

# Philosophy *With* Basic Income But *Without* Professional Academic Incentives

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|---|---------------------------------------|------|--------|------|----------|----------|--------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| RANK  | INSTITUTIONS                          | MEAN | MEDIAN | MODE | LOWER CI | UPPER CI | REGION | RANKING 2017 | RANKING 2014 | RANKING 2011 | RANKING 2009 | RANKING 2006 |
| 1   | New York University                   | 4.7  | 5      | 5    | 4.7      | 4.8      | USA    | 1            | 1            | 1            | 1            | 1            |
| 2   | Rutgers University, New Brunswick     | 4.5  | 4.5    | 5    | 4.4      | 4.6      | USA    | 2            | 2            | 2            | 2            | 2            |
| 3   | Princeton University                  | 4.4  | 4.5    | 5    | 4.3      | 4.5      | USA    | 2            | 2            | 3            | 2            | 2            |
| 4   | University of Pittsburgh              | 4.2  | 4      | 4    | 4        | 4.3      | USA    | 4            | 6            | 5            | 4            | 5            |
| 5   | University of Michigan, Ann Arbor     | 4.1  | 4      | 4    | 4        | 4.3      | USA    | 4            | 4            | 4            | 5            | 3            |
| 5   | Yale University                       | 4.1  | 4      | 4    | 4        | 4.2      | USA    | 6            | 5            | 7            | 8            | 16           |
| 7   | Harvard University                    | 3.9  | 4      | 4    | 3.8      | 4        | USA    | 9            | 6            | 5            | 6            | 7            |
| 7   | Massachusetts Institute of Technology | 3.9  | 4      | 4    | 3.8      | 4        | USA    | 7            | 13           | 7            | 6            | 7            |
| 7   | University of California, Berkeley    | 3.9  | 4      | 4    | 3.8      | 4        | USA    | 9            | 10           | 14           | 9            | 12           |
| 7   | University of California, Los Angeles | 3.9  | 4      | 4    | 3.8      | 4        | USA    | 9            | 10           | 11           | 9            | 7            |

(PGR, 2024)

For eleven years, the core members of the *Against Professional Philosophy* circle (APP, 2013-2024) have been consistently, critically, and sharply distinguishing between (i) philosophy pursued and practiced authentically and seriously for its own sake, as a full-time, lifetime calling, i.e., *real philosophy* and (ii) philosophy pursued and practiced as a money-making career that’s conducted according to the set of strict coercive authoritarian and moralistic and neoliberal expectations, norms, policies, and rules— which Jeff Schmidt aptly calls *ideological discipline* (Schmidt, 2000)—governing the activities of research-&-publication, teaching, and so-called “admin” or “service,” that’s characteristic and indeed partially constitutive of recent and contemporary higher education at colleges and universities, i.e., *professional academic philosophy*. Susan Haack has also dubbed these two diametrically opposed alternatives *philosophy as a calling* and *philosophy as a profession* (Haack, 2021). To be sure, there are some people working *outside* the professional academy who also pursue and practice philosophy as a money-making enterprise: perhaps they’re paid editors of popular philosophy journals; or perhaps they write and sell popular philosophy books; or perhaps they write and sell popular philosophy articles to magazines; or perhaps they appear as philosophy talking-heads on

TV or YouTube; or perhaps they write paywalled philosophy blogs or other kinds of paywalled philosophy social media; and so-on. For the purposes of this essay, I'll classify these people as *professional non-academic philosophers*, because they're pursuing and practicing philosophy as a money-making enterprise, but are not also engaged in a career that's conducted according to the ideological discipline that's characteristic and indeed partially constitutive of recent and contemporary professional academic philosophy. Correspondingly, I'll then refine our original critical sharp distinction so that it holds between (i) real philosophy, on the one hand, and either (iia) professional academic philosophy or (iib) professional non-academic philosophy, on the other hand. Granting that, what follows in this essay are three interlinked thought-experiments motivating an overall argument that explores some important implications of that refined critical sharp distinction.

For the purposes of this essay, let "basic income" be shorthand for the package consisting of (i) a regular, yearly stipend, with adjustments for cost-of-living increases, that's minimally sufficient for the purposes of everyday life for one or more people in a household, for example, the equivalent of \$80,000.00 USD, which is currently the median yearly household income in the USA, (ii) adequate healthcare—noting that in the USA, where healthcare is *not* a universal right, as it is in many countries, the cost of this would be subtracted from the yearly stipend, and (iii) adequate public education from pre-school through higher education—also noting that in the USA, where free higher education for all qualified students is *not* a universal right, as it is in many countries, this would also be subtracted from the yearly stipend.

