

It is this deterioration of the Other as a subject that affects the For-itself so intensely, so intimately, that constitutes the negation of the ontological status of the Other. It is by virtue of this negation that the Other must remain Other in relation to the Self. Our concrete relations with others aim to reestablish this experience. It is from this point of departure that Sartre may properly analyze our concrete relations with others as being essentially either masochistic or sadistic, as being relations that are destined to fail.

The establishment of the Other as a *fact* of the world must first originate with the ontological actuality of the Other for consciousness. Insofar as the Other magically establishes himself through the look, the enlivened consciousness is able to simultaneously comprehend both itself for the Other and the Other for itself. It is this initial relation with the Other that establishes the ontological structure of the Other in relation to the Self. If the For-itself is to have foundation in the world, then it must acquire its Self through a magical bond with an Other.

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The Responsibilities and Dangers of Pragmatism

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ABSTRACT: John Lachs has argued that the value of academic philosophers rests not in their scholarly writing, but fundamentally in their ability to educate minds to be critical and open. In this paper, I show the continuity of this outlook on the work of philosophers with Lachs's stoic pragmatism. Stoic pragmatism is the view that the pragmatic optimism of thinkers like James, Royce, and Dewey must be tempered by a stoic acceptance of our limitations as human beings. While I support Lachs's controversial views regarding stoic pragmatism, I suggest some ways that we can employ the skills of philosophers beyond the classroom as well.

AS A PHILOSOPHER AND SCHOLAR, John Lachs is unafraid of ruffling feathers. At the Eastern division meeting of the American Philosophical Association of 2006, he argued that the great value of philosophers has little to do with their serious writing, and everything to do with their ability to train minds to think carefully and clearly. The paper he presented, "The Lessons of History," was subsequently published in the spring 2007 issue of the *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. He admits his belief that philosophers have not contributed much to the body of human knowledge over the last two thousand years. If we are useful, then, we are teachers first and foremost.

While there is much about Lachs's position with which I cannot help but agree, I believe that more can be said for the value of the academic philosopher, but not just any. I believe that the pragmatic philosopher, he or she who believes that our theories are meaningless if they do not manifest some consequences for our world, bears a great responsibility for precisely the reasons that Lachs raises. There is a double-barreled problem for pragmatists. First, they must study the history of philosophy to discover their passion for the pragmatic, their reason to "follow Plato

back into the cave,” as Lachs has put it (Lachs, 2003, 14). Second, if they do just as they learn they must, they often step outside of departments of philosophy, and leave the academic world of philosophy to those who are not pragmatists. Thus, academic philosophical support for pragmatic philosophical outlooks becomes increasingly uncommon.

Although the second problem has been slightly alleviated by some recent growth in the popularity of pragmatic philosophy, I believe that philosophers can have additional kinds of impact beyond what Lachs highlights in “The Lessons of History.” Sometimes that impact can be achieved from departments of philosophy, but the demands of publication in tenure-earning journals seems to steer scholars away from the more helpful and socially rewarding writing practices. The options left to pragmatic scholars who do not find themselves in departments supportive of pragmatic philosophical considerations are either to find work outside the academic world or to find it in another department.

Recent research has substantiated the value of journal articles.¹ Law journals can influence actual policy and legislation. Authors of articles in law quite often support their work with the study of philosophers and scholars in other fields. This complements the notion that the value of our work is not inherent in the articles we write. The motivation and willingness to find justifications outside academia is in agreement with Lachs’s point about philosophers. Let us not be afraid to show others the value of what we do. By far the easiest way to do this is to show the dramatic impact we can have on rendering sharper the critical thinking skills and intellectual acumen of undergraduates.

To clarify Lachs’s point about the real prospects of philosophers, we can look to his article, “Stoic Pragmatism.” In it, Lachs contrasts the over-zealous optimism of pragmatists with the excessive humility of the stoics (Lachs, 2005). The pragmatists, he writes, “are at one in thinking that human intelligence can make a vast difference to how well we live, and they extol the possibility of improving our circumstances. They tend to be dissatisfied with the status quo and see indefinitely sustained amelioration as the solution to our problems” (Lachs 2005, 95). In contrast, Lachs explains that for the stoics, “The key to living well ... is control over self, not over circumstance, and they embrace inner calm in the face of whatever misfortune befalls us” (Ibid.).

