

*Get rid of conscious or unconscious class thinking and begin thinking of educational organisation in terms of keeping the learning process going for as long as possible in every life. Instead of the sorting and grading process, natural to a class society, we should regard human learning in a genuinely open way, as the most valuable real resource we have, and therefore as something which we should have to produce a special argument to limit rather than a special argument to extend (R. Williams, 'Education and British Society', in *The Long Revolution*, Chatto and Windus 1961, 125-55)*

This small academic universe still remains one of the few precursors of the grand universe of humanity, of all human beings, who must learn to create with one another new solidarities. Only by means of the participation of the whole public may a university develop its true powers (Rectoral Address, University of Leipzig, 1947)

*Self-consciousness needs an adventure, an experience—it needs application. It cannot constitute itself in advance of its application upon another; it constitutes itself only through application. Our modern English-language empiricism and behaviorism, on the other hand, have processed Erfahrung, or experience, through a preconstituted atomistic grid. Thereby, of course, they have remained oblivious of the very adventure of travel on which they themselves have been embarked since the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. The adventure that is the very essence of modern science must be relived, rethought, and its very character as adventure brought to the fore (Misgeld, Nicholson, Schmidt, Reuss - Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History, *Applied Hermeneutics*, 1992)*

A being that draws itself round its own core creates, even unintentionally, the boundary-line. And the frontier—even though it be unintentionally—creates the enemy (Freyer, in Kolnai, 417)

*Thus it seems clear that behind that philosophical radicalism which pretends to go back to immediate facts or data, there is always hidden an uncritical reception of traditional doctrines. For some thoughts about the facts must occur even to these radicals; but since they are unconscious of them to such a degree as to hold that they merely admit the facts, we have no choice but to assume that their thoughts are uncritical (Gomperz, *Weltanschauungslehre*, I, 1905, 33)*

*It may be a cultivated thing to eat with a knife and fork, but that is not the right approach in philosophy (Gadamer, *Heidelberg Interview*, 1986)*

The Public Philosophy Question: Bias, Opportunity and the Modern University

Matt Andersson

In re: "Is Public Philosophy Good? [The Point](#), *Examined Life*, Agnes Callard, February 2019

With my respect and admiration for *The Point*, a wonderful new publication, and the University of Chicago's philosophy department, one of the most storied in the world, I do find it somewhat challenging however, to discern the intent of this paper (and it does invoke a certain "hermeneutics of suspicion" especially as professors are notorious for saying things they don't actually believe, or do not fully appreciate).

As a polemic, it invokes a first order problem (with some tantalizing second and third order implications) that may not resonate with a more traditionally-centered philosophical tradition, or with those in related domains where there is no such effective dichotomy; or if there is, the public component is vital if not inherent (for example in economics).

As an assertion, it may benefit from some clarification of basic terms (while confronting its somewhat awkward elitism). Some of its challenges—and opportunities—may reside in unexplored and undefined concepts, especially concerning the nature of academic philosophy, and the current construct of "public philosophy" about which much has been written. In these

regards, I would respectfully recommend an excellent paper by Robert Hanna (actually, any paper by him), “How to Escape Irrelevance: Performance Philosophy, Public Philosophy, and Borderless Philosophy.” This may be provocative for the writer’s next installment.

Otherwise Ms. Callard appears to be asking, not whether public philosophy is “good,” but rather *if it is good for her* (or her profession as she understands it). That is a fair question. Perhaps she is wrestling with the environmental differences in closed, structured, classroom teaching (degree-granting, institutional, programed instruction) and open unstructured public interaction (perhaps with limited if any, bilateral communication). In that regard, her concerns, at least philosophically, may be unwarranted: All is public (somewhat as ‘truth is manifest’), but this assumes that one has intellectually reconciled the synthetic nature of public and private (which is merely another example of dualism). It is perhaps a perspective one might expect to see coming from the inside of academic philosophy, which in Chicago’s case, may be a particular analogue example of a corporate “silo” (or perhaps as Popper might have asserted, from a ‘Hegelian renaissance of tribalism’).

Karl Popper otherwise, may have the last word on philosophy’s inherent nature when he explains or conveys, its utter dependence on a Kantian ‘pre-theoretical substrate,’ but more specifically, its historical basis in the difficult, forced consideration of problems *outside philosophy proper* (*Conjectures and Refutations, The Nature of Philosophical Problems and Their Roots in Science, 66-75*, “Genuine philosophical problems are always rooted in urgent problems outside philosophy, and they die if these roots decay”).¹ Put another way, philosophers used

