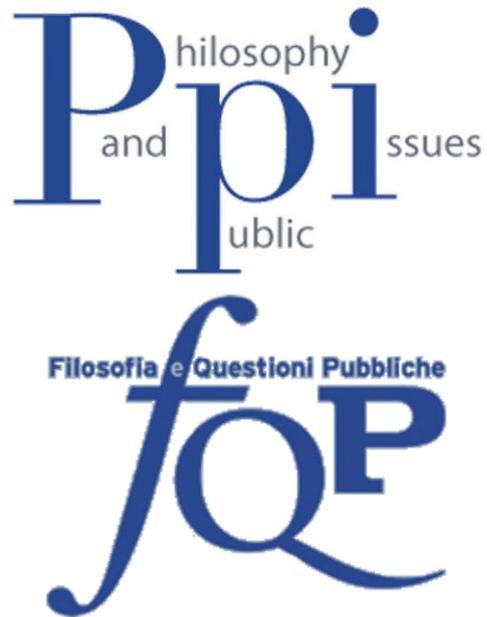


SYMPOSIUM  
TYRANNY, DEMOCRACY, AND ECONOMY



A REPLY TO COMMENTS

BY  
LEIF WENAR

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## A Reply to Comments

Leif Wenar

I am grateful to the four commentators for their thoughtful and challenging essays. In these responses, I will begin with issues of principle and move toward policy, leaving reflections on engaged political philosophy for the end.

Ingrid Salvatore is exactly right that governing globalization should start with cleaning up at home—in the countries where most of us who read this journal live. It is our laws and policies that drive the resource curse abroad, by favoring the powerful over the people. Let me choose just one of hundreds of examples to illustrate what is at stake, which concerns five mining deals between an Anglo-Swiss corporation and the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). According to Kofi Annan’s Africa Progress Panel, over two years

the DRC lost at least US\$1.36 billion in revenues from the underpricing of mining assets that were sold to offshore companies. Total losses from the five deals reviewed were equivalent to almost double the combined annual budget for health and education in 2012. This is in a country that ranks lowest on the UN’s Human Development Index, with some of the world’s worst malnutrition, its sixth highest child mortality rate, and over 7 million children out of school...

Across the five deals, assets were sold on average at one-sixth of their estimated commercial market value. Assets valued in total at US\$1.63 billion were sold to offshore companies for US\$275 million. The beneficial ownership structure of the companies concerned is unknown. Offshore companies were able to secure very high profits from the onward sale of concession rights. The average rate of return

across the five deals examined was 512 per cent, rising to 980 per cent in one deal.

What we see is officials of a very poor country selling off the country's minerals for a small fraction of their value, through secret structures to a corporation which then makes massive profits selling those minerals on. The Congolese officials (and shadowy intermediaries to the deals) appear to have substantially increased their personal wealth through these deals. Were it not for determined investigative work by the NGO Global Witness, and the leak of the Paradise Papers, the details of this corporation's business in the Congo would likely still be hidden.<sup>1</sup>

This corporation, as all of our corporations, is entirely a creature of laws we make. Our laws create these corporations, sustain them, and define the rules they must follow when doing business abroad. More, our laws define what will count as corrupt dealings abroad, and (just as important) our own officials decide how vigorously to enforce the anti-corruption laws on our books. Still more, our laws define the rules for banking secrecy, tax havens and corporate anonymity that allow these corporations to drain assets out of poor countries, aided by a pinstripe army of bankers, lawyers and accountants that help to bring the assets back legally into our own countries.

As one walks through a city like London or New York, one frequently passes luxury apartments and stately houses bought with assets stripped from resource-rich countries. These dwelling-places are mostly empty; their purpose is only incidentally to be

<sup>1</sup> For the continuing story of Glencore, Dan Gertler, and mineral contracts in the DRC see the Global Witness website, <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/oil-gas-and-mining/congo-secret-sales/>.

places to live. Rather, these are essentially safe deposit boxes, to store ill-gotten gains and ensure that they will now be secured by the rule of law of a rich country. These are particularly visible manifestations of the unjust transfer of wealth from poorer countries to ours, facilitated by our own laws, policies, officials and professionals.

Natural resources like oil, metals and gems can bring riches. Unless those who exploit them are held to account, these resources can fuel corruption, conflict and oppression. The most reliable source of accountability over resources in our world is the most obvious one—the people of the country where the resources are located. Greater public accountability has been the shared goal of all of the reforms around natural resources in the past two decades, and countries with greater public accountability have been less resource-cursed. An empowered citizenry is the best check on the power of resources, and what our countries can do to empower those citizens is to affirm the rights of all peoples in our laws public statements.

The resource curse is bad for nearly everyone in the world, except those who make a profit from it. Corruption, conflict, oppression, regional instability, refugee crises, energy price volatility, the spread of extremism around the world—if greater public accountability over resources can help to alleviate all of these problems, would anyone still doubt its value? Valentina Gentile does, because she does not yet see a ‘normative theory’ in *Blood Oil* that grounds all peoples’ rights to their resources. Popular resource sovereignty might do so much good. And yet, Gentile wonders, what could be its ‘normative justification’?

*Blood Oil* is explicitly based in consequentialist theory. The principle of Popular Resource Sovereignty (PRS) is the principle for control over resources whose realization will, among the available options, make the world a better place—more peaceful,

more stable, and more just. The lives of millions of real people who exist right now will improve, and humanity will move a step closer to its perfect state of the free unity. This is the same form of argument, consequentialist, that Bentham made for the abolition of the slave trade, that Mill made for the liberation of women, and that Sidgwick made for the obligation to keep one's promises. Toward the end of this essay I speculate why some academics today no longer recognize this traditional form of argument as philosophy at all.

A welcome opportunity to illustrate consequentialist political philosophy works is opened by Salvatore, who queries the nature of peoples within the principle of PRS. Salvatore wonders, after all, *what is* a people? She searches for answers through history back to Neanderthal times, through the ontology of natural kinds, to the self-identifications of individuals today. She finds many different conceptions of 'a people,' none of them very plausible for ascribing control over resources. She expresses puzzlement about the nature of peoples, and falls back on cosmopolitanism. Yet the consequentialist political philosopher looks for the answer to the question of the nature of peoples in one domain that Salvatore overlooks: the domain of politics.

The questions of politics are about power, and the answers to its questions must be addressed to the agent who is meant to act on them. The question of who should have power over the world's resources can only be addressed to humanity as a whole, and humanity—even as represented by the 'international community' of state officials—is an agent with quite limited capabilities. This agent is not able to reach conclusions about which 'peoples' should control resources by, say, surveying history from Neanderthal times. The only answer about the nature of peoples fit for use today is that it is the *citizens* of independent countries who should be sovereign over their land.

