

Philosophy and Engagement, 2016

University of Pennsylvania

April 8-10



Call for Papers:

It's often suggested that philosophy should do more to "engage" with the wider society in which it's embedded. The suggestion raises questions as fascinating as they are important.

First, a question of obligation: Why should (or shouldn't) philosophers be concerned to maintain certain lines of communication with the world outside of our debates and theories, and which of those lines ought we be most (or least) concerned about? Are there some significant social goods philosophers are uniquely positioned to provide, say, to policymakers, to pre-collegiate students and schools, to prisoners, to the seriously ill or disabled, to the general public? Is there a professional or other ethic that demands we provide such a good, or is there something important our own field stands to gain from efforts at engagement?

Second, a question of methodology: While we may grant that philosophers ought to engage with the social challenges we share with our fellows outside the discipline, how central is this sort of activity to distinctly philosophical endeavors? John Dewey gives one answer—the test of the value of any philosophy is: "Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments... make our dealings with them more fruitful?" But some think otherwise, that philosophical study needs no justification from the practical realm. Bertrand Russell went so far as to suggest that philosophers, from Plato to William

James, who attempted to use their professional competence for edification rather than "a disinterested search for truth" were guilty of a kind of treachery.

Third, a question of practice: Wherever we think the obligation to engage fits within the larger philosophical endeavor, if there is such an obligation, how can philosophers most effectively meet it? Should we refocus our

theoretical efforts on topics that seem especially relevant to society at large, and expend less energy on topics that, from an outsider's perspective, appear parochial and abstruse? Or is the key, instead, to engage in more effective "outreach," so that our fellows are better prepared to follow and benefit from the conversations already current in academic philosophy?

We welcome papers and presentations that address the full range of these questions, from the metaphilosophical to the practical, including presentations of practical efforts at engagement already

underway. Ought philosophy be engaged, and to what extent? What should an engaged philosophy look like? And how can our discipline come close to that ideal?

At least three slots are available for faculty and/ or graduate contributed papers.

Please submit an abstract and a short statement of interest by February 1, 2015

Abstract submissions and/or questions about the conference should be sent to philosophyoutreachupenn@gmail.com

Confirmed Speakers:

Karen Detlefsen (UPenn), Kristie Dotson (Michigan State), Ira Harkavy (UPenn), Max Hayward (Columbia), Kyle Whyte (Michigan State)