

SYMPOSIUM: The Effects of Multiculturalism on Scholarship

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Manifestations of Illiberalism in Philosophy

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Over the centuries, philosophy has been seen in many ways: as a midwife to the birth of ideas, as queen of the sciences, as an owl flying at dusk, as a ladder to be kicked away upon reaching enlightenment, and as a large-scale map relating the small-scale maps of the sciences. The image suggested by philosophy's role in recent changes in the academy is Typhoid Mary—one who infects others while avoiding serious illness herself. Many ideas that underlie the politicization of the university had their origin in philosophy. Yet philosophy has largely managed to escape politicization.

I

Let's begin by distinguishing two kinds of multiculturalism. Diane Ravitch has defined *pluralistic multiculturalism* as the quest to enrich our common culture, making it more inclusive by incorporating elements of other cultures.¹ I am a strong advocate of this kind of multiculturalism. Philosophy has often been conceived and taught as something created by Socrates in fifth-century B.C. Athens and developed over the centuries in Western Europe and North America. That picture is misleading and incomplete. The Buddha, Confucius, and Lao Tzu all predate Socrates.² Though one could argue that none are truly philosophers—none concerns himself primarily with establishing conclusions by careful definition and argumentation—rich philosophical traditions have grown from their work and, indeed, were growing from their work by the time of Aristotle.³ Study of these traditions not only expands one's sense of the questions that can be asked and the answers that

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can be given but also dispels the quasi-Hegelian sense of inevitability that often accompanies the study of the history of philosophy.

In its effects on philosophy as a discipline, however, multiculturalism has not primarily been pluralistic. It has encouraged scholarship on other cultures, but those effects are small compared to the effects of politicized multiculturalism—or *illiberal multiculturalism*, as I have called it, following Dinesh D'Souza—which sees scholarship and the curriculum as a means to political change.

I have argued in other places that multiculturalism is a classic bait-and-switch operation.⁴ The *arguments* are always for pluralistic multiculturalism—unless addressed to the already converted!—but the actual goal is the political transformation of the university. One could have guessed this from the comments of two Stanford activists, quoted by D'Souza eight years ago:

We're not saying we need to study Tibetan philosophy. We're arguing that we need to understand what made our society what it is.

Forget Confucius. We are trying to prepare ourselves for the multicultural challenge we will face in the future.⁵

But what does pluralistic multiculturalism in philosophy offer? Confucius, Tibetan philosophy, and the like! Now Confucianism and Buddhism are central to the worldviews of much of Asia's population, and Asian Americans are some of the nation's fastest-growing ethnic groups. Interactions with Asia are of vital political and economic importance. Studying these philosophies might therefore seem relevant to preparing "ourselves for the multicultural challenge we will face in the future," if that is what is at issue. But they have no obvious political implications. So, interest in them is limited.

II

The dominance of illiberal multiculturalism over its pluralistic alternative is evident in patterns of philosophical research. I have examined the number of publications reported in each of the past ten years in *The Philosophers' Index* on various topics—some pluralistic, some political—to judge the actual effects of multiculturalism on philosophical research. There has been an increase in scholarship devoted to non-Western philosophy, but it has been modest, and, in several areas, there are signs of its being short lived.

Consider first issues of quantity:

Japanese philosophy: The average number of publications from 1991–1996 was 2.3 times the 1987–1990 average.

Buddhism: The number of publications is up 77 percent since 1987.

Chinese philosophy: The number of publications is up 55 percent from 1987, but is down 32 percent from its 1991 high.

Indian philosophy: The number of publications is up 39 percent from 1987, but is down 35 percent from its 1991 high.

African philosophy: The number of publications is below 1987, but the high was fairly recent, in 1994.

So much for the philosophical stock quotations.⁶

Issues of quality are harder to judge. Some of the scholarship on non-Western philosophy has itself been politicized. David Hall and Roger Ames, for example, find Confucian thought remarkably similar to that of “such thinkers as Foucault, Derrida, and the American pragmatist Richard Rorty.”⁷ They take Confucius’s talk of the mandate of Heaven as referring to “the specific environing conditions that set up the viable possibilities in a particular social setting or historical epoch” (12). This is the opposite of standard readings, according to which the Will of Heaven is transcendent: the decree of God, the moral order, or, in Chu Hsi’s words, “the operation of Nature which is endowed in things and makes things be as they are.”⁸ Indeed, Hall and Ames’s construal is something like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.’s, citation of the words of the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights,” as establishing the Founders’ *relativism*. To paraphrase Allan Bloom, people advancing arguments like these must think their audience will believe anything.⁹ But there is more than silliness behind them. Hall and Ames maintain that the mandate of Heaven is purely contingent and context-relative to discredit the notion of rights and to justify the suppression of the democracy movement at Tiananmen Square.¹⁰

Still, scholarship on non-Western philosophy generally remains solid. Increased attention to non-Western traditions is a good thing, a positive effect of multiculturalism. The number of publications remains small, and key texts often have not even been translated into English or any other modern European language, let alone interpreted. There is historical and philosophical work of real significance to be done.

