

Preface

In recent years, political philosophers have been addressing topics such as multiculturalism, global justice, war and terrorism, and climate change that spill beyond the boundaries of the discipline of analytic political philosophy. The most obvious explanation of such attention is that these philosophers are responding to the most important issues of our day. There is the following further explanation. The earlier and sustained focus on theories of the just state – initiated over thirty years ago by Rawls’s *Theory of Justice* and Nozick’s *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* – has crowded out the possibilities of future contributions in this area. Given the sheer magnitude and quality of the contributions to this topic to date, there is no longer much conceptual space one could plausibly occupy in order to spin out a new and distinctive liberal egalitarian or libertarian theory of domestic justice. Moreover, it now appears much less clear than it did fifteen or twenty years ago that there is attractive and feasible space to occupy that is to the left of the leftmost reaches of liberal egalitarianism. For different reasons, having to do with a principled opposition to an abstractly principled approach to political philosophy and a preference for a more historically and culturally-grounded approach to politics, there is no traditionally conservative Theory of Justice waiting in the wings either.

This increasingly interdisciplinary approach to political philosophy is refreshing. It is also perilous, in a manner that I shall briefly delineate. It takes an enormous amount of education and effort to reach the point where one has something worth saying within the confines of even a single academic discipline, let alone across more than one. Remember that every accomplished and distinguished professional philosopher was once new to the field. When they enrolled in their first undergraduate courses in philosophy, they were not lacking in sheer cleverness. Nevertheless, with rare exception, these initial efforts were too untutored, philosophically naïve, and error-prone to be worth publishing. Forays into philosophy by even the most brilliant and distinguished professional physicists, mathematicians, jurists, psychologists, and economists are often less impressive than the work of the best undergraduates in their final year of philosophy. Such philosophizing by the uninitiated can have grave consequences: American Supreme Court justices have rested their conclusions about the legality of abortion and physician-assisted suicide on some embarrassing philosophical claims. The phenomenon I have been describing is not, of course, unique to those who venture into philosophy. Philosophers who venture out into other disciplines are equally vulnerable. Economists, for example, are often scathing in their assessment of the

quality of the decision theory and the soundness of the macroeconomic claims to be found in the work of political philosophers who are regarded as at the top of their field. Not surprisingly, these contributions often strike them as less impressive than the work of excellent undergraduates in their final year of economics.

So what is a philosopher to do if he or she wants to engage in interdisciplinary work? The most obvious advice is: don't try this in your armchair at home alone if you're not yet an expert in the relevant discipline beyond philosophy. One obvious solution is to acquire the relevant expertise oneself. A truly interdisciplinary graduate education is an excellent place to start. The LSE Philosophy Department provides a model for this, with its MSc degrees in Philosophy and Public Policy and Philosophy and Economics. Another obvious solution is to secure a collaborator with the relevant expertise. If neither is possible, then just stick to philosophy pure and simple. One can find inspiration in a philosophically brilliant wealth of single-disciplinary approaches of lasting value to practical topics, as initiated and exemplified by the seminal contributions of Philippa Foot's 'The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect' and Judith Jarvis Thomson's 'A Defence of Abortion' in the late sixties and the early seventies.

Mike Otsuka