

## On Applying Ethics: Who's Afraid of Plato's Cave?

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The present paper is a response to Gerald Gaus, who has argued that philosophers should not apply ethics. After a critical evaluation of Gaus's arguments, I present several ways which Sidney Hook has outlined for philosophers to bring their skills to bear fruitfully on public policy matters. Following Hook's list, I offer three of my own suggestions for further ways in which philosophers can positively contribute to the application of ethics and of philosophy generally. Finally, I propose the venue of consultancy as a way in which philosophers can begin to use the many skills they have to offer for confronting the problems people face outside of the academy.

In "Should Philosophers 'Apply' Ethics?" Gerald Gaus (2005) presents four challenges to applied philosophy. The present paper is a response to each of his challenges. In closing the paper, I summarize the helpful ways in which Sidney Hook has suggested that philosophers can contribute to discussions of public policy, which is my area of applied ethics, and I offer three of my own ideas about what else philosophers have to offer. Finally, I mention briefly two of the ways I believe philosophers can learn and help others through an engagement with people outside of academic philosophy departments. I believe and will argue that philosophers can contribute to public policy and some ought to do so.

In *A Community of Individuals*, John Lachs diagnoses a great challenge for philosophers who seek grant funding (Lachs 2003, 9). The problem is that so often philosophers undermine one another and fail to agree on even the fundamental assumptions of each others' work. I believe that by and large Lachs is right. The fact that we cannot agree on even the basics of philosophy has given other disciplines some weight to their belief that philosophy does not achieve new knowledge, while their own fields, building and refining basic shared understandings, do yield it. While there is a danger in undermining others' work, I think that there are two reasons to engage in it. First, some people hotly challenge the bases of *my* work, which is at least psychologically motivating. Second, and more seriously, as a philosopher I welcome the challenge to my basic assumptions that philosophers levy. It seems to me that if

I know well enough what I am talking about, I must have thought about serious challenges, or I might know my field and justify my work better if I recognize the most substantive challenges my work might face. Thus, while I think that Professor Lachs is right about a problem plaguing the field of philosophy, I feel compelled to address a philosopher who believes that I am wrong not only with regard to an assumption underlying one of my current projects, but about even the goal of my very employment.

I am Assistant Professor of Public Policy Leadership at the University of Mississippi. As a philosopher, I was hired to teach ethics and public policy, along with critical thinking and other political philosophy and applied ethics courses. My work and my job, therefore, are grounded on the idea that students of public policy might benefit from the application of philosophical insight in the areas of ethics and political philosophy to real-world problems in public policy.

I hope it is understandable, then, when I say that Gerald Gaus is someone whom I must answer. Professor Gaus, James E. Rogers Professor of Philosophy at the University of Arizona, published an essay which he has posted prominently on his academic website. His essay “Should Philosophers ‘Apply Ethics?’” has the suggestive follow-up question immediately after the title: “By ‘applying ethics’, do philosophers actually succeed in corrupting philosophy?” This article, published in *Think* in 2005, is evidence of a changing of the guard in the field of academic philosophy. Some who held the purse strings and influence of the mainstream philosophy departments tended to dismiss ways of thinking not their own at academic meetings and in hiring practices. So tragic is the change from this practice for Gaus that he opens his essay with a discussion of the job market for philosophers. Gaus writes, “‘Applied ethics’ is the growth industry in philosophy. Many philosophy departments, starved for students, have found a new, and apparently lucrative, market in teaching applied ethics” (Gaus 2005, 63). So tenuous is the field of applied ethics that Gaus uses scare-quotes around the term several times that he mentions it. Also, his implication is clear that departments exhibiting growth in applied ethics were ones generally that were unsuccessful in attracting interest in philosophy. The further implication in reference to the market as lucrative is also a sly way of slandering applied philosophers, suggesting avarice.

