

The Relevance of Analytic Philosophy to Personal, Public, and Democratic Life

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Abstract

Increasingly, philosophy is being viewed by the public as a non-essential part of non-academic, political life. Moreover, the converse, that philosophy is viewing itself as non-essential to life, is also becoming true. Both trends are deeply troubling. This essay has two aims, both of which stem from these trends. The first is to show that they can partly be explained by a misunderstanding by philosophers of philosophy's original goals. In fact, we argue that the goal of philosophy from the very beginning was to improve lives and that this attitude has been present throughout its history. The second is to show that this mistake is pervasive and to try to articulate some of what has been lost as a result. So as to not be entirely negative, we provide brief remarks on what can be done to remedy the situation. We hold that generally, people's lives and especially people's political lives are worse than they otherwise might be because of the disconnect between the public and philosophy. Finally, we close with a few practical activities that some philosophers are already engaged in to make work in philosophy more public.

Introduction¹

Especially in the United States, there is a deep divide and mutual distrust between the public and philosophy. At least since the Reagan administration, there has been a growing anti-intellectualism which views theoretical knowledge as practically useless and generally free-floating from and logically insensitive to the goings on of the community. During this same time, academic philosophy has detached itself from the community as well; often not caring about such issues in the Kripke-influenced Analytic tradition and not caring to make one's

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self understandable and presentable to the public in the post-modernist-influenced Continental tradition. This paper has two central tasks: (1) To argue that the history of philosophy has recently been misconstrued by some prominent philosophers and that, from the outset, philosophy was meant to be relevant to everyone's life. In this way, philosophy has always been public in nature. (2) To show what has been lost by philosophy remaining out of the public, and also what philosophers might do to make their work public. While much of the substance of these claims seem quite obvious to us, we feel it is still worth arguing for since it is very important and since it is surprisingly controversial. We will proceed in two large sections, following the two tasks listed above.

I

There is a particularly pernicious self-conception of philosophy in contemporary Analytic circles which we take to be both a consequence and cause of the fracture between public life and philosophy. For many, it is merely a seed of a thought that guides their actions only implicitly and semi-consciously. This makes combating it particularly difficult. Not all have been led by it only implicitly, though. Much to his credit, Scott Soames, in his impressive two-volume history of the Analytic tradition, has had the self-knowledge and wherewithal to explicitly formulate the view. He says that:

In general, philosophy done in the analytic tradition aims at truth and knowledge, as opposed to moral and spiritual improvement. There is very little in the way of practical or inspirational guides in the art of living to be found, and very much in the way of philosophical theories that purport to reveal the truth about a given domain of inquiry. In general, the goal in analytic philosophy is to discover what is true, not to provide a useful recipe for living one's life.²

This is the self-conception of Analytic philosophy that we wish to combat. For further evidence of its hold in America beyond Soames, one need look no further than the hero of Soames' narrative, Saul Kripke, who has made similar claims; adding that "the idea that philosophy should be relevant to life is a modern idea. A lot of philosophy does not have relevance to life" and "the intention of philosophy was never to be relevant to life."³ That this view of Analytic philosophy and philosophy, generally, would have found support in such prominent places is bound to have disastrous consequences if not corrected. Soames' history garnered the 2003 Award for Best Professional/Scholarly Book in Philosophy from the Association of American Publishers. Furthermore, the eminent A.P. Martinich has claimed that, even though there are other worthy candidates, the work is sure to become the standard history of 20th century Analytic philosophy. Kripke is the author of a book on the

semantics of proper names and the metaphysical consequences of such a semantics that has been cited thousands and thousands of times.⁴

As much as we think there is genius in their work, on this matter we cannot help but say that Soames and Kripke are just wrong. We think that the view is false, but that it fails the tests for several other virtues as well. Gesturing at these different problems will occupy the remainder of this section. These include, in the order in which we will take them up:

- (1) No matter the scope given to the time frame or the broadness of the term ‘philosophy’, the Kripkean view reveals a deep ignorance of the history of philosophy. At every point of its existence, philosophy has had a strong tie to pursuit of political ideals (and, n.b., via the thinkers most interested in truth, rigor, clarity, and argumentation).
- (2) Even if this weren’t the case (i.e. even if, historically, philosophy had been tied to a love and desire of truth at the expense of the good), the tireless investigation into the truth of the matter would still lead one to investigate public and personal life issues. Put simply, the matters aren’t conceptually distinct enough that it is logically possible to do the former well without doing the latter.
- (3) Even if neither of these was the case, one should not encourage being okay with philosophy not being of value to the well-being of ordinary folks. It misunderstands what is distinctive about philosophy by its very nature and by historical contingency.

