



# DEWEY STUDIES

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**Mission:**

*Dewey Studies* is a peer-reviewed, online, open-access journal of the John Dewey Society, dedicated to furthering understanding of John Dewey's philosophical work and enlivening his unique mode of engagement with the vital philosophical questions of our time.

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

LEONARD J. WAKS  
Temple University, Emeritus  
Editor-in-chief



*Volume 2 · Number 1 · Spring 2018 · Pages 1-5*

The editors of *Dewey Studies* are pleased to bring you the first issue of our second Volume. Please join me for a brief guided tour.

The issue features an invited panel on public philosophy, organized by Eric Thomas Weber (University of Kentucky), Executive Director of The Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA). John Dewey was, as Weber makes clear, a public philosopher *par excellence*. As detailed in James Wallace's excellent study *Liberal Journalism and American Education: 1914-1941* (Rutgers University Press, 1991), Dewey was a prominent public intellectual who, along with such luminaries as Randolph Bourne, Herbert Croly, and Walter Lippmann, shaped liberal sentiment in the period spanning the two world wars. Dewey wrote literally hundreds of articles on pressing public concerns in such periodicals as *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, not to mention occasional appearances in *Fortune*, and other mass circulation magazines. Such was his influence during his heyday that, it was said, Americans of liberal persuasion didn't quite know what to think until John Dewey spoke. Dewey's conception of public philosophy has influenced the global movement for public journalism. Dewey even earned a cover story in *Time Magazine* in 1928, and a U. S. postage stamp in the *Prominent Americans* series. The German philosopher scientist Count Hermann Keyserling claimed that "The two contributions of America to world culture are Professor Dewey and Negro jazz."

So what about public philosophy today? The panel on public philosophy includes three articles. In the first, "Philosopher-as-Liaison? Lessons from Sustainable Knowledge and American Philosophy," authors Danielle Lake (Grand Valley State University) and Paul Thompson (Michigan State University) engage recent discussions on publicly engaged research and scholarship, concluding that this work can be augmented through more direct engagement with the American philosophical tradition. Although they do not belabor this point, their suggestions for public scholarship run parallel to Dewey's.

In the second, "Taking it to the People: Translating Empirical Findings about Black Men and Black Families through a Black Public

Philosophy,” Tommy Curry (Texas A&M University) and Gwenetta Curry (University of Alabama) offer a view of public philosophy as a critical discipline for uncovering, disputing, and overturning public misconceptions, including those spread or reinforced by other public intellectuals by confronting them with the results of scientific inquiry. Their case in point is the public image of the Black male as hypermasculinized, dangerous, and sexually predatory. The authors show how such images are sustained not only through entrenched racist attitudes but also by fashionable discourses circulated by Black public intellectuals. They critique these interpretations of Black males by reference to empirical research results contradicting them. The Currys’ argument makes implicit reference to Peirce’s well known discussion of “The Fixation of Belief.” If entrenched racism rests on the method of tenacity, the interpretations of public intellectuals rest on the equally flawed method of reason: their views are merely “agreeable to reason,” a phrase Peirce puts in quotes to indicate that such views, in his words, “rest on no fact in the world.”

The third, “Evaluating Public Philosophy in Higher Education: Lessons Learned Baking Philosophical Bread,” Anthony Cashio (University of Virginia, Wise) and Eric Thomas Weber offer four criteria for recognizing, evaluating, supporting, and rewarding public philosophy: substance, accessibility, invitingness, and community-building. The authors explain how these criteria emerged and guided their efforts in “Philosophy Bakes Bread,” their popular radio show and podcast. Blogs and podcasts are twenty-first century alternatives to the mass media of the twentieth century Dewey so effectively employed. The authors show how philosophers can use them to engage contemporary publics on a global scale.

The panel puts on the table several different approaches to the aims and methods of public philosophy. The editors of *Dewey Studies* invite our readers to respond to these panelists, and to offer fresh approaches for contemporary public philosophy. We intend to publish further panels on issues related to the work, life and times of John Dewey. Please contact the editors with proposals and suggestions.

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Turning to our regular features, this issue includes an interview of the Slovakian philosopher Emil Visnovsky by Eli Kramer of Warsaw University's Institute of Philosophy. Visnovsky is professor of philosophy at the Department of Philosophy and History of Philosophy, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia, and one of the leading voices on Dewey and American Pragmatism in Central Europe. The interview explores his introduction to American philosophy and pragmatism, his interactions with Larry Hickman, Richard Rorty, and other American philosophers, and the state of pragmatism and Dewey studies in Central European philosophy.

Two research notes demonstrate the strength of American philosophy and pragmatism in contemporary China. In the first Professor Sun Ning (Fudan University) describes the work of the John Dewey Studies Center at Fudan, and its massive Dewey translation project, which has completed the translation into Mandarin of the collected works of Dewey—the first complete translation of the collected works in any language. In the second, Professor Wang Chengbing describes the ambitious William James project at Beijing Normal University, where an international interdisciplinary team is collecting, interpreting, analyzing, editing and translating the classic philosophical texts of James. The project aims to account for the spirit and texts of James' pragmatism, as well as its process of development, core propositions and key concepts, and the status and influence of James within pragmatism and philosophy more generally. It is ironic that as the Dewey Studies Center at the University of Southern Illinois—the center where the collected works were compiled—has been closed, these centers of research in American pragmatist studies and Dewey studies are flourishing in China.

Finally, this issue offers two book reviews. In the first, Seth Vannatta (Morgan State University) discusses *Contemporary Philosophical Proposals for the University: Toward a Philosophy of Higher Education* edited by Aaron Stoller and Eli Kramer (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). In the second, Independent Scholar Robin Friedman assesses the collection *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Harvard University Press,

2018), and in particular the editors' efforts to place Dr. King in the mainstream of American public philosophy.

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This issue of *Dewey Studies* demonstrates the on-going diverse interest in, and influence of, John Dewey throughout the world. The editors ask readers to submit articles to Associate Editor Jared Kemling ([jaredkemling@gmail.com](mailto:jaredkemling@gmail.com)), ideas for panels and special issues, interviews, research notes to Leonard Waks ([ljwaks@yahoo.com](mailto:ljwaks@yahoo.com)), and book reviews and composite review articles to Reviews Editor Daniel Brunson ([daniel.brunson@morgan.edu](mailto:daniel.brunson@morgan.edu)).

PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY PANEL  
INTRODUCTION

ERIC THOMAS WEBER (University of Kentucky)



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In 2017, I had the honor to be encouraged to propose a panel of papers on public philosophy for *Dewey Studies*. John Dewey was the quintessential public philosopher. He did not have all the answers, but he saw how important it was for philosophy not merely to play with fun ideas for privileged scholars, but to consider the obligations that intellectuals have for making life better for and with our fellows.

Among the authors of each of the three papers included in this panel is at least one member of the Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA), whose mission is “to use the tools of philosophical inquiry to improve people’s lives and enrich the profession of philosophy through conversation and community building.” John Dewey was a champion of the instrumentalist outlook, which saw ideas as tools for making life better.

In their paper, “Philosopher-as-Liaison? Lessons from Sustainable Knowledge and American Philosophy,” Danielle Lake and Paul Thompson demonstrate how obstructive the impediments to interdisciplinary and publicly engaged scholarship can be in our colleges and universities. There are scholars engaged in such work, but institutional structures and disciplinary traditions threaten public scholars in real, meaningful, and troubling ways. Any future in which public philosophy is to be encouraged must take into account the considerations that Lake and Thompson raise, and can, as they argue, benefit from the example they highlight from sustainability science. We need not reinvent the wheel when we have good examples available to us about how to combat entrenched traditional and disciplinary challenges. The Deweyan idea of the liaison-officer has been fruitful in sustainability sciences, and can be applied elsewhere with benefit. Among their most useful insights in learning from sustainability practices is the overall orientation that they clarify, which draws on the liaison-officer concept from Dewey, while addressing the problems of disciplinary navel-gazing, interdisciplinary out-ward looking from one’s discipline, and feed-back loop dangers that stem from traditional disciplines. Lake and Thompson explain how the liaison officer metaphor informs an approach akin to bridge-building between different disciplines to span boundaries necessary

for addressing problems that reside between the spaces of traditional disciplines. Lake and Thompson are clear about the challenges, dangers, and potential costs to such work, but the risks of failing to engage in boundary-spanning inquiry can mean the failure to address some of humanity's deepest existential threats.

It is important to appreciate the threats and impediments to good public philosophy, a theme in Lake and Thompson's essay as well as in the other two. In their powerful piece, "Taking it to the People: Translating Empirical Findings about Black Men and Black Families through a Black Public Philosophy," Tommy J. Curry and Gwenetta D. Curry note and highlight the threats to philosophers who speak against the more accepted, dominant themes that seem non-threatening to white liberal scholars and journalists. Curry and Curry reveal how some people find it radical to expect empirical evidence for the claims that some theorists advance, especially about Black males. Curry and Curry showcase not only the power and importance of resisting harmful mythologies and unwarranted yet commonly accepted narratives about Black men, but they address debates among scholars in colleges and universities as well as the larger public. Curry and Curry reveal the potential power for self-identity that Black public philosophers can offer for members of the Black community, beyond the academy. They sensitively note that no generalization is hard and fast about all members of any group, yet powerful and harmful narratives that rest on empirically rebuttable claims pervade American culture. These accepted myths and sources of injury are not only levied by a long history of troubling social science research practices insensitive to white supremacy, but also by many prominent public intellectuals of color. Curry and Curry explain how some Black public intellectuals gain prominence in the public view through appeals to narratives that reinforce false beliefs about absentee parenthood and myths about unidirectional intimate partner violence. Curry and Curry demonstrate the enormity of the task of the Black public philosopher, yet at the same time show what kind of difference could be made by a sensitive, confident, and empirically informed public philosophical movement.

The remaining paper, which I coauthored with Anthony

Cashio, my co-host on the Philosophy Bakes Bread radio show and podcast, “Evaluating Public Philosophy in Higher Education: Lessons Learned Baking Philosophical Bread,” concerns our thinking about what we have been doing since the fall of 2016, in planning and then launching the show. We have sought to follow in John Dewey’s footsteps today. What would Dewey do, one might ask? He would be engaging the public by means of writings, talks, newspaper and television interviews, and radio. He would remain engaged in substantive philosophical reflection and dialogue but would not think it enough to enjoy discussions in the comfort of the ivory tower alone. Philosophers can have some fun outside of the cave, but in Plato’s still important metaphor, our friends are inside. And, in fact, in a sense, we still are too, at least about the many things that we fail to think philosophically about. Our friends and the fellows we engage in public philosophy can teach us many things. Still, we have obligations to practice public philosophy. The simple reason is that our world needs more thoughtful, civil discourse as much as it ever has, and at a time when our powers to harm ourselves and our fellows are greater than they have ever been before. At the same time, our institutions of higher education need tools for recognizing, evaluating, and supporting public philosophy. Cashio and I offer four simple criteria as possible tools to that end: namely substance, accessibility, invitingness, and community-building.

I hope that these essays will nudge philosophers out beyond mere speculation about the potential value of public philosophy, only discussed in theory. While there remains need for deep and sometimes technical reflection on what we do and ought to do, each of the philosophers contributing on this panel has practiced public engagement and public philosophy. Each has seen and felt its challenges and has gotten up again to continue the work that Dewey has called our supreme intellectual obligation. The last decade has seen a significant, though still early and budding resurgence of public philosophy. There is still much to be done, however, and scholars inspired by Dewey’s example could be among the leaders and exemplars of this vital, growing, and greatly needed movement.

# PHILOSOPHER-AS-LIASION? LESSONS FROM SUSTAINABLE KNOWLEDGE AND AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

DANIELLE LAKE (Grand Valley State University) &  
PAUL THOMPSON (Michigan State University)



With the purpose of extending recent discussions on the need for—and barriers to—publicly engaged research and scholarship, this article links recent discussions emerging within interdisciplinary studies and sustainability science with American Philosophy and research on wicked problems. Sustainability science, as a domain for problem-inspired, participatory action research, can be seen as an effective counter-point to disciplinary divisions. In order to gain entry into the epistemological and practical challenges within such practices, the article extends recent work by Robert Frodeman that suggests philosophers have a critical role to play in the field (whether political, social, or environmental). The linkages that Frodeman identifies can be used to diagnose critical issues facing efforts towards transdisciplinary work and the academy more broadly. We argue his recommendations can be fruitfully expanded upon by more direct engagement with the American Philosophic tradition. We conclude by showing how the interplay between these fields helps to identify fruitful avenues for affecting systemic change.

Keywords: American Philosophy; Sustainability;  
Transdisciplinarity; Robert Frodeman



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“Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men.”<sup>1</sup>

With the purpose of extending recent discussions on the need for—and barriers to—moving beyond inter- and trans-disciplinarity and towards publicly engaged research, this article reviews and links discussions emerging within interdisciplinary studies and sustainability science with doctrines from classical American Philosophy and research on wicked problems. Philosophers working in the philosophy of science argue key barriers to successful interdisciplinary science reside in a failure to recognize the way that epistemic values, methodological traditions, and both metaphysical and meta-ethical commitments tend to be shared within disciplinary traditions, while divergence is observed when different disciplines are compared. Sustainability science (SS) can be seen as an effective counter-point to these divisions. Conceptualized as neither applied nor basic curiosity driven research, it is seen as a domain for problem- or use-inspired research that requires significant breakthroughs and advances in understanding to resolve. Sustainability science is also characterized as science undertaken in response to “wicked problems”: challenges with large social and economic stakes, irreversible consequences, multiple stakeholders, high levels of uncertainty, low tolerance for error and little agreement about the fundamental problem definition.<sup>2</sup>

In order to gain entry to the epistemological and ethical issues involved we begin by providing a brief overview of the relevant fields, including interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and sustainability science. Given its relevance to these discussions, we next analyze Robert Frodeman’s recent work. Frodeman refers to the trends noted above in developing his critique of the institutional setting of

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, “The need for a recovery of philosophy,” *The Middle Works*, 1916-1917. Vol. 10. Edited by J. A. Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1980), 3-48, 46.

<sup>2</sup> While not characterized as interdisciplinary in Proceedings of the National Academy of Science literature, the sustainability science section often does have authors from more than one discipline.

disciplines in contemporary research universities. He argues that philosophy must take on the task of challenging the barriers that current institutions pose to genuinely sustainable knowledge production.<sup>3</sup> The role philosophers play in facilitating interdisciplinary conversations can, he suggests, be augmented by critique of the organizational and incentive structures currently being perpetuated in universities and disciplinary organizations. For instance, with narrowly framed structures for what counts as legitimate knowledge, efforts to shift the system are stymied.

While Frodeman offers a useful starting point, we argue his work can be fruitfully enhanced by American philosophy as well as systemic and participatory engagement practises. Participatory engagement with people who are not ensconced in disciplinary institutions reminds researchers that they are involved in problem solving. Disciplinary researchers who forget this may obtain data that allows them to publish results, but they will not secure or maintain the interest and cooperation of their community collaborators. It is the focus on problem-solving that provides the impetus for integration across disciplines, an observation well made by John Dewey in the first half of the last century.<sup>4</sup> Yet Frodeman's analysis of the institutional setting is relevant here as well, for there are disincentives for engaged scholarship. As such the linkages that Frodeman identifies can be used to diagnose even further critical issues facing efforts towards transdisciplinary work and the academy more broadly. Such diagnoses identify fruitful avenues for affecting systemic change. First, then, we briefly summarize the dangerous paradigms embedded in disciplinarity.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Frodeman, *Sustainable knowledge: A theory of interdisciplinarity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Zachary Piso, "Integration, values and well-ordered interdisciplinary science," *The Pluralist* 11 (2016), 49-57.

### Disciplinarity (aka “Navel Gazing”)



In *Sustainable Knowledge*, Frodeman asks his reader to critically consider what role knowledge should play in our lives<sup>5</sup>; he rejects the assumption that limitless knowledge production, disconnected from application, is an intrinsic good. The disciplining and sub-disciplining of knowledge operates, he says, under the mistaken assumption that specialization and innovation are limitless goods. We must remain cognizant of the fact that “without interpretation, the data carried by the increasing flows of information are as meaningless as they are overwhelming.”<sup>6</sup> To the extent that disciplinary knowledge encourages an “internal gaze”, to the extent that it comes to “trump the priorities of society at large” and forestalls engagement with those outside of the academy, we have a serious problem.<sup>7</sup>

Frodeman’s use of the term “internal gaze” is intended to summarize a complex set of factors that influence knowledge production in academic disciplines. Disciplinary research builds upon prior findings within a given discipline, and in doing so presupposes that the audience for research results has both the vocabulary and a prior understanding of established findings.<sup>8</sup> What is more, as Josiah

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<sup>5</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Fischer, *Citizens, experts, and the environment: The politics of local knowledge* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> See Katri Huutoniemi, “Interdisciplinarity as academic accountability: Prospects for quality control across disciplinary boundaries,” *Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy* (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2015.1015061> and Stephan Fuchs, *Against essentialism: A theory of culture and society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

Royce noticed more than a century ago<sup>9</sup>—and as a half century of work in the philosophy of science after Thomas Kuhn has firmly established—scientific practice is shaped by implicit ideas or paradigms that reflect the values shared within a disciplinary community. These values are expressed through procedures for grantmaking and peer-review, as well as standards for tenure and promotion. As such, a broad array of standards and practises within science are fixed by processes that are internal to the disciplinary community. It is in this sense that discipline-based knowledge reflects an “internal gaze”.

Although Frodeman’s study concerns knowledge production within universities, navel-gazing is not confined to the academic world. Bryan Norton discusses the Balkanization of knowledge production within different administrative units of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Here, knowledge developed to perform regulatory functions also operates with something like an internal gaze. Norton refers to this phenomenon as towering, reflecting the way that divisions of the EPA were at one time housed in a labyrinth of office towers. As with Frodeman’s study of the university,<sup>10</sup> the creation and maintenance of sharp distinctions between the disciplines and their institutionalization in bureaucracy creates a barrier to integrated thinking that serves public interests poorly.<sup>11</sup>

We are facing, Frodeman says, an impeding knowledge “crisis.” This crisis is caused in part by a shift in power: an ongoing “loss of control over knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> However, a crisis is also an

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<sup>9</sup> Jacquelyn Kegley, “Peirce and Royce and the betrayal of science: Scientific fraud and misconduct,” *The Pluralist* 5, Issue 2 (2010): 87-104.

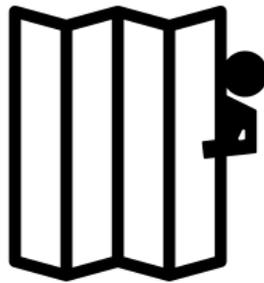
<sup>10</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*. See also Frodeman and Adam Briggie, “When philosophy lost its way,” *The New York Times Opinion Pages* (January 11, 2016), [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/11/when-philosophy-lost-its-way/?\\_r=0](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/11/when-philosophy-lost-its-way/?_r=0).

<sup>11</sup> Bryan G. Norton, *Sustainability: A philosophy of adaptive ecosystem management* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), <http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226595221.001.0001>.

<sup>12</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 27.

opportunity for systemic change.<sup>13</sup> As Huutoniemi points out, “disciplinary networks can interact and communicate, even learn from each other, when there are actual relations and bridges between them.”<sup>14</sup> The question then moves to whether interdisciplinary research is a fruitful response to this crisis.

### **Interdisciplinarity (aka “looking out from within”)**



The oft neglected underlying value of interdisciplinarity, according to Frodeman, is that it reminds us of both the “inherent limitations to knowledge” and its role in addressing “societal needs.”<sup>15</sup> Current university structures fail to take seriously the fact that knowledge is practically limited by our capacity to understand, by “time and money,” and by “research itself.”<sup>16</sup> Thus we should judge both “the overall intellectual merit” of possible research projects and their potential for “broader impact” before we commit resources to them.<sup>17</sup> The US’s National Science Foundation now requires grant applications explain the broader impact of the research on society; this shift is an example of emerging changes currently underway.

Understood as a shift towards looking “outward, away from a

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<sup>13</sup> C. M. Alpaslan and I. I. Mitroff, *Swans, swine, and swindlers: Coping with the growing threat of mega-crises and mega-messes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Huutoniemi, “Interdisciplinarity as academic accountability,” 5.

<sup>15</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

group of peers”, interdisciplinarity is a step in the right direction.<sup>18</sup> According to Allen Repko, “the interdisciplinary enterprise is about building bridges that join together rather than erecting walls that divide.”<sup>19</sup> “*Interdisciplinary study*,” Repko goes on to say, “is not about who can win the argument, but about who can bring together the best ideas of all stakeholders to get the job done.” While Repko concludes interdisciplinary scholars are primed to play the role of recruiter, facilitator, or mediator in work on real world problems.<sup>20</sup> Frodeman calls this argument into question. Interdisciplinarity has limitations.

The shift to interdisciplinarity has—Frodeman says—left us with a number of problems. For one, “the whole system is [still] set up to pin our careers on the judgment of disciplinary peers” and this again incentivizes navel gazing.<sup>21</sup> Many prominent interdisciplinary scholars tend to mimic disciplinarity, seeking to acquire all the tools of the disciplines (a canon, their own conferences, journals and associations, degree programmes, and departments).<sup>22</sup> Secondly, it is not at all clear that “interdisciplinary research does a better job... at addressing societal problems”. Although granting agencies in the industrialized world have increasingly favored projects conducted by multi-disciplinary teams, Frodeman notes that the internal gaze of the disciplines nonetheless continues to shape the refereed journal articles that are the primary product of even interdisciplinary science.<sup>23</sup>

The third problem with interdisciplinarity is that it continues to seek methodologies when instead it should focus on “sharing... particular insights and rules of thumb that have developed in a piecemeal manner.”<sup>24</sup> Frodeman calls this “Methodism,” saying it is a mistake because it “forces a given situation to live up to pre-established standards rather than allowing the situation to suggest its own

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>19</sup> Allen F. Repko, *Interdisciplinary research: Process and theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 325.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>21</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 45.

standard for evaluation”<sup>25</sup> and “allows us to bracket discussion of purposes and goals,” giving us “the patina of objectivity.”<sup>26</sup> Wicked problem scholars emphasize this same point, concluding that efforts on messy, real-world problems “cannot be standardized.”<sup>27</sup> Unacknowledged by Frodeman, a number of different approaches are—and have been—underway, including systemic engagement practices,<sup>28</sup> feminist pragmatism,<sup>29</sup> and participatory action research.<sup>30</sup>

Frodeman, to be fair, does highlight a couple of projects underway. For example, O’Rourke and Crowley’s Toolbox Project is one particularly valuable method for interdisciplinary collaboration. These interdisciplinary workshops go beyond a standard set of procedures, “culminating in introspection, dialogue, and adjustment.”<sup>31</sup> Designed to help us collaboratively address multi-scaled, value-laden, messy social and ecological issues that resist “formulaic responses”, the Toolbox Project seeks to be a “highly contextual” process “that makes use of heuristic strategies targeted at overcoming specific types of challenges.”<sup>32</sup> The project is prefaced on the belief that a failure to communicate is one of the primary

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>27</sup> Gerald M. Allen and Ernest Gould, Jr. “Complexity, wickedness, and public forests,” *Journal of Forestry* (April 1986): 20-23, 23.

<sup>28</sup> M. A. McNall, J. Barnes-Najor, R. E. Brown, D. Doberneck, and H. E. Fitzgerald, “Systemic engagement: Universities as partners in systemic approaches to community change,” *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 19, Issue 1 (2015): 1-26.

<sup>29</sup> Danielle Lake, “Jane Addams and wicked problems: Putting the pragmatic method to use,” *The Pluralist* 9, Issue 3 (2014): 77-94.