Gaus further diminishes applied ethics programs when he writes that “then there are the ‘problems’ of applied ethics” which he believes to be a fanciful and opportunistic description of real life problems only set in this way to benefit mediocre, false, and even “corrupt” philosophers (Gaus 2005, 63). Stated most directly, Gaus is arguing that unsuccessful philosophers starved for success are chasing money in the name of applying ethics.

One response I could have to Gaus’s way of thinking about the movement of applied philosophy would be to ignore him and to go on with my work. While I certainly do my work, I also take Gaus’s challenge seriously for three reasons. He is extremely intelligent. He focuses an entire essay on arguing a view that

challenges the fundamental assumptions of my work. Finally, I believe I can gain from Gaus's challenges if I can answer them. While it may come as no surprise, I wholeheartedly disagree with him. The quick of Gaus's challenge is that he conceives of philosophy as only one half of what I see in Plato's call. The philosopher must exit the cave into the light, to be sure. He or she must not forget as Gaus seems to do, however, the philosopher's responsibilities to those left behind, nor the reasons why we seek to leave the cave. To embrace the philosopher's responsibilities includes venturing back into the murky cave. Now, on my own account, it may not be necessary for each and every philosopher to do so, but it is the case that some ought to do it. Sidney Hook made a similar point in his essay "Philosophy and Public Policy" (Hook 1970). Not everyone must be a fireman or a police officer, but some people must be.

Gaus's first challenge concerns what he thinks philosophers should be doing. If they are good philosophers, he believes that they should be pursuing two things, truth and justification. Presumably, philosophers should be pursuing philosophical truths. If we do not classify which kinds of truth we should be pursuing and which kinds of justification, I should be able to get tenure by counting the fibers in my rug, offering justification for my beliefs about the numbers and kinds of fibers present. One thing is clear in Gaus's understanding of the motivations of proper philosophers. He believes that philosophy's goal is "to get things right, not to make the philosopher (or others), richer, healthier or happier" (Gaus 2005, 63). In other words, philosophy should not be undertaken for the benefits it brings. Gaus does not clarify why it is we are after truth, though many answers could be suggested here, such as that we seek it for the curiosity it satisfies. In any case, according to Gaus truth should be pursued even if it will end in achieving less happiness.

Here I take issue with Gaus's assumptions. First, his paper does not specify that counting rug fibers is insufficient for good philosophy. There is a reason it would be silly to do it. It almost always does not matter! Unless a murder occurred in my hotel room, or unless the rug in my room is to be appraised for replacement value, what could the number of fibers possibly contribute to human happiness or enhanced, helpful knowledge? The answer seems to be nothing. Essentially my challenge to Gaus is that we inevitably value certain areas of inquiry over others, and we do so for a reason beyond curiosity. Interest infuses curiosity, and most generally we are interested in things that make us happier to learn about.

My second response is again to invoke Plato. His message is familiar, in the voice of Socrates: "the life which is unexamined is not worth living." It seems plain to me here that to engage in philosophy involves an activity which is undertaken for a crucial element of happiness. If I want to avoid a life not worth living, it seems I must engage in philosophy, in self-reflection. Thus, if one wants to help others to live more meaningful lives, one way to help is to bring philosophy to them. If I think that philosophy contributes to rendering lives worthy of being lived, it is difficult to see the illegitimacy of aiming

philosophy at the improvement of the lives of people. My assumption, which I think is right, is that a life worth living is better than a life that is not.

The lingering question to which Gaus returns in concluding his essay is whether in thinking as I do I am corrupting philosophy. Gaus explains that to corrupt philosophy is to “sacrifice the idea that philosophy is impartial in that its goal is simply to get things right” (Gaus 2005, 64). Here I believe that Gaus would need to say more before I could properly address his concern. It appears to me that he is identifying a way of thinking about philosophy with the class of all good philosophy, and then calling all other ways of thinking about philosophy bad. An assumption underlies his challenge here. I believe that Gaus must have some answer to why it is we pursue truth. Why do we want it? The quick answer I have suggested is that we are curious beings. It is our inclination to look and find things out. If we often learned things that hurt us, however, might our inclinations not have conditioned human beings against inquiry? Was it not the greatest strength of human beings over other animals and natural and social challenges that we can inquire into problems and fix them? It seems to me that inquiry is our most powerful tool for living happier, longer, more pleasant lives, even if some people employ inquiry in the hopes of hurting others.

