

Yale University, 1969-1972

In this essay I speak of my life at Yale, and how it changed my map of philosophy.

Yale's philosophy department had been a leader, after Harvard, in the early 20th century, but had decided in the '30s and '40s to stand against the tide of analytic philosophy by continuing the older traditions of pragmatism and British idealism. Harvard had Quine; Yale had Brand Blanshard. In the early '60s Yale made up for lost time by hiring Wilfrid Sellars and several leading logicians. The department grew strong in analytic philosophy, but at the cost of divisions among the faculty. Then the University of Pittsburgh swooped in and stole those analysts away, leaving 1969 Yale with American pragmatism (John Smith, Rulon Wells), European philosophy, especially Heidegger and Hegel (Karsten Harries, Kenley Dove, John Findlay), advanced logic (Frederick Fitch, Richmond Thomason), philosophy of science (Norwood Hanson, then Bas van Fraassen, Paul Feyerabend, none of whom stayed long), British analytic philosophy (Wittgenstein and Hume with Robert Fogelin, modality and Moorean ordinary language analysis with Casimir Lewy, category theory with Stephan Körner), plus a set of talented junior faculty, mostly continental.

Whom to hire and whom to tenure were the issues that had split the department before the Pittsburgh raid and would do so more bitterly a few years after I received my PhD. During my time at Yale the faculty seemed peaceful but they didn't share much; they sat on their separate mountains; we students traveled between, visiting different gurus.

Yale transformed my reading of Hegel. Quentin Lauer at Fordham had taught a theistic metaphysical Hegel to supplant Thomistic ontology. John Findlay at Yale did as well, but he found a different Neoplatonic ontology there, more accurate, I thought. Kenley Dove's Hegel did an explicitly "non-metaphysical" study of categories, which I mostly accepted, linking my interpretation with those of Richard Winfield and Stephen Houlgate, though they affirmed and I doubted that Hegel's program could be made to succeed.

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Life at Yale

My first year at Yale I joined a mixed gender and mixed race group of graduate students renting a house belonging to a medical professor on sabbatical. I had my own room and shared cooking, music and discussion with intelligent comrades in philosophy and music history. It was a great transition from years of community living as I now began grad school and explored social life on my own. I helped organize similar groups renting faculty houses my other two years at Yale. All were good communities, the first year the most solid and deep, the second more distant, the third the most lively. Since I did not live near the campus much of my life took place at home or in the network of graduate school apartments.

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Yale focused its considerable resources more on its talented undergraduates than on us striving graduate students. The library was a pleasure to use, other graduate school facilities less so. In those days Gary Trudeau was an undergraduate publishing his comics in the Yale daily news I and I followed them eagerly. Because I had a fellowship and didn't need to do TA work, I met very few Yale undergraduates, a talented and privileged group. I do remember one striking discussion with an undergrad poster child for the "thousand male leaders" that the president of Yale boasted the college produced each year. This student was the sixth generation of his family to attend Yale and his parents were involved in the military and CIA.

Yale was proud of itself and its history, with none of the uncertainties about belonging to the world which afflicted the Jesuit institutions. But that old Yale was changing: the year I arrived was the year that Yale went coed, and at the very first class I attended, in a luxurious wood paneled classroom overlooking the academic gothic quad of Branford College, the professor arrived wearing tattered blue jeans and a horizontal striped polo T-shirt. It wasn't the old Ivy League. But also I tiptoed quietly past Skull and Bones and the other secret society "tombs", and in Yale's Payne-Whitney's temple to sport I visited the polo practice room's mechanical horse, and watched from high banked seats as Aristophanes The Frogs was performed in the grand swimming pool

This was the time of protest; Kent State occurred that fall and a few weeks later New Haven reluctantly hosted a great protest against the trial of Bobby Seale. I helped give out granola to the protesters camping on Yale quadrangles, and I watched the protest go on peacefully while hundreds of armed soldiers lined up behind the Yale buildings, waiting, while girls walked by handing them flowers. Drugs were all about in those years, especially the newly illegal LSD, plus mixtures of marijuana and other chemicals. I tried a few but was too self-controlled and afraid to try the stronger brews. More significant for me was learning how to get beyond the sexless avuncular demeanor the Jesuits had taught me for dealing with women. That brought revelations and misadventures that were at times surprising, silly, and painful for all concerned. Beyond Yale, my contacts in those years were mostly with other philosophers at conferences and with people I met through the Danforth foundation, whose annual meetings for fellows I attended and helped plan. In later years I continued to work with the foundation, reading applications and interviewing candidates for the fellowship. Danforth had a knack for assembling sensitive and smart academics. We were sad when a change in the membership of its board caused the foundation to turn away from higher education.

