TWENTY-ONE STATEMENTS ABOUT POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY ON THE STATE OF THE PROFESSION

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Introduction

I expect that at a certain age everyone comes to think they are living in a time of great political upheaval. Things change, and when they do or appear to be about to, people who are uncomfortable with a particular change or just uncomfortable with change full stop think that the life they have known and come to love cannot possibly continue if these changes come to pass or are not immediately reversed. In most cases, the real reason they think this is simply a particularly volatile combination of paranoia and lack of imagination. But not in all cases, which is why this kind of thinking is impossible to suppress. And I have to admit that I am worried. I am worried about the kind and degree of economic dislocation we are currently seeing; about the xenophobia, isolationism, and undemocratic attitudes that seem to be inexorably on the rise in supposedly well-established liberal democratic societies; about the growing vitality and mainstream appeal of extremist parties and candidates that had long been long thought of as being on the isolatable fringe; about the kind of race-based and religious violence that we are seeing everywhere in the world today; and about the lack of persuasive power that facts seem to hold in debates about public policy today while emotions run so hot and deep they are leading us to forget where our best interests lie or, even worse, encouraging us to pursue what we may erroneously perceive as our best interests without regard for the common good. All this gives me a sense of déjà vu I cannot

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shake that we are re-living the 1930s. Policies that we know will work from prior experience are being ignored or outright rejected with a contempt that is hard to reconcile with rational thought, while ideas that have proved not only wrong but dangerous time and time again seem to have a death-grip on those who are supposed to be guiding our response to the problems of the present. The net result of all this being that there is a populist pox arising on both established houses of political morality (the moderate left and the moderate right) and there is a real possibility that our lives could be handed over to autocrats and demagogues that cannot possibly make things any better and most likely will makes things dramatically worse.

Of course, while the 1930s did not end well, history does not have to repeat itself. It is within our power to step back from the brink and not jump head-long into self-destruction once again. Indeed, there are many things that people of good faith can and should be doing to respond to the forces currently buffeting us throughout the world today. But I intend to talk about only one: what we as political philosophers should be doing if we are to contribute to the effort to ensure that things do not get any further out of hand. Not because I think that political philosophers have a uniquely important role to play here (it is important but not *uniquely* important), but because it is the role I have spent the most time thinking about, and because a shockingly large percentage of contemporary political philosophers seem to be utterly unwilling and perhaps even unable to attend to the job that society and history has assigned to them.

In words of Isaiah Berlin, this lack of attention by political philosophers is both surprising and dangerous. "Surprising," Berlin says,

> because there has, perhaps, been no time in modern history when so large a number of human beings, in both East and West, have had their notions, and indeed their lives, so deeply altered, and in some cases violently upset, by fanatically held social and political doctrines. (Berlin 2002a: 167)

And "dangerous," he says,

> because when ideas are neglected by those who ought to attend to them—that is to say, those who have been trained to think critically about ideas—they sometimes acquire an unchecked momentum and irresistible power over multitudes of men and may grow too violent to be affected by rational criticism. (Berlin 2002a: 167)

Berlin wrote this in 1958, and he was talking about the battle between liberal democracy and communism, but his words sound eerily apposite today, for the same overall phenomenon of philosophical neglect seems to be at work. Indeed, we could not have reached the precipice on which we now stand unless our education system in general and our profession in particular had not so blatantly failed to provide people with the tools to think rationally and critically about the various social and political choices currently being presented to them (see Robinson 2017).

This does not mean, however, that I am claiming that "political philosophy is dead" as Peter Laslett famously did in 1956 (Laslett 1956) and Berlin himself queried pointedly in 1961 (Berlin 1978).[1] That claim was different—it was a based on the belief of a large part of the philosophical community that there was nothing important or even interesting left for political philosophers to do, a belief that was taken very seriously at the time but was ultimately proved false when John Rawls published *A Theory of Justice* in 1971 (Rawls 1971). Indeed, that book inspired such a flood of new, intellectually significant and topically relevant material that one could rightly marvel at how robustly the discipline had been resurrected (see generally Miller 1990). But while the volume of this material has still not begun to subside, its intellectual significance and quality has been in serious decline since at least the beginning of this century.[2] New and important work is appearing less and less frequently, while the scope of most of the work that is now appearing is getting smaller and more internal and its practical applications more difficult to discern. The discipline has reached a point of intellectual stagnation, continuously

repeating itself or obsessing over less and less important topics or offering solutions that are only more infeasible than solutions that have already proved infeasible in the past. In short, the profession has been making itself inconsequential and irrelevant for quite some time, even though real-world developments suggest that the need for input from those trained in the methods and ideas about which political philosophers are supposed to have expertise could not be more critical.

What follows then is a set of statements about how I believe that we, as political philosophers, should approach what we do, both within the academy and without (although there are an extremely limited number of opportunities to pursue this profession outside of the academy). It contains my view as to what political philosophy should be about, how political philosophy should be done, and how courses in political philosophy should be taught. It is designed to function as the basis of an introductory lecture in a course on political philosophy, but it is also designed to be more than that—to be a comment on the current state of the profession. Useful introductory material of the "What is Political Philosophy?" variety is surprisingly thin on the ground (I shall give a brief summary of what is out there in a moment), and commentary on the current state of the profession is non-existent. So, there is a definite gap here to be filled. Given my objectives, then, this piece is primarily normative, although it does make some descriptive claims along the way. The descriptive claims I make are based largely on my own experience—that is, based on anecdotal evidence, because few of the points I make about the current state of the profession have been the subject of formal study, and many are simply not subject to empirical proof one way or the other. Where there is more formalized empirical evidence available, however, I will cite it. And even where there is not I will rely on my own experience only when I believe it is widely shared. While I will not be able to fully develop and defend each of the claims I make here, I will spend a lot of time on the most controversial ones, and whenever possible I will also provide

references to other works where more extensive discussion can currently be found. In any event, I hope those interested in the profession will see that there are reasons to be troubled here and take this piece as presenting an agenda for how those worries might be taken on.

One final introductory point. This piece is written in a style and a tone that might strike some as unusual for an article in an academic journal. It contains both argument and memoir, is intended not only for experienced scholars and upper-level students but also for students who have not previously encountered political philosophy, and uses language that is sometimes more colorful and personal than what has become conventional for works of this kind.[3] But one of my arguments is that the current convention of maintaining a constrained style and dispassionate tone in political philosophy is arbitrary and, more importantly, that it is having a detrimental effect upon both the substance and the persuasive power of the work currently being generated by the profession. I intend to challenge this convention and argue that rather than being so relentlessly detached, political philosophers should (at least sometimes if not always) see themselves as what Ruth Behar, writing about doing anthropology, famously called "the vulnerable observer;" that is, recognize that they are immersed in a practice to such an extent that full objectivity is neither possible nor desirable (see Behar 1996).[4] But this does not mean I am endorsing full subjectivity either. My claim is simply that full objectivity is often a pretense anyway and we would do better to be more realistic and nuanced in our approach toward a practice in which we are already immersed. So I ask my readers to keep an open mind on my use of language until they hear this argument, and accept that given what I am arguing, I need to put my money where my mouth is, so to speak, and employ the techniques that I am arguing have been inappropriately and detrimentally suppressed by the current conventions of the profession. But rest assured, my stylistic choices are a compliment to and not a substitute for substance. I do not intend to forsake

analytical rigor. I simply ask for a little indulgence from those who are currently used to a more conventional approach, with the promise that I will do my best to ensure that by the end of this piece such indulgence will pay off.

The Twenty-One Statements

1. What Political Philosophy Is About

Political philosophy should be about how we can better understand the nature and potential of social cooperation and how we can use that understanding to improve the arrangements under which we live.[5] And sometimes it is. But often it is not. Often it relies on an utterly unrealistic view of human nature and circumstances and posits how we should arrange things in a world which does not exist and is not likely to exist anytime in the foreseeable future. Often it devolves into discussions of minuscule points of technical analysis that have little connection with the real world, engaging in discussions that have meaning only for insiders, and becomes what could be more accurately described as "philosophical trainspotting;" that is, a pointless activity obsessively pursued. Sometimes, even when it does have ramifications for the real world, it seems completely ignorant of or unconcerned with these effects, thinking that these are irrelevant as long as one is engaged in a search for truth and that there is no need to put political theories in any kind of context notwithstanding the possibility that these real-world ramifications may be dangerous and disturbing.

The potential for problems arises here because the issues that political philosophers address are important. These include: What is human nature and what does human nature tell us about the political arrangements under which we should live? Should we have a government, or should we order our society by relying exclusively on private arrangements? If we should have a government, what aspects of our lives should it be allowed to regulate, and what sort of basic structure and

institutions should it have? More specifically, what kind of political system, what kind of economic system, what kind of legal system, what kind of education system, what kind of health care system, and what kind of welfare system should society have? What kinds of regulations are appropriate for these institutions to enact? How should we distribute the benefits and burdens of social cooperation, such as income and wealth, rights and obligations, and the bases of self-respect? What are rights, what rights should people have, and how should these rights be enforced? What is liberty, and when, if ever, can liberty be infringed? How should we decide this? What role should religion have, if any, in the government of society?

But just because the issues that political philosophers address are important, this does not mean that what these philosophers have to say about them necessarily will be. While many people seem to think that as long as they talk about something that is profound, what they say will be profound, this is not correct. Thoughts about important topics can be just as inane as thoughts about inconsequential ones. And spouting inane or even just not very insightful observations about important topics and engaging in confused analyses of them can be dangerous, for such comments may lead us seriously astray, disguising the importance of what is stake rather than illuminating it, making the whole enterprise in which political philosophers are engaged seem trivial and silly or worse, encouraging us to take actions that will be counter-productive given our stated goals or even fully self-destructive.

I will return to this point throughout this piece. But right now, I want to make some more general remarks about how the field of political philosophy can be better understood.

2. The relationship between political, legal, and moral philosophy

These three areas of philosophic inquiry are sometimes collectively referred to as "value theory," but I find this label too abstract and over-inclusive to really capture the sense of what is

almost always approached as three distinct areas of inquiry. These three areas, however, are related—political philosophy is a subfield of moral philosophy, in the sense that moral philosophy is about the difference between right and wrong, while political philosophy is about the difference between right and wrong with regard to the design and operation of the institutions of society, the scope and nature of the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities these institutions generate, and the distribution of the burdens and benefits of social cooperation within this institutional structure.[6] Legal philosophy, in turn, is a subfield of political philosophy, as it is about how we should describe and regulate our rights, responsibilities, and opportunities through law.

Note that some political philosophers, and an alarming number of politicians, deny this. That is, they deny that politics and therefore political philosophy necessarily contains a moral element.[7] But as Berlin argued long ago in an important essay that now seems to have been forgotten, this is incorrect (see Berlin 2001). Even those who argue that political philosophy or at least politics is exclusively about promoting and achieving success, power, strength, wealth and so on are taking a moral position. Rather than rejecting moral values altogether, they are simply embracing moral values of a different sort. Berlin's primary example was Machiavelli, but the same could be said of Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph de Maistre, Carl Schmitt, and any other theorist or politician who places ends above means, success above integrity, order above justice, beauty above intellect, and so on (see, e.g., Machiavelli 1988; Nietzsche 1994; Schmitt 1996; Berlin 1990). As Berlin notes, in an enlightened society, these are unattractive moral choices, or at least they should be, but they are moral choices nonetheless (Berlin 2001: 44-5).

