Why We Should Rethink Philosophical Professionalism

Abstract

What does it mean to be a "professional" philosopher? Today, this is predominantly if not universally understood as being a university professor who is focused on teaching and who has academic freedom. However, philosophers today face novel challenges: academic freedom in teaching is questioned; research is typically strongly prioritized over teaching; and philosophers increasingly do philosophy outside of academia. Hence the old philosophical professionalism increasingly fails to give normative guidance to philosophers. Inspired by the sociology of the professions, this article proposes a new way of thinking about philosophical professionalism, where an ideal of service is strongly emphasized. The paradigm of philosophical work is no longer simply university teaching, but a local endeavor serving various types of community through systematic reflection. Academic and non-academic philosophers thus form a community of cooperators, supporting and informing each other's work.

"Moore? He shows you how far a man can go who has absolutely no intelligence whatever." – Ludwig Wittgenstein

[Philosophical] work is the product of the community of scholars, and you're just one tiny proboscis on that vast amoeba of philosophy. And there's stuff right in the middle, the nucleus, and in there, people are doing things that nobody's ever going to figure out outside the amoeba itself. –Kwame Anthony Appiah

Introduction

What does it mean to be a "professional" philosopher? Today, this is predominantly taken to mean being a university professor: being part of an academic institution and teaching at the tertiary level. The *Code of Conduct for the American Philosophical Association* (APA 2016) defines "professional philosophical activities" exclusively in terms of academic activities.[1] Since codes of conduct are typically consensus statements of professional organizations, it seems safe to conclude that the standard concept of philosophical professionalism today is that of the university professor.

Why do concepts of professionalism matter? First and foremost, they provide a normative framework to guide practitioners in their daily work. Thus, for instance, medical professionalism orients physicians and nurses towards the value of "care". For university professors, as will be documented later in the paper, the core values are "academic freedom" and "student development".

Concepts of professionalism are normative in a second way: they guide judgments as to who are *legitimate* practitioners and what can be considered *legitimate* work. This means that many individuals may be working towards the same goals, but only some of them will be considered "professional" in the sense of legitimate and trustworthy. This demarcation is not arbitrary or driven by power alone. According to the framework that I will be using – that of the sociologist Eliot Freidson (Freidson 2001) – professionalism depends not just on a service ideal (e.g., the value of "care") but also standards of competence.

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[1] "… undergraduate advising, the supervising and mentorship of graduate students, and the hiring and review of faculty colleagues" etc. (APA 2016, 1)

Philosophers are typically very concerned with "standards of competence". Subdomains including epistemology, philosophy of language, or phenomenology have all at various points in the history of philosophy been taken as defining the core philosophical standards of competence (see section 2). By contrast, the aim of this paper is to bring attention to the other component of professionalism: the service ideal. Who are professional philosophers serving, and what is the service being offered? These are questions that most professional philosophers would likely have difficulty answering. However, as this paper will argue, these are questions we *must* ask given a number of challenges today.

This paper will focus on three large challenges facing philosophers. The first concerns academic freedom: how to navigate demands from students (and/or administrators) on how to teach? The second is the growth of professionally accredited philosophers over the past decades, leading to many of them being active outside of academia: philosophical consultants, philosophers in think-tanks and non-profits, philosophers working as policy advisors, philosophers teaching to children and in high-schools. The current, narrow conception of philosophical professionalism (university professor) does not provide meaningful guidance for them. Finally, the third challenge concerns the promotion of philosophical research as a means of accountability and/or unit of prestige. In short, even though professorships were designed to *teach*, teaching is mainly a "burden" for professors who are increasingly expected to do *research.*

Each of these three challenges are not met by the old philosophical professionalism. Who is academic freedom to be used for? What is the service entailed by philosophical research? The answer to that question can no longer be simply "students" as was once the case. A new collective answer is needed – i.e., a collective decision for novel professional norms – because in absence of such an answer, academic freedom is *de facto* under pressure. Freedom is compromised by pressure to acquiesce to demands of others, or by pressure to be competitively successful.

Today a lot of work is done in recognition of the need to engage with the broader community – in a variety of ways – as well as to weaken the focus on obtaining a university professorship. However, this work is arguably taking place without the requisite normative shift. Thus, for all the promotion of "alt-ac" careers, the very term "alt-ac" reaffirms a standard of success defined by obtaining a university professorship. To illustrate by means of a contrast case: even though very few residents

in cardiology may become professors in cardiology, but nobody would tell them to prepare for an "alt-ac career". Such conceptions of what it means to be a "successful" philosopher may be social constructs but yet impossible to dislodge by unilateral action, since unilateral deviations from norms of success are penalized. Hence the importance of collectively reflecting on professionalism and what "success" should mean.

In this way, the proposal here is that – far from attempting to "dediscipline" philosophy (Frodeman 2013) – there is a strong case for *strengthening* philosophy's structures of professionalism. This proposal merely provides a normative framework to unify and ground a very large variety of work that is already being done by philosophers to provide meaningful philosophical services to the community. In this respect the paper will justify certain current trends in philosophy.

However, the argument here also has some revisionist implications. Endorsing a genuine philosophical professionalism implies a vision of the philosophical community where philosophers in the "academic core" (metaphysics, logic) cooperate to support the work of philosophers in the "academic periphery" (philosophy of the sciences, philosophy of arts, etc.). Those in the periphery in turn cooperate to support the work of academic non-philosophers (scientists, artists, etc.) as well as the work of non-academic philosophers serving the broader community (see also Kitcher, 2011 for a similar intuition). There is much work that remains to be done to realize this vision – for instance, non-academic philosophers often lack an established body of knowledge to draw on. Nonetheless, if the community of philosophers is to react adaptively to the changes in the 21st century environment, there is little other option but to endorse a robust and richer sense philosophical professionalism beyond that of the university professor, and to do the necessary work to realize that vision.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first four sections, professionalism is introduced as a sociological concept, and it is sketched how concepts of professionalism have informed philosophy in the past, and how they continue to do so today. Sections five through seven each focus on a major problem facing philosophers today, each of which call for a rethinking of philosophical professionalism. Section eight concludes with a synoptic view on the discipline.

