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In another paper in this journal (Bartlett 1986), I looked at ways in which philosophical positions become self-encapsulating ideologies, and examined why it is that communication between philosophical standpoints is so difficult.

In this paper, I look at the same phenomenon, but from the point of view of the personality structure of philosophers themselves. I make an attempt here to begin to describe the psychological profile of the philosophical personality.

Philosophers are accustomed to applying their discipline to other fields. There very likely does not exist any field of human endeavor that has not been considered from the standpoint of its philosophical foundations. Philosophers are comfortable, and perhaps even somewhat unquestioning, about the one-way perspective revealed in these applications of philosophical reflection to other fields.

In part, this is due to the comparative rarity of studies of philosophy from a non-philosophical standpoint. There is perhaps also a resistance on the part of philosophers to being studied: some of the universality inherent in the meta-standpoint of philosophy is mitigated when philosophy is considered in terms of contributing social, economic, political, or psychological factors.

For example, early in the development of phenomenology, much energy was invested in attacks on phenomenology for its possible "psychologistic" tendencies. —For a philosophical approach (the phenomenology of logic especially was at issue) to involve psychologism was a sign that it had not raised itself above the nature and limitations of the mere psychology of its human practitioners. If phenomenology itself were deep-seatedly psychologistic, the discipline would be condemned to subjectivism; it could never reach the aspirations of a dispassionate, objective science. Husserl worked hard to dispel many of these criticisms, and even tried to subject certain of his own earlier work to honest, critical reappraisal.

When vague footprints of human psychology—and associated subjectivism—were encountered in the innermost regions of philosophical thought, distrust and negative judgment were aroused in many philosophers.

Throughout its history, philosophy has sought for a real measure of {296} detachment from everyday concerns, from the world of practical involvement. It has valued reflective transcendence. It is therefore understandable if philosophers and the field itself resist examination from the standpoint of one or another of the special disciplines philosophy has studied from its higher order frame of reference. The more or less privileged meta-standpoint accepted, endorsed, and defended by philosophers is reduced, or certainly it is rendered more modest, when the activity of philosophers itself is made the object of a higher order scrutiny.

The recent growth of meta-philosophy has been motivated by this end, to provide a needed context for reflections on the nature of philosophical activity. The meta-standpoint employed, however, continues to regard itself as an expression of philosophy, albeit of a higher order. It

remains unusual to regard philosophy from a non-philosophical perspective.

It ought to be clear to any of us who are professional philosophers that we claim a privilege when we claim the highest meta-level, one that is perhaps more a matter of tradition than intrinsic justification.

Before any of us ever heard of philosophy, we shared with other humanity a fair number of commonplace characteristics. The man or woman, the youth, or the child antedates the philosopher. And this antecedence is, as I will try to suggest, more than the accident of chronology. Adult, professional philosophers are, like any adults, guided and influenced by extra-philosophical factors.

The factors of this sort that I would like to examine here are of the psychological variety. I do not believe that the existence of psychological underpinnings of philosophy necessarily suggests that philosophy is condemned to subjectivistic psychologism, any more than generalizations about the psychology of mathematical discovery reduce mathematical truths to subjective arbitrariness.

Certainly, the decision to look at philosophical activity from a psychological point of view could itself be studied philosophically. There are heights above heights, and yet higher levels of reflective attention could continue as long as do our patience and mental endurance. But here, for the purposes of a brief excursion into a little-trampled domain, the highest level meta-framework I will adopt is a psychological one.

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When an undergraduate in philosophy, I began vaguely to notice some traits in my fellow majors that seemed to set them apart from students in other fields. There was pipe smoking, for instance, enriched by exotic fragrances that can still summon up early remembrances of a philosophical infancy. There were beards, prevalent then, long hair, and sandals. And there was a very "considered" manner of speech, which {297}some referred to as "California BBC." I wondered then if these were a few external signs of inner difference: Was there a special inner state that stood in need of outward criteria? Were these and other outward behaviors manifestations of similarly differentiating inner workings?

In graduate school, it seemed that the differences were more explicit. Friends in other fields followed programs that were "vertical"—*first*, they took differential equations and group theory, *then* they could take quantum electrodynamics. Courses had to be taken sequentially, for clear-cut reasons. The curricula of such fields, I now know, are called vertical. In my graduate department, however, there was no consensus, for example, whether logic should be a prerequisite to epistemology, or whether it was essential to read Plato and Aristotle before or after 20th Century thinkers. And some members of the department, during evening wine get-togethers (another special philosophic trait at that time), could be heard to wonder aloud whether anything written more than a hundred years previously had much contemporary worth. Perhaps reading Plato and Aristotle was not essential at all. And years later, at another university, I listened to the contrary opinion voiced by several members of the old-guard of history of philosophy: perhaps 20th Century thinkers were not of much value, and could safely be ignored on the required graduate reading lists.