<sup>30</sup> O. Fals Borda, “Participatory (action) research in social theory: Origins and challenges,” in *Handbook on Action Research*, edited by P. Reason and H. Bradbury, 27–37 (London, England: Sage, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> T. E. Hall and M. O’Rourke, “Responding to communication challenges in transdisciplinary sustainability science,” in *Heuristics for transdisciplinary sustainability studies: Solution-oriented approaches to complex problems*, edited by K. Huutoniemi and P. Tapio, 119-139 (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 119.

challenges to effective collaboration on wicked problems. There are frequently multiple and conflicting, yet valid interpretations of our shared problems. This conclusion (that poor communication is one of the primary reasons effective responses are so rare) is also supported by wicked problem scholars. Indeed, interdisciplinary work across our differences takes enormous effort, time, and money. It also forces an often painful examination of our own assumptions, values, and commitments.

The Toolbox Project seeks to redress these communication failures by employing facilitation techniques, surveys, and various deliberative tools. This project, then, begins to do the work Frodeman recommends by fostering a set of skills and virtues grounded in the consideration of the “political, rhetorical and psychological nuance” of each case and yet also likely to be adaptable in other contexts.<sup>33</sup> Extrapolating from this example, we can conclude interdisciplinarians should seek to operate as boundary spanners by holding themselves accountable to others so they can cogenerate, and widely disseminate knowledge to all those involved.<sup>34</sup> Frodeman calls this boundary spanning work transdisciplinarity. However, with few-to-no incentives to interact across disciplines and outside of the academy, vastly different perceptual understandings and narrow commitments to self-interest proliferate.<sup>35</sup> Undeniably, a failure to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries has consistent cognitive, social, and institutional causes.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> See J. A. Ramley, “The changing role of higher education: Learning to deal with wicked problems,” *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 18, Issue 3 (2014): 7–22, <http://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/index.php/jheoe/article/view/1286>; S. S. Batie, “Wicked problems and applied economics,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 90, Issue 5 (2008): 1176–1191, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8276.2008.01202.x>; and D. H. Guston, “Boundary organizations in environmental policy and science: An introduction,” *Science, Technology and Human Values* 26, Issue 4 (2001): 399–408, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/016224390102600401>.

<sup>35</sup> Lake, “Jane Addams and wicked problems.”

<sup>36</sup> E. Van Bueren, E. Klijn, and J. Koppenjan, “Dealing with wicked problems in networks: Analyzing an environmental debate from a network perspective,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13 Issue 2 (2003): 193–212.

On this interpretation, the Tool Box Project moves in the right direction, fostering a weak transdisciplinarity; but it does not go far enough for at least two reasons. For one, these workshops are largely targeted at and designed for interdisciplinary academic teams. This is a still too narrow framing of accountability. In “Interdisciplinarity as Academic Accountability” Huutoniemi expands this framework by asking her reader to more broadly consider what academics should be accountable for, to whom, and by what mechanisms. By expanding who counts as a peer we would make our research more visible and hold ourselves responsible for the outcomes of our work;<sup>37</sup> we would begin to move beyond interdisciplinarity and into the community.

### **Disciplinarity as Feedback**

To the extent that the Toolbox Project operates within the academy and under institutional pressures of disciplinarity, then, it does not go far enough. These workshops are conducted within a system that still incentivizes disciplinary “navel gazing.” That is, scholars are caught up in a self-reinforcing feedback loop that discourages engaged scholarship whatsoever (displayed in figure one). This concept of feedback, originally developed to describe the behaviour of electronic circuits, was significantly expanded and developed in the early days of cybernetics. It is now a basic concept in systems analysis approaches to complex and wicked problems, as articulated in the work of Jay Forrester and Donella Meadows.<sup>38</sup>

Paul B. Thompson uses the idea of self-reinforcing feedback to demonstrate how perceptions of risk can be amplified through a series

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<sup>37</sup> M. J. Dubnick and H. G. Frederickson, “Introduction: The promises of accountability research,” in *Accountable governance: problems and promises*, edited by M. J. Dubnick and H. G. Frederickson (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2011), xiii-xxxii.

<sup>38</sup> J. W. Forrester, *Principles of systems*, 2nd ed. (Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications, 1968) and D. Meadows, *Thinking in systems: A primer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2008).

of plausible (if not necessarily valid) inferences.<sup>39</sup> If one begins with a judgment that the scientific community is not taking its responsibility to assess technological risks seriously, it is reasonable to infer that it would be risky to rely on them. From this judgment it is reasonable to infer that buying or using a product derived from that work is risky, and from this judgment it is reasonable to infer that the product itself is risky. If the product is risky, then the scientists are not doing their job, and the cycle of risk amplifying feedback begins again. Thompson argues that resistance to GMO's leads opponents to the belief that key ethical concerns are not being examined, which in turn leads them to question the moral character of supporters, which then reinforces not only the idea that the product is risky, but also that GMO supporters lack strong moral character. In general, feedback loops demonstrate how various mechanisms (whether thought-processes, institutional procedures or structures, individual habits or social customs) can reinforce one another, ultimately perpetuating vicious cycles that make intervention efforts incredibly challenging.

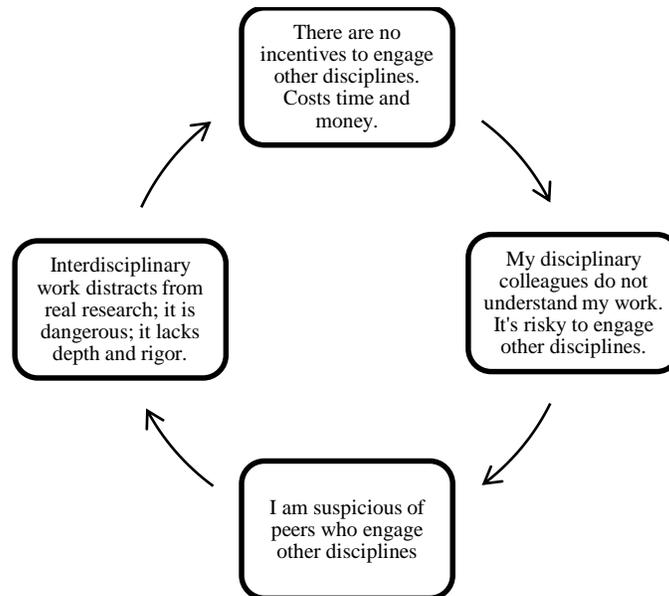
Here we argue that the same idea can help us understand the dominance of disciplinary science within contemporary research institutions. What does a mutually reinforcing values-risk disciplinary feedback loop look like?<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Paul B. Thompson, *From field to fork: Food ethics for everyone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Huutoniemi also characterizes this loop by briefly tracing the history of disciplinarity. As disciplines form, experts narrow their focus and resist efforts to engage outside of their cohort.

Figure 1: The Disciplinary Value Risk Feedback Loop



To begin, the way disciplines are situated within the academy creates a value-risk feedback loop that prohibits or penalizes scientists—and scholars more generally—from actively intervening. As the diagram shows, the still dominant tenure and promotion system provides no incentive to engage one another across our disciplinary expertise. That is, since those outside the field do not understand the field as experts do, they have to—at best—answer basic questions and respond to additional concerns. Isolation and the resultant lack of understanding across disciplinary divides tends to encourage the conclusion that interdisciplinary work lacks depth and rigor, which then leads to suspicion of colleagues who do engage across disciplines. Disciplinary training encourages junior faculty and graduate students not to move beyond recognized, legitimate disciplinary methods (which are often very formulaic).

Indeed, the very “process of socialization into a profession” tends to instill not simply “knowledge and skills but also a fundamental reorientation of one’s identity.” This reorientation, according to David Kolb, is “pervasive,” leading to a certain “standard and ethics,” as well as particular ways of thinking and behaving that come to shape

our subsequent judgments about what is good and bad.<sup>41</sup> Disciplinarity, by operating under the assumption that prolific knowledge production is an ultimate good, fails to acknowledge the real limitations of time and resources; it ignores the need for work-life balance.

In addition, disciplinary training and its proscriptive methods yield success within the system: publications, grant funding, and advancement. Taking a Deweyan frame on this situation helps the observer to see how both unreflective habits of thought developed through disciplinary training and institutional rigidity exacerbate this loop, reinforcing one another. Indeed, macro, meso, and micro structures and processes all contribute to the dominant attractor. That is, assumptions, policies, and structures that question the quality of the research and categorize interdisciplinary scholarship as illegitimate, reinforce the status quo and exacerbating change efforts.

In the end, positive interventions in the feedback loop are unlikely since reference to one's peer group is necessary for publication. Interdisciplinarity, as constructivist and boundary-spanning, fallible and context-dependent, as well as inherently pluralistic, is not valued within the dominant ideological and institutional framework.<sup>42</sup> Aligning with our argument, Huutoniemi shows that "disciplinary boundaries are claimed, maintained, and challenged mainly for other than epistemic reasons, but that they do have epistemic consequences."<sup>43</sup> This value-risk feedback loop powerfully illustrates Frodeman's overarching message: "the whole system is set up to pin our careers on the judgment of disciplinary peers."<sup>44</sup>

Examining Frodeman's analysis through the value risk feedback loop makes his question to the reader even more pressing:

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<sup>41</sup> David Kolb, *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Upper Saddle River: NJ Prentice Hall, 2003), 182.

<sup>42</sup> Kelly A. Parker, "Interdisciplinary Research and Problem Solving: A Guide for Students," 2016, [http://www.academia.edu/14982806/Interdisciplinary\\_Research\\_and\\_Problem\\_Solving\\_A\\_Guide\\_for\\_Students](http://www.academia.edu/14982806/Interdisciplinary_Research_and_Problem_Solving_A_Guide_for_Students).

<sup>43</sup> Huutoniemi, "Interdisciplinarity as academic accountability," 5.

<sup>44</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 37.

“How do we avoid capitulating to the disciplinary impulse that is so deeply woven into both our intellectual habits and our institutional structures”?<sup>45</sup> Well, mostly, we don’t. Shifting the momentum within such a loop tends to require we replace one of its variables, dampen the effects, limit the factors feeding the loop, or add negative feedback into the system. Combining these intervention strategies with Frodeman’s examination of the meta-situation, however, yields the conclusion that a disciplinary knowledge culture is undergoing some change.<sup>46</sup> The 2016 *Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* is one such prominent example.<sup>47</sup> Frodeman, though, calls on scholars to do more, to not simply question our methods, but to also engage in “cultural and philosophical critique” and to “rethink... the functions and institutions of knowledge.”<sup>48</sup> In a similar vein, Kolb—by hearkening back to John Dewey—recommends the academy do more to develop the “whole person.”<sup>49</sup> It can do this by encouraging “creativity, wisdom, and integrity” and by requiring scholars work in teams, collaborate with other scholars and the community, and apply their expertise to complex projects.<sup>50</sup> This boundary spanning work is necessary for blurring our current divides and fostering connections that encourage meliorative action.<sup>51</sup> However, as seen in figure two, scholars are also caught up in a value risk feedback loop that discourages engaged scholarship whatsoever.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Frodeman references the rise of student debt, new and disruptive technologies like Google and MOOC’s, the near financial collapse of many colleges, the incredibly high rate of scholarly publications alongside the indicators that show many of these articles are not being cited, a shift towards neoliberalism (towards private goods), as well as dangers resulting from new knowledge and technology (i.e. genetics and defense).

<sup>47</sup> Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber, *Slow Professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

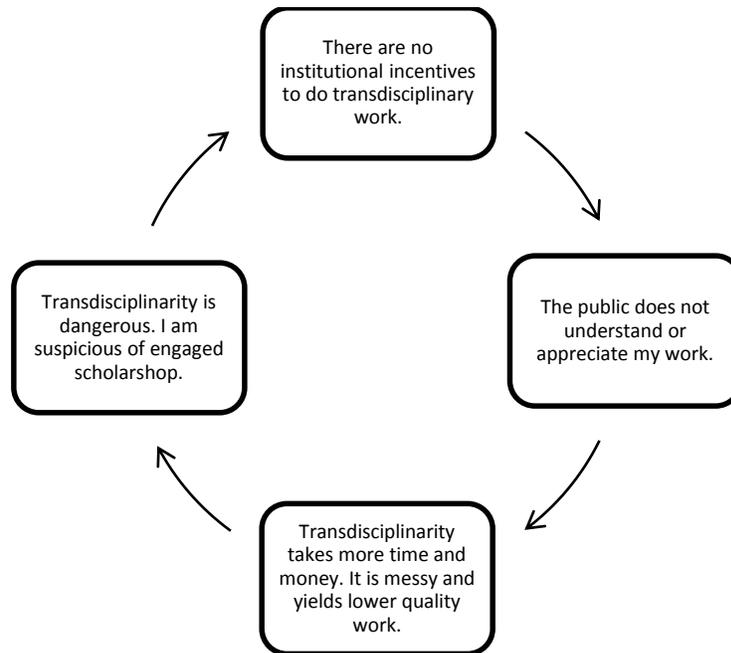
<sup>48</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 70.

<sup>49</sup> Kolb, *Experiential learning*, 162.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>51</sup> Guston, “Boundary organizations in environmental policy and science,” 399.

Figure 2: The Transdisciplinary Value Risk Feedback Loop



In large measure, community-based teaching, research, and service do not count in personnel policy decisions. There are few-to-no mechanisms that incentivize transdisciplinary work. In addition, research shows that scholars perceive heavy obstacles to community-based scholarship, generally concluding this work is risky within the current tenure and promotion process.<sup>52</sup> These perceptions easily feed into conclusions that engaged, transdisciplinary work itself is non-ideal, those who do it lack rigor, and thus that other scholars should be suspicious of their work. Put another way, “the pull of the traditional ways of defining individual goals, professional practises, and organizational cultures can be stronger than the push of the need to change.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, public education—as an agency meant to serve the public needs—is instead making that work more difficult to

<sup>52</sup> C. M. Orr, “Women’s studies as civic engagement: Research and recommendations,” Prepared on behalf of the Teagle Foundation Working Group on Women’s Studies and Civic Engagement and the National Women’s Studies Association, 2011.

<sup>53</sup> V. A. Brown and J. A. Lambert, *Collective learning for transformational change: A guide to collaborative action* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

accomplish. On this interpretation, one of the biggest mistakes we continue to make is to separate intellectual from ethical and experiential learning. According to American philosopher John Dewey, this separation results from a “failure to conceive and construct the academy as a social institution, having social life and value within itself.”<sup>54</sup> The point of education should be to respond more *intelligently* to our environment, “thereby transforming the world as we transform ourselves.”<sup>55</sup> (Garrison, Neubert, and Reich, 2012, xiii).

While scholars are caught within these loops, it is nevertheless still the case that when we never stop to consider how the methods are relevant or not—how they help solve problems or not—then we not only risk irrelevancy, we also risk wasting limited resources on misjudging the nature of our collective, systemic problems. Also building upon the work of Dewey, Frank Fischer calls this “the tyranny of expertise” and suggests this loop tends to perpetuate, instead of alleviate, injustice.<sup>56</sup> Like Frodeman, he suggests we need to radically reconstruct our “professional practice” so that it promotes critical discourse among competing knowledges, both “theoretical and local, formal and informal.”<sup>57</sup> These loops exemplify a number of wicked dimensions surrounding transdisciplinary scholarship in need of further attention. Academics must wrestle with what it means to be accountable in different contexts.<sup>58</sup> We begin to intervene in these loops by recognizing the dangers and the costs of this narrow focus on isolated and prolific knowledge production.

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<sup>54</sup> John Dewey, (1983). *Moral principles in education in The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Vol. 4. Edited by J.

A. Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP: 267-292, MW 4:273.

<sup>55</sup> L. Garrison, S. Neubert, and K. Reich, *John Dewey’s philosophy of education: An introduction and recontextualization for our times* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> F. Fischer, *Citizens, experts, and the environment: The politics of local knowledge* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Huuttoniemi, “Interdisciplinarity as academic accountability.”

### Sustainability (aka “Spanning Boundaries”)



Sustainable knowledge production aimed more directly towards meliorating wicked problems would operate under a collaborative, transdisciplinary model where knowledge is both coproduced and more directly linked to its application. That is, while disciplines manage knowledge through breaking it “into discrete domains,” transdisciplinary wicked problems require we resist this temptation. In fact, wicked problem scholars argue that disciplinarity (and the individual and institutional structures behind it) contributes to and exacerbates our social messes.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, transdisciplinary work steps outside the castle-like infrastructure of higher education, intentionally coordinating “knowledge production with parties beyond the ivy walls of the academy.”<sup>60</sup> It is “engaged work” and as such “draws upon many perspectives to frame questions, explore options, and develop and then apply solutions to challenges.”<sup>61</sup> The university as a boundary spanning institution would operate as a flexible and stable force for change; it would be a hub around which effective networks operate.<sup>62</sup>

Given our current challenges, the goal, according to

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<sup>59</sup> See Alpaslan and Mitroff, *Swans, swine, and swindlers*; V. A. Brown, P. M. Deane, J. A. Harris, and J. Y. Russell, “Towards a just and sustainable future,” in *Tackling wicked problems: Through the transdisciplinary imagination*, edited by V. A. Brown, J. A. Harris, and J. Y. Russell, 3–15 (New York: Routledge, 2010); and Norton, *Sustainability*.

<sup>60</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> J. A. Ramley, “The changing role of higher education: Learning to deal with wicked problems,” *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 18, Issue 3 (2014): 7–22,

<http://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/index.php/jheoe/article/view/1286>, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Guston, “Boundary organizations in environmental policy and science.”

Frodeman, is “more gentle progress.”<sup>63</sup> Current and impending crises place us in a position of urgency where we nevertheless need to “exercise precaution” and “preserve options for continual course correction.”<sup>64</sup> There are, that is, serious opportunity costs to our current trajectory of prolific knowledge production. We must ask ourselves what the “economic, social, and ethical” costs of this knowledge proliferation are.<sup>65</sup> We must ask what we are seeking to sustain and “what we are going to let go by the wayside.”<sup>66</sup> We must expand our framework, acknowledging a responsibility not only to our own “disciplinary cohort,” but also to the “larger community.” These same conclusions lead Fischer to argue for a particular form of public participation: advocacy research. Fischer recommend we follow in Dewey’s wake and “transcend the ‘value-neutral’ ideology of expertise by explicitly anchoring research to the interests” of others, to public issues, and policy work. Advocacy research can make implicit assumptions explicit and uncover hidden practises; it tends to encourage those involved to “speak for themselves.”<sup>67</sup> It also raises red flags for traditional scholarship and its value-commitments to expertise. Here, sustainable knowledge can and should ultimately operate as a “regulative guide.”<sup>68</sup> So how then does sustainability science measure up?

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<sup>63</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 63.

<sup>64</sup> M. J. Cohen, “When sustainability bites back: Cautionary lessons from the field of public health,” *Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy* 10, Issue 2 (2014): 1-3, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 65. Even “philosophical reflection” is a “zero sum game. Time spent... keeping up on the scholarly literature is time not spent thinking about” the very real problems in one’s “local community” (Frodeman 2014, 97).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>67</sup> Fischer, *Citizens, experts, and the environment*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 74.

### **A Case in Point: Sustainability Science as Sustainable Knowledge?**

Dewey noted long ago that separating science from the social milieu “encourages irresponsibility” and a disregard of the social consequences.<sup>69</sup> Science, that is, gets it wrong when it loses sight of the fact that it comes from – and should return to – the world around us.<sup>70</sup> Sustainability science, as problem-focused and use-inspired research, requires significant breakthroughs and advances in understanding. It seeks to be socially relevant in at least three ways: by (1) working to analyse its practises, (2) consistently assessing the interactions between epistemology and ethics within its research, and (3) fulfilling a responsibility to improve the situation of others.<sup>71</sup> As a response to wicked sustainability problems, it also tends to challenge current social practises and institutions.

This field has grown explosively over the last thirty years (since the early 1980's); it has, according to a 2011 meta-study, cultivated collaboration across space, time, and discipline. In fact, a review of the literature demonstrated that in 2000 “a giant cluster of collaboration” was formed, unifying SS as a field across a wide range of disciplines. The study illustrates that the rate of growth has been exponential; the field has been doubling approximately every 8 years.<sup>72</sup> Given its commitment to grounded research and real-world impact, this exponential growth is seen as an encouraging development.

Analyzing the “Evolution and Structure of Sustainability

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<sup>69</sup> John Dewey, *Logic: The theory of inquiry*, in *The Later Works*, 1925-1953, Vol. 12. Edited by J. A. Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1996), LW 12: 483.

<sup>70</sup> See M. J. Brown, “John Dewey’s logic of science,” *HOPOS: The journal of the International society for the history of philosophy of science* 2, Issue 2 (2012): 258-306; and C. Fehr and K. S. Plaisance, “Socially relevant philosophy of science: an introduction,” *Synthese* 177, Issue 3 (2010): 301-316.

<sup>71</sup> Fehr and Plaisance, “Social Relevant Philosophy of Science,” 310-311.

<sup>72</sup> L. M. A. Bettencourt and J. Kaur, “Evolution and structure of sustainability science,” *Proceedings of the national academy of the sciences* 108, Issue 49 (2011): 19540-19545, <http://www.pnas.org/content/108/49/19540>, 19541.

Science”<sup>73</sup> with Frodeman’s recommendations firmly at hand yields some red flags. The first red flag focuses on the exponential growth of SS scholarship. Is this a limitless good? According to the authors, it is a great thing: they say the growth of SS “bodes well for its future success at facing some of humanities’ greatest scientific and societal challenges”<sup>74</sup> They also say the creation of a new field, “a conceptual and practical whole”, around SS is *necessary* in order for it to “achieve... ambitious and urgent goals... and tangible socioeconomic impact.”<sup>75</sup> This leads one to ponder a subsequent question: to what extent is the creation of a field of study/discipline (and the structural and logistical supports that come with it) necessary for effective, collaborative networks to flourish and sustain themselves? Indeed it would not be too hard to argue that SS is currently seeking to acquire “all the tools of the disciplines: its own conferences, journals, degrees, and departments.”<sup>76</sup> To what extent has the movement of SS fed into the “logic of the cancer cell,” operating under the assumption that explosive growth is an unlimited good? Or to what extent does SS escape this critique because it is almost always grounded in real world application, operating with its own impact in mind? And, finally, while it is clear that SS has been successful in disseminating itself, Frodeman’s *Sustainable Knowledge* encourages the concerned reader to turn a more critical eye towards the outcomes of SS. Its success must also be measured by how it has addressed our sustainability challenges. How engaged in the community is SS? How connected is it to policy and governance? To business or the non-profit sector? Focusing on creating and growing a new academic field within the current system can easily lead scholars away from ensuring their work is practically relevant.

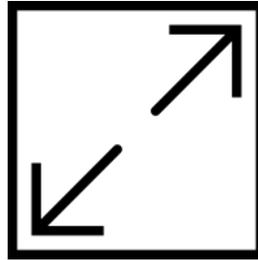
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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 19545.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 19541.

<sup>76</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 40.

**Dedisciplinarity (aka “blurring boundaries”)**

With this guide in mind, Frodeman and Briggie argue that the disciplining of philosophy within the academy was a mistake. They suggest philosophers are capable of acting as “synthesizers,” “formalists,” “translators,” and “specialists,” but that the structures of the academy have narrowed the scope of philosophic work, purifying it as a narrowly framed specialty.<sup>77</sup> In *Sustainable Knowledge*, Frodeman ultimately concludes that philosophers should actively engage in public problems, proposing active and engaged roles for the philosopher and the humanist more broadly: the philosopher bureaucrat and the field philosopher.<sup>78</sup> The philosopher bureaucrat works within public or private institutions on problems as they emerge.<sup>79</sup> The field philosopher starts in the world at the project level and through a messy, “problem-oriented” collaborative process integrates “knowledge production” with its use.<sup>80</sup> As field philosophers themselves, Thompson and Whyte provide recommendations for working in this way, suggesting the traditional philosopher’s task of creating and judging the most persuasive arguments can be fruitfully reinvisioned. For instance, environmental philosophers could initiate and facilitate philosophical research through conducting community dialogues around local issues of

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<sup>77</sup> Frodeman and Briggie, “When philosophy lost its way.”