1. Concepts of Professionalism

What does it mean to be a "professional"? The colloquial meanings seem very diverse. Sometimes a "professional" is often understood as someone who makes a living out of the occupation (e.g., "the brilliant young basketball player turned *pro*"). Other times it denotes someone with a high degree of skill (e.g., "the DIY-enthusiast did a real *professional* job on the home repairs"). However, while not wrong, these understandings of professionalism are incomplete from a more systematic sociological perspective. According to one particularly influential sociological analysis, that of Eliot Freidson, a "profession" involves the following five elements:

> 1. A body of knowledge and skill which is officially recognized as one based on abstract concepts and theories and requiring the exercise of considerable *discretion*;
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> 2. An occupationally controlled division of labor [into different specializations];
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> 3. An occupationally controlled labor market requiring credentials for entry and career mobility;
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> 4. An occupationally controlled training program which produces those credentials, schooling that is associated with 'higher learning', segregated from the ordinary labor market and provides opportunities for the development of new knowledge;
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> 5. An ideology serving some transcendent value and asserting greater devotion to doing good work than to economic reward (Freidson 2001, p. 180; emphases mine).

The first four characteristics concern the difficulty of knowledge (if the knowledge involved is common-sense, then there is no need for a profession), the autonomy of the professional ("discretion), and the importance of the community (for controlling who enters the profession, and for deciding who should do what).

It is the fifth characteristic that is of central importance for this paper: the "transcendent value" of service. A professional is someone who does an activity primarily for the sake of others and only secondarily because they enjoy the activity or because of economic rewards. This transcendent value or service ideal is typically stated at the beginning of the code of conduct of a profession. For instance, the

American Medical Association's (AMA) code of ethics starts off with referring to "care":

> A physician shall be dedicated to providing competent medical care, with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights (AMA 2001).

This value of "care" thus guides a great variety of professional medical activities: how a physician prescribes medicines, how clinical research is conducted, how medical students are taught and credentialled, or how the different specializations of physicians are organized. What "care" precisely means is impossible to pin down – its precise meaning depends on context – but that does not mean that it is meaningless. Instead, the transcendent value plays a precise ethical function: it guides the individual and collective decision-making of physicians.

Concepts of professionalism can be subject to debate, conflict, and change over time. Thus for instance, medical professionalism has become considerably less paternalistic in recent decades, allowing for more decision-making by the patient (Beauchamp and Childress 2013). The old paternalism no longer offers sufficient guidance: in contemporary social environments, where patients want (or demand) a greater say in deciding treatment course or want to be transparently informed about their health condition, the old paternalism problematically offers no guidance on how to craft communication with patients.

In this way, the most powerful reasons for updating a concept of professionalism are when the old concept simply offers no guidance for novel challenges. However, before going into such reasons regarding philosophical professionalism, first I will try to make the underlying assumption – that philosophical professionalism is to be characterized by an orientation towards service – more plausible. After all, while it is relatively clear that a physician is someone providing services to a client, it may be unclear how philosophers can be similarly conceived of as professionals.

2. The Ivory Tower View

In fact, some readers may balk at the suggestion of philosophy being a profession with structural similarities to medicine or law. They may hold the normative view that philosophical reflection should not be influenced at all by the needs of one's community, as to do otherwise would constitute a corruption of philosophical

integrity. This view can be called the "ivory tower" view of philosophy, where philosophy seeks "truth" or "understanding" for its own sake, akin to the value-free ideal of science.

The value-free ideal is typically construed as a specific type of independence, namely from *economic or political ideology.* Philosophers (and academics more generally) should be able to pursue truths that cannot be monetized, that do not directly contribute marketable skills to the workforce, or that are at odds with dominant moral and/or political convictions. This ideal is constitutive of the Socratic/Platonic conception of philosophy (in contrast to sophism). However, this is not at all at odds with a service-oriented professionalism. On the contrary, the ethical function of professionalism is precisely to provide professionals with normative resources to resist forces that erode service. In order to safeguard a service provided to the community, the professional must resist certain external ideologies whenever relevant. In this way, the ivory tower view and the view of philosophy as a profession are not at odds.

However, the ivory tower view is an abstraction and thus incomplete: it ignores the societal conditions that allow for philosophers to provide their service. For instance, the larger cultural and educational context must be hospitable to – i.e., not too harsh in their judgment of – young adults pursuing philosophy. Like a fragile flower, philosophy has been crushed in the past when the wider religious or political context is inimical to it. Hence it is crucial for any discipline or profession that its practitioners promote their services and fight for the conditions to provide them (Abbott 1988). The ivory tower view is something that can be held by certain isolated individuals who work in protected environments; however, it is not something that a professional body as a whole can afford to hold over an extended period of time.

A third and final reason to relax the defensiveness of the ivory tower view, is that there is actually nothing original or unusual about the suggestion in this paper that philosophy should be oriented towards service. While the community of philosophers has often not been *formally* organized along the lines of the logic of professionalism, philosophers have always *de facto* reflected about their standards of competence and about how to directly engage with the community they inhabit. In other words, concern with (proto-)professionalism has driven philosophers in the past.

