

The Ideal of Global Philosophy in an Age of Deglobalization

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(forthcoming in *Global Philosophy*)

Global philosophy is an ideal. It includes the affirmation of intercultural philosophy and internationalism but it goes well beyond cultural and geographic cosmopolitanism. To embrace global philosophy is to reject any approach to philosophy that cleaves to closed communities and private conversations.

It is true that throughout history and currently in some parts of the world, philosophers are subject to coercion and suppression from governments or other powerful actors. Under those circumstances, philosophical inquiry must be conducted secretly. But this is not the case for most of us today. Moreover, with the proliferation of relatively affordable online communication, it is easier than ever for philosophers from around the world to read one another's work, to engage with one another, and to collaborate cooperatively. Current conditions favor a genuinely global philosophy that is open to all and that opposes barriers to inquiry erected in the name of traditions, communities, nations, and specializations.

Can there really be a global philosophy or do practical constraints mean that it must remain an unrealized ideal? Insofar as people are embodied and situated within a specific society in a specific geographical location, philosophy always comes from some place and tradition. The places where philosophers and their work originate inevitably shape philosophical inquiry; the material conditions, politics, and history of a place organize the way questions are asked and the topics that are considered important. But to do philosophy well, one must look beyond the confines of place, community, and tradition to imagine the stranger who has not yet read our work. Good philosophers already carefully consider objections and anticipate their critics. Thus, in an important sense, excellent philosophical work is engaged with unfamiliar and even hostile audiences. Philosophy is a collective activity and insofar as we record our inquiry at all, we direct our work to future audiences. Philosophical writing is always directed towards a future interlocutor but it also ought to be aware of a contemporary reader from another place or another tradition. The ideal of global philosophy represents the hope that we can increase cross-cultural collaboration and exchange, and to promote a more internationalist approach to philosophical inquiry.

Arguably, we are living in the period of history most conducive to the practice of philosophy so far. The problems that contemporary civilization faces are severe, but they require rational, imaginative, and morally sensitive responses. Philosophers, along with other humanists, and artists will offer new ways of understanding, new solutions to problems, and will provide a deepened access to and insights into what it means to be a human person in an age of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and climate change. These are concerns that have global implications and this new context is already testing the capacities of traditional institutions. For example, while our universities, colleges, and the system of academic publishing inherit a venerable and rich tradition of excellence, they are subject to capture by local interests in ways that hamper their genuine mission.

By renaming the journal *Global Philosophy* I hope to signal a new model of philosophical publishing that is not directly tethered to established Anglo-American or Western European disciplinary hierarchies. This will be a journal that is awake to and inclusive of the philosophy of the wider

world. Not as that work is imagined through Anglo-American eyes, but as it is genuinely practiced in the philosophical communities of Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Islamic World. The conversations that happen in these places will not always be easily embraced by those with Western European or North American sensibilities, and sometimes a genuinely global philosophy will involve friction, discomfort, and even fundamental disagreement. This is as it should be.

Those of us working within the philosophical mainstream are susceptible to the illusion that our assumptions and perspectives are universal and not conditioned by our own economic and cultural circumstances. We are often blind, for example, to the ways that hierarchies in the Anglo-American academic world emerge or how matters of style, method, and choice of subject matter are shaped by local considerations that are not intrinsically connected to philosophical excellence. Thus, it will be necessary for *Global Philosophy* to have an editorial board that represents all interested philosophical communities. In the coming years I will work to redesign and grow the journal in ways that make it a premiere venue for twenty-first century global philosophy. This will involve a redesign of the peer review practices of the journal aiming to maintain excellence while coping with the reality of large scale contemporary academic publishing. Some of these changes will be discussed below in more detail.

Deglobalization in Intellectual Life and the Reemergence of National Philosophies

There are significant headwinds. Not that long ago one could read confident predictions about the coming efflorescence of global philosophy. Thom Brooks wrote that the future of philosophy is moving towards global philosophy and he characterized it as “[t]he idea of global philosophy is the view that different philosophical approaches may engage more substantially with each other to solve philosophical problems” (Brooks 2013, 254). That assertion of the value of global philosophy has been challenged. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the growing tensions between the United States and China it has become common to hear that we are entering a period of deglobalization in trade, politics, and cultural life. Deglobalization is the process of reducing the interconnectedness and interdependence of countries, regions, and economies around the world. We see its effects in trade, investment, financial flows, migration, and cultural exchange. In economic life we see it in the rise of protectionist trade policies and economic barriers, such as tariffs and quotas, along with the increasing use of onshoring and localization strategies, which involve producing goods and services closer to where they will be consumed, rather than relying on global supply chains. Deglobalization was accelerated by the pandemic as countries imposed travel restrictions and other measures that disrupted supply chains and cross-border economic activity.