<sup>78</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 87.

<sup>79</sup> Robert A. Frodeman, Adam Briggie, and James Holbrook, “Philosophy in a neoliberal age,” *Social Epistemology* 26, Issue 3 (2012): 18-36.

<sup>80</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 108.

concern.<sup>81</sup>

John Dewey, responding to the problems of “over-specialization” and isolation within the academy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, presents remarkably similar arguments about the role of philosophy in society. He argued that philosophers should see themselves as “liaison officers.”<sup>82</sup> In particular, Dewey suggested philosophy should interpret and utilize science in order to help envision possibilities for the future, and then facilitate movement toward those possibilities.<sup>83</sup> According to Dewey, philosophy should critically examine the “best available knowledge of its own time and place” in order to consider how “beliefs, institutions, customs, [and] policies” can more directly bear upon the “good.”<sup>84</sup> Philosophy as liaison is boundary spanning, directing philosophers to consider how new knowledge is linked to possible effective and ethical uses.<sup>85</sup> According to Larry Hickman, Dewey “recognized that in order to solve the problems generated by our technologies in particular, and by our attitudes toward our technological milieu in general”, we must cultivate a “specialized set of techniques.” Hickman says Dewey “championed a new way of thinking about traditional philosophical problems designed” to address the “pushes and pulls of life in industrial democracies,” especially the problems of “technology-as-culture.”<sup>86</sup> This conception of philosophy effectively utilizes its “critical mind against the domination” of “prejudice, narrow interest, routine custom” and the divide between institutional goals and human needs.<sup>87</sup> Within a Deweyan framework philosophy “functions as a

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<sup>81</sup> Paul B. Thompson and Kyle P. Whyte, “What Happens to Environmental Philosophy in a Wicked World?” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 25, Issue 4 (2012): 485-498, DOI: 10.1007/s10806-011-9344-0, 1.

<sup>82</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 1, Edited by J. A. Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1981), LW 1: 306-307.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>85</sup> R. L. Chapman, “How to think about environmental studies,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41, Issue 1 (2007): 59-74.

<sup>86</sup> L. A. Hickman, *Pragmatism as post-postmodernism: Lessons from John Dewey* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 155.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

kind of go-between and translator.”<sup>88</sup> Frodeman’s recommendations for philosophy and the academy can be enriched by Dewey’s pragmatism, Kolb’s experiential learning model, and by recommendations derived from research on wicked problems.

For example, crucial to Frodeman’s definition of field philosophy—and similarly aligned with recommendations from both Dewey and wicked problem scholars—is both its goal to lessen our problems (not resolve them)<sup>89</sup> and to widely disseminate the lessons learned.<sup>90</sup> These goals align with systemic action research practises and the public philosophy movement.<sup>91</sup> Success is defined by the difference one makes “on the ground,” by the extent to which one changes “the world.”<sup>92</sup> In Dewey’s words we can then explore “methods for their realization in the homely everyday experience of mankind.”<sup>93</sup> We can subject our decisions to “constant and well-equipped observation of the consequences they entail when acted upon, and subject them to ready and flexible revision in the light of observed consequences.”<sup>94</sup> Studying the work necessary for meliorating our wicked problems, yields the conclusion that “the antidote for fragmentation is coherence, shared understanding, and shared commitment, shared meaning for terms and concepts, shared

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>89</sup> Dewey also recommends we do more to meliorate problems. He says, “to abandon the search for absolute and immutable reality and value may seem like a sacrifice. But this renunciation is the condition of entering upon a vocation of greater vitality” (LW 4:249).

<sup>90</sup> While applied philosophy has demonstrated that real-world problems can benefit from philosophical reflection, it has not fully assisted “people and institutions in all walks of life with the philosophical challenges they face” (Frodeman 2014, 104). To the extent that applied philosophy works by applying top-down theoretical principles to particular situations, it gets it wrong.

<sup>91</sup> See the recent development of *The Public philosophy journal* and the Public Philosophy Network.

<sup>92</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 111.

<sup>93</sup> John Dewey, *The quest for certainty: A study of the relation of knowledge and action*, in *The Later Works*, 1925-1953, Vol. 4, Edited by J. A. Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1996), LW 4:250.

<sup>94</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, in *Later Works*, 1925-1927, Vol. 2, Edited by J. A. Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984), LW 2:362.

commitment for solutions that are good enough to get on with the real business of learning through action.”<sup>95</sup>

On this front, there is widespread concern that philosophers working on socially relevant science are not truly engaged “on the ground.” Indeed, in 2010 an entire issue of *Synthese* was devoted to this concern. A lack of interaction between philosophers of science and scientists (and the public) is especially confounding and disturbing precisely because it is a field intentionally developed to bridge the divide between the disciplines, between knowledge production and knowledge use. Like Dewey and Frodeman, Heather Douglas argues that clarity about the complex situations we confront is best achieved through “the crucible of application.” Through application we “test” our “theories, see their pitfalls, and develop new approaches to old problems.”<sup>96</sup> Further extending Dewey’s work, feminist pragmatism—involving both place-based local activism and global outreach—can be harnessed as a form of participatory action research. It highlights how we might work in the community under inherently messy, dynamic situations and demands mutuality and reciprocity. As a process for flexibly and collaboratively responding to our shared problems in real time, it builds upon Dewey and Addams’ work, offering much of value to engaged scholars seeking to work across diverse interests.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> H. Salwasser, “Confronting the implications of wicked problems: Changes needed in Sierra Nevada National Forest planning and problem solving,” *Proceedings of the Sierra Nevada Science Symposium: Science for Management and Conservation*, USDA Forest Service (Albany, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, 2004), 7-22, 21.

<sup>96</sup> Heather Douglas, “Engagement for progress: Applied philosophy of science in context,” *Synthese* 177, Issue 3 (2010): 317-335, 323.

<sup>97</sup> Lake, “Jane Addams and wicked problems.”

## Conclusion

In the end, Frodeman says that we should measure our success “by the extent to which” we “address the needs of others as they define them,” by the extent to which we literally “change the world.”<sup>98</sup> On this front, legitimate critiques can be raised about even the most practical fields of study. As the Value Risk Feedback loops illustrated, there are clearly overlapping institutional (including economic, political, and cultural) and individual (including, but not limited to, self-interest, limited perspectives, time, and resources) reasons for our failure to engage. With these causes in mind, we can and must value interventions along a variety of fronts; we can, for instance, do more to address the assumptions, values, and belief-systems underriding the current situation; we can seek to change current policies and procedures. We can also call for systems changes.

As Dewey noted long ago, “the only way to [really] prepare for social life, is to engage in social life.”<sup>99</sup> Further resources can be acquired through the literature on wicked problems, participatory action research, soft systems modeling, and systemic engagement practises. Grounding this literature and the tools, processes, and recommendations it provides is a Deweyan pragmatism. Thus, it is valuable to engage Dewey’s articulation of the role of philosophy, his critique of institutional lag and unreflective habit, and his pragmatic philosophy more broadly (with a focus on context, experimentalism, iterative problem-solving, fallibility, and reciprocity). While engaged, transdisciplinary scholarship does not “automatically solve more problems, nor resolve perplexities,” it does enable us to grapple with our problems, to “courageously and intelligently” meliorate suffering. And while engagement does “not assure us against failure,” it turns our failures into “a source of instruction.”<sup>100</sup> And since the lag between the

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<sup>98</sup> Frodeman, *Sustainable Knowledge*, 111.

<sup>99</sup> John Dewey, *Moral principles in education*, in *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Vol. 4, Edited by J. A. Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983), 267-292, MW 4:272.

<sup>100</sup> John Dewey, *Human nature and conduct*, in *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Vol. 14, Edited by J. A. Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983), MW 14:11.

needs of our time and our dominant institutional responses is still great, since our problems are still urgent, and our responses still largely inadequate, there is a lot more work to be done.

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TAKING IT TO THE PEOPLE:  
TRANSLATING EMPIRICAL FINDINGS  
ABOUT BLACK MEN AND BLACK  
FAMILIES THROUGH A BLACK PUBLIC  
PHILOSOPHY

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Public philosophy has often meant a practice of thinking and commenting on the realities of the world that exceed the original boundaries of philosophy as a discipline. For Black scholars, however, scholarship has always been public and engaged the realities and sufferings of Black people and the world at large. Rather than debate the merits of whether or not philosophy should be publicly engaged, especially when considering the matter of race, this essay argues that a Black public philosophy is needed to correct the spread of misinformation, racist propaganda, and ill-informed theorizations given to the public under the banner of the Black public intellectual. The authors believe that Black public philosophy, a practice that offers theories to the public rooted in empiricism, historical findings, and an analysis of Black people's political circumstances in the United States, is necessary to socialize Black Americans away from the pathological accounts offered to account for their deviance and disadvantage.



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“the definitive role of the black public intellectual [is] interpreting the opaquely black heart of darkness for whites.”

—Adolf Reed

Public philosophy—its meaning, impact, and regard as philosophy—has been the topic of both trepidation and concern throughout the academy since the turn of the century. As scholars become more focused on the pragmatic and real-world consequences of academic scholarship to oppressed and marginalized communities, the task set before disciplines was how to assess scholarship (e.g. publications, speeches, podcasts, & blogs) that not only directly engaged the public, but concerned itself with problems specific to the public. Traditional academic disciplines simply did not know where to establish borders between academic publication and public intellectualism. Some pragmatist scholars such as Nathan Crick argued that it is fallacious thinking to suggest that “the Ivory Tower exists as a place with high walls that shelter an elite class of thinkers kept separate from the practical problems of their age.”<sup>1</sup>

Such separations, Crick explains, are the result of the modern university’s adherence to Aristotelian delineations between the *epistème*, which is thought to be contemplative knowledge like that of science or philosophy, and *technè*, which is productive knowledge like that of art or rhetoric.<sup>2</sup> Inspired by the work of John Dewey, Crick concludes that the aesthetic production of knowledge—like that of art or rhetoric that engages and is produced by the work, *technè*—is always a form of *praxis*. It was not until May of 2017 that the American Philosophical Association offered a statement of support urging philosophy departments in American universities and its organizational members to recognize public philosophy, or a practice of philosophy that “engages with contemporary issues as well as work that brings traditional philosophies to non-traditional settings” as a

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan Crick, “Rhetoric, Philosophy, and the Public Intellectual,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 39.2 (2006): 127-140, 130.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

“growing site of scholarly involvement.”<sup>3</sup> Other traditions of academic production however require no such analytical exegesis or apologia regarding their relationship with the public and its problems.

Black Studies, for instance, founded in 1968 at San Francisco State University by the sociologist Nathan Hare begins with a quite different assumption. Hare argued that Thorsten Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* and *The Higher Learning in America* give an account of American education as a product of a leisure class mentality that sought to “conspicuously display their apartness from the manual worker through the attachment of prestige to non-productive endeavor. Thus education, which was largely private at the time and afforded only by the well-to-do, emphasized the abstract as over against the practical.”<sup>4</sup> University education socialized students to reproduce middle class goals and behaviors. Hare writes, “As middle class aspirants began to emulate the leisure class, and education was largely socialized, the principle of exclusiveness was reinforced by the need to stern the flood of recruits to professional occupations.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike the white-bourgeois university still processing the consequences and trying to halt the influx of Black scholars into the university, Hare conceptualized Black Studies as a socially engaged and activist endeavor. To concern one’s self with the impact that racism has on the Black community was to engage in activist scholarship that not only reoriented mainstream white theories about Black Americans, but sought to re-socialize Black Americans all-together.<sup>6</sup>

Over the last several decades however the direction and goals of Black Studies have been largely questioned. Authors such as Fabio Rojas have argued that the financial contributions of foundations like Carnegie and Ford redirected the activist and nationalist focus of Black Studies scholarship towards more discursive and multicultural

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<sup>3</sup> American Philosophical Association, “APA Statement on Valuing Public Philosophy,” <https://www.apaonline.org/page/publicphilosophy>

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Hare, “The Challenge of the Black Scholar,” *The Black Scholar* 1.2 (1969):58-63, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Hare, “The Battle for Black Studies,” *The Black Scholar* 3.9 (1972): 32-47, 32.

<sup>6</sup> Joyce Ladner, *The Death of white Sociology: Essays on Race and Culture* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1973).

formulations of American race and racism.<sup>7</sup> Similar analysis has been put forth by the philosopher Sylvia Wynter who has argued that “..Black Studies as a whole, were to find their original transgressive intentions defused, their energies rechanneled as they came to be defined (and in many cases, actively to define themselves so) in new multicultural terms as African-American Studies; as such, this field appeared as but one of the many diverse ‘Ethnic Studies’ that now served to re-verify the very thesis of Liberal universalism..”<sup>8</sup> Black Nationalism and the Black Arts Movement’s attempt to redefine the Human was thwarted by the rise and popular acceptance of Marxism and Black feminist thought and literature which “took as one of its major targets the male and macho hegemonic aspect of the black nationalist aesthetic and its correlated Black Arts Movement, even where black women had played as creative a role as the men..”<sup>9</sup> This bourgeois-ization of Black Studies committed newly minted Black scholars to endorsing Black feminist historiographies and theories of Black politics which resulted in a distancing and endorsement of the stereotypes of poor young Black men. As Wynter explained in “No Humans Involved”:

it is this category of the jobless young black males who have been made to pay the "sacrificial costs" (in the terminology of Rene Girard's *The Scapegoat*, 1986) for the relatively improved conditions since the 1960s that have impelled many black Americans out of the ghettos and into the suburbs; that made possible therefore the universal acclamation for the Cosby-Huxtable TV family who proved that some black Americans could aspire to and even be drawn inside the

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<sup>7</sup> Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 131-166.

<sup>8</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désetre,” in *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 107-169, 109.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

sanctified category of Americanness in its present form.<sup>10</sup>

The consequence of the growth of a Black intellectual class in the university and society more generally was a distancing from the condition of poor young Black males, and ultimately an endorsing of the phobic-inspired lens of whites who viewed Black males more generally as dangerous, violent, and anti-woman. Despite the historical antecedents of these views residing in the early white supremacist writings of white feminists, segregationists, and racist white sociologists, this pathologization of Black men and boys has been identified by Elaine Brown as a “new racism” which is particularly anti-[Black] male.<sup>11</sup> According to Brown, the targeting of Black men and boys remains undiagnosed among Black feminists because their solidarity around woman-hood utilizes an anti-male ideology that excludes Black men from the reformist and coalitional ethos of gender studies, and specifically works against forming a revolutionary Black praxis.<sup>12</sup>

The Black public intellectual has been scrutinized over the last several decades for presenting inaccurate and in some cases pathological views of the community and audience they claim to represent. For example, the political theorist Adolph Reed has claimed that the intellectual progenitors of the Black public intellectual are not Black radicals, but more accommodationist conservative Black figures like Booker T. Washington. For example, Washington had to give lip-service to the racial inferiority of Black people popular with white progressives at the turn of the century to secure their financial backing.

There is a tension that becomes apparent in the figure of Booker T. Washington for the Black public intellectual—that of the dual audience, according to Reed. Prominence, wealth, and visibility are not based on the relevance of the Black public intellectual’s

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<sup>10</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues,” *Voices of the African Diaspora; The CAAS Research Review* 8.2 (1992): 13-16,

<sup>11</sup> Elaine Brown, *The Condemnation of Little B: New Age Racism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Elaine Brown, “Proud Flesh Interview: Elaine Brown,” *Proud Flesh: A New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness* 1.2 (2003): 1-14.

pronouncements to Black audiences. Black people largely do not control media outlets or possess the nepotistic structures that determine the ascent of an individual Black scholar at will. Because the institutions cultivating Black public intellectuals are managed by white liberals (progressives, feminists, etc.), white liberals direct the discursive content, determine the audience, and provide the platforms for Black public intellectuals. This reality, writes Reed, “reflects an important complication facing black intellectuals; they need to address both black and white audiences, and those different acts of communication proceed from objectives that are distinct and often incompatible.”<sup>13</sup> Reed suggests that the definitive posture of this class of intellectuals is one of consensus designed to attack the mythical threats of ideological extremism. “Their political utterances exude pro forma moralism, not passion. Their critiques are only easy pronouncements against racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism or equally easy dissent from a lame Afrocentricity that has no adherents among their audience anyway,” writes Reed.<sup>14</sup> The pronouncements of Black public intellectuals, especially in regard to race and gender, are impervious to empiricism and fact, because the stringent critique of the alleged cultural foundations, the Black episteme so to speak, is mythological. As Reed explains, “The posture of the black public intellectual is a claim to speak from the edges of convention, to infuse mainstream discourse with a particular “counter-hegemonic” perspective at least implicitly linked to one’s connectedness to identifiably black sensibilities or interests...[this] posture is flimflam that elides the dual audience problem.”<sup>15</sup>

No clearer case exists in the minds of the authors than the problem that is our point of focus in this article—the theoretical and popular conceptualization of the Black male and his relationship to the Black family at large. Adolf Reed’s infamous essay names a select cadre of scholars whom he takes to be representative of misrepresentations

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<sup>13</sup> Adolph Reed, “What are the Drums Saying Booker?: The Curious Role of the Black Public Intellectual,” in *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 77-90, 81.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

the Black public - their intelligence, their actual conditions, and their cultural foundations of knowledge. However, the growth of the Black public intellectual class over twenty years later has been simultaneously accelerated by technology and social media and also less attended to because the Black public is no longer solely engaged by media appearances and speaking engagements, but through Twitter, Facebook, and various iterations of popular blogs and periodicals.

Today, Black public intellectualism is rewarded often in place of a scholar's communication to the public of empirical research or findings that substantiate the position, rhetoric, and expertise of said Black public intellectual. Instead of research, it is not uncommon to find moral pleas against the Black community - condemnation framed as socio-cultural critique and commentary of the Black community for not adhering to the politics or moral commitments of Black scholars in the academy.

Said differently, Black public intellectualism is not an endeavor which aims to communicate the findings of Black intellectuals; rather, the Black public intellectual takes on a charismatic persona of an oracle. Such individuals are usually legitimized by a doctorate and a position in an academic institution, but rarely seek to share actual research that offers evidence of a much narrower scholarly expertise. Instead the Black public intellectual, dedicates much of their time offering opinions on any number of fields be it economics, geopolitics, or contemporary race relations in the United States, regardless of the actual field their doctorate may have been obtained. Often the "expertise" of the Black public intellectual is connected to buzzwords or commonly accepted tropes like: white supremacy, misogynoir, intersectionality, or other identity rhetoric and how these tropes can be used to explain a seemingly infinite number of social phenomena and political crises. Currently, Black public intellectualism often undergirds its progressive gender politics through an unquestioned promulgation of pathological theories of Black men and boys as dangerous, hyper-masculine, and sexually predatory.

We argue here that public philosophy is a necessary component of the resocialization and education of the Black public

away from their fear and criminalization of Black males. The use of empirical findings and evidence amongst scholars in the academy is limited because humanities disciplines operate within paradigms that elide empirical evidence in favor of narratives that reify the experience of the individual scholar or experiences of the group the scholar claims to be a member of. Black public intellectualism requires no rigor or evidence to substantiate the claims of their public pronouncements. Replacing research with morality, public intellectualism regarding American race relations and the problem of the Black male succeeds by the extent to which it extends feminist generalizations of Black men as hyper-masculine and predatory. We argue as well that public philosophy is a more efficient means of countering the pathological theories of Black men and boys held not only by society at large, but intra-racially, or amongst members of the Black public themselves. By directly engaging the Black public through an explanation of alternative theories concerning the sociological condition and possible futures of Black men and boys in the United States, the authors argue that Black public philosophy can reorient the gender frames used to explain Black male incarceration, homicide, and deviance beyond models which assume hyper-personality traits and deficits amongst this population.

### **The Relationship between the Caricatures of Black Males in Gender Theory and the Stereotypes Propagated throughout Social Media**

Unlike white men, who still occupy many of the positions in universities throughout the country, Black and Brown men are the two most under-represented groups in the U.S. academy. According to Anne McDaniel, a demographer concerned with the Black gender gap in education, “the historical trend in college completion for blacks is not marked by the reversal of a gender gap that once favored males, as it is for whites, but rather entails a longstanding female

advantage.”<sup>16</sup> Black men have always been outnumbered in undergraduate as well as graduate ranks in the United States. The economist Amadu J. Kaba explains: “By the mid-1970s, more black females had enrolled in colleges and universities in almost all levels than black males. In 1976, of the 1,033,000 black students enrolled in higher education institutions, 563,100 (54.5%) were women and 469,900 (45.9%) were men.”<sup>17</sup> “In 1976, of the 943,400 black students enrolled in undergraduate institutions, 512,700 (54.3%) were women and 430,700 (45.6%) were men..In terms of graduate enrollments, out of the 78,500 black students enrolled in graduate programs in higher education institutions in 1976 (excluding non-resident aliens), 46,500 (59.3%) were females and 32,000 (40.7%) were males.”<sup>18</sup> Since 2000, Black men have comprised less than 40% of the associate, professional, and doctoral degrees awarded to African-Americans.<sup>19</sup> According to the most recent American Association of University Professors report, there are roughly 48,000 Black male and about 70,000 Black female professors at Title IV colleges or universities in the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike the history of white Americans in higher education, Black men have always been outnumbered by their female counterparts in college enrollment and degree attainment. The gender inversion between Black males and Black females in the professoriate is a result of the dire under-representation of Black males historically in the student body. While Black men are amongst the most underrepresented groups in the academy, Black men are not gifted

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<sup>16</sup>Anne McDaniel, Thomas A. DiPrete, Claudia Buchmann, and Uri Shwed, “The Black Gender Gap in Educational Attainment: Historical Trends and Racial Comparisons,” *Demography* 48 (2011): 889-914, 891.

<sup>17</sup> Amadu J. Kaba, “Progress of African Americans in Higher Education Attainment: The Widening Gender Gap and its Current and Future Implications,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13.25 (2005):1-32, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2012* (Washington D.C: U.S. Department of Education, 2012), <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72>.

<sup>20</sup> John W. Curtis, *The Employment Status of Instructional Staff Members in Higher Education, Fall 2011* (Washington D.C.: American Association of University Professors, 2014), 54-55.

with the voice and recognition of being the most marginalized. As a group they are denied a standpoint epistemology. Despite always being outnumbered by their female counterparts in education, the targets of affirmative action in hiring and graduate education are racialized female groups. This ideology is so contrary to fact that many gender scholars will argue adamantly that Black males enjoy various privileges despite their physical under-representation and being a race-sex minority. Because they are undesirable, their lesser numbers as students and professors are multiplied such that they are imagined to comprise the majority of Blacks in universities and classrooms despite all evidence to the contrary.

This demographic disparity has had dire consequences for both the production and authoring of theories concerning Black men and boys in the United States. The under-representation of Black male bodies has corresponded to the erasure of Black males' voices—their experiences—within gender theory. Black males do not constitute a significant population as students or professors in universities. As such, theories about Black men and boys are written from the perspective of those groups who interact with and interpret this group.