A second assumption is worth attention here, though it may be a well-worn critique. If one asks how many coffee cups I have on my desk, the concept of there being a right answer is straightforward. There may be debate about whether to include disposable cups along with the reusable ones, but whichever approach one chooses, there could be a correct answer that follows. When one inquires into beauty, however, or into better ways of living, even among some easy distinctions of right and wrong there often arise many issues about which it is difficult to think that correctness is the appropriate measure of meaningful inquiry, versus categories of better or worse, or in some cases equally reasonable yet conflicting answers. Just as in the difference between deductive reasoning and inductive, certain contexts appear to have categorical separations and others have differences of degree. If this is true, “getting things right” appears to me to be a way of thinking that inclines towards the categorical. Some philosophers may think that is better philosophy, but this is by no means self-evident. In fact, if it is right that some answers in philosophy are better and worse rather than right and wrong, then applying the “getting things right” standard seems to get things wrong.

To summarize my response to the accusation of corruption, if I agree with these assumptions that Gaus announces uncritically, then surely I would consider myself to be a corrupter of philosophy. For the reasons I have mentioned, I reject these premises. I also wonder how Gaus reconciles his own inner demons when he publishes work in books on applied ethics, such as “Dirty Hands” in *The Blackwell Companion to Applied Ethics* (Gaus 2003). Gaus is not alone in committing what Habermas has called a “performative contradiction” (Habermas 1992). It is clear, however, that Gaus is presenting no joke in his essay. Anecdotally speaking, I have met many philosophers who have expressed

to me their views that Gaus embodies in his “Should Philosophers ‘Apply Ethics?’” essay. As a result, then, it would seem that Gaus’s critique here, though flawed, should raise questions about why it is he appears to participate in this activity which he condemns as bad philosophy.

Gaus’s second challenge to applied ethics concerns the problems of bias. He writes,

If philosophy is to possess intellectual activity – if it is not to be (merely) a playful activity, then it cannot rest content to propose plausible philosophical explanations... If what you *want* to believe is relevant, then philosophical positions will, at least in part, reflect different wants... Or, to be less kind, philosophy will be ideological: the persuasiveness of your philosophical explanation will depend on the wants, values, and ends of your advocacy. (Gaus 2005, 64)

There are several steps to Gaus’s challenge here. First, he implies that it is important for philosophy not to be “merely” playful. It seems reasonable to me to think that there can be good philosophy that is merely playful. That depends, of course, on the parameters of what is mere. How do we isolate any activity that is “merely” playful. Children running outside may be playful, but they are also exercising. Couch potatoes watching mere entertainment may learn some things from watching Jeopardy. Second, it is unclear what Gaus means by “resting content.” I once heard an essay at a conference that had a conditional thesis whose antecedent, it seemed to me could not possibly be right or better than another way of thinking. I asked the philosopher why on Earth he wanted to make that argument. He answered that he was curious about the subject. In my own way of thinking, there may be other more fruitful areas of inquiry, but what he was doing was acceptable philosophy. It is Gaus who raises the more controversial claims of exclusivity in the practice of philosophy.

It is a crucial step of inquiry to figure out what are the plausible ways of thinking about an issue. Certainly one of the reasons to do so is to inquire further into the greater weight of one way of thinking over another. In cases in which one answer or a small number of answers will be in some sense right and others wrong, it would behoove scholars to take that next step and to figure out what distinguishes the ways of thinking as such. It is not clear, however, that the people who propose ways of thinking must be the same persons who compare and evaluate them. Some evaluation is almost always done, but frequently without finality. That is true for four reasons. No one scholar can be exhaustive. The proposal of a way of thinking itself can be hard work. Proposing ways of thinking involves different skills from comparing and contrasting them with others. Finally, there are subjects about which rightness and wrongness are not appropriate categories. Must one eat peas with a fork or is a spoon permissible? Surely the answer depends on one’s context and on the purposes of the

individual in question. The non-contextual, invariant truth of the matter is something in this case that could only be a fiction.