As we said, Kripke’s claim is historically mistaken. Philosophy in the Western tradition can trace its lineage back to 6th-4th century B.C.E. Greece. As is well known, this period reached its apex with the work of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Socrates would have found it absolutely repugnant to think that it is possible to be concerned with finding and knowing truth *rather than* with finding a recipe for living one’s life. The guiding idea of Socrates’ philosophical outlook was his doctrine of moral intellectualism. On this view, knowledge and virtue are one and the same thing. Knowing the truth about the virtuous way to live and actually living those virtues do not and cannot come apart for Socrates. So, obviously theories aiming at the truth will be omni-present in philosophy. But this will, in no way, take away from the extent to which philosophy is concerned with ordinary and political life. On the contrary, it can only add to it!

Moreover, these Greeks would have claimed that philosophers had better hope that they do something other than provide, “theories that purport to reveal the truth about a given domain of inquiry”. According to Plato’s doctrine of recollection, we all already have those theories dormant within us. This is why Socrates saw his value in his providing the public service of

asking the questions and having the conversations required for members of the community to recall that knowledge; to actualize the potential within themselves.

Plato, too, would've taken great issue with the thought that one could be a philosophical success without thereby being concerned with public life. In *The Republic*, Plato argues that, by the very nature of philosophy, the appropriate role for the philosopher is to be the ruler of the state. This is because the best philosopher is the happiest a human can be and has as his aim the well-being and unity of the society. As he puts it himself, "until philosophers bear rule, states and individuals will have no rest from evil".⁵ Hence, philosophy has been intimately concerned with recipes for living a life since its origins in ancient Greece. Even the first self-styled philosopher, Pythagoras, had primarily ethico-political motivations for his use of the very term (we transliterate as) 'philosopher'. In doing so, he was separating himself from the Sophists, which means wise or knowledgeable ones. Pythagoras did not care for their self-interested (n.b., monetary-based) pursuit of understanding or their hubris in implying that they were *possessors* of wisdom. Hence, he wanted to be known merely as a lover of wisdom for its sake and for the sake of others, rather than for one's own sake. And for those Ancient philosophers for whom the love of wisdom was done for one's own sake, this was because of how immensely helpful it could be to their lives above all else. In many ways, Hellenistic philosophy, Stoicism, Skepticism and Epicureanism are all, at the heart, self-help philosophies with wisdom playing central role for "moral and spiritual improvement".⁶

The intervening periods between the origins of philosophy and our contemporary period do not help the Kripkean outlook either. It is true that the medieval period was rife with fanciful metaphysical theories, both novel and mere continuations of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophizing. That said, these theories were primarily put forth with the goal of defending, extending, or understanding views, concepts, and questions from the philosophy of religion; moral and spiritual improvement being the obvious ultimate goal here. Furthermore, the modern philosophers, those who Kripke seems to credit as the progenitors of the view that there is some difference between investigation aimed at moral and spiritual improvement and investigation aimed at truth about a given domain of inquiry⁷, may be the worst evidence for his view of all. It seemed to be the main goal of the early Rationalists like Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza, and some empiricists, like Berkeley, to show that there was no tension between the formal, rigorous, and mechanistic new science and traditional worldviews which had great room for freedom, responsibility, and value. Leibniz, for instance, made his Principle of the Best the foundation of his metaphysical system. This is the view that our innate knowledge of God gives us knowledge that we live in the best possible world. Because of this, we can have a fully rationalistic

epistemology says Leibniz since we can always figure out the true theory by figuring out what would be true in the best possible world. This is not even to mention the myriad ways in which Locke, Berkeley, Leibniz, Hobbes and Hume were caught up in the politics of their day, in, albeit, very different ways.⁸ Hence, metaphysical theorizing and value-considerations cannot be separated for the Moderns either.

At this point an objector might claim that while Kripke may be wrong about the larger history of the idea that philosophy should be concerned with truth and knowledge rather than moral and spiritual improvement, Soames is certainly right that this has played a distinctively important role in the Analytic tradition. That said, even this restricted claim lacks plausibility. We think a more accurate way to describe what Analytic philosophers first had in mind is that a focus on truth, knowledge, clarity, argumentation, and rigor is one of the best ways toward moral and spiritual improvement. Or even that a good recipe for living one's life is the cooperative attempt to discover what can be proven true.

On the other hand, it is somewhat understandable that Soames and Kripke could miss this. Highjacking Wittgenstein's frustrating terminology from the *Tractatus*, it is as if, in a certain sense, the lion's share of early Analytic philosophers decided the best way to get their ethical views across was not to say them, but to show them in the way they went about doing philosophy. We will not try to defend this last claim much here, but we hope that if only one thing is gotten from this paper, it will be that being an Analytic philosopher, even when not engaging in ethics, does not mean that one is not ethically concerned or that one isn't concerned with their work being relevant to life. Sometimes we are even inclined to think that, for say the Positivists, the group of Analytic philosophers we will focus on here, metaphysics may be nothing more than disguised ethics.