And again for the purposes of this essay, let "professional academic incentives" be shorthand for the package consisting of (i) a yearly salary determined by neoliberal professional academic market values, (ii) annual three-month free time/vacations included under your yearly salary, (iii) a tenure-and-promotion stream with at least three ranks of professorship, two of them tenured ranks, each rank tied to regular salary bonuses and/or permanent increases, often but not always depending on so-called "merit," or on seniority, but in any case also increasingly high professional-social status conferred for each higher rank, and a special ultra-high professional-social status conferred for special endowed ("named") professorships or Chairs, (iv) regular paid sabbaticals every few years for all tenured professors, (v) yearly research funds and travel funds, especially at the higher-ranked colleges and universities, (vi) a rigid hierarchical system of rankings among colleges and universities, so that professors receive proportionally higher professional-social status by being employed at higher-ranked institutions, right up to the world-ranked top ten institutions, for example:

| World Rank | Institution                                 | Country        |
|------------|---|----------------|
| 1          | University of Oxford                        | United Kingdom |
| 2          | Stanford University                         | United States  |
| 3          | Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT  | United States  |
| 4          | Harvard University                          | United States  |
| 5          | University of Cambridge                     | United Kingdom |
| 6          | Princeton University                        | United States  |
| 7          | California Institute of Technology, Caltech | United States  |
| 8          | Imperial College London                     | United Kingdom |
| 9          | University of California, Berkeley          | United States  |
| 10         | Yale University                             | United States  |

(World University Rankings.ch, 2024)

(v) a rigid hierarchical system of rankings among departments of philosophy, as per the Philosophical Gourmet Report overall rankings, part of which is displayed at the top of this essay, so that philosophy professors receive proportionally higher professional-social status by working at higher-ranked departments, (vii) a set of more-or-less competitive disciplinary or trans-disciplinary fellowships and grants, from the post-doctoral level up through all higher professorial ranks, with high professional-social status awarded to the winners of such competitions, and so-on and so forth, the total collection of which Susan Haack has aptly dubbed *perverse incentives* (Haack, 2022; see also Hanna, 2022a).

So, in short, philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives provides you with the opportunity to pursue and practice philosophy authentically and seriously for its own sake as a full-time, lifetime calling, autonomously, hence in a self-determining and rationally-guided way, independently of the ideological discipline that’s characteristic and indeed partially constitutive of professional academic philosophy, without all the incentives—i.e., goodies—that professional academic philosophy so effectively employs in order to addict you to that way of life and to normalize its ideological discipline, but also in a way that won’t starve you or make you homeless, won’t prevent your access to adequate healthcare, and won’t prevent any children you might have from getting a perfectly adequate education, all the way from pre-school through higher education.

Indeed, philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives is today’s equivalent of Socrates’s audacious, edgy, and radical proposal in the *Apology* that instead of being put to death by his Athenian accusers and persecutors, he should in fact be rewarded with “free maintenance by the state” for his full-time, lifetime

labors as a philosophical gadfly (Plato, 1982: p. 22, 37a). Or in other words, philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives provides you with the opportunity to do real philosophy, as opposed to professional academic philosophy, with all its professional academic incentives and all its ideological discipline. In another essay, I've discussed the hard problem of how a basic income without professional academic incentives and ideological discipline, that's then used for doing real philosophy, really could be secured in the contemporary real world (Hanna, 2022b: section IX); here, I'll simply assume, for the purposes of argument, that it's somehow really possible to secure this in the contemporary real world, and also briefly describe one mode of that near the end of the essay.

Now, what about professional non-academic philosophy? On the one hand, if it were done primarily so that the opportunity of philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives could be realized, then professional non-academic philosophy could also be real philosophy. But on the other hand, if it were done primarily as a money-making enterprise, then professional non-academic philosophy would be sophistry, not real philosophy.

Now for the three interlinked thought-experiments.

In the **first** thought-experiment, let's suppose that you've recently received a PhD in philosophy and have also decided to pursue and practice philosophy thereafter. Then you're offered the following triadic option: either (i) philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives, or (ii) professional academic philosophy, or (iii) professional non-academic philosophy? If you choose (i), or if you choose (iii) primarily so that the opportunity for basic income without professional academic incentives can be realized, then you could be, and indeed you very likely are, a real philosopher, and if so, then you should be heartily applauded by all who love real philosophy, even if they happen to disagree with your philosophical views. But if you choose (ii), then you're nothing but a careerist and a sophist. And if you choose (iii) primarily as a money-making enterprise, then, although you're not a careerist, you're still nothing but a sophist.