I saw these and related behavioral manifestations of philosophical differentiation, and of curricular difference. And, as I came to know the field better, I saw a recapitulation of analogous signs of difference in the thought of the written works themselves, the products of philosophical dedication across the centuries.

To my knowledge, no experimental psychological study has ever been made of philosophers as a group. It could be a delightful, at times painful, and maybe instructive thing for us to have on hand. Of course, we would quickly go beyond any message such a study might have for us, because we would soon begin to philosophize about it. But perhaps there would be a pause in which to

consider, before the philosophical impulse took over....

It is a pause to consider that I am aiming for here. If only our sense of humor about ourselves is improved slightly, my intentions will be satisfied. I do not have an experimental psychological study to share. Only some reflections, from a psychologically-interested philosopher of psychology with a small amount of training in psychotherapy.

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And so what follows is not excessively serious about itself; it is ironic, sad, and, I hope, a fairly accurate basis for a psychological description of an activity I have at times loved, at times hated, have respected, have been frustrated with, and yet return to faithfully. {298}

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My observations along these lines— observations of other philosophers as well as of myself—are still tentative, but they have persisted more than twenty years, and have been confirmed repeatedly. Here, I would like to look at these five psychological dimensions shared by many of us who are philosophers:

- rigidity, or resistance to change
- contentiousness, or the drive to win in argument
- narcissism, or deafness due to ideological commitment
- intellectual lassitude, or resistance to a unitary philosophical methodology
- objectification of personality defenses in the philosophical framework one endorses.

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Rigidity

From a psychologist's viewpoint, rigidity is a defense. It is the close kin of fear: fear of change, fear of rejection, fear of lack of approval, or perhaps simply fear of disagreement in judgment.

A personality structure that is noticeably rigid sometimes is appropriately called obsessive or compulsive. In such a person, there is a tendency to be highly conservative, and often to engage in ritualistic behavior.

Analogous characteristics in a philosophical position are resistance to change of ideas ("hardening of the categories""), imperviousness (often by express design) to criticism, a drive to persuade others to endorse one's own position, a power-motivated methodology that somehow "compels assent" by means of techniques of logic or rhetoric, and a semi-private, quasi-ritualistic, special terminology that to varying degrees militates against comprehension by non-initiates.

Other disciplines clearly share some of these characteristics. But only in religion is a man's world view as closely shackled to his sense of personal identity, and hence tied to his set of defenses.

That rigidity in this psychological sense characterizes much philosophical thought is interestingly expressed by Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., in his claim that "philosophy can have no appeal to the relaxed mind." A rigid psychology is a psychology with axes to grind. Philosophers are position-takers. I have never met a colleague whose professional identity is not a function of the axes he likes to grind. A national congress of individuals like this is therefore an affair of contention.

Contentiousness

Psychologically considered, this trait is an outgrowth of a weak self-image, or the expression of an ego-structure that thinks somewhat too {299} well of itself. The *need for approval*, or the *need for power*: they can both serve to predispose an individual to contentiousness. Perhaps it may begin in infancy with a belligerent contrariness. Or it can start because of a strong parent whose approval is sought, but who is a poor listener: the child is cowed and later switches over to aggressive contending (a so-called reaction-formation). Or, it may be encouraged by the contentious personality of a parent, and so the past perpetuates itself .

No matter how the inclination begins, it is fundamentally an urgent, sometimes pained, need to win and to avoid losing. Much the same motive pushes an athlete to break records. The bodies of philosophers being what they are, however, we usually turn to other things! . . .Our schoolyard memories as budding young intellectuals often involve memories of bullies with larger frames and bulging muscles. Then we come to hear that the pen is mightier than the sword, and take to the arena of words, seeking to prove ourselves in the contest of argument.

It is evident that great and less than great works can be motivated in this way. The struggle for an improved self-concept and the quest for power have at times given us some of the finest creations of the human spirit.