And while really establishing this is outside the scope of this paper, we will try to point at some characteristic justifications. For instance, if one wants to understand the Positivist's social structure and the forces that moved them as a social group through one paradigmatic example, they should look no farther than Otto Neurath. Neurath, who was himself a sociologist by training, was the only member of the group to have been a part of the movement throughout the entirety of its existence. He was present from its beginnings in the first Vienna Circle meetings between Neurath, the mathematician Hans Hahn, and the physicist Phillip Frank, to its incarnation under Schlick's direction, until its slow diffusion prompted by the spread of Nazism in Europe. Furthermore, he was the driving force behind public spreading of the ideas of the circle through his project, the publishing of the *Foundations of the Unity of Science*. In the opening pages of this monumental encyclopedia, Neurath states very clearly his understanding of the spirit behind this

movement, “Logical Empiricism- empiricist rationalism- is united by persons who have some interest in science or hope that science will help to ameliorate personal and social life.”⁹ So, rather than setting scientific and politically-driven attitudes apart, Neurath links them together intimately for the Positivists. Furthermore, this formulation was not an aberration peculiar to the Foundations. Leading Neurath scholar, Jordi Cat, has argued that Neurath’s “views on the language, method and unity of science were led throughout by his interest in the social life of individuals and their well-being... Objectivity and rationality, epistemic values to constrain scientific thought, were radically social”.¹⁰

Neurath practiced what he preached as well; becoming a governmental official for the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic. This political activity too was not unique among the early Analytic philosophers. We think that Bertrand Russell- a man who the positivists took great inspiration from- his anti-war and freedom of thought activism should be one of analytic philosophy’s proudest achievements. This is because, maybe more surprisingly than the mere fact that there were positivists who happened to be politically active, many of them thought this political action was not unrelated to their work. That is, they self-conceived of positivism as an ethical project and an extension of this activism. A fun anecdote from the history of analytic philosophy that furthers this point is when we learn that Wittgenstein’s family referred to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the book that helped launch the positivist movement, as “Uncle Ludwig’s little book on ethics”.¹¹ Russell, too, explicitly noted similar motivations for a commitment to truth, knowledge, and rigor as we noted earlier, saying:

The evils of the world are due to moral defects quite as much as to lack of intelligence. But the human race has not hitherto discovered any method of eradicating moral defects... Intelligence, on the contrary, is easily improved by methods known to every competent educator. Therefore, until some method of teaching virtue has been discovered, progress will have to be sought by improvement of intelligence rather than of morals.¹²

We are not completely alone in having this type of view about positivism, either. One of the foremost scholars of the movement, Richard Creath, has a forthcoming paper which was delivered at the first meeting of SSHAP in 2012 and which argued that Carnap and Neurath both had largely-ethical motivations in adopting positivistic and radically-empiricist views. Here he argued that Carnap; “opposed mere speculation in part because it could make no real progress and in part because such speculations aided and abetted superstitions that were dangerous both to the individual and to the community.” On top of that, he put such stock in empirical knowledge because:

Carnap saw science as international, cooperative, and progressive. Sometimes theories are overturned but for the most part this change is in favor of clearly better theories. In metaphysical philosophy, Carnap said, each scholar builds up his or her own system. The philosophers work at cross purposes.¹³

Ultimately, this ethical basis is our concern with positivism too. We think it would be an ethically-good view to have that there can never be knowledge of anything without their being communal access to that thing and we think this is a consequence of positivism. Put rather simply, we think positivist verificationism stems from the ethical view that I should not count anything as evidence unless you and everybody else have equal access to it as I do; either through publicly-observable empirical evidence for synthetic truths or our shared linguistic conventions for analytic truths. This seems to us the most cooperative, democratic, anti-authoritarian, epistemology that one could ever come up with. In short, rather than Positivism's obsession with science being about a concern for truth and knowledge *instead* of moral improvement, as Soames would have it, the positivists thought one should want to adopt conventionalism about a priority/necessity and reductionism about metaphysics because they constitute a backlash against the terrors that superstition and ego-centrism have brought on throughout human civilization. As Carnap puts it, his anti-metaphysical orientation belongs with "movements which strive for meaningful forms of personal and collective life, of education, and of external organization in general....It is an orientation which acknowledges the bonds that tie men together, but at the same time strives for free development of the individual."¹⁴ Soames also, characterizes Analytic philosophers as having a steadfast commitment, descendant from Moore's common sense philosophy, to the idea that good philosophy needs to be grounded in pre-philosophical thought. We read this as nothing more than the ethical maxim that one should only believe in the seminar room what they can implement in their everyday lives and activities.