I enjoyed driving around Connecticut's lovely towns, interesting coastal areas, and parks along the Connecticut River. I was not far from friends and family in New York and Boston. I reveled in the colorful fall panoply in Vermont and New Hampshire, and once I made a visit to Maine to plan a conference for the Danforth Foundation. I couldn't guess that state would later become my home, and when I did live in Maine, I looked back on Connecticut as entirely too civilized.

The summer of 1970 I made my first trip to Europe. There I was, one year out of the Jesuits,

highly educated in European history and culture, able to speak several of the languages, but inexperienced at day to day socializing with ordinary folk -- this made for an enlightening trip. I flew on one of the early jets, a British VC- 10 with four engines mounted on its tail. Arriving in London I spent a few days with a cousin in a flat belonging to a friend of my father. Then off to Paris, then Geneva, where I stayed with a group of people including the sister of the friend I had toured the Carolinas with a year earlier. I drove around Switzerland, marveling at the scenery, and got in trouble with a border guard. Then on to Vienna where I stayed with a friend my sister had met during her junior year there. A quick trip to a still war-torn Budapest, then a flight to Madrid, overnight train rides drinking wine and trying out my Spanish with fellow passengers. On the coast I tried to link up with my cousin but couldn't find her. As a version of the old Grand Tour my trip was abbreviated but still life-expanding.

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Yale provided many fine teachers and lectures, but fifty years have blurred most of the courses together in my memory. Three experiences, though, still keep coming back to me. They all involve chalk.

John Findlay was doubly retired from several universities when he came to teach at Yale before moving on to Boston University. He was a charming, urbane and strongly opinionated philosopher who cheerfully and energetically expressed opinions far off the mainstream. He had been one of the first to write a book reintroducing Hegel to analytic philosophy. His Gifford Lectures (an invitation often considered to cap one's philosophical career) expounded a Neo-Platonic quasi-Hegelian view he described as theosophy without the bad parts. His teaching method involved him facing the blackboard and writing as he spoke out summaries of the text being analyzed; he would fill all the boards available in the classroom and then erase the first and continue writing. It was a strange performance, for the summaries were available in print, but in person in his office or at dinner he could be most expansive and inspiring. One of my most treasured memories was at my dissertation defense: after asking a series of probing questions John closed with "I shan't take up anymore of your valuable time, but you are wrong".

From my reading at Fordham I was familiar with Wittgenstein and with Carnap-Sellars philosophy of science. Now I was discovering how much more was going on at Oxford and Cambridge. Casimir Lewy was a Cambridge philosopher of great repute but little publication. Some of the best British philosophers of the next generation were his students. Visiting Yale he taught on ordinary language. His classroom mannerisms, we heard, were copied from his teacher GE Moore. When I visited Lewy in Cambridge later I found in his small house a huge safe containing all of Moore's papers. During his course at Yale Casimir Lewy took up Quine's famous counterexample, "the number of the planets is necessarily greater than seven". Quine

meant this to downgrade quantified modal predicate logic. Today the example is normally handled by distinguishing talking about the number (nine in those days) which happens contingently to be the number of the planets but which on its own is necessarily greater than seven. I remember Lewy filling the board with dozens of slightly different variations, showing subtleties in our ordinary use of "necessary" and "possible" that Quinean formalization ignored or erased. Finally he slammed his chalk down on the table, fragments flying in all directions, as he exclaimed ironically "and Quine is a fine modal logician." The irony of the remark comes from the fact that Quine hated modal logic because he felt it would introduce concept that would bloat ontology with essences and possible worlds. Lewy was implying that even the standard propositional logic which Quine supported diminished the subtlety of ordinary discourse. To Lewy's Moorean sensibilities any formalization ran roughshod over the flexibility of our ordinary language. I was powerfully impressed by his point, and it meshed in my mind with the sequence of advanced logic and meta-logic courses from Rich Thomason.

Richmond Thomason was the newly hired logician -- he of the bluejeans and polo shirt -- who taught the first class I attended at Yale. He later moved to Pittsburgh and then to Michigan. He used a textbook which he wrote himself, and which I can testify from having used many logic textbooks was better than any of them, though perhaps too tough for an undergraduate beginning class. In his advanced courses you faced an oral exam, you and he alone with him asking questions and you writing on the blackboard. After several students had come through the room seemed ankle-deep in chalk dust. I remember vividly the exam when I was asked to construct a proof of the semantic completeness of modal predicate logic, using Henkin-style methods which we had learned for simpler systems.

Thompson's courses joined with Lewy's in my mind to question the standard goals of analytic philosophy. We studied the variety of modal, tense, and deontic logics that could be built, each capturing different aspects of our ordinary talk about possibility, time, and obligation. Combined, Lewy and Thomason questioned the analytic goal of digging down to the logical foundation of language and thought, suggesting instead that the powerful tools developed by Frege, Russell, and others did not excavate deep foundations so much as build useful superstructures for different pragmatic purposes. That chimed with Whitehead's move away from collaborating with Russell on the Platonic goals of *Principia Mathematica* towards developing his more Aristotelian methods for constructing ontological concepts through abstraction.

My most useful intellectual experience at Yale was my solo preparation for the comprehensive exams which covered the whole history of philosophy. It was a chance to read texts I had long wanted to study and to discover others I had no idea about. I found myself fascinated by, for example, the Leibniz-Clark correspondence, some more obscure essays by Plotinus, and Greek atomism. I sat in a sunny porch/room in a comfortable chair and rolled through the history of philosophy. It came together enough on the examination to win a small prize which I used to purchase a French philosophical dictionary and some Plato and Aristotle texts in Greek which still look down on me as I write these words.

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I deliberately wrote an analytic dissertation. *Conceptual Pluralism and Rationality*. Stephen Körner became my main dissertation advisor, along with Karsten Harries. I reviewed theories about conceptual frameworks and the different kinds of arguments, especially transcendental arguments supporting one ultimate framework for ontology. I argued there was no such ultimate framework, and pushed a generally pragmatic reading of the task of ontology.

Coming out of a mix of British and Polish analytic philosophy, Körner showed how different areas of ordinary language could be formalized in different logical systems, classical for theory and intuitionist for practical reasoning. He made me aware that there was not necessarily one logical foundation at the basis of all different kinds of discourse. This went against many US analytic programs. Coming from Fred Fitch's work on multiple logics, Richmond Thomason's advanced logic courses had taught me how to develop systems of modal or tense logic and choose among them. The richness of language practice could exceed a formal system, yet also a formal system could be used to trim the excess of and find overlooked fallacies in ordinary language. The effect was to shift logic away from the search for a foundation of language to seeing language as, in Wittgenstein's terms, a motley of practices which was being unified and synthesized by the formalization, which was a tool to be employed rather than a deep foundation. I used this in my dissertation to argue that metaphysical schemes were not foundations but pragmatic syntheses and that while there could be no argument for one ultimate metaphysical scheme, there could be good pragmatic reasons for adopting this or that scheme. This put me in good UK company but created difficulties later for my dealing with the Harvard style of analysis dominant at the Chicago department, because for a long while I didn't fully appreciate the root of our differences.

Leaving Yale I felt was in possession of a much firmer map of the philosophical landscape. My dissertation had surveyed the new territories and my earlier maps were now opening onto vast areas of logic, semantics, and European social theory. But on my next move the landscape altered again.

A few years after I left Yale. the divisions within the department sharpened again and there were problems which over time worked themselves out. I enjoyed attending speaking at a "we are back!" presentation/reunion some years later where I met up with old grad school friends.