3. The relationship between political philosophy and political science

While there is no bright line between the two, political philosophy tends to focus on the normative, political science tends to focus on the descriptive—political science is an attempt to

bring the methods of the natural sciences to the study of political phenomena. In describing political phenomena, of course, political scientists are also interested in describing the *causes* of this phenomena. Some of these causes, of course, are normative. In other words, people sometimes behave in a certain manner because they believe they should behave in this manner, either because they believe this is morally required or because they believe it is in their interest to do so, or both. But political scientists are far less interested in arguing about whether these normative beliefs are justified than political philosophers; they are mostly interested in whether these normative beliefs exist and if so what they are. And if they are interested in whether these normative beliefs are justified, it is almost always possible prudential justifications on which they focus.

Political philosophers, in contrast, are primarily interested in developing and defending the underlying justifications for our social institutions and their actions, and for our actions toward each other. Unlike political scientists, when it comes to focusing on prudential or moral justifications, political philosophers are primarily interested in the moral.[8] While political philosophers often do rely on data for their views (and should do so more often), the acquisition of such data and the causal analysis that helps explain this data are generally seen as work for political scientists, economists, and others to do, at least to the extent that this causal analysis is physical rather conceptual. Because political philosophers focus on the normative, political science and political philosophy are fundamentally different enterprises requiring different sets of tools and skills. But one set is as necessary as the other. One has to have empirical data to make any meaningful observations about the world; but without normative analysis, data acquisition and empirical causal analysis alone are often useless.

These differences in emphasis, however, have created problems running in both directions. Political scientists often present their data in great detail, reserving only a page or two at the end

for analysis, almost as an afterthought and in any event as a statement that presupposes the conclusions to be drawn from the relevant data are so clear that no one could reasonably disagree. Or, if it is unclear what conclusions should be drawn, that no one could say anything informative about what to make of the data they have presented "until further research is completed." But many of these questions are not merely unresolved, they are unresolvable, at least to a degree of reasonable certainty. There are simply too many variables, and controlled experiments involving complex social or economic systems are either impossible to construct or unethical because this would put half the subjects of the experiment at unreasonable risk. And in the absence of the ability to conduct God-like experiments, the causal relations involved are too complex to ever be sorted out with sufficient clarity that those who are skeptical of the underlying causal claim will accept this sorting as correct. What remains is risk and uncertainty, and in such circumstances, we need moral principles to guide us, the development and application of which is the specialty of political philosophers. Political scientists therefore need to take what political philosophers do a lot more seriously.

On the other hand, if political philosophy is to be relevant to decisions about how to react to or influence real world events, references to the state of our empirical knowledge are also required, if only to establish that in certain cases the extent of our empirical knowledge is incomplete. Yet political philosophers often look with disdain on work that refers to the empirical world, implying that the reliance on empirical data within philosophical argument necessarily makes one less philosophically sophisticated and weighty. Or, even worse, political philosophers sometime eschew the empirical world but not empirical assertions, making these as if no one in a more empirically-oriented field had ever looked into these matters, or acting as if reference to this work was both unnecessary and unhelpful in the high-minded world of the philosopher. While this

attitude is perhaps infrequent, it is frequent enough and endemic enough to undermine the reputation of the profession and suggest that the potential real-world relevance of what political philosophers do, or at least can do when they are their best, is less than it is. Even worse, it might be giving moral cover to those in the real world who are actually trying to change the nature of public discourse—those arguing that facts do not matter. Indeed, if anything is obvious from the latest presidential campaign in the US and the Brexit campaign in the UK and their subsequent ramifications, it is that we are moving toward a post-factual world, where utterly unsupported factual assertions are common and actual data is viewed as unreliable given the supposedly vast conspiracy by those in charge of generating such data to deceive us, making facts no longer relevant to opinion formation (see, e.g., Leonhardt and Thompson 2017; Skidelsky 2017; Stern 2017; Tappin, Van Der Leer, and McKay 2017; Worthen 2017; Sargent 2017; Douglass 2017). So not only do political scientists have to take the need for conceptual and normative analysis more seriously, political philosophers have to take their obligation to reference the real world more seriously too.

4. Where the profession of political philosophy takes place

Another important distinction between political science and political philosophy is where the work of each gets done. Political philosophy, unlike science, the arts, law, engineering and of course *politics*, takes place almost exclusively in the academy. This gives the academic political philosopher a role that those who specialize in these other fields do not need to undertake. That role is not simply analytical—to systematize and explain political phenomena taking place "out in the real world," but to actually *do* political philosophy. For if those in the academy do not do it, it is not going to be done. Unlike most of their academic colleagues, political philosophers therefore have a dual responsibility—not only to teach others how to do political philosophy or at least how

to understand and interpret the real world better using the tools that political philosophers can provide, but also to actually do political philosophy themselves.

5. More on the importance of political philosophy

Unfortunately, this special role that political philosophers have to play in academia is often insufficiently recognized within the university, perhaps because everyone has political opinions and therefore it seems like no special expertise is required to form them. But just because everyone has political opinions does not mean that the enterprise of political philosophy, which strives to develop, organize, and place such opinions in an overarching coherent moral structure, is some lesser kind of intellectual exercise, one that anyone could do, as many academics (and especially non-political philosophers) seem to believe. To the contrary, political philosophy is one of the most important areas of intellectual inquiry that one could undertake. Unlike the ideas of those who specialize in other types of philosophy, the ideas of political philosophers have changed the world; not only when they are doing their job well, but also, unfortunately, when they are doing their job poorly. So the stakes are high for the political philosopher. Indeed, together with religion and technical change, nothing has been more responsible for great upheavals in human society than political philosophy. As Keynes said

> The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences are usually the slaves of some defunct economist [or political philosopher]. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not so many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas of civil servants and politicians and even agitators are not likely to be the newest. But, sooner or later, it is ideas, not vested interests which are dangerous for good or evil. (Keynes 1964: 383-84)

Note that I have inserted another reference to political philosophers into the quote in brackets, just to emphasize Keynes's point, for the quote is often truncated to contain only the first mention of political philosophers and this reference is then ignored. In its truncated form, the quote is then used to illustrate the importance of economics, (see, e.g., Quiggin 2012: 1; Heilbroner 1999: 14), as if Keynes had not also expressly assigned equivalent importance to political philosophy. I shall say more about the relationship between political philosophy and economics in a moment, but right now I want to call attention to another point Keynes made in this passage that is also far too often ignored: that it is critically important to train young people in the means and methods of political philosophy and provide them with an adequate set of tools they can use to form and evaluate public policy when they (or at least some of them) become central figures in organizing our social life. For despite its obvious importance, political philosophy was then and is again now being undervalued and under-supplied in the academy.

6. Primary and secondary political philosophy

To begin to see what is happening in the profession, it is useful to divide the field into two types or levels of activity: primary political philosophy and secondary political philosophy (see Ball 1995: 44). Secondary political philosophy is the study, discussion, or attempt to clarify or perfect works of primary philosophy. Primary political philosophy is the offering of new theories of political morality. But this does not mean that works of primary political philosophy pay no attention to works of political philosophy that have come before. All political philosophy is informed by and illuminated in the light of the past, and therefore by "new" I do not mean to suggest that a work of primary philosophy has to start from scratch. There may be no bright line between the two, but work that is primary offers solutions or at least analyses that are sufficiently

different from that which has come before to be thought of as an independent alternative to the primary philosophy of the past.

To be dynamic rather than static, the field of political philosophy requires work of both sorts. But we are currently in a period of intellectual stagnation. That is, what worthwhile work there is being generated now is almost exclusively of the secondary variety. Indeed, very little of the basic cannon of primary political philosophy now being taught (Rawls, Nozick, Dworkin, and so on) originates more recently than the wake of the Vietnam War, and much of it originates centuries and even millennia earlier (see Moore 2011). Moreover, political philosophers have now ceded much of the area of economic justice to economists, who for the most part expressly reject the idea that morality has anything to tell us about the economy or how to manage it (see Reiff 2015a: 12-14). And depending on how cynical one wants to be, one can see the relatively recent explosion of work on global justice, unoriginal as this may be (it frequently just applies slightly tweaked principles of domestic justice to the international arena), as at least partially motivated by the feeling among many political philosophers that almost everything interesting and original that could be said about issues of domestic justice has already been said (see generally Brock 2017).

Of course, it is no doubt true that doing primary rather than secondary political philosophy requires a vision that is as rare in political philosophy as it is in any other field. It may even be true that people who have such vision appear in waves rather than being scattered randomly across history. But it has been a very long time since the last wave hit. And it is not like there have been no significant events in our social and political life since the turn of the century that might suggest some new thinking by political philosophers would be helpful. We have had 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the consequences of which are still playing out, the civil war in Syria and the flood of refugees it has created, an exponential rise in economic inequality to levels not seen since

the Gilded Age, a financial collapse second only to the Great Depression followed by crushing unemployment, a reduction in unionization to levels not seen since before World War II, the resurrection of the extreme right in the US and elsewhere, political paralysis in government, Brexit, the rise of Donald Trump and Trumpism, and so on. So there has been plenty to react to. This suggests that there is something about the way we have institutionalized the teaching and production of political philosophy that is discouraging those with vision from coming forward or, even worse, preventing us from seeing them when they do. A certain kind of closed-mindedness seems to have overtaken the profession. Perhaps this is a characteristic of most historical periods, but there does appear to be something unusual about the current period that is making this problem particularly acute.

7. **Incrementalism in political philosophy**

One reason why the profession is so stalled at the moment is that too many political philosophers have adopted the methodology of incrementalism. In the sciences, in law, and perhaps in some of the social sciences and humanities too, incrementalism may indeed be the best and most effective way of improving our thinking about various matters. But this is not true in the arts and in political philosophy. This is not to say that incrementalism does not have a place in either field, but that the nature of each field is such that it requires bold new ideas in order to move forward. Not only because intellectual and aesthetic advancement in these fields comes in leaps more often that steps, but also because "moving forward" requires the production of work that captures the imagination of the people, those outside the discipline, or at least some of those people, for only then can each field have the real-world effects which are its reason to exist. And new ideas are required to attract people outside the discipline. But new ideas arise in political philosophy with appalling infrequency. And when they do, these ideas are often not engaged by

other political philosophers. They are not even attacked—they are simply ignored, the death knell for any attempt at intellectual advancement (see Mills 1959: 125-6).

In this sense, political philosophers face an even more difficult task than their counterparts in art. Because art is not primarily an academic discipline, it is often possible to find some portion of the population that is receptive to new work, even work that breaks sharply with the past. It is much more difficult, in contrast, for new ideas to penetrate the academic consciousness. There is probably no reason why this must be so, but the academic arena has a tendency to become hermetically sealed from within. Academics often became academics precisely because they became infatuated with certain ideas when they were young, and they naturally have difficulty bringing themselves to recognize that the inspirational ideas in which they invested their careers have not and will not work. Indeed, there may be nothing more difficult than trying to get someone to understand something when maintaining their current intellectual commitments requires that they not understand it. Faced with what often seems like a black hole for new ideas, then, incrementalism appears to be the safer strategy. And sometimes, no doubt, this strategy may bear fruit. But this is not how political ideas outside the academy tend to rise and fall. Incrementalism is one thing, but incrementalism in the face of rapidly moving erroneous but bold ideas out in the real world is foolhardy. The political philosopher, as Nietzsche correctly realized, needs to not only reach for the pen in such times, but also for the hammer (Nietzsche 1990). Dangerous ideas need to be directly confronted and attacked, and ideas that have proved impotent or counter-productive no matter how promising they once seemed cannot be allowed to frame the debate forever.