The ways philosophers have of contending with one another are fairly unique. Usually, their oral arguments appear to be tips of icebergs of incompletely expressed positions that drift past one another like the proverbial ships in the night. There is often the question whether two contending philosophers are actually talking about the same thing. For if they were, they ought eventually to be able to reach agreed-upon conclusions, and this we seldom if ever seem to be able to do.

Narcissism

In related papers (Bartlett 1986 and Bartlett 1986[a]), I have referred to certain observations made by Paul Arthur Schilpp who, after a lifetime's experience dealing with many renowned philosophers, believes that this situation of non-communication is precisely what most philosophers actually *prefer*. Their preference is not openly expressed; it is a psychologically unconscious or preconscious predisposition.

Narcissism is self-involvement to the point that an individual is unable to accept realities beyond his or her own subjective world. Philosophically, this is the world of the solipsist. Politically, it takes the form of ideology.

When philosophical positions are formulated in different conceptual languages and there is no common, shared methodology to bridge differences, and when the intellectual problematics of the positions, the questions they wish to address, are fundamentally divergent, then we have a disciplinary incarnation of narcissism: a host of windowless monads. The frames of reference of philosophers become hermetically {300} sealed, self-enclosed systems of meaning, that are as difficult to bridge, from a psychological point of view, as communication can be between a schizophrenic patient and the attending psychiatrist!

Contemporary personality theory believes narcissism to be an especially prevalent disorder today. Every age seems to have its own special varieties of physical and emotional impairments. Narcissism is increasingly a common diagnosis among psychiatric patients today. It is not known why this is the case, although there are of course hypotheses.

The desire to find sanctuary in a self-enclosed conceptual system can be appealing to an individual searching for security, as a return to an unthreatening environment. Those of us with

inclinations to scholarship know of the special aesthetic and peaceful pleasures of immersion in one's specialty. There are doubtless security-satisfying psychological dimensions to be found in books, familiar bibliographies, and the faces of fellow disciples who ascribe to the view one holds.

Yet, to a psychologist, narcissism is not a positive orientation. It blocks individual growth and maturation, and handicaps the formation of healthy relationships.

If some of the principal underpinnings of philosophy are narcissistic in character, the growth of the discipline will be analogously blocked. It would be hard to achieve progress in any discipline in which the main language spoken is Babel.

Intellectual Lassitude

The history of philosophy is peppered with attempts to develop and promote unitary methods that would allow the practitioners of separate philosophical approaches to communicate with one another, to evaluate their own work and the work of others using neutral criteria, and so to achieve a body of philosophical results that can serve as the basis for future work. Attempts like these seem often to be motivated by the kind of frustration expressed by Russell, when he observed that the history of philosophy is a history of unrealized promises.

Men like Husserl, Carnap, Reichenbach, and Russell have argued on behalf of a scientific orientation to philosophy. In their cases, their common background was training in mathematics, probably the ideal example of a vertical discipline. Other scientific philosophers, like Schlick, Bohm, and Mach, also expressed interests in unitary method; they shared early training in physics, again a highly vertical discipline in which earlier results are established, often modified, but always built upon constructively to make growth in the discipline possible.

Yet, the vast majority of philosophers through the ages has shown an unwillingness to establish a constructive, progressive, vertical discipline. Philosophers have instead been position-takers, each for himself, or for his prophet, and have claimed the right for each to go his own way. A "horizontal" discipline has been the result. The multitude of divergent {301} branches that their efforts have produced resembles the meanderings of snail traces in the dark, rather than the well-organized road systems in mathematics and physics! Some have defended the freedom philosophy thereby allows and have honored the spirit of individual inquiry.

There are no doubt many fine and true things that can be said about liberation from criteria of exact evaluation. The liberal arts are liberating to the human mind precisely because they permit creative explorations that are unfettered by prescribed constraints, imposed in science by unitary methods. The majority of philosophers has repeatedly expressed its allegiance to the liberal arts model.

From a psychological standpoint, this reach for liberation may indicate a deep-seated resistance to discipline, organization, structure, and standards of objective evaluation. Symbolic logic, though it is quickly advancing beyond a mere academic mind-bracer, remains intimidating to a large population of philosophers. It is a boogey to most metaphysicians, especially to those whose memories of positivism still are clear. Logic is often reluctantly granted a minor role in graduate requirements. The resulting surface exposure of philosophy graduate students to logic insures a wide gulf between their subsequent work and the idea of a *mathesis universalis* or a *calculus ratiocinator*, Husserl's and Leibniz's terms for what would, if realized, constitute a vertical approach to philosophy.