This is the answer that humanity has spent centuries developing—intellectually, institutionally, and affectively—and it is an answer it now grasps quite well. Why would a philosopher want to derange the world’s politics by insisting on a different approach (say, one that tracks ‘historically just claims’) which is beyond humanity’s capacities to work through? Like each of us, humanity needs ideas that it can use to live better, starting today.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps this might appear too pragmatic. It might seem that a philosopher must grasp the true essence of a thing before allowing it into her political theory. Until we know what a people *really* is, we cannot ascribe any power to peoples. Yet note that such essentialist stubbornness would delegitimize the entire international system as well. For there is just as much ambiguity in the concept of ‘a state’ as in the concept of ‘a people.’ If we demur from any appeal to how ‘state’ is understood in actual practice, we would then likely conclude that *states* can have no authority, at least until their ontology is resolved. (‘Fine with me,’ a cosmopolitan may be tempted to say—and yet, then, what *really* is a person?)

The principle of PRS says that the citizens of a country are sovereign over its natural resources, and that these resources start out as the people’s property. The book recommends that all countries use this principle, instead of effectiveness, as the basis of their own laws, to determine from whom it will be legal to buy resources. Salvatore queries the application of this principle to one country that many readers may be especially interested in.

<sup>2</sup> This is argued in *Blood Oil*, pp. 197-200. The book here also affirms that subnational and cross-national groups like the Navajo and the Kurds are peoples, who hold rights against national peoples according to international norms that should be further strengthened.

Salvatore is especially interested in Saudi Arabia, whose regime is marked out in *Blood Oil* as a regime that other countries should not be buying oil from, at least not under current conditions. Salvatore's position on Saudi Arabia is rather this: the problem there is that citizens *do* consent to what the regime is doing—the real problem is in the formation of their preferences and beliefs, which lead them to give that consent.

Salvatore and I agree that, in the long run, how social systems form identities is crucial.<sup>3</sup> One point where we may disagree is about conditions in Saudi Arabia. 'Saudi Arabians are not 'too fearful' to protest,' she writes, 'Nor do they seem to feel any special anxiety for their freedom.' I wonder how she can be so confident.

In August 2017, ten Nobel Peace Laureates, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Shirin Ebadi, and Lech Walesa, appealed to the Saudi king and crown prince to stay the execution of 14 protesters who have been sentenced to death, after what the Laureates say were unjust mass trials.<sup>4</sup> One juvenile defendant's crime was to set up a social media page called 'The Liberals' and invite people to join in demonstrations. (This defendant claims that his confessions to further charges involving in violence were extracted under torture.) The sentence passed down on this young protester is that he will be beheaded, and that his body then be publicly displayed in a crucified position. Does this look like a regime trying to frighten potential protesters? If Salvatore is correct that most Saudis already feel no desire to protest, then such sentences seem literally to be overkill.

<sup>3</sup> See *Blood Oil*, pp. 353-55.

<sup>4</sup> <http://bit.ly/2Br2Fhc>

The Laureates' letter is only one report of hundreds, stretching back over decades, from reliable observers, saying that Saudis have faced serious consequences when they have tried to resist the regime. Indeed, while he was consolidating his power in 2017, Mohammad bin Salman had his political opponents even within the royal family and business elite imprisoned (and perhaps tortured).<sup>5</sup> And the Saudi regime has been deploying powerful surveillance and decryption software (sold to it by a British company) to monitor electronic communications within the country.<sup>6</sup> Salvatore could tell us more about why she is so confident that citizens are not too fearful to protest in a country such as this one.

The argument of *Blood Oil* is that we need not speculate on whether the average Saudi actually fears or loves the regime. We don't have to reach the question of how many Saudi citizens endorse how the regime is managing their resources—for example, whether they approve of Mohammad bin Salman spending more than a billion dollars of the country's oil revenues on luxuries for himself and a friend, while imposing austerity cuts on the population.<sup>7</sup> These kinds of facts may be hard for

<sup>5</sup> Middle East Eye, 'Exclusive: Senior Saudi Figures Tortured and Beaten in Purge,' November 9, 2017. <http://bit.ly/2BqUd1w>

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, 'BAE 'Secretly Sold Mass Surveillance Technology to Repressive Regimes',' June 15, 2017. <http://bit.ly/2B1DmkY>

<sup>7</sup> On one day in 2015, Mohammad bin Salman spent \$550 million in a one-day impulse purchase of a super-yacht for himself. In 2017, he used intermediaries to buy a da Vinci painting for \$450 million—apparently as a gift for his autocratic mentor in the Emirates. To give a sense of the scale of personal spending here, with this money the prince could instead have bought 5000 Lamborghinis, keeping 2700 for himself and giving 2300 to his friend. See New York Times, 'Rise of Saudi Prince Shatters Decades of Royal Tradition,' October 15, 2016, <http://nyti.ms/2BqS4TG>; Wall Street Journal, 'Da Vinci's 'Salvator Mundi' is Likely a Gift From Saudi Arabia to the U.A.E.,' December

outsiders to glean, especially in a country where the regime allows no significant polling of ordinary people.

What outsiders can say with confidence is that Saudis are not in conditions to give valid consent to how the regime is managing their resources. This is clear from facts like those above and described in *Blood Oil*. It is very difficult for an average citizen to discover what the Saudi regime is doing with the oil money, because it is one of the most opaque states in the world. Citizens who do try to discuss and protest the regime's decisions would reasonably fear swift and dire consequences. Saudis cannot be giving valid consent to what the regime is doing, because they cannot rationally say 'no' to it.

Now Salvatore appears to want to give up on the possibility of valid consent as a standard of judgment, and instead turn our moral attention to 'the very way in which our preferences and beliefs come to be formed in our social systems.' One concern motivating her to make this switch appears to be that outsiders may 'rig' the conditions needed for valid consent, so that they can come to the conclusions about foreigners that they wanted to reach anyway. If this is her concern, then we may be unmoved. After all, the basic conditions for valid consent (adequate information, independent judgment, opportunity to deliberate, possible dissent) are not controversial, even cross-culturally. And if outsiders 'rigging' their judgments to get the results they want is the problem, how much more is it a problem when they judge what are good conditions for preference- and belief-formation in foreign countries?

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8, 2017, <http://on.wsj.com/2BsGw2f>. The prince also appears recently to have bought the most expensive residence in the world for \$300 million. New York Times, 'World's Most Expensive Home? Another Bauble for a Saudi Prince,' December 16, 2017, <http://nyti.ms/2pqidwK>.

In the end, I wonder whether Salvatore will want to give up on valid consent as a standard of judgment that is useful in law, even regarding people from foreign lands with different customs. To test this, we can imagine a trial in Italy of a man who comes from a distant land. This man has been arrested in Rome, and charged with being the leader of a human trafficking gang. The court hears that this man has often beaten and perhaps even killed women who he has brought into the country in years past. He has taken the passports and money of the foreign women who now work in his Italian sweatshop. He has threatened to turn these women over to the police if they try to escape. And he has threatened their families back home should they make trouble for him or the gang.

As a legal matter, what verdict would Salvatore recommend? What if the women stayed silent when asked about their situation? Or what if some women said in court that they weren't scared, and endorsed what the accused had done for them? Should the law then require the court to dismiss the charge of forced labor, perhaps allowing the judge to lament the conditions under which foreigners form their preferences and beliefs?