Despite this apparent incompatibility of fundamental outlooks, Lachs argues that the two extreme positions can be fused. For, if the constant pursuit of the improvement of life can be put on hold from time to time, allowing for a stoic attitude, at least temporarily, then the two positions are not incompatible. In this way, Lachs offers us a position that he calls “stoic pragmatism.”

A stoic pragmatist can seek a better life and a better world, but must recognize those factors of working on such improvement that cannot be controlled or changed. In *Intermediate Man*, published fourteen years before “Stoic Pragmatism,” Lachs already offers us an example of this sort of stoic pragmatism. In the book, Lachs discusses some of the consequences of alienation, a concept he reveals to be

problematically charged with descriptive and evaluative meaning. He explains there, and in his chapter, “Violence as a Response to Alienation,” in *The Relevance of Philosophy to Life*, that mediation is the cost of the many benefits we inherit from modern life. While academics rail against alienation, Lachs explains that we might be better off working to control or ameliorate its ill-effects. In this sense, Lachs offers us an example of putting stoic pragmatism to work. Let us realistically accept the facts of alienation or, better, mediation, and let us work to improve upon those consequences of such societal structures that need improving. Romantics can have their log cabins, but their hammers and axes were probably manufactured by someone else!

Imagine a company in today’s society that grows from three employees to four thousand in seven years. One can anticipate the terrible growing pains, the shockingly rapid mediation of tasks, responsibilities, and capitalization. We envision three people who become extremely rich, and a great number of people performing the grunt-work, making the three wealthier day by day. One company exhibited such rapid growth, but made every effort to make employees feel appreciated, happy, and well cared for by their employer. Google reported on their approach to seeking company success as follows:

We try and remove significant distractions, allowing employees to focus on their job. We try to include as much as possible to allow people to focus on their work and take away the stress of financial pressures - we offer consulting around that and advice on financial responsibilities. Plus we give things like a free lunch, free snacks at all hours of the day, free drinks, [and] a massage chair. We get people in to give us massages too and [there is] gym membership, which we subsidise [sic]. Really we just want people to work hard but to play hard too at the end of the day. (Cohn, 2005)

Certainly, Google is an employer that seeks profit and hard work from its employees. But, unlike Carnegie, the leaders of Google have found an intermediary between caring for workers and seeking profit. Apparently, their method has proven profitable.

At this point, I find Lachs’s view compelling. Scholars in particular tend to dramatize problems in dualistic ways, and demonize business, modernity, and alienation. So common is this intellectual trend that Robert Nozick devoted an article to asking “Why Do Intellectuals Oppose Capitalism?” (Nozick, 1998). Surely capitalism as it was found in its least controlled stages was terrible. And, it may continue to be in international trade today. But internally in the United States, it appears that we have found measures to control the ill-effects of a powerful system of innovation and production. We now have the Food and Drug Administration to make sure that all manner of terrible things are not sold to us. We have insurance companies, as in need of repair as their systems may be. I, for one, would not choose an uninsured life in the woods for my family’s ailments. Just one of the countless medical bills my daughter incurred was for \$100,000. Our insurance company paid it without hesitation. Though this is not everyone’s

¹ Thanks to Scott Aikin for this point.

experience, at one time it was no one's. We also have labor laws, a minimum wage, and consumer safety standards. To say that capitalism must be bad is to give up, I believe, the effort to control its ill-effects. In this sense, Lachs is quite right about the possibility for a common ground between stoicism and pragmatism.

