the articles and books we read, the research projects we initiate, the evaluation exercises to which we submit), and ask ourselves: to what end? And by this I don't mean the usual vague, sweeping formulations about the value of liberal education for democracy, or justifications by way of a self-serving disciplinary historiography which highlights the contributions of philosophy or philosophers to the progress of science, or cheap shots at other humanist disciplines with reference to our comparative success in adapting to scientometric standards, etc., but rather an unflinching, critical self-examination about the possibility and purpose of philosophy.

My own current work is related to all the things we've just discussed. I have three projects, or rather ideas that I'm working on right now. One concerns the scientific publication market, together with scholars from the history of science and ideas, business history, sociology of literature, and sociology of philosophy. My part in the project, "The Practice of Theory," studies the relationship between explicit standards of argumentation and scholarship and *de facto* practice in the discipline, and analyzes the functional establishment of an institutionalized philosophical "center" and "periphery" through JIF and other similar techniques of mechanized, quantitative evaluation. The philosophical interest of the project is to ask what it is that philosophy (the community of professional philosophers) takes to be its central task and the criteria according to which it assesses the extent to which this is achieved, and the rationality behind these criteria. The idea is to navigate between the third-person perspective on the discipline in the manner of sociology of knowledge, and the first-person (plural) perspective on the subject's internal historiography, to see what the disciplinary values that inform judgment are *de facto*, and compare these to the values explicitly avowed by its practitioners. One could describe the task here as a micro-study of a theme that I have been concerned with since I wrote my dissertation, namely, the dismantling of the notion of judgment as grounded in a subject and its' replacement with an anonymous, mechanized objectivity.

A related project has the working title "Philosophy and the Very Idea of a University." My thesis is that ideas about how to improve and maintain efficiency and quality in education are necessarily reflections of values regarding what one takes to be its central point and purpose, and these ideas are in turn expressions of historically determinate social and cultural norms, practices and tendencies, some of which have the character of "absolute presuppositions," to borrow a term from Collingwood. What philosophy can contribute to the debate on education and research, among other things, is to

raise our awareness about the assumptions involved in current ideas, and help us see not necessarily *what* alternatives are available, but at very least *that* alternatives are possible. To this end, I would want to concentrate on a certain eventalization which occurred with the advent of the modern research university and the conceptualization of science and education that came with it. One of the keys to understanding this specific event, I think, is the shift in the sense of "objectivity" described by Daston and Gallison. They trace the modern terminology of "subjective" and "objective" to the early 19th century reception of Kantian philosophy, leading to the general use of the modern sense of objectivity by the 1850´s. With this new assumption, the value of the cultivation of the capacity for and exercise of judgment as a *sine qua non* for science becomes almost incomprehensible. Judgment is thought to belong to the domain of the aesthetic and perhaps the ethical, but has no place in scientific thinking per se. At the same time, I want to show that judgment is inescapable insofar as long as there is evaluation. Judgment is something necessarily exercised by the subject, however one conceptualizes the grounds on which the judgment is exercised. Mechanized quantification does not do away with judgment; it merely weakens, impairs and hides it. In this respect, formalized systems of verification and assessment are undemocratic, since the norms on which they are based are not transparent. You cannot reason or debate with a thing, and what formalized procedures and protocols do is to *reify* the norms involved in the activity of assessment and evaluations so that considerations alien to the system are locked out at the outset, thus crippling judgment and disenabling reasoned discourse. The project is a study of the philosophical analysis of the idea of subjective judgment and its relation in particular to education and scientific thinking, which I take to be intimately related to the question of "critical thinking," how it is to be cultivated and to what purpose.

Finally, I've submitted a proposal for funding for a research project with colleagues in philosophy and literature called "What should a Swede know?" The idea is to examine the concept(s) of education implicitly assumed in the Swedish educational system: which ideals are explicitly formulated and on what tacit presuppositions, which educational aims are articulated as the ultimate function of education at different levels and how are these to be realized? In higher education, the notion of *Bildung* is central, but related to other forms of training and education: the project analyzes the transformation of the academic notion of education within the educational system as a whole and how the idea is negotiated to fulfill the purposes and goals of the distinctly Swedish phenomenon of a generously state- and community-sponsored program of lifetime education.

MP: Thank you.