Another form of incrementalism that I should mention here is hyper-specialization. There a growing tendency in all fields of inquiry, and political philosophy is no exception, to be broken

down into smaller and smaller subfields as the field matures. This tendency has been demonstrated in value theory by the creation of environmental ethics, bio-ethics, global ethics, business ethics, and so on as distinct subfields of inquiry. Even though these subfields are formally denominated parts of ethics, given the connection between moral and political philosophy they often deal with issues within the realm of political philosophy. The creation of ever-finer subfields of inquiry, however, necessarily makes the focus of those involved in them much narrower, and therefore makes the creation of new, broader, generalizable theories of political philosophy much less likely. Moreover, once born, these subfields tend to branch off like the lives of Derek Parfit's famous duplicated man (see Parfit 1984: 200-1, 215-6, 242-3, and 287-9), with each branch quickly establishing its own conventions, specialized expertise, language, and literature. New faculty are hired expressly to focus on one of these subfields or another and having been categorized like this, may find it difficult to be taken seriously if they try to do something else. Innovations in thinking in one subfield are not easily discoverable by those in others, partly because people tend not to look beyond their own backyard, and partly because the particularized language and literature each develops makes them less accessible to outsiders. Of course, I am not denying that important work can take place in such subfields; indeed, under the current circumstances, this may be where the most important work is currently being done. But the barriers erected by subfield divisions often serve to stifle more general advances and to make more particularized advances that can generalize harder to access. Once begun, however, such fragmentation is almost impossible to reverse. The only real avenue of response is to try to build awareness of the danger hyper-specialization presents and do whatever may be possible to break down the walls that hyper-specialization tends to erect.

8. Political philosophy and economics and the relationship between empirical and moral argument

Another reason why contemporary political philosophy has become so timid about advancing new ideas is that it has ceded much of the territory of practical relevance to economics. An example of this is the question of what government should do, if anything, about unemployment, and the threat automation presents to our economic well-being. Another is whether and if so to what extent economic growth is an unabashed good, and in either case what we should do about the possibility that we are moving into a period of secular stagnation (see, e.g., Gordon 2016).[9] While political theorists have been writing about economic inequality for decades, unemployment, economic growth, and many other issues that have to do with economic justice are today often viewed as issues that only economists may discuss, at least among those who currently hold senior positions in university departments and leading journals and publishing houses and therefore have the most influence in setting the agenda of the profession. This is not good for political philosophy, and it is not good society, for it suggests that many issues of great public import are simply empirical disputes to be resolved by those who purport to be (but in reality are not even if they do not admit or realize this) mere technicians trained in determining what economic policies will have what economic effects. Indeed, economists often act as if moral reasoning plays and should play no role in their discipline at all. Economics is about *means*, they say; the selection of *ends* is up to someone else (see, e.g., Robbins 1932: 23). Because I have detailed the extent to which this is not true elsewhere at great length (see Reiff 2015a: 11-15), I will not say more about this point here, but I will point out that this widely-held belief among economists leads them to apply moral principles on a barely conscious or sub-conscious level, leaving these principles too far off-stage for their own much less anyone else's critical examination

and review. This, in turn, prevents us from recognizing that moral principles are actually central to our decision about what to do in these cases and thereby prevents us from considering what those moral principles might require. Economics, after all, is just the causal part of political philosophy. The moral part is what is commonly done by political philosophers, and it is morality that tells us what to do in cases of empirical uncertainty by advising us which risks we should take and which we should eschew (see Reiff 2015a: 13-15).[10]

9. What can go wrong with theories in political philosophy

There are various other ways in which theories in political philosophy can go wrong even when they do attempt to tackle issues of primary importance.[11] Understanding these is important not only if we are to analyze and construct theories of political morality, but also if we are to understand where the profession of political philosophy can go wrong. Some of these problems, of course, are more serious than others, and later I shall discuss these particular problems further. But for now, it may be helpful to have a list of all of the ways in which theories can go wrong in one place. In considering this list, however, remember that just because a theory can be criticized on one or more of these grounds does not mean those criticisms are correct. Indeed, much of what political philosophers do consists of arguing about whether some theory is afflicted with one or more of these problems or not.

A theory may be *incorrect*. In this case, the theory makes predictions that turn out to be wrong—that is, the predictions that the theory makes are either empirically untrue or contrary to what morality actually requires us to do according to some other, more persuasive theory or perhaps merely our considered moral intuitions. In either case, one way to deal with this problem is to shrink the scope of the theory—in other words, apply the theory to a more limited set of circumstances in which the problems with the broader theory do not arise. This is arguably what

Rawls did in describing his theory of justice as fairness as a political conception, which he then distinguished from a comprehensive conception (see Rawls 2001: 14). If this is not possible, however, the theory may have to be abandoned. An example of the latter kind of theory is the view that if you want to help the poor, give money to the rich, and it will "trickle-down" to those less fortunate like manna from heaven. This view, as I have argued at length elsewhere, is empirically false and morally reprehensible (see Reiff 2015a: 61-2, 99; 2015b: 66-70; 2012), although it continues to be the unwavering policy of the Republican party (see Cassidy 2016).

A theory may be *trivial*. In this case, the predictions the theory makes are true, but insignificant or obvious, regardless of whether they purport to be primary or secondary. This is the basis of the criticism leveled by Stanley Fish against *Law's Empire* and Ronald Dworkin's theory of adjudication (see Fish 1989). To deal with this problem, a theorist could broaden the scope of the theory or give it further content in order to make it more useful and important. But many times, doing this effectively requires a new theory altogether, which means the old theory might as well be abandoned.

A theory may be *empty*. In this case, the theory makes predictions only about a certain set of cases and there are in fact no cases which are actually members of that set. This is the criticism Hegel makes against Kant's theory of freedom, and that political perfectionists make against liberalism—specifically that liberalism's only policy is permissiveness, and that liberalism is accordingly empty of guidance about what we should do (see Reiff 2007: 202). It is also, for example, what was (among other things) claimed to have been wrong with President Trump's theory that he lost the popular vote only because of widespread voting fraud by undocumented immigrants, for almost no examples of such illegal voting could be found (see Tackett and Wines 2018). Emptiness is a serious problem, and if true it is probably impossible to remedy. Again, a

theory which suffers from this problem might as well be abandoned, for it only has relevance in the hypothetical worlds created in the academy. As far as the real word goes, empty theories cannot be used for anything but to mislead and to deceive.

A theory may be *incoherent*. This can happen in a variety of ways. For example, a theory could apply inconsistent assumptions, or it could be impossible to articulate or apply, or both. This is one of the criticisms I make elsewhere against nihilism (see Reiff 2007: 197-9). Many other theories fall into this category too. Other examples include the claim that economic austerity is expansionary**,** which is conceptually incoherent as well as being empirically untrue (see Reiff 2015a: 113-34, 2015b:1-40), and the claim that all government regulation is antithetical to the idea of a free market economy (see, e.g., Viner 1927: 231-232; Osborne 2007; Reiff 2017b). Unfortunately, theories that are actually incoherent often have great intuitive appeal—that is, they seem plausible on a superficial level and only reveal themselves to be incoherent when subjected to more detailed consideration. This is why, despite their incoherence and their failure in the past, many incoherent theories continue to walk zombie-like into the future.

A theory may be *indeterminate*. In this case, the theory does not make specific predictions about what state of affairs shall obtain, but it does make general ones. That is, the theory eliminates some possible outcomes, but more than one outcome may still be possible under the theory. A theory like this may nevertheless be very valuable because eliminating some options is often very useful. On the other hand, if there are too many options that would still be consistent with the theory, the theory may need to be supplemented with another so that it can generate more specific predictions. The indeterminacy objection is one of the objections I raise to the difference principle, the principle governing the distribution of social primary goods for which John Rawls is justly

famous, and to luck egalitarianism (see Reiff 2012). In these cases, I think these indeterminacies are irresolvable, but in many cases, they are not.

A theory may be *utopian*. In this case, the theory relies on unrealistic assumptions about human nature and/or circumstances, and therefore does not make predictions that are likely to be useful in the real world. Sometimes it may be good for a theory to be a little utopian, because it is possible that if people embrace the theory, some sort of moral transformation may occur. There is nothing wrong with encouraging people to listen to the better angels of their nature. Arguably, this is what happened when we embraced theories against racial discrimination—initially, some people thought that we could not expect people to treat members of other races the same way they treated members of their own race, but by declaring that all races should be treated equally, we helped change people's attitudes. Today most people agree that racial discrimination is wrong and should not be permitted, although given the success of race-baiting in the 2016 US presidential campaign and the UK Brexit vote, not as many as I had thought. On the other hand, the assumption that socialism would eventually work a moral transformation of people's attitudes regarding what distributive justice required proved to be a spectacular failure, despite what G. A. Cohen thought even unto death (see Cohen 2009).

A theory may be *untestable*. In this case, the assumptions on which the theory relies and/or the predictions that it makes are not amenable to empirical refutation or proof. Many theories suffer from this problem, at least in part, for it is difficult to experiment with theories for the design of society; one can usually only implement them or not and hope for the best. But this does not mean that theories that are untestable should be rejected. There are many things we know but cannot prove that still can and should provide powerful reasons for action. On the other hand, as Mark Twain is reputed to have said, "it's not what you don't know that gets you into trouble, it's what

you know for sure that just ain't so." An example of the latter is the view that housing prices cannot go down everywhere at once, a view that helped produce the 2008 financial crisis (Ip 2018). So care should be taken before acting on any theory that is untestable in advance.

A theory may be *impractical*. Such a theory may be conceptually correct, but there are such practical impediments to its implementation or to obtaining the data it requires that there is no chance it could ever be put into effect. This is one criticism that is raised against Robert Nozick's historical entitlement theory of distributive justice—given that almost nothing that is currently owned was initially justly acquired and thereafter only justly transferred, a huge amount of rectification would be required and this is so impractical that discussion of his theory and its ramifications amounts to nothing more than an academic exercise.[12] This is also an objection that can be raised to Ronald Dworkin's "envy test," which describes how one could ensure a just initial distribution of resources (see Dworkin 2000: 67-8, 70, 73, 85-6). While the envy test may be a practical way of making a fair initial allocation of resources on a lightly-populated desert island where there are few resources to be divided, it requires information that we do not know and could not possibly obtain in the world in which we actually live. Although it may be useful sometimes to know that something is conceptually possible even if not actually possible given our current limitations, we can often become deluded by such theories into thinking they tell us more about our lives than they actually do. Such theories should accordingly be approached with caution.

