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PPE AS AN INTELLECTUAL ENTERPRISE

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1 The General Case for (Some) Interdisciplinary Work

Anything that throws light on its subject matter also casts shadows. So much is just in the nature of light. And those shadows cannot be dispersed simply by increasing the intensity of the light: doing that just makes the shadows deeper. Of course, if the intensity of the light is reduced, so is the capacity to see anything clearly. If you want to illuminate the shadows, you have to come at things from different perspectives: you have to shine some light, simultaneously, from different *angles*. And as every theatre-lighting engineer knows, in order to establish a shadow-free stage, you have to secure an appropriate *balance* among the various light sources.

This picture animates our view of PPE – that is, *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* – as an intellectual enterprise. Bringing philosophy, political science, and economics together in the study of social and political institutions sheds light and banishes shadows in ways that no subset of these three disciplines could possibly accomplish. For example, economists shed invaluable light on markets, efficiency, incentives, and trade-offs, but regularly ignore the formal and informal institutions that structure choices and social interdependence; and economists (almost as a matter of professional pride) steer clear of questions of rights, or justice, or value. Meanwhile, political scientists bring a deep understanding of institutions that structure choices and create social interdependence, along with their origin and structure and effect. Political scientists also explicitly consider positive rights and values as they find expression through and in those institutions. Yet, political scientists often leave to one side perverse incentives and markets (except as phenomena to be regulated or left alone) and questions concerning institutionally transcendent rights, justice, and values. Philosophers, of course, talk ad nauseam about rights, justice, and value, and they are fully engaged with questions concerning ideal political institutions and perfect markets, but they regularly ignore actual social and political institutions and how they work, or fail to work, and the incentives, perverse and otherwise, that they create.

It is worth emphasizing at the outset that this view of PPE is both pro- and counter-disciplinary. It is pro-disciplinary in that it insists that disciplines are crucial sources of illumination and are indispensable.[1] However, because the picture highlights what each of the disciplines (inevitably) occludes, it foregrounds the importance of reaching across disciplinary boundaries.

Reaching across these boundaries, though, is a huge challenge. Often, the philosopher will be drawing distinctions that seem pointless or fetishistic to the economist and political scientist. Or the economist will be making points that will seem to the philosopher and the political scientist totally

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beside the point. Or political scientists will be insisting on pieces of empirical reality or aspects of the current political process that do not seem to the economists or the philosophers to fit into any larger picture of what really matters.

In our experience, genuine interdisciplinary communication requires a certain creative imagination and patience as well as mutual respect and trust from all parties: otherwise, there is simply a lot of talking at cross-purposes (which frequently hides mutual misunderstandings and disagreements that might, once recognized, be fruitfully explored). And if that is the outcome, there will be a consensus among *all* participants that, whatever else, the exercise of trying to talk to one's disciplinary neighbors is not worth the time.[2] As a matter of empirical fact, the amount of intellectual engagement between disciplinary departments (at least within the Humanities and Social Sciences) seems, in most places, to be negligible. It would simply not occur to the average economist to attend a seminar in the Philosophy department for example. Of course, time and intellectual effort are scarce – and the professional rewards are greater within, and senses of obligation greater towards, one's own patch. If practice is any guide, it seems that prevailing norms within the modern university do not encourage – and in many cases actively discourage – serious interdisciplinary engagement. If that is a fact, as we believe it to be, then it is one that deserves recognition, at the very least because it forms part of the environment within which PPE is to be pursued.

We should note that our particular view of PPE is not the only one available. One might, for example, advocate PPE as the "right way" to do normative social theory – that PPE ought to replace Political and Social Philosophy, or that it ought to replace Economics and/or Political Science as separate activities. Such a view harks back to an earlier period when disciplinary boundaries were less clearly drawn – and sees PPE as recapturing the mental landscape of giants like Smith and Hume. The folk version of this conception is that Philosophy brings to Economics a broader set of motivations and a richer (and more plausible) normative framework; while Economics and Political Science bring to Philosophy a greater recognition of the relevance of facts and a more practical impulse; while Economics and Philosophy both bring to Political Science a greater analytic structure and hence more theoretical rigor. All these additions are desirable, but such an approach treats PPE as a direct rival to the component disciplines. It treats PPE as operating, in the final analysis, on the same level as, and competing with, the individual disciplines, rather than as depending crucially on them. We hope it will be clear that this is not how we see things.

There is a third view of PPE that is not really interdisciplinary at all. This view is that each discipline has some things that it can learn from its neighbors – a mathematical technique that, for example, Philosophy might usefully borrow from Economics; or robust empirical findings about politics that Economics might absorb from Political Science; or a probing distinction from Philosophy that Political Science might embrace. To the extent that such borrowing makes for better Philosophy or better Economics, or better Political Science, there can be no serious objection to it. But this third view involves a resolutely disciplinary perspective, in that the test of success is whether something is added to the borrowing/raiding discipline. PPE, on our reading, appropriately has broader aspirations.