3. The Evolution of Philosophical Professionalism

It is important to illustrate how a new philosophical professionalism would not constitute a radical break with the past. Hence some discussion of the history of philosophy cannot be avoided, even though, for the historians among the readers, I must add the disclaimer that the following discussion is not intended as a contribution to academic history of philosophy. Often history of philosophy is presented as a history of ideas. What I wish to illustrate is that the history of philosophy is also a history of *competition* between concepts of professionalism. A cursory examination of the historical sociological structures of communities of philosophers suggests that the proposal of this paper – to update philosophers' concept of professionalism – is simply business as usual.

A first example of when the community of philosophers radically reconceived their professionalism was the transition from scholastic to Cartesian philosophy. Scholasticism its own standards of competence (e.g., the scholastic method of *lectio* and *disputatio*) and was based on a body of "esoteric" knowledge (i.e., the works of Aristotle and scholastic philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas). It had a clear service ideal, namely to reflect on and clarify religious belief (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Descartes, famously, found this confusing, and promoted a dualistic and mechanistic metaphysics together with a methodology of doubt. This is what we tell our students. However, what we mention less often is that, by the standards of scholastic professionalism, Descartes would have been considered an "amateur". He was working as an itinerant, independent scholar, and from this respect, his achievement of reconceiving philosophical professionalism is all the more remarkable.

To see this, note that from a broader sociological perspective, the function of many academic debates is to allow the associated profession to establish jurisdictional dominance over rivals (Abbott 1988). One need not go so far as deny that any sense of objective truth plays a role, but the "truths" that matter are those that allow competitive advantage. For instance, mental health has long been a battle ground between different professions. At the beginning of the 20th century, spiritualism practitioners were dominant, but where displaced by psychiatrists who successfully claimed better scientific reliability (Abbott 1988). Academic debates – i.e., clashes between professors – can become focal points of clashes between professions, because the profession of professor has the unique position of being "the profession that

educates the other professions" (Perkin [1969] 1969). In other words, the control over how students obtain legally sanctioned certification (i.e., university degree) has ripple effects downstream in professional practice.

Turning back to Descartes, we see he was in fact highly concerned with promoting his ideas inside academia. He was not a hobbyist doing philosophy merely for his own pleasure. Thus, for instance, he explicitly promoted his *Principles of Philosophy* as a teaching tool for French Jesuits (Descartes 2008, 70). Some Utrecht professors (Henricus Regius) took to promoting his ideas. The degree of his influence and threat is illustrated by the episode when, in 1642, the rector of the University of Utrecht, Gisbertus Voetius, banned the teaching of Cartesian ideas. One of the reasons was that Cartesian ideas would prevent students from understanding the scholastic state-of-the-art (Descartes 1984, 393). This may seem tautological to our ears, but given that "success" as a philosopher meant mastering the methods of scholasticism, Voetius was in effect concerned that Descartes was hampering the professional development of students.

Fully developing the fruitfulness of this sociological approach to the history of philosophy would require a different paper, but allow me to look at one other jurisdictional conflict which continues to shape today's academic philosophy: that between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy. The methodological differences were deep and intense. A leading figure in one tradition, Heidegger, claimed that science "does not think" and presumably by extension, all philosophy conceived of as applied logic[2]. By contrast, a leading figure in the other tradition, Carnap, claimed that Heidegger himself spread nonsense and pseudo-statements (Carnap [1932] 1932).

Unsurprisingly, this methodological division had an ethical component. In the manifesto of the logical positivists (1929), it is clear that they viewed themselves as the heirs of Enlightenment, battling superstition and ignorance, and how they connected the latter with both "metaphysics" and the rise of "*völkisch* supra-individual holism" (Uebel 2020). The logical positivists rejected fascism (in contrast to Heidegger), and many emigrated to the United States (Carnap, Hempel, Reichenbach, Neurath, etc.) where they colonized U.S. departments.

Why they were so successful is up for debate. One element is that, in the context of the Cold War, their apolitical version of philosophy of science was an appealing

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[2] This was Ayer's view of philosophy: "... philosophy is a department of logic."[2] (Ayer 2012, 57)

contrast to the socially engaged Marxist philosophy (Edgar 2009). Another element may be that, compared to for instance the Heideggerian way of doing philosophy, the analytic method is easier to teach and to imitate, thus allowing for cumulative and collaborative philosophical work (Levy 2003). A third relevant element in the story is how analytic philosophers, once they captured prestigious journals, pursued a purifying editorial strategy. Thus work from rival schools, such as American pragmatism, process philosophy, idealism and non-Western philosophy, no longer found a home in prestigious journals (Katzav and Vaesen 2017).

Regardless of the historical reasons, the main upshot is that analytic philosophy colonized U.S. departments, and with it, the right to teach students in the way they saw fit. This is significant for the global philosophical community because of geo-political reasons: U.S. universities and science have been globally pre-eminent (visible in, for instance, the English language as *lingua franca* in academia). Its version of philosophical expertise has, in many places, come to be seen as the standard, and even a means to justify shutting down certain philosophy departments.[3]

Even if one would grant that analytic philosophy has come out the victor, in history victories are only ever provisional. And in fact, today's analytic philosophers are increasingly interested in topics traditionally addressed by continental philosophers (e.g., Foucault, Adorno, or Marcuse). Topics such as power structures, gender and racial oppression, or mental health would have been previously shunned, but are increasingly unavoidable due to the demand for clarity on these issues.

Another development lies in signs how many philosophers of science are taking distance from core analytic practices they accuse of being sterile or empty. Engagement with the broader academic/scientific community is highly valued (Pradeu et al. 2021). Analytic metaphysics is often viewed as paradigmatically insular and uninformed (Ladyman and Ross 2007). However, also the way epistemology and ethics rely on "intuitions" as if they were sense-data has been taken to task (Machery 2017). If these criticisms would gain wider currency, they would redefine what "legitimate" or "professional" philosophy means and thus how students are taught.