The third challenge that Gaus presents seems the most important and in my view the most misguided. Gaus believes that when we want to believe something, we are led astray or corrupted philosophically. Nietzsche's famous maxim comes to mind. He proclaimed often that "convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies" (Nietzsche 1996, I, Aphorism 483, 234). I think certainly that one can blind oneself with conviction. At the same time, however, if a researcher studies diabetes because his family has suffered and lost members to the disease, it seems perfectly plausible to think that the researcher may be one of the best to study his or her field. One researcher I know runs a major laboratory with the hope and convictions and inspirations of great interest in helping people get healthier, in combating the disease that killed his family members, and that may bring him financial gain should he find the best cure or treatment yet available. His conviction is that he can help if he works hard to find the cure. Incentive systems as their own category of interesting problems regarding medicine aside, this researcher may be more likely than any dispassionate person I have ever met to discover the best treatment or cure for diabetes. It seems perfectly counter to Gaus's challenge to applied philosophy here that this should be so. The researcher could be motivated only by money, but he is not. Should he discover that someone else's method for treating diabetes is better, he would want people to know about it, and he would want to improve as far as possible upon it rather than his own ideas. At the same time, interests, biases, wants, all these things deeply motivate him to inquire, and human happiness is a powerful drive for him.

From the philosopher's point of view, a further response is possible. William James's views on temperament challenge Gaus's assumptions. James would say that what Gaus is worried about is already and always happening. He would say that given people's temperaments, they are already inclined to prefer certain philosophical outlooks and conclusions. One may think this a bad thing, but that would be like saying it is too bad that we must consume calories. Life would be easier if we did not have to eat, but it would not be life as I can recognize it. The Jamesian answer here would not be one which gives up care for inquiry, of course. Rather, it demands that we recognize how inquiry works, what motivates people to think and act, such that we can work to alleviate the ill-effects of the way things work. Gaus may not be happy with this way of thinking, but if his standards are impossible, the error is his own.

Gaus's third challenge is that ethics in real life are murky. If they are messy things, no good philosophy can come from them. He writes,

As David Ross pointed out in *The Right and the Good*, although we may be able to obtain knowledge of abstract principles of right, particular judgments and specific issues involve conflicting principles, and it is exceedingly difficult to provide answers to these questions that have any

claim to being clear and definitive.... When we apply ethics – e.g., when we seek to determine how our principles concerning freedom, respect for life, the metaphysics of persons and so on relate to aborting a fetus in the fifth month – there simply is no powerful argument that demands acceptance by all. (Gaus 2005, 64-65)

A trouble here in Gaus's analysis is the same as before. It appears as though his standards for good philosophy are clarity, definitiveness, and arguments so powerful that they command acceptance by all. If philosophy is only good when it meets all of these criteria, it may be that there is then *no good philosophy*. That seems troubling to me for two reasons. First, I think there is a great deal of good philosophy. Second, that means that Gaus's own arguments in his essay are not good philosophy. They certainly do not demand acceptance by all, and in my own view are not definitive. So here again, it seems we are left with a question begging argument.

Gaus's fourth challenge to applied ethics is the presentation of an example of overly quick thinking and argumentation that the popular *New York Times Magazine's* column "*The Ethicist*" committed. Whether or not that columnist was doing good philosophy is no real challenge to the whole field. I write some bad papers. I write some that are better than others. My worst essay is not reason to deny that my best essays are philosophy. Simple and accessible philosophy could be a great thing if done right. One example from the *New York Times* does little to challenge the field as a whole.