Our title is designed to draw a distinction between PPE as an intellectual enterprise and PPE as a pedagogical one. PPE as an undergraduate program (or as an element in a postgraduate one) has many virtues, most of which relate to the capacities it encourages and develops in students – capacities, for example, to think analytically; to synthesize diverse perspectives into a coherent view; and to temper idealism with realism, without losing sight of the ideals. The justification for PPE as a scholarly activity by contrast lies in its usefulness in illuminating its subject matter rather than in the intellectual qualities it develops in and requires of its practitioners. Yet, there is an important sense in which the intellectual and the pedagogical enterprises, as we understand them, have common ground: a commitment to amalgamating and synthesizing the separate disciplines in a way that a mere juxtaposition of disciplinary specializations fails to do. What that process of amalgamation and synthesis involves, and secures, and

why juxtaposition of differing specializations falls short, are interesting questions in their own right. We shall say a little about this aspect of PPE in what follows.

Of course, PPE qua PPE need not be seen as a substitute for juxtaposing disciplinary perspectives on some topic but rather as a complement to them. The PPE project of integrating disciplinary perspectives provides, as we see it, an enriched understanding of the single, shared, phenomenon – social and political institutions.

2 Disciplines and the Division of Epistemic Labor

One might think of disciplines simply as markers in the epistemic division of labor – as mere reflections of the specializations that disciplines instantiate. And in that spirit, it is tempting to refer to the early chapters of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in which specialization and the division of labor play such a central explanatory and normative role.[3] Such temptation reflects both Smith's status as a proto-typical PPE scholar and Smith's explicit reference to specialization within intellectual enquiry. As Smith points out:

> In the progress of society, philosophy or speculation becomes, like every other employment, the principal or sole trade and occupation of a particular class of citizens. Like every other employment too, it is subdivided into a great number of different branches, each of which affords occupation to a peculiar tribe or class of philosophers; and this subdivision of employment in philosophy, as well as in every other business, improves dexterity, and saves time. Each individual becomes more expert in his own peculiar branch, more work is done upon the whole, and the quantity of science is considerably increased by it. (Wealth of Nations I.1.ix)

We have no quibble with the thrust of Smith's claim: specialization and division of labor in intellectual enquiry does offer considerable advantages. Yet Smith's reference to specialization in enquiry as an instance of the operation of the more general engine of wealth generation raises three topics worth discussing here.

In the first place, the explanation of specialization that Smith offers in the Wealth of Nations does not, we think, really fit intellectual enquiry, even as intellectual enquiry exhibits significant specialization. Specifically, that account treats efficiency and a desire for trade as the engines of specialization. While efficiency and the desire for trade are clearly implicated in some intellectual specialization, we think a lot of intellectual specialization has other sources, which must be independently explained.

In the second place, Smith's own treatment allows, as we think it should, that there may be more general limits to specialization's advantages and indeed leaves room for the possibility that the degree of specialization may be carried too far. That possibility will be, on its face, of special interest to the interdisciplinary scholar. Much of the interest of interdisciplinary work lies in the recognition that overspecialization often leaves underexplored issues and opportunities that fall between the specializations that happen to have developed.

And finally, in the third place, while Smith understandably highlights the advantages of specialization, the costs (as Smith recognizes) deserve attention. We think these costs, when it comes to intellectual enquiry, are often significant. In many cases, they are no doubt worth paying. Yet in others, they strike us as worth taking account of and addressing (more or less directly).

We seek in what follows in this section to address each of these three issues in turn.

2.1 Why the Origins of Specialization in Intellectual Enquiry Are Different?

In the Wealth of Nations, Smith's explanation of specialization and the division of labor and their attendant advantages appeals to our interest in exchange. As he puts it (at the outset of chapter 2):

> This division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual, consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another. (Wealth of Nations I.2.i)

For Smith, this "propensity to truck, barter, and exchange" finds expression in making and taking offers of the kind: "Give me that which I want and you shall have from me that which you want."[4] The picture is one in which producers of knowledge "sell" their expert knowledge to individuals who want to use it, and the engine of specialization is the desire to have more to trade. But much "knowledge" is not produced in this mode. Often, enquiry starts with curiosity, not thoughts of advantage, and its fruits are often made available free of charge. In Adam Smith's day, the progress of intellectual enquiry depended on "gentlemen scholars" (they were mostly men, sadly) driven mainly by intellectual curiosity. Many had private means; some had university posts, but these were not particularly well remunerated and certainly the compensation attached bore little relation to the extent or significance of the incumbent's research output.