A theory may be *self-defeating*. A theory is self-defeating when doing as it recommends makes it less likely that its goals will be achieved (see Parfit 1984: 3-51, 87-100). A theory that directs one to consciously plan to be more spontaneous, for example, would be patently self-defeating. In an article called "The Politics of Masochism," I claim that liberal egalitarianism is self-defeating, or at least self-limiting, because it will naturally produce the background conditions

necessary to trigger economically masochistic behavior among the very people it is designed to assist (Reiff 2003). Elsewhere, I claim that a belief in collective responsibility is self-defeating, for it encourages people to behave wrongly—if you know you will get blamed for the wrongdoing of others even if you behave well, and there is always *somebody* who is going to behave badly, why not commit some wrongdoing yourself and at least get some personal benefit out of it? (Reiff 2008). A theory that is self-defeating, of course, effectively provides its own reasons for abandonment.

A theory may be *too easily subject to misuse*. All theories, even if correct, can be misunderstood and accidentally or perhaps even deliberately misapplied. Sometimes, these unintended consequences may be anticipated and therefore headed off at the proverbial pass. But sometimes a theory may be so easily misunderstood, and corrective measures so easy to ignore or difficult to implement, that the theory is likely to be more dangerous and destructive than helpful. It may be, for example, that torture can sometimes be morally justified—maybe even morally required (see, for example, the argument for torture made in Kamm 2011: 3-72). Those that believe this (and similarly controversial positions) should feel free to make their views clear. But when they do, they should also recognize that views like this can be easily misappropriated, extended beyond their intended scope, misinterpreted in dangerous ways, and otherwise misused with real-world political consequences. Political philosophers should always be alert to this possibility and take action to minimize the chances it will occur. If they do not, they may find their theories used for purposes they find perverse and with which they would seriously disagree. Indeed, this is exactly what has happened to the difference principle, which has among other things has been used to provide moral cover for the "trickle-down" theory of supply-side economics, thereby increasing economic inequality, not reducing it as Rawls intended (see Reiff 2012). And it is not sufficient to

respond to a charge of unintentionally aiding and abetting evil by saying that one's theory has been misapplied if one could have anticipated this misuse and attempted to preempt it.

10. The aversion to real world issues and the fear of controversy among contemporary political theorists

Another way on which political theory can go wrong has nothing to do with defects in the conception or operation of the theory itself but relates to whether philosophers today are sufficiently willing to take the risks required for primary political theory to be created. This should not need to be said, but it does—political philosophers should not shy away from issues that are, well, *political,* in the sense of being controversial statements about what to do about issues of great public import that actually have some possibility of being instantiated in the real world instead of being merely expressions of unlikely-to-ever-be-realized utopian ideas. This does not mean that this is *all* political philosophers should do; merely that this is *one* of the things that political philosophers should do. Yet many political philosophers today, especially some of those at our most prestigious academic institutions, seem to be fervently committed to never saying anything that could possibly have any effect in the real world and thereby bring controversy down upon them. And I am not just talking about junior faculty who fear not getting tenure and therefore censure themselves to avoid any possible blowback to their careers. Many senior, long-tenured political philosophers today seem afraid of saying anything controversial too, unless it is so completely infeasible as to be effectively non-threatening. "Nothing a political theorist says could possibly have an effect on the real world anyway," a respected senior political theorist who was then head of his department at a world-class university once told me.[13] And the explanation for this cannot simply be that having adopted timidity and blandness as a survival strategy when junior, these attitudes become impossible to shake once senior. The pressure to conform created by the

tenure-system has always been there, yet risk-taking was much more prevalent in political philosophy in previous periods and still is prevalent in at least some other disciplines today. The risk-aversion characterizing the discipline today must accordingly have some other sources that we need to identify and control if political philosophy is to become more vigorous and topical once again.

One source of this overly self-deprecating and inevitably self-defeating attitude is what has become the general corporatization of the academy. Universities, the claim now goes, should be run like businesses, and the first rule of running a business is to ensure that everyone who is employed in that business respects the authority of their line managers, does what they are told, and gets along. Whether this is indeed good for business I will leave to others to debate, but even if it is, in the academy it is deadly. People who respect the authority of their line managers tend to respect authority full stop, and as Hillel Steiner, one of the few giants of modern political philosophy who is still active today once quipped, "used to be, having a lack of respect for authority was a requirement for being an academic."[14] The reason for this was that a willingness to defy authority was seen as a necessary attribute if one was to be willing and able to effectively express and defend positions that might be disruptive to the existing technical, intellectual, and/or political order. But this has changed. The more hierarchical an organization becomes—and the corporatization of universities has made them much more hierarchical—the more a respect for authority seems essential if the organization is to run smoothly.[15] Even challenging the views of colleagues who are merely co-academics and not academic administrators can be seen as detrimental to good order and discipline within the academy today, although one would have thought that academics should be used to having their views challenged. If such challenges occur on a regular basis, this is seen as interfering with the "collegiality" of a department, and a

department that lacks collegiality is viewed as "dysfunctional." Such a department is then likely to get little or no support from its academic dean and to have the number of its academic lines and programs frozen if not cut or allowed to disappear through attrition. So while the impetus behind enforcing collegiality may be well-intentioned, it creates an academic environment that is unlikely to be lively and dynamic and is antithetical to intellectual progress within the discipline.

Rather than having its intellectual edges softened to such an extent that the chances of disharmony have been effectively eliminated, a discipline like political philosophy needs philosophers on both the left and the right whose commitment to their views brings with it the continuing possibility of conflict. While these philosophers should respect each other as persons and therefore treat one another as persons deserving of such respect, this does not mean they must feign respect for one another's ideas. Indeed, depending on what these ideas are, it may be the case that they should *despise* one another's ideas (see Berlin 2002b: 229 for the attribution of a similar view to Mill). Political philosophy involves the most fundamental notions of how society should be organized and what each of our roles should be in this, and given the importance of such issues, people often do and really should care deeply about them. In such cases, it is simply unreasonable to expect those with strongly opposed views on these issues to treat each other as if their respective views were simply inconsequential matters of taste. Nor is it true that all political theories on either the left or the right can be viewed by those on the other side as within what Rawls famously called "the burdens of judgment," or the reasons why reasonable people can reasonably disagree (Rawls 1993, 1996: 54ff). The farther we go in either direction the harder this becomes. But out of the heat of intellectual conflict, great ideas are born, fleshed out, and become capable of withstanding attack. So we are hampering the development of primary political philosophy by insisting that academics not disrespect each other's work in the name of what in reality is a false civility. It is

far more important to have a diversity of views among political philosophers than construct a department where everyone feels comfortable together at a backyard barbecue, even if this makes a department more difficult to manage. Ease of management is not a formula for invention and innovation; it is a tell-tale sign of a mediocracy, an organization in which being mediocre becomes a necessary attribute for success. This, in turn, threatens to turn the academy into what Simon Leys called "The Hall of Uselessness" (Leys 2011: esp. 42). Any university that has a group of political philosophers that all get along is likely doing something very wrong.

11. The role of ideal theory in political philosophy

One of the ways that many current political philosophers have avoided clashing with one another is to abstract out from the questions that divide us—to do what is currently labeled "ideal theory." Ideal theory is commonly thought to be theory about what would be most just in an ideal world, whereas non-ideal theory is viewed as being about what would be "second-best" (or third best of fourth best), justified only where practical considerations indicate that moral compromises have to be made given the world in which we live. And ideal theorists often express outright contempt for the non-ideal. The contemporary political philosopher Andrew Mason, for example, asks "what reason do we have for thinking that any adequate analysis of an ideal such as justice must be conducted in the light of an investigation of what is feasible?" (Mason 2004: 255).[16]

But in my view, this represents a misunderstanding of how ideal theory was originally conceived. Ideal theory was originally not meant to be ideal in this very strong sense, but to be ideal only in the sense that it was to be tested under the assumption of *favorable* circumstances; that is, circumstances that are realistically achievable, not highly unlikely or infeasible (see Rawls 1971, 199: 216; Simmons 2010). And even then, whatever theory one develops in this light must be further tested to see if it can bear what Rawls calls "the strains of commitment" (Rawls 2001:

102-3, 124-6; Rawls 1971, 1999: 123-6, 153; Waldron 2016). These are the reasons why people might urge renegotiation of a theory once they become aware of how it applies to them. If a theory cannot withstand the strains of commitment, this is a reason to reject it, regardless of whether it might be suitable in a world where people were not so obsessed with furthering their own interests even at the expense of the interests of others. Clearly, this is not the same thing as imagining what theory would hold in an ideal world, where there would be little scarcity and much altruism, and few (or perhaps no) people who might be trying to subvert the theory or who would be incapable of conforming to it. Ideal theory in the weaker sense does not disregard human nature and circumstances. Ideal theory in the stronger sense is simply a silly waste of time, for no theory that does disregard human nature and circumstances is worth fretting about. Moral theory is supposed to provide us some guidance as to how we should live, and theory that is ideal in the strong sense rejects this as a goal.

I could say more about how those who think of themselves as doing ideal theory have gone astray, but the debate over ideal/non-ideal theory has absorbed far too many intellectual resources already.[17] I do want, however, to point to one side-effect of the current obsession with doing ideal theory in this strong way that has particular relevance to the issues we are discussing here: the focus on the ideal functions as a way of putting down those who can be characterized as doing non-ideal theory, for it allows this latter kind of theory to be dismissed as simply a *modus vivendi*, as being intellectually impure and morally compromised. It allows usefulness to be used against itself. The claim to moral primacy by the ideal is accordingly something that all serious political philosophers should reject.

12. **Political philosophy and the politics of the academy**

Political philosophers can be based in philosophy departments, politics departments, economics departments, law schools, business schools, and elsewhere as well. You would think that a field which is this interdisciplinary would have a lot of influence in the academy, especially now that interdisciplinarity has become intellectually chic. But it does not. Political philosophy's interdisciplinary nature simply produces a dilution of its power within the academy and therefore results in its marginalization. Political philosophy is marginalized by non-political philosophers because it is easily accessible and popular (at least when taught well), and its potential accessibility and popular appeal is thought to be evidence that it is intellectually unsophisticated. It is marginalized by political scientists because it is theoretical and conceptual and not empirical and therefore not a source of the kind of sizeable grants that political scientists spend most of their time pursuing and which give those who can attract such grants power and prestige within the university. It is marginalized by law professors because it is not substantive "black-letter law" and is therefore viewed as not helping students understand and win ordinary or even constitutional legal disputes and therefore, as I heard one very respected professor of legal and political philosophy (incorrectly, in my view) tell his law students in his introductory lecture, "the material we will cover in this class will not help you get the Mercedes, if that is what you want." And it is marginalized by economists because it is not mathematical and is deliberately normative in the moral (as opposed to the prudential) sense, even though the mathematization of economics is itself a fairly recent development (see Debreu 1991)[18] and as I have already noted, economics is morally normative too although economists often do not realize this or admit it when they do. Taken together, these various forces not only disempower political philosophy within the academy, they also make courses in political philosophy far less numerous and therefore far less accessible than

existing or at least potential student demand for such courses would otherwise suggest they should be.[19] Because of the way in which the academy is organized, political philosophy tends to be both undersupplied and insufficiently supported.

13. **The language of political philosophy**

If political philosophy is to have some effect on the real world, political philosophers must speak in a language that most people can understand and reject the exclusivity of the mathematical language of economists. They must also eschew the dry and sometimes symbol-laden language that has become so common in other forms of philosophy today. They must use real-world examples, draw on popular culture, sometimes employ sarcasm and humor, and try to make their writing as vivid and vivacious as literary if not popular fiction. Political philosophy should be philosophy for the masses, even when it is written as a direct communication to the elite for *their* communication to the masses, and therefore always should be written so as to be accessible and meaningful to everyone and beyond that, to actually move people to take action and radically reform their opinions about the world.

Unfortunately, political philosophy written in this way, even when it makes well-defended and innovative claims, is often dismissed as rhetoric. Effective rhetoric is then further disparaged by being characterizing as a polemic, which today has a derogatory connotation even though the word "polemic" merely means "argument," albeit a particularly vigorous one perhaps (see generally Norris 2017; Garsten 2011). Rhetoric, of course, is also simply forceful argument, and using rhetoric or even creating something that can be characterized as a polemic does not mean that ideology and emotion have been substituted for reasoned argument.[20] Indeed, all language is rhetoric; it would be impossible to speak in any other way (see de Man 1979: 105-6, quoting Nietzsche). Language that is supposedly drained of rhetoric is just dull; what is left is still rhetoric,

it is just ineffective rhetoric, for it has been deliberately designed to not be engaging for the reader. The current insistence on understatement and on cool, supposedly objective, emotional detachment in political philosophy is simply a form of self-delusion, a way of simulating doing something more akin to science than a truly qualitive evaluation and analysis of the arrangements under which we live. The latter approach is the one political philosophers should take, for two reasons.

First, it is not the political philosopher's job to adopt the so-called "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986). That view may be appropriate in other areas of philosophy, but not in political philosophy. Indeed, it is not even possible in political philosophy. Political philosophers are always somewhere, immersed in a society that has an established political culture and usually many established subcultures too. Even historians of political philosophy are somewhere, writing about the present even if they are doing so by describing what is in reality the present's views of the past. Every political culture has its fundamental presuppositions, and the very fact that these presuppositions are so fundamental means that they are difficult to see for those who are already steeped in examining the world through the moral framework that these presuppositions necessarily create, much less to abstract out from them.[21] This does not mean that political philosophers should not try to be aware of these presuppositions and how they shape the very way everyone who accepts them thinks about problems in political philosophy—it merely means that when they do examine these fundamental presuppositions they have to be discussed in passionate terms or the essential "fundamental-ness" of these ideas is either being missed or inappropriately denied.

Second, as Berlin argued in the passage I quoted at the beginning of this essay, the very role of the political philosopher (or an important part of it at least) is to motivate social and political action, either in the sense of trying to put the brakes on irrational or morally objectionable political

movements or start or fuel rational and morally praiseworthy ones. Argumentative intensity is necessary for this. Of course, this does not mean that we should all adopt the Trumpian practice of inflammatory hyperbole, an approach that results in the complete debasement of language and the elimination of meaningful categorization through the elimination of every shade of grey (see Hohmann 2018). I am not advocating moving from one extreme to another here. In other words, I am not arguing that the political philosopher should adopt the extreme internal point of view, the point of view of the fully committed participant, although much supposedly primary and even secondary political philosophy is done from this perspective without acknowledging it, and even worse, affirmatively concealing it under a patina of detachment created through the use of formal and artificially restrained language. What is a required is not feigned detachment with covert commitment, but what H. L. A. Hart calls a "critical reflective attitude" (Hart 1994: 57); that is, "a general disposition to comply with the requirements of some duty-imposing norm(s), a general disposition to object to contraventions of those requirements by other people, and a general disposition to acknowledge the appropriateness of censure that is directed against one's own contraventions of those requirements" (Kramer 2018: ch. 3).[22] The critical reflective attitude, in turn, is what enables the political philosopher to adopt a moderate internal point of view, the point of view of those who strive to present not only justified but also persuasive recommendations about the proper organization of our social and political life, recommendations to which they themselves are and acknowledge themselves to be subject. And this requires the effective use of rhetoric, not just a fetish for argumentative comprehensiveness. In any event, there is no reason why political philosophy cannot be vivid in its use of metaphor and imagination and otherwise written in an engaging style and not also be rigorous, focused on precise distinctions, and argumentatively tight (See Dryzek 2010; Garsten 2006; O'Neill 2002; Grassi 1980). The fact that contemporary works

of political philosophy do not often exhibit both sets of characteristics is the fault of these works themselves, and not some inherent contradiction between style and substance.

14. **Analytic v. Continental political philosophy**

In the Anglo-American world, most political philosophy is what is called "analytic" political philosophy. Of course, most philosophy in the Anglo-American world is analytic philosophy, so the fact that that there should be analytic political philosophy should come as no surprise. All analytic philosophy (political and non-political) prizes tight argumentation, precise definition of terms, and conceptual analysis. But *non*-political analytic philosophers often criticize political analytic philosophers for not being analytic enough. And it is true that in addition to clarity, argumentative precision, and completeness, the best analytic political philosophers strive to be colorful, accessible to outsiders, topical and relevant to real world decisions. Some non-political analytic philosophers see this as a compromise of analytical purity and precision. On the other hand, many non-analytic philosophers and other kinds of intellectuals and laypeople too criticize analytic philosophers for being so obsessed with analytic precision that their work is dry, tedious, relentlessly abstract, intellectually atomized, and boring, providing an experience for the reader that is similar to eating a loaf of toast. And if this is the result of a full commitment to the analytic style, it is not a bad thing for political philosophers to avoid this approach and instead make their work more accessible. Regardless of whether analytical political philosophy is *too* analytical in the objectionable way I have identified, however, the criticism that it is insufficiently analytical should clearly be rejected.

In any event, analytic political philosophy is just a style—political philosophy can also be written in what is called the "continental" style. Technically, the term "continental" is used to refer to a group of post-structuralist and post-post-structuralist philosophers (both political and non-

political) who are mostly French-speakers, such as Derrida, Foucault, Rancière, Deluze and Guattari (see, e.g., Rancière 2012). But the term is also sometimes used more loosely to refer to anyone who does not write strictly in the analytic style, including such giants as Kant, Hegel, and of course Marx, although there is a form of Marxist political philosophy produced in the Anglo-American world called "analytic Marxism," which is the kind of Marxist material produced by the political philosophers G. A Cohen, Jon Elster, John Romer, and others too (see Cohen 2001; Elster 1985; Romer 1986). And of course, some philosophers (especially contemporary philosophers) who are from the continent nevertheless write in the analytic style, mostly in English but sometimes in their native language, and some Anglo-American philosophers write in the continental style (see, e.g., Cornell 1992). So the distinction here is not strictly based on national origin or language but rather on the means of expression one chooses to use. In any event, for my purposes it is sufficient to understand the term "continental" as simply a catch-all for anyone who does not employ the analytic style.

The reason I am mentioning this is that analytic philosophers often disparage continental philosophy, and especially the continental style, as being flabby and undisciplined, interminably long-winded, plagued by vague and ill-defined terms and full of obscure and incomplete arguments or no arguments at all. In other words, the continental style is assumed to reflect a lack of not only argumentative precision and rigor, but also substance, especially in more modern works. This, in turn, leads analytic political philosophers and therefore most of their students to believe that continental philosophy—or at least contemporary continental philosophy—is not a worthwhile source of ideas or arguments or insights into our respective and often shared social and political experience.

But this is not correct. Continental philosophy—or at least continental political philosophy, simply has different objectives in mind. Instead of clarity and argumentative precision, it believes that such attributes are mere illusions, for in its view language is not capable of accomplishing this, and instead proceeds more like poetry or fiction. It is much more interested in the use of history and metaphor as a source of argumentative power and less obsessed with avoiding detours and digressions, and, in any event, is more often designed to create a general impression rather than communicate a precise argument. Its appeal is therefore intended to be more holistic than finely targeted, more tentative and tantalizing than final and complete. It aims to provoke and raise questions rather than provide answers. But this does not mean it does not aim to persuade. It simply aims to persuade that rather than looking for precise solutions, one should look more generally to refine one's attitudes and overall approaches. Continental political philosophy is accordingly just as rigorous as analytic political philosophy in the sense that it attempts to fully explore the issues it addresses—it just has a wider conception of what such exploration means. As political philosophy, it can accordingly be just as effective in stirring its readers to action (if not more so) than the kind of philosophy that is so often written in the analytic style.

But I am not arguing that we must or should abandon the argumentative precision and completeness of analytic political philosophy for the looser more impassioned approach of continental philosophy. Indeed, I have already stated my view that if we want to, we can have precision and completeness and present arguments that are more engaging too. What I am arguing here is that it is simply irrational to ignore a style of philosophic inquiry that has had such a huge influence on the world, despite its lack of analytic precision. While non-analytic philosophy is marginalized in most English-speaking philosophy and politics departments, it is the dominant basis for literary criticism and analysis and is also extremely influential in sociology, women's

studies, cultural studies, and in many other fields as well. Denigrating continental political philosophy leads many analytic political philosophers to miss the various insights into contemporary problems or phenomena that other academics have repeatedly found in works of continental philosophy. And not only works of continental philosophy from the left. Indeed, if we are to understand the thinking beyond the lurch to the right that is occurring throughout much of the world today, we had better stop blaming this on pure irrationalism and start playing closer attention to the works of continental political philosophers like Giovanni Gentile, Carl Schmitt, Joseph de Maistre, Othmar Spann, Julius Evola, Alain de Benoist, Ivan Ilyin, and so on, all of whom have been extremely influential on the contemporary right (see Gregor 2005; Gentile 2002; Spann 2011 [1930]; McCormick 1997; Evola 1995; Berlin 1990; Barbashin and Thoburn 2015; Benoist 2017; Sheehan 1982: 50-63). It is accordingly important for students of political philosophy to understand both the continental and the analytic reservoir of ideas on offer and the advantages and disadvantages of using the analytic or the continental style as their primary form of expression. Instead of eschewing the continental style and dismissing the ideas of continental philosophers without even bothering to try and understand them, political philosophers of today must be trained to embrace both styles and be able to draw sustenance and inspiration from each tradition.

15. **The domination of political philosophy by the right**

It has become conventional wisdom that the academy is today dominated by the left. And indeed, survey after survey reveals the academy to be overwhelmingly populated by those who self-identify as being on the left, especially although not exclusively in the US (see Abrams 2016; Kristof 2016; Brandt 2016; Turner 2017; Brooks 2017). But despite the results of these surveys, I do not believe that this is true, or rather, to the extent that it is true it is true in a way that is more

misleading than it is informative. In my experience and the experience of many of my colleagues who have been teaching long enough to remember a different kind of academy, there are important aspects of the university that are not addressed in surveys of the political attitudes of its teaching personnel. And if we look at these, we find that the academy today is overwhelmingly conservative, indeed even corporatist in the internal sense, regardless of whether the university as an institution or the majority of its teaching personnel may be left-leaning in an outward sense. By this I mean that with regard to its approach to education, its willingness to try out new ideas, its suitability as a home to those who are not "organization" men or women (see Whyte 2002), its ever greater reliance on highly-paid professional administrators who see themselves as "management" and therefore as separate and distinct from the faculty they administer, its emphasis on a certain kind of uniformity and its suppression of and reaction to internal dissent, its intolerance toward ideas and proposals that are radical but not so clearly unachievable as to be effectively harmless, the academy is not liberal at all (see Williams 2013 (reviewing Gross 2013); Newfield 2017, for similar observations).

There is also reason to doubt that the traditional categories of left and right continue to have the meaning we might once associated with them. Indeed, given the general shift toward the extreme right in America and other supposedly liberal democracies too, the right is far more to the right than it used to be. Those who at one time would have considered themselves on the moderate right are now likely to see themselves as being on the left given how far the right has moved away from them. Even traditional conservatives may not feel totally comfortable identifying themselves as being on the right today, for while they argue for positions commonly perceived as being on the right, they do so from within the framework of political liberalism (see Reiff 2007: 174-5). In contrast, the right today is mostly an illiberal and *anti*-liberal right, a form of perfectionism that

joins Aristotelian and sometimes even Nietzschean moral theory with Platonic political theory and neoliberal economic theory (see Lilla 2016: esp. *x-xxiI;* Heilbrunn 2017; Reiff 2015b: 120-25, 2017a and b; Holmes 1993). It is not an effort to restore the traditional values of the recent past, or an effort to transmit culture across generations because the maintenance of existing values and ways of life is perceived as an important good, but an effort to impose values perceived as only being fully embraced in a rose-colored version of the ancient world, values that have actually been rejected for generations now and whose contemporary embrace would not be conservative but radical indeed. The fact that more academics identify themselves as being on the left than used to be the case, if this is a fact (see Gravois 2007 for an in-depth discussion of this), is accordingly not persuasive evidence that the range of political opinions represented in the academy has actually changed, or that it is currently over-weighted toward the "rightward-adjusted" left than it should be.

In any event, even if members of the academy as a whole are now further to the left than they used to or should be, this is not true in political philosophy, the discipline that gives the concepts of "left" and "right" meaning. Regardless of what has happened to the university as a whole, since at least the turn of the century the discipline of political philosophy has become more and more conservative, not only in its resistance to change, willingness to encourage and then embrace new work, and administrative attitudes, but in its outward political outlook as well. There are a number of reasons for this, each of which I shall now discuss. And I shall begin with the reason behind so much of the shift to the right in politics lately: the influence of money.

16. How political philosophy has been influenced by funding from the right

Given the steep drop off in public funding (see Reiff 2014), bringing money into one's department is far more important in the academy today than it used to be. Unfortunately, financial

support for political philosophy is raised most easily from the rich, and the rich tend to be on the right. Of course, it took some time for those on the right to realize that funding the education of those interested in political philosophy rather than simply trying to cut funding for education full stop could be an effective tool for advancing their own interests. For example, back in 1949, the right libertarian and one of the founding fathers of economic neoliberalism, F. A. Hayek, warned that intellectuals and especially philosophers (by which he meant political philosophers) were moving the masses toward socialism, or at least toward "progressive" political views, which Hayek regarded with what I think can be fairly characterized as unabashed contempt (see Hayek 1949: esp. 419, 423-4). While his response was to deny that such intellectuals (except of course, himself) had any special claim to wisdom and to assert that the influence of progressive ideas was undeserved, attacking the problem that he and others on the right perceived by inciting anti-intellectualism proved to be an only partially effective strategy (Hofstadter 1962, 1963). Over time, however, those on the right realized that a more effective strategy might be to generate intellectuals of their own.

The activist program to influence public concerns and attitudes through the production of more and more conservative political philosophers found its most direct expression in what has come to be known as "the Powell Memo" (Powell 1971). That document, written in 1971 by Lewis F. Powell, then a prominent Richmond, Virginia lawyer who would shortly thereafter be appointed by President Nixon to the Supreme Court, set forth what has since been frequently characterized as the blueprint for the radical right's subsequent attack on a wide variety of economic regulations and progressive policies and institutions in the United States.[23] The memo pitches the civil rights movement, the labor movement, the anti-war movement, the environmental movement, and so on as all constituting dangerous attempts to undermine "freedom." And while the memo identifies a

number of basic institutions of society as co-conspirators with these movements, the one that receives the most attention is education. "College campuses" are described as some of the "most disquieting" sources of what is characterized as an "attack" against free enterprise, the rule of law, and democracy itself (Powell 1971: 1). As a solution, the memo proposes a multipronged program, including the funding of conservative think-tanks and scholars, the vetting and criticism of textbooks that are viewed as unfair to conservative viewpoints, the demanding of "equal time" for conservative speakers on campus, and perhaps the most important tactic, the "rebalancing' of university faculties to include many more conservative viewpoints (Powell 1971: 15-20). Funding for the appropriately conservative "scholarly journals" is also to be provided, as is funding and encouragement for the publication of books and articles by conservative scholars more generally (Powell 1971: 22-3). Powell's great insight was accordingly that the political attitudes of American academics are not all of equal strategic importance. The attitudes of those teaching courses and producing books that are designed to inform and influence the political attitudes of students and the general public and provide so-called academic expertise to the government and media matter more. To move society to the right, it was not necessary to dominate the academy as a whole, but merely to more effectively infiltrate the disciplines dedicated to the analysis and constructive formation of these political attitudes, such as political philosophy, wherever it may be occurring. And that is what the right and especially the radical right has been doing even since.

Indeed, aside from being an excellent example of what Richard Hofstadter called "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" (Hofstadter 2008), the memo proved to be inspirational to the radical right. It "electrified the Right, prompting a new breed of wealthy ultraconservatives to weaponize their philanthropic giving in order to fight a multifront war of influence over American political thought" (Mayer 2016: 76). It was expressly mentioned by the billionaire Charles Koch

(one of the two ultra-conservative Koch brothers) when he helped found the Cato Institute, the right-libertarian think tank that has become the mother of numerous other right-libertarian think tanks, funds, and organizations also supported by one or both Kochs. Together, these institutions fund right-leaning scholars, provide financial assistance to right-leaning students, underwrite the dissemination of right-leaning views, publish and republish right-leaning books at subsidized prices, and so on. Powell's memo also inspired Joseph Coors, a supporter of the John Birch Society, to become the first donor to the conservative think tank that would become the Heritage Foundation, and to support many other conservative organizations as well (see Mayer 2016: 77-8; Temin 2017: 17-18). In the wake of the Powell memo, the ultra-conservative Richard Sciafe has so far helped bankroll some 133 conservative institutions outside the academy (Mayer 2016:76-7). And inside the academy, the Koch brothers alone are now funding programs at some 283 four-year colleges and universities (see Mayer 2016: 171, 363-366; Levinthal 2015; Schulman 2014: 99). Like-minded donors who do not want their conservative philanthropy to be open to public scrutiny can contribute to this effort anonymously through a vehicle the Koch brothers set up called "the Donors' Trust," or through other established conservative funding conduits like the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, the Bradley Foundation, the Sciafe Family Foundation, the David Horowitz Freedom Center, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, and others, all of which directly or indirectly support right-leaning academic programs, research centers, institutes, or professors or agitate for the greater representation of right-wing ideas in the academy or both.[24]

Of course, the institutes, research centers, and professorships set up with money from the contemporary right are ostensibly open to political philosophers of all persuasions. But donors actually do have an official say over who is being hired and what is being taught in some cases (see Levinthal 2014; O'Harrow and Boburg 2017), an unofficial say in others, and in any case can

accomplish the same thing by simply funding courses or entire programs of courses that would otherwise not be taught and will in practice only attract academics who are sympathetic to the right because they have not just right-wing but radical right-wing views effectively embedded in them (for example, free-enterprise institutes, Adam Smith centers, libertarian think tanks that are in practice dedicated to the promotion of right libertarianism but not left libertarianism, and so on).[25] And while there is nothing wrong with studying a wider range of philosophers of the right (indeed, this is essential if students are to understand what is happening in the world today), it is a problem if the works of these philosophers are taught uncritically or if this results in philosophers of the left not being given the attention that their historical impact indicates they deserve. I leave it to each reader to make his or her own judgment about whether certain of their colleagues can be characterized as teaching their courses in this way, but there does seem to me to be an unfortunate tendency for institutions that host programs funded by the radical right to hire political philosophers who are not only right-leaning but also view their role as promoting certain received views rather than challenging them or developing new ones. Indeed, I suppose something like this attitude is built into the very idea of conservatism, whereas something like its opposite is built into liberalism.[26] In any event, once hired into these ideologically aligned positions, these philosophers then generate a wide range of material designed to support what had been intellectually isolated right-wing views, and even more importantly, to reproduce themselves by training PhD students to be sympathetic to the right even in its current historically unrepresentative extreme formulation. As a result, generations of academics engaged in doing some form of political philosophy, whether they be in philosophy, politics, economics, business, or law, have now been shaped or at least significantly influenced by the push toward the right that the Powell memo recommended. And

this rightward push will no doubt continue if something is not done to counteract it (see Carpenter 2015; Lipton and Williams 2016; Sessions 2017).

I realize, of course, that there are left-wing think tanks, research centers, and institutes too. But there are not nearly so many as those that have arisen on the right since the issuance of the Powell memo, and those that do exist are not nearly so well-funded. Liberal philanthropist George Soros, for example, is often named by those on the right as the left-wing version of the Koch brothers, and he does give a lot of money to educational institutions. But the overwhelming majority of this goes to international or international-focused programs or a university's general fund, and therefore its effect on the formation of political opinions and present and future opinion-makers within the United States is minimal (see Levinthal 2015). For whatever reason, neither left-leaning organizations or think tanks nor left-leaning wealthy individuals nor unions have seen fit yet to support research centers, academic programs, and professorships of political philosophy in comparable numbers to those funded by the right (see Levinthal 2015; Drezner 2017). And even when they do, they have not tended to try to influence much less control the ideology behind what is being studied and taught. To make matters worse, some of the more left-leaning academic research centers that do exist are now being closed under pressure from right-wing boards and/or state legislatures (see Carpenter 2015: Moynihan 2017)). There is even a bill under consideration in one state's legislature that would require its public universities to consider political party affiliation when hiring new faculty (see Martin 2017), which in light of the claimed liberal bias of academia toward the left, is obviously an attempt to institute what can only be seen as affirmative action for academics on the right.

Perhaps this would all be less concerning if those currently in the academy on the left were producing more innovative, engaging, and persuasive progressive political philosophy. Regardless

of whether they now represent an overwhelming majority or a minority of political philosophers, however, most of those on the left are doing nothing more than thinking of yet more ways to tweak Rawlsian approach to distributive justice. Even those who embrace luck egalitarianism, the now also dated but still most popular alternative to the Rawlsian approach, are merely tweaking their views and not proposing anything new.[27] If we are to produce a new generation of progressive ideas, we accordingly need to take some more proactive steps. And by this I do not mean that universities should be encouraged to begin refusing money from the right, although this may sometimes be appropriate depending on the strings attached. I mean that universities should at least insist on transparency in funding (see Herzog 2018), for sunshine is often an effective disinfectant. But most importantly, it is necessary for all concerned parties to start building an infrastructure for supporting moderate right and left-leaning political philosophy that is more comparable to the infrastructure that the radical right has already successfully established and which is now dominating the generation of political philosophy and political philosophers.