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[3] Or in other words, to justify the closure of certain philosophy departments: "… The very distinguished Oxford philosopher Michael Dummett … told me flatly that it was wrong in principle to try to preserve all these provincial academic departments. Philosophy, he said, was a serious and highly technical subject which should only be studied at its own proper level. And what Dummett meant (…) is that 'the proper object of philosophy' had been finally established with the rise of 'the modern logical and analytical style of philosophizing'." (Midgley 2018)

To sum up this discussion: even though it may be unusual to question what philosophical professionalism should be, in a deeper sense this is business as usual. Methodological disputes have long been the arena in which concepts of philosophical professionalism clash. However, most of these disputes sought to redefine what it meant to be a philosophy professor. The proposal of this paper is that a more radical redefinition is in order today. To get a better grip on the status quo, let look in more detail at how the philosophical community today conceives of its professionalism.

4. Philosophical Professionalism Today

Codes of conduct represent consensus statements on how practitioners should conduct their work. For the philosophical community, the only code of conduct of an association of professional philosophers is that of the American Philosophical Association. Here it is quite clear that philosophical professionalism is understood as that of the university professor. When the APA code refers to "professional philosophical activities", the examples it gives of such activities are exclusively academic activities: "... undergraduate advising, the supervising and mentorship of graduate students, and the hiring and review of faculty colleagues" etc. (APA 2016, 1).

To give a broader context to what it meant to be a university professor: historically, a professor was a teacher, not a researcher (see Enders, 2007). Research was optional. Only in the 19th century, with the birth of the modern Humboldtian research university, did research come to be seen as an essential part of being a university professor. However, even then, teaching remained central, since the rationale for research was that it allowed professors to achieve higher teaching standards (Pritchard 2004). This period also saw the introduction of the PhD as a form of professional accreditation to enter the profession of university teaching.[4]

In many ways, the APA code and closely related statement of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) still largely live in a Humboldtian universe. The AAUP statement reveals the nexus between the research and teaching:

> Professors, guided by a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge, recognize the special responsibilities placed upon them. Their primary responsibility to their subject is to seek and to state the

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[4] Today we take the necessity of PhDs for granted, but when William James complained about the "PhD Octopus" in 1903, the phenomenon of a PhD was still viewed as a strange import from Germany, and as a somewhat tasteless form of status-seeking.

truth as they see it (…) As teachers, professors encourage the free pursuit of learning in their students. (AAUP 2009)

In endorsing this statement, the APA code affirms that "academic freedom in the classroom and in scholarly endeavors is foundational to the forms of inquiry that shape philosophy, as an academic discipline and as a profession." (APA 2016, 2)

While the emphasis of the APA code is Humboldtian, it does specify supplementary principles (APA 2016, 2):

- Institutional responsibilities (for research, teaching, and "service")
- Interpersonal values (fairness, equitability, dignity, respect, integrity, trust, scrupulousness to personal ethics)
- The value of the public promotion of philosophy

These additional values represent "auxiliary" values (Desmond 2020) in that they do not necessarily concern the core service (teaching). Thus, fairness and respect can help teacher-student relations but do not guide how core decisions with regards to research or teaching (e.g., syllabus design, or how do to additional research) should be made.

Curiously, there is also a category of "service" (APA 2016, 2) that is distinguished from teaching and research. This reflects what was historically a U.S. addition to the Humboldtian ideal (Ben-David, 1992). "Service" includes service to the university (various types of administration and management), service to the professional community (peer-review, editing, etc.) and service to society (public philosophy: opinion pieces, podcasts, popular or semi-popular monographs, etc.). In a sense, the proposal of this paper is that "service" should not be viewed as a rest-category (i.e., everything that is not teaching or research), but also as encompassing teaching and research.

Several broad trends have served to put this normative ideal of professionalism increasingly out of touch with actual challenges facing philosophers. We will discuss three important challenges, each pointing in to why philosophical professionalism should be reconceived along the lines of service.

5. Challenges to Academic Freedom

The service ideal of university professors to teach, historically, did not simply consist in imparting knowledge, but rather (and even primarily so) as forming the *characters* of future leaders of society. For instance, in the Oxbridge tradition the university was

expected to "cultivate the public mind and national taste as well as a gentlemen culture among the coming elite" (Enders 2007, 10–11).

Today this moral function of university education is gone. However, demand for it shows up in different ways. Today there are conflicts between academic freedom and demands of socially-engaged students (or administrators). Why this is so is a complex question in which the absence of the moral function of the university likely plays only a small part. Nonetheless, it does raise the question how the professional philosopher should deliberate on and navigate these conflicts.

How should the university professor interpret student demands for socially engaged philosophy? The closest the APA code comes to this is in recommending that teachers "select relevant materials", without giving any guidance on what "relevant" means, or on how to navigate student disagreement. Moreover, the APA code tells us that:

> Philosophy teachers aim to teach their students how to think, write, and speak clearly; how to read, understand, and critique philosophical texts; and how to develop their own philosophies in conversation with other people.

Yet, what should the philosopher do when challenged, or when faced with a demand on what (or how) to teach?

It is a genuine dilemma – just the sort of dilemma for which a concept of professionalism should offer normative guidance. For on the one hand, if they simply acquiesce with student demands they compromise academic freedom. However, on the other hand, to refuse to engage with students would be serve to increase distrust. Such refusal casts the ivory tower view of philosophy in an unfavourable light, as the view of the overprivileged philosopher.

The tension between trust and privilege is inherent to any profession. Trust must necessarily be placed in professionals: by assumption professionals offer an important service based on "esoteric" knowledge that requires considerable training and that clients do not have access to through common-sense (Desmond and Dierickx 2021). However, the importance of the service also confers *prestige* or *social status* on professionals – this is how evolved moral psychology works (Henrich and Gil-White 2001; Price and Van Vugt 2014). This is not problematic in itself, but the danger always exists that professionals can *take advantage* of the privileges (and trust) given to them by wider society.