¹ I am not asserting a “neoliberal” market utility per se for philosophy, for example as described by Michelle Maiese in “Higher Education, Neoliberalism, and the Need for Borderless Philosophy,” or by R. Frodeman, A. Briggie, and B. Holbrook, “Philosophy in the Age of Neoliberalism,” (*Social Epistemology* 26, 2012), although their “interstitial” and “field philosophy” may very well be coherent, at least as an initial first approximation of reform. I am instead asserting a philosophical position: that philosophy is inherently of the public, but more fundamentally, that the distinction between private and public is false, and like much human thinking, is a product of analogue or dualism modeling that tends to serve as merely a conceptual aid in the absence of integration. Moreover, “markets” and “neoliberalism” tend to be invoked as ideological responses and thereby biased, and often, illogical. For example, Popper’s assertion that philosophy claims its coherency through its attachment to problems external to philosophy proper, does not mean *ipso facto*, problems in markets, or *that problems are markets*. There is an identity of problems across all political economies: philosophy is equally isolated from external problems in Russia or Mexico generally, as it is in the US or Canada. However, there is an interesting similarity to a certain economic construct called “core theory” which asserts that not all competitive acts can result in a stable equilibrium, and that cooperation can be equally important, or in some cases even more causal or even vital, to any equilibrium. In that regard, public and especially borderless philosophy, is a kind of ‘core theory’ example, in that it fundamentally works through open collaboration. Indeed, *academic philosophy may in contradistinction, be an example of a monopoly market* with discriminatory behavior in competitive hostility (it doesn’t like borderless or even public models); is collusive (with other universities) and seeks price discrimination or fixing (in tuition, wages and federal contracts). Borderless philosophy moreover may assume an alleviation of property and contract rights which places it still in a neoliberal market context, but as a challenge. The modern university and its members are very much in the market construct which is why borderless-ness, as in commercial applications that seek liberation from ownership, contract and pricing constraints (for example the “Georgist Paradigm” explained in “The Corruption of Economics” by Professor Mason Gaffney) is resisted. *Academic philosophers may misunderstand both academic philosophy and market economies*. Of course borderless and/or public philosophy rests on a larger ideology that can provide a basis for reform in any discipline or any current competitive market arrangement. Interestingly, it may be in the Nordic countries, Norway in particular, where there is a unity or quasi-integration of philosophy and political economy. Of course, modern neoliberal (or neoconservative) economics as practiced and promulgated by Chicago, for example, is inherently a philosophical enterprise, and not so much from the

to be grappling with intense, immediate social problems in much more primitive economies (even the “Chicago pragmatists” found themselves in the middle of appalling economic conditions which pressed on their own lives and livelihood. Are today’s academic philosophers instead merely the cultural equivalent of teenage, overindulged “millennials?”).

But in Chicago’s case this is still a modern academic problem: it has no engineering or engineering culture, for example, to focus its intellect on, and thereby has a tendency to close back in on itself (unlike business, law, medicine or science, to some lesser degree). Chicago doesn’t make things any more (or as Nobel physicist Robert Millikan said when he left Chicago for CalTech, “They have a more sane blend of engineering and science”). This may help explain why the Chicago philosophy department is centered in Idealism, in history, and to some extent in linguistics, with a much smaller platform of philosophy of science (with a fairly typical, somewhat distracting accommodation, to identity sub-categories).

Compare this to Chicago’s earlier days of a more natural and necessary “public” interaction and program development (James, Dewey, Peirce, Mead, or even Russell, Carnap, Anscombe and Morris to some extent, and in different ways Arendt or Strauss) where a paper such as this one would probably have been greeted quizzically. In other institutions such as Texas, Stanford, Edinburgh and Toronto, where philosophy is linked strongly to “public” ventures in science (symbolic logic at Stanford; computer science at Texas; cognitive experimental science applications in AI and robotics at Edinburgh, or technology generally at Toronto, for example) such questions as the writer poses would either be dismissed, or remedially answered.

Put another way, perhaps only from a modern philosophy department such as Chicago’s, would such a paper be generated: *Thinking and being may indeed be one, but thinking and doing are not* (I would include law as an example of a positive pairing at Chicago, and it is, relatively, but the modern law school is so conceptually deformed by the ABA, and as well because it is a graduate program--an inflated LLB--that, including from additional ideological complications, both philosophy and law easily become detached from a mature, productive public logic. I would suggest philosopher Nussbaum as an example of such detachment.)

This otherwise helps explain why the graduate school of business is so successful (bias acknowledged): it is to social science what engineering is to physical science (and it is increasingly subsuming applied philosophy including where experiments and data are more prevalent). Chicago’s traditional academic departments are still in many ways suffering a hangover from the unfortunate influences of previous president Robert Hutchins, and beyond that from a deeply entrenched academic institutionalism where for example in philosophy, as Robert Hanna smartly observes, *no real innovations, breakthroughs or discoveries have been made in nearly half a century*. Chicago Philosophy is not dangerous (not a generally unique

influences of Locke, Smith, Hume, Mill, Ricardo,, Malthus or Marshall, but Hegel (it asserts market liberalism, but ultimately serves the State). Otherwise one of academic philosophy’s constraints in optionality (borderless, public or field, among others) is financial: it lives in relative subordination institutionally to professional schools, and therefore has serious financial restrictions on its ability to enterprise, with a tendency to close in on itself in an act of protection and preservation (Chicago’s department is an example of even resisting inter-departmental cross-listing). Moreover, the modern business school is increasingly subsuming philosophy and psychology and attacking their modest barricades from within).

academic problem). It seems of a somewhat tortured “post-Hegelianism” (perhaps intellectualism is a better word). To some extent the writer’s paper arguably demonstrates why. Another necessary consideration that it invokes, however, is the broader challenges of the modern university. It is here that answers to her questions largely can be found.

In closing, I may very well have mis-understood at least some of the writer’s intentions, and perhaps even ratified her concerns. This is a fascinating issue with many complications, including much larger provocations ultimately in political economy and the nature of the modern state and corporation. I do hope however that some “fast feedback,” as we say in business, alleviates (or magnifies) her concern to some extent, while appreciating that the impression she otherwise creates may in some cases be fugitive from her written intent.

I have the utmost regard and enthusiasm for philosophy (and speaking of “public philosophy,” see Glenn Most’s outstanding publishing example, “The Classical Tradition”). In my experience, including as a parent of college students where the writer’s essay draws my strongest concern in pedagogic implications, it is underappreciated and underexploited in the modern university: the more philosophy the better. But it is in definitions, institutional (or non-institutional) structure, and in applications especially, that much necessary progress can initially be made. Back to Parmenides? Maybe. Perhaps more forward to the philosophical challenges of science and technology, which often solve (or modify) the social, political, economic and even metaphysical.

With Regards and Appreciation,
Matt Andersson, Chicago, '96