I put this as a question to Salvatore about Italian law, because Italian law must also decide tomorrow whether it will be legal for Italians to buy Saudi oil from the Saudi regime. My view is that Italian law should not give up on a standard of possible valid consent—not only regarding labor rights, but regarding the principle that the valid consent of property owners is needed before it is legal to buy their property.

The principle of PRS says that the natural resources of a country are the people's property—they start out in the people's hands. No one should be able to sell off those resources beyond the possible authorization of citizens. Yet, as *Blood Oil* explains, so long as officials are accountable to those citizens, they can

rightly pass laws saying that the resources will be managed by a state-owned company. Or that the resources will be privatized. Or that they will be left in the ground.

So Gentile misconstrues PRS when she writes that it requires ‘liberal property rights,’ by which she means ‘individual property rights.’ PRS only requires that resources start out as the property of the people, and that further decisions about their property be accountable to the people. Gentile voices a more common concern, however, when she worries that in changing our laws to respect PRS we might be perceived as imposing this principle on other peoples ‘from outside.’ She draws on Rawls’s work to worry that in respecting this principle we would be, in effect, forcing foreign peoples to be more liberal.

Many in the West have instant negative reactions to the idea of forcing democracy on foreign countries, and rightly so. Recent military interventions for this end—especially by the United States and United Kingdom—have been immoral and costly failures. Yet PRS is not a principle that the West has tried to force on developing countries. In fact, if anything, here history shows the opposite dynamic.

PRS is a principle that countries in the global South have insisted on, against opposition from the Western powers. These countries pressed this principle to protect their self-determination against the rapacious Western companies that were intent on plundering their resources. ‘The oil is ours!’ was the famous slogan of Brazil’s resistance to the exploitation of Western oil companies, and as Chile argued when it introduced the pivotal resolution in the United Nations, ‘Self-determination would be an illusion in a country whose natural resources were controlled by another State, and it would be farcical to give a country political

freedom while leaving ownership of its resources in foreign hands.’<sup>8</sup>

PRS is a principle of the global South; we in the West should make it our principle too. And it is a pleasure to report that the global South is again taking the lead for PRS. In November 2017, Brazil became the first country in the world to introduce Clean Trade legislation. This Clean Trade bill would require Brazil to import no more oil from states where the minimal conditions for PRS are not met, and would require Brazil’s national oil company to sign no new contracts for oil production with regimes in these states.<sup>9</sup> Brazil, the fifth largest country in the world, a leader of the global South—if Brazil can take a stand for the rights of all peoples, why can’t Norway? Why can’t the United Kingdom? Why can’t the United States?

Gillian Brock is rightly curious about the practical implementation of Clean Trade, and especially of the Clean Hands Trusts that are meant to enforce the property rights of all peoples to their natural resources. Brock’s concern is that the Clean Hands Trusts would become overly complex, requiring an implementing country to keep track of and act on too many global transactions. If the US sets up a Clean Hands Trust after China buys \$3 billion of oil from the autocrat of Equatorial Guinea, say, won’t the US then have to track not only direct Chinese imports but also imports from countries to which China might have sold ‘tainted’ goods?

For technical reasons, Brock’s specific concerns may be moot; for example, all the money needed to fill a Clean Hands Trust

<sup>8</sup> See Nico Schrivjer, *Sovereignty over Natural Resources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Brazil, Federal Senate Bill Number 460.

could be collected from US-China direct trade. The more significant point here is about how political actors plan their strategy to bring about political change. Strategy is a defining feature of all successful campaigns—even of the most ‘principled’ campaigns in history.

As readers of *Blood Oil* know, I find the British campaign to abolish the slave trade particularly inspiring. Most of those who led and joined this campaign were motivated by their Christian faith and the horrors of their country’s ungodly trade in human beings. Cotton, tobacco, sugar—all around them in their everyday lives, these women and men saw goods imported from the slave colonies, grown and harvested with misery and cruelty. Still, the campaigners against the slave trade did not boycott slave-grown cotton, or slave-grown tobacco. Nor did they launch a campaign to stop the building of slave ships.

The campaigners only launched a public boycott of a single commodity: slave sugar. Why? Because a boycott of all slave-grown goods would have been ‘too big an ask’ for Britain at the time. And the campaigners chose sugar because it was enjoyed by nearly everyone—while its sweetness could be poignantly contrasted to the blood and suffering involved in its production. In short, the campaigners focused on a campaign that they (correctly) thought could succeed in moving public opinion and so the political consensus. Wise strategy is like this—it is acting in ways most likely to bring about principled change.

Today, most people already support the idea that ‘a country belongs to its people.’ So the task is to show people that implementing this principle will produce real benefits at reasonable costs. A Clean Trade bill like the one introduced in Brazil is the first priority—it announces that a country will be getting out of business with bad actors abroad while it expresses support for the rights of peoples everywhere. If Clean Hands

Trusts, or even the prospect of them, will be useful for persuading China to join, then these trusts may also be deployed. The Public Accountability Spectrum is also available for setting a national posture toward resource exporters that are above the line of minimal accountability.<sup>10</sup>

The ultimate goal of the British reformers was not that Britons stopped using slave-grown sugar, or slave-grown cotton or tobacco. Their ultimate goal was the end of slavery. Clean Trade offers its array of policies, toward the goal of ending the suffering, injustice and divisions that flow from trade in natural resources. Both are principled campaigns to reshape political reality, and in the end it is the reality that matters.

Now Brock rightly says that if we are worried about our complicity in injustice abroad, PRS cannot be our only concern. As she says, exploitation steals labor from workers, corporate tax avoidance steals revenues from government, and all within a historical context where the evils of slavery, conquest and colonialism remain largely unrectified. ‘If we are really talking about clean trade,’ as she pithily puts it, ‘it seems that we should also be addressing other sources of grime.’

Brock and I agree completely that we should be addressing all of these issues, and more. The injustices around us are so sanguinary that we will never be able to pronounce ourselves ‘clean,’ but we may be able to scrape off some layers of the moral taint that accretes as we live in this wicked world. Brock’s own illuminating work on tax justice, on institutional corruption, on brain drain, on global health and more shows where progress might be made, and I cannot believe that she would say we

<sup>10</sup> *Blood Oil*, \*.

should not push for progress on any of these until we can succeed in all of them.

Clean Trade offers a unique opportunity among all of our options. The principle of effectiveness for resources that nations now use drives major dysfunctions worldwide: oppression, war, instability, corruption, terrorism and more. No one defends effectiveness as a moral principle, while most find PRS obviously right. Moreover, PRS is already proven to work—this is not just some philosopher’s fancy. And reforms to increase PRS work on the causes of injustice and instability, not just (as with policies on say, brain drain) on the effects. These reforms go to the root of many problems—and progress on problems like civil wars and terrorism will free up the international agenda, making other global problems easier to solve. These reforms are fundamental, far-reaching, and feasible right now.