In the contemporary world, intellectual enquiry is often pursued within universities – where the relation between salary and research output – and still less the usefulness of research output – is vague and indirect. To a significant extent, a scholar's salary depends on whether others in the field regard that person as a "great scholar, doing first-class work." As a result, academic scholars write primarily for other academic scholars – the professional standing of each depends on what the academic audience makes of what that scholar writes. This is not to deny that the "usefulness" of research may be one criterion in determining whether the "work" in question is "first-class"; but it is clearly not the only criterion and in at least some fields usefulness may not be relevant at all. Nor is it to deny that there is considerable serious research going on in pharmaceutical companies, and among medical technology manufacturers, and computer manufacturing giants and so forth – research that *is* evaluated in terms of its capacity to contribute to commercially viable "goods." Much of this latter research will be obedient to the exchange principles that govern Smith's trading nexus: yet a good deal of science – physical and otherwise – is not.

In short, it seems clear that a major motivation for enquiry has been (and remains) intellectual curiosity as an end in itself – either on the part of the scholar herself or her intended audience (or both). Scholars pursue lines of enquiry because they find them interesting and because others whose opinions they care about find them interesting.[5] Specialization in this setting is pursued precisely because of its advantages in sharpening skills needed to pursue interesting questions and solve challenging intellectual puzzles. Training within a discipline is in many ways akin to the aspiring tennis player committing hours to practice his serve, or the golfer spending time and effort in trying to improve her putting, without thought of turning professional.

Our point here, we should emphasize, concerns only the influential "market explanation" of specialization offered in the Wealth of Nations. Elsewhere, Smith himself notes the inadequacy of such explanations when it comes specifically to intellectual specialization:

> Wonder, therefore, and not any expectation of advantage from its discoveries, is the first principle which prompts mankind to the study of Philosophy, of that science which pretends to lay open the concealed connections that unite the various appearances of nature; and they pursue this study for its own sake, as an original pleasure or good in itself without regarding its tendency to procure them the means of many other pleasures. (The History of Astronomy, III.3, 1795)

Taking account of this important motive for intellectual enquiry and the specializations that it generates is crucial to understanding, among other things, how and why intellectual labor does manage, so often, to make substantial contributions to the technical progress and the "wealth of nations."

There will doubtless be some demand from governments (and the electorate at large) for publicly funded universities to demonstrate their usefulness; and some internal impulse from scholars themselves to justify the value of their activities to a wider audience. Exploring how the non-commercial interests that operate on intellectual enquiry actually work and what their upshots are, is an important topic for enquiry in itself (perhaps in a PPE mode). For our purposes here, though, we are content to note that the intellectual specializations are not well explained without recognizing the extent to which those who engage in enquiry are motivated by curiosity and wonder and not simply market considerations. To ignore this fact risks crushing the spirit that makes progress, intellectual and otherwise, possible.

2.2 The Limits of Specialization

In chapter 3 of the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith argues that one prime constraint on the extent of specialization is the "size of the market." As he makes clear, the size of the market can effectively be increased in a number of ways – by reducing transport costs so that a producer can reach a larger number of customers; by increasing aggregate population; and/or by increasing the density of population. But these alternative ways of increasing numbers (and thus the degree of specialization) indicate the relevance of additional considerations in determining how far specialization extends. For example, Smith contrasts agriculture with manufacturing: farmers, Smith thinks, must have multiple skills – and this because the land cannot sustain enough workers to allow each agricultural worker to fully specialize. Increasing the density of the agricultural population in the interests of greater specialization would reduce, not increase, the per capita income of agricultural workers.

Furthermore, as Smith explicitly noted, specialization is likely to impose intellectual and personal costs. Concentrating on a particular narrow activity, Smith thought, made many workers "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become… Dexterity at his own particular trade … seems to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social and martial virtues."[6] It is not entirely clear whether Smith thought that workers gave up their "intellectual virtues" unconsciously – becoming preoccupied with the minutiae of their particular trades – or that they just endured the boredom for the sake of the additional material benefits their specialized jobs delivered. The former is the more sinister – at least for those specialized in intellectual enquiry itself because it suggests that boredom may not operate as an effective constraint against excessive concentration on particular questions or particular methods.

It is worth noting that there are some arenas in which specialization does not seem to promise significant advantages. Take a simple example. Suppose there is a difficult sum. We can imagine that many people might exercise their minds with this sum, but adding additional people may not reduce the difficulty or promise a more rapid solution. Each additional person will simply replicate the calculations made by all the others. Contrast that case with a mathematical exercise that *can* be broken down into separate parts: in this case, there is a potentially profitable division of labor – with each individual concentrating on a different aspect of the problem. Even here, however, although there are advantages in additional numbers, there may be no scope for specialization as such: the advantages of specialization that Smith is focusing on derive from the development of different *skills* – ones that arise from the repetition of a distinctive activity. Only if the different aspects of the puzzle involve recognizably different skills and only if those different skills are applicable to a wider range of puzzles, might there be advantages in the participants in puzzle-solving specializing.