To close my analysis of Gaus's arguments against applied ethics, here are his own words. He writes,

So should philosophers apply ethics? As citizens, they have every right to. Philosophers need not leave public policy debates over these matters to theologians and 'professional ethicists'. However, when applying ethics in this way they are not doing philosophy, any more than are good journalists, public officials (including the bureaucracy), policy analysts, and other citizens when they think clearly about these matters.... But philosophers are at risk in ways other citizens are not. For participation in public controversy masked as philosophy corrupts philosophy, and this is the crux of the danger in applying ethics. (Much political philosophy is corrupting for many of the same reasons). A sophisticated, rational, ideological advocacy is conducted as if it were philosophy, giving the impression (both to ourselves and our students) that philosophy is a [sic] merely an intellectual game in which you defend what you want to believe. (Gaus 2005, 67)

Finally, he writes, "Providing reasoned defences of these positions *and their opposites* is valuable for democracy. They are not, though, good philosophy" (Gaus 2005, 65). The simple answer that I think we can offer Gaus

is to say that philosophy can be more than simply getting things right. We can also say that interests and wants are powerful motivations for innovation, that Plato's own most famous metaphor implied a responsibility to do more than pursue the truth – he wanted us to return to our friends in the cave – and that avoiding a life not worth living appears to be a powerful motivation that is focused on the positive consequences of inquiry. For these reasons, I think it is crucial for at least some philosophers to consider what they can offer to people outside of professional philosophy departments, especially in areas where we meet ethical dilemmas.

Moving on from my critique of Gaus's challenges for applied philosophy, it is reasonable to ask how it is philosophy can contribute to public policy or to any field of applied ethics. Fortunately, Sidney Hook offered an excellent start to answering this question with five suggestions. To these five, I add three of my own.

In "Philosophy and Public Policy," Hook explains that any researcher must study extensively all the relevant facts of a case or area to the best of his or her ability. Thus, if you ask a strong historian, political scientist, and philosopher about rights sought in the civil rights movement in the United States, such scholars would know as much as they can about the particular context of the debate between them. In this instance, the philosopher is not bringing unique knowledge to the table when approaching an issue of public policy regarding civil rights, except perhaps facts as seen somewhat differently through the philosopher's lenses, but just as in copy editing, the more eyes on a text, the more mistakes or interesting issues are usually caught. In short, the first offering that a philosopher contributes to debates in public policy is his or her common scholarly care for the relevant facts.

The second strength that philosophers bring in analysis of problems for public policy is an unusually strong ability to unearth and examine underlying assumptions, usually tacit presuppositions. Though I was raised in a highly educated household, I first encountered the word "presupposition" in my introduction to philosophy course. Uncovering assumptions is somewhat like solving puzzles. The more practice you have at combing through the pieces, the better you are at finding things that are generally hard to see. Philosophers sniff out assumptions, study implication and logic, and notice when support for ideas is weak and unnoticed as such.

Hook next identifies philosophers' strengths at clarifying and sharpening the points at issue for debate as a further contribution we commonly make in interdisciplinary debates. Drawing distinctions is a remarkable specialty we learn and use when we test universal claims. We see the general categories of things fitting in our conceptual frames for the most part, but philosophers know exceptionally well how to look for those examples that do not quite fit. They are therefore acutely capable of clarifying the different kinds of things people talk about in debates, establishing new distinctions, and cutting out those elements repeated in debates that clutter our view of the landscape of relevant ideas.

Following the tasks of sharpening points for debate is the next charge that philosophers can ably fulfill. That is to question the logical consistency of explicitly held beliefs and underlying assumptions that have previously gone unnoticed. We can also question well the newly sharpened points at issue for debate once we lay them out more clearly than they were found to be before. Philosophers are so good at this step that we have systems of translation and signs for logical operations to make sure that even the most complex of co-dependent propositions and derivations can be assessed with a system of tables, the counterexample method, and truth trees.