The only campaign with the same kind of potential to benefit humanity is the one that Brock highlights, which is the campaign on climate change. Climate change is a massive problem, and (as with many other issues) effectiveness for resources is likely making the problem worse and progress harder. For example, when one surveys the countries that today least regulate climate-damaging practices like gas flaring, one finds that these are countries where the governments are less accountable to their people.<sup>11</sup> And as Michael Ross and Eric Voeten have shown, the more oil a country exports, the less likely it is to join

<sup>11</sup> Ed Crooks, ‘Gas Wasted By Oil Industry Flaring On The Rise,’ *Financial Times* December 13, 2016 (flared gas per barrel list).

intergovernmental organizations such as those that coordinate action on climate.<sup>12</sup>

So progress on ending effectiveness will likely help progress on climate change. And yet, Brock asks, should we instead directly support policies that promote the development and use of renewable energies? Given a choice between Clean Trade and climate, isn't the latter more urgent? The answer is that both are urgent, and these campaigns can support each other. I will only say a few words on this here, as I will address these synergies more fully elsewhere.

In speaking about climate, it's crucial to get a sense of today's energy realities and trajectory. Today humanity still satisfies a full 85% of its energy consumption with fossil fuels. (Oil is 33%, coal is 28%, gas is 24%). In spite of all the press they get, all the renewables together today provide a mere 3%.<sup>13</sup> The world is built around burning fossils in a hundred different ways, and rebuilding this structure will be enormously costly.

More, the mainstream projections are predicting what will seem to most a painfully slow energy transition. To take one mainstream projection as an example, China is predicted to be a global leader in renewables but also to increase its oil demand by 30-100%, even between 2015 and 2025. The poor Asian countries, like China and India, will account for more than half of the world's energy consumption growth through 2040. And though renewables grow faster than any other source (2.3% a

<sup>12</sup> Michael Ross and Eric Voeten, 'Oil And International Cooperation,' *International Studies Quarterly* (2015), pp. 1-13 at 10.

<sup>13</sup> BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2017, p. 7.

year), fossils will still account for 77% of global energy use in 2040.<sup>14</sup> At this rate, ‘fossil free’ is not even on the horizon.

Into this grim situation, Clean Trade offers a high-impact, market-based argument that over half the world’s oil reserves cannot be sold right now and so must be left in the ground. It also allows environmentalists to add national security and global stability to their case for not buying this oil. As discussed in the ‘Green Trade’ section of *Blood Oil*, Clean Trade sets definite targets for emissions reductions that will also stimulate such investment.

So the transition from oil can be sped up with an ‘Autocrats to Alternatives’ plan that declares blood oil unsellable. The campaign for this plan cannot be hostage to a single election or a fluctuation in the price of oil. As with all such efforts, if the analysis is correct and the solutions are the right ones, then sustained campaigning will find its moment of opportunity and the changes in policies can come quickly. Prohibiting trade in blood oil could be the fastest way for the world to make progress on climate.

Turning to Pietro Maffettone, all authors should be so fortunate to have an interlocutor as sympathetic and constructive as. His splendid essay is a meditation on the nature of political philosophy, and my response will build on his reflections on how philosophy should engage with the world.

As Maffettone describes ‘engaged’ political philosophy, its main task, ‘is not simply to search for truth but rather to attempt to contribute to the practical advancement of the moral ideals

<sup>14</sup> Deepa D. Datta and Robert J. Vigfusson, ‘Forecasting China’s Role in World Oil Demand,’ Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco Economic Letter 2017-24, p. 1.

that constitute the core of one's philosophical visions.' The purpose of engaged political philosophy is, as he says, 'to shape political reality.' An engaged political philosopher will also of course value work that is meant only for specialists within the academy. She will likely produce such work herself. Yet with her engaged work she will aim directly at improving the political life of her community, her country, or the world.

Maffettone says that an engaged political philosopher's most important addressees will be her fellow citizens, and I think this is possibly but not necessarily so. Sometimes a philosopher will aim to engage with the public, yet in other contexts she can more effectively shape political reality by engaging with elites. As Maffettone notes, for instance, Machiavelli, 'worked as a high-level politician and addressed some of his intellectual efforts to a specific set of political leaders.' What will matter to the engaged philosopher is change, so her audience will be the most potent set of change-makers that she can reach.

The engaged political philosopher is a familiar figure from the history of our discipline. Who is on the other side? Call a 'disengaged' political philosopher someone who denies that engaged work should be done—whose motto is 'truth for truth's sake,' and who therefore thinks that today academic philosophers should write only for one another. Let me say from the outset that I believe that all academic philosophers should engage with specialized academic research, and that we must train our students rigorously in the scholarly traditions that make truth the highest priority. Yet to be disengaged is to go further, and to say that philosophers should not engage with the world at all. How many academics would say that?

It is true that we have recently been through a rather unusual period in the history of political philosophy, when disengagement came close to being an orthodoxy. When I was in graduate

school, for instance, the received view on training graduate students was that while philosophers of physics might learn some physics, and philosophers of language could learn some linguistics, political philosophers should definitely not study politics, neither its institutions nor its history. Somehow, political philosophy was not about politics. All of us understood that, to be taken seriously as a ‘real’ moral and political philosopher, our arguments should not become entangled in what one of my teachers dismissed as ‘facts about the world.’ (We were all shocked when several prominent figures appeared as authors of ‘The Philosopher’s Brief’ on assisted suicide in *The New York Review of Books*—until we were told that Ronald Dworkin had strong-armed them into signing on as a personal favor.<sup>15</sup>)

During this period there were also theorists who were critical of disengaged philosophy. A group who came to be called ‘realists’ were interested in

developing a more practical political theory whose closer proximity to the real world of politics, through a greater appreciation of feasibility constraints or sensitivity to the conditions of political possibility, makes it better suited as a guide to action for political agents as they actually are. From [their] perspective, the key failing of much contemporary political philosophy has been to abstract or idealise away too far from the real world, creating an unbridgeable gap between theory and practice.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ronald Dworkin et. al, ‘Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers’ Brief,’ *New York Review of Books*, March 27, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Hall and Matt Sleat, ‘Ethics, Morality, and the Case for a Realist Political Theory,’ *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 20:3, 278-295 at 279. Hall and Sleat emphasize a different motivation for realists in this article.

What was peculiar was how little about ‘practice’ these so-called realists then had to say. When theorists like Bernard Williams and Raymond Geuss wrote about politics, they ended up being almost exclusively critical of other philosophers, and it is hard to know exactly why this was. It might be that such theorists were simply not equipped to engage in politics. Having an excellent interpretation of Sophocles, or an original line on Nietzsche, does not prepare one to discuss the real workings of power in our day, and this could be the reason that these men only generated vague and procedural positive positions (such as a valorization of ‘truthfulness’ in politics). However this might be, what this period left us with were mostly critiques of disengaged theory that were as abstract as their targets. One might have thought that the priority of those who find realism compelling would be to get on with realizing it.