Hence, if one adopts the perspective promoted by this article, the choice between philosophical integrity and a socially engaged philosophy is a false one. Professional service and professional autonomy (academic freedom) are inseparable. Professional autonomy is granted by the public in the trusting expectation that it will be used to serve the community; however, given the esoteric nature of professional knowledge, outsiders cannot dictate how this knowledge is applied (since they per definition lack the relevant expertise).

So, when students ask for socially-engaged philosophy, they do not necessarily need to be interpreted as "customers" demanding a "product" (this is a market-based logic of organization: Freidson, 2001), but rather as "clients" requesting a "service". Clients can communicate their needs and desires, but the professional still needs to use their own judgment and expertise on how to best deliver that service. However, to ignore the needs of students (whether intellectual, moral, or existential) would also entail a betrayal of genuine professionalism.

In this way, a core challenge today is to navigate challenges to academic professionalism. These challenges often involve how developments in broader society impinge on philosophy, and show how a service ideal of professional philosophy where academic freedom is absolute does not give the right guidance. There needs to be a broader service ideal, explicitly acknowledged in a professional code of conduct, and conflicts between professors and students bear witness to this need.

6. The Diversity of Philosophical Service.

Many philosophers today work as non-academic philosophers. They do not teach university students, but are providing philosophical services to other members of society nonetheless. Yet, by the current definition of philosophical professionalism, they would be categorized as "non-professional". Here are five categories of non-academic philosophers:

1. Philosophical consultants (e.g. the American Philosophical Practitioners Association)
2. Philosophers advising policy makers (e.g., think-tanks such as 80,000hours.org)
3. Philosophers in corporate policy (e.g., Society for Business Ethics or Institute of Business Ethics)

4. Philosophers in primary and secondary schools (e.g., The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children; see Gatley, 2020)

5. Philosophers contributing to the public debate through media organizations (e.g., aeon.co or The Stone)

Not all of the philosophers in these roles are outside of academia. In fact, many academics do public philosophy (category 5) or try to extract lessons from their research that are relevant for policy makers (category 2). The point here is that these categories of work are not recognized as "professional philosophy". Hence they are conceptualized as hobby-like activities for academics. Moreover, the organizations hat are explicitly dedicated to these categories of service are not recognized as organizations of professional philosophers.

Categorizing an activity as "professional" is not just a question of terminology: it entails a considerable value-judgment. It entails not simply that the practitioner does valuable work or that the practitioner has high standards of competence: it entails that the practitioner can be *trusted* and that their trustworthiness is public knowledge. By contrast, withholding the label "professional" from these philosophical activities implies a value-hierarchy (where some work is more valuable than others) and a status hierarchy (where some practitioners deserve more respect and deference than others).

These hierarchies are mirrored in common ways philosophers think about careers in philosophy. In the absence of systematic empirical studies (as far as I know), we can rely on anecdotal evidence. Thus, an implicit status hierarchy informs the phrase "alt-ac job"[5]: jobs that are an *alternative* to academia. The phrase groups at least five highly diverse types of philosophical work (ranging from engaging with children to engaging with CEOs) together in a single category of "non-academic". The dichotomy has the effect of implicitly affirming the academic option as the standard option. Academia is plan A; alt-ac is plan B.

No doubt this is unintentional, but status biases have a way of manifesting themselves in all sorts of unintentional ways. For instance, consider concepts of "success". What does it mean to achieve "success" as a philosopher? Even non-academic organizations often can remain beholden to the same entrenched success biases: thus they write that a reason *not* to do a PhD in philosophy is that "chances of

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[5] https://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2020/11/dealing-with-the-collapse-in-the-academic-job-market-advice-for-mentors-and-people-on-the-job-market.html

success are low", whereby success is defined as a permanent academic post at a research-focused university.[6]

Other phrases that reveal how non-academic philosophical work is judged to be less valuable include: to "make it" as a philosopher. What does "making it" mean? It means "winning" the academic competition. Often the discourse here reflects the U.S. tradition of self-help, with titles resembling "How to win friends and influence people" (Carnegie 1936), such as: "Good Work If You Can Get It: How to Succeed in Academia" (Brennan 2020). While of course well-intentioned, such advice, especially when coming from tenured professionals, only serves to strengthen the perception that there is a status hierarchy of philosophical work.

This is a curious situation if one compares the philosophical profession to other professions. Nobody thinks of an accomplished cardiologist as someone who "didn't make it" because they are not a university professor. The essence of the medical profession is to provide care to patients: it is not to conquer a position of privilege that allows one to develop one's interests.

Even among other academic domains, it would be hard to find an intellectual practice that is so linked to being a university professor. One can be a professional psychologist, physician, engineer, lawyer, sociologist, regardless of whether one is a professor or not. In literature, the paradigmatic practitioners are novelists or poets, who may or may not be professors. Even in history, the American Historical Association affirms that historians can be professionally active in "not just classrooms, but museums and historic sites, documentaries and textbooks, newspaper articles, web sites, and popular histories." (AHA 2019).

Why should we as philosophers not be similarly inclusive of the varieties of philosophical activity? After all, each of the five types of philosopher mentioned above seems to provide a valuable type of service:

1. Service to the human being: through finding clarity & meaning in one's life course, goals, & relationships.
2. Service to corporate leaders: by clarifying corporate goals and relationships with stakeholders and communities.