The fear, the trepidation, the internalized hatred, whites and many Blacks have of lower class Black males expresses itself in the psychoanalytic motivations attributed to Black males throughout history. Today, this gender disparity is reflected in the kinds of theories and interpretive schemes used to explain Black men's higher rates of poverty, unemployment, downward mobility, and violence. Hyper-masculinity, a term originally used to express a female personality disorder Black men acquired in female headed households, due to the absence of Black fathers, has now become a catch-all phrasing used to explain both the beginning and end of Black male malfeasance.<sup>21</sup> Black public intellectualism now interprets Black

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<sup>21</sup> Allan Barclay & D.R. Cusumano, "The Study of Man: Testing Masculinity in Boys without Fathers," *Transactions* 5 (1967): 33-35; Patricia Moran & Allan Barclay, "Effects of Father's Absence on Delinquent Boys: Dependency and HyperMasculinity," *Psychological Reports* 62 (1988): 115-121; Henry Biller, "A Note on Father Absence and Masculine Development in Lower Class Negro and white Boys," *Child Development* 39.3 (1968): 1003-1006; Ulf Hannerz, *Soulside: Inquiries*

males—America’s enduring social problem—to white liberals. Discussions of Black men and boys that remind America of its failure, pointing to its systematic repressive apparatus that refute any claim the U.S. has to being a democracy, are denied within disciplines and by various journals. Michael Eric Dyson, for example, argued on the popular television show *The View* that “13% of Black men voted for Donald Trump; part of that is patriarchy and sexism. Black men, who believe it or not, believe some of the same cooked over values of patriarchy.”<sup>22</sup>

No evidence is needed to reach such a conclusion. There is no need to survey the attitudes, the political or sociological motivation of the minority of Black men who voted for Trump, or even a consideration of the complexity for Black men asked to vote for a candidate like Hillary Clinton, who said that young Black men were super-predators, “kids with no conscience, no empathy, we can talk about why they end up that way, but first we need to bring them to heel.”<sup>23</sup> Dyson does not acknowledge nor even recognize the irony of suggesting that Black men are sexist and patriarchal for not voting for Clinton when over 80% of Black men in fact did vote for her, or consider that any issue could be more important than Clinton’s gender to a Black male voting public. 13% did not follow suit, so the 4% of Black women that voted for Trump or the 6% of educated Black women that did as well is inconsequential to his analysis.<sup>24</sup> The explanation for any behavior of Black men and boys that is outside the political morality of progressives or deemed undesirable is explained to be caused by patriarchy, misogyny, or hyper-masculinity.

Black males remain as objects—the phobias of other groups’

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*into Ghetto Culture and Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 118-120.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, “The View June 4, 2018 ABC: Michael Eric Dyson; View Your Deal,” Youtube Video, 26:45, June 4, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=099jmHp\\_fm](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=099jmHp_fm).

<sup>23</sup> Hillary Clinton, “1996: Hillary Clinton on “superpredators” (C-SPAN),” Youtube Video, 1:15, February 25, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0uCrA7ePno>.

<sup>24</sup> We assume that Michael Eric Dyson is using CNN’s “Exit Poll,” November 23, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls>.

imagination. Such accounts found throughout Black masculinity studies suggest that Black men are primarily mimetic beings who seek to imitate the character and power of their white male oppressors. Contemporary theories concerning Black men and boys begin with the assumption that they are sexist, homophobic, and misogynists. Despite decades of evidence showing that Black men have always been more gender progressive than white men and women, and over the last decade have actually surpassed Black women's gender consciousness in many regards,<sup>25</sup> there is a tendency to conceptualize Black males as defective, in need of repair, and dangerous.

To be clear: though we have attitudinal and survey data reaching back to the early 1980s showing that Black men are not only not sexist, but the most gender progressive group in America—a disposition we argue emerges from their experience of anti-Black misogyny—liberal arts disciplines endorse gender theories that cast Black males as pathological, misogynistic, and aspiring patriarchs.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Simien, *Black Feminist Voices in Politics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), and "A Black Gender Gap? Continuity and Change in Attitudes to Black Feminism," in *African American Perspectives on Political Science*, ed. Rich Wilbur (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 130-150. Also see Catherine Harnois, "Complexity Within and Similarity Across: Interpreting Black Men's Support of Gender Justice, amidst Cultural Representations that Suggest Otherwise," in *Hyper Sexual, Hyper Masculine?: Gender, Race and Sexuality in the Identities of Contemporary Black Men*, eds., Brittany C. Slatton and Kemesha Spates (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 85-102; and Catherine Harnois, "Race, Gender, and the Black Women's Standpoint," *Sociological Forum* 25.1 (2010): 68-85, 82-84.

<sup>26</sup> Ruby Lee Gooley, "The Role of Black Women in Social Change," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 13.4 (1989):165-172; Kathleen M. Blee and Ann R. Tickamyer, "Racial Differences in Men's Attitudes about Women's Gender Roles," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 57 (1995): 21-30; Andrea G. Hunter and Sherrill L. Sellers, "Feminist Attitudes among African American Women and Men," *Gender & Society* 12.1 (1998):81-99; Andrea G. Hunter and James Earl Davis, "Constructing Gender: An Exploration of Afro-American Men's Conceptualization of Manhood," *Gender & Society* 6.3 (1992): 464-479; Catherine Harnois, "Intersectional Masculinities and Gendered Political Consciousness: How Do Race, Ethnicity and Sexuality Shape Men's Awareness of Gender Inequality and Support for Gender Activism?," *Sex Roles* 77 (2017):141-154; and Wizdom P. Hammond and Jacqueline S. Mattis, "Being a Man About It: Manhood Meaning Among African American Men," *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 6.2 (2005): 114-126.

They have politically shared the values of intersectional political thinking, supported women candidates, and endorsed the importance of women socially more than any group of men in the United States, and to a greater extent than white women for decades, and have surpassed Black women in this regard as well over the last decade. Despite this evidence, there is a tendency in the academy to recodify many of the tropes we reject as racist into gender theories. For example, while one may be apt to reject the idea that Black men are dangers to women as little more than a racist caricature, there is a compulsion to accept this very same claim once it is expressed as a gendered idea where Black men—because they are hyper-masculine—aim to dominate and oppress women to reclaim their masculinity.

### **Anti-Black Misandry and Black Public Culture**

America is inundated with negative stereotypes of Black men and boys through media, journalism, and even Black public intellectual culture. It is not uncommon for major Black online journals to endorse articles and opinion pieces that depict Black men as violent deviants and dangerous misogynists. One of the most popularly circulated and discussed recently was Damon Young's "Straight Black Men are the White People of the Black Race." In this article Young writes "It feels counterintuitive to suggest that straight black men as a whole possess any sort of privilege—particularly the type of privilege created for and protected by whiteness. In America, we are near or at the bottom in every relevant metric determining quality of life... Intraracially, however, our relationship to and with black women is not unlike whiteness's relationship to us. In fact, it's eerily similar."<sup>27</sup> Completely overlooking the effects of incarceration, poverty, previous exposure to violence, or even the reality of Black male victims of domestic abuse and child (sexual) abuse, Young offers assertion upon assertion concerning straight Black men. He suggests for instance that

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<sup>27</sup> Damon Young, "Straight Black Men are the White People of the Black Race," *VSB.com*, September 9, 2018, <https://verysmartbrothas.theroot.com/straight-black-men-are-the-white-people-of-black-people-1814157214>.

We're the ones whose beatings and deaths at the hands of the police galvanize the community in a way that the beatings and sexual assaults and deaths that those same police inflict upon black women do not. We're the ones whose mistreatment inspired a boycott of the NFL despite the NFL's long history of mishandling and outright ignoring far worse crimes against black women. We are the ones who get the biggest seat at the table and the biggest piece of chicken at the table despite making the smallest contribution to the meal.<sup>28</sup>

Young suggests that Black men's disproportionate rates of abuse are evidence of Black men's privilege and power over Black women. He suggests that Black men as a group pose a danger to the women and girls in their communities, saying "And nowhere is this more evident than when considering the collective danger we pose to black women and our collective lack of willingness to accept and make amends for that truth."<sup>29</sup> A subsequent article by Veronica Wells suggested that the only appropriate word to describe Black men's relationship to Black women is terrorist. Wells argues "for years, decades even, Black women have been trying to tell the entire Black community that one of our biggest threats in the world is the very Black men we've birthed."<sup>30</sup>

This idea was echoed by two leading Black feminists, Amber Phillips and Jamilah Lemieux, visiting The Breakfast Club when Amber Phillips said "Black men are the number 2 cause of death for Black women under 50."<sup>31</sup> On social media hashtags like #BlackMenAreTrash become popular to collectively express the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Veronica Wells, "Because Harasser is Just Not Enough: Why I Consider Calling Black Men Terrorists," *MadameNoire.com*, September 27, 2017, <http://madamenoire.com/842761/because-harasser-is-just-not-enough-why-i-consider-calling-black-men-terrorists/>.

<sup>31</sup> Jamilah Lemieux and Amber Phillips, "Jamilah Lemieux & Amber Phillips Discuss Cultural Journalism with The Breakfast Club," Youtube Video, December 13, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcF8Pbmz1bQ>.

pathological descriptions of cishet Black males. Early this year, #TheRootArticles was created to collectively condemn the slanted stories blaming Black men for homophobia, domestic abuse, and the collective suffering of the Black community.

There are countless examples that could be used to demonstrate this point, though a literature review of the misandric misrepresentations of Black men is not the purpose of this article. However, we believe it is necessary to both contextualize and analyze these stereotypes. Public debates and conversations concerning Black men and women is nothing new to Black journalism. Unlike these pundits, previous generations of Black intellectuals recognized the vulnerability of Black males within patriarchy and often published academic articles in Black magazines like *Essence*, *Jet*, or the *Negro Digest*. In contrast today social media and the proliferation of online blogs have drawn consensus around Black men as violent, patriarchal, and homophobic without any real appeal to evidence, whether sociological or psychological. Today, stereotypes and first-person accounts or *theory* dictate the conclusion of discussions about Black men. In the 60s for example, the *Negro Digest* published "The Frustrated Masculinity of the Negro Male" by Dr. Nathan Hare.<sup>32</sup> This article argued that American society created obstacles specifically designed to prevent Black men from being providers and protectors for their families. Hare argued that one of the main components of patriarchy depended on the ability for men to work, and by preventing Black men the ability to work or find employment, it prevented them from being recognized societally as men.<sup>33</sup> Quoting Killens, Hare explains: "The one thing they will not stand for is for a black man to be a man."<sup>34</sup> Well into the 1980s, Black scholars such as Alvin Poussaint, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, continued to publish social commentaries backed by clinical studies on Black male personality, deviance, and stereotypes.<sup>35</sup> Poussaint

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<sup>32</sup> Nathan Hare, "The Frustrated Masculinity of the Negro Male," *Negro Digest*, August 1964, 5-10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Alvin Poussaint Jr., "What Every Black Woman Should Know About Black Men," *Ebony* 37.10 (1982): 36-41.

emphasized that the growing economic and educational gap between Black men and women would produce various negative associations of Black men generally with lower class violence and deviance. This economic gap placed Black males in a downward trajectory that impacted their life chances and specifically increased their representation in the prison industrial complex. Mass incarceration displaced Black men from their families and communities. Robert Staples, a noted sociologist of Black families, cautioned that the societal negation and demonization of Black men not only affected how the world saw the Black male, but also how Black mothers and caretakers socialized their Black sons.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, *Ebony* magazine kept a close eye on the widening gap between Black men and women throughout American society suggesting that the inequalities between uneducated, poor, and unemployed Black men and Black women would produce problems concerning the more educated and socially mobile Black female counterpart.<sup>37</sup> The economic displacement of Black men became even more noticeable in the 1990s. Dr. Poussaint explained that “Middle-class Black women complain that they feel devalued by Black men who are sexist and treat them disrespectfully. These women are also troubled by Black men who reject them by courting White women, claiming Black women as a group have ‘an attitude.’ Although they are not preoccupied with Black women courting White men, Black men do, in turn, complain of being devalued by Black women.”<sup>38</sup>

Following decades of a deliberate program to institutionally decimate Black men and boys economically, politically, and socially, Black males did in fact emerge as an underclass in America.<sup>39</sup> At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mass incarceration, poverty, and contemporary gender theories emphasizing the disproportionate

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Staples, “The Mother-Son Relationship,” *Ebony* 39.12 (1984): 74-79.

<sup>37</sup> Editor, “How to Close the Widening and Dangerous Gap between Black Men and Women,” *Ebony* 40.4 (1985): 60-66.

<sup>38</sup> Alvin Poussaint Jr., “Stop the Male Bashing and Infighting,” *Ebony* 48.4 (1993): 86-95, 89.

<sup>39</sup> James B. Stewart and Joseph W. Scott, “The Institutional Decimation of Black American Males,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* (1978):82-92 for the relationship between Black male incarceration and societal viability.

deviance of Black men and boys successfully synchronized Black masculinity to criminality and danger.<sup>40</sup>

Black male studies scholars and Black family scholars have long understood the relationship social conditions and institutional white racism have to theory. There has long been an inter-disciplinary and multi-methods consensus concerning the perceived danger and violence Black men pose to society amongst (white) social sciences.<sup>41</sup> Social dominance theorists, psychologists looking at the perceived size and aggressiveness by whites of Black men, economists evaluating agentic behavior, and even political scientists evaluating American attitudes concerning violence all show that Black men are perceived as more violent and dangerous than white men and women and Black women.<sup>42</sup> The stereotypes of Black men which insist that Black men are more dangerous, more sexually predatory, and by effect phobogenic and anti-social, drive many of the policies and perceptions of Black men by whites and other Blacks. It is the culmination of these sex specific phobias that denote what Black male studies scholars identify as anti-Black misandry, or the “cumulative assertions of Black male inferiority due to errant psychologies of lack, dispositions of deviance, or hyper-personality traits (e.g., hyper-sexuality, hyper-

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<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of how stereotypes about Black males being criminals and dishonest effect employment, see Ronald B. Mincy, eds., *Black Males Left Behind* (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence E. Gary, ed., *Black Men* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Ltd., 1981).

<sup>42</sup> Jim Sidanius and Felecia Pratto, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Melissa McDonald, Carlos D. Navarrete, and Jim Sidanius, “Developing a Theory of Gendered Prejudice: An Evolutionary and Social Dominance Perspective,” in *Social Cognition, Social Identity, and Intergroup Relations*, Roderick Kramer, Geoffrey Leonardelli, and Robert Livingston, eds., (New York: Psychology Press, 2011), 189-220, 190; Robert W. Livingston and Nicholas A. Pearce, “The Teddy Bear Effect: Does Having a Baby-Face Benefit Chief Executive Officers?,” *Psychological Science* 20.10 (2009): 1229-1236; Colin Holbrook, Daniel Fessler, and Carlos David Navarrete, “Looming Large: Racial Stereotypes Illuminate Dual Adaptations for Representing Threat versus Prestige as Physical Size,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 37 (2016): 67–78; Corrine McConaughy and Ismail White, “Racial Politics Complicated: The Work of Gendered Race Cues in American Politics,” Working Paper.

[https://apw.polisci.wisc.edu/APW\\_Papers/mcconnaughy\\_white\\_2015.pdf](https://apw.polisci.wisc.edu/APW_Papers/mcconnaughy_white_2015.pdf).

masculinity) which rationalize the criminalization, phobics, and sanctioning of Black male life.”<sup>43</sup> Much of the theory that is publicly supported as Black radicalism merely reorients decadent white theories of Black men’s lack and anti-sociality as intersectional gender theory.<sup>44</sup>

This recodification of racial claims as gendered claims is often utilized in interpreting incidents of abuse or the disproportionate rates of intimate partner violence or intimate partner homicide. In this way, particular incidents of violence by Black males are taken to be demonstrations of some prior ontological presumption about Black masculinity that would not hold up to scrutiny, or be entertained as legitimate, if made as a racial proposition about Blacks. Because racial claims are interrogated sociologically by comparing the behaviors or conditions of whites and Blacks in ways that gender claims about Black males do not, there is an assertion that Black men simply are deviant and violent without any comparison to their female counterparts or other groups who inhabit similar circumstances. Black men have never been the leading cause or the second leading cause of death for Black women, and certainly not through intimate partner homicide. This statistic was not only retracted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, but also revised and excised from several governmental reports and publications as an error.<sup>45</sup> As Carolyn West, a psychologist

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<sup>43</sup> Tommy J. Curry, “Killing Boogeymen: Phallicism and the Misandric Mischaracterizations of Black Males in Theory,” *Res Philosophica* 95.2 (2018): 235-272, 267; and William A. Smith, Chanel Jones, Jalil Bishop, Tommy J. Curry & Walter Allen, “You Make Me Want to Holla and Throw Up My Hands: Campus Culture, Black Misandric Microaggressions, and Racial Battle Fatigue,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (2016):1-21.

<sup>44</sup> See Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), and “Haterz in the Midst: Reflections on the Sequestration and Vitiating of African Male Identity in the Academy,” *Illinois Committee of Black Concerns in Higher Education Journal* (2000): 28-33, and “Michael Brown and the Need for a Genre Study of Black Male Death and Dying,” *Theory and Event: Special Issue on Michael Brown and Ferguson* 17.3 (2014), and “This Nigger’s Broken: Hyper-Masculinity, the Buck, and the Impossibility of Physical Disability in the Black Male Body,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 48.3 (2017): 321-343.

<sup>45</sup> Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., “Assessing Risk Factors for Intimate Partner

specializing in intimate partner violence, writes: “Black Americans are not inherently more violent than other ethnic groups. In fact, many of the racial differences disappear, or become less significant, when researchers control for socioeconomic status.”<sup>46</sup> Other scholars have been clear that framing the disproportionate rates of intimate partner violence as solely belonging to perpetration by Black males is erroneous. Multiple experts on domestic violence in the Black community have realized that the failure to recognize bidirectional abuse, Black male victimization, and Black female perpetration is ideological.

The research provides no support for a conclusion that African Americans have an inherent biological or cultural propensity for violence; rather, the stressors and oppressive systemic forces that disproportionately affect African Americans place them at greater risk for domestic violence...despite the overrepresentation of African American male victims of domestic violence and female-perpetrated homicides, there is a dearth of literature on Black male victims. This omission seems to reflect an assumption that males alone are responsible for intimate violence and are not themselves harmed by abuse. On the contrary, data show that for African American males as well as females, “involvement in abusive relationships is likely to result in depression, stress, and

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Homicide,” *NJJ Journal* 250 (2003): 14-19, 18; Glenn Kessler, “Fact Checker: Holder’s 2009 Claim that Intimate-Partner Homicide is the Leading Cause of Death for African American Women,” *The Washington Post.com*, December 18, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2013/12/18/holders-2009-claim-that-intimate-partner-homicide-is-the-leading-cause-of-death-for-african-american-women/?postshare=9491470635302968&tid=ss\\_fb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2013/12/18/holders-2009-claim-that-intimate-partner-homicide-is-the-leading-cause-of-death-for-african-american-women/?postshare=9491470635302968&tid=ss_fb); Eric H. Holder Jr., “Attorney General Eric Holder Speaks at Domestic Violence Awareness Month Event,” U.S. Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-eric-holder-speaks-domestic-violence-awareness-month-event>.

<sup>46</sup> Carolyn West, “Living in a Web of Trauma: An Ecological Examination of Violence among African Americans,” in *The Wiley Handbook on the Psychology of Violence*, eds. Carlos A. Cuevas and Callie Marie Rennison (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 649-665, 649.

alcohol abuse”—outcomes placing the entire family system at risk.<sup>47</sup>

Social context, ecology, and the antecedents to Black male violence are thought to be irrelevant when theorizing about Black males. The overwhelming assumption of Black men’s hyper-masculinity stands in for the conditions that give rise to intimate partner violence and deny the realities of bidirectional abuse amongst Black men and women historically. For over forty years, various studies have shown intimate partner violence and homicide rates between Black men and women to be comparable.<sup>48</sup> Domestic violence is a complex social issue with multiple causes and correlations in the Black community.<sup>49</sup> As Shareefah N. Al’Uqdah, Calisda Maxwell, and Nicholle Hill explain: “IPV [Intimate Partner Violence] is not attributable to one singular cause, but is a product of multiple factors. These factors include: residing in disadvantage neighborhoods, unemployment, low SES, experiences of racism, and the social, political, and historical remnants of racism that have resulted in a process of projective identification within the African American community.”<sup>50</sup> The racist stereotypes surrounding Black

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<sup>47</sup> Kathleen Malley-Morrison, Denise A. Hines, Doe West, Jesse J. Tauriac, and Mizuho Arai, “Domestic Violence in Ethnocultural Minority Groups,” in *Family Interventions in Domestic Violence*, ed. John Hamel and Tonia L. Nicholls (New York: Springer, 2007), 325.

<sup>48</sup> C.A. Field & R. Caetano, “Longitudinal Model Predicting Mutual Partner Violence among White, Black, and Hispanic Couples in the United States General Population,” *Violence & Victims* (2005): 499-511; and R. Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, S., & Field, C. A., “Unidirectional and Bidirectional Intimate partner violence among White, Black, and Hispanic couples in the United States,” *Violence & Victims* 20 (2008): 393-396; and Robert Hampton & Joan Kim, “Domestic Violence in African American Communities,” in *Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Natalie J. Sokoloff, Christina Pratt (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 127-141.

<sup>49</sup> Tommy J. Curry and Ebony A. Utley, “She Touched Me: Five Snapshots of Adult Sexual Violations of Black Boys.” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 28.2 (2018): 205-41.

<sup>50</sup> Shareefah N. Al’Uqdah, Calisda Maxwell, and Nicholle Hill, “Intimate Partner Violence in the African American Community: Risk, Theory, and Interventions,” *Journal of Family Violence* 31 (2016): 877-884, 880.

men enable white institutions as well as Black intellectuals to scapegoat Black males as the sole perpetrators of violence in Black communities. These pundits continue to assert that IPV resides in the pathological masculinity of Black men. Poverty, racial oppression, and trauma are not explanatory factors for these critics. Empiricism, or a basic knowledge of intra-racial violence amongst Blacks, is not required to speak about Black men or boys, or their relationship with their own communities. As the aforementioned authors state: “Blaming African American men solely for the high rates of IPV in the African American community diminishes service providers’ willingness to counteract the larger societal factors that also contribute to IPV within the African American community, thereby maintaining such negative environments that perpetuates IPV.”<sup>51</sup> The continued support for the ill-informed theories and negative caricatures of Black men by scholars and social media commentators merely perpetuates the conditions and dis-affective personality disorders linked to intimate violence in Black communities.

Black public philosophy plays a vital role both in deconstructing the racist mythologies which accumulate around the Black male body, and perhaps more importantly, in engaging the Black public as to the ever-present dangers of accepting theories without context. It is the job of the Black public philosopher to marry theory to the lived realities of the Black community and connect the antecedent structural inequities to behaviors that are thought to reside within Black (male) deficiencies. This kind of public philosophy ruptures the popularity of ongoing cultural mythologizations of Black male life by showing that the consensus based popularity of these theories, which assert themselves to be correct despite the evidence, is rooted primarily in the confirmation bias of white racist institutions and policymakers that propagate its intellectual and disciplinary stature.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 879.

### **Destroying the Myth of Black Male Non-Involvement with the Black Family**

Currently, there are a number of controlling images of the Black family led by negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media and social media. The former president Barack Obama repeated this “myth of the absent Black father” throughout his presidency suggesting that the absent Black father is responsible for the problem of the “single Black female household” in a Father’s Day address in 2008 and again in 2013 at Morehouse’s commencement when he urged Black male graduates of Morehouse to stay in the home and be good fathers.<sup>52</sup> Even the noted cultural critic bell hooks has written that “Since so many black males uncritically accept patriarchal thinking, they continue to believe that children do not need a fathers care as much as they need mothers... Parenting is a difficult, arduous, time-consuming job that men are not eager to do. In this way black males are no exception. From slavery on many black males have chosen to avoid parenting. They breed children they have no intention of raising.”<sup>53</sup> This long enduring myth continues century long myths concerning Black men as deserters, pimps, and womanizers. The racist caricature of Black men as hyper-sexual becomes a peculiar masculine trait that endangers women and children in these narratives.<sup>54</sup>

The idea that most if not all Black men are deserters and do not care about their family and children has been disproven a number of time over the years. Most notably, the recent CDC 2013 Father Involvement study reported that among the 10,403 father surveyed, a

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<sup>52</sup> Politico Staff, “Text of Obama’s fatherhood speech,” *Politico.com*, June 15, 2008, <https://www.politico.com/story/2008/06/text-of-obamas-fatherhood-speech-011094>;

Barack Obama, “Read President Obama’s Commencement Address at Morehouse College,” *Time.com*, June 2, 2016, <http://time.com/4341712/obama-commencement-speech-transcript-morehouse-college/>.