Furthermore, if Kripke really is concerned with an unending quest for truth, one of the things he should be worried about is the set of consequences of his own views. Unfortunately, then for his view, it seems to us that some of his most well-known work has important consequences for ethical debates. Soames has made it clear that he thinks the most important result of Kripke's work (n.b., his discovery of the necessary a posteriori) is its undermining of, what Gillian Russell has called, the Linguistic Doctrine of Necessary Truth ('LDONT').¹⁵ Sometimes referred to as 'conventionalism about necessity,' LDONT is the view that necessity is not a mind-independent part of reality, but is rather grounded in meaning conventions. It seems a reasonable assumption to make that ethical truths are invariant across possible worlds. After all, we would not hold that if there were just enough changes to the body of contingent truths, it would all of a sudden become acceptable to

murder in that possible world. If this is the case, then answering the question of whether or not LDONT is true can immediately impact an answer to the question of whether or not ethical truths are conventional or are woven into the fabric of nature mind-independently. So, understanding the conceptual reach of Kripke's own views requires being worried about life and recipes for living life.

What if we are wrong about all of this, though? What if it is the case that philosophy has historically been concerned with truth for no political, ethical, or otherwise-related-to-life reasons and that this is so due to the very nature of the logical consequences of those theories? Would Kripke's attitude be justified then? We actually still think not (though one of us may have more reservations about this than the other). It is certainly the case that some philosophy is relevant to life and that philosophy can be made relevant to life. For instance, consider the following proof:

In general, if it is valuable for somebody to do *x*, then it should be done by the experts on *x*. Hence, if it is valuable for somebody to reconstruct and evaluate for validity and soundness arguments given by politicians, then it should be done by the experts on validity and soundness of arguments. Philosophers are the experts on the validity and soundness of arguments. If it is valuable for somebody to reconstruct and evaluate for validity and soundness those arguments given by politicians, then it should be done by philosophers. Kripke thinks it is okay for philosophers to not engage in this activity. Thus, by *modus tollens*, he ought to hold that it is not valuable for politicians to have their arguments scrutinized. Any conscientious observer of the contemporary American political scene would be unlikely to support this conclusion.

II

The first part of this essay endeavored to show that the Kripkean claim was incorrect, at least historically speaking, and in so doing established what we believe are fairly broad boundaries for public philosophy. That is to say, we hold in this essay that because all philosophy is relevant to life, then all kinds of philosophy ought to be fair game for being considered public philosophy. The second part of this essay has two goals. First, it will outline what a society, particularly a democratic society, can gain from public philosophy. Second, it will offer some suggestions regarding the sort of things philosophers can do to make their work public.

The Benefits of Public Philosophy

In the way of preliminaries, we need to say something about how we conceive of “the public” here. One might view this part of the project as the most crucial in defining “public philosophy”. The discipline has at least some idea of what the boundaries of philosophy are; the “public” bit is what is complicating the matter. We do not wish here to advance some new conception of the public sphere, nor do we believe it necessary to articulate any of the competing views on the nature of the public sphere or public reason or public morality. For our purposes, we refer to the public in the broadest possible sense.¹⁶ We mean a class of non-academic and “ordinary” people. If all of philosophy is relevant to life, then all lives can benefit from it. To be sure, as we will show shortly, this includes public spaces where political discussion happens, but it might include much more. Philosophy should enter both public political debates and private deliberations for everyone because doing so improves their lives.

By gesturing toward democratic society, we acknowledge that Kripke was in part right when he implied there was something special about political philosophy. We hold here that it is true that political philosophy is probably most obviously relevant to life, though it is not the only branch relevant to life. To begin with the obvious then, it is uncontroversial that democracies require, or at the very least do better, if they contain particular sorts of citizens. Research programs in these areas are well established. Philosophers have historically paid good attention to which character traits citizens ought to have and to what degree, how they ought to participate in rule-making to approximate a legitimate democracy, and what institutional arrangements best promote freedom, liberty, or autonomy, to name just a few. To be sure, all such philosophy is relevant to life and sufficiently public.