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[6] https://80000hours.org/career-reviews/philosophy-academia/#chances-of-success-are-low

3. Service to policymakers: by analyzing and clarifying core issues underlying a public debate, and deliberating about various policy options (cf. Plaisance and Elliott, 2021).
4. Service to children: by helping them reason about important questions in life (cf. Gatley, 2020).
5. Service to the public debate: by analyzing and clarifying core issues underlying a public debate

However, simply providing a service not sufficient to qualify as professional. There also needs to be standards of competence, based on a body of knowledge, and some form of accreditation of these competences. This accreditation would also need wider legal and social recognition. In this way, one cannot simply redefine professionalism by fiat – it's not a question of conceptual engineering. Theoretical work needs to be done to establish rigorous standards of competence, and political work needs to be done to obtain broader social recognition.

As a case study, consider the community of philosophical practitioners. This community is already well organized (via the American Philosophical Practitioners Association), and has processes of accreditation. However, they face intense competition from other professions that currently have jurisdiction over mental health and wellbeing, namely, psychologists and psychiatrists (Marinoff 2001). Nonetheless, the scientific methodology underlying psychology and psychiatry – and hence claims to exclusive professional competence – is not beyond doubt (cf. the entire fields of philosophy of psychiatry or of psychology). Moreover, recent approaches in psychology, such as positive psychology or existential psychotherapy, are directly using philosophical research and concepts (e.g., virtue ethics) to address patient well-being. There seems no principled reason why philosophical consultants, perhaps supported by academic philosophers, could not robustly professionalize.

It important to emphasize, however, that when any activity seeks to professionalize, it is not enough to simply have a body of useful knowledge: the political component is crucial as well (see Abbott, 1988). Hence, in face of stereotypes about philosophy, it is all the more important that philosophers to promote their discipline. In this way, the broader societal success of one philosopher should not be a source of envy or resentment, since their success is beneficial to the entire philosophical community.

This line of argument has an important practical implication. Often, when academics discuss the state of academia, it is typically characterised by a deep sense of malaise. And not without reason: in domains such as medical science, only 15% of PhDs remain in academia (Gould 2015). That this is not an ideal state of affairs is an understatement, given reports of increasing mental health problems among PhD students (e.g. Nature, 2019). While similar data about philosophy are lacking, from anecdotal discussions on the blogosphere, philosophy seems to face a similar malaise, perhaps exacerbated by idea that one must be a professor to make a living doing philosophy. What can be done? Often it is said that supply should be decreased: cut PhD programs. By contrast, the rationale sketched here would help the demand side of the equation: professional philosophers have a lot to offer society, but must get organized in order to establish a jurisdiction and social recognition of their competences.

To sum up, philosophers are active in a broad diversity of areas today beyond academia, and should be recognized as part of the community of professional philosophers. These subcommunities of philosophers would still face challenges in the process of professionalization, but professionalization almost always involves some conflict (with rival professions) and must be a collective effort. The first step would be for the code of conduct of a leading philosophical organization, such as the APA, to explicitly recognize and promote the services these philosophers provide, as well as stimulate academic philosophers to support non-academic philosophers through research.

7. What is the Purpose of Philosophical Research?

The third fundamental challenge facing the philosophical community is a crisis in philosophical research itself. This is a slow-moving crisis, and is the result of a very slow but nonetheless inexorable trend, whereby philosophical research has been increasingly promoted as an end in itself.

In the Humboldtian universe, as already mentioned, the teleology of research lies in teaching: the professor "seeks and states the truth as they see it" in order to create a community with their students where neither teacher nor students have monopoly over knowledge but are unified in their search for truth (Pritchard 2004, 510). The teaching that involves learning on the part of the teacher as well is simply the *best* teaching (Pritchard 2004).

Today, it seems fair to say that the *entelecheia* of the professional philosopher is *not* teaching. This can be observed in a shift in prestige, from teaching to research. Once, not too long ago, the "best" philosophers were the ones who received the most teaching responsibilities whereas "weak" philosophers were kept away from students and told to do research. Research positions were, thus in effect, ways to isolate weak philosophers.[7] Today, by contrast, the shift in prestige is betrayed by common phrases such as: "teaching *burdens"* or "teaching relief". Research positions, involving little or no teaching, are in fact the *most* prestigious positions. Success in research, operationalized via various metrics (publication count, impact factors, citations, h-index) has come to determine career success – including, ironically, whether one is given the privilege to teach university students.[8]

Why has research come to be so highly valued? The most obvious trend has been the valuing of scientific research as a driver of economic growth and technological innovation (OECD 2008, 126–27). This has provided a strong impetus to incentivize research, one which has spilled over to attitudes towards research in the humanities. This has also led to the monopoly that universities had over research to have been weakened (e.g., in the USA, governments and private corporations now provide two thirds of research funding: National Science Board, 2016). Thus, universities must compete with other scientific institutions to be able to do research.

A second broad trend, perhaps more directly relevant to a humanities discipline such as philosophy (or at least as it's typically characterized), is the broad trend of distrust towards the professions generally, which largely took place in the 1980s and 1990s. The privilege and power of the professions was increasingly distrusted, and this led to a corresponding emphasis on "accountability". According to Enders, this meant that "there is diminishing trust in the self-steering capacities of academics as long-standing and deeply socialized professionals (…) Governments have tried (and still try) to link measures of 'outputs' more closely to funding…" (Enders 2007). In other words, the linking of prestige to research output is partially a result of an engineering of the social structure of academia by non-academics.

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[7] This was the case until the late 1990s at <the alma mater of the Author>, according to personal communication with <XXX, emeritus professor>.

[8] This is ironic because specialization in a research niche helps to success in research, whereas good teaching requires an academic to retain a broad overview to make intuitive connections for students (Schimank and Winnes 2000). In other words, good researchers do not necessarily make good teachers.