<sup>53</sup> bell hooks, *We Reel Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (Routledge: New York, 2004), 97-98.

<sup>54</sup> Lawrence E. Gary, “Introduction,” in *Black Men* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Ltd., 1981), 1-17.

higher percentage of Black fathers were more involved in the day to day activities with their child when compared to white fathers.<sup>55</sup> The study reported that 27 percent of Black fathers took their children to or from activities every day compared to 20 percent of white fathers. Forty-one percent of Black fathers helped their children with their homework every day compared with 29 and 28 percent of Hispanic and white fathers, respectively. In spite of the overwhelming evidence that shows Black men are actively involved in their children's lives many people are invested in perpetuating the myth of the absent Black male father. An article published in *The Dallas News* entitled "Why does the myth of the absent black father persist?" states that "Our society has a negative impression of black men that is automatically imposed on black fathers. When black boys exhibit negative behaviors, there is often an automatic assumption of an absent father."<sup>56</sup> The negative impressions of Black men are predicated on stereotypical views of Black men shown repeated in the media. One example of the willingness of people to embrace these stereotypes can be found on the many blog posts and YouTube videos with Black women still holding on to the myth due to their personal experiences with men. One video posted in response to the CDC report argued that since there was a high number of Black men not in the home there is no possible way they are involved in their children's lives.<sup>57</sup> Reading the commentary under this video you can clearly see there are a large number of people who agree with her assessment of why the CDC study is incorrect purely based on their experience. One person posted (M Night) in response to the aforementioned video that: "At the end of the day, Black people just have to look around at their families, friends and acquaintances and see that Black men aren't in the home

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<sup>55</sup> Jo Jones, PhD.; Williams D. Mosher, PhD; Division of Vital Statistics. *Father Involvement with Their Children: United States, 2006-2010*. National Health Statistics Reports. CDC. No 71, Dec 20, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Louis Harrison and Anthony Brown. "Why does the myth of the absent black father persist?" *Dallas News*. <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2017/06/16/myth-absent-black-father-persist>. 2017 accessed April 7, 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Cynthia G, "Did The CDC Really Debunk The Myth Of Absentee Black Fathers?," *YouTube.com*, March 28, 2018, <https://youtu.be/tln1Jlb9tcw>.

actively raising their kids.”<sup>58</sup> There were many comments which echo similar sentiments about the absences of Black men in the family unit.

Previous research done by Robert Staples studying Black families clearly demonstrated that Black men have always played an active role in the lives of their children and other children in the community whether they were married to the mother or not.<sup>59</sup> In studies by Gillette (1960) and Daneal (1975) which are both cited by Staples, he points out that Black middle-class fathers participate more in their child’s care than do their white counterparts and are very child-oriented.<sup>60</sup> Collin’s essay, “The Meaning of Black Motherhood,” published in Staples’s *Black Family Studies* discussed the role that Black men in the communities play by stepping in and becoming father figures to Black boys whose fathers are not in the picture.<sup>61</sup> Collins refers to these male figures as “Other Fathers,” which is very similar to what she describes as “Other Mothers,” women in the community who fulfill the mother role when the mother is not in the picture. Other Fathers provide the financial support while Other Mothers provide emotional support and guidance. One must ask why we readily accept the term/concept of Other Mothers but are resistant to the idea that Other Fathers exist in the Black community. Although a number of these studies are from the 70s, they demonstrate the role Black fathers have historically played in the Black family.

These findings are far from antiquated. A recent study by McDougal and George investigated the role of social fathers in the Black community.<sup>62</sup> Twenty-four Black social fathers were interviewed regarding the role they played in the life of the children and why they became involved in the rearing of the children. Social

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Staples. *The Black Family: Essays and Studies*, (Belmont: Carnegie Learning 1999).

<sup>60</sup> Robert Staples. “Masculinity and Race: the Dual Dilemma of Black Men.” *The Journal of Social Issues*. 1978. 169-183.

<sup>61</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture,” in *The Black Family: Essays and Studies* (Belmont: Carnegie Learning, 1999), 156-166.

<sup>62</sup> Serie McDougal III and Clarence George III, “I Wanted to Return the Favor”: the Experiences and Perspectives of Black Social Fathers.” *Journal of Black Studies*. 2016, Vol 47(6) 524-549.

fathers are defined as “resident or non-resident stepfathers, mothers’ romantic partners, grandfathers, uncles, and many other family associates who demonstrate parental behavior and act as fathers or father figures to a child.”<sup>63</sup> The results revealed there were four major reasons Black men became involved raising non-biological children: package deal concept, the need for a male role model, passing on a blessing, and biological father inadequacy. This article provides a qualitative example of the current way Black males view their roles in the Black family. A recent article by Brandan McLeod investigates the impact that spending time in prison had on the amount of parental involvement Black men had with their children.<sup>64</sup> The results from this study indicated that spending time in prison did not have a negative impact on the amount of parent involvement Black fathers had. Said differently, even when Black fathers are incarcerated during their lifetime they still remain actively involved in the lives of their children. In an effort to correct the stereotypical view of the Black family, Black Public Philosophy can play a major role by providing an outlet for scholars who study the relevant empirical research to speak openly about the issues facing the Black community backed with evidence.

Black public philosophy needs to draw from the insights of early Black family scholars who understood that internalized racism and disciplinary training affect how we think about Black families and the people that comprise those units. La Frances Rodgers-Rose’s *The Black Women* clearly articulated how racial oppression—not personal choices or cultural pathology—created the condition of the current state of the Black family.<sup>65</sup> Rodgers-Rose’s book not only provides evidence of personal stories but also empirical evidence to support the narrative. The Black family has been a subject of study for many years and has largely been viewed through the pathological lens of white social scientists. Joyce Ladner’s book *The Death of White Sociology* gives

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 526.

<sup>64</sup> Branden A. McLeod, “Penalties: Examining Fathers’ Involvement amidst the Collateral Consequences of Previous Criminal Justice Involvement.” *Urban Social Work*, Vol 1(2) 144- 164.

<sup>65</sup> LaFrances Rodgers-Rose, *The Black Woman* (Sage Publication: 1980).

verifiable evidence of how white social scientists have always viewed Black people as well as Black families as deviant.<sup>66</sup> Ladner's argues the measures being used to evaluate Black people and Black families were based on racist scientific measures and did not accurately depict the Black Family. Today we see a resurgence of similar rhetoric when it comes to the study of Black families and the responsibility has landed solely on the "degenerate" Black male body.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Public philosophy is necessary to try to combat some of these negative stereotypes being perpetuated by false information based on personal experiences and the internalization of stereotypes rationalized through oral histories, propaganda, and bias. While it is something of a cliché, and vacuous with regard to the aforementioned program of misinformation to suggest that philosophy is the pursuit or love of wisdom, there is a sense of philosophy that can directly address the internalization of racist stereotypes amongst the Black community. In "On Derelict and Method," Tommy J. Curry argues that "philosophy is an activity of inquiry into the world which is supposed to guarantee its practitioners some level of assuredness in the ways we interpret the realities before us."<sup>67</sup> Unlike other traditions of philosophy that proceed from the intuition of the *a priori* or the moralization of their political values as axiomatic and virtuous, our view of philosophy attempts to offer some schematic association between empirically situated truths and what we can reasonably suggest should guide our interpretation of reality given these truths. Far too often Black philosophy finds itself to be dictated by political ideals that are not substantiated by the information available to scholars. This is often the case with how Black philosophers understand the problem of

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<sup>66</sup> Joyce Ladner. *The Death of White Sociology: Essays on Race and Culture* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press: 1973).

<sup>67</sup> Tommy J. Curry, "On Derelict and Method: The Methodological Crisis of African-American Philosophy's Study of African-Descended Peoples under an Integrationist Milieu," *Radical Philosophy Review* 14.2 (2011):139-164, 144.

racism and whiteness given what we know about implicit bias, racial formidability, and social dominance, but also implicates our understandings of categories we deploy in analysis or advocacy in the real world, like gender. Many Black philosophers working in the areas of race, class, and gender simply do not appeal to history, sociology, economics, or the archives of Black activism throughout the centuries, to ground their predictions about Black poverty, sexual violence amongst Blacks in the United States, etc.<sup>68</sup> As such, what is often reflected in peer-reviewed articles and subsequently disseminated to the public are particularly slanted historiographies isolated from criticism or investigation by the consensus of particular constituents that regard any inquiry into the assumptions of their particular frame as offense. Decades ago, Stuart Hall warned that the very concept of identity could not be trusted as the foundation of cultural studies or a full account of social phenomena:

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity - an 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation).<sup>69</sup>

Public philosophy problematizes the unitary narrative of the self that seems obvious. It is never the case that all women, or all Black women, or the Black woman, or Black masculinity is in fact apparent

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<sup>68</sup> See Tommy J. Curry and Max Kelleher, "Robert F. Williams and Militant Civil Rights: The Legacy and Philosophy of Preemptive Self-Defense," *Radical Philosophy Review* 18.1 (2015): 45-68; and Tommy J. Curry and Gwenetta Curry, "On the Perils of Race Neutrality and Anti-Blackness: Philosophy as an Irreconcilable Obstacle to Thought," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, (Forthcoming).

<sup>69</sup> Stuart Hall, "Who Need Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1996), 5.

and acting in unison with historical force at the moment of examination. As Hall explains, “The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it 'lacks'.”<sup>70</sup> There is no one experience that represents all others. In a sharp departure from the identitarian logics deployed in Black public intellectualism, both as the medium of discourse and the calculus of analysis, the authors suggest that Black philosophical inquiry into social phenomena—*Black public philosophy*—when based on empirical evidence, should emerge as tentative but reproducible. By this the authors are suggesting that philosophical analysis, when applied to material conditions and limited by the parameters of concrete social phenomena, should emerge as a possible theory of the relationship of circumstances amongst many other hypotheses made possible by the consideration of facts. Said differently, “If we take African-American philosophy to be philosophical activity, then we should expect, by necessity of being philosophy, that Africana philosophy should result in the same methodological rigor—some assuredness in the ways that Africana people have used to interpret their realities.”<sup>71</sup> How we think about and consider a problem can produce any number of possible interpretations given the evidence, but attending to the evidence, previous literatures, and findings, regarding a problem should not lend itself to infinite varieties of counter-factual conclusions. For example, while there may be several different ways to theorize the disproportionate rate of intimate partner violence amongst Blacks in the United States, the previous literature and CDC reports documenting the existence of Black male victims since the 1970s rule out theories that suggest there are no Black male victims of IPV or Intimate Partner Homicides (IPH). Given the closeness of the number of reported victims, theories that can explain what has previously been described as bidirectional violence amongst Black couples and families should be given preference to those that cannot. Why? Because given what is known, the theory has to both postulate a tentative cause but

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<sup>70</sup> Stuart Hall, “Who Needs Identity,” 5.

<sup>71</sup> Tommy J. Curry, “On Derelict and Method,” 144.

limit itself to what is actually known about that which is theorized.

*Public philosophy* can serve as a corrective to the mainstream mythologies posing as theory accepted as authoritative in the Black community. In the case of Black men and boys, this mythological discourse is utilized to deleterious effect. In our contemporary landscape to be a Black public intellectual of recognizable status is to endorse a political intersectionality that advocates for a coalition ethos prioritizing the marginalization of other identity groups above the concrete disadvantage and suffering of specific racial and ethnic minorities. Said differently, the coalitional logics of today's popular intersectional norms demand an engagement and endorsement of women generally, LGBTQ battles for recognition, and a condemnation of racism and sexism, but discourage radical programs that build solidarity with indigenous struggles, migrant workers, or Third World anti-colonial movements. This is of course not to say that the issues facing LGBTQ persons or women are not important, but rather to argue that the violence and exploitation of these groups are explained by the force of systems that have in many ways been developed and tested on Black Americans. This explanation does not negate the experiences or marginalization of these groups, rather they focus the attention not on the identitarian calculus of marginalization, but the material consequences of actual, material, oppression. This means that HIV risk, domestic violence, and homicide are analyzed based on their occurrence and propensity in relation to poverty, neighborhood, and socialization of the groups involved, not the mystical interiorization of patriarchy, homophobia, toxic masculinity, etc.

As such, the dominant narratives of Black political progress are progressive, not radical; they require no actual empirical verification or explanation beyond the generalizable gesture to the identity of a selected group of perpetrators. If Black men disproportionately commit violence against women, then Black masculinity is anti-woman and misogynistic. Even though one could imagine that Black men are the majority of the perpetrators of domestic violence against women, it does not hold that the majority of Black men are perpetrators of domestic violence. In theory however

it is this stereotype, or fallacy, that is accepted as true. As Wynter explained a decade ago, the Black feminist intervention into gender centered on the macho caricatures of Black men as the negative element in the Black community. Today, it is this caricature of Black men as violent that explains why Black communities are disproportionately dangerous, homophobic, and misogynistic. Scholars who argue that Black males, and consequently the larger Black community, should be understood through a lens that prioritizes racism, classism, and urban segregation (i.e. structures, institutions, etc.) are considered to be regressive, or worse yet designated as 'hotebs,' because they do not endorse the misandric stereotypes of Black men and boys, and the alleged dangers they pose to the Black family, and the women and children in their communities more broadly.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hotep>

# EVALUATING PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: LESSONS LEARNED BAKING PHILOSOPHICAL BREAD

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In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of public philosophy. Many institutional structures and challenges impede or impose heavy costs on philosophers interested in public engagement. The American Philosophical Association has called for the development of tools for recognizing, evaluating, supporting, and rewarding public philosophy. This essay offers a proposal including four concepts that could be useful for the fruitful evaluation of public philosophy in higher education: substance, accessibility, invitingness, and community-building. These concepts have arisen out of the authors' experience with engaged public philosophy by means of the syndicated and award-winning Philosophy Bakes Bread radio show and podcast that launched in January of 2017. The four concepts we propose for evaluating public philosophy arise centrally in the work that we do and could offer a valuable starting point for the recognition and much needed support for public philosophical work in higher education.



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In 2017, the American Philosophical Association released a statement drafted by its Committee on Public Philosophy calling for members of the profession to encourage and reward quality work in public philosophy and to develop tools for evaluating such work professionally.<sup>1</sup> The need for evaluating public philosophical work calls for systematic thinking about the value of public philosophy and remains one of the movement's challenges. While there are many nuanced forms of public philosophy and some useful considerations

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<sup>1</sup> APA Communications, "APA Statement on Valuing Public Philosophy," *The Blog of the APA*, May 18, 2017, <https://blog.apaonline.org/2017/05/18/apa-statement-on-valuing-public-philosophy/>. Full text of the APA statement:

*"The following statement was proposed by the committee on public philosophy (Lynne Tirrell, chair) and the committee on the status and future of the profession (Sally Scholz, chair) in March 2017 and approved by the board of officers at its meeting in May 2017.*

"The American Philosophical Association values philosophers' participation in the public arena. This includes work that engages with contemporary issues as well as work that brings traditional philosophies to non-traditional settings. Public philosophy may also bring the discipline into dialogue with other humanities, the arts, natural sciences, social sciences, and interested people outside of academia. Public philosophy is done in a variety of traditional and non-traditional media. Public philosophy can be especially valuable when it reaches populations that tend not to have access to philosophy and philosophers. Further, the APA notes that public philosophy raises the profile of the discipline, the scholar, and the home institution.

"The APA encourages departments, colleges, and universities to recognize public philosophy as a growing site of scholarly involvement. To that end, the APA encourages institutions to develop standards for evaluating and practices for rewarding public philosophy in decisions regarding promotion, tenure, and salary, so that faculty members who are interested in this work may, if they choose, pursue it with appropriate recognition and without professional discouragement or penalty. Although peer-reviewed scholarly publications remain central to the profession, the APA applauds philosophers' contributions to public policy, to consultation with government, medical, business, and civil society institutions, and to public opinion in general. Public philosophy presented or published outside of standard academic venues has evident value as external service to the profession and/or community. But we also urge institutions to consider broadening their standards for evidence of excellence in research and teaching and to consider whether their faculty's work in public philosophy is more properly counted as contributing to these latter categories of faculty evaluation."

about its value available,<sup>2</sup> in this paper we propose what we believe are broadly applicable general criteria for evaluating public philosophy, in terms of a) substance, b) accessibility, c) invitingness, and d) community building. Specifically, we will argue that opportunities like radio shows and podcasts open powerful avenues for public philosophical engagement and continuing education, which demonstrate that, with the right recipe, philosophy can be substantive, conversational, inviting, and community-building.

We begin by explaining further the need for criteria for public philosophy, our list of which is neither complete nor exclusive. Next, we introduce the nature and purposes of the Philosophy Bakes Bread radio show and podcast that we launched in January of 2017. We then examine the concept of philosophical substance and our approach to embodying it in a conversational style. After that, we consider how philosophy can be made accessible for the general public, followed by a section on how to bring difficult ideas into reach and to make philosophy inviting. Then, we present our experiences and plans for taking advantage of the power such programming offers and promises for philosophical community building. Finally, we explain the heavy commitment and work involved in creating such programming, typical of public philosophical work in general, which we believe to be worthwhile for the future of philosophy despite its challenges.

## 1. The Need for Criteria for Public Philosophy

The academy is an inherently conservative institution in many ways. Given the great value of many of our time-tested practices and traditions, colleges and universities change slowly. In well-run

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggie, *Socrates Tenured: The Institutions of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016), and Christopher Meyers, "Public Philosophy and Tenure/Promotion: Rethinking Teaching, Scholarship and Service," *Essays in Philosophy* 15, Issue 1 (2014): 58-76. See also a substantial list of 56 "indicators of impact" for research, as found in J. Britt Holbrook, Kelli R. Barr, and Keith Wayne Brown, "Research Impact: We Need Negative Metrics Too," *Nature* 497 (23 May 2013): 439, <https://www.nature.com/articles/497439a>.

institutions, this both allows and is due to attention, care, and thoughtfulness in decision-making. Scholars in philosophy have been conditioned over the years to embody the norms of other fields, and are typically evaluated on the basis of research, teaching, and service. These categories also are generally calcified into norms directing scholars' work. As scholars are busy people, we tend typically to engage most in those activities on which we are evaluated, according to the traditional norms for evaluation.

Academic journals and scholarly book monographs are generally the avenue for advancement and recognition for most research expectations. Teaching criteria usually have to do with classroom teaching and the mentorship of students, though the latter is only narrowly measured, if it is measured at all. Service in some institutions concerns simple or basic activities, such as serving on various committees, and in some others it can mean the running of one's institution. Activities that are called "public philosophy" often do not fit neatly in any of these categories. Some scholars and administrators consider it a form of service, thinking that public philosophy is the public presentation of ivory tower insights, such as in the form of public lectures or writings shared with the community. This outlook does not see public philosophy as research because the discovery of truth is thought to happen first, and then the activity in question is more a matter of dumbing down and delivering wisdom from on high to the masses.

Other outlooks see public philosophy as teaching, especially when in appearance it shares attributes with classroom activities, such as in teaching philosophy in extra-institutional settings. This outlook similarly sees public philosophy as a matter of delivering wisdom to the lucky recipients beyond the academy. Rarely, but occasionally, public philosophy is understood as research. When it is, however, it is often weighted fractionally in comparison with *real* scholarly research. A few op-eds in newspapers might, in generous departments, be thought to add weight to a weak journal publication record. This is often how such work is perceived, with the exception of extraordinary cases in which a public philosophical project both garners large sales or visibility and awards, like a Pulitzer prize or a major book award.

Some tenure and promotion guidelines specify that for a book to be counted as research it must be published by a university press. That would separate projects like Alexander Nehamas's 2016 book on *Friendship*<sup>3</sup> or Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*<sup>4</sup> from \$150 hardbacks from major university presses<sup>5</sup> because they were not published with the right "pedigree."<sup>6</sup>

When one is already a tenured full professor at an elite university, such distinctions matter less, yet they affect scholars everywhere. In cases of book publications that sometimes garner broad, general audiences, we are still talking about philosophical works that are typically one-directional, not considering the research potential and meaning of community-building and transactional scholarship. Scholars can and do often learn from and in communities. Public engagement in philosophy can be revelatory in remarkable ways, yet it is often discouraged. Such trends can push scholars to be less relevant, less intelligible for the general public, and thus less apparently worthy of public support. If and when scholars wish to overcome these challenges, or when administrators appreciate these forces and want to counteract them, mechanisms are and will be needed for differentiating valuable work to be encouraged and supported from wanton or idle, careless proclamations or attention-getting yet publicly or institutionally harmful behavior. For these reasons, we offer a set of basic categories for evaluative criteria. We present a simple approach for evaluation criteria because, at least for early experiments, starting simply makes the process more accessible to all involved and, in time, problems can inform refinements to the

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *On Friendship* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Such as Bruce Kuklick's excellent book, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/a-history-of-philosophy-in-america-1720-2000-9780198250319>.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, Menand's book won a Pulitzer Prize in 2002 for History and Nehamas is already established beyond any need for promotion. Yet in some institutions, evaluation criteria would count against works of these kinds for people seeking advancement.

categories that we propose.

## 2. What Is Philosophy Bakes Bread?

In January of 2017, we, the authors, launched a public philosophical project in the form of a radio show and podcast. Philosophy Bakes Bread is a talk radio show that airs on WRFL Lexington, 88.1 FM in Lexington, KY, and syndicates on KBLU LP Logan, 92.3 FM in Logan, Utah. The show is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA). After airing, our episodes come out as a podcast.<sup>7</sup> The program began as a weekly show and centers on an interview format. Regular episodes are approximately one hour long, and are occasionally accompanied by “Breadcrumb” episodes, which run eight to twenty minutes in length. Regular episodes invite a guest onto the show, often a professional philosopher or someone from beyond philosophy who thinks philosophically or about philosophical issues. Our aim is to showcase the practical value of philosophy for everyday life and leadership. The show gets its name from the poet Novalis, who in reply to the quip that philosophy bakes no bread, wrote that “Philosophy can bake no bread, but she can procure for us God, Freedom, and Immortality. Which, then, is more practical, Philosophy or Economy?”<sup>8</sup> We reply to the line that says that philosophy bakes no bread, talking to philosophers who exemplify great metaphorical bread baking. So far, our guests have included Dr. John Lachs of Vanderbilt University, Dr. Martha Nussbaum, as well as the authors Danny Klein and Tom Cathcart of *The New York Times* bestseller, *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar*.<sup>9</sup> At the time of writing, we have aired 73 episodes on the radio and released 67 in the

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<sup>7</sup> Available on SOPHIA’s Web site, on PhilosophersInAmerica.com, or directly at PhilosophyBakesBread.com

<sup>8</sup> A less embellished version is available in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Novalis. See Kristin Gjesdal, “Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg [Novalis],” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 11, 2014, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/novalis/>.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein, *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

podcast.<sup>10</sup>

There are many philosophy podcasts these days. It is reasonable to wonder how Philosophy Bakes Bread is different. Many shows introduce listeners to the history of philosophy. Or, they talk about some particular philosophical issue. These are typically aimed at the introductory to advanced student of philosophy, or to specialists. Some target general listeners, but even among those, most are either topical or survey-style shows. Our show targets general audiences, first via the radio in Lexington, KY, and then around the world via our podcast. In addition, our focus is on how and why philosophy matters, how it makes a difference for our lives, thus filling a niche in the genre of philosophy podcasts. It takes a great deal of work to put on this show, and so it simply is not the case that anyone can put such a show on. A lot of time and some resources, such as a podcast recording service like Zencastr, and a distribution service, like Libsyn.com, not to mention transcription work, such as in the help we get from a paid undergraduate philosophy student, are needed to produce the show. The reasons to do this are many; however: it advances SOPHIA's mission of building communities of philosophical conversation. It also pursues pragmatic public philosophers' goals of public engagement and emphasis on the relevance of philosophy to life. It yields rich responses and interactions with listeners. It offers materials for discussions for SOPHIA's local chapters, and promotes the value of philosophy for the public. Some podcasters have developed a significant audience, to the point of generating a great deal of support on sites like Patreon.com.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> There is a process for the various steps of releases, hence the delay in podcast releases.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of writing, Stephen West is receiving \$7,376 per episode he releases in the Philosophize This podcast, via his Patreon page: <https://www.patreon.com/philosophizethis>. Given the many costs, in terms of services and time, generating support makes such work more feasible and perhaps profitable for exceptional cases.

