



## Field Philosophy as a Disturbing Practice: Philosophical Legitimacy and Methodological Divergence

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### Abstract

This article examines field philosophy as an emerging practice within the humanities in a context shaped by increasing demands for social relevance and public contributions of publicly funded research. It argues that field philosophy is neither a simple application of philosophical theories to concrete situations nor an imitation of objectifying social science methods. Rather, it should be understood as an autonomous, though marginalized, philosophical practice grounded in a reflexive stance, the co-construction of questioning, and attention to how ideas are appropriated by actors in practice settings. Drawing on a cross reading of Frodeman, Vollaire, Despret, Buchanan, and Stengers, the article develops two complementary lines of analysis. First, it clarifies the conditions under which field philosophy can claim philosophical legitimacy, showing how disciplinary norms and institutional routines can exclude situated and transdisciplinary approaches. Second, it specifies both the proximities and the differences between field philosophy and empirical social sciences. While both attend to situated experience, field philosophy is distinguished by its aim to transform meaning, by an ethics of dialogical equality, and by an emphasis on post-research follow-up as an indicator of durability and actor empowerment. The article concludes that field philosophy should be recognized as a generative, relational, and transformational practice capable of shifting conventional criteria of philosophical validity while renewing the social responsibility of philosophical work.

**Keywords:** Field philosophy, philosophical legitimacy, co-construction of knowledge, interdisciplinarity, and post-research follow

## Introduction

In the current academic landscape, research activities are increasingly expected to demonstrate their impact beyond strictly scientific contributions. Publicly funded research is now assessed according to its social relevance, practical usefulness, and capacity to inform public action and collective decision-making. This shift has profoundly reshaped evaluation regimes across disciplines, placing growing pressure on the humanities and social sciences to justify their role in terms of measurable outcomes and societal benefits.

Philosophy is not immune to this transformation. Traditionally associated with speculative inquiry, conceptual analysis, and normative reflection, philosophical work is often perceived as resistant to impact oriented frameworks that prioritize efficiency, transfer, and instrumental value. As a result, philosophy risks being misunderstood either as an incomplete form of science, lacking empirical rigor, or as a form of abstract reflection detached from concrete realities. In response to these pressures, some philosophical practices have sought greater engagement with real world problems, public issues, and interdisciplinary contexts.

It is within this broader movement that field philosophy has emerged as a marginal yet increasingly visible practice. Field philosophy seeks to relocate philosophical inquiry beyond academic settings by engaging directly with lived situations, social actors, and concrete problems. However, this situated and often collaborative approach raises important questions regarding its philosophical legitimacy and methodological status. Is field philosophy merely an application of pre existing theories to empirical contexts, or does it constitute a distinctive mode of philosophical practice? And how does it relate to the empirical methods of the social sciences, with which it appears to share certain features?

This article addresses these questions by advancing a central thesis: the specificity and relevance of field philosophy do not lie in the adoption of empirical techniques or in its proximity to practice alone, but in a productive tension between three constitutive dimensions of philosophical work. These dimensions are conceptual activity, critical examination, and normative orientation toward action. Rather than forming separate domains, they operate as interdependent poles within a dynamic system. It is this internal tension that enables philosophy to function as a reflexive and transformative practice in contexts shaped by demands for impact and social relevance. By clarifying this dynamic, the article aims to reposition field philosophy as a legitimate, though perturbative, form of contemporary philosophical inquiry.

## Methods

The article adopts a conceptual and analytical methodology grounded in philosophical interpretation rather than empirical investigation. Its approach is based on a structured argumentative strategy developed in two complementary movements.

The first movement consists in an analytical demarcation of philosophical discourse from neighboring forms of knowledge production, particularly science and the fine arts. This demarcation does not aim to establish rigid boundaries or hierarchies, but to isolate the specific resources of philosophical practice. By distinguishing philosophy from scientific explanation and from aesthetic production, the analysis identifies reflexivity and conceptual creativity as central features of philosophical inquiry.

The second movement involves a systematic reconstruction of the internal dynamics of philosophical practice. Drawing on a critical reading of contemporary philosophical literature, the article conceptualizes philosophy as a productive tension between three poles: conceptual activity, critical reflection, and normative orientation. This reconstruction allows for an examination of how these dimensions interact, constrain, and reinforce one another, particularly in situated and practice oriented contexts.