2.3 Disciplines as Certifiers

One important constraint on the operation of Smith's "community of exchange" is the extent of trust and trustworthiness within the trading nexus. Bee Wilson (2008) illustrates the point nicely in relation to food additives through the 19th century. When individuals lived on small rural holdings and prepared their own food from raw ingredients, they did not need to rely on others for the quality of their food. Once the economy had developed to the point that their diet consisted largely of "prepared" foods – cheeses, pies, commercially prepared sausages, etc. – consumers were then vulnerable to adulteration of the foods they consumed. If people believed that suppliers of prepared foods were untrustworthy – that food additives were as likely to be damaging as advantageous – then the division of labor in food preparation would never have developed in the way that it did. The point generalizes. Commercial society of the kind that Smith describes depends on trust. The division of labor is limited not just by the size of the market but also by the amount of trust operative within the market system.

Although "enquiry" is not exactly an exchange process (for reasons discussed earlier) the problem of trust extends to specialization in intellectual enquiry. Securing the benefits of intellectual division of labor requires two means of coming to know – one by direct evidence (say, by conducting an experiment oneself); and one by the testimony of someone else who one can trust is reporting the results accurately. If the second route to knowledge were not available, each would have to derive and examine all of the evidence individually, thus undermining the point of division of intellectual labor. The advantages of intellectual division of labor depend on the trustworthiness of testimony.

Such trust is not exclusively a matter of the dispositions of participants. It is also mediated by institutional arrangements – ones that certify the properties of the information that is available, that reward trustworthiness and punish trustworthiness, and that detect and make public which is which. On our view, this is a valuable role that disciplines play in academia. After all, a large amount of time and energy within the organization of enquiry is taken up not just in training individuals to the tasks at hand but also: (i) in certifying whether or not particular individuals have achieved an appropriate level of competence; (ii) in certifying (via refereeing procedures) the quality and reliability of specific research output; and (iii) in certifying the credentials of other scholars by writing referees reports for persons whose qualities as a researcher you are judged to be in a position to assess. Professional reputation is a critical asset for all those for whom "*speculation … is a chief occupation or trade*"; and both formally and informally, people monitor the performance of others and contribute to that reputation. But each does so within a highly partitioned domain. A department Head in Chemistry would not normally rely on a reference relating to a new hire from a geologist – still less from an economist or a philosopher. She would (rightly) look to the judgment of acknowledged experts in the relevant discipline, and probably in the relevant subfield within that discipline. Indeed, each discipline might plausibly be understood in terms of the set of mutual certifiers.

That established disciplines provide this important "certification" service needs to be borne in mind when people call for tearing down the silos and dismantling the disciplines. Some commentators rail against the hegemony/tyranny of disciplines in a manner that makes their attitude seem not so much interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary but rather *anti*-disciplinary. Or at least, *non*-disciplinary. That is not in our view a proper attitude. Disciplines have some valuable features, not least that they are "trust-justifying" institutions.

It is time to summarize the burden of this section. Adam Smith's few throw-away lines about specialization in the organization of enquiry, early in the *Wealth of Nations,* encourage seeing enquiry as just another example of the specialization that is characteristic of market economies.[7] Seeing things this way is, we think, a serious mistake. It underestimates what is distinctive about specialization in enquiry; and, more to the point for our purposes, misses much that is important about the structure and operation of intellectual disciplines. We have tried to catalog here what some of the

relevant aspects of intellectual disciplines might be. All told, they leave us thankful that there *are* disciplines, especially for the specialization and trust they make possible, even as we advocate for intellectual work that actively reaches across disciplines on the grounds that staying within disciplines has its own serious costs.

3 Shadows and Conflicts

Earlier we suggested that PPE, conceived as a domain of enquiry, involves commitment to the idea of PPE as an enterprise that integrates the three disciplines. One upshot of this thought is that we ought to be especially attentive to the ways in which philosophy, political science, and economics are often in tension, if not direct conflict: cases where what is a mainstream view in philosophy is widely held to be eccentric or outright wrong in economics or political science. And vice versa. We shall offer a few examples shortly. In each case, we see the tensions (and conflicts) as intellectual opportunities that consistently hide in the shadows so long as one operates only within one or another of the disciplines.

Our first-round hypothesis in relation to such apparent tensions and conflicts is that they reflect the (necessarily) partial vision of the disciplines involved. The broader view that PPE offers enables either a reconciliation or a modification in all disciplinary positions that provides a better fix on the matter at stake. But of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that a particular discipline is just wrong on a substantive matter[8] – or that we should suspend judgment on some proposition on which there is overwhelming consensus in some discipline because that proposition is staunchly rejected in another. Whatever response is appropriate, we think PPE as an area of study requires us to be especially attentive to the relations *among* the disciplines – to the places and manner in which they seem to be at odds. Such areas strike us as constituting a core piece of the PPE enterprise. Or at least, the tensions often reveal especially promising opportunities for PPE research. And on that basis, we conclude this chapter with a number of examples that illustrate apparent conflicts (sometimes of emphasis, sometimes of substance) and which might be thought of as primary elements in an agenda for PPE scholarship.