So we have been through an unusually disengaged period in political philosophy. Yet perhaps the situation has now changed? Thinking of Onora O’Neill or Elizabeth Anderson or Debra Satz or Tommie Shelby, say, one sees philosophers who have published work that is clearly intended to shape political reality. Would anyone now dismiss this work as ‘more like sophisticated political activism than ‘real’ philosophy’ (as Maffettone puts it)? How many in the field still believe that ‘philosophy requires well-policed boundaries methodologically speaking—that the discipline cannot accept more than one means of approaching its goal and developing its tools’? I leave this as a question for the reader’s own reflection.

If there are still very many disengaged philosophers in the academy, we might be curious as to how they now see our field. Determined to police the borders of ‘real’ philosophy, what territory do they take themselves to be patrolling? What historical tradition do they see themselves as working within? If these

disengaged theorists think of themselves as the ‘real’ philosophers, what are their canonical texts? Who would they take history’s most distinguished ‘real’ political philosophers to be?

For the engaged political philosopher, the question of the canon is easy—it just is the familiar canon of Western political philosophy. The last time I was teaching ‘Modern Political Theory’ at Princeton, I asked the students to think about the lives of the philosophers who had authored the texts they were studying. Thomas Hobbes fled his country in fear of his life, partly because of the political philosophy he was writing. The same was very much true of John Locke. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* and *Emile* were both banned in France and Geneva, and after Rousseau escaped arrest in France his house was stoned by a mob in Motiers. The authorities hounded Karl Marx from Germany to Paris and from Paris to London, and in London they still tailed him with undercover police because he was leading an international revolutionary movement. John Stuart Mill was of course a Member of Parliament, and his essays (on women, on liberty, on the death penalty and more) contributed much, as he intended, to shaping the politics of his time and of our own.

As Maffettone says, ‘Exiled, imprisoned, tortured, publicly vilified for their ideas, their lives often threatened and sometimes taken, over the centuries the intellectual giants in the field saw their disputes about the nature of political society as anything but strictly theoretical or limited to narrow technical circles.’ To any of these canonical philosophers, the idea that political philosophy should be disengaged—that it should never try to ‘shape political

reality’—would have been uproarious.<sup>17</sup> When we teach our students this canon, we are teaching them nothing but engaged political philosophy.

Who would disengaged philosophers put in their canon? Who would they see as the leaders of their tradition? It would be uncharitable to foist, say, Epicurus on them (‘I never desired to please the rabble. What pleased them, I did not learn; and what I knew was far removed from their understanding.’<sup>18</sup>) Who then?

One’s first thought is that it would be the Scholastics, since they did primarily speak to each other. And Thomas Aquinas is not a bad candidate for a distinguished disengaged forebear. When Aquinas gave a ‘public’ lecture, for instance, this meant that not only his own students but also members of other colleges were allowed into the audience.<sup>19</sup> Yet it would not be fair to call schoolmen like Marsilius and William of Ockham disengaged, as they prosecuted quite significant disputes with the Pope over the limits of his temporal authority. A better candidate for a disengaged forebear might be Duns Scotus, ‘The Subtle Doctor,’ who wrote primarily in metaphysics and epistemology, and whose contemporary counterpart I will mention presently.

If Maffettone were correct that the academy today is full of disengaged political philosophers, policing the territory of ‘real’ philosophy, wouldn’t we see men like Aquinas and Scotus taught as the masters of politics? While Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx

<sup>17</sup> This is even true of John Stuart Mill, who I am reliably informed actually did have a sense of humor. (Personal communication, Jonathan Riley, December 2017.)

<sup>18</sup> Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus*, trans. Eugene O’Connor (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 59-62.

and Mill would be expelled from the curriculum as mere activists? That this is not the situation today makes me wonder whether Maffettone is correctly interpreting the state of affairs.

Yet perhaps I am missing the most obvious disengaged political philosopher of our times, whose work should still be taught after Hobbes and company expunged from the syllabi? I think not. It is true that John Rawls's work has mostly been of interest to those within the academy. Yet Rawls does not appear to have seen his own work as entirely disengaged.<sup>20</sup> His arguments across his three major books rest on empirical generalizations across economics, psychology and history in ways that disengaged political philosophers will tend to disfavor (I will say more about this later). And Rawls is quite explicit that that the role of political philosophy in society should be 'political' in ways that disengaged philosophers will recoil from.

When Rawls discusses the roles of political philosophy, he never mentions 'finding the truth.' Rather, he says, the first role of political philosophy is to find bases of agreement within divided societies such as ours, so that citizens can solve the problem of order. By finding such bases of agreement, he says, the political philosopher can help citizens to cooperate on a basis of mutual respect. Rawls's thesis that political philosophy should help, first and foremost, to solve the problem of order is about as far from a 'truth for truth's sake' position as one can get.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For instance, one of Rawls's arguments from the original position cannot go through unless books like his *Justice as Fairness* are known in the public culture. John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 121, ft. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed Rawls's 'first role' looks more like an answer to Bernard Williams's 'first political question.' Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. G. Hawthorn. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 3.

Moreover, none of the other roles that Rawls describes for political philosophy (orientation, reconciliation, and probing ‘the limits of practicable political possibility’) are disengaged either. So if John Rawls were to be allowed into the disengaged canon, it could only be with the warning that he is a dangerous subversive.<sup>22</sup>

Let us set aside for the moment the question of who might make it into the disengaged canon, and turn to engaged philosophy. Maffettone says that, ‘Engaged philosophical work, some will inevitably complain, is not really philosophy because the training and expertise that it requires are not the kind that most practicing philosophers believe to be central to the social practices of doing philosophy and becoming a philosopher.’ Now I believe that the social practices that Maffettone is speaking of here are not those of becoming a philosopher, but rather those of becoming a member of the academy. So let us begin with looking at the life of an engaged political philosopher, who follows in the footsteps of the familiar canonical figures in the tradition.

Like her distinguished forebears, the engaged philosopher is a committed intellectual, who reads widely, who talks to everyone who knows, and who strains every synapse to shape political reality through her philosophical work. This engaged philosopher is of course obsessed with finding the truth: both the truth about what is right and about how best to achieve it. Yet there is an idea besides ‘truth’ that is nearly as important to her, which her own values force upon her. This is idea of responsibility—of being a responsible political actor.

The engaged political philosopher knows that she is asking for a great deal in trying to shape political reality. She is calling for

<sup>22</sup> Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 1-4.

changes in deep structures of human affairs. She knows that the realization of her plans will entail serious costs—that at least the plans and dreams, and also possibly the lives, of real people will be sacrificed in the transition to a different and better world. To be responsible, she must continually check whether these great costs can be reduced or ameliorated. She must ask herself many times over whether the gains she hopes to see are really worth what will be lost. And the burdens of responsible action force her to return, again and again, to ask whether she really does believe, down to the soles of her feet, in her philosophical vision. Only conviction can assure a responsible philosopher that she has a right to ask reality to change its shape.