The resistance to a unitary philosophical methodology in philosophy is not, I believe, a matter of historical accident: It is the expression of choice. Philosophy has attracted, and continues to attract, individuals who are either intellectual individualists, and who therefore have no taste for

methodological constraints, or individuals who become intellectual partisans of views that serve as comfortable niches for their sets of interests, values, and tastes. A little later, I will try to call attention to some of the reasons why philosophy has had this attraction.

At first glance, these two groups—of revolutionary spirits, on the one hand, and of expositors of tradition, on the other—appear to be heading in opposite directions. Yet both groups have a common psychological basis. The identity of the philosophical revolutionary is a function of his repudiation of what now is and has been, and his defenses rally to protect an unrealized future ideal. The traditionalist's identity is tied up with his rejection of ideas that could disturb the equilibrium of history conserved, and his defenses rally to protect this valued past. Both sets of defenses are marshaled to defend a cherished ideal. Either sort of individual will be touchy about competing, alternative positions. Rigidity, contentiousness, and narcissism frequently combine in the philosophical personality that prefers a liberal anarchy of thought to a disciplined, progressive effort in which not all positions are equally good, valid, or useful.

The observable characteristic of this personality is a form of {302} intellectual lassitude that defends against a variety of claustrophobia, a claustrophobia that finds standards of objective evaluation to be straight-jacketing and stifling.

Philosophical Systems: The Objectifications of Personality Defenses

There is perhaps no psychological topic of more interest to the psychologically-interested philosopher than this. Unlike the preceding four psycho-philosophical characteristics that lend themselves to description, we have here a speculative question. No detailed psychological data about the personality structures of great philosophers are available. Is the philosophy of each an expression of a psychologically basic set of defenses? Were phenomenologists first individuals with marked introspective tendencies? Are logicians basically obsessive-compulsives? Are philosophers of religion inwardly especially insecure? Are philosophers of science disappointed scientists, or perhaps do they feel an exaggerated threat by science? Are metaphysicians regressive personalities, with early fixations that become transposed to a systematic level?

What if such things are true? Is this an indictment of philosophy? For, are not any man's interests outgrowths of his personality structure, his tastes, predispositions, his entire autobiography? Isn't it ultimately no more than a tautology to link a man's work to his personality type, his sense of personal identity, what he values, what he rejects—and hence, to his defense system?

Psychometrists have devised a number of tests to indicate the degree of match between an individual's interests and the interests of established professionals in a wide variety of fields. These interest inventories are often used to provide a potentially useful indicator, among others, for people choosing among vocations.

Fundamentally, when a psychologist uses a client's interest inventory in this way, a connection is assumed to exist between the client's psychological inclinations, his or her interests, and probable satisfaction for that person in a particular line of work (equated with conformity to the interests of established professionals in the field).

Certain personality types are known to head for certain professions. For example, many compulsive individuals become good, and often contented, technicians and accountants. Many outer-oriented, affective people go into sales, teaching, social work. Shy personalities may gravitate toward forestry or farming.

If the description offered in this paper is in broad lines correct, then many rigid, contentious, narcissistic individuals with tendencies toward intellectual lassitude will be attracted to philosophy. And if this is true, why would it be?

The assumptions of the psychometrist researcher provide a very ordinary answer. If established professionals in philosophy are individuals whose personality types involve certain identifiable predominating {303} elements—rigidity, contentiousness, narcissism, intellectual lassitude—then young people will be more or less sorted during the process of academic socialization so that, often, students with these psychological characteristics will be attracted to philosophy. The vocational guidance value of interest inventories rests on a highly conservative assumption: that happier birds are those that flock with others of the same feather. In the process, perhaps only a secondary benefit, a minimum of feathers will be ruffled.

This hypothesis suggests, then, that students whose personality type is of the indicated sort will tend to be attracted to philosophy. It is a step further to wonder whether the proponents of the major varieties of philosophical systems possess, in their own personality structures, more specialized psychological characteristics that can be correlated with variations in the systems they endorse.

If this were the case, we would find in the field of philosophy an area of intellectual activity to which not only individuals of a particular psychological profile are attracted, but a field in which an individual's special personality style is transposed and reproduced in the particular philosophical position he or she professes. I hope to treat this question at length elsewhere.