This list of examples is by no means exhaustive – nor are we thinking that they reflect the most significant points of tension within PPE. They are simply some that strike us as both significant and ripe for exploration.[9]

3.1 Categorical vs. Comparative Thinking

John Broome draws a contrast between philosophers and economists in terms of a distinction between categorical and comparative thinking. He points out that philosophers tend to draw distinctions and think in terms of categories – true/false or right/wrong or good/bad, for example, while economists tend to traffic less in distinctions and to think more in terms of comparisons – say in terms of credence (which presumably comes in degrees) rather than belief or, in the ethical domain, in terms of betterness rather than rightness.

Of course, not all economists think comparatively in all areas. For example, Arrow's famous impossibility theorem and the social choice framework of which that theorem is the most famous fruit, typically deal in terms of stipulations (categorical specifications). Nor do all philosophers think categorically. For example, many formal epistemologists deal with their subject matter in terms of metrics of epistemic warrant rather than belief; and consequentialists in ethics and political philosophy think in terms of trade-offs and optimal outcomes. Still, one might concede, there *is* a difference in approach and attitude. And that difference, to whatever degree it exists, might invite the questions which is right? or which is better?

What seems clear to us, is that forcing a choice here, or thinking one mode of thinking has simply gone off the rails, is a mistake. Economics can, for example, hardly dispense with its categories. The

claim that A is "more X than Y" or that "A is more X than B is" – which are on their face comparative claims – seem to depend on categories X and Y and for that matter on the A and the B being well-defined. Just what is at stake in Broome's distinction and in what domains it matters raise interesting, and we think unresolved, issues – ones that would seem to be of special relevance to PPE.

3.2 Motives vs. Incentives

Economists are (or purport to be) interested primarily in human behavior – or (in fact more commonly) in changes in that behavior in response to changes in external circumstances. The external circumstances they focus on in most cases are changes in relative prices – in the "incentives" people have to act in particular ways. Given the basic behavioral model deployed in economics (the "rational" maximization of preference satisfaction subject to relevant scarcity constraints), changes in beliefs are also a possible source of behavioral change; but as a matter of general practice, belief change (and preference change) are generally backgrounded by economists in favor of explanation based on incentives/relative prices. One of the contributions that so-called "behavioral economics" has made to this general exercise has been to emphasize the role of *additional* behavioral triggers – ones that lie outside the standard "rational choice" model. To the extent that such additional triggers put pressure on that standard model, behavioral economics is seen as a challenge to the mainstream approach – but behavioral economics remains *economics* in that it exhibits mainstream economics' preoccupation with behavior.

Economists tend not to be interested in the mental processes individuals go through in deciding how to act – or in the considerations that induce them to act as they do. Although economists talk loosely about "revealed preference," as if behavior did genuinely reveal something about the mental processes that produce the behavior in question, there is actually little interest among economists in those mental processes as such.

Philosophers and political scientists by contrast are often vitally interested in the *motives* that induce action – in the kinds of beliefs and values and attitudes that combine to produce behavior. And they are interested in such things in part for their own sake and not merely as tools for predicting behavior. Often, they are interested in behavior because of what the behavior reveals about beliefs, values, and attitudes, not the other way around.

Now, one might respond that there is no real conflict here – that there are just two different (if somewhat related) objects of study. But that underplays the contrast. Economists traditionally see beliefs, values, and attitudes as inferable from a specification of the (non-psychological) conditions and the resulting behavior, whereas philosophers and political scientists traditionally see them as pre-existing and independent causes of the behavior they allow us to predict and explain. Traveling with this difference is a contrast in the weight given, or not, to how beliefs, values, and attitudes are influenced or changed.

The issues here strike us as partly methodological, and partly normative. We are not confident that we ourselves fully understand what is at stake, but there do seem to be a variety of questions here that it would be helpful to unravel. And such unraveling seems like a good project for the PPE scholar.

3.3 Motivational Assumptions

Of course, economists do famously regularly make some assumptions about values or attitudes. Ask for an "economic" explanation of some phenomenon and the assumption of material self-interest will not take long to appear. So, although it is technically the case that utility functions can include all kinds of considerations, in practice the tendency of economists is to assume that material self-interest governs most of the decisions. *Homo Economicus* is both "rational" and self-interested – with self-interest here understood not in terms of the fact that A's preferences are indeed A's, but rather that the content of A's preferences involves A's material consumption, relatively narrowly construed.

That A's preferences might include the well-being of others (both positively and negatively valued) or that it might include obedience to certain norms or habits – or even the requirements of virtue – are possibilities from which economists tend to think one can safely abstract in most applications. Political scientists and philosophers tend to import a considerably richer psychology.

It is worth noting here that the issues at stake are basically empirical ones (at least on their face).[10] But there are matters of debate about how fine-grained motivational assumptions should be. In work done by one of us (Brennan and Pettit, 2004), the assumption that individuals desire the esteem of their fellows (a long-standing assumption in social theory, endorsed by Adam Smith among many others) has been explored within an analytic frame that borrows strongly from economics. The significant feature in this work is that individuals care about the judgments and attitudes of their fellows (and have incentives to behave in ways of which those others approve and avoid behaving in ways of which they disapprove) without any departure from egoism: each is taken to care primarily about the esteem she *herself* accrues. There is no necessity to invoke concern for the esteem in which others are held.[11]

One might make a related point in the contrast between economics and political science. The "economic" approach to politics has, for the most part, attributed to voters (and to political agents such as politicians and bureaucrats) the same self-interest that those same individuals exhibit in markets. We think that that particular motivational assumption is misplaced – that the direct extrapolation of behavior from market settings to the political fails to take adequate account of the differing circumstances of political and market choices (see Brennan and Lomasky, 1993). Political Science is much more open concerning the things that might figure in the motivations of voters (and of those who are ultimately subject to voters' approval): political scientists tend to come at this issue inductively – as an empirical matter to be explored "without prejudice" rather than something where market behavior provides the relevant presumptions. As a result, allegiance, party membership, identity, or values come on the scene as relevant to political choices in ways that resist reduction to a person's concern with herself, let alone her own material well-being.

There is a further (distinct) question about how much allowance should be made for motivational heterogeneity. Philosophers and political scientists are more disposed to allow for differences in motivation within the population; whereas economists are prone to assume homogeneity (or treat heterogeneity as irrelevant or as safely ignored for explanatory purposes).[12] The effects for analysis are significant. Absent a recognition of heterogeneity, there is no scope for *selection* effects in the analysis of institutions or policies (and these, unfortunately but not inevitably, play a minor role in economic analysis).

The bottom line is that such motivational issues arise as a core topic in PPE – partly because each of the disciplines, as it seems to us, tend to ignore the richness of the phenomena they are all exploring. Our own view here is that the assumption of predominant self-interest uniformly across the population is of rather limited usefulness even in traditional "economic" applications – and becomes increasingly strained as economists stray further from those traditional applications.

3.4 Normative Considerations

One conspicuous difference between economics, political science, and philosophy lies in their different conceptions of "normative desirability." Of course, economists often declare that judgments of value have no place within economics at all.[13] But, in practice, economists seem quite uninhibited about making policy recommendations based on their judgments about normative desirability. Yet those judgments often reflect a narrow (and, in our view, implausible) conception of what counts as important, both when it comes to ethics and when it comes to what is rational. On the view that we see as common within the standard economic framework, the only thing that counts normatively is preference satisfaction. Accordingly, liberty, justice, equality, virtue – these all count exactly to the extent that individuals have preferences for them (which is shown directly by

how much the individuals are prepared to sacrifice to secure them). Moreover, preference satisfaction is routinely treated within economics as coterminous with "well-being." So, for example, it is simply a conceptual impossibility for a mother to sacrifice her own well-being in order to increase the well-being of her child because any such sacrifice must – thanks to the assumptions that choice reveals preference – increase the mother's own preference satisfaction and therefore her own well-being. Equally, soldiers who heroically sacrifice their lives to save their fellows – by throwing their bodies on exploding grenades, say – are revealing their preference that their fellows' lives should be saved at the expense of their own. In that sense, the soldiers are entirely "preference-satisfying." We are prepared to allow this conception of revealed preference and (revealed) preference satisfaction. It is surely a stretch, however, to declare that those who sacrifice their lives for others are always increasing their (own) well-being.

None of these criticisms commits one, of course, to the view that preference satisfaction is not a consideration in normative evaluation or that perhaps, in some settings, a decisive one. It is simply to register dissatisfaction with the idea that preference satisfaction (revealed or otherwise) is the only normatively relevant metric in town.

Political scientists and philosophers do, in contrast, regularly appeal to a richer understanding of well-being, justice, equity, and rights that are treated as important independent of peoples' actual preferences. We are both on this side of the contrast, when it comes to the normative evaluation of behavior, preferences, policies, and institutions. But our concern here is not to defend our side, but to highlight the extent to which thinking about the contrast is relevant to PPE.

3.5 Discounting for Time

Discounting for time is a more specific instance of a case where what is taken as given in one discipline is routinely rejected in the other. Economists treat as self-evident that one should discount for time – that it makes sense to value something less the further it is in the future, so that, say, it makes sense to value getting $5 today over getting the same amount, or even little more, tomorrow.

For philosophers,[14] it is equally widely held that discounting is irrational, that the *mere fact* that some payoff is in the future, rather than now, should not have an impact on how much one values it. Of course, usually the fact that some payoff is in the future means that waiting for it carries some risks – that one will not actually get it, or that when one gets it the $5, say, has less purchasing power – and those risks mean it may make sense to value future payoffs less. But here what makes how much one values the payoff is not merely the fact that it is in the future.