The burdens of responsible political action are heavy. Perhaps the best way to feel them is to imagine that there has been some disaster in the capital of your country, and you are now in charge. What reforms would you put in place in your first year in office, when all of your fellow citizens—and indeed all the world—will be holding you accountable for the outcomes? What laws or policies would you believe in enough to disturb the status quo? This thought-experiment is useful because it brings out how the lives of people one knows—and perhaps even one's own life—might be damaged in the realization of one's ideas.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The reforms that I propose in my own work, such as Clean Trade Acts, will likely have quite significant costs in terms of livelihoods and even lives. Political transitions—even ones to freer and more equal societies—are almost always turbulent, as (for example) the post-colonial histories of the United States or India show. And as always the poorest, who are the most vulnerable, suffer the most in such transitions. I still endorse my proposals, because I believe that the consequences of continuing the status quo are even more grave overall. But this is the part of my own work where the burdens of responsibility weigh extremely heavy. Perhaps I might add that the best question I've ever gotten after presenting this work is whether I would still

Although the burdens are heavy, the rewards of doing engaged political philosophy are great. The first impression that an academy-only philosopher may have when she thinks of effecting real political change is that this activity is so interesting because it is so challenging. The number and variety of actors in play is quite large, and to win an argument she will need to be able to defend her position from a much wider range of objections than she has been used to. Many academic philosophers say that they are ‘value pluralists,’ but it is another matter—and highly stimulating—to enter an intellectual competition with real stakes against smart and determined people whose world-views are quite different than one’s own. This ‘game’ of real politics is more complex, and as Rawls says in explaining his Aristotelian principle, we should rationally prefer it as we prefer chess to checkers.<sup>24</sup>

Disengaged philosophy, of the type that I was trained in, often seems too simple. It is not hard to find some single value or principle, and produce an argument that the world would improve by conforming better to it. (One familiar pattern of such argument is this: ‘Here is inequality/need, there are surplus resources, so resources should be rearranged.’) Sometimes those making such arguments begin with the qualification that they don’t believe their single value (like autonomy or luck-insensitive equality) to be the only value, and so their conclusions are only provisional. But the weighing with other values or principles never comes, and the means and costs of implementation are not

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favor these reforms if one of the lives that had to be sacrificed in the transition was my own. (My answer was, ‘Of course yes.’)

<sup>24</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 426.

discussed. How important then is that single value or principle, really? How would one know?

The main reason to do engaged political philosophy is to try to make the world better—and a significant side benefit is that it can also make one a better philosopher. Needing to convince many experts requires one to understand much more about how the world really works: about institutional strengths and vulnerabilities, the motivations of relevant actors, the rigidity of current feasibility constraints, the history that led to where we are, and much more. Understanding the world in these ways is quite helpful for separating what are truly objective values and what are merely the ideological fumes from some long-passed campaign bus. Thinking through political interventions forces one to choose among values in consequential situations, and so to understand the weight and the place of each of them.

Engaged philosophy also requires a much better sense of the nature of most political action, where powerful actors are making rapid decisions with quite imperfect information, always while surrounded by opponents and by allies of varying degrees of trustworthiness. And being engaged therefore makes one a much better reader of the other engaged philosophers. With some experience of trying to shape political reality, one understands why Locke, say, made the moves he did in his philosophical writings, given how he was trying to shape his political reality with his words.

Finally, doing engaged work can be quite a fruitful method for philosophical discovery. It is one thing to learn the two lines of reply to each of the five main objections to the three major positions in the literature. It is another thing to take responsibility for real political engagement. Engagement makes it urgent to discover what is really and ultimately right. This urgency can inspire new theorizing, as one burns through what one has

learned to discover what one truly believes. (In my own case, this is a certain form of Kantian consequentialism.)

The crucial struggle for all political philosophers, which Maffettone rightly brings into focus, is objectivity. This is a challenge for academic philosophers, for reasons I'll address first. Yet, as we will see afterwards, doing engaged philosophy can also compromise philosophical objectivity, just in different ways.

The risks of a culture of academy-only political philosophy should be clear (though they may be of the 'difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it' variety). One of the daily challenges of academics is to stay focused on the truth about justice and the human condition, without being distracted by fashionable posturing or falling into a gravity well of received wisdom. As we all know, this is extraordinarily difficult. The philosophers that we admire were all fiercely independent thinkers, which is why they saw so much that others never could. We all aim at their independence of mind, and doing disengaged philosophy can endanger our efforts to reach a more objective perspective from which we can see the truth.

One source of risk is that universities are institutions, and they are institutions whose character tends to pressure against independent thinking about politics. The training that leads to an academic job is highly structured, and nearly all philosophy departments have exactly the same institutional form. So we academic philosophers find ourselves speaking mostly with people who have quite similar life experiences, living standards, daily routines, and relationships with other parts of society (government, media, etc.). For philosophers working on the Frege-Geach problem, this might not matter much. But for philosophers trying to understand justice and the human

condition, daily reinforcement of such a narrow perspective may not conduce to our seeing the whole truth.

A second kind of risk comes from what Maffettone calls, ‘the sociology of the profession.’ We academic philosophers are of course no more resistant to sociological forces than anyone else, and these forces may push us to see ourselves more as academics than as philosophers. Hierarchies of esteem within associations are quite compelling to creatures like us. The need continually to define standards and rank members is especially strong within associations with few outward-facing metrics of success (like ‘units sold’ or ‘hours billed’). The American philosophy profession is particularly status-focused, and one half-believes the story of the American professor who rushed back from lecturing on Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality* to check the latest *Philosophical Gourmet Report*. Yet any association where recognition, pay and job security correlate to position in a group-defined hierarchy will have tendencies toward signal-sending and bandwagoning and group-think. In political philosophy, these tendencies can shift our thinking away from independence and objectivity.

The third and greatest risk of a culture of academy-only political philosophy arises from a source often discussed, which is the ever-increasing articulation of specialisms within universities. To set up this point, I would like to recall something that is vivid whenever we teach the canon of political philosophy as it is usually understood. This is that the arguments of our greatest political philosophers quite often rest on bold empirical generalizations.

Think, for example, of Hobbes saying that religious pluralism risks civil war—while Locke says that it is religious persecution that does. This difference in their empirical premises ends up making a significant difference in their conclusions about religious toleration. Or think of the dispute between Hobbes and

Locke over whether holding the powers of office will ennoble a monarch, or rather corrupt him—and how deeply this difference on empirical facts affects their views on sovereignty.

Consider the democratic peace thesis, now one of the most robust results in International Relations, which originated in speculation by Kant that far outran any method in his day to test it empirically. Or think of Rawls's argument for his just savings principle, which is grounded on the thesis that, 'What men want is meaningful work in free association with others'—and not wealth.<sup>25</sup> Or think of Rawls saying that the main ideas that motivated *The Law of Peoples* are that the great evils of human history follow from injustice within nations—and that when domestic justice is achieved, the great evils will disappear.<sup>26</sup> Most of the lasting work in political philosophy rests on ambitious empirical judgments such as these.