Returning to the prospects of philosophers, therefore, we can better understand Lachs's point about them. When we hear that the average journal article is read by a handful of people, we come to feel discouraged about the prospect that our research is of any real importance. This notion is further intensified when we consider that scholars make up such a small portion of the human audience as it is. Although the famous statistics about the low readership of scholarly articles has recently been challenged cogently in Donald King, Carol Tenopir, Michael Clarke's article "Measuring Total Reading of Journal Articles," Lachs's point remains (King et al., 2006). Consensus is so rare amongst philosophers that it makes sense to say that we hardly ever arrive at new knowledge. Philosophers disagree about the foundations, let alone the contents and structures, of knowledge, of logic, of ethics, of justice... So, it is natural, then, for Lachs to claim that what philosophers truly have to offer is their ability to contribute to the intellectual development of students. In "The Lessons of History," Lachs writes that "Philosophy is ill-adapted to produce final truths, but is unmatched in its ability to raise provocative questions and provide an astonishing range of answers... In brief, its primary job consists not of engaging in unique forms of inquiry, but of raising uniquely better inquirers" (Lachs, 2007, 393).

Of course, Lachs refers to teaching as no small task or value. In his chapter, "Teaching as a Calling," in *A Community of Individuals*, he writes, "Teaching is a central part of what creates this fabric of human connectedness" (Lachs, 2003, 21). And, he admonishes the odd structure of rewarding researchers so much more than teachers. He explains, "the reward for fine teaching is a few hundred dollars, while high disciplinary standing achieved by research yields annual salaries well in excess of a hundred thousand" (Lachs, 2003, 20).

While I believe more can be said to defend the pragmatic optimism of philosophers to achieve something socially important with their scholarship and writing, I must admit that Lachs has pinpointed a real worry about the backward valuation of professors. Upon achieving sufficient scholarship, some professors exemplify what Lachs calls "unannounced retirement with full salary upon the attainment of tenure" (Lachs, 2003, 16). Indeed, professors who find comfort in not having to perform well as scholars or as teachers upon the award of tenure have deeply confused the value of their role in society and in their own institutions. Somewhat like surgeons, philosophers are given a great responsibility and opportunity. We are allowed, if not expected, to cut into the minds of students, to break the firmed up habits of ideas that have been connected without thinking. We are entrusted with the education of those who are not accustomed to people with the intellectual and argumentative experience we have. We have an opportunity and a responsibility to help students grow as a consequence of our relationship with them.

Lachs exhibits great pragmatic optimism when he speaks of teaching as a calling. He writes, "it is as if a voice spoke or, better, an arm reached out and made

us do whatever needs to be done so the next generation can stand on our shoulders and know more, live better, and be more humane than any before" (Lachs, 2003, 18). This clear optimism is echoed in the later chapter entitled "Improving Life" (Lachs, 2003, 59-71). In this chapter, we find Lachs's most succinct restatement of a considered fusion of stoicism and pragmatism. He explains that Dewey's ideas "help us achieve some, though by no means all, of the little improvements of which the human frame is capable. Not wishing for Utopia," he tells us, "is a sign of maturity. Yet it is a sad sign: relinquishing the hope for more decisive and more permanent betterment of our condition leaves a living wound in the human soul" (Lachs, 2003, 71). Despite the reality that Lachs spells out, in "The Lessons of History" he maintains his optimism for philosophy, whose purpose, he writes, is "the best of human purposes: to make sure that the next generation is better than we are" (Lachs, 2007, 394).

What we find in these passages, and in Lachs's stoic pragmatism generally, is an acceptance of the fact that our own contributions will be relatively small in the scheme of things, and particularly so for the hard-fought scholarly debates. In this light, academic philosophical scholarship should not be taken too seriously, and certainly not as the greatest value that philosophers have to offer. Yet, I believe an avenue of value remains for scholars to make use of what they do have to offer. Lachs speaks of students as targets of great importance for the contributions of philosophers. It seems that what philosophers have to offer could equally be of service beyond the ivory tower. Scholars are exceptionally good at carefully critiquing ideas and writing. Why not consider their value for the public press? A few break-away scholars like Steven Pinker and Richard Rorty have succeeded in writing for broader audiences.

Philosophers could contribute in the popular media in terms of critical thinking, since that is a fundamental area of their expertise. Those who are less timid might even consider being in the public light on camera. I do not believe my point presents a disagreement with Lachs's statement about teaching and the limited value of philosophical scholarship. Rather, I think it worthwhile to advocate greater reward for teaching in academia. Universities and colleges occupy a special place in society, much like the field of law, in which workers can take a year off, or several, to engage in different projects and pursuits. Politicians so often come from careers in law for this very reason. Losing an election simply means regaining one's law career or lecture circuit. Academia, at least portions of it, could serve as an excellent platform for public figures to come and go into the service of society.