Methodologically, the article relies on a cross reading of key contributions associated with field philosophy and related approaches, including works by Frodeman, Vollaire, Despret, Buchanan, and Stengers. The analysis is interpretative and normative in nature. It does not seek to generate empirical data or causal explanations, but to clarify conceptual frameworks, epistemological assumptions, and criteria of legitimacy. As such, the method is suited to the article's objective: to provide a philosophical account of field philosophy as a distinct and reflexive practice capable of engaging contemporary demands for relevance without reducing philosophy to instrumental utility.

## Results

First, field philosophy emerges as a distinctive philosophical imaginary that reconfigures traditional modes of philosophical practice. Rather than positioning philosophy as a predominantly speculative or text centered activity, field philosophy foregrounds engagement with concrete situations, lived experiences, and practical problems. This reconfiguration does not abandon philosophical rigor but displaces it, emphasizing reflexivity, situated questioning, and conceptual work developed in proximity to real world contexts. In this sense, field philosophy reshapes the figure of the philosopher from detached observer to reflexive participant, without reducing philosophy to applied expertise.

Second, the analysis highlights the marginalization of field philosophy within academic philosophy and identifies mechanisms of disciplinary discrimination. These mechanisms include the privileging of text based scholarship, the suspicion toward empirical engagement, and the implicit association of legitimacy with abstraction and universality. Field philosophy is often perceived as insufficiently philosophical because it disrupts established norms of evaluation and professional recognition. This marginalization reveals not merely an institutional resistance to novelty, but deeper power dynamics governing what counts as legitimate philosophical work.

Third, field philosophy is shown to function as a perturbative practice within the discipline. Its perturbation lies in its capacity to unsettle conventional criteria of philosophical validity, such as distance from practice, methodological purity, and disciplinary autonomy. By engaging directly with actors, contexts, and problems, field philosophy challenges the assumption that philosophical value is best secured through detachment. This perturbative role does not weaken philosophy; rather, it exposes the contingency of its dominant norms and opens space for alternative forms of rigor grounded in reflexivity, dialogue, and responsibility.

Finally, the comparison with empirical social sciences reveals both methodological proximities and decisive divergences. While field philosophy shares an attention to situated experience and interaction, it differs fundamentally in posture and finality. Its aim is not primarily causal explanation or objectification, but the transformation of meaning, the co construction of questions, and the sustained reflexive engagement with actors over time. The emphasis on follow up after the research process further distinguishes field philosophy, highlighting concerns with durability, appropriation, and the autonomy of actors beyond the moment of inquiry.

## **Discussion**

These results contribute directly to contemporary debates on social relevance, research impact, and public intelligence. In a research environment increasingly structured by expectations of measurable impact and utility, field philosophy offers a distinct response. Rather than translating philosophical knowledge into predefined outcomes, it reframes relevance as a relational and processual achievement, grounded in sustained engagement, reflexive dialogue, and the co production of meaning.

The perturbative character of field philosophy is particularly significant in this context. By questioning dominant evaluative criteria, it resists a purely instrumental conception of impact and instead foregrounds qualitative transformations in understanding, judgment, and collective orientation. This aligns with broader calls for forms of public intelligence

that do not reduce knowledge to technical solutions, but cultivate critical capacities and shared sense making within societies.

At the same time, the analysis clarifies that field philosophy should not be conflated with empirical social science research. Its contribution lies not in generating explanatory data, but in accompanying practices, interrogating values, and sustaining reflexive spaces where the purposes and consequences of action can be examined. The focus on follow up after research underscores this orientation, shifting attention from short term outputs to longer term processes of appropriation and empowerment.

A key limitation of the present study must nevertheless be acknowledged. The article does not present an empirical investigation of field philosophy in practice. Its contribution is conceptual and epistemological, aiming to clarify the conditions of legitimacy, differentiation, and evaluation of this emerging practice. Future work could build on this framework to support empirical studies that document how field philosophy operates in specific contexts and how its effects unfold over time..

## **Conclusions**

This article has argued that field philosophy should be understood as a legitimate, though marginalized, philosophical practice characterized by reflexivity, co construction, and sustained engagement with situated problems. By examining its disciplinary position, its perturbative effects, and its divergence from empirical social sciences, the analysis shows that field philosophy challenges conventional criteria of philosophical validity without abandoning rigor. Its relevance lies not in instrumental utility, but in its capacity to transform meaning, support actor autonomy, and sustain reflexive inquiry within public and professional contexts. In an era dominated by impact oriented research agendas, field philosophy offers a non utilitarian yet necessary contribution to the social responsibility of philosophical work.

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