Yet institutional specialization now pressures academic philosophers away from making ambitious empirical judgments. Such judgments, it is sometimes thought, can only be made by the academics working in the social science departments. Unlike Rawls, some working within the philosophy departments now do not believe themselves to be competent to frame new generalizations about, say, psychology or political economy. Some academic philosophers do not even believe themselves to be competent consumers of social-scientific research. A division of labor is palpable in which 'real' political philosophers do only

<sup>25</sup> Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p. 290. The quoted text continues, '... these associations regulating their relations to one another within a framework of just basic institutions.'

<sup>26</sup> John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7. Rawls expressed the idea in the second conjunct in terms of 'just (or at least decent)' social policies and institutions.

abstract normative work, while social scientists are in charge of descriptive statements about the social world.

This institutional division of labor is pressuring academics away from the argumentative style of the canonical philosophers. The pressure within the new division of labor is toward more formal arguments, toward fictional examples, and toward thought experiments. Perhaps these institutional developments were behind my teacher's dismissal of 'facts about the world'—but, again, this is a dismissal that would have mystified most of the philosophers who wrote the major works of our discipline.

I also believe that the institutionally-driven prohibition on making or evaluating causal claims—like the causal claims in the examples from Hobbes, Locke, Kant and Rawls above—has had a further intellectual impact on philosophers within the academy. It has pushed them ever-further toward non-consequentialist theory. Indeed, I believe that some theorists are becoming incapable of seeing consequentialist theorizing as part of the discipline at all. If what happens in academic departments defines 'philosophy,' and those working in these departments are not allowed to make significant causal claims, then philosophical justifications cannot rest on such claims—or so the reasoning seems to go. I noted above that Gentile could not see a 'normative theory' in an explicitly consequentialist book like *Blood Oil*. Elsewhere I have noted that theorists like Anna Stilz and Chris Armstrong have only been able to see 'pragmatic' and not 'philosophical' justifications in the book.<sup>27</sup> These are all fine theorists, but during these moments I hear the only institution, not the tradition, speaking through them.

<sup>27</sup> See Leif Wenar, Michael Blake, Christopher Kutz, Aaron James, Nazrin Mehdievya, and Anna Stilz, *Beyond Blood Oil*, ed. Laurie Shrage and Naomi Zack (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

Above I suggested that the ‘disengaged canon’ should center on scholars like Aquinas, while excommunicating Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx and Mill. I would now suggest that as their foundational modern figure, disengaged philosophers should canonize an academic who, like Duns Scotus, saw himself as working primarily in what today’s academic philosophers call the ‘core’ areas.<sup>28</sup> The canonical modern disengaged political philosopher is Robert Nozick. In his Preface to *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Nozick declared his method:

I write in the mode of much contemporary philosophical work: there are elaborate arguments, claims rebutted by unlikely counterexamples, surprising theses, puzzles, abstract structural conditions, challenges to find another theory which fits a specified range of cases, startling conclusions, and so on. Though this makes for intellectual interest and excitement (I hope), some may feel that the truth about ethics and political philosophy is too serious and important to be obtained by such ‘flashy’ tools. Nevertheless, it may be that correctness in ethics is not found in what we naturally think.<sup>29</sup>

Nozick’s ‘flashy’ tools are familiar to philosophers trained in the ‘core’ areas. And although Nozick himself knew quite a lot about empirical research relevant to politics, these tools are perfectly suited for those who do not. Political philosophers can use these tools without understanding how the political world works. This Nozickean formal methodology became widespread within the profession, as the center of gravity of ‘what we

<sup>28</sup> Scotus sketched an early social contract theory, but he did so almost as an aside in an excursus on restitution. See *John Duns Scotus’ Political and Economic Philosophy*, ed. Allan Bernard Wolter (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic, 1974), pp. 14-15.

naturally think' shifted about how to find correctness in the field.<sup>30</sup>

Nozick's 'flashy' tools may indeed be useful for finding the truth in political philosophy. Yet it looks like it was a pressure from an institution (specialization) that has pushed academics into thinking that *only* such tools should be used. It looks like the institution that first just hosted political philosophers then redefined how its guests believed they should do their work. Universities redefined academics' method—away from relying on empirical and especially causal premises, toward only arguing over abstract, probably non-consequentialist principles (that social scientific or low-status philosophical work could then perhaps 'apply' to the real world). And the new, university-based method then redefined political philosophers' aims—away from engaging with the world, toward engaging only with one another, thereby making them more like those in the more politically inert sub-fields like metaphysics and epistemology.<sup>31</sup>

The risks to objective inquiry is evident here. If we allow ourselves only a small set of tools, we are in danger of losing contact with much of our tradition, which is, like vocal music or tragic drama, one of the oldest and richest traditions in all human activity. If we bequeath our students only this set of tools, then only a small set of problems will seem salient to them. And if the

<sup>30</sup> See Jonathan Wolff, 'Analytic Political Philosophy,' (typescript, 2010), p. 20, which identifies Judith Jarvis Thomson's 'A Defense of Abortion,' as another influential text in this tradition.

<sup>31</sup> To continue the thought that Rawls should be regarded by disengaged philosophers as a dangerous subversive, it might be remembered that he presented 'The Independence of Moral Theory' as his Presidential Address to the American Philosophical Association (*Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 48 (1974 - 1975), pp. 5-22).

academic institutions that have recently been hosting political philosophers themselves begin to fail, as they may well in the next generation, then academic philosophers may not even have each other to talk to. The practice of political philosophy, as it has been done for centuries, may be lost.

This disengaged period really is an outlier in the history of political philosophy. Rarely if ever have political philosophers been working within such a highly articulated institutional divisions of labor. It appears that the institutions during this period pressured against the use of traditional methods and against considering familiar theoretical positions, while generating temptations toward signal-sending and intellectual conformity. These are all forces that work against robust, independent inquiry, and it is a tribute to philosophers like O'Neill, Anderson, Satz and Shelby to have resisted them.

Yet it must be acknowledged that doing engaged political philosophy also carries risks to objective inquiry, and risks that are at least as serious. As Maffettone presents this risk, 'being engaged might make intellectual work, and philosophical work in particular, less objective. Concentrating on affecting progress in the real world might detract from the required candour and dispassionate attitude that many philosophers have seen as central to their attempts at discovering truth.'

This seems to me to be undeniable. I want to illustrate this point with Hobbes, so let me begin with Hobbes's view of the goal of philosophy.

For Hobbes, the goal of philosophy is not to discover the truth, but to promote human benefit. As Hoekstra describes Hobbes's view,

So what is the end of philosophy, if not the delight in solving problems, the discovery of truth, or the imparting of knowledge?