Finally, Hook argues that philosophers can contribute in the form of ethical theorizing. Perusal of the various texts concerning ethics that are released in the disciplines of business administration or political science yields quick evidence that philosophers are needed outside of our own professional settings. Consider as further evidence of the value of philosophers' knowledge of ethics the many new kinds of demand for us. Hospitals employ bioethicists. The United States has from time to time assembled Presidential committees to study ethical implications of research and other activities. Schools all over are building into their professional curricula the study of ethics, such as at medical schools, schools of journalism, accounting, law, business, and others. The more that rigorous, professional philosophers are the ones to fill these seats, the more we see quality work emanate from their schools. It often occurs, furthermore, that philosophers hold more than one degree relevant to their posts. Take for example Professor Carl Elliott of the University of Minnesota's Center for Bioethics. He holds a Ph.D. in philosophy and an M.D. as well. Elliott and others like him easily qualify in the first contribution that Hook raises and they substantially deepen the ethical contributions to debates that only philosophers can offer in public policy.

To these five points, I add three suggestions regarding what philosophers can offer in applying ethics. The first among these concerns conflict resolution. John Rawls described a common notion in alternative dispute resolution – overlapping consensus. Just as philosophers are good at noting tacit assumptions, they can demonstrate to competing groups which of their tacit interests are shared across party lines, allowing the cultivation of solutions to shared problems. One example came to me from a discussion with a conservative student. He thought he was greatly in conflict with environmental groups, not realizing that he shares many interests with environmentalists, but would simply prefer to call himself a conservationist. He is a hunter and assumed that environmentalists would criticize him for hunting, and thus he was critical of their efforts. Perhaps the language of conservation sounded appealing to a self-proclaimed conservative. At the same time, he wants to put controls on industrial pollutants, limiting business's freedoms to some extent, in order to protect the natural environments he loves. There may be groups that will butt heads directly, but sometimes simple differences in labels can raise conflicts

where there are few. Noting and pointing out overlapping consensus in cases like this one are crucial for good conflict resolution.

The next area to which philosophers could contribute substantially concerns agenda setting, or policy prioritization. All too often philosophers focus on particular policy debates, under the reasonable assumption that narrowing one's focus is a good thing. At the same time, many groups must decide how to spend their time, such as in the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions on which cases to accept for review. Utilitarian theorists would say that a policy agenda that will address the greatest good either of the most people or the vastly greater good of a smaller group would be the better choice in setting priorities than another way of proceeding. Deontological theorists might argue that the rights of individuals that are grossly violated ought to be the first problems addressed in governmental consideration. We see the latter concerns in Rawls's *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls 1999). Along these lines, philosophers can note and evaluate reasons and assumptions involved in policy prioritizations.

Finally, philosophers are good at reconceiving ideas and problems. They do so with their creative abilities to imagine counterexamples to rules and to envision new conceptions of things such as persons, responsibilities, justice, virtue, duty, and more. This process is the frequently necessary task of reformulating the problems to be addressed in public policy. I mean here something different from philosophers' abilities to clarify muddled ideas or confused principles. I mean something bigger. Philosophers are often quite good at speculation and invention in the realm of ideas. Consider how different are the views of what a person is that you can find in Hobbes, Rousseau, Descartes, William James, Josiah Royce, and Paul Churchland, just to name some varied western thinkers. Countless others could be listed here. My point is that philosophers from the first are trained to consider and suggest alternate ways of unifying a variety of experiences, properties, things, and processes into conceptions.

Philosophers could contribute substantially to that vital component of public leadership that we call vision. Philosophers in some ways are among the most imaginative people concerning the realm of possible ideas. The various speculations and ideations of the kind that Gaus finds frivolous are important, I believe, in the imaginative task of envisioning the possibilities of intelligent progress.

An important question arose in discussion about the present paper at the Eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association in 2008. While these are the skills that philosophers may bring to bear in applied ethics debates and public policy deliberations, the questioner at the conference asked what real payout there is for those who invite philosophers' participation. What might someone who hires a philosopher gain in instances of ethical conflicts?