In the **second** thought-experiment, let's suppose that you're currently either a professional academic philosopher or a professional non-academic philosopher, and that you hadn't ever actually self-consciously recognized the real possibility of pursuing and practicing philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives, and then you were informed of that real possibility — say, by reading this essay. Now, in order to enrich that opportunity, let's further suppose that any opportunity for philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives also includes

the opportunity to teach philosophy to a fairly small number of truly interested, engaged, self-disciplined, and talented students, every year. Then, assuming the existence of that enriched opportunity for philosophy with a basic income but without professional academic incentives, and also assuming that you were offered that enriched opportunity, would you then exit your professional academic philosophy job or your professional non-academic philosophy job in order to take up that enriched opportunity, yes or no? If yes, then you could be, and indeed you very like are, a real philosopher, and if so, you should be heartily applauded by all who love real philosophy, even if they don't happen to agree with your philosophical views; but if no, then you're nothing but either a careerist and a sophist, or else not a careerist but still nothing but a sophist.

Finally, in the **third** thought-experiment, which focuses on professional academic philosophy alone, let's assume that you're currently a professional academic philosopher working either at a top ten university as per the Times Higher Education world university top ten rankings displayed above, or at a top ten philosophy department, as per the Philosophical Gourmet Report top ten rankings displayed at the top of this essay. For convenience, let's call the top ten universities, *elite universities*, and the top ten philosophy departments, *elite philosophy departments*. So you're currently a professional academic philosopher who is working at either an elite university or an elite philosophy department (or, obviously, at both). Moreover, you also explicitly and publicly profess a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, perhaps under the rubrics of social justice theory and/or identitarianism. Then you're offered the opportunity to give up your elite professional academic philosophy job, in order to give that very job to a deserving and qualified young philosopher who belongs to some or another oppressed minority group, in return for which you're also offered the enriched opportunity of philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives. So would you do this, yes or no? If yes, then not only could you be, and indeed you very likely are, a real philosopher, and if so, then also you have integrity, and therefore you should be heartily applauded by all who love real philosophy that's conducted with integrity, even if they don't happen to agree with your philosophical views or with your moral and sociopolitical beliefs; but if no, then you're nothing but a careerist, a sophist, and a "woke" hypocrite.

Now, attentive readers might have already noticed that if you're currently working as a professional academic philosopher, then the enriched opportunity for philosophy with a basic income but without professional academic incentives can actually be realized in the contemporary real world simply by means of taking early retirement, or at least retirement-at-age-65, and then also continuing to engage philosophically with some of your best former students, since your professional academic pension income and healthcare benefits, social security income, and medicare, taken

together, will easily provide adequate funds for that. Correspondingly, I have an audacious, edgy, and radical two-part proposal that, in the contemporary real world, is effectively equivalent to Socrates's proposal to his Athenian accusers and persecutors, that he be rewarded with "free maintenance by the state" (Plato, 1982: p. 22, 37a): hence I'll call it *the neo-Socratic proposal*.

The **first** part of the neo-Socratic proposal is that any professional academic philosopher—but especially those working at elite universities or at elite philosophy departments—should take early retirement or at least retirement-at-age-65 and thereby realize the opportunity for philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives, so that they can do real philosophy. And the **second** part of my two-part neo-Socratic proposal is that any professional academic philosopher who is working at an elite university or an elite philosophy department who also explicitly and publicly professes a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, should take early retirement or at least retirement-at-age-65 and thereby realize the opportunity for philosophy with basic income but without professional academic incentives, not only so that they can do real philosophy, but also so that they can give up their elite professional academic philosophy job in order to give that very job to a deserving and qualified young philosopher who belongs to some or another oppressed minority group. Given the ideological discipline that's characteristic and indeed partially constitutive of professional academic philosophy, it's easily conceivable that most or even all professional academic philosophers—especially those working at elite universities or at elite philosophy departments—who are approaching, or who have already passed, the age of early retirement or retirement-at-age-65, will not have self-consciously recognized either the existence of the neo-Socratic proposal or its rational compellingness.

But now, Dear Reader, you do self-consciously know that the neo-Socratic proposal exists and also that it's rationally compelling: therefore, if you fail to act on it now or when the appropriate time comes, then you're nothing but either a careerist and a sophist, or—what's even worse, if you also explicitly and publicly profess a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education—nothing but a careerist, a sophist, and a "woke" hypocrite.

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