### 3. Substantive Philosophy in Conversational Style

We do not believe in drawing strict lines for what is and is not philosophy, for that has long been a way of exercising unwarranted exclusion and bias. Nevertheless, we recognize that it is possible that not everything a philosopher does is necessarily philosophical just because a philosopher is doing it. Public philosophers are, furthermore, often criticized for either “dumbing down” philosophy or for not really doing serious philosophy. We reject that attitude. It takes great mastery to understand ideas well enough to render difficult or complex thoughts simple and clear. When we invite people on Philosophy Bakes Bread to engage in substantive philosophical conversation, we often welcome professional philosophers, but not only. We have had guests from the legal field on the show, such as the host of *The Cross Examined Life* podcast.<sup>12</sup> Cathcart and Klein, authors of *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar*, earned bachelors degrees in philosophy, but have had careers in hospice management and in writing.<sup>13</sup> Some of our guests have run outdoor expeditions companies,<sup>14</sup> high school classrooms,<sup>15</sup> university assessment

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<sup>12</sup> Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Chris Tatem, “Is the Cross-Examined Life Worth Living?” Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 20, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, May 16, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/06/22/024-ep20-is-the-cross-examined-life-worth-living/>.

<sup>13</sup> Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, Tom Cathcart, and Daniel Klein, “The Wisdom in Humor,” Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 17, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, April 24, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/05/31/021-ep17-the-wisdom-in-humor/>.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Andrea Christelle, “Philosophy in Nature,” Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 28, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, June 13, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/07/18/032-ep28-philosophy-in-nature/>; and Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Alejandro Strong, “Philosophy Outdoors,” Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 57, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, December 4, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/01/26/061-ep57-philosophy-outdoors/>.

<sup>15</sup> Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Nick Caltagiarone, “Philosophy in

efforts,<sup>16</sup> YouTube businesses and consultancies,<sup>17</sup> educational and training companies,<sup>18</sup> productive writing careers as independent scholars,<sup>19</sup> as well as high powered political commentary news venues, such as *Vox.com*.<sup>20</sup> In the future, we envision more guests who are not academically trained philosophers, but who care about and showcase the value of philosophical ideas in their work. SOPHIA's mission, after all, is to engage people beyond the field of philosophy and beyond the academy in philosophical conversation. We want our conversations to be meaningful and substantive philosophical dialogues. So, it is important to reflect on what it means for such dialogues to be substantive. In fact, the statement from the American Philosophical Association about public philosophy hinted at the need for some new thinking about the nature and value of public philosophical work, such

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High School," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 37, Transcribed by Laura M. of Rev.com, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, August 8, 2018, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/08/30/041-ep37-philosophy-in-high-school/>.

<sup>16</sup> Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Annie Davis Weber, "Assessing Assessment," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 25, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, May 30, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/07/05/029-ep25-assessing-assessment/>.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Gregory Brian Sadler, "The YouTube Philosopher," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 38, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, August 15, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/09/05/042-ep38-the-youtube-philosopher/>.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Amy Leask, "Philosophy at Home," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 46, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, September 25, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/10/21/050-ep46-philosophy-at-home/>.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and John Altmann (LeGore), "Disability and Popular Culture," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 66, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, April 2, 2018, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/06/26/070-ep66-disability-and-popular-culture/>.

<sup>20</sup> See Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Matthew Yglesias, "Public Philosophy and Polarization," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 49, October 9, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/11/02/053-ep49-public-philosophy-and-polarization/>.

that it can be evaluated and counted among a scholar's contributions towards tenure and promotion.

So, what is substantive philosophy? One thing it need not necessarily be is jargon-filled. Jargon can prove helpful for short-hand references, but technical terms are not a defining feature of philosophical substance. On our account, a substantive philosophical conversation is either about issues that are decidedly philosophical, such as issues about knowledge, the nature of things, or values. Or, it is about apparently mundane matters or topics not typically considered philosophical, but addressed with philosophical methods, such as of questioning, creative hypothetical speculation, assumption testing, and so on. Public engagement is wonderful, but mere showmanship, getting attention by means of sensationalism, name-calling, hurtful acts, or other tricks, is not the modeling of philosophical virtues. As Dewey argued in the "Supreme Intellectual Obligation,"<sup>21</sup> our aim is similarly to develop in ourselves and in our listeners the scientific attitudes and intellectual habits of mind necessary to appreciate wisdom and to put it to use. The scientific attitude is skeptical, yet adaptable in the face of evidence. The intellectual habits of mind are those which ask for clarification of terms and assumptions, the testing of beliefs for consistency and coherence, and the evaluation of our moral claims and beliefs.

We began our interview-styled episodes with Anthony as our first guest on the show. Prior to airing on WRFL, the show had been a pilot podcast that Eric began in 2015. Given that, we introduced Anthony by talking about a key and wonderful opening text of great relevance still today, Plato's *Republic*.<sup>22</sup> Shows like that one cover material that is considered decidedly philosophical. Episode 3, by

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<sup>21</sup> John Dewey, "The Supreme Intellectual Obligation," *Science Education* 18 (February 1934): 1-4. Republished in *The Later Works of John Dewey, Volume 9, 1925-1953: 1933-1934*, Edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), LW: 9.96-101.

<sup>22</sup> Eric Thomas Weber and Anthony Cashio, "The Molemen and Plato's Cave Today," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 1, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, January 9, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/01/19/ep1-the-molemen-and-platos-cave-today/>.

contrast, focused on modern history and social science about generation theory, approached with a philosopher's eye and our questions for Dr. John Shook about an outlook that some consider to be deterministic.<sup>23</sup>

Some of our episodes will be *about* philosophy, its context and presentation in education, more than about a particular philosophical text or issue. One example is our two episode set on teaching philosophy to first-generation college students.<sup>24</sup> Issues like that one are approached philosophically, more than being specially about this or that narrow philosophical issue. For example, in making assumptions about student's needs, one may fail to consider economically disadvantaged students, revealing the potential for philosophy professors' injustice in the classroom. One example is that first-generation college students with financial needs may not have their books for a class until a month into a semester, because of delays in financial aid distribution to buy their textbooks. To judge such students as irresponsible for not having their books earlier adds insult to the significant inconvenience of poorly timed funding.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and John Shook, "All Shook Up about World War III," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 3, Transcribed by Rebekah K. at Rev.com, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, February 1, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/02/01/007-ep3-all-shook-up-about-world-war-iii/>.

<sup>24</sup> Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, Daniel Brunson, and Seth Vannatta, "Teaching Philosophy to First-Generation College Students: Part I of II," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 6, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, February 16, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/02/16/010-ep6-pt1of2-on-teaching-philosophy-to-first-gen-college-students/>; and Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, Bertha Alvarez Manninen, and Jackie Kegley, "Teaching Philosophy to First-Generation College Students, Part 2 of 2," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 15, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, April 10, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/04/26/019-ep15-pt2of2-on-teaching-philosophy-to-first-gen-college-students/>.

<sup>25</sup> For that discussion see Weber, Cashio, Brunson, and Vannatta, "Teaching Philosophy to First-Generation College Students: Part I of II," Transcript page 11, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/PBB-6-BrunsonAndVannatta-Transcript-Boling-051017.pdf>.

At bottom, whatever the topic of our episodes, we aim to keep our conversations philosophically substantive by a) not letting guests get away with unquestioned assumptions or beliefs; b) holding them accountable for their arguments; and c) differentiating substance from “rigor.” These expectations can be guiding criteria for judging the substance in an individual scholar’s public lecture, writing, or engagement. The first two of these practices may seem straightforward, but the latter bears some explanation. There are many scholars who think that “rigor” is what matters, that ideas must be new and must be presented with the utmost of precision, even if such description makes the material unintelligible to listeners. Here we see a clash of ideals of public philosophy, for if rigor requires inaccessibility, it is incompatible with good public philosophy aimed to engage the wider public. We do not believe that such rigor is a necessity for substance. While experts may never succeed at ensuring that the lay public understands all the subtleties of a specialist’s theories and refined beliefs, the test, according to Dewey is whether humanity can benefit from wisdom maximally, while diminishing the harms that come from scientific innovations, broadly understood. We believe that “rigor” as a term and concept is often employed in elitist and exclusionary ways, as a kind of wrongheaded bit of jargon. As Einstein is often attributed for having said, “If you can’t say it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.”<sup>26</sup> We believe that substance does not have to be inaccessible. When rigor calls fundamentally for accessible precision, we favor that, but whatever else people might mean by it worries us. Inaccessibility of wisdom undermines its value for humanity, which conflicts with the idea that it is a virtue, particularly when more people need to understand or otherwise benefit from relevant insights that could improve life for our fellow men and women.

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<sup>26</sup> A good example of our point is that this idea is useful even if Einstein never quite said exactly this. The attribution is not the point.

#### 4. Making Philosophy Accessible

When one aims to engage in accessible public philosophy, it is important to ask: “accessible for whom?” One’s audience matters. There are those philosophers who worry about the term or concept of “audience,” since it summons the idea that the philosopher is some great expert who delivers his or her wisdom to the uninformed masses. The first worry, about assumptions of expertise, is of concern if philosophers assume that they do not have anything to learn from those whom they are engaging. “Audiences” today, however, can respond to and communicate with content creators. Social media are largely responsible for that great change. When we put out our podcasts and requests for feedback, people have responded by email, Twitter, Facebook, and voicemail. We call for and welcome people’s feedback, wishing to learn from it, without denying that philosophers can have valuable substance to contribute as well.

The second worry about the language of “audience” is the one-way street connotation that might be involved. But, that too is undercut by social media. Our “breadcrumb” episodes have followed up on listener feedback, resulting in having past guests on again. We also ask for listener comments, questions, and answers to our questions for segments or dedicated “breadcrumb” episodes that we call “You Tell Me!”

That said, we will continue to use the word “audience,” understanding that we do not mean to imply a limitation of insight to our expertise, nor that public engagement should mean just one-way communication. Audience matters because it informs us on what “accessibility” can mean. Wonks in the public policy world can benefit tremendously, such as in the foreign policy sphere, by language from Martha Nussbaum on the capabilities approach to development. Amartya Sen’s formal writing style won’t win him awards for poetry,<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See this biting critique of his writing style if targeted to general audiences: Wes Alwan, “How Not to Be a Public Intellectual: Amartya Sen’s Terrible Piece in the New Republic,” *The Partially Examined Life: A Philosophy Podcast and Philosophy Blog*, August 24, 2014, <https://partiallyexaminedlife.com/2014/08/24/how-not-to-be-a-public-intellectual-amartya-sens-terrible-piece-in-the-new-republic/>,

yet his work has been highly influential for many in humanitarian aid. Philosophers of education who study philosophical psychology may have a great deal to contribute to debates about self-concept and other educational phenomena. Using traditional scholarship and jargon can be useful and perhaps even standard for policy wonks who design new policies for education, the environment, or foreign aid. At the same time, that is but one kind of audience and there can be many others. As such, accessibility as a criterion will vary in form depending up on the relevant audience, something which the author alone does not control entirely. As such, one must take care to imagine the potential breadth of one's audience. For that reason, we lean towards imagining a broad audience.

In our case, we aim to engage in philosophical conversation that can be understood even by people who only have a 10<sup>th</sup> grade education.<sup>28</sup> This means that we either avoid jargon altogether, or we insist that our guests use simpler terms to explain more complex phrases and language. We have had people on our program who have used terms like “orality,” “sublimation,” “otherizing,” “normativity,” philosophical “pragmatism,” and “Hegelian dialectic.” Terms like these yield a request from us to explain them immediately and briefly. We make it a fun challenge to ask seasoned experts to explain a very complex term like one of these within about 1 minute.<sup>29</sup> It seems

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which refers to Amartya Sen, “Global Warming Is Just One of Many Environmental Threats That Demand Our Attention,” *The New Republic*, August 22, 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/118969/>.

<sup>28</sup> According to a report on figures relevant to the year 2000, roughly 84% of Americans 25 years or older had completed at least a 10<sup>th</sup> grade education, and 80% had at least a high school diploma. Trudy Suchan, M. J. Perry, J. D. Fitzsimmons, A. E. Juhn, A. M Tait, and C. A. Brewer, “Education,” in *Census Atlas of the United States: Census 2000 Special Reports*, 157-173, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C., 2007, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/censusatlas/>, 158-159.

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Larry A. Hickman, Weber's former dissertation director, took on the task of explaining Hegel's concepts of “thesis,” “antithesis,” and “synthesis” in a minute or less in Episode 40. See Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Larry A. Hickman, “Democracy and Education Today,” *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 40, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, August 28, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/09/17/044-ep40-democracy-and-education-today/>. In fairness, we warn guests of our expectations, so to avoid such

funny at the time, but if a general listener tuned into 88.1 FM in Central Kentucky cannot understand a necessary term in under a minute, it is likely that we should avoid its use, given our chosen audience. Of course, our audience also includes scholars and intellectuals from over 100 countries, who listen via the podcast, but we must not ignore less experienced listeners just because explaining concepts is challenging or just because we are unaccustomed to talking to people who have never heard of concepts like the Marxist understanding of the alienation of labor. Or, on occasion, when we realize a difficult word slipped through without explanation, we sometimes introduce a word or two in a break before a segment in which it comes up.

Philosophy can be inaccessible. The term “alienation” may seem obvious to the initiated philosopher, but not to the general public. A simple explanation can render terms like this easier to understand. If we want people to benefit from what we are doing, we need to put our ideas in terms that people can easily grasp, and that need not undermine the value or substance of what we are talking about. It is important to note that just having a philosophy podcast does not mean that it will be accessible. Philosophy is hard, especially for people who are new to it. Thus, our sequence - airing on the radio first - presents a strong cause for rendering our language simple, clear, and intelligible, as well as our ideas understandable in bite sized steps that we hope all can follow. We find that this challenge requires us to understand our subject matter better. It takes more preparation, not less, to strive for accessibility.

Last but not least, we find it is important to consider the way our show can be physically accessible to the largest audience possible. Radio shows and podcasts are great at reaching large audiences but may alienate some listeners, especially those with hearing impairments. In order to make the format of the show accessible to a larger audience we have been working hard to fulfill the goal of providing a transcript for every episode on the show’s website. While

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quizzes, one need only resist the urge to use language that our listeners might find challenging. Given academic culture, however, it is considerably more difficult than most scholars expect.

not every episode has a transcript yet, due to costs and processing time, we remain committed to getting every episode transcribed so as to be more accessible to a larger audience.

The transcription process offers many more benefits beyond accessibility for persons with hearing impairments. For two examples, texts of our shows offer a kind of academic archiving that can be cited and quoted from with pagination, as we have done in the present paper. Transcripts can be shared and are quite popular on Academia.edu. They are also very useful pedagogical tools for those who have chosen to assign podcast episodes as course texts for philosophy classes. Along with the podcast episodes, our transcripts have been assigned in courses in Introductory Philosophy, Ethics, Business Ethics, American Philosophy, and the Philosophy of Religion, according to listener reports. Searching for quotes and passages is also easier. This renders what might have seemed more like a service product, in a conversational interview, more akin to a research product, which has technical, referenceable text with pagination and formal formatting. Accessibility, therefore, bears many far-reaching benefits in its various forms.

### **5. Making Philosophy Inviting**

We intend by the category of “invitingness” the general idea that philosophical conversations or arguments should be presented in such a way that the intended audience would *want* to engage with it. This category sometimes has less to do with content and more with overall presentation, but not entirely. Esoteric puzzles about the logic of counterfactual conditionals concerning the theory of possible worlds may be a very difficult topic to make interesting to non-specialists. Perhaps there can be a manner of delivery that would make it work, but some topics connect far more easily with people’s interests, such as ethics in life and death decision-making. This does not mean that topics must always be ethical or about every life issues. They can be about art, science, epistemology (though the word is likely to be better avoided for general audiences), and more, but the preparation for public engagement of whatever topic must be prepared for with

careful consideration of what will make it inviting. This dimension of public philosophy can be quite demanding, and involves a skill set not often taught nor traditionally celebrated in the academy. There is admittedly a bit of “salesmanship” that may seem crude to many academic philosophers,<sup>30</sup> but that concern is ill-considered. Thinking of making philosophy inviting involves many of the same considerations one has when presenting difficult ideas in the classroom or writing for the general public as established scholars do when they write for *The Stone* at *The New York Times* or other such venues.

While there are many ways of doing philosophy in an inviting and engaging manner. The goal is to strike the right combination of substance and accessibility as determined by the target audience. When it comes to Philosophy Bakes Bread (PBB), we want the audience to understand how valuable philosophy can be for their lives. We are constantly working to find the right blend of relaxed casualness of conversation and rich content. If the conversation is overly casual it runs the risk of being flippant. Yet, too much formality and it risks becoming boring to the general public and thus becoming less accessible. A good deal of preparation for each show involves developing the questions that we think will lead to just this recipe. We find that some of the best questions are lighthearted in delivery but can only really be answered with thoughtful, insightful responses.

One of the best ways of making public philosophy inviting is by making it personal. This is the heart of our show. We want people to connect with personalities, to get to know something about the persons speaking and how their experiences illustrate the richness of philosophy for them and for others. It’s vital for us, therefore, that we start with the maxim “Know Thyself”. Rather than thinking of philosophy as “the book” or “the text” or even “the argument,” people need to see that there’s a person - or several people - there with histories not too unlike ours, but with experiences of viewpoints that make them unique and special to learn from. That helps us either to

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<sup>30</sup> Jeffery J. Williams, “The Rise of the Promotional Intellectual,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 5, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Rise-of-the-Promotional/244135>.

identify with them or at least to understand them better. It helps us to connect with why someone may think and feel very differently from how we do.

The best show is revealing. It shows us something personal and practical. After all, that philosophy has broad practical application is the thesis of the show. We strive to demonstrate that philosophical problems arise from personal concerns and the interests of members of the community. For just this reason their philosophical work has tremendous practical impact. For instance, Jana Mohr Lone, Director of University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children, told us how her interest in finding a way to connect philosophy with her own children's education marked the beginning of her important work in doing philosophy for children.<sup>31</sup> By making philosophy personal we seek to dispel the aura of the esoteric that often surrounds the public conception of philosophy.

One of the motivations behind this show, and our desire to engage in public philosophy generally, is that we both find great joy in philosophical thought and conversation and we want to share this joy with our guests and listeners. We also find consolation in difficult times.<sup>32</sup> There is a style of philosophy, common among many academics and stereotypically expected among young white men in coffee shops, that is decidedly confrontational. Our simple and playful

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<sup>31</sup> Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Jana Mohr Lone, "Philosophy for Children," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 13, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, April 3, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/04/12/017-ep13-philosophy-for-children/>.

<sup>32</sup> See Eric Thomas Weber, "Acceptance and Happiness with Stoicism," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Pilot Episode 0.1, March 14, 2015, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2015/03/14/0-1-ep0-1-acceptance-happiness-with-stoicism-pilot/>; Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and John Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 5, Transcribed by Kevin Dotson, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, February 9, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/02/09/009-ep5-john-lachs-on-stoic-pragmatism/>; and Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Annie Davis Weber, "Finding Peace," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 59, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, December 18, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/02/16/063-ep59-finding-peace/>.

advice for those who want to engage in public philosophy that is inviting is: don't be a jerk. This is an important stylistic concern. While there is a place for a combative or confrontational style, we find this style is uninviting to most members of the public. We want to encourage interest in philosophy, the ideas of our guests, and the growth of the philosophical community. We want more people to be thoughtful and to be able to be civil as they entertain others' ideas without necessarily adopting them. The Socratic method is tried and true, but when weaponized, it can work against the purposes of the way we are approaching public philosophy. One can be critically engaged with the public and other thinkers without also undermining the sense of community with acrimonious questions or tone.

The topics of our shows are often quite serious, but we want to show that there is a lighter side to philosophers and to philosophy as well. Philosophers can seem so serious, to the point of grumpiness. At the same time, we know that philosophy and philosophers can be fun and funny. To this end we include a segment at the end of the show called "Philosophunnies." The idea is that it's important for people to see that philosophers know how to laugh – we can laugh at ourselves, and we can laugh about the things we write and talk about. Even difficult subjects have been useful for us to laugh about. We have found that humor often disarms people. It warms listeners up to material, furthermore, or helps us to see a sunnier side to cloudy or darker topics. The key is to use that kind of device for the right reasons, and to put it at the end, as a reward for paying attention to the meat, potatoes, and the vegetables of the episode. Like a good meal, philosophy can be nourishing and fun. The idea that "A serious and good philosophical work could be written consisting entirely of jokes" is often attributed to Wittgenstein, but even stranger, Charles Peirce evidently said that "I seriously believe that a bit of fun helps thought and tends to keep it pragmatic."<sup>33</sup> We do too.

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<sup>33</sup> Charles Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Volume 5, CP 5.71. We are grateful to Daniel Brunson for bringing this quote to our attention.

## 6. Community-Building — Philosophy Breaks Bread

Another reason for including humor in our material is that humor has tremendous power both to humanize and build community. For our show, it is part of our effort to weave together an inviting style with the final dimension of public philosophy we would like to highlight – community building. There is much that philosophy excels at, but we have found, to our delight, that one of the great strengths of public philosophy, one that is often not touted, is its ability to create, expand, and enrich communities. Community building depends on success in the other categories, i.e. substance, accessibility, and invitingness. Insofar as public philosophy exhibits these characteristics well, it may well lead to community development and engagement.

Community building can also be an intentional part of public philosophy. When we began planning for the show we knew we wanted to find ways to encourage and build community. In fact, *Philosophy Bakes Bread* is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA), whose mission is to build communities of philosophical conversation. As such, the radio show and podcast were meant in part to serve as tools for offering conversational topics for communities to get together and talk about. In fact, we have begun creating prototype one-sheet documents about select episodes that local groups, SOPHIA chapters, can use to facilitate rich, meaningful conversations.<sup>34</sup>

Since the show's planning stages for radio delivery in the fall of 2016, we wanted to find ways to engage with our listeners and encourage conversations outside of the show. We have always included the "You Tell Me!" segment. We had originally planned to

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<sup>34</sup> See for example James William Lincoln, "Episode 1: The Molemen and Plato's Cave Today – A Slice of Philosophically Baked Bread," *The Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA)*, March 16, 2018, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/03/16/the-molemen-platos-cave-today/>; and James William Lincoln, "Episode 53: Kneeing and Civil Protest – A Slice of Philosophically Baked Bread," *The Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA)*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/07/18/kneeling-and-civil-protest/>.

respond to comments and questions at the beginning of every show, but we have now found that putting out smaller episodes, “Breadcrumbs”, is a more effective and fun way of responding. We also try to utilize many of the tools available for modern dialogue – Facebook, Twitter, email, and voicemail. We treat our show as an invitation to the listeners to think about the issues and questions we raise and to join in larger community discussions.

Community-building is always a mix between the intentional and the organic and we have been delighted by the ways our show has been able to create community. At the time of this writing, the show has had over 44,000 downloads from over 100 countries, not counting listeners to the radio show in Kentucky and Utah, nor to any livestream listeners who tune in to the radio stations via the internet. The work we put into this show reaches a much larger audience than the average traditional academic paper or book. The vast majority of our podcast listeners are in the United States, the U.K., Australia, and Canada, but we have had downloads from Austria to Zambia and from Thailand to Turkey. The podcast format allows for and encourages community beyond normal international boundaries and has yielded rich friendships with inmates in federal prison in Lexington, KY as well as university professors in Venezuela, dealing with governmental collapse.