III

These pluralistic effects pale, however, in comparison with the political effects of multiculturalism. Overall, in 1996 there were 34 percent more publications on non-Western philosophy than there were in 1987. Compare the following more political topics:

Racism: Up 587 percent from the 1987-1990 average.

Diversity: Up 1000 percent from 1987 (even from 1993).

Feminism: Up 341 percent from 1987.

Gender: Up 392 percent from 1987.

Moreover, feminism has ten times the number of publications for racism, and more than all areas of non-Western philosophy combined.¹¹

Ten years ago, feminism had about as many publications as Indian and African philosophy combined. In 1996, it had about four times as many as those two combined. Here is another way of looking at it: In 1996, there were forty-five more publications in non-Western philosophy than in 1987. There were 148 more publications in feminism. Add in racism, diversity, and gender, and there were 234 more. Politicized, illiberal multiculturalism has had far greater effects than its benign pluralistic cousin. Indeed, one would not go far wrong in saying that multiculturalism in philosophy has mostly meant feminism.

This is odd. Women do not have a distinctive culture. Moreover, since women do not form a “discrete and insular minority”—or, in this case, majority—the effects of past discrimination are not inherited by the next generation of women. It seems a stretch, therefore, to include feminism under the heading of multiculturalism at all. Nevertheless, women outnumber minorities, Sanskrit specialists, Sinologists, and others.

IV

What is wrong with feminist philosophy? I can give only the sketchiest answer here, and I hasten to say that feminist philosophy is not all politicized. The earliest philosophers to work in feminism, especially, have done some significant research. But, as I have argued elsewhere, multiculturalism is best seen as a form of mercantilism.¹² As always, in protected industries, quality declines from a lack of competition. That has happened in feminist philosophy.

A great deal of feminist philosophy is flawed simply because it puts politics first. The goal is political change, not truth. Now this is not always *fatal*; one may have political motivations to seek the truth. It is always *dangerous*, however, for the same political motivations can lead one to ignore or suppress the truth. What makes it especially dangerous in this case is that feminist research is characterized by a lack of empirical evidence and argument. There is, in fact, a marked hostility to science.¹³ Entire books have been written on child development, family relations, and so on, by people who not only have never done any empirical research on these topics themselves but who also have no familiarity with the relevant empirical research done by others.

Much feminist philosophy exhibits what Thomas Sowell calls “the vision of the anointed.”¹⁴ Researchers display a bipolar view, with dichotomies between oppressor and oppressed, “targets” and “mascots.” There is no sense of tradeoffs and complexities. Social problems are attributed to the heteropatriarchy without any felt need for detailed argument or analysis, while minor points are heralded as “radical reconceptions” of traditional notions.

Most puzzling of all to analytic philosophers are wild forms of argument found in feminist and other politicized research. Many of these are not origi-

nal with illiberal multiculturalists, but have their roots in Marx, Freud, Heidegger, or various postmodernists.

Argument from authority: A says that p
∴ p

(This works only if A is a canonical figure such as Marx, Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty. It is strengthened if the premise has the form “A *has argued* that p” or even “A has shown that p,” as in “Rorty has shown that truth is relative to an interpretive community.” If A is a target figure such as Locke or Adam Smith, of course, such language is inappropriate, and one may instead conclude Not p.)

Raising the question: A has called p into question.
∴ Not p

(“Derrida has called into question the assumption that utterances have determinate meanings. So a theory of meaning is impossible.”)

Argument from interests: Asserting that p could serve the interests of someone I dislike (a “target”).
∴ Not p

(“Saying that women earn less than men because women interrupt careers to have children, work fewer hours, obtain fewer degrees in technical areas than men, and the like of course serves the interests of successful men in the workforce who do not want their own privileges to be challenged. So, those are not the real reasons for women’s reduced earnings.”)

When the revolution comes: p would not change some feature of the status quo, but q would.
∴ q and Not p

(“Lacan’s understanding of the development of the child’s self-concept in the mirror stage tends to leave contemporary social/sexual roles unchallenged, while Kristeva’s radical reconception of the mirror stage provides the ground for contending that contemporary roles are oppressive. So, Kristeva’s revolutionary account of the development of the child’s self-concept is to be preferred over Lacan’s reactionary account.”)

Reductio ad anything: X is analogous in some respect to Y.
∴ X is really Y

(The *locus classicus* of this is Marx, for whom anything analogous to class struggle is really an instance of class struggle. It appears in Freud, where the reduction is to sexual drives, and in Foucault: “Schools and hospitals

are analogous in some ways to prisons. Prisons are means of social control. So, schools and hospitals are means of social control.” Compare the argument in a recent history article: “The dominance of whites over blacks in the slave South has many parallels to the dominance of men over women. So, the phenomenon of slavery is best understood as an instance of sexual oppression, in which Africans were forced into the role of woman.”)

Causes in the air: X is conceptually related to Y.
∴ X causes Y.¹⁵

(In Freud, “The rat man’s fear of rats seems in some way related to his fear of his father. So, his fear of rats is caused by his fear of his father.” Or, in Kristeva, “The hostility, fear, and sense of alterity that men have for women is structurally similar in some ways to the sense of alterity the weaned child develops for the mother’s breast. So, weaning is the cause of sexual discrimination.”)

In isolation, these arguments are obviously silly. In context, however, and embedded deeply in layers of nearly unintelligible prose, they are hard to identify and evaluate. It is no accident that much politicized philosophy is written in an intentionally opaque style. That, however, is not the full story. When intelligent scholars make such intellectual moves, one must apply a principle of charity and consider the possibility that they are not advancing arguments at all. Many feminists think of themselves as applying the hermeneutic method, that is, as creating interpretations rather than constructing arguments. If those interpretations do not aim at truth and employ reasoning that reliably approaches it, however, it is not clear why the rest of us should pay attention.

V

Despite the increase in politicized scholarship, the effects of multiculturalism on philosophy have been limited. Philosophy has not gone the way of English; we have not returned to the cave. There are a number of positive signs.

1. Even at four times its 1987 level, Feminism still has fewer entries in the *Philosophers’ Index* than God—and less than one-third the number for Logic.
2. Class-related topics are declining. Marxism is the topic of 56 percent fewer publications than in 1987. Postmodernism is down almost 50 percent from its 1993 high, as is deconstruction. These are the topics of 209 fewer publications than in 1993.¹⁶
3. The field’s top journals—*The Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Review*, *Ethics*, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, *Mind*, *Noûs*, and *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, as judged by circulation, acceptance rate, and prestige—publish little or no politicized work.
4. A much smaller percentage of work in politicized fields is in refereed journals; much more appears in edited collections.

5. Politicized research has made few inroads at top graduate departments. Of the top thirty Ph.D. programs in philosophy, 75 percent have no one on the faculty who lists feminism as an area of specialization.
6. The few politicized Ph.D. programs rank low in national surveys.
7. Politicized job candidates fare relatively poorly. According to American Philosophical Association statistics,¹⁷ in 1995–96 there were:
 - 1.1 candidates for each job advertised in applied ethics
 - 1.7 candidates for each job advertised in logic and philosophy of mathematics
 - 2.4 candidates for each job advertised in ancient philosophy
 - 2.6 candidates for each job advertised in philosophy of mind
 - 2.9 candidates for each job advertised in philosophy of science
 - 3.1 candidates for each job advertised in ethics
 - 5.0 candidates for each job advertised in feminism
 - 5.7 candidates for each job advertised in Continental philosophy
 - 6.3 candidates for each job advertised in philosophy of religion

The only area worse than the politicized areas of feminism and Continental philosophy is philosophy of religion. (People still write about God, but cannot get jobs doing it.) That logic is near the top, and politicized areas near the bottom, is very good news for the discipline.

VI

Despite philosophy's success at containing illiberal scholarship, there are worrisome signs. Politicized works that cannot find places in top or even mid-dling refereed journals nevertheless find outlets. Feminists and others have created their own journals. They have come to dominate certain publishers who increasingly offer book contracts before seeing a manuscript. They even actively solicit authors—a practice formerly reserved for textbook publishers—whose politicized work has little market in philosophy itself but a much larger market in English, women's studies, and related areas. The areas that philosophy has infected are thus reinfesting philosophy. In politicized areas, there is an ethic of lavish praise for other politicized researchers in book reviews, referee reports for publishers, tenure and promotion reviews, and so on.

The result, as Barry Smith has pointed out, is that people working in politicized areas can increasingly create sham *curricula vitae* filled with sham publications—items that would never have been published in more mainstream, respectable channels or, in some cases, that have not yet been written. Promotion files are padded not only with sham CVs but also sham review letters. It is thus possible for people to take paths quite apart from traditional academic evaluation to create the appearance of academic achievement.

There are few effective checks on this process. Those who try to point out the sham face the response, "People in that area give the work high marks. Surely we cannot second guess the criteria of the field itself." This tends to win out in tenure and promotion committees, many of whose members hail from politicized areas of the humanities or social sciences.

The fact is that it is much easier to create an impressive-looking CV in politicized areas than in traditional areas of scholarship. This creates perverse incentives for younger scholars, especially women, many of whom gravitate to politicized fields, much to their professional detriment. The path looks easy but, as the job data mentioned above illustrate, the appearance is deceptive. Philosophers who see through the sham realize that effective evaluation of researchers in politicized areas has become impossible; the safest response is not to hire them in the first place. But graduate students often lack information about the job market until it is too late.

VII

Why has philosophy withstood the assault of illiberal multiculturalism as successfully as it has? I cannot go into a full explanation here. Part of the story is that contemporary analytic philosophy takes science as a model. Hans Reichenbach, in his 1950 book, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*, noted that analytic philosophy has not only frequently taken science as a subject matter, viewing scientific investigation as an epistemic ideal and largely replacing traditional epistemology with the philosophy of science, but also itself stresses precision, mathematical formalism, and argumentation. Philosophy has withstood political attack for many of the same reasons that science has done so.

A deeper reason is that, as Allan Bloom noted, multiculturalism challenges the possibility of philosophy. The illiberal multiculturalists are neo-Sophists. Western philosophy was born in Socrates's struggle against such Sophists as Protagoras. Anything that suggests that there is no truth, or that truth is in the eye of the beholder—in Protagoras's words, that knowledge is perception, that man is the measure of all things—is antithetical to philosophy itself. Without truth, as Protagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Nietzsche alike saw, there is only power—something philosophers notoriously lack.

Notes

1. Diane Ravitch, "Multiculturalism: *E Pluribus Plures?*" *American Scholar* (Summer 1990).
2. The Buddha (563–483), Confucius (551–479), and Lao Tzu (604–?), contemporaries, roughly, of Thales (624–545), Anaximander (611–546), and Pythagoras (581–479), all died before Socrates (470–399) was born.
3. In China, for example, Mo Tzu (470–391), Mencius (372–289), and Hsiin Tzu (310–212) all advanced arguments in debating Confucian doctrines.
4. Daniel Bonevac, "Leviathan U.," in *The Imperiled Academy*, ed. Howard Dickman (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1993).
5. Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York: Free Press, 1991).
6. This chart indicates the actual number of publications in these areas in the past ten years:

<i>Area</i>	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	98
African	35	15	17	12	26	8	31	59	43	24
Arabic	1	2	1	1	4	0	3	8	7	4
Japanese	8	5	5	5	19	10	12	13	23	11

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|----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Chinese | 29 | 38 | 30 | 58 | 66 | 60 | 65 | 36 | 39 | 45 |
| Indian | 28 | 50 | 19 | 20 | 60 | 35 | 29 | 23 | 19 | 39 |
| Buddhism | 30 | 37 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 38 | 44 | 30 | 45 | 53 |
7. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, "Understanding Order: The Chinese Perspective," in *From Africa to Zen: An Invitation to World Philosophy*, eds. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), 22n.
 8. Chu Hsi, *The Philosophy of Human Nature*, trans. Percy Bruce (London: Probsthain and Co., 1922), 23.
 9. Allan Bloom, "Western Civ—and Me," in *Giants and Dwarfs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).
 10. Their article begins and ends with Tiananmen Square. If Western moral concepts have no application in China, Hall and Ames argue, then the common view of Tiananmen and subsequent events as the oppression of people seeking freedom and human rights must itself be a distortion. They ask,

How are we to interpret the incident at Tiananmen as a democratic revolt if in our democracy there is a prevailing conception of personhood that entails natural rights, free choice, independence, autonomy, and so on, while in China such values, far from being self-evident and normative, have traditionally been regarded by even the sagest Chinese as sociopathic? (2)

For a detailed criticism of Hall and Ames, see my "What Multiculturalism Should Not Be," *College Literature* 21, 3 (1994).
 11. The actual numbers:

Area	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	98
Afro-American	0	1	0	0	2	3	16	7	9	2
Diversity	4	7	5	6	4	9	4	14	22	40
Racism	7	4	0	4	8	11	13	25	42	22
Feminism	63	71	99	104	118	130	222	176	196	215
Gender	12	23	24	25	31	23	86	55	88	47
 12. See my "Leviathan U."
 13. See, for example, Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), which attacks science as nothing more than another ideology. Harding's hostility to science is nicely demonstrated and refuted by Margarita Levin, "Caring New World: Feminism and Science," *American Scholar* (Winter 1988).
 14. Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Aointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
 15. This fallacy has been discussed at length by Adolf Grünbaum.
 16. The numbers:

Area	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	98
Deconstruction	34	43	43	55	48	55	97	38	60	53
Marxism	188	146	125	110	132	78	134	151	112	82
Postmodernism	20	33	50	81	103	115	233	120	189	120
 17. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, May 1997.

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A Welcome for Postcolonial Literature

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In the past fifteen or twenty years, a massive shift has occurred in the attention of literary scholars. Scholarly effort has increasingly moved away