In academic life, we see a less obvious kind of deglobalization; in many societies there are increasing calls for technological applications of research, for the deployment of research in the service of national and commercial priorities, etc. The demand that academic inquiry be relevant is not necessarily misguided, but it is important that we have a non-arbitrary and reflective attitude towards ‘relevance’. Philosophers have traditionally been in the position to offer critical assessment of these pressures. We can ask what it means for scholarly research to be relevant and to whom? To specific corporate or political interests, to the interests of a dominant ideological faction, to some unexamined notion of scientific or technological progress? Deglobalization affects the lives of philosophers in other ways: In the United States, we have seen an increasingly suspicious attitude towards Chinese scholars and an increasingly security-driven and proprietary attitude towards intellectual property. In our discipline, localisms are a bit more subtle than in the sciences and engineering, but they still constitute strongly opposing forces to the idea of global philosophy. While relatively few

contemporary philosophers would regard themselves as engaged in something like a national philosophy and are mostly committed to a kind of intellectual cosmopolitanism in our inquiry, we are not immune to deglobalization.

Explicit commitment to national philosophies is rarely voiced. However, it has been a prominent option for philosophers since the nineteenth century. This happened initially in the formation of nation states in Europe, but also as part of decolonization in the second half of the twentieth century. Bhikhu Parekh describes how Jawaharlal Nehru saw the creation of an Indian national philosophy as integral to the consolidation of the newly independent state (Parekh 1991). Similarly, Zambia's first president Kenneth Kaunda chose 'Zambian humanism' as the Zambian national philosophy (Kanu 2014). Many other instances of philosophy in the service of national projects could be mentioned here. In contemporary Russia, for example, the idea of a national philosophy is gaining ground (See Sokolov & Iakovleva 2004) and plays a central political role in the cultural life of the country.

We are beginning to see indications of a retreat from the ideals of internationalism that were championed so courageously by the refugees from central Europe in the mid-Twentieth century. Philosophers like Otto Neurath, Rudolph Carnap and others argued for and helped to cultivate an internationalist movement in philosophy (Neurath 1983; Symons et. al 2010). Similarly, in 1937 The International Institute of Philosophy (IIP) was founded by the Swedish philosopher Åke Petzäll, along with Français Raymond Bayer, Émile Bréhier and Léon Robin.¹ The IIP was a significant institution in the post-war development of philosophy and remains committed to internationalism. With the arrival of refugee and immigrant philosophers, the influence of internationalism was baked into the development of American philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. During the twenty first century, this influence has diminished for reasons I will discuss below.

Subject matter and specialization

Localism in philosophy is not just a matter of physical place. We can also shut ourselves off from criticism and conversation by retreating into inaccessible hyperspecializations and technicalities. While the division of scientific labor has its place and while specialization is often conducive to excellence, philosophical inquiry risks sterility if it incentivizes highly specialized work that conforms to narrow disciplinary or even sub-disciplinary standards.

In the decades prior to the financial crisis of 2008, when Anglo-American philosophy departments were relatively financially healthy, a narrowly defined research niche in a fashionable topic could provide easy rewards in the early career of a young philosopher. With cleverness (or a good advisor in graduate school) one's work could be crafted to satisfy the preferences of a manageably small number of specialists. Their approval was a necessary condition for professional advancement. Securing a tenured position in the traditional American philosophy department was largely a matter of adequately conforming one's work to the demands of local experts in one's specialization. This model of how we certified one another as experts and the incentive structure that resulted, gradually cultivated a risk-averse spirit of caution and conformism among philosophers. In defense of this tendency, we tend to cite notions of increased professionalism, we praise the epistemic humility of modest research agendas, and we note the collective and incremental nature of philosophical progress. But less charitable interpreters might suspect that when young philosophers

¹ See <https://www.i-i-p.org/EN> (last accessed January 5, 2023)

retreat into narrow niches they are simply adopting a strategy for professional advancement. Either way, the current incentive structure of academic philosophy in the United States favors cautious and modest research agendas for early career philosophers. Philosophical inquiry thrives when it is conducted in a spirit that risks overreaching a bit and welcomes criticism. Philosophy thrives when its creative, skeptical, and self-critical core is not subordinated to excessively cautious American-style professionalism or to equivalent demands from other local elites or traditions.