The upshot is the following: on the one hand, philosophical research has increased in importance and prestige, but on the other, as it has become divorced from the Humboldtian service ideal of the unity of teaching and research, it has become less guided by *any* service ideal. This puts pressure on the professional character of philosophical research; moreover, it means that current concept of professionalism fails to give guidance.

Academic philosophers today must navigate a dilemma concerning their research. On the one hand, the success of research is determined by the *reception by one's peers*: fellow experts in a sub-domain of philosophy. These are the individuals who will determine journal publication, or the acceptability of a book manuscript, or whether the work deserves to be cited, or showcased as a keynote at a conference. However, on the other hand, insofar philosophical research is a *professional* activity its quality is only proximately determined by peers, but ultimately by its *contribution to laypersons.* By "laypersons" is simply meant someone who is not a professional philosopher: perhaps a biology professor, or perhaps a teenager searching for existential guidance, or perhaps a politician, or someone with autism. If the piece of philosophical work thus only impacts fellow professional philosophers without offering a service to laypersons, then it fails any standard of professional service.

Taking this dilemma seriously means that there is no easy way out. One cannot just decide to stop caring about one's peers, and for a good reason: the opinions of one's peers are often a good indication of quality of research. These are also the individuals that can be of most help in reading, commenting on, and improving on research. Yet, the community of philosophers, as a professional body, can only motivate its existence to wider society if it can point to a service that it provides.

Moreover, philosophical research (and likely scientific research in general) needs a broader service ideal to remain tethered. When it is absent, philosophers are no longer cooperating to provide services to non-philosophers, but are competing over limited resources (journal space; tenured professorships; research funding). Hypercompetition, as biologists are well aware of, does not always lead to increased overall fitness, but can lead to perverse strategies. In context of academia, perverse competition can manifest itself in different ways: strategies of citation maximization (Ale Ebrahim et al. 2013; Fong and Wilhite 2017); or the creation of research jurisdictions and cliques of researchers (Millgram 2015) where researchers review and cite each other's work.

The only way out of the fundamental dilemma is by collectively affirming a service ideal for philosophical research. Only when there is a collective ideal of service can one trust that the judgment of one's peers will likely align with the quality of the service for non-philosophers.

In this way, we could suggest four distinct types of service in philosophical research:

1. <u>Service to academic philosophers:</u> thinking about the conceptual problems, foundational challenges, or broader significance of some philosophical discipline. Thus, academic work in metaphysics may be not read by non-philosophers, but may be useful to philosophers of science, or philosophers of art, or ethicists.

2. <u>Service to other academic disciplines:</u> thinking about the conceptual problems, foundational challenges, or broader significance of some academic discipline (law, history, theology, sociology, economics, psychology, medicine, biology, chemistry, physics, computer science, mathematics).

3. <u>Service to non-academic philosophers:</u> thinking about the conceptual problems or foundational challenges faced by philosophical consultants or philosophical think-tanks. For instance, the philosophy of psychology and of psychiatry would be relevant for the former; business ethics or political philosophy for the latter.

4. <u>Service to the intellectual public:</u> thinking about problems that are of existential, ethical or theoretical interest to members of the public.

Of the four, only the second category of philosophical research is explicitly realized today: thus philosophers of law, of science, or of history already conceive to their domain as (in part) providing a service to legal scholars, or historians, or scientists. By contrast, the first is contentious; the third is non-existent and unconceived; the fourth is conceived and currently being promoted.

To start with fourth category: what is meant here is tackling questions the general public would be interested in (often the big philosophical questions), but in a way that is not merely "popularizing". Popularization – whereby latest philosophical research is presented in an accessible way – is itself not a research activity, but could be best categorized as a teaching activity (i.e., teaching the public). Public philosophy *as a research activity* means doing philosophical research in a way that can be appreciated by the general intellectual public.

This type of philosophy was even dismissed in the 20th century, and viewed as at odds with the demands of professionalism. One of the few 20th century representatives include the French existentialists; it was more prevalent before the professionalization of philosophy in the 20th century. Today public philosophy remains an underappreciated category even as non-philosophers have stepped up and taken over public philosophy, whereby they present synoptic, wide-rangings views on human history and human nature (even if this is sometimes disguised as science popularization). In other words, the public demand for public philosophy remains: a broad, more inclusive concept of professionalism would explicitly recognize this type of philosophy as a valuable service.

Concerning the third category: here the analogy is with other professions, such as the legal or medical profession, where the vast majority of academic research is undertaken in order to support the activities of practitioners.[9] If non-academic philosophers would grow in stature and obtain professional status, this type of research would increasingly become important. Currently there are some academic journals dedicated to supporting the work of non-academic philosophers: for instance, the American Philosophical Practitioners association has its own journal (*Philosophical Practice*). However, as a community, philosophers do not seem to currently place any emphasis on this third category of philosophical research.

The first category is at once the most widespread category of philosophical research; however, the characterization of it in terms of service might be controversial. It namely holds that, if a philosophical sub-domain does not aim to serve non-philosophers, then it must aim to serve philosophers *outside* of its subdomain.

To illustrate this question, let us revisit the debate on the legitimacy of the way research in metaphysics and other "core" philosophical disciplines is being conducted (Ladyman and Ross 2007; Machery 2017).[10] In L.A. Paul's defense of the status quo, she primarily focuses on defending the *methodology* of metaphysical research. The strategy she uses is to argue that the methodology in metaphysics is the same as

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[9] For instance, medical research is sometimes even *defined* as geared towards supporting medicial practitioners: "Medical research involves research in a wide range of fields, such as biology, chemistry, pharmacology and toxicology with the goal of developing new medicines or medical procedures or improving the application of those already available." (Nature 2021)

[10] In general, the philosophy of science community seems to be strongly concerned with being of service to the wider academic community (for an overview, see e.g. Pradeu et al., 2021) as well as to policy-makers (Plaisance and Elliott 2021).

scientific research (Paul 2012): from the perspective of the sociology of the professions, this strategy is the standard one for establishing the legitimacy of a domain. However, and more directly relevant for the purposes here, she touches on what the *service* of metaphysics should be: metaphysics is a "rich opportunity for philosophers of science, who can draw on their scientific expertise to evaluate the plausibility (or otherwise) of metaphysical theories that bump up against the domain of the empirical" (Paul 2012, p. 8).