Timing issues arise in political science as well of course. Incumbents make choices involving the spreading of costs and benefits between the current electoral period and future ones. And voters who in their "economic roles" discount the future might be expected to do so at the ballot box as well. Do democratic norms about the authority of the "voice of the people" require a corresponding bias towards benefits in the present (and postponing costs to the future)?

In addressing questions like this, it is reasonable to suspect that there is a lot of "talking at cross-purposes" – mutual misunderstandings and some confusion on all sides. Do the issues here collapse into ones already mentioned relating to the normative status of individual preferences or the appropriate way to understand "rationality"? Or are there some extra considerations in play? We do not aim to sort out this confusion here[15]: we simply note that this is another issue with claims to be on the agenda of the PPE specialist.

3.6 Ideal vs. Non-Ideal Theory

There is a debate – rather confused, as we see it – around so-called ideal vs. non-ideal theorizing in normative political theory. It seems clear that one thing that is at stake in this debate is the relevance

of facts about agent motivation, and what is feasible in light of those facts, or more particularly the point at which such considerations matter in figuring out which social and political arrangements are best, and why.

An attractive thought is that there is a distinction between the normative and the positive or between values and facts, that allows for, and maybe demands, treating questions of value as fundamentally independent of facts (including facts about what people are willing to do or accept or believe). This idea travels comfortably with the thought that it is a philosopher's job to worry about the "true" meaning of justice or to specify the domains in which inequality most matters and the political scientist's and economist's job to work out what is feasible in the pursuit of greater justice or greater equality, so defined. This picture suggests a neat separability between the normative and positive and one that falls conveniently along disciplinary lines. But that picture is at least open to question.[16] More than a few students of politics think that the idea of doing normative analysis before considering the basic facts about how politics actually works is either flying blind or (at best) a matter of building castles in the sky.

3.7 Methodology and the Philosophy of Science

Philosophy and social analysis (whether of an "economic" or "political" kind) meet at two points: in relation to applications in which ethical considerations are in play; and in relation to general methodological questions. In this latter connection, one might expect that philosophy of science might have things to say to both economics and political science that would be helpful to those disciplines – and that issues in those disciplines would provide grist for philosophers of social science. To take a specific example from the political setting, there is an issue as to how causality is to be understood in settings of collective determination. In what sense, for example, do individual voters "cause" the outcome of elections in a democratic polity, when typically each individual voter's vote has no influence on who wins?[17] This kind of issue is especially relevant for economics where "methodological individualism" is standardly taken to be a core commitment of the basic method. What status do collections of individual agents have in any explanatory scheme that insists on some kind of ultimate reducibility of social phenomena to individual action? Alternatively put, how exactly is "methodological individualism" to be understood in the social sciences?

It is an interesting feature of economics in particular (at least in its mainstream variant) that it is committed to what, on the face of things, seems a quite specific method – with rather little in the way of methodological reflection. George Stigler, Nobel Laureate in Economics, used to insist that no economist should turn to methodological questions before the age of 60 – and this appears to be a widespread view within the profession. One of the advantages of PPE, as we see it, is that the evident variety of methodologies used to understand social and political institutions encourages methodological self-consciousness.

The situation in Political Science and its connections with methodological issues is different from that in Economics: there certainly seems to be no prejudice against a concern with method within political science. The difficulties in political science reflect more the fracturing of the discipline itself. The absence of a unified method in political science[18] means that a conversation on methodological issues between philosophy or economics on the one hand, and "political science" as a whole, on the other is hard to imagine. It seems clear however that issues of method are in play in the economics/political science intersection – and specifically in the application of economic methods to the study of political processes (or what we might term "rational actor political theory"). Philosophers of science may be useful brokers in sorting out some of the issues at stake in that particular intersection – and that would seem a natural place for PPE to start.

However, it would have to be conceded that a good deal of philosophy of science is so abstract that it is hard to see how it would be much help in that task. As an example of something to be

striven for, we are impressed by the extent to which many prominent "philosophers of biology" are also players in biological/evolutionary theory: this area seems to be one where the philosophy of science and the practice of a discipline come together in mutually profitable ways. That kind of relation seems to us a reasonable aspiration concerning the interplay of the philosophy of social science and the social sciences.

The general thought we have wanted to advance in this section is that significant points of tension between the participant disciplines represent a natural point of departure for PPE scholarship. There are in fact lots of such "points of tension" – and the object in this section has been just to offer a few examples that strike us as interesting and that we think make some claims on the attention of PPE scholars. The list is not supposed to be exhaustive. One thing however is clear: such issues are not likely to be a high priority for those who see their audiences as lying resolutely *within* any of the component disciplines taken separately.