Among the difficulties of attempting such a broad and admittedly vague proposal is the trouble of assessing the quality of one's work. I believe this challenge to be at least one of the reasons academia focuses so heavily on scholarship rather than teaching. It is easier to evaluate! To determine whether one has a strong publication record is easier than to determine whether one is an acceptable or successful teacher. First, one must have publications. If one does not, then a clear indicator is set. Teaching, in contrast, is something that all college professors do. The quality of publications is not so easy to determine in mid-level journals, but is very easy at the extremes.

When it comes to teaching, however, quality might be difficult to determine from student evaluations, peer evaluations, or even teaching awards. To paraphrase how Lachs himself put it at the eastern APA, when you have enough teaching awards, and have them each year, eventually everyone has one! This problem would not be new for what I would call engaged philosophers. Engaged philosophers would be those who do not merely keep the comfort of their small academic circles and groups of students. They would be thinkers who have been informed by studies of Plato and Rawls, but who take the skills they have developed to the public problems we face and discuss everyday in newspapers, magazines, and television programs. Engaged philosophers would be very difficult to evaluate as well. How do we determine whether or not a publication in a local newspaper is worth the time and efforts of a scholar? This is not an easy question, but this difficulty does not seem to stop us from teaching students. Of course, many come to see the teaching of students as the necessary evil that real scholars must endure in order to perform their true research. Such snobs are exactly the right target for Lachs's incisive critique.

Ought we not seek to apply Lachs's point about the real value of philosophy outside the academy? As scholars we have the rare opportunity to perform research at the best libraries available, to engage with other great minds from various fields, and employ these opportunities to the problems of our day. But why not push our expertise beyond the academy? The simple answer might involve the demands of tenure. The academic tenure system has evolved over time to discourage public engagement. But surely we can do things differently. At least pragmatic work can be done after tenure, branching out further than before tenure. It is surprising that we have had so few scholars ascend to the presidency in America, a country that champions public education as fundamental to our form of government. Scholars must not be penalized for running for school boards, writing in newspapers, advocating animal rights and environmental concerns. We should be encouraged to pursue such endeavors. We might even become examples for our students, rather than theorists alone. The philosopher-king may be too bold a start for most, but the philosopher on the school board may not be.

I mentioned the danger for pragmatists of pursuing a meaningful, practical path for applying values and philosophical skills. It is of no surprise that in the practical fields of study, such as sociology and education, pragmatic philosophers like John Dewey have been hugely influential. Scholars who really buy into the pragmatic values often leave philosophy. This, of course, leads to a dwindling of the scholars of pragmatic philosophy in philosophy departments. On the one hand, this is sad to those who appreciate that direction of philosophy. On the other hand, it seems a natural result of pursuing the consequences of one's pragmatic beliefs. My own experience has led me from a philosophy department to a novel, new interdisciplinary department of Public Policy Leadership, in which I teach ethics, critical thinking, political philosophy, and more. This is one example of a developing field in which tenure requirements are still in the design stages. There may realistically be a place, therefore, in which scholars are encouraged to write for broader audiences, engage them actively in print media, organizational

development, and the classroom, while also pursuing tenure at a research institution. There will always be journal articles to write. Indeed, the scholarship necessary for good work in the areas I have mentioned lends itself to journal articles. The value, however, in what we have to offer as scholars must be understood as Lachs describes. I would only add that we can apply our abilities beyond the classroom, and perhaps employ the little we have learned to our communities at large as well.

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What Can Philosophy Contribute?

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ABSTRACT: This essay responds to Eric Weber's article, "The Responsibilities and Dangers of Pragmatism" (in this issue of *PCW*). It reflects on the question of what academic philosophy can contribute to the contemporary world. Its conclusions are modest but animated by hope that philosophy can help to gradually improve the human condition.