This is a concept of *indirect service*, where work is pursued in the hope that it would be of future use to others. There are some domains, like pure mathematics, where the model indirect service has worked well. For instance, Bayesian statistics of Galoisian group theory have both proved immensely useful for non-mathematical domains of enquiry, even though they were not designed as such. However, the question is whether the model of pure mathematics can be applied to metaphysics.

Philosophers of science conceive of philosophical work as a *direct service*, where the philosopher, including the metaphysician, takes in initiative in engaging with others' domains. An instance of this view of metaphysics would be Descartes' view of metaphysics as the trunk of all science. In Descartes' view, basic ontological categories (i.e., body and mind) are necessary to enhance the conceptual clarity of scientific research. But Descartes actually did research in physics, mathematics , or medicine, thus showing the value of his metaphysics. This view of metaphysics would be a more direct manifestation of service-oriented philosophical professionalism.

It is important to emphasize here the fallibilism and epistemic humility required in evaluating "philosophical service". Service need not imply a direct usefulness. Philosophical work can remain incubated in small communities of enquirers, even for quite some time. If the philosophical community is an amoeba, then some philosophers are ensconced in the center with little direct contact with non-philosophers. Nonetheless, an amoeba that cannot interact with its changing environment will eventually die. Similarly, core philosophical work needs to play a function in the wider philosophical enterprise, and thus ultimately contribute indirectly to the lives and work of non-philosophers, either in academia (scientists, historians, physicians, lawyers, etc.) or in politics and the public debate, or in the daily lives of all members of society.

8. Towards a New Philosophical Professionalism

A single paper professionalism does not make. Norms of professionalism are living, breathing norms that endure by shaping how individuals and collectives view and interpret challenges, and how they decide to meet those challenges. Even so, sometimes groups of practitioners can get trapped, where every individual may not agree with the ruling social norms, and yet be unable to take unilateral action. Hence a systematic reflection on what philosophical professionalism can and should mean, as this paper has attempted, can be a first step in kickstarting a collective and coordinated effort to change social norms.

The situation today is that the normative concept of philosophical professionalism is that of the university professor with almost absolute academic freedom. However, by contrast, philosophers on the ground today must navigate: (1) limits on the academic freedom to teach, (2) a research environment which is metric-driven, hypercompetitive, and determinative for one's professional position (since teaching has become low prestige) (3) the challenges of providing services outside of academia.

The message of this paper is that these challenges are opportunities to strengthen philosophical professionalism. The old professionalism of the university professor is under threat, but the response need not to be defensive but can lie in redefining professionalism. A new and more explicit focused on service (in the broad sense) can absorb these challenges, and offer normative guidance not just to university professors, but to all professional philosophers doing valuable work.

A proper development of philosophical professionalism would also necessarily entail a reorganization of the profession. After all, one of the defining criteria for a profession is that the professional body collectively decides on how to organize the work. Thus, how much work should there be in metaphysics? Epistemology? Ethics?

Kwame Appiah's metaphor of the amoeba is richly suggestive here. There is a distinction between "core philosophy", aimed at supporting the work of fellow philosophers, and "peripheral philosophy", aimed at interacting with non-philosophers. However, to judge any of the two to be "real" philosophy would be of course absurd. Peripheral philosophy is perhaps more ephemeral, but it is also more likely to be of direct service to non-philosophers and hence also likely to do more to

promote the value of philosophy in wider society. By contrast, core philosophy acts to provide abstract conceptual frameworks for philosophers acting on the periphery.

Even though it would be tempting to say that academic freedom trumps collective decision-making on how structure the philosophical amoeba – this is not in fact the case. Currently there may not be conscious, rational deliberations on this issue, but it *de facto* happens through prestige hierarchies. The mechanism here is that editorial decisions in prestigious journals and hiring decisions in prestigious departments set the tone for the profession as a whole, because quality is quantified through prestige indicators more commonly known as "reputational measures" (e.g. Leiter). However, when reputation becomes untethered to real service, it can produce a perverse competition where certain traits are selected for as prestige indicators even though they may lack any broader professional function.

Surely the philosophical profession can never become exactly similar to, for instance, the medical profession, where only a small subset of medical professionals are university professors, and only a further subset would be concerned with purely theoretical problems. Some areas of philosophy remain somewhat similar to pure mathematics, where work is organized according to principles of beauty or truth, regardless of whether it will be of service to other domains. The real question is: where does a good balance lie?

Philosophers seem especially prone to judging each other in terms of "brilliance", i.e., internal aptitude (Leslie et al. 2015). By contrast, to take professionalism seriously means to adopt something of Wittgenstein's attitude when he praised Moore as an example of how far a person can go in philosophy despite no intelligence whatsoever. This compliment was not entirely back-handed: Wittgenstein believed that integrity, not intelligence, was far more important for doing good philosophy.[11] Philosophical professionalism is based on the same fundamental insight: what matters, even in philosophical research, is integrity, and this in turn is defined by an attitude towards service. A new professionalism is needed to respond to the three big challenges for academic philosophers today. They do not call for more brilliance or even more philosophical rigor, but for rethinking the intentions and values underlying philosophical work.

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[11] https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/ge-moore-philosophy-books-analytic-ray-monk-biography

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