4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have offered a picture of PPE as an intellectual enterprise that is decidedly pro-disciplinary while, at the same time, being committed to transcending disciplinary boundaries and paying special attention to the questions and issues that are cast in the shadows of one or another (or even all) of the disciplines. The pro-disciplinary features arise from a recognition of the important role that disciplines play in the organization of enquiry and the presumptive authority that each of the three disciplines involved in PPE carry as separate enterprises. One upshot of this approach is that we reject a conception of PPE as itself a *rival* discipline – an alternative to philosophy, political science, and economics as traditionally pursued. We are not denying, though, that PPE is an area of specialization and might be, or might become, a "discipline" – albeit one that will always be somewhat parasitic on its component disciplines.

At the same time, PPE is clearly a "counter-cultural" activity in the organization of enquiry. It recognizes that disciplines come at a cost – they have their blind spots and their downsides – and part of the role of PPE is to try to offset those costs and exploit the opportunities the disciplines leave unexplored.

Our picture involves the thought that PPE, if it is to be properly pursued, must be undertaken (in large part, at least) as an integrative enterprise – one that helps itself to the tools of philosophy, political science, and economics to look carefully into the shadows left unexplored by philosophy, by political science, and by economics, left on their own. Yet, in addition to exploring the shadows, PPE (as we understand it) finds opportunities in negotiating and trying to reconcile tensions among the disciplines, taking those tensions as, themselves, signs of what we do not yet understand. Indeed, as we see it, those points of tension – operating at all sorts of levels – constitute a natural point of departure for PPE scholarship; and, in that sense, reflection on where those points of tension lie represents a natural point of departure for what is, after all, still a somewhat nebulous and ill-defined niche in the overall division of intellectual labor.

Notes

1 In that sense interdisciplinarity is to be contrasted with "nondisciplinarity" or "antidisciplinarity" with which it is sometimes confused.
2 Talking to one's disciplinary colleagues about neighboring disciplines (and the apparently ridiculous things that preoccupy them) is, of course, not at all the same thing. That kind of conversation can be fun. But it hardly meets the central purpose of PPE.
3 Importantly, specialization and division of labor are separate phenomena, at least to the extent that people might divide up jobs without there being any real specialization required – people might be able to do any of them and might even cycle through different jobs over time.

4 As Smith puts it later in chapter 2, the issue at stake is not whether you and I want the objects of exchange for their own sake or for some further purpose, but whether exchangers must give up something to get what they want (for whatever reason).
5 There is in these cases a market of sorts for what is of interest to others, especially once interest is recognized as the coin of the realm. Yet even allowing that, there is, we think, a large amount of intellectual activity, and specialization in the process, that is driven by the scholar's interest without regard for, or sensitivity to, whether others are or will be interested.
6 Here is the full passage: "The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects are perhaps always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life." An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Book 5, Chapter 1.
7 In some ways, that view is encouraged by Smith's general posture towards the older Aristotelean idea that specialization arises out of differences in natural talents: that view, Smith describes in terms of the "vanity of the philosopher." Smith's general skepticism about natural differences was a feature that 19th-century economists broadly shared: it was this (and not Malthus' population theory) that induced Carlyle to invent for economics the "dismal science" tag.
8 Otherwise progress in that discipline would be ruled out a priori.
9 On the other hand, we would be interested if readers have suggestions as to examples we have not included and might have (and some indication of why they are significant); and would be appreciative of communications to us in that connection.
10 In some cases, it may be appropriate to make "worst case" or "best case" assumptions about motivation. In political settings, for example, Hume famously assumes that "everyman is a knave and has no purpose in all his actions other than self-interest" not because this is so, but because, as Mill puts it, "this is the special circumstance against which constitutions are designed to guard."
11 The exception would be others with whom one's reputation is associated. So one might care about the esteem of one's academic department and thereby of one's fellows because of the borrowed glory one might thereby obtain.
12 After all, all subjects face the same changes in relative prices and so all face the same kinds of incentives to alter their behavior "at the margin."
13 Such was the claim in Robbins's influential treatment (1932).
14 And some economists – notably Pigou and Ramsey.
15 Note though Broome's suggestion that there is a misunderstanding about what it is that is being discounted – economists are talking about discounting goods or money values; philosophers are talking about discounting utilities. This strikes us as a useful point, but we do not think it exhausts the confusion in this domain! There is for example some evidence that individuals do discount utilities. See Greene and Barron.
16 We have dipped into this topic, together, in a paper prompted by David Estlund's *Utopophobia*. See Brennan and Sayre-McCord (2020).
17 My vote is neither necessary nor sufficient to secure the victory of the candidate/party for which I vote in say the US presidential election. On this see Goldman (1999), Tuck (2008), and Brennan and Sayre-McCord (2015).
18 It is implausible to think of a basic textbook in Political Science (if such could be imagined) carrying the title "The Political Science way of Thinking": identifying a common perspective across the discipline, beyond the conviction that politics somehow understood "matters," presents as a serious challenge.

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