I OWE A DEBT OF GRATITUDE to Professor Weber for pointing out what has escaped me over decades of philosophical work. I did not explicitly recognize that the view I articulated in "Stoic Pragmatism" has been for a long time, and perhaps from the first, a defining feature of my thought. As early as "To Have and To Be" and in retrospect very visibly in *Intermediate Man*, I maintained that the human lot can be improved and that our efforts should be focused on improving it. At the same time, I always thought that there are sharp limits to what we can achieve in life and that some of the things that happen to us must in the end be accepted as beyond change or redemption.

In "Stoic Pragmatism," these dual tendencies attained explicit expression in arguing that stoics give up too soon and pragmatists make the mistake of never wanting to give up. If the two views were suitably combined, we could acknowledge the legitimacy of both struggle and surrender and embrace both human power and our finitude. I continue to believe that some such attitude is by far the best for a satisfying life and a peaceful death. The difficulty, as always, is with knowing when to be resolute in struggle and when to yield to the inevitable with a gracious smile.

The question of what can and what cannot be accomplished raises its head everywhere, but especially where genuine achievements are hard to come by. It is an enduring problem for thoughtful philosophers who look at the outrageous claims of their colleagues with amazement and dismay. Understandably perhaps, graduate

students are given the impression that when they become professionals, they will be able to offer contributions of the first order to human knowledge. They are made to believe that they will be able to outthink physicists and psychologists, that they will correct everyone else's mistakes and that, if they work hard enough, they will discover some striking (and perhaps eternal) truths about the world.

As a result, young philosophers enter the classroom and controversies in the journals with a sense of preternatural confidence. They know they will clean out the Aegean stables of fuzzy thinking and they are convinced that the side they take in any argument is demonstrably right. Strikingly, professionals who pride themselves on knowing how to be skeptical seem never to have any doubts about their own abilities and ideas; if anything, letting loose the fireworks of skepticism becomes for them an instrument of self-assurance.

All but a few philosophers lose this self-certainty over time; the ones who don't, become insufferable bores. The decline in self-confidence goes hand in hand, unfortunately, with a loss of interest in philosophical problems, and especially in the problem of what philosophy is good for. They come to believe that it is good, primarily, for earning a modest but comfortable living and for shaking up unsuspecting undergraduates. These chastened souls, unable to gain the respect of people in other fields and no longer believing that they will ever add much to the sum of knowledge, flash their wares to impress students and consider it a victory when they convince one or another of them to enter the profession.

The cynics in the field, on the other hand, believe in the depth of their souls that philosophy is worthless and will soon be interred. The death of philosophical reflection is announced regularly by people who make their living, and fame, by its continued vitality. The living contradiction makes no impression on these fine professionals, who seem not to realize that they are in the business of putting themselves out of business.

So we have in philosophy the excess and deficiency Aristotle identified with vice: some thinkers maintain that philosophy can do everything, while others insist it can do nothing. Some look for an endless series of achievements, while others quickly reconcile themselves to failure. There is a happy medium between these views, but uncovering it is impossible without a clear understanding of the nature and limits of philosophy. So long as we fail to take a dispassionate and critical look at our field of endeavor, we will not be able to assess its value and potentialities.

We must begin by recognizing that the administrative structure of colleges and universities places philosophy in a misleading position. The fact that there are departments of philosophy suggests parity with fields such as physics and sociology. This invites the idea that, like other inquiries, philosophy has a unique subject matter, an established method and the bright prospect of making new discoveries. In reality, none of this is true. Philosophy is at its best when dealing with the investigations and results of other fields, it has no accepted fertile method and it has not uncovered a single true proposition on which its practitioners agree.

As I have argued elsewhere, the impotence of philosophy in exploring the world is more than made up for by its skill in educating inquirers. Philosophers can lavish exquisite critical attention on the assumptions and methods of other fields and

produce a morally and politically sophisticated citizenry. They have already established indispensable roles for themselves in hospitals, in the formulation of public policies and in corporations. Their influence would be greatly enhanced if they were dispersed all over the university and the community instead of being isolated in their own departments.

This leaves the roles of philosophical research and writing in question. Professor Weber seems to think that “academic philosophical scholarship should not be taken too seriously.” By contrast, I see no problem in according it room and respect, so long as it is done not naively with a view to establishing truths, but as exercises of dialectical skill, clarity of vision and imaginative conceptual construction. The study of good philosophical writing and the effort to express difficult ideas with clarity are vital tools in the education of philosophers. The key is to realize that teaching critical skills must not be viewed as the cash cow that pays for research but as the ultimate justification of arcane philosophical controversies.