I answered with an example. A philosopher working at a hospital may serve a valuable function beyond the uses I have mentioned thus far. Quite often hospital administrators rush to their legal teams in cases of conflict, hoping to

find the best and swiftest solution to problems. While seeking legal counsel is often necessary, the interesting thing about medicine concerns all the problems for which we have no preset policies. Just as Gaus suggested, following David Ross, there are situations that seem murky, and that is because they are. If there is no clear law about what to do in a situation, lawyers can try to predict the option involving the lowest projected cost to the hospital should lawsuits be filed. One could at least imagine a circumstance, however, in which what appears to be the right thing to do in a case is different from what a lawyer will predict to be the minimal legal, probable cost of lawsuits. Even if one does not have such insight or inclination to think one decision better than another, is it the ethical thing to do to decide primarily on the basis of projected financial costs? Consider the decision about automobiles that was so scandalous involving the Ford Pinto (Lee 1998). If you could pay out less money from lawsuits and settlements than it would cost to fix a problem, is the lower costing measure the right one to choose? If it were found out that the lower costing measure were always the one taken, can we not imagine the terrible outcome of a lawsuit that would challenge the error of this system?

One way for a hospital to deal with this matter would be to do the best job that it can reasonably be expected to do in searching for the most ethically justifiable decision in a given case. I will call this notion ethical due diligence (EDD). If a hospital had a team of three ethicists, one or more of which was educated with a medical doctorate on top of his or her training in philosophy, and those three people conferred with the patient, his or her doctor, family, and relevant persons, if time allowed, and then rendered a decision about what they could decide would be the most reasonable course of action, it would seem that the hospital did at the very least the best that it could do with the resources available to address the problem. Thus, hospitals might not only protect the bottom line, but at the same time might be less liable for the decisions they make as a result of sincere EDD. Surely there could be controversy over the ways in which the ethicists deliberate, but a great deal of policy has been established, some of which has been helpful at preserving individuals' liberty as a result of the Belmont Report, even if it has since needed some updating (*The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* 1979).

At the Eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association, I heard philosophers bemoan the fact that although they were presenting suggestions that they had carefully crafted for the President-elect to adopt with regard to foreign policy challenges, there was little to no chance that the new President will either hear or follow such suggestions. Philosophers sometimes value the focus on applied issues that they take up, yet feel that their efforts are futile. One proposal I have is to move from the long, carefully articulated papers that we write for journals and books, to write short, one-page and five-page briefs about the arguments we have put forward with regard to the challenges our nation faces. Then, with an attached cover letter, philosophers so inclined

can send their addressed policy proposals to their representatives, governors, Senators, President, newspapers, television news stations and more. If we do not tell our representatives what our ideas are, how can we reasonably complain about our own futility?

A measure that I intend to take after further planning and preparation is more novel still than one-page briefs. As a faculty member with students interested in how what we learn in the classroom can apply to the real world, I envision a student and faculty project, perhaps initially for a class, which would offer free consultancy to a community or group of morally conflicted people. What I have in mind near where I live would be to send out letters to small communities around the university, asking whether the people in those communities might benefit from the attention, interviews, and careful analysis of a group of students and faculty members willing to serve as consultants. The demand for consultancy is enormous. The attention that newspapers and other news media might give, along with the attention of the consulting students and faculty members, will help those who feel they lack a voice regarding their problems. It could also allow for a laboratory-like testing ground for the value of philosophical and ethical analysis. I see great potential for learning and for calling attention to the problems of people in municipalities near universities. If philosophers can succeed at showing their value in this way, grant money could be sought. Support could target the expenses that might include course releases for the necessary time the process might take, for the writing of papers and policy briefs describing the processes employed and lessons learned. The overall aim of such a program would be to establish and maintain an innovative and exciting way of rendering philosophy palpably helpful.

I hope that this essay and its many practical ideas have clarified ways that philosophers can rigorously and fruitfully applying the lessons of philosophy and ethics, both inside and outside the classroom.

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