17. Answering the charge of liberal bias

Of course, even if we ignore the changes initiated by the Powell memo—that is, even if we assume that conservatives are actually underrepresented among political philosophers in the academy today given their significance in the intellectual cannon and in history, this does not mean that conservative *ideas* are necessarily underrepresented, or that liberal faculty are so intellectually biased that they are incapable of teaching conservative ideas as well as liberal ones and of mentoring students who find conservative ideas attractive or already identify as being on the right. The argument that they cannot is to resort to the argument that only people who belong to a certain group can understand its beliefs or represent its interests, an idea that the right has been disparaging for years whenever it is made by those on the left. But academics have a long and proud traditional

of teaching ideas with which they disagree. Why should we assume that those on the moderate left, which (unlike the current immoderate right) expressly embraces toleration as a fundamental value, are incapable of treating conservative or ultra-conservative faculty or students or their ideas with the requisite degree of respect? There may of course be individuals who fail to live up to their duties in this sense, and those who self-identify as being on the current right do constantly complain that they are treated with disrespect by their universities and departments, although there is also some conservative pushback on this (see Heath 2017). But there is no non-anecdotal empirical evidence that there is any systematic bias against conservative ideas or the persons who promote them on university campuses today.

Nor is the anecdotal evidence often cited by those on the right as suggesting a lack of tolerance for conservatives and their ideas on campus as concerning as they claim. Most of this relates to conservative persons and ideas that are so extreme they are more properly categorized as belonging to the far right, or the radical right, or as it is often misleadingly described today, the "alt-right." More traditional conservative individuals—those who trace their intellectual lineage to thinkers like Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott and who argue for their positions within the moral framework provided by fundamental presuppositions of political liberalism, do not seem to be complaining (see Abrams 2017). For the most part, those who are complaining reject the idea that modern society should provide room for both the moderate right and the moderate left to operate. Instead, they hope to create a society in which everyone is required to embrace a very specific set of (often extreme but always comprehensive and prescriptive) social and political views (see Caiolo 2017; Kopetmen, Bharath, Schwebke, and Robinson 2017; Hartocollis 2017; Beckett 2017). These more extreme ideas should indeed be discussed on campus—it is important that students be exposed to them in an ordered and contextualized manner and that research

continue to be done on them so that the influence and the danger they represent can be better understood. But as Rawls noted long ago, it is not unjust to be intolerant of persons who personally embrace these ideas, for if given the chance they would suppress those who disagree (see Rawls 1971, 1999: 192). Indeed, it would be absurd not to mention self-defeating if the big tent of academia was to be considered appropriately inclusive only if it included those who would kick everyone else out. The existence of "doctrines that reject one or more democratic freedoms is itself a permanent fact of life, or seems so," but under political liberalism, such views are *unreasonable* and therefore must be contained, Rawls warns us, "like war and disease—so that they do not overturn political justice" (Rawls 1993, 1996, 2005: 63-4 n. 19). In other words, liberalism is not just about permissiveness; liberalism has teeth, and it not improper for it to bear them sometimes. And Rawls is not alone in maintaining such a view—T. M. Scanlon also argues that it is not intolerant to not tolerate the intolerant, nor espouse tolerance as official doctrine, nor deny the intolerant the opportunity that others have to state their views (see Scanlon 2003: 196-7). Many others argue similarly as well (see, e.g., Popper 2013: 581 n. 4). And while much more needs to be said about how to distinguish unreasonable views that are not worthy of toleration from reasonable ones that are, the difficulty presented by such line-drawing and the partial indeterminacy that will inevitably remain does not render the core moral conclusion here invalid. No institution within a liberal society is required to tolerate those who seek to undermine the very basis of liberalism's existence, and while they *may* do so when the intolerant do not represent a threat to the moral framework that liberalism erects, and in any case the response to intolerance must always be proportional to the threat presented, in the present context, the threat is abundantly clear.

Finally, even if we were to find the anecdotal evidence of the intolerance of certain extreme conservative viewpoints within academia disturbing and concerning, the weight of such evidence currently suggests that the more worrisome pressure on academics today is actually coming from the right. Obviously, this suggestion runs counter to the claim usually expressed by those on the right as the problem of oppressive "political correctness" (see, e.g., Pérez-Peña, Smith, and Saul 2016),[28] and I am not denying that views on the right as well as on the left are sometimes inappropriately suppressed on campuses today (see Hartocollis 2016). But there is no left-wing version of the Professors Watchlist, a list of university teaching personnel who are supposedly expressly biased against the right (see Mele 2016; Butler 2016). Death threats are made mostly against those perceived as being on the left, trolling attacks as well, so it is right-wing bullying of faculty who are perceived as being on the left that seems the most intense (see, e.g., Palumbo-Liu 2018; Lieberman 2017; Mann 2016). At the very least, the limited anecdotal evidence of the practice of unjustified or excessive intolerance on the left is no more extensive than the anecdotal evidence of such conduct on the right.

18. The misapplication of the principle of neutrality

In addition to the influence of right-wing money and the resulting over-representation of right-wing personnel and the over-promotion of right-wing ideas, the development and transmission of progressive ideas in political philosophy is also being hampered today by a misapplication of the principle of neutrality. This is the idea that in a liberal society, government should remain neutral between competing comprehensive moral doctrines, conceptions of the good, and ways of life—that is, not officially favor or support one or some collection of views over others (see Reiff 2007:178-9). Unfortunately, in the academy, this principle has been incorrectly assumed to require never openly taking a stand on any contemporary controversial

issue currently subject to political debate (see Marneffe 2002). Faculty not only feel pressured to keep their opinions to themselves, whatever these may be, they often pressure themselves not to reveal their own opinions thinking that this is what they must do to appear neutral to their students. This is especially problematic because this attitude is found mostly on the left and successfully applied mostly to those on the left as well. Those on the anti-liberal right, after all, do not believe in the principle of neutrality—indeed, there is long intellectual tradition now of arguing that the liberal commitment to neutrality leaves it unable to stand up for its own beliefs (see, e.g., Schmitt 1996: 70; Strauss 1953: 4-5), although this has not stopped those on the right from accusing those on the left of lacking neutrality.[29] And it is true that under liberalism, government neutrality is believed to be fundamental because it allows if not produces value pluralism, which in turn is viewed as the hallmark of a liberal society. But values have to come from somewhere, and if they are not going to be imposed by the government under liberalism then educational institutions, be they public or private, along with religious institutions, the family, and culture are the places from whence they must come. Indeed, the university may be the most important value-imparting institution on this list, for it is the only one that can be counted on to make a systematic presentation of a wide range of sets of values rather than just one. While it would be a violation of neutrality for government to direct university professors to express a specified view, or to prohibit them from expressing a specified view, it is essential that professors be allowed to express their *own* view if they are to both inform their students "what is out there" in terms of substantive values and assist them in developing their own reasonable comprehensive moral and political doctrines and conceptions of the good (see De-Shalit 2005).

But this does not mean I am suggesting that political philosophy professors on the left should strive to become partisan shills. It is of course true that one way to be persuasive is to

present your opponent's position in a distorted, unflattering light, or perhaps not even make clear that there *is* an opposing view. That is what I am accusing those on the currently immoderate right of being too inclined to do. But one can have opinions, make clear what those opinions are, and still present all sides of a debate in their best possible light. In other words, we can have neutrality in *presentation* without insisting on the neutrality of the *presenter*. And this is all the principle of neutrality requires. The sooner the left learns to recognize this the sooner its self-destructive tendency to suppress its own and support the other in the name of proving its neutrality the quicker some progress can be made.

19. The political philosopher as role model

Some respected philosophers nevertheless believe that university professors should keep their opinions on "political" matters to themselves for a different reason—they believe that the opinions of such people (but not, apparently, themselves) on such matters are worth no more than the opinions of anybody else (see, e.g., Fish 2016). In other words, they are openly hostile to the idea of claimed "expertise" in any area where ordinary people are capable of forming reasoned opinions of their own (see Nicholas 2017). Not that this is an unreasonable position in other contexts. Such a thought is enshrined in American law with regard to what subjects may be the subject of expert testimony before a jury—only issues that are so outside the normal range of experience that some sort of specialized technical knowledge is required to understand them may be the subject of such testimony (see, e.g., Rule 702, Federal Rules of Evidence). I suppose that what is driving this concern is a desire to prevent the erosion of autonomy—if we give more weight to the opinions of so-called experts than to our own on subjects we are capable as analyzing ourselves we will be effectively delegating the formation of essential portions of our belief set and our corresponding reasons for action to others. But there is nothing about recognizing that the well-

informed and well-reasoned opinion of others is an important resource in deciding what we each should do or believe that means we are implicitly giving up our responsibility for making these key decisions in our own lives. The loss of autonomy concern here is simply overstated.

Indeed, it is especially important that we know the opinions of professors who are supposedly trained in analyzing the issues on which they speak, even if we are capable of coming to reasoned opinions on these ourselves without such assistance. First, because all political philosophers have views about what they discuss (if they do not they have no right to call themselves political philosophers), so if professors disguise their personal views, this is deceitful, and insisting that professors be deceitful is inconsistent with and undermining of every other aspect of their mission. Second, because there is no reason to think it would be better for professors to conceal their views when this only makes it more difficult for students to evaluate the neutrality of the presentation, even if we assume that such attempts at concealment would be successful—something which there is also good reason to doubt.[30] And finally (and most importantly), under liberalism it is important for students to see professors of political philosophy as role models. What I mean by this is that if a student respects the argumentative rigor and analysis of a particular professor, the student is more likely to take the fact that this professor endorses a certain view as a reason to take that view seriously. Correspondingly, it a student finds a particular professor's intellectual discipline lax, the student is more likely to find the fact this professor endorses a certain view as a reason to be wary of it. This is simply human nature. The professor is a natural role model (either to model oneself after or to model oneself against) whether anyone likes it or not. It is self-defeating to deny this important aspect of university education by discouraging academics from making their own views known, especially in a discipline like political philosophy which

exists only in the academy. For if academics do not make their own views clear, there are no other role models in political philosophy available.

20. Political philosophy at the elite private institution

In the United States, unlike most other liberal capitalist countries, a large percentage of our elite universities are privately funded. Obtaining an education at one of these private institutions is very expensive and, even when generous scholarships are available, the children of the wealthy still have a striking advantage in admission (see Reardon, Baker, and Klasik 2012; Bailey and Dynarski 2011; Aisch, Buchanan, Cox, and Quealy 2017). Of course, tuition at our public universities is rising too, and this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed, but this is a matter best discussed elsewhere.[31] My point here is that because the profession tends to be led by work being generated by those teaching at elite institutions, and because most of these in the US are private, we must consider whether the way our higher education system is organized and funded has unintended but important effects on the development of the discipline of political philosophy.

I think it does. One of the major topics of interest among political philosophers is the distribution of wealth, income, and opportunities and the problems that the unequal distribution of these resources can cause or perpetuate in our society. One such inequality, of course, is that there tends to be a vast difference in the resources available at private as compared to public educational institutions. As a result, those who teach at private institutions tend to get more research leave, have to teach fewer courses, and have more access to research support than those at public institutions. And it is difficult to rail against privilege and the undeserved benefits this may convey when one is in the midst of privilege and in receipt of those benefits oneself. It is especially difficult to do this before an audience composed mostly of privileged students. Indeed, I cannot believe that

philosophers of the left will not lose their edge within elite private institution, even if they manage not to be completely co-opted or seduced into quietude by the wealth and privilege they find around them. Throughout history, left-leaning political philosophy has been most vibrant and credible when it takes place in difficult surroundings, in buildings where one sticks to the floor, not in those that are so grand and sterile that one can eat off of it. It is probably no accident that the most active philosophers on the left (and especially the far left) are currently based in European (public) universities, while the most active philosophers of the right are based in the United States. Much as I like the comfort, resources, and high-quality students available at elite US private institutions, I am afraid we must recognize that the way our higher education system is funded here has an inevitable dampening effect on the amount, type, and vigor of high-profile work being generated by left-leaning political philosophers.

Not that I am suggesting those on the left should refuse to teach at such institutions—obviously, teaching at such institutions increases one's prestige and the profile of one's work, and it is important for the students at such institutions to be exposed to more progressive ideas given that they are more likely than their public university counterparts to be become leading figures in government, business, and perhaps even culture. And in the current economic environment, few academics have the luxury of being picky about where they teach. But more has to be done to by the left to bring political philosophy and important political philosophers to the public university, where they are not mostly teaching the children of the existing elite. I recognize that in public universities, political philosophers need to be protected from right-wing legislatures that would try to directly suppress their work (see Purdy 2015), but attempts at direct suppression can be made at private universities too. In any event, it is easier to fight direct suppression than the subtle seduction of co-option, for in the latter case there is no easily identifiable aggressor to address.

21. Why it is so difficult to break from the past

I have one final thought on why we are seeing so little original, vivacious, relevant primary political philosophy being produced today, on either the left or the right. We are moving into a period where a generation of great political philosophers—those who made significant primary contributions to contemporary political philosophy, like John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Robert Nozick, Brian Barry, G. A. Cohen, and so on have died and those remaining are becoming silent due to age. The profession is now in the control of their students or, in more and more cases, in the control of the students of their students. Such people naturally tend to view their role as carrying the message of those who inspired them forward into the future rather than blazing a new path themselves and indeed, the theories of the last previous generation of great political philosophers still overwhelmingly dominate the subject matter of current work. This is not to suggest that the work of these greats does not deserve continuing study, explication, and refinement. But at some point, greats cast as much shadow as they do light. The students of great primary political philosophers and their students were no doubt great students, and some may have even become great secondary political philosophers, writing insightfully about their mentors, but the students of greats and the students of their students rarely turn out to be great primary political philosophers themselves, even in the unlikely event they do produce some primary material. As the greats pass on, the profession accordingly becomes ossified in their wake. Indeed, it is no accident that the most recent burst of advancement in political theory—the one that began with Rawls—came at a time when political philosophy was thought to be dead and no one then writing felt much a personal connection with those viewed as the greats of the past.

What can be done about this? Must we wait for enough time to go by that no one feels much of a connection to this last generation of greats anymore? I hope not. What is required to get

things moving again is striking new thinking from what will turn out to be a new generation of greats. But innovation in political philosophy rarely attracts consensus, especially when it comes from unconventional places, which it most often does. Indeed, genius most often comes out of nowhere. So how we are going to recognize who might be among the next generation of greats? Well, the most important thing when searching for new ideas is to get out of their way—by that I mean that we need to be a lot less concerned with pedigree and position than we currently are and a lot more generous in our willingness to entertain new theories that come from outside of what has become for many of us a hermetically sealed and stultifying intellectual bubble. Students can in fact be of great help to us here—they have little intellectual investment in existing theories, so are naturally more willing and able to recognize something as intriguing when it comes along wherever it might come from. If we just listen to our students—not as a source of new ideas themselves (although of course we should be listening for this too), but as a guide toward the "new music" of political philosophy, we might just be able to hear the future coming.[32]

Notes

[1] Berlin asked, "is there still such a subject as political theory" given that "no commanding work of political philosophy has appeared in the twentieth century" (Berlin 1978). See also Plamenatz 1960 (discussing whether political philosophy was indeed dead).

[2] Brian Barry began to worry that this was happening as long ago as 1979. See Barry 1980: 283-284.

[3] This was not always so. See, for example, the frequent use of humor in Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Nozick 1974), which is no doubt one of the reasons why it is so appealing and has become so influential, and the frequent use of striking metaphors and strong language throughout J. M. Keynes's work, which has also been hugely influential.

[4] Closer to home, Stanley Fish makes a similar point in Fish 1989a.

[5] Note that attempts to summarize the field in just a single sentence are rare. Even attempts at more comprehensive descriptions are uncommon. For one of the better versions of the latter, upon which I shall draw in a moment, see Rawls 2007. The most illuminating and succinct portion of this discussion appears on pages 10-11 as section 2. A slightly expanded version of this particular section of the discussion also appears in Rawls 2001 as section 1. The most famous attempt at describing the field, however, is probably the essay "What is Political Philosophy?" by Leo Strauss (see Strauss 1959). Despite being almost 50 pages long, however, I find this piece

distinctly unilluminating. A somewhat more illuminating and significantly shorter effort can be found in Raphael 1990.

[6] See Nozick 1974: 6 ("moral philosophy sets the background for, and boundaries of political philosophy. What persons may or may not do to one another limits what they may do through the apparatus of the state, or do to establish such an apparatus. The moral prohibitions it is permissible to enforce are the source of whatever legitimacy the state's fundamental coercive power has"); Norman 1998: 279, ("Political Philosophy for methodological Rawlsians, and just about everyone else, is commonly taken to be a branch of moral philosophy"); and Strauss 1959: 10-12. A long discussion of this point is also set forth in Kymlicka 2002: 5-7.

[7] For a discussion of both views and reference to some of their respective adherents, see Larmore 2013. Note that Larmore himself ultimately concludes that political philosophy cannot address the characteristic problems of political life "except by reference to moral principles understood as having an antecedent validity." So while Larmore also argues that political philosophy should be considered an autonomous discipline, whatever that is supposed to mean in this context, his assertion is more semantic than substantive, for he concedes that political philosophy necessarily contains a moral element, which is the only point I am making here.

[8] Berlin again: "I think that political theory is simply ethics applied to society, to public issues, to relations of power, that and nothing else. Some people think that political theory is simply about the nature of power; I don't think that. I think that political theory is about the ends of life, about values, about the goals of social existence, about what men in society live by and should live by, about good and evil, right and wrong. Neutral analysis of the facts of public life is sociology or political science, not political theory or philosophy." From Jahanbegloo 2007: 57-58.

[9] The phrase "secular stagnation" actually comes from Larry Summers (see DeLong 2013).

[10] For a similar argument against the primacy of empiricism, albeit in a somewhat different context, see Oakeshott 1975.

[11] In this section I draw in part but expand on Elster 1989: 1-3.

[12] See Elster 1982: 230: "[Nozick's] *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* is the best-known statement of libertarian thought. Brilliant and frivolous, it generates excitement, provocation, and irritation in equal measures . . . [but] it does not take a careful reading to see that it has virtually no implications for policy."

[13] See also Biggle and Frodeman 2016: "Philosophers have mimicked scientists in all the worst ways: practicing a highly specialized discipline and speaking primarily to one another."

[14] In personal conversation with the author.

[15] C. Wright Mills, who began to worry about this in his own discipline (sociology) some time ago, calls this the "bureaucratization" of the academy. See Mills 1959.

[16] For an answer to Mason's question, see Farrelly 2007. See also Cohen 2003.

[17] For those interested in perusing some of the existing literature on these issues, see, e.g., Gaus 2016; Valentini, 2009, and the entire issue of *Social Theory and Practice* 34:3 (2008), which is devoted exclusively to a discussion of the ideal/non-ideal debate, especially Stemplowska 2008 and Robeyns 2008.

[18] For some criticism of this turn toward mathematization, see, e.g., Krugman 2009; Levinovitz, 2016.

[19] See, for example, Moore 2011: 125: "Based on the survey, it is clear that political theory is treated as being not essential to political science in a disturbingly large proportion of political science departments." My own experience suggests the same is true of philosophy departments.

[20] See Dowding 2018: 250: "Given that emotion is always part of our reasoning process, and given acknowledgement that our emotions ought to be engaged in our deliberative assessments, we cannot always assume that we are being manipulated simply because our emotions are engaged."

[21] For a discussion of the fundamental presuppositions of liberalism and how these differs from various perfectionist viewpoints on both the extreme left and the extreme right, see Reiff 2007.

[22] See also Kramer 1999: 166.

[23] For a discussion of the role the Powell memo played in re-activating the radical right in the 1970s, see Mayer 2016: 72-91; Phillips-Fein 2009: 156-165; MacLean 2017: 125-126. See also Schmitt 2005. Note, however, that while Schmitt questions whether the Powell's memo sets forth an influential statement of conservatism, this attempt to diminish the importance of the Powell memo misses the point. Powell's memo is not intended as an ideological defense of conservatism; Powell just takes conservative ideas as given. What the memo does is set forth a game plan for opposing liberalism, undermining its influence in American society, creating and supporting competing conservative institutions, and replacing those with liberal ideas in existing institutions with more sympathetic free marketeers wherever possible. It is as a plan of action, not an intellectual statement, that it has been incredibly influential.

[24] See Sleeper 2016; Scheiber 2017 ("Like the Kochs, the DeVoses are generous supporters of think tanks that evangelize for unrestrained capitalism"); Coaston 2017) (describing the influence of the ISI).

[25] See, e.g., MacLean 2017: esp. ch. 3; Schuessler 2017 (describing the political influence of the right-wing funded Claremont Institute and the Claremont Review of Books); Platt 2016 (Charles Koch Foundation plus two anonymous donors provide funding for 11 new faculty members, up to five post-doctoral researchers, and an annual conference or workshop); Schalin 2015. Note that the Pope Center, at which Schalin is based, is itself a celebration of attempts to move the academy to the right. The Center is a conservative think tank founded and funded largely by Art Pope, the wealthy chairman and C.E.O. of Variety Wholesalers, a discount-store conglomerate, whose money helped flip the North Carolina legislature to the Republicans in 2010 and who also bankrolled the 2012 election of Republican Governor Pat McCrory (see Purdy 2015; Mayer 2011). Pope has also funded a number of other think tanks and research centers, and at one-time was the chair of the national board of Americans for Prosperity, the Tea-Party group founded and heavily funded by Charles and David Koch (see Carpenter 2015).

[26] Something like this observation is made the basis of the argument presented in Cholbi 2014.

[27] I suppose I should also mention here the movement for universal basic income (see Van Parijs and Vanderborght 2017), which is finally getting some traction now after languishing in obscurity for decades. Despite being heavily promoted by some on the left, however, it is actually based on a right-wing proposal from the 1960s (see Friedman 1968). And while its advocates see this as a strategic advantage, I do not think this means that it can be considered an example of new progressive thinking, even if its adoption in its liberal form were not entirely politically infeasible. In the US, at least, the only way it could actually have a widespread impact is if it were reclaimed by the right and used to justify the elimination of all sorts of existing government assistance to the poor.

[28] For a thoughtful defense of political correctness, see Owen 2016.

[29] The thinking here, I suppose, is that the left is to be judged in part by its compliance with its own standards, even if the right rejects them. It is also, no doubt, a way of "working the refs," a

way of intimidating the left so that it will be overly solicitous to the right so as disprove even unfounded claims of bias (see Krugman 2016).

[30] See Kelly-Woessner and Woessner 2006: 496 (almost 90% of students surveyed felt confident they were able to identify their professor's political leanings even if the professor did not make those leanings explicit).

[31] For one possible solution to this problem, see Reiff 2014.

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