Because Philosophy Bakes Bread is both a podcast and a radio show we have found that it can have global appeal while also encouraging community and conversation at a more intimate level. The biggest surprise is probably that our most regularly responsive listeners are in prison. A group of inmates in a federal prison in Lexington, KY have written us many times, have sent us letters, paintings they have made, as well as questions and responses to our prompts. The group listens each week, talks about the show, and sends us their thoughts. They have told us that they deeply value the show and hope that we can help them start a SOPHIA chapter in the prison. This type of community connection and outreach demonstrates the power of public philosophy generally, reaching even people whom most people do not see or hear from. Also at the local level, we have felt incredible warmth and encouragement from our home station,

WRFL Lexington. In our first year, 2017, the station named Philosophy Bakes Bread “Favorite Talk Show” for the year. Then, in May of 2018, we were awarded “Overall Favorite Show” of the many programs that air on the station. It is not just scholars and students of philosophy, nor people far away, who have been welcoming and found our inviting, community-building worthwhile. Philosophy can reach people and be a tool for building genuine communities right in our own hometowns. We have achieved our start in community-building with a radio show and podcast, but other groups that are like SOPHIA can also gain from this kind of local and global outreach to communities, prisons, and other interested groups, either for its own sake, or for the countless benefits that come from enriching community engagement and interaction, or both.

### **7. Conclusion: A Lot of Work, but Worth Our While**

We have presented some possible criteria by which public philosophy may be assessed in institutions of higher education, though they could easily apply to other educational levels if and when pre-college philosophy were to grow. Our criteria value philosophy engaged with the public in terms of substance, accessibility, invitingness, and community building. These categories are also suggestions for philosophers to consider when they think about presenting their ideas to the public for other reasons, such as in pursuing grant support or publication agreements. In our experience, they are what have emerged as some of the most salient and important factors to consider when engaging in public philosophy. This list is not exhaustive, nor do we think that all public philosophy must include all of these criteria – though all do require substance at least. If philosophy is to have a future both within and outside of the academy, we need to develop guidelines such as these for the assessment of the quality of public philosophy. Here we have attempted to show that this is a task that can be to the benefit of all, including the scholars. Given the current political climate and the growth of new forms of communal spaces, philosophers need to consider seriously the ways that philosophy can be effective outside of the academy. To this end, philosophers need to

be prepared to engage with the general public. This means the training of skills and techniques that are alien and even seemingly antithetical to philosophy as it is widely practiced in the academy.

The work of public philosophy can require a retraining of our academic habits. It also takes a great deal of time and resources.<sup>35</sup> As it stands, those who care to pursue public philosophical engagement must take risks in straying from some entrenched academic norms. Such work is riskier so long as our institutional structures still fail to recognize, evaluate, or reward public philosophical work. Traditionalists will be dismissive and belittling. But the more people practice public philosophy, the faster the culture will shift. We must take risks, invest the time and resources, and believe in the work enough until others come around and think it was their idea all along. We do philosophy in public not for attention, but because it is, as Dewey insisted, among our supreme intellectual obligations as scholars and philosophers. We offer *Philosophy Bakes Bread* as an example of what philosophy can look like in the future, when it is freed from the historical limitation of academic traditions of thinking and communicating. It is our best effort to put public philosophy into practice and to showcase the ways in which the profession can grow in substantive, accessible, and inviting community-building.

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<sup>35</sup> Recording our podcast takes time to plan and invite guests, plan for interview content, record interviews, edit episodes, air episodes on radio, master aired episodes for the podcast, prepare show notes, prepare social media promotional language and photos, and then request, review, and format transcripts, released on our Web site. Costs include money for our recording platform, our podcast dissemination platform, our Web site, our editing, our transcription, and help with production as well as promotion of the podcast's platforms and special releases. These are some of the investments in time and money that depend on donations to SOPHIA now and that motivate forthcoming fundraising efforts on Patreon.com and Facebook.

# JOHN DEWEY STUDIES IN CENTRAL EUROPE: ELI KRAMER INTERVIEWS EMIL VISNOVSKY

EMIL VISNOVSKY (Comenius University)  
& ELI KRAMER (University of Warsaw)



Emil Višňovský, PhD. is Full Professor of Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy & History of Philosophy, Comenius University, and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Research in Social Communication, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia. He is the co-founder of *Central-European Pragmatist Forum* (2000) and of the online journal *Pragmatism Today* (2010). He has served as the Editor-in-Chief of the international journal *Human Affairs* (de Gruyter) since 2002. Emil is the author of 6 philosophy books published in Slovak, including *Studies in Pragmatism & Neopragmatism* (2009) and *New Studies in Pragmatism & Neopragmatism*, and a monograph on Richard Rorty (2015), and over 100 academic papers published in Slovak, Czech, English, Italian, Turkish, Polish, and Russian. He has translated over 10 philosophy books and dozens of papers from English to Slovak, most of them the works of American pragmatists.

Dr. Eli Orner Kramer is an affiliated researcher at the Department of the Philosophy of Culture, the Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw. He is also the John Dewey Society Democracy in Education Initiative Co-Organizer. He is a philosopher of culture who specializes in meta-philosophy, as well as the history and philosophy of higher learning.



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*Q: When did you first become engaged with the philosophy of John Dewey? If and what struck you about his work?*

I first read Dewey (and James) in Slovak translations when they were published in an anthology during my university studies in the late 1970s at my *alma mater*, Comenius University in Bratislava. These translations were a series of selections from his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* and *Experience and Nature*. What struck me in both of them, but in Dewey in particular, was the practical dimension of philosophy, or the understanding of philosophy itself as a kind of a practice whose meaning is to help to solve “the problems of men” and of social life. At that time, it read as another kind of a philosophy of practice on a par with the Marxist focus (of a non-dogmatic variety in terms of Marx’s 11th *Thesis on Feuerbach*) on (“revolutionary”) praxis. I have come to see my generation as the last one (and the “lost” one) which was looking for philosophy as the conceptual and effective tool to change “the old regime” in my country, within the framework of a more “advanced socialism.” History did not give us a chance to bring about these changes. The developments in and after the “Velvet Revolution” in 1989 took a different course.

*Q: What kind of “a different course” do you have in mind?*

Citizens of former Czechoslovakia, who supported this revolution, had diverse expectations, intentions and even illusions. Many of them hardly could have imagined in those weeks of exaltation at the end of 1989 what kind of a future might emerge. What united the majority, however, was the decisive will to end the old regime and a desire for freedom. As it gradually turned out within a couple of years during the 1990s, the gist of the whole social and political upheaval has become the restoration of capitalism in Czechoslovakia with all its repercussions in all walks of life including those Dewey had criticized almost a century ago (such as “money culture”, harsh individualism, establishment of new oligarchy, patriarchy, political corruption, total crisis of social trust, etc.). Quite sadly enough, people have mistook democracy just for free market and free elections (i. e. for capitalism), which is clearly far-far away from the Deweyan ideal of democracy as

a way of life. Today, after almost 30 years from this radical change of social order, it is evident that Slovakia (as an independent state since 1993 after a “velvet” divorce from the Czech Republic and a full member of EU and NATO since 2004) still suffers from various kinds of diseases of this transition to capitalism.

*Q: How has Dewey influenced your own philosophical commitments and work?*

My personal “philosophical journey” may be summarized as follows: from Marxism, to analytic philosophy, and then to pragmatism. The problem of practice or human action has always been at the center of my work. One of the books which instructed me on this journey was Bernstein’s *Praxis and Action*. In the late 1980s I have been working on the analytic philosophy of action (in a Davidsonian vein) on which I wrote my PhD Dissertation (defended in 1993 at Comenius). I went on reading Dewey (and James and Rorty) in English more extensively only after 1989.

I can remember very well at least two specific events that definitely moved me to pragmatism: (i) the visit of Larry Hickman to Bratislava in 1991, and his lecture on Dewey’s philosophy of technology, and (ii) establishing personal correspondence and contacts with Richard Rorty at the same time. Rorty also visited Bratislava on my invitation, first in 1993 and then in 1996. Rorty not only donated his works to my personal library, but also arranged via the John Dewey Studies Center the donation of Dewey’s collected works to me and some of my colleagues. He also arranged a sponsorship for the publication of my translations of Dewey in the volume I entitled *The Reconstruction of Liberalism* (2001), into which I have gathered Dewey’s most important writings from political and social philosophy.

But before that, in 1998, I had compiled, translated, and coedited (with my colleague prof. František Mihina) *The Anthology of Pragmatism*, the first major volume on pragmatism ever in Slovakia, which has started to serve as the recent source for studies in pragmatism. For this volume, I translated more of Dewey and Rorty (while my colleague

did Peirce and James), and we both wrote an extensive introduction and commentaries. Last but not least, after meeting Larry Hickman in Boston at the World Congress of Philosophy in 1998, and also some other people from the SAAP, I decided to establish (with John Ryder) the “Central-European Pragmatist Forum” as a scholarly community. This effort came to fruition in 2000 at a conference in Stará Lesná (Slovakia). So far so good. I take my “practical” philosophical commitments as truly Deweyan, in the sense that he himself as a philosopher was practically involved in numerous social (and even political) projects.

As for Dewey’s ideas, I have to confess that there is a lot in his corpus which I still have yet to immerse myself in, but from the portions I have come across and have understood, I would select at least the following as having shaped my own work: the conception of experience as transactional life-practice, the conception of creative democracy as a way of life, the conception of mind as social construction, and the conception of the human being as naturally cultural being. This all may be framed by his “cultural naturalism.” Dewey, for me, was a genius whose ideas (like those of e. g. Nietzsche) surpassed his time, though he still wanted to write primarily for his time. His ideas should be studied as deeply relevant, in a variety of ways, for the 21st century. Alas, in my own country there is very little interest, and even less knowledge of, Dewey, even though I have lectured on his philosophy for the past two decades at several universities in Slovakia and also in the Czech Republic.

*Q: So what, if any, has been the reception of Dewey in Slovakia, and Central Europe more broadly?*

This may be summarized in a couple of points: First, Dewey was known and recognized more as an educator than a philosopher here in the first half of the 20th century. His works on education were translated and published in Czech, including *Democracy and Education* (1932). Second, in the second half of the 20th century—after WW2 and until 1989—Dewey’s philosophy (as well as pragmatism as a whole) was largely (and often intentionally) misinterpreted as an

“ideology of American imperialism,” so as to make it unattractive to students and readers. The exceptional translations I have mentioned were “allowed” just for the sake of the history of philosophy, which meant that it was taken as one of those “dead” philosophies that belong just to the past. And third, only after 1989 has a broader reception been made possible (as I have indicated above), but even this is of very little effect.

One of the reasons for that might be that pragmatism, as such, still has quite a “bad name for a good philosophy” in this part of the world. I am constantly explaining to my students that this is because philosophy in our intellectual tradition is taken as something highly intellectual, even spiritual. Thus, for those people philosophy hardly can be “pragmatic.” The word “pragmatic” itself has a bad connotation in our culture, so many are done with any kind of pragmatism even before they have started to read it as philosophy. To overcome these barriers demands hard work. But for those who have undertaken this work, the fruits are respectable, and the ground is fertile for the younger generation.

Another reason for the opposition to pragmatism, and Dewey in particular, is our political culture. For instance, when I published the volume on Dewey’s reconstruction of liberalism, the political liberals here started to be heard saying to the press that Dewey was no liberal, that he was a socialist or even a communist (in any case a leftist). For them, the only true form of liberalism is the classical European right-wing liberalism of Locke, von Hayek, and Milton Friedman that they invoke. I had to organize a panel discussion to clear up this misconception, but this was of a little effect. In summary, Dewey’s politics is almost unknown, even among the social democrats, in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

*Q: If and where do you think you disagree with Dewey's philosophy?*

From all my studies of Dewey, I have found that there are almost no substantial points where I disagree with him. If there are such points, they are only minor. In this respect, I also do not see a substantial

controversy between Dewey and Rorty, or between classical and new pragmatisms, since I would think that Dewey himself would like to have his ideas furthered in a new situation, rather than having them merely recycled. This is what Rorty, to my mind, was trying to do, never forgetting to remind his readers that he is a Deweyan who tries to combine Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein (among others). I see Rorty's pragmatism as a continuation of Dewey's in a creative way, rather than as a disruption. I do not think the followers of any great philosophers should be dogmatic. Dewey himself was certainly no such dogmatist (e. g. in his relation to Hegel).

*Q: What are the most important living ideas of Dewey for philosophy, for Europe, and for the world more broadly?*

Dewey's magnificent corpus is almost inexhaustible. It is a repository of ideas that has the potential to inspire new efforts from philosophy to education, to politics, to arts, to religion, and beyond. For instance, in our contemporary academic struggle against the absurdities of neoliberal practices, Dewey's ideas on academic freedom and the university are still relevant and powerful. Or in the criticism of the absurdities proposed by current transhumanism and its ideology of human-techno-enhancement, Dewey's ideas about humanity, humanness, and the values of human life are even more relevant today and have to be decisively utilized.

As for philosophy in general, it was Dewey who came up with the idea that if philosophy is to survive and thrive, there needs to be a deep reconstruction in philosophy. He imagined and outlined a new philosophy, such that would be relevant to life and useful to society. Rorty's more recent "anti-philosophy" is just a continuation of Dewey's deconstruction of all traditional philosophy.

As for Europe and the global world, it is the Deweyan idea of interconnectedness and mutual dependence that has not been understood up until now, not to say implemented in political and international practices. This conception is based on his ideas of community, communication, and cooperation, as the core of human

social life. Only through these ideas can we come to an understanding of our common interests (a concept John Ryder is developing in his works) without which, I suspect, there is a very dim future in front of us, instead of a Deweyan

Were the slogan “America First” be adopted to and applied by all nations, what kind of a world would we end up in? Does this slogan allow Slovaks to invoke “Slovakia First,” or allow Germans to invoke “Germany First?” And if so it goes, who will cooperate with whom and on what basis? There would be no common interests, just everyone’s particular interests. In such a situation, are we not coming back from Dewey to Hobbes? But such a regress would be totally useless since Hobbes himself already started to realize that every particular interest (no matter if American, Slovak, German, etc.) depends on the interconnectedness with all others. In global politics we have to move far beyond Hobbes and toward Dewey, whose idea was that every individual entity—including the USA, Slovakia, Germany, etc.—is dependent on the relations with all other entities. Contemporary politicians have much to learn from Dewey. The problem is how to realize the full import of his lessons about our interdependent democratic life.

*Q: What do you see as the most exciting avenues for future Dewey scholarship?*

Dewey scholars should continue in their open strategy, that is in an open and creative exchange with scholars of every other school—be it analytics, in the philosophy of science, or phenomenologists, in epistemology, or existentialists in philosophical anthropology, or hermeneutists, in the philosophy of culture, etc.—because Deweyan communication (or Rortyan conversation) of mankind is the avenue to mutual understanding. On the other hand, there is no way to a brighter future if all of the philosophical schools fight with each other on the presumption that, “only our philosophy is the best and the true one.” Such was the fate of Marxist-Leninist philosophical schools (as I saw it in my personal experience) who despised all other philosophies as belonging to the dustbin of history. The philosophy of the future—

or future philosophy—will be Deweyan in its spirit, if it will be an open, creative, and cooperative endeavor.

# RESEARCH NOTE: THE DEWEY CENTER AT FUDAN UNIVERSITY

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Fudan University



*Editor's Note:* Research notes offer a starting point for inquiry; they aim to introduce and orient our readers to existing literature on topics in Dewey Scholarship. They are not necessarily intended as exhaustive bibliographies or detailed treatments of the topics. Whether solicited or volunteered, the notes are reviewed for quality by the *Dewey Studies* editorial staff, but are not subjected to anonymous peer review. Readers wishing to prepare such notes are invited to send queries to Daniel Brunson, Reviews Editor, at

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Pragmatism was introduced into China in the early 20th century. Together with the Marxism freshly introduced also at that time, they constructed the New Cultural Movement Union in China, and contributed significantly to the enlightenment of Chinese minds. However, due to the complicity of social environment, the Marxists and non-Marxists in China developed some serious misunderstandings as well as fierce oppositions. Pragmatism studies thus were halted until the late 1970s.

In 1980s, Prof. Liu Fangtong from Fudan University initiated communication between Chinese and American scholars. He established the connections with SAAP, as well as with the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Based on these new interests, Fudan University held an extensive national conference on pragmatism in 1998. At that conference, Chinese scholars revalued pragmatism and reached a wide consensus. Also, after a long preparation, Fudan University held a series of international conferences; attendees included Chinese and many international scholars. In 2004, the Center for Dewey and American philosophy Studies was founded at Fudan University, which marked the full recovery of the pragmatism studies in China and the normalization of the communication between Chinese and international scholars. The Center was renamed as the Dewey Center in 2014.

Pragmatism studies in China have gained strong support from the government. The Dewey Center was founded directly under the leadership of Fudan University. We have held several international conferences that were not only supported by the university, but also approved by the government.

Since 2006, supported by the government and the National Social Science Fund, the Dewey Center and the scholars from other institutions have been collaborating on the translation of the 37 volumes of *The Collected Works of John Dewey* into Chinese. This great project was completed in 2015. The publication of Dewey's works in Chinese is the first complete translation of *The Collected Works of John Dewey* in the world. It will contribute a lot to pragmatism studies, and especially Dewey studies, in China. After the completion of the

Collected Works, under the new directorship of Prof. Chen Yajun, we have published 6 volumes of *The Selected Works of John Dewey*. Also we have initiated an annual called *Pragmatic Studies*.

To use Dewey Center as a platform, we eagerly want to enhance the international communication between Chinese scholars and the scholars from all over the world. We have proposed to found a Society for the studies of pragmatism and American philosophy in China. We want to extend the proposal to all the scholars with regard to founding an international institution for the advancement of pragmatism and American philosophy studies. The Dewey Center at Fudan University will contribute by all means to this project.

RESEARCH NOTE: PROJECT  
INITIATED IN CHINA TO  
TRANSLATE AND RESEARCH  
THE PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS  
OF WILLIAM JAMES

WANG CHENGBING  
Beijing Normal University



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## **Project in China Initiated: Translation of and Research on the Philosophical Writings by William James<sup>1</sup>**

Wang Chengbing<sup>2</sup>

In November, 2017 the China National Planning Office for Social Science approved a major national project “Translation and Research of the Philosophical Works by William James” (17ZDA032). The project is headed by Professor Wang Chengbing from Beijing Normal University. More than 20 professionals from the universities in Mainland China, Hong Kong of China, the United States and Italy are participating in this project, which has been endorsed by such prominent American Jamesian scholars as Professor John Mcdermott, Professor Richard Bernstein, Professor Larry Hickman, Professor Roger Ames and Professor James Campbell. This is currently among the most important philosophy academic projects in China. The project will be concluded before the end of 2022.

### **Overall Questions and Research Subjects Contained Within This Project**

Based on a comprehensive grasp of existing research at home and abroad, this project positions itself on the academic frontier to further collect, interpret, analyze, edit and translate the classic philosophical texts of William James. While attending to the overall spirit and texts of pragmatism, it also studies the developmental process, core propositions and key concepts of Jamesian philosophy, and the status

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<sup>1</sup> This note is abridged and modified from my report about this project to the William James Society in the Central Division of American Philosophical Association (APA) in Chicago on February 22, 2018. Thanks to the comments from Professor Tadd Ruetenik and other colleagues attending that meeting.

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and influence of James within pragmatism. Jamesian pragmatism involves various disciplinary branches, spheres or specialized research fields including philosophy, sociology, literature, psychology, political science, axiology, logic and religious studies,. The project will be interdisciplinary, multidimensional and comprehensive. The primary research concerns are enumerated below.

*(1) The first aspect of the project is to collect, edit, translate and comprehensively research the Jamesian philosophical classics and commentaries.*

This will involve analysis of the history and current status of James' works in the United States and European countries, as well as the current status as with its translation, publication and circulation in China.

*(2) The second aspect of this project is to investigate important ideas in Jamesian philosophy, and analyze and summarize the status and influence of Jamesian philosophy in contemporary pragmatism.*

This research will be organically combined with the study of James' own thought and the history of ideas, to complement and facilitate the translation and study of James's works. The project will select some pivotal concepts, such as the view of metaphysics, truth, experience, stream of consciousness and pragmatist methodology in Jamesian philosophy. Starting with these theoretical concepts, it will investigate the development of James' personal thought in the context of the development of pragmatism as a whole.

*(3) The third aspect of this project is to study the status and influence of Jamesian philosophy in the history of western philosophy and contemporary western philosophy.*

The study of Jamesian philosophy from the perspective of the history of philosophy has advanced among North American and European philosophers in recent years, but has been a weak link in the study of

pragmatism in China. This project will explore the relationship between Jamesian philosophy and traditional empiricism and contemporary Western philosophy, exploring the relationship between James and such of his contemporaries as Henri Bergson and Bertrand Russell, as well as more recent philosophers including Ludwig Wittgenstein and Emmanuel Levinas.

*(4) The fourth aspect of the contents of this project is interdisciplinary research on axiology, jurisprudence, philosophy of mind, political philosophy, and religious philosophy in Jamesian pragmatism.*

Jamesian pragmatism opposes empty talk and approaches reality comprehensively - in many disciplines and topics. Chinese researchers tend to limit their work narrowly to their own disciplinary fields and academic horizons. This project has invited researchers from different fields to undertake collaborative and cooperative research into Jamesian pragmatism, seeking breakthroughs in holistic, interdisciplinary and multidimensional and comparative research.

Thus the project will study related thoughts in James' philosophical literature, concerning theory of value, religious philosophy, psychology, philosophy of mind, social and political philosophy and the influence of his philosophy on pragmatic jurisprudence.

*(5) The fifth aspect of this project is to explore the dynamic relations of Jamesian philosophy to European continental philosophy and Chinese philosophy from the point of view of comparative philosophy.*

Comparative philosophy has a long history, and the study of Jamesian pragmatic philosophy from the perspective of comparative philosophy is an important academic effort. On one hand, comparative study of Chinese and Western philosophy in the 21st century is no longer simply the enumeration of common or different points of thought between different philosophers and philosophical schools. Rather it penetrates deep into the mode of thinking itself, the theoretical essence and discourse manner, of each side, in order to find common ground. On the other hand, since the end of last century, some

important experts in Western academia have become keenly interested in the comparative study of Chinese and Western philosophy, conducting comparative research, putting forward new interpretations and establishing in-depth intercultural discussions; Roger Ames' comparative study of pragmatism and Confucianism is a noteworthy example. The project will regard comparative research into Jamesian philosophy as a case study. The project will be grounded in the latest and most reliable research achievements to turn the excessive one-directional discussion into real exchanges between two sides.

### **Arrangements of Subprojects**

The project is composed of five connected subprojects, each headed by a recognized scholar in the study of pragmatism:

*Subproject 1: The Collation, Editing, Translation and Study of the Collected Philosophical Writings of William James.*

Volumes 1-8 will consist of the collation, editing, translation and study of James' philosophical works.

Volume 1: *Pragmatism.*

Volume 2: *The Meaning of Truth.*

Volume 3: *A Pluralistic Universe.*

Volume 4: *Principles of Psychology*, Volume I.

Volume 5: *Principles of Psychology*, Volume II.

Volume 6: *Principles of Psychology*, Volume III.

Volume 7: *The Varieties of Religious Experience.*

Volume 8: *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy.*

*Subproject 2: The Collation, Editing, Translation and Study of the Collected Philosophical Writings of William James*

Volumes 9-15 will consist in the compilation, editing, translation and research of the *Collected Philosophical Writings of William James*. The contents of these 7 volumes are mainly the literature collected, collated, proofread, edited and published by foreign academics after James' death.

Volume 9: *Some Problems of Philosophy*.

Volume 10: *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.

Volume 11: *Essays in Philosophy*.

Volume 12: *Essays in Religion and Morality*.