Because of this fact though, political philosophers and ethicists also have a special obligation to public philosophy. All things being equal, political and social philosophers and ethicists ought to approach research from the bottom up.¹⁷ That is to say that philosophers of this sort ought to find real political and social problems and bring clarity to them, suggest solutions for them, and/or give us reasons to act on them at all. Thomas Pogge, whose work and life have represented this principle very well by the way, praises Amartya Sen and Joan Robinson for their contributions to a very real problem, the development of effective measurements of suffering, in the following way:

Insofar as morally significant indices have actually been constructed and applied, this work has differed from typical philosophical work in two respects. Generally ignored by professional moral philosophers, index construction has received uneven

philosophical attention mostly from non-philosophers, including prominent ones like the economists Joan Robinson and Amartya Sen. And, unlike most philosophical works, some indices have become highly influential: followed and cited by the media, policy-makers, and the general public. *This is an unfortunate combination—unfortunate for those who suffer the effects of deeply flawed indices and unfortunate also for academic philosophy, which is marginalizing itself and missing an opportunity to bring its wisdom to bear on something that really matters.*¹⁸

The message read strongly is that philosophers have instrumental reasons and moral reasons for aiming their work at problems that matter. Instrumental as it will help improve their status on campuses and moral as there is real harm being done when the right people are not participating in problem solving. Philosophers like this have real power to improve people's lives; they ought to exercise it.

We return now to the claim that philosophers, and political philosophers especially, have paid good attention to the concept of citizenship. Cultivating good citizens though amounts to something like what Aristotle (*NE* I.7) would have us call cultivating character. By any account, this is a task that requires more than simply passing on some knowledge of institutions or a general disposition toward respecting the law. It involves teaching citizens to think about how they relate to one another and how to form the rules that will govern them. There are important tasks here for all areas of philosophy. So that it is clear this is not true for any particular form of democracy, consider two divergent democratic views.

First, suppose that democracy functions in much the way Dewey (1927), or more recently Elizabeth Anderson (2004), suggest that it does. In this model, citizens organize and re-organize themselves around particular problems and work with each other to solve them. Epistemic models like this emphasize situated and unique knowledge, as well as citizens working together and talking to each other to solve these problems. To do this well, citizens need a wide variety of tools that philosophers can help provide. For example, even though it might be true that some good political discussion can take place without logical, rigorous, argument, it seems to us uncontroversial that at least some of the time citizens will need basic to advanced logic skills to identify strong, and perhaps more importantly, fallacious arguments. Consider arguments for military intervention into foreign countries. Many will appeal to something like a slippery slope argument, "if we let country x do y, then who knows what will come next...". Citizens need to be able to evaluate this claim. Is the antecedent true? How do we know it is true? Does it follow that further bad acts will occur if we do nothing? What other facts do we need to evaluate both claims?

Even further, citizens will do better if they understand what's good about strong arguments. What are the problems when arguments are inconsistent? Fallacious? Or illogical? Again, not all political decisions need to be made with a purely or only logical support, but when deciding between reasons and alternatives, it is important for citizens to know what they are giving up when they support a weaker argument. Philosophers across specializations have a role to play in instilling the value of good arguments.

Second and alternatively, Jeffery Green (2010) suggests that modern democracies can function with the masses watching politicians, developing a concept he terms "ocular democracy". The claim here is, broadly stated, that the power of ordinary citizens can be placed in their ability to observe and surveil politicians and political action; rather than only emphasize the voice of the people, democratic theory ought to also pay attention to the eyes of the people. If this less participatory model of democracy is right, philosophers still have an important role to play. Citizens will need to know how to understand the use of language and rhetoric. They will need to know what it means what a politician utters a promise, a pledge, or a guarantee. When John Boehner promises to make jobs, "priority one", what has he really done? We would also need a more delicate understanding of aesthetics, symbols, and spaces. Where a politician speaks, how she moves, what kinds of people are in the audience, what they are wearing, to whom else they refer can all be additional ways to communicate to the public. They can also be additional ways for the public to evaluate political rhetoric.

Going even further, in either (or any) model of democracy, citizens will also need to know things about how data is collected and what facts can mean. They need to know about correlation, causality, survey and polling biases, and all the other problems that empirical social scientists deal with all the time. Suppose for example that a news network reports that 85% of respondents would vote for Sarah Palin in the next presidential election. This seems like a pretty powerful statistic that might change the way citizens approach their political choices. That report may or may not note however that their data was gathered from a poll placed on SarahPalin.com. The sample here is small, and most importantly, not random. Citizens need to know how and when to ask these questions to assess the power of data. Philosophers of science and mind need to help keep an eye on the methodology used to gather data, and the way it is presented to avoid manipulation, and ultimately coercion and domination.

Finally, philosophers can also provide us the tools and moral motivations to act on problems that may not seem imperative to us, either because we cannot see them at all, or fail to realize the harm we are actually inflicting. Peter Singer's work on global poverty (Singer

1972, 2004) is perhaps the paradigmatic example. Singer is, as much as anything else, trying to motivate action by calling attention to a serious, global moral failing. He articulates the harm being done in accessible philosophical terms, but also in empirical terms. He makes it clear how the harm is being done and how we can act to ameliorate it. Poverty is not the only public problem that needs to be brought to the public's attention and more clearly articulated. To name just a few examples of work that is being done: Elizabeth Anderson (2010) has tried to show all the harms associated with segregation, Harry Brighouse (2006) has paid great attention to inequalities in public school systems, and Sally Haslanger (2000) has done work to articulate a politically helpful concept of gender. Citizens are often well intentioned, but they are also distracted and ill-informed. Philosophers can help sharpen our knowledge and fix our gaze on the most salient and important problems.