A Meta-postscript

Unfortunately, many psychological names of personality types have gained derogatory overtones. To call a person obsessive-compulsive is tantamount to an insult in everyday society. Yet some of the world's finest thinkers were clearly obsessives, and their abilities were often directly related to their meticulous care for detail. One might think of Kant, for example. Psychologically diagnostic labels have met with ignorant use in common discourse. One of the world's greatest contemporary violinists is a victim of polio, and the world admires his wonderful artistry in spite of his handicap, and perhaps more, because of it. Yet, an obsessive-compulsive who is drawn to mathematics, and becomes great in that discipline, is fortunate to be *excused* by society for his neurotic tendencies. And yet it is more conceivable that his compulsive neurosis may be more directly responsible for the quality of his mathematical work than that polio serves the needs of violin playing. Both polio and compulsiveness can be handicapping: one is respectable and understood, the other often not.

And so it is when we ask the inevitable evaluative question: If many, perhaps the majority, of philosophers share in psychological rigidity, contentiousness, narcissism, and intellectual lassitude, then is this a good, or a bad, thing?

After a reasonably long association with philosophers, my own tentative and clearly subjective appraisal is this: "It takes all kinds to make a world, and each must have his place." {304} In terms of human compassion, it is well that there are professional niches available for rigid, contentious, narcissistic, intellectually lethargic individuals. This is true, it is important, and should not be overlooked.

At the same time, these characteristics of personality are, in the general psychological view, not "self-actualizing," healthy qualities. They tend to interfere with personal growth. Rigidity calcifies and inclines one to brittleness in the face of the need to change. Contentiousness is alienating, isolating one from fellow humanity and shared concern. Narcissism encapsulates, and blocks communication and growth. Intellectual lassitude, in the sense intended here, is close to a phobia of constructive, cooperative effort:

When these qualities dominate a field of thought, they are surely maladaptive. The discipline cannot advance. It chases its tail. The clutch slips, and though the engine races, the vehicle that

philosophical reflection affords remains stationary. It will continue to make promises, but remain incapacitated, unable to fulfill them.

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My intentions here have been primarily descriptive, and to some extent diagnostic. I am not a believer in determinism, and so have spoken only of associations and correlations between psychological qualities and the philosophical attitudes they may encourage. And, I have done so only in general terms. Obviously not all philosophers are rigid, or contentious, or narcissistic, or intellectually lethargic. And my observations are intended to encourage discussion, not to provoke or to insult.

A psychological reflection on the field of philosophy would mean a good deal more in these quantified times if quantitative, statistically significant results from empirical psychological studies of philosophers were available. But they are not. And empirical studies do tend not to impress most philosophers, anyway.

If the psychological observations offered here are on the right track, then it follows that it will be difficult, even *a priori* impossible, to find anything that is capable of conveying an effective message to the majority of philosophers across the boundaries of their island universes of meaning. To be enmeshed in an ideology of one's own fashioning is incompatible with the awareness that one's commitments are ideological.

It is a hard path from diagnosis to change. If the status quo of the profession has long been permeated by a self-limiting, maladaptive psychology, change will be difficult to initiate. Change of this sort can come, if at all, perhaps only very gradually. There are obvious external pressures placed on the field of philosophy in these technologically dominated times. To survive among vertical disciplines that compete for students, academic philosophy may, for economic rather than psychological reasons, be forced to adapt:

It now seems possible that epistemology will detach from philosophy and become an independent field of study. Logic has already moved {305} within the embrace of mathematics. It may be a small step for philosophy of science, both because of its close contact with science and because of its increasing technical sophistication, to establish its own comparative autonomy: Already, several leading graduate programs in philosophy of science are virtually independent of coexisting traditional departments of philosophy. Fields like artificial intelligence and cognitive science are absorbing certain of the more vertical aspects of philosophic thought.

These are indications of change. They all reflect what has happened many times before in its history: philosophy has given rise to approaches that eventually desert the mother discipline in order to develop in a vertical manner.

One should hope that intellectual freedom inspired by liberal arts ideals will never die out. But, since it is one of the world's oldest disciplines, there are probably many things in the cobwebbed attic of the house of our philosophic ancestors that ought to be aired and discarded.

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If some of what I have had to say in this psychological reflection on philosophy is accurate, defenses will be hooked. And if I am wrong, then indignation is likely to be sparked. I do not, however, wish to hook defenses, or to spark indignation. What is more important and constructive than either of these is for us to permit ourselves a pause in which to reappraise, to be willing to drop for a moment our position-taking and to reflect unencumbered. Above all, we philosophers ought not to take

ourselves too seriously. To persuade ourselves of this, we probably need a serious study of this topic.

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