Volume 13: *Manuscript Essays and Notes*.

Volume 14: *Manuscript Lectures*.

Volume 15: *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*.

*Subproject 3: The Study of James' main Philosophical Views and his Status in Pragmatism.*

This subproject consists of two parts. The first is about James' main philosophical views. The research group will investigate the core concepts in Jamesian philosophy which have influenced pragmatism and beyond that, contemporary Western philosophy. The second focuses on the James' position within pragmatism as a whole. Academia has paid relatively little attention to James's crucial position in pragmatism, and this research can also further clarify the academic status and influence of James's central concepts.

*Subproject 4: The Study of Jamesian Philosophy from the Perspectives of the History of Western Philosophy and Contemporary Western Philosophy*

This subproject will discuss Jamesian philosophy in the context Western philosophy as a whole. To investigate the status of a philosophical school or philosopher in the history of Western philosophy is a routine research approach. So far as the study of Jamesian philosophy is concerned, however, this approach can play an extraordinary role. First, relatively speaking, research in history of philosophy has tended to neglect pragmatism. This subproject aims to

overcome this neglect. Second, the project aims to go beyond current research predicaments and achieve some academic breakthroughs: On one hand, Jamesian pragmatism appears very simple. This feature makes it very difficult for researchers to find a foothold or focus in their research. On the other hand, Jamesian pragmatism has its own center and narrative style which has at times eluded scholars. Approaching James through the history of Western philosophy can help researchers to determine the logical starting point in James' pragmatic philosophy, map his ideas, and thus clarify the historical status of Jamesian philosophy.

This research will also examine Jamesian philosophy in the context of contemporary Western philosophy. The investigation at this aspect will, by disclosing the influence of Jamesian philosophy on contemporary western philosophy, try to understand the close relationship between Jamesian philosophy and modern Western philosophy further to understand the philosophical significance of central pragmatic ideas in the evolution of contemporary Western philosophy.

*Subproject 5: The Interdisciplinary, Cross-border and Comprehensive Study of Jamesian Philosophy in the Horizon of Comparative Philosophy*

Jamesian philosophy has been interdisciplinary since its emergence, involving many disciplines and fields. James himself has seriously discussed many issues and made progress. Based on James' philosophical work, the project selectively discusses James' views in jurisprudence, sociology, psychology, axiology and social philosophy. The approach through comparative philosophy mainly features these three aspects:

Firstly, the dialogue between and comparative study of Jamesian philosophy and Anglo-American analytical philosophy.

James claims his theory to be a neo-empiricism, but since its emergence, it has complex relationships with Anglo-American analytical philosophy that belongs to the empiricist tradition; and there have been inheritance, conflicts, differences and syncretism between these two. The study of relationships between Jamesian

pragmatism and analytic philosophy has become an indispensable part of research.

Secondly, the dialogue between and comparative study of James's philosophy and contemporary European continental philosophy (including phenomenology, postmodern philosophy and deconstructionism, etc.). The relationship between Jamesian pragmatism and European continental philosophy is an increasingly important topic. As the thoughts and methods of deconstructionism and postmodernism emerged in the European continental philosophical circle, researchers have attended to relationships between Jamesian pragmatism and those philosophical trends.

Thirdly, in the era of economic globalization, a comparative study of Jamesian and Chinese philosophy should be among the most noteworthy approaches to comparative study of pragmatic philosophy in the 21st century. On one hand, due to the dominance of China and the United States in today's world, American pragmatism and traditional Chinese Confucianism will inevitably be brought into dialogue. On the other hand, due especially to Dewey's exchanges with Chinese philosophers during his visit from 1919 to 1921, the influence of traditional Chinese philosophy on classical pragmatism is also a noteworthy subject. As well, due to its role in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement, pragmatism has had an inestimable influence on Chinese modern philosophy and culture. Thus, a comparative philosophy approach would further our understanding of contemporary Chinese philosophy, culture and political life.

### **The Anticipated Goals of and the final outcome of this project**

This project anticipates the following accomplishments:

Firstly, to accomplish the translation, and the study, of the *Collected Philosophical Writings of William James* (15 volumes) into Chinese by 2022, which is an important achievement in the field of Chinese pragmatic research. The translations will be published by the Commercial Press(商务印书馆) which was established in 1897 and is now the oldest publishing house in China, enjoying an excellent

reputation for its publications of the translations of the western classic humanity and social science works.

Secondly, to understand the essence and evolutionary process of Jamesian pragmatism, and its position in Western philosophy. This project is going to provide a big-picture account of relationships between Jamesian and Chinese and European philosophies, of the contemporary influence of Jamesian philosophy on Chinese philosophy, culture, scholarship and education, and of the possibilities and concrete vehicles for dialogues between pragmatism and Chinese philosophy. Through the study, collation and publication of the classic literature, it will provide necessary textual support for relevant academic research. The research group anticipates that its arduous work will not only promote the study of Jamesian philosophy in China and expeditiously deepen research into Jamesian philosophy and bring it to the frontier of international academia. Regarding international academic dialogues, this group anticipates that Chinese scholars will attain greater visibility and discourse power on such topics as the journey of Jamesian pragmatism in China and the comparative study of Jamesian pragmatism and Chinese philosophy. .

Thirdly, to form a research team and an academic community consisting of professionals with high scholastic level, strong interest in Jamesian pragmatism, and proficiency in international dialogues. Chinese research in pragmatism has been less robust than research on analytic and Continental European philosophy, hindering understanding of American philosophy in China. Over the the next five years this project will work hard to concentrate attention on pragmatism and expand its academic team. Supported by significant funding, the research group will translate the best James literature, write serial essays and compile the *Textbook of William James's Philosophy*, publish a monograph the *William James's Philosophy in Contemporary Academic Context*, and improve the textbook construction concerning pragmatism in China universities. It will also accelerate talent training by organizing doctoral students as participants in the research as assistant lecturers and researchers.

Fourthly, to make progress in the construction of relevant databases. All the members of the research team are experts in the study of pragmatism in China, and have accumulated significant research materials. In the course of this project, the research group will make further efforts to collect, collate, compile, translate and publish important literature (including video materials), especially to import and digest newly discovered first-hand materials and latest research publications from abroad, and build a relatively authoritative and complete literature database.

The project will be completed and pass the evaluation of the committee organized by the China National Planning Office of Social Science in 2022.

BOOK REVIEW: *CONTEMPORARY  
PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOSALS FOR  
THE UNIVERSITY*

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*Contemporary Philosophical Proposals for the University: Toward a  
Philosophy of Higher Education.* Aaron Stoller and Eli Kramer, eds.  
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 268 pp. ISBN: 978-3-319-72127-  
9 (Hardback, \$100); 978-3-319-72128-6 (Ebook, \$80)

<https://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9783319721279>

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Only nine years ago I defended a dissertation and took a tenure track job at a public urban research university in a philosophy department. In eight years I have ascended through the ranks of tenure and promotion by publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals and have taught many students many philosophy classes. Yet, only eight years in, I feel like an ancient relic of a past system. Why? Storm clouds loom. A mortgage crises turned financial crises turned state government budget crisis has ended in decreased funding to public higher education. Administrative bloat and governmental aid have contributed to higher tuition and student debt. Thus, enrollment is down two million in the last five years. The radical right thinks humanities education is tantamount to leftist indoctrination, and grant funders and employers seem to chant only “STEM.” Universities turn to online education and accountability/assessment to weather the storm, but departmental and university closures occur all around us. This morning my university’s president sent the faculty an article on how higher education is dying and an indication that we need to do something new to stay alive.

But do what? The editors of this volume refuse go the route of quietistic cynicism. Instead, Aaron Stoller and Eli Kramer bring philosophical tools to bear on the future of higher education and have organized a multi-author volume around the empirical-denotative method of John Dewey. In what follows, I will discuss the book’s organization, the problem (that I glossed above) that the book addresses, and two recurring themes, the university’s relationship to culture and to diversity. Last, I will illustrate the virtues and shortcomings of its last and most engaging chapter, and offer a point of criticism about what the volume lacks. If you care about the future of higher education and are willing to entertain the notion that philosophical inquiry can help guide our thinking about that future, I recommend you get a copy of this well-crafted and timely volume.

The book is explicitly organized and guided by John Dewey’s empirical-denotative method, which insists that philosophical inquiry “start from and terminate in directly experienced subject-matter” (6). Thus, Stoller and Kramer open with a review of the literature

discussing the indeterminacy in higher education and point to the myriad of issues that need serious imaginative reconstruction, including the university's relationship to culture, the institutional structure of the university, the role of the academic in the university and society, and the nature and aims of a university curriculum. Part I is defined as "the problematic situation," as this is the first step in Dewey's pattern of inquiry, the move from indeterminacy to problem. A chapter on the problem of political unanimity in higher education, another on neoliberalism, technology, and the turn to online classes, and a third on thin uses of "diversity" in higher education are well-situated here. Part II includes two chapters reflecting broadly and insightfully on the nature of a liberal education and Michael Oakeshott's understanding of the function of "conversation" in the cultivation of norms necessary to promote a civil association. Part III turns to generalized reconstructions of the university, including chapters on an ecological approach to understanding the relationship between the university and culture, education for citizenship in a global era, and one proposing that the African *telos* of "communion" displace those of "autonomy, truth, and citizenship." Part IV completes the arc of Dewey's pattern of inquiry with a co-authored chapter exposing philosophical approach to transdisciplinary, collaborative, and publicly engaged education and scholarship. Part V looks to future inquiry, bringing Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy to bear on the technological singularity predicted by Ray Kurzweil and other futurists as it pertains to the future of education.

The first recurrent theme I will address involves the notion of diversity. Dwayne Tunstall's chapter offers a much needed critique of thin calls for diversity on college campuses, which amount to institutional marketing functioning as "a veneer to cover over the messy realities on their campuses, especially campuses of predominantly white colleges and universities," including "persisting racial and ethnic disparities in higher education enrollment and attainment, as well as racial and ethnic disparities in earnings, employment, and other social and economic outcomes between white communities and communities of color" (68). As a response, Tunstall offers a less problematic conception of diversity, using the Association

of American Colleges and University's definition as "individual differences (e.g. personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g. race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations" (69). This conception means that commitments to diversity are also commitments to inclusion and equity. Tunstall offers pointed condemnations of what happens when the former is extolled and the latter ignored.

Martha Nussbaum is less critical of "the new emphasis on diversity," which she sees as a "way of grappling with the altered requirements of citizenship in an era of global connection, an attempt to produce adults who can function as citizens not just some of the local region or group but also... of a complex interlocking world" (148). Nussbaum's chapter opens with a welcomed historical undermining of conservative demands that education be "an acculturation into the time-honored values of one's own culture" rather than "the new education" which conservatives caricaturize as "a mono-lithic political elite... attempting to enforce a 'politically correct' view of human life, subverting traditional values" (147). Nussbaum notes that this image is at least as old as Aristophanes's depiction of Socrates in *The Clouds*, and that calls for education to make students more fully "self-aware, self-governing, and capable of recognizing and respecting the humanity of our fellow human beings, no matter where they are born, no matter what social class they inhabit, no matter what their gender or ethnic origin" are as at least as ancient as Seneca (146). Nussbaum notes that democracies are inherently plural, so an education for citizenship necessitates the need for the cultivation of respect across differences, which includes the infusion of world-citizenship perspectives into general and specialized courses in an aim to promote narrative imagination. Her chapter is strengthened by giving two poignant denotative examples of how liberal education has, and therefore can, cultivate these habits of mind.

The second theme, the relationship between a university and culture, follows from the first. Crispin Sartwell gives a concise philosophical history of how "linguistic constructivism" emerged and helped create a culture of "ideological uniformity of universities—

particularly in the humanities and social sciences” (27). This history culminates in Richard Rorty’s nominalism, anti-realism, and relativism, but more importantly in his equation of truth with a certain vision of progressive political consensus. Sartwell sees this as an unfortunate development, and given that this ideological uniformity is a premise in the right wing’s rhetorical argument against the humanities in higher education, his history of its philosophical underpinnings is timely. Ronald Barnett’s chapter expressly takes up the question of the relationship of the university to culture, offering a variety of criticisms of the idea that a university should teach a “unified” set of the ‘great’ symbolic achievements of a society” and that such a set of achievements exists independent of their selection by some empowered group. Much space is given to the potential problem, but Barnett ends by asserting that the concept of culture is “inescapable and essential” (137). The university is itself a culture which makes agential choices its culture and values. His vision of the university exemplifies an “ecological culture,” one of “concern for the world in all of its manifestations” (143). The strength of this chapter is its exposition of a multiplicity of potential relationships between a university and culture. Nonetheless, I was left wondering what big problems his ecological approach helps solve.

The book’s final chapter, its longest, is both challenging philosophically, even to a reader well-read in Whitehead’s process metaphysics, and engaging. In it, Randall Auxier argues that contemporary scientists and scientific journalists are dogmatically attached to mathematical modeling and uncritical at the level of ontology. Auxier uses many of Whitehead’s ideas to help us think about the transition in education from high-entropy (biological) learning to low-entropy (artificially intelligent and post-human) learning. While the walking encyclopedia vision of the professor and the brick and mortar vision of the library will become extinct, or already are, Auxier envisions a role for teaching in post-singularity future, where mass erudition will have replaced mass literacy, a role which guides students in the difference between what is valued more and less and to pass on the enduring standards for that valuation (239).

After many pages of engaging process ontology, we get some

rather optimistic predictions and prescriptions for the future of higher education, some of which I would like to question. Auxier views physical campuses as artifacts of the last two centuries and sees them as unnecessary because of the success of online classes in “content retention,” but this is the very old school purpose future education will not serve. The online model is given its critical due in Chapter 3 of this volume, and I have seen nothing in its current deployment that gives cause for such optimism. Auxier prescribes the decoupling of athletics from higher education, and thinks that college sports should follow the model of baseball, which has a well-functioning minor league. That the marriage of higher education and competitive athletics is silly is not debatable. But Auxier underestimates their sentimental and financial importance to many colleges and universities. Other options, such as turning the sport into a major course of study, are more easily foreseeable and more seamlessly capable of transition than a complete dissociation. I predict that if these continue to bring in revenue for universities, they will persist. When it is empirically shown that they represent a financial burden on universities, they will die out slowly.

I will end with one topic I found missing from the volume, and this involves another of Auxier’s prescriptions. Auxier sees “no natural complementarity between original research and... teaching,” and argues that universities’ focus on research has contributed to killing good teaching (251). In my experience, writing those journal articles not only keeps a mind thinking, and a mind thinking is helpful to good teaching, but keeps a teacher humble and empathic. I find that teachers who drop out of the research game, relieving themselves of the emotional burden of reading scarring reviews from nameless referees, are more likely to write scarring comments on student papers. They have the privilege of being armchair academics, judging all the putatively inferior drivel they grade from a comfortable position of not being judged. That said, if rewarding faculty for research and failing to cultivate excellent, humane teaching, (covered with care in this volume in many chapters I failed to acknowledge), then what about graduate education in the future university? University professors were all trained to be specialist researchers, even in the

humanities, and even for those with PhDs employed in teaching colleges, community colleges, and as lecturers and adjuncts. In addition to the many excellent contributions in this volume, I would have liked to have read one involving Deweyan inquiry into the nature of our PhD programs, their culture, their (lack of) diversity, and their woeful deficiency in education in pedagogy. Do we need to produce so many PhDs, and if not, why do graduate programs persist at their current rate? Do universities need to develop robust “teaching tracks” that decouple research and tenure requirements? These questions deserve exploration in a volume such as this.

I do not want to be an artifact. Reading, writing, and teaching philosophy in a physical classroom with high-entropy, living and breathing students is a profession I want to endure. Some of these problems in higher education surely will pass on their own. Others are wicked, systematic and persistent. Stoller and Kramer have assembled a diverse set of philosophical inquiries into their nature, and they have achieved their aim, offering proposals for a philosophy of higher education and calling on its readers to do the same.

# BOOK REVIEW: *TO SHAPE A NEW WORLD*

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Shelby, Tommie and Brandon Terry, eds, *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 464 pp. ISBN: 9780674980754 (Hardcover, \$35).

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### Martin Luther King Among The Philosophers

**T**his new book commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of Dr. King's assassination on April 4, 1968. In his brief life, King had various roles from preacher to activist to political thinker. King placed his activism and nonviolent quest for justice squarely within the context of his religious and philosophical commitments. A Christian minister, King's philosophy included theism, a belief in the ultimate reality and value of each human person, and a belief in natural law. Philosophers who influenced King include Socrates and Plato, Augustine, Kant, Hegel, Royce and his "beloved community," the American personalists, Reinhold Niebuhr, Buber, and Gandhi. King knew the work of the American Transcendentalist and social reformer Theodore Parker (1810–1860). King derived his eloquent summation of belief from Parker which elliptically refers to many of King's philosophical concerns: "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." King was concerned with the nature and achievement of justice, and with how, if at all, questions about God and the nature of reality are important to human justice. The central place these questions held in King's work is the theme of this new book.

The volume consists of fifteen essays framed by Shelby's and Terry's Introduction, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and Political Philosophy", and by Jonathan Walton's Afterword, "Dignity as a Weapon of Love." It is valuable to read the essays which comprise the heart of the book in light of the goals of the book as addressed in both the Introduction and the Afterword. Thus, focusing on King's political thought and on the nature and achievement of justice, Shelby and Terry write that the book explores what King's thought teaches about building a more just, peaceful world and about political morality, judgment, and practice. They argue that philosophers have insufficiently studied King, due to the iconic, romantic stature he has assumed in American culture and due to the popular, non-academic

character of King's writings. The "romantic" vision of King tends to obscure the radical nature of his understanding of equality and of economic justice. Many of the essays in this book show that King's thought still has the ability to provoke discomfort. The contributors to the volume closely examine King's writings, including the five books he published during his lifetime and two posthumously-published collections of essays. Shelby and Terry maintain that King is, indeed, a "systematic thinker" (5-6) who will be shown "even in, or perhaps *especially* in disagreement—to be an important and challenging thinker whose ideas remain relevant and have surprising implications for public political debate" (7).

In the Afterword to this volume, the scholar of religion Jonathan Walton looks back on the book's fifteen essays. Walton writes in part in the context of the current political Administration and of the Black Lives Matters movement, but his discussion is broader and emphasizes King's religious vision. Walton tries to connect King's religious and political commitments while recognizing the independent value of King's political thought for those who do not share his religious, metaphysical convictions. Walton sees King as fulfilling the two great tasks of philosophy – exploring who we are and how we should live -- that sometimes get obscured through academic specialization. He finds that King articulated a philosophy that was "neither theoretically derivative nor materially reductionist" (341) that recognized both the kingdom of God and the material requirements of a just society.

Contrary to many thinkers, Walton argues that religion properly has a place in public life and that King showed how this may be achieved. Religion may properly play a role in the public sphere when its stated commitments are "not inconsistent with the normative values of modern democracy" (342). The values of human equality, equal treatment under law, and checks and balances in government are woven into the fabric of the United States' governing documents. King affirmed these values through his deep religious commitment to the belief that man is created in the image of God and through his personalistic idealism's stress on the dignity of every human being. Thus, Walton argues, King's thought philosophically

ties together his religious and social commitments while providing a separate basis for the latter in an appeal to the governing documents of a secular United States for those rejecting the religious aspect of King's thought. With this discussion of the goals of the volume as set out in the Introduction and Afterword, I look briefly at the content of the book itself.

The book's fifteen essays are divided into four parts. The first part, "Traditions" includes Robert Gooding-Williams' examination of the influence of Dubois and Booker T. Washington on King as shown in King's 1958 book *Stride Toward Freedom*. Bernard Boxill offers a historically-informed essay on "The Roots of Civil Disobedience in Republicanism and Slavery." Karuna Mantena's essay discusses King's development of his philosophy of nonviolence and the influence of Gandhi. Paul Taylor's essay, "Moral Perfectionism," discusses King's commitment to personalistic idealism and explores how King's ethical position and political commitments might be restated for those without a commitment to theism or personalistic metaphysics. He argues for an answer based on Emerson and Cavell which stresses the need for continued self-examination and self-reassessment in order to reconstruct both self and society.

The four essays in Part II, "Ideals," include Ronald Sundstrom's study of the tension between racial consciousness and color blindness in King, while also insightfully exploring the relationship between the religious and the political components of King's thought. Danielle Allen's "Integration, Freedom, and the Affirmation of Life" also stresses King's religious vision and argues that his political thought is a corrective to the work of liberal thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin and John Rawls. Derrick Darby's essay offers a close examination of the right to vote. He argues that the importance of the right to vote is rooted in a conception of individual dignity even more basic than the constitutional protection of the Fifteenth Amendment. Thus Darby's exploration of the right to vote weaves together religious and political considerations in examining the right to vote while also providing for their separability. Martha Nussbaum's splendid essay, "From Anger to Love: Self-Purification and Political Resistance" draws heavily on her earlier books to discuss the nature of anger and hatred and how they

are to be controlled. Nussbaum works to a careful comparison of King's views with those of Gandhi to find that King's thought left more room than did Gandhi for recognizing the value of feelings such as erotic love and friendship and also was more nuanced in leaving room for self-defense and the just war in the context of a philosophy of nonviolence.

Part III, "Justice" includes Tommie Shelby's "Prisons of the Forgotten: Ghettos and Economic Injustice," which examines the phase of the Civil Rights Revolution that began after the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Curry examines King's concept of economic justice following the riots in northern cities. Shelby recognizes the theological commitments of King's thought, but he argues that King also was a public philosopher who defended his views on the necessity for economic change by secular arguments and by empirical evidence. Shatema Threadcraft and Brandon Terry consider King's often-criticized attitude towards women in their essay "Gender Trouble: Manhood, Inclusion, and Justice" and suggest using King's own position against himself to develop a more egalitarian, less male-dominant view of gender relationships. Lawrie Balfour's "Living in the Red" combines a careful reading of King's 1967 book *Where Do We Go From Here?* with her own analysis to explore the thorny question of political reparations to blacks and other disadvantaged groups. Lionel McPherson's provocative essay "The Cost of Violence" compares King's approach to military action with that of President Barack Obama. He finds that both King and the former president relied in part on pragmatic considerations in the use of military force. He argues that King's approach was superior in that it was grounded in a "pragmatic skepticism" about the use of force and also because it relied heavily on non-pragmatic moral considerations.

The final part of the book, "Conscience", begins with Michele Moody-Adams' reading of King's work as developing "The Path of Conscientious Citizenship". Drawing on Royce's vision of the beloved community, Dewey's philosophy of art and of democracy, and on Socratic dialogue, Moody-Adams understands King's work as showing what it means to participate as a conscientious citizen of a democracy. Her essay stresses the seminal importance to King of his

religious commitments. Brandon Terry's "Requiem for a Dream" begins in 1966 with James Meredith's Mississippi March and explores the philosophical issues that arose between King and advocates for Black Power. As did King, Terry takes seriously the arguments of black thinkers supporting Black Power. Terry emphasizes the coercive nature of many of the nonviolent strategies utilized by King, including boycotts. Terry argues that King's rejection of violence was based in part on pragmatic considerations in that he believed violence would be unsuccessful to attain results in the United States and would provoke and increase hostility in the white majority. The final essay in the volume, Cornel West's "Hope and Despair: Past and Present" offers a moving, eloquent portrait of King in his last years and develops the personal, political, and philosophical considerations which led King close to disillusionment and to nihilism. Drawing parallels between King and Du Bois, West argues that both leaders ultimately overcame despair "with a deep sense of calling that yielded a tangible hope through courageous action, subtle reflection, and subversive memory" (337).

With its many thoughtful essays, the book's greatest impact was in returning me to King's writings. After reading this book through, I read or reread King's own books before turning to reread and review this volume. King's works are the best source of what he means with the work of scholars serving as a guide. King properly holds an iconic place in American life. Fifty years after his untimely death, King's thought deserves to be pondered and read.