What Philosophers Can Do

Still respecting philosopher's and philosophy department's roles in universities, what is there for philosophers to do to reach the public? Firstly, we should note that it seems unlikely that tenure and hiring standards are changing anytime soon. Philosophers will still have to publish academic papers in academic journals to gain the job security and respect from their peers that they will need to advance a public philosophy. The onus is then falls most heavily on tenured, established, and experienced faculty. Here we suggest four ways for philosophers to make their work more public: take the lead on "interdisciplinary" and civic movements, take a stand on public problems, contribute work that is publicly accessible, and view their work as part of larger research programs. These suggestions are not meant to imply that none of these things are happening presently. On the contrary, it seems to us that there are many philosophers doing exactly these kinds of things; going above and beyond their typical academic duties to research and teach. We make these suggestions anyway to both underscore their importance and hopefully alert those who have not yet seen the value of doing philosophy in this way.

(1) There are two trends being adopted in universities nationwide that, in our view, come together. The first is a movement toward interdisciplinary studies of a subject area. Undergraduates interested in, say, ancient history, might have a learning "cluster" or "interest group". These are programs of study or a set of courses plucked from different departments across campus. A student might take ancient philosophy in a philosophy department, ancient Greek in a language department, pre-modern warfare in the history department, art and archaeology in an art department, and so on. The goals of such programs are to help students to see how their coursework in different departments connect

with one another and ensure a more balanced liberal arts education. This is also presumably a valuable skill on the job market. Being able to draw from multiple sources to solve problems is an advantage.

The second trend is toward supplying students with an explicitly civic education. Here coursework is focused on both meta questions like “what makes a good citizen?” and courses that will actually create better citizens. Both movements have central tenets to give students multiple perspectives from across their campuses, and real life skills and some cases real life experiences. Crucially then, the civic movements emphasize taking real action in local communities. Programs like Princeton’s PACE Center, Tufts’s CIRCLE, or Washington University’s Gephardt Center all represent fine examples.¹⁹ What we call for here is for philosophers to note and take leadership roles in these trends. Philosophers of all sorts are uniquely positioned to both offer valuable intellectual resources to students choosing these paths, and to university planners and curriculum coordinators about which courses should be included, how long programs ought to run, etc. This unique position comes primarily from the philosophical training in the weighing of reasons, the discussing of moral worth, and the ability to apply a critical eye to many disciplines outside of their own.²⁰

(2) A second way that philosophers can make their work public is by making their stances, and reasons for those stances, on public, salient, and controversial issues known. Part of keeping philosopher’s feet on the ground is not only researching from the bottom up, as mentioned above, but also contributing to the public discourse about these problems. Consider two of the central figures of contemporary political philosophy: John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Rawlsian philosophy, while certainly aimed at the improvement of social life, was abstract. It is not obvious to readers what real problems might affect Rawlsian principles. These abstract principles are supposed to be generally applicable. Yet, we do not know what kinds of things might affect fairness or the difference principle. The principles failed to interact with the real world.²¹ Stances on actual political problems were difficult to make out. Exacerbating the problem, Rawls himself, despite being the most influential political philosopher of his generation failed to take many public stances. Not only could Rawls’s influence have had an impact on actual decisions, but he might have also guided public discussions on the many social issues facing the US over Rawls’s most prominent 25 years (1971-1995). Citizens might have had better reasons to support or reject particular positions, or they could have been moved to act on problems that they otherwise would not have. Habermas (1998) believed in and admired the Rawlsian project, but remained critical of several of its most crucial ideas. More importantly for this argument though, was that Habermas’s philosophy led him to take clear and principled stands on salient political

debates.²² In recent years his attention has turned toward rescuing the European Union, but for a while now he has made efforts to instantiate his vision of a healthy public sphere and a deliberative public. This contrast is not, necessarily, to say anything about the use of ideal versus non-ideal theory. Both ought to be counted as public philosophy, and indeed we hold that both are necessary if philosophy is to get anywhere.

Instead the much more modest point here is that philosophers have both obligations to get out of their offices and make their moral and political positions known and also obligations to think about how their principles might help make sense out of real world problems.²³ Often, their views are in fact the strongest, as they are the most well thought out. What good, after all, is a strongly held and well-defended moral position if the holder of the view allows it to go transgressed with nary a word? Similar to the point above, these obligations are stronger on philosophers with statuses analogous to Rawls and Habermas for two reasons: 1) their job security allows them more intellectual freedom and 2) their stature gives them strong credibility and a larger, more willing to listen audience. Principles should be able to interact with the world and should be stated.

(3) A third way philosophers can make their work more public is perhaps the most straightforward: make work more publicly available. Too often philosophers seek to reach only other philosophers. To be sure, there is great value to this exercise. Fleshing out complicated ideas sometimes requires discussing them with epistemic peers. However, serious academic research should not be limited to only discussions amongst philosophers. Instead, we argue that there needs to be both a greater effort to engage the public at large and a greater appreciation by the rest of the philosophical community for such efforts.

Many philosophers, for example, come down particularly hard on “pop” philosophy books. Certainly it seems that some of this criticism is warranted. Bad work is bad work, regardless of the audience. But philosophy is doing a disservice to itself to criticize the effort, in general, to bring philosophy, even if a somewhat watered down version, to the public. Why should philosophy be reserved for those with a degree or the most diligent autodidacts? Further, the purchasers of such books should generally be considered allies. That is, these are “ordinary” citizens with at least some interest in learning about philosophy and understanding how it might inform the other parts of their lives. It is, we think, a more difficult task to get citizens to realize that philosophy might serve that role at all. People that are convinced of this should be encouraged—they should be fed philosophy.

In addition to writing and going easy on popular philosophy books, the other avenue philosophers should take greater advantage of is blogging. We mean this to include writing

and maintaining one's own blog, as well as contributing to other sites that aggregate views on a particular topic. Not only does this put philosophy out there in a way that is free and publicly accessible, but it can also serve to help philosophers with a platform for point (ii). Philosophers then need not write daily about their day-to-day research or teaching, but they might contribute to the public discourse on those topics that are most pressing and interesting to them. Surely they can do better than most of what counts as "contributions" to the public discourse.

A further benefit still to such a strategy is that it offers a way for "the public" to speak back to philosophy. Here we mean to introduce a second way in which philosophy ought to be done with an eye toward emphasizing the "bottom up." Earlier we suggested that going from the bottom up meant that philosophers ought to begin by trying to apply philosophy to actual problems in the world. Here, we use the term to suggest that this process ought not be single sided. That is, this is not only a matter of philosopher's being able to inform public debate. It might also be a way for the public to inform philosophy. The public does not write its own books or articles and, at large, does not take many philosophy courses (if they go to college at all). Philosopher's then, while they might shoulder a good part of the blame for failing to talk to the public, should not be blamed to the same degree for not hearing the public.²⁴

(4) About fifteen years ago John Searle published an article entitled, "The Future of Philosophy" (1999). The article had the ambitious aim of articulating some of the ways he believed that philosophy was to progress in the new millennium. The central theme of the essay is that progress in philosophy is clear, or at least clearest, when philosophers hand off a problem to science to finish solving. For example, Searle believed that neuroscience was close to solving the classic mind-body problem. The question for science, he writes, is, "how exactly do neurobiological process in the brain cause conscious states and processes, and how exactly are those conscious states and processes realized in the brain?"²⁵ Indeed, not only is this a question that science is equipped to answer, but it looks as though Searle was correct in assuming that great progress on this problem was on the horizon.

We wish to argue here that all of philosophy would be better served, and more public in nature, if it viewed itself in this role as a stage in larger, interdisciplinary research programs. The academy exists not only to provide education to our young students or to provide stable careers for those who are good at "thinking" all the time, but also to help solve public problems. In some cases, these problems are both easy to identify and easy to recognize progress toward solutions. For example, consider when public funds are used to research a particular disease. The public knows cancer is a problem and it knows that we have

progressed in treating and preventing it. Philosophical problems are much harder for the public to see. Exacerbating the problem is that many of these problems are the same ones we inherited from the Ancients. Work in philosophy then should try to have an understanding of where the problem comes from, why it is important to solve it all, and what, ultimately, a solution will look like. These too are difficult questions. What would progress toward figuring out a just society really look like? What would it take to get us there? At what point is out of philosophy's hands and into another discipline's? But they are questions worth answering to avoid losing the forest through the trees and to help keep philosophy public, publicly relevant, and publicly important.