The kinds of localism that became dominant in Anglo-American philosophy are just one example of the kinds of pressures that global philosophy sets itself against. The factors that shape the work of philosophers always tend to be dominated or at least influenced by local concerns. Moreover, the incentive structures and labor conditions that we encounter vary dramatically from country to country. The topics we pursue, the style we adopt, the way that our work is divided between teaching, research, and engagement with public life will depend largely on the educational system in which we find ourselves and the expectations and education that have formed us. I hope that *Global Philosophy* can be a counterweight to the immediate local pressures that shape the lives of philosophers. I hope that it can be a venue where one's work will be read and appreciated by an audience well beyond your home base.

Global Philosophy as a large-scale, generalist journal

As editor, there are some steps that I will take to promote this ideal. As a practical matter, our discipline is in desperate need of a large generalist journal that can offer a home to creative philosophical work from a growing international community. *Axiomathes* has done this and its editorial practices have been marked by open-mindedness and objectivity under the leadership of Roberto Poli. In the year that I have edited the journal I have worked to follow the example of his strong leadership. Like many other journals in the discipline, we now face challenging issues related to the scale of philosophical research. The number of submissions to philosophy journals has increased dramatically over the past two decades and top journals have become extremely selective to the point where acceptance rates in our discipline are lower than in some of the most important venues in the natural sciences. This is not conducive to the health of our discipline for a variety of obvious reasons.

The experience of submitting a paper to a journal in philosophy is increasingly frustrating and time consuming. Overburdened referees seem more interested in quickly finding reasons to reject submissions and editors are struggling to simply keep up with the deluge of papers and therefore generally defer to referees. Just as importantly, with some exceptions, the most highly regarded philosophy journals are ensconced in small communities of Anglo-American philosophers who have been educated to attend to a specific range of acceptable style and content. Where our discipline has made room for philosophical work outside this relatively narrow range, it has tended to do so in more technical areas of the discipline, in applied ethics, or in more marginal sub-specialties. Philosophy of science, formal epistemology, logic, and some areas of applied ethics have provided space for philosophers from outside the dominant universities to publish. So far there has been no large-scale venue for generalist and non-technical philosophy that is not subject to some of the localist conditions of contemporary philosophy publishing described above. I hope that *Global Philosophy* can serve this role in the years ahead.

The transition to a large generalist journal does not mean a reduction in the standards of quality that bring readers to high quality philosophy journals. Nor does it mean that we will turn away from the topics that *Axiomathes* traditionally focused on. Rather, my goal is to broaden the scope while making the decision and referee process speedier. To do this, I will endeavor to quickly reject papers that are unlikely to succeed in a rigorous referee process while calling on a broad international editorial board to offer a wide range of perspectives.

In the months and years ahead, I hope to steadily grow both the membership of the board and the number of papers and special issues we publish. I will not be looking for reasons to reject good work and frankly I would rather risk publishing a bad paper than miss the chance to publish an important but imperfect paper. This change will take time and will require the expansion of the journal and the editorial board in the years to come. I hope that you will join me in working towards this goal.

Philosophy thrived in the United States during the Twentieth Century in part because it was not American philosophy. Life and energy was breathed into the musty pragmatist tradition by mid-century philosophers from Europe and elsewhere. Logic, metaphysics, philosophy of science, epistemology, moral philosophy, and philosophy of mind thrived in the United States thanks to the happy combination of massive public investment in higher education after the Second World War and an influx of talent from abroad.

It is still the case that many of the world's greatest philosophers live and work in the United States, and it is still possible to become a very well-educated philosopher in some of its colleges and universities. However, the situation is changing. Disinvestment in public higher education over the past two decades has changed matters significantly. A new kind of American philosophy has emerged since the 1990s with its own idiosyncratic local concerns: A national philosophy, or rather, a national culture of philosophy has emerged that is oriented towards a distinctively American set of concerns and way of thinking about philosophy.

While I am editor, *Global Philosophy* will be based in the United States and I will count on the support of the American community of philosophers. But my hope is that most of the editorial board will be drawn from outside of the English-speaking world within a few years. This will be a journal that serves as a friendly interlocutor to the new national philosophