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WHAT WE DO WHEN WE DO PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract. In this paper, I present a reflective exercise on philosophical methodology. The aim of this exercise is to encourage people to think actively and reflectively on what they do when they do philosophy, and how they do it, both in terms of research practice and teaching practice. In addition to situating the motivation for the exercise in the broader tradition of philosophical methodology, I also report on an instance of this exercise that was undertaken at the Principia conference in Florianopolis, Brazil, in 2025, which I hope can be used as an exemplar for other people running similar exercises.

Keywords: methodology • philosophy • metaphilosophy • philosophical questions • workshop description

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1. Introduction

For a group of people whose common activity involves asking and answering big questions about big topics, we philosophers spend remarkably little time reflecting on what it is we are doing when we do philosophy, and what it is that this philosophy that we do actually is. A perusal of introductory textbooks on philosophy serve as one witness to this—take any selection off your shelf and look to see how they define or characterize philosophy, or how they define or characterize "doing philosophy," and you'll often find quite a cursory answer, or even a strange and suspicious silence[1]—but another witness to this can be found by simply asking your philosophical colleagues to articulate their philosophical practice. Ask a philosopher "what do you do when you do philosophy?" and the answers will range across the flippant, the joking, the unreflective, and the uncertain. Flippant answers tend to be along the lines of "I read things and think about them and then write about them." A few might add, more seriously, references to reading groups, discussions with other philosophers (whether informally or via more structured situations such as participation in workshops), commenting on other people's work, teaching material relating to the problems they're thinking about to upper-level students, identifying unsolved

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problems (whether out there in the world, or within the bounds of established philosophical interpretation), etc.[2] Others might be refreshingly honest and admit they've never thought about the question before.

Rarely do we stop and look, deeply and reflectively, at our own practice as philosophers, to apply our philosophical methods of curiosity, investigation, questioning, and considering to this practice. Yet, when we do so, we learn interesting things—about the nature of philosophy and its practice, where we fit in this ecosystem, and how our positionality affects our practice, both in teaching and in research. The basis of this paper is the belief that we collective don't talk enough about what we are doing, and how, and why, when we do philosophy, and that there is a lot to be learned from doing so.

This is not your typical philosophy paper. I am not planning to advance an argument for an abstract conclusion about what philosophy is, or should be, or what philosophical practice is, or should be. Instead, I am going to present a reflective exercise that I encourage readers to take away and carry out in their own philosophical communities, whether this is their departmental colleagues, in the classroom with their students, or a broader cross-section of likeminded researchers.

This paper directly arises from a two-part interactive workshop "What We Do When We Do Philosophy" that I ran at the Principia conference in Florianopolis, Brazil, in 2025.[3] For this workshop, I was given two hours, one the first night of the conference, one the last night, which meant that I could make it a proper workshop: I used the first installment to set the scene for assigning explicit homework assignments asking participants to reflect on their own practice and experience of philosophy, and in the second installment, I collected their assignments (in the form of an interactive activity, which I'll explain below) for discussion.

The plan for the rest of the paper is this: First, I will prime the pump, so to speak, with some reflections on the nature of philosophy and philosophical methodology, in §2. Then, I will present the activities of the workshop, and describe how these activities unfolded, in §3, before turning to why such an activity is valuable, and how we might use the outcome of these reflective exercises not only to understand but also to improve our philosophical practices, in §4. My final remarks, in §5, are followed by an appendix containing an example of an individual reflection on philosophical methodology.

2. The nature of philosophy and philosophical activity

Before we can answer the question "what do we do when we do philosophy," we first need to ask "what is philosophy?" As I noted above (fn. 1), it is quite an salutatory exercise to simply survey what philosophers have to say about their own field. Of

the five books I pulled off the shelf, one addressed the issue only obliquely while the other four each had quite different things to the say about the nature of philosophy.[4]

Moore's *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* opens with a chapter "What is Philosophy?" whose first sentence is: "I want, as a start, to try to give you a general idea of what philosophy *is*: or, in other words, what sorts of questions it is that philosophers are constantly engaged in discussing and trying to answer" (Moore 1953, p.1). Nagel's *What Does it All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy* poses philosophy as a distinctive discipline because

> unlike science, it doesn't rely on experiments or observation, but only on thought. . . it is done just by asking questions, arguing, trying out ideas and thinking of possible arguments against them, and wondering how our concepts really work. The main concern of philosophy is to question and understand very common ideas that all of us use every day without thinking about them (1987, pp.4–5).

Honderich and Burnyeat's edited collection *Philosophy As It Is* is prefaced with remarks on two properties of good philosophy, that it be *rigorous* and *imaginative*, because these "are qualities called for by the nature of the questions with which philosophy asks" (Honderich and Burnyeat 1979, p.1), while Baggini in *All That Matters: Philosophy* says philosophy is what differentiates humans from other species; for him, "philosophy" is captured in the act of asking "why?" (2012, p.4).

Three of these books present a picture of philosophy as characterized by the types of questions that philosophers ask, whether these questions are simply "why?" or whether they are rigorous and imaginative "big picture" questions such as "What's the point of it all? What is the meaning of life?" (Baggini 2012, p.4). Another way to think about the picture of philosophy that these books are painting is that philosophy is characterized by its *content*—that the questions philosophy asks (about the meaning of life, about what there is, about how we know things about it, about what is good and what is bad) are somehow more deep, more broad, or more fundamental than those asked by other disciplines. This way to characterize philosophy embraces a plurality of methods and ways of answering the questions.

The outlier, Nagel, focuses less on the questions being asked and more on how they are answered, that is, it is about the methods and methodology of philosophical activity. However, he is an outlier only as a consequence of my very unserious methodology of selecting books from a shelf. If I had chosen other books, there would have been others corroborating Nagel—such as Flew in the revised edition of his *Introduction to Western Philosophy: Ideas and Argument from Plato to Popper*, who takes philosophy to be "an activity which can have connections in all directions," which, he argues, is "one of the grounds of its claim for a place in any programme of liberalizing and integrative studies"(Flew 1989, p.16)—were philosophy not able to reach beyond some narrow list of topics, it would not have the liberatory power that it has.[5]

There is, of course, substantially more nuance to answering the question "what is philosophy?" or "what characterizes philosophy?" than simply "it's/its content" or "it's/its methods," and I am not trying to argue for a rigid, binary account that accepts or rejects one or the other of these two, purportedly exclusive conceptions—in fact, quite the opposite as we will see in the next section. However, what is important for my purposes is that there are these two different lenses through which philosophy and philosophical activity can be viewed, as which lens someone takes determines what picture of philosophy they have. Additionally, each of these lenses give rise to their own further specific questions: If philosophy is characterized by its content, then what kinds of content characterizes philosophy? If it is characterized by its methods, then what kinds of methods? The task of answering these questions is itself a fundamentally philosophical task, whichever lens you are looking through.

3. The exercise: What we do when we do philosophy

The reflective exercise starts from the observation made in the previous section: That answers to the question "What is philosophy?" can be placed on a spectrum where on one end, philosophy is characterised by its CONTENT, and on the other end, it is characterised by its METHOD, and begins by asking the participants to reflect on how they would answer this question themself. Note that this is not the unique way to characterize this spectrum—we could just as easily talk about the spectrum that ranges from TOPICS to TECHNIQUES. This is also not the only relevant possible spectrum: Another spectrum that would be interesting to consider via the same exercise is the one that ranges from characterizing philosophy of the basis of its depth to characterizing philosophy on the basis of its tools.

After people have had sufficient opportunity to reflect, gather everyone into a large enough space cleared of furniture, and identify one side of the room as METHOD and the other CONTENT (or other labels as appropriate), and begin the activities:

First activity, ask: *Where on the CONTENT — METHOD spectrum would you place yourself?*

This is not an abstract, theoretical question, but a practical one: First, everyone needs to identify roughly where on the spectrum they would place themself, but then they need to talk to the people around them to see if they've gotten it right, or whether they are more to one side of the spectrum than the person they are standing near. The result will be not unlike herding cats, and it's unlikely that any group of people will be able to force themselves into a complete linear order (if for no other reason than that it's unlikely that you're in a room big enough for this to take place), but that's okay: It is fine if there are equivalence classes of people in roughly the same

place on the spectrum, so long as they agree that they were all in roughly the same place.

Second activity, starting at one end of the spectrum and working to the other, ask people to: *Say something about why you put yourself where you did.*

The aim of this exercise is to get people to articulate their position and their reasons for it for an audience wider than just the people that they first stood near in the initial organizing. (This may result in some people shifting where they stand, so be sure to come back to anyone who may move as you're going down the line!)

Third activity (which can be done simultaneously with the previous one) ask: *For those who are more toward the CONTENT end, what kind of content do you think characterizes philosophy? For those more toward the METHOD end, what kinds of method?*

For those who are more on the CONTENT or topic side of the spectrum, the challenge is to define what gets to count as as philosophical content or topic, and what doesn't. I like to draw an analogy with another definitional exercise, which I call "Chair or No Chair": Come up with a definition of 'chair' that includes everything you intuitively want to count as a chair, and doesn't include anything that is obviously not a chair.[6] For every definition that is proposed, see if you can propose a counterexample. It's a surprisingly difficult game even with chairs, so it should be no surprise that the Philosophy or No Philosophy version is even harder.

A similar task awaits those who think it is more about methodology than about content. The onus is on them to not only identify what methods are specifically philosophical (so we will have to go beyond "reading and thinking and writing (and talking)," because other disciplines get to use those methods too), and—perhaps not easier—to identify what types of methods are definitely *not* philosophical.

Fourth activity, for a particular philosophical tradition or subfield *X* (e.g., analytic philosophy, continental philosophy, ethics, philosophy of language, etc.), ask:

1. *What is X philosophy—content or method?*
2. *What methods? What content?*
3. *Who/what is included? Excluded?*

This activity is optional but provides opportunity to engage with people who struggle with the first three activities on the basis that philosophy is too nonuniform for any single answer.

Fifth activity, ask: *What problems did you face while participating in these activities?*

This question allows people to engage in some meta-meta-reflection, to philosophize about their philosophizing about philosophy.

4. Reflections

I was nervous about running the workshop as a proper, interactive workshop, because the success of these activities crucially depended on the willingness of the participants to be engaged, but I should not have been. At first, I'm not sure people entirely believed me when I said I was giving them homework and expected them to come to the next installment of the workshop prepared to discuss their answers, but I was surprised at how many people turned up having done the work.

It is hopefully not surprising, having read the description of the activities in the exercise, that many interesting and productive conversations arose during and from the workshop. One particularly beautiful—and surprising—outcome came during the second activity, where people were asked to explain their choice of place on the spectrum. The first person to speak, over on the CONTENT end of the spectrum, articulated their answer in terms of theoreticality—that philosophy is characterized by a certain level of depth or height (we collectively never quite figured out if theory is above us or below us...); and then the last person to speak (over in the METHOD corner) articulated *their* answer in almost *exactly* the same terms—without even realising it until it was pointed out![7]

What is the purpose of asking doing such an exercise? I've already motivated the activity by appeal to the need for self-reflection, which is often surprisingly absent in our every day philosophical activity. From this point of view, the workshop was very successful; not only were there excellent, reflective discussions during the activity itself, in the three full days of conference intervening, I overheard a number of conversations between people discussing how they'd answer, covering questions such as whether the questions were about how they do philosophy or how they teach philosophy, or how they do philosophy or how they *want to do* philosophy, as well as references to the questions during the Q&As of other talks.[8]

But there are two more, perhaps more significant, reasons why we should explicitly ask and reflect on these types of questions. The first is the impact that asking these questions has on our history, and the second is the impact that asking these questions has on our future.

4.1. Thinking about the past

In order to think about the impact these activities can have on our understanding of the history of philosophy, I want to distinguish between the methodology *of* the history of philosophy and methodology *in* the history of philosophy. The former refers to how we, as modern philosophers, look at the history of philosophy (including specialized subdisciplines like history of logic), the tools and methods that we as modern philosophers use for analyzing historically remote content. The latter, however, looks

at historical philosophy and philosophers and asks "What were the methodologies these philosophers used?"

Philosophy is not a fixed discipline that has existed unchanged since Thales first hypothesized that everything is water. The history of our discipline features many periods where the scope of the discipline has shifted, with different aspects peeled off and separated into their own silos. Even if we narrow our field of subject simply to "philosophy as inherited in the West from ancient Greece," we can identify various points in history where this has happened—here I mention but three of them: (1) in the high Middle Ages when Aristotelian/secular philosophy began to separate itself off/be separated from theology, with explicit pronouncements about what types of questions philosophers were allowed to discuss and which were proscribed for the theologians (cf. Uckelman 2010), (2) the birth of modern science out of natural philosophy in the Renaissance and Early Modern era (cf. as a representative example of this separating out of science as distinct from philosophy Francis Bacon (Peltonen 2025)), and (3) the separation of psychology from philosophy as a distinct discipline in its own right in the late 19th century (cf., e.g., the founding of the American Psychological Association and the American Philosophical Association as distinct scholarly bodies in 1892 and 1900, respectively). If we take a content-focused approach to the nature of philosophy, then historians of philosophy must decide whether it is the history of what *we* now call philosophy that they are studying, or whether they are studying what has, historically, been called philosophy (cf. Uckelman 2009, ch. 1).

When considering methodology *in* the history of philosophy, we can re-run the exercise of the previous section but instead of asking ourselves and our friends and colleagues, i.e., contemporary philosophers, to answer the questions, we can ask the questions with respect to historical philosophers. Where would particular historical philosophers put themselves on the CONTENT — METHOD spectrum? Would they put themselves on the spectrum at all? Our understanding of where historical authors are located on this spectrum in turn has consequences on how we read historical texts. There are at least three different ways that we can read philosophical (and other) texts that are remote from us in time. The first is to read them as *historical* texts, i.e., as mere historical curiosities—and this is unlikely to be very interesting from a philosophical point of view. The second way is to read them as philosophy *of our time*: If we take our own contemporary conception of philosophy and apply it retrospectively to a historical text, not only can we ask what we might learn from that text that is relevant to our own modern questions and concerns, we can also learn more about where we've the boundaries of our discipline by asking whether these historical texts *fit* within those boundaries. For instance, when I teach an introductory logic class to undergraduates, and within that class I teach them about the "white horse is not horse" argument attributed to Gōngsūn Lóng (Indraccolo 2017), an explicit question I ask is whether this argumentative exchange counts as *logic*, i.e.,

whether it makes sense for me to have taught them it *in the context of an introductory logic class*. Finally, the third way is to read these texts as philosophy *of their time*, measuring them against the standards and boundaries in operation at the time the piece was written, taking seriously the point recognized in the previous paragraph, that what gets to count as philosophy changes over time. Each of these different ways of reading a text will give rise to different evaluations of the utility and value of the text as a piece of philosophical work.

4.2. Thinking about the future

Unsurprisingly, just as there are consequences about how we think about the history of philosophy given what we think philosophy is, our choices also have consequences for the future of philosophy: *What* we choose to read, study, and teach from the past (or even from the present) determines what will "count" in the future, and *whom* we read, study, and teach from the past (or the present) determines who will "count" in the future. The bounds of what counts as philosophy, and what counts as doing philosophy, are not fixed even if we take a snapshot of the field as it currently is: Every choice that we make about whom or what we devote our philosophical attention to helps shape the boundaries of what is considered worth our attention, both now and in the future.

While much of the focus of the reflective questions was directed at how we, as philosophers, *do* philosophy, the same types of questions can also be asked with respect to how we *teach* philosophy, for it is via teaching philosophy that we train the next generation of philosophers in doing philosophy. When we select particular philosophers, topics, or methods to teach in our classes, we are signaling to student philosophers that *these* are important. We can either make choices that *broaden* the field, making it more expansive and more inclusive, or we can make choices that *narrow* the field, that not only exclude specific thinkers and their thoughts from consideration, but that do so in a *systemic* way. When so-called feminist philosophers argue that it is incompatible to be a feminist, or a woman, and a logician at the same time, they are shutting down *a priori* any possibility of the development an approach to logic that does not systematically exclude from participation a portion of society characterized entirely by their nonlogical properties. Such an approach locks a door before it can even be opened, to see what might—and in fact does—lie on the other side, namely feminist logic (cf. Uckelman 2025). Working on the assumption that as philosophers we find philosophy valuable and want to extend access to this value as widely as possible, we must hence be incredibly mindful about who and what gets included and excluded on the basis of the choices that we make.

5. Final remarks

While the exercise in §3 is framed as a group exercise designed to get philosophers to talk to each other, it is possible to undertake these activities as an individual. Whether you do the exercise on your own or in a group, in this final section I want to leave you, the reader, with one final homework assignment.

Final activity: *What is the impact (of trying to answer these questions) on:*

1. *Your research?*
2. *Your teaching? (Do you teach "what is philosophy" or do you teach "how we do philosophy"?)*
3. *Your scope of philosophy? (Does it change, as a result of these activities?)*
4. *Who/what gets included/excluded?*

There is no one *right* way to answer these questions. What is important is that we, if we are to be *good* philosophers, (1) know *what* our answers are, (2) can say *why* we have answered this way, and (3) understand *how* our answers impact our practice. **Why?** Because this is the only way we can work to dismantle barriers to entry and systematic structures of exclusion: By understanding who gets included and who gets excluded as a result of the choices that we make.

A. One woman's methodology

When I was an early graduate student, I remember being baffled by other students further along who seemed to have an endless amount of ideas. Where did these ideas come from? I didn't get any guidance on how to generate good philosophical ideas from the seminars I was taking, which focused on relatively traditional questions in traditional analytic philosophy and expected us to do the same. For the most part, I found the questions boring, though the methods used to answer them interesting. But I struggled to connect the methods that interested me to content that also interested me.

The idea for the exercise presented in §3 first came to me at a workshop in 2017; during a lovely walk through Oxford with the other participants, I ended up in an extremely heated debate with a fellow philosopher (whom I will not name as we are still friends!) about the nature of philosophy; he was firmly in the "content," insisting that there were some topics that were simply not and could not be philosophical, while I found myself entrenched in the "method" corner, insisting that *any* topic could be made philosophical, if only it was tackled with the right methods. My own position has not changed since then. This is partly why when I discuss methodology with other

philosophers, I tend to focus on the question "how do you do philosophy?" rather than the question "what problems do you work on?", because I am more interested in process than in topic.

From the flippant to the serious, all the answers I receive can be viewed as variations on "how to get ideas and do something with them." In this appendix, I want to outline four specific methods that I use regularly, with great effect, in my own research, and which I explicitly teach my undergraduate students, particularly those who are struggling with developing thesis topics. The purpose of this appendix is to give people a starting point for articulating their own philosophical methodology, via giving an example.

My four methods are: (1) Edge cases, (2) Intersection, (3) What's in there?, and (4) Tool combination. I will discuss each of these briefly, and give an example of each.

Edge cases involves taking a traditional theory, topic, or question, and instead of working in the center of it, work on the edges, work on the borderlines. Instead of asking how theories of fiction account for mainstream literature (no more endless focus on *Sherlock Holmes*!), ask how these theories cope with fanfiction (Uckelman (forthcoming)). Instead of asking how theories of meaning work for natural languages that have large corpora and are well understood, ask how these theories cope with fictional or constructed languages (Uckelman 2016).

Intersection involves saying "here's a thing that interests me in philosophy. Here's a thing that interests me outside of philosophy. What's in the intersection?" This is the method I tend to recommend to undergraduate students needing to develop a thesis topic, because it's a really good exercise for those who are struggling for ideas. This method crucially requires buying into the idea that philosophy is characterized more by method than by content, since it is built on the foundation that any subject can be made philosophical if it is approached in the right way. It can, however, also be used to take two topics *within* philosophy which are not typically connected, or where people have argued explicitly that there can be no overlap or connection—as when feminist philosophers have argued (incorrectly in my opinion!) that feminism and formal logic are incompatible with each other (Uckelman 2025).

I tend to use the **What's in there?** method for history of philosophy and logic or historical philosophy and logic. It involves taking a historical text and asking: "What does it say? How does it compare to what other people at the same time were saying? How does it compare to what we say today?" A subgenre of this methodology is the "What did they say?" method, in which you start from a modern topic—such as unusual operators in temporal logic—and ask "what do historical authors have to say about this topic?" (Uckelman 2016). The advantage of picking remote historical texts that most people haven't looked at before is that you are pretty much guaranteed to say something new—low-hanging fruit: pick it!

My final method is one that I use most in predominantly logical rather than philo-

sophical contexts. If we think of different types of logic and different things that can be added to different logical systems, e.g., modal logic, temporal logic, agents, dynamics, self-reference, etc., as different tools, **Tool combination** asks "what happens when I combine these tools together?" This generates formal questions to answer—how to write the definitions correctly to represent the interaction between the various parts, what will the models look like, what kind of axioms would such a system have—as well as more theoretical ones, involving what can then be done with the resulting toolkit, and what types of problems it might possibly be able to shed some light on. This method also usefully connects with the previous one, when focusing on logical texts, where it is useful to ask "What tools do I need to combine in order to be able to say something about What's in there?"

All of these methods are aimed at finding and asking questions; but then a separate, albeit related, issue arises, "How do I know if the questions these methods generate are *philosophical enough*?" Addressing this issue requires us to be able to distinguish the good questions from the bad (or at least, not so good) questions, and then to have some idea how to go about answering them.

Let's go back to Intersection, and flesh out how to generate questions using this method. Once I have a topic in Intersection, I ask myself the following questions:

1. What do you want to know?
2. What would count as an answer to this question? How are you going to discriminate between things that answer the question and things that don't?
3. What would count as a good answer to this question? How are you going to discriminate between competing answers? What are your foundational principles, the things that you cannot give up? What is the purpose of this answer (are you looking for something functional, moral, epistemological, etc.)? State these at the beginning of what you are writing, as part of your motivation.

Then, once you've answered the main question, there is one last question to answer, in order to complete the philosophical project:

> Who cares? Why does it matter? What has changed as a result of having this answer? What must change as a result of having this answer? Does having this answer affect our behavior? Does it affect what philosophical position we must adopt to remain consistent? Does it change the philosophical landscape by either removing or adding possible positions? What difference does it make?

Working through this questions is not a guarantee that the philosophical question or problem you started off with is a *good* one, but it is a helpful way to winnow out some which are not!

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Notes

[1]I undertook this exercise myself in the library of the philosophy department at Durham University. From the "general philosophy" section I picked five books at random and looked to see what they said, in their first few pages, about what philosophy, or philosophical activity, is. Anthony O'Hear's *What Philosophy Is* presupposes that the reader already knows what philosophy is and begins by immediately dumping the reader deep into metaphysics, but does provide some guidance as for how to flounder in these depths: "the methods use by philosophers will be much the same whether they are considering metaphysics or other philosophical topics, such as knowledge, language and thought, or values... philosophy differs from other human activities not by presuming a grasp of standards higher than those implicit in non-philosophical activities, but only in the way philosophers reflect consciously on the standards implicit in other activities and effect comparisons between them" (O'Hear 1985, pp.11, 13).

These books range from popular books aimed at a general audience to books specifically written for philosophers to edited collections intended to be a general introduction. I discuss the other four in the next section.

[2]These are all specific suggestions made to me when I asked my philosopher friends these two questions: "What is your methodology for 'doing philosophy'?" and "Does this differ from your methodology for 'writing philosophy papers'?"

[3]But its ultimate origins lie in a visit to Florianopolis two years earlier, when I had the opportunity to give a masterclass on philosophical methodology to members of the Núcleo de Epistemologica e Lógica at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, providing me with my first impetus to think seriously and reflectively about this issues. So I owe great thanks to Evelyn Erickson for inviting me, on behalf of GRIFA (GRupo Interinstitucional de Filosofias Analyticas) to give the 2025 workshop, and to Ivan Ferreira da Cunha, Cezar Mortari, and Jerzy Brzozowski, whose invitation to give a keynote at Principia 2023 was the reason I was there in the first place, and hence had the opportunity to give this masterclass.

[4]The fact that three out of the five were published in the 1980s perhaps says more about the state of my departmental library than it does about the state of philosophical reflections on the nature of philosophy, but I would challenge the reader to find a similar collection of five books from the last ten to twenty years that was radically different.

[5]Having said that, I feel obliged to also note that just because philosophy *has* this power doesn't mean that it is always used, or that philosophy, philosophizing, and philosophical activity hasn't been used as a tool of oppression, through setting up definitions and theories that systematically exclude groups of people from consideration, or through the exclusionary structures that are sometimes used to teach it. We'll return to this point in §4.

[6]For instance, "has four legs and a back and you can sit on it" includes horses.

[7]In an even more beautiful moment, when we reset the chairs and everyone resumed their seats, it turned out the two of them were sitting next to each other. Maybe philosophy is a circle, not a line.

[8]I even had someone seek me out in the airport the day after the conference, to tell me how useful and thought-provoking she'd found it and how much she appreciated it.