Conclusion

This paper holds that philosophy is and has always been relevant to life. The history on this matter is against the likes of Kripke and Soames who claim otherwise, even when it comes to the recent Analytic tradition. But, even more importantly, we argue that even if this history is not quite right, that philosophers have both moral and instrumental reasons for making their work public. Given the peculiar nature of philosophy as a discipline and as an institution, we claim that this fact that philosophy *can* be made relevant to life is sufficient for it to be the case that most philosophers *ought* to be making their work relevant to life. Along the first line, philosophy's nature is more like that of an activity rather than a particular subject matter. Philosophy involves the systematic and rigorous investigation into those fundamental questions across all disciplines that are normally taken for granted. Given this, the philosopher can always change his subject matter and still remain a philosopher. So, any philosopher can make their projects ethically and politically relevant without sacrificing expertise. This is just not something open to most disciplines and, because of this, we think there is a special onus on the philosopher to utilize this state of affairs. Along the latter line, philosophers have the benefit of working in a discipline in which there is little consensus and little threat of doing something new, radical, and outside the norm. Moreover, philosophy may be seeming to be less and less relevant to the public at large. They cannot see why it is important. Philosopher's aiming, at least in part, to help the public see precisely how it is important, can only be good.

Notes

¹ We are thankful to audiences at SUNY Potsdam, the University at Buffalo, and the 2013 Meeting of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion at Oriel College, Oxford for useful comments on various portions of the paper at various stages. Our gratitude also goes to an anonymous reviewer at *Essays in Philosophy* whose suggestions greatly improved the paper. Finally, we'd like to very personally thank David Curry for insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper and for years of instruction and encouragement which made our careers possible in the first place.

² p. xiv of Soames' *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.

³ Andreas Saugstad, "Saul Kripke, Genius Logician", accessed October 18, 2013, <http://bolesblogs.com/2001/02/25/saul-kripke-genius-logician/>.

⁴ Since it is just anecdotal evidence, this gets relegated to an endnote. That said, since it is illustrative, it is included. The one of us who is a philosopher had to read *Naming and Necessity* in all three of the seminars he took his first semester of graduate school. On top of that, this was not the only semester he was asked to read the book. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the instructiveness of stressing the prominence and representativeness of Soames' and Kripke's views.

⁵ Plato, Benjamin Jowett, *The Republic and Other Works* (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 193.

⁶ Many thanks to David Curry for helpful discussion on this last point.

⁷ If he intends to use 'modern' as part of a proper name, rather than a colloquial description.

⁸ Again, many thanks to David Curry for valuable discussion on this point.

⁹ From the opening pages of the *Foundations of the Unity of Science*.

¹⁰ From Cat's Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Neurath.

¹¹ p. 71 of Peter Barker's, "Uncle Ludwig's Book About Science," *Philosophical Topics*, 1981 Supplementary Volume.

¹² p. 127 of Bertrand Russell's, *Skeptical Essays*.

¹³ Both of these can be found in Richard Creath's (forthcoming) "(Anti-)Metaphysics in the Thirties: And Why Should Anyone Care Now?".

¹⁴ Pp. xvii-xviii of Carnap's *Logical Structure* (1969).

¹⁵ Gillian Russell, "A New Problem for the Linguistic Doctrine of Necessary Truth", in *New Waves in Truth*, eds. Cory Wright and Nikolaj Pedersen, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

¹⁶ For the broader and more typical academic discussion of the public sphere see, for starters, Archon Fung's "Recipes for Public Spheres..." (2003), Craig Calhoun's edited volume, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992), or even Alan McKee's *The Public Sphere: An Introduction* (2005). Even further John Dryzek's *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance* provides a thought provoking view on the future of public spheres in part II (2010).

¹⁷ There is another way to interpret the bottom up/top down distinction to which we will return shortly.

¹⁸ p. 76 of *Politics as Usual*: our emphasis.

¹⁹ In order, <http://pace.princeton.edu/>, <http://www.civicyouth.org/>, <http://www.gephardtinsttute.wustl.edu/Pages/default.aspx>.

²⁰ Peter Levine is one such philosopher who has heeded this call. Peter is the director of Tufts's CIRCLE institute, which is an arm of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service. Peter continues to write rigorous philosophical work on important public issues while also taking on a leadership role in the planning of civic educations on campus.

²¹ Later Rawls did respond to this line of criticism mostly in *The Law of Peoples*.

²² See for example: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/habermas-the-last-european-a-philosopher-s-mission-to-save-the-eu-a-799237.html> and, of course, his last two books, *Europe: the Faltering Project* (2009) and *The Crisis of the European Union* (2012).

²³ For a nice example see Debra Satz's *Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets*. Satz provides some general principles for criticizing what she calls "noxious markets", but also then applies those principles to real market/ethical problems including: the sale of reproductive labor and the sale of sex labor.

²⁴ Thomas Nadelhoffer, among others, are working on an open access (but crucially still peer-reviewed) philosophy journal with just this thought in mind, as published authors would also be asked to monitor the public comments of their work for at least 2 weeks after it is published. See <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2013/11/philosophical-exchanges-a-plea-for-suggestions.html#more>. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pushing us on this point.

²⁵ p. 2073 of "The Future of Philosophy".