Hobbes has a ready answer: ‘The End or Scope of Philosophy, is, that we may make use to our benefit of effects formerly seen; or that by application of Bodies to one another; we may produce the like effects of those we conceive in our minde... for the commodity of humane life.’ Hobbes repeats Bacon’s formula that ‘knowledge is power,’ and... defines philosophy as ‘the Knowledge acquired by Reasoning... to the end to bee able to produce, as far as matter, and humane force permit, such Effects, as humane life requireth.’ The end of philosophy - to produce what humans require - is integral to the very definition of philosophy.<sup>32</sup>

For Hobbes, ‘Practical philosophy’ is a pleonasm... Benefit is ‘the scope at which all Speculation should aime,’ and even the most sophisticated theoretical constructions should be judged according to the improvements they bring about.<sup>33</sup>

For Hobbes, it is disengaged work that cannot be ‘real’ philosophy—in fact, there can be no such thing as disengaged philosophy. It simply cannot exist.<sup>34</sup> Hobbes, of all the thinkers in the traditional canon, must be the one that disengaged philosophers repudiate most completely, as he explicitly defined philosophy as the shaping of political reality. John Rawls was fond of saying that *Leviathan* is the greatest work of political philosophy in English, but this should only make disengaged philosophers all the more suspicious of Rawls. The disengaged will likely feel more sympathy with the schoolmen who burnt *Leviathan* in the Bodleian Quad in 1683.

<sup>32</sup> Kinch Hoekstra, ‘The End of Philosophy (The Case of Hobbes),’ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006), pp. 25-62 at p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Hoekstra, ‘The End of Philosophy,’ pp. 32, 33.

<sup>34</sup> I suspect that other great figures in our tradition, like Rousseau and Marx, would agree with Hobbes on this point.

Yet the risk to objectivity is also visible in Hobbes's work. If, as Hobbes believes, doing philosophy is about increasing 'the commodity of humane life,' then

The end of benefit to humanity may require profession as well as silence, even if one thinks the profession false. Hobbes proposes an interpretation of Aristotle according to which 'he knew to be false Philosophy' his claims about entities and essences, but nonetheless disseminated them for reasons of self-preservation or conformity to the civic religion. Hobbes sometimes says that he, too, endorses a position because of 'reverence due to the Laws.'<sup>35</sup>

Here disengaged philosophers are quite right to object that engaged philosophy seems 'more like sophisticated political activism than 'real' philosophy.' Silence, rhetoric, spin, even falsehoods—as the example of Hobbes shows, engaged work must in principle be open to all of them, if these are the best means to the desired political end. (As David Estlund once put the point in conversation, 'Why not bad arguments?') And engaged consequentialist philosophy will fall under even greater suspicion on this score. This is a very serious concern. It might seem that an engaged philosopher must give up on truth as the touchstone for everything she says.

Let me offer my own view, as a consequentialist who sometimes aims at shaping political reality with his philosophical work. My consequentialism has the free unity of ends as its ideal—ultimately, all of our actions are to be judged on how much they conduce to the unity of humanity. As readers of my

<sup>35</sup> Hoekstra, 'The End of Philosophy,' p. 45. Hoekstra's interpretation of Hobbes is more controversial here.

work know, within this project I am less interested in choices within improbable circumstances, or in the fine details of our current rules of conduct. The firmest foundation of unity in our daily lives is our social roles. Nothing motivates action on unified ends more than our roles, and ‘role consequentialism’ is a large part of my overall view.

To see the importance of roles, consider what your day is like today. When you consider why you are doing what doing now, what you will do next, and what you will do after that, the explanation will very likely center on your social roles. You are a scholar, a teacher, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, a voter, a department chair, a friend. Most of the dramas in our lives concern whether roles have been performed and how they have been prioritized—and so do most stories in the news. Most moral progress has come through the elimination (slaveowner), revision (boss) and introduction (citizen) of roles. Today’s amazing flourishing of seven billion higher primates, humans, is inconceivable without the role-based motivation and coordination of their actions.<sup>36</sup>

My view is that the role of the scholar in our world is exceptionally important. Like many of the most consequential roles, this one is ancient: we have the Schoolmen to thank for forging its standards of precision, accuracy and rigor, and the early scientists to thank for reinforcing its norms of dispassionate, world-guided inquiry. And the home of scholarship is still in the schools. We academics are the inheritors of a remarkable set of normative standards that define who we are. We are seekers of truth.

<sup>36</sup> See *Ethics* article.

The reason that the role of the scholar is so important today is that, to put it simply, everyone else lies. Academics and journalists are the only people today whose job is to tell the truth about the whole world—and sometimes we wonder about the journalists. When one does engaged philosophy, one constantly witnesses attempts at gross deception—by politicians, by business people, by civil servants, even by leaders of civil society. The part that academics play in human affairs is small, but extremely consequential. Humanity very much needs individuals whose job it is to tell the truth about everything, and we must do everything we can to ensure that this role is passed on intact to future generations. For consequentialist reasons, we academics must, foremost and always, strive always to get it right.

To conclude, as academic philosophers, we find ourselves in a difficult position today—torn, as it were, between the noun and the adjective. As philosophers, we find that the institution that currently hosts us is pressuring us to give up major works and methods of our tradition—and that it tends to foster in us a narrowness and conformism inimical to our intellectual independence. Yet as academics, we feel very deeply the importance of preserving our precious traditions of truth-telling, especially in an age of spin and false news. Should we then engage with, or disengage from, political reality?

My suggestion is that we can do both. A disengaged bonfire of the traditional canon of political philosophy should be foresworn, and indeed we political philosophers should keep reminding our academic colleagues in the ‘core’ areas that the greatest work in our tradition has been engaged.

However, we academic philosophers should train our students to be scholars first. The norms of precision, accuracy, rigor, and above all ‘getting it right’ are too valuable to lose—and, once lost, they would unlikely be recreated today, at least in the humanities.

Indeed we philosophers should likely be more demanding than we are on our students' scholarship, given the countervailing pressures of our times (including, as Maffettone notes, those from academic administrators). 'More Duns Scotus, less global justice' seems a good rule for training the next generation of scholars—so long as philosophy students are also permitted to study the methods of social science, like statistics, as well as political institutions and history.

As philosophers within the academy, it seems right that everyone should do academic-only work, while only some work will aim for broader audiences. And one task that non-consequentialists might valuably take on is to make sure their consequentialist colleagues stay on the straight and narrow scholarly road, by respecting the absolute priority of the practices of truth and candor.

Still, anyone tempted to praise a disengaged culture within philosophy departments might reflect on their place in history and in the world. The disengaged position appears to be the product of institutional norms and forces that can endanger a political philosopher's objectivity and independence. At least one of our greatest political philosophers, and likely others, would deny that disengaged philosophy is even possible. And a survey across the centuries (instead of across the profession today) will find that most of the work with last value in our tradition has aimed at shaping political reality. Academics who are aggressively disengaged might well be real scholars. What they would need to show is why they should be regarded as doing real political philosophy.

As academic philosophers, we also face a problem of order. Perhaps then our common aim should be to blend our noun and our adjective as felicitously as we are able. For both the more engaged and the more disengaged among us, our aim should

be—to quote a philosopher with friends in both camps—to foster cooperation on a basis of mutual respect.

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