I agree with Weber that the educative function of philosophy must not be confined to colleges and universities. Philosophers, because of their training in critical thought, can have interesting and vitally important things to say about the moral and political problems facing our communities. Such public intellectuals as Emerson, Thoreau, James and Dewey have had a profound influence on the tone of American culture. Even less-accomplished minds can offer their ideas in books, op-ed articles and public lectures, so long as the topic is relevant, the presentation engaging and the language accessible.

To encourage involvement in issues of interest to the general public, a few years ago the Centennial Committee of the American Philosophical Association offered a prize for the best op-ed article written by a professional philosopher and published in the immediately prior twelve-month period. The number and quality of the submissions came as a surprise to all concerned. The interest of philosophers in the problems of their communities proved to be much greater than anticipated: it became clear that professors were writing voluminously for their local papers on issues that ranged from the timely to the eternal.

Strikingly absent from the many submissions, however, were high-impact statements from well-known philosophers in elite institutions. People who had made a name for themselves in the profession seemed satisfied to be dealing with abstract problems and writing for a minuscule audience of specialists. Many academic disciplines create public intellectuals of significant visibility; philosophy has done little of it in the last fifty years. At least a part of the cause for this failure is the desire of professionals not to look unsophisticated. Technical complexity commands respect; “popularizers” are treated with contempt. Even though many of the great philosophers wrote in a way thoroughly accessible to persons of ordinary intelligence, a certain amount of obscurity disguised in a flood of strange words is considered necessary in the field today.

Professor Weber is correct to point to the difficulty of evaluating the work of philosophers who focus their efforts on addressing the community. But this problem, he rightly insists, must be placed in the context of the obstacles standing in the way of the sound assessment of research and especially of teaching. The quality

of teaching is a function not primarily of what students recall by exam time but what they remember and act on twenty-five years later. Student evaluations of teaching performance are an indicator of this, though not a particularly accurate one. The assessment of research suffers from the self-aggrandizement of the in-group: tenure evaluators must be in one’s narrow area of specialization, and all such individuals have a vested interest in seeing colleagues in their field succeed. So it is obvious that evaluation of every academic activity is problematic, and especially problematic when we deal with its long-term effects.

Nevertheless, appraising the contributions of what Weber calls “engaged philosophers” is by no means beyond our capacity. If we listen to undergraduates about in-house teaching, we can listen to the people in the community who are addressed and affected by the public philosopher. Editors of newspapers can offer valuable information about op-ed writers, physicians can estimate the usefulness of medical ethicists and the public at large can assign a value to the ideas it is offered. In relation to philosophy, both administrators and philosophers must give up the expectation of important research breakthroughs. Once this expectation is surrendered, ample evaluative standards can be developed for appraising the value of every type of philosophical contribution.

Weber hits the right note once again in thinking of teachers as examples for their students. No greater compliment can be paid to an idea than acting on it, and there is no better way to undermine the value of a belief than to endorse it only verbally. Even in adulthood, the best learning is by imitation. This imposes a momentous responsibility on teachers: they must enact their beliefs or else be fraudulent. Philosophers are particularly burdened by this requirement, because the precepts and principles they teach bear directly on how people lead their lives. The ideal of unifying action and belief is difficult to achieve, but it sets the standard for those who understand that teaching is offering oneself as a living exemplar of what one’s ideas can accomplish.

Pragmatists are not the only philosophers to outgrow the narrow confines of their departments in the academy. Professionals who work in applied ethics, along with others who understand that the primary role of philosophy is to aid people in living well, naturally seek help from other fields and aim their efforts at improving the community. This need not result in the eventual disappearance of philosophy departments; they will no doubt continue to be necessary for educating young professionals. But more and more philosophers will become attached to other departments, and double appointments and secondary appointments may open the minds of others to the areas of the university and of community life where they can make lasting contributions. The future lies in regaining for philosophy the power it once enjoyed and making it again a central player in the drama of gradual human self-improvement.

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