

Anti-Theory in Philosophy: A Case for Pragmatism



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In this paper, I discuss the tendency in philosophy to become an excessively theoretical enterprise, an enterprise aspiring to such highly generalized viewpoints on reality, mind, language, or ethics that its “findings” lose touch with lived experience and with broader intellectual concerns and become highly “scholastic,” wedded to abstractions, ideals, dichotomies, and principles that do not find any clear application in everyday life and discourse. I distinguish two types of reaction to this philosophical tendency, a quietist versus a pragmatist reaction, the one being entirely hostile to philosophical thought, the other attempting to revitalize philosophy with practical, or dynamic, models of philosophical activity. Following Dewey, I offer a diagnosis of over-theorizing in philosophy, and suggest a remedy, focusing on the inseparable connectedness of a philosophical observer with “objects” of her observation, be it reality, mind, value, or knowledge, which (so I claim) both motivates and delimits the philosophical aspiration for generality and transcendence. Along the way I discuss relevant contributions by Wittgenstein, James, Dewey, Putnam, Nagel, Elgin, Feyerabend, Williams, Chapel, Quine, Kitcher, and Pettit.

Biography:

An associate professor of philosophy (emeritus), I am specializing in the history of analytic philosophy, and the philosophical works of Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, and others, as well as on American Pragmatism, and the works of Peirce, James, Dewey and others. I have published numerous scholarly papers on these themes, as well a book on the history and continuing prospects of analytic philosophy (in Hebrew). I have also edited Hebrew translations of books by Hume, Rawls, Rorty as well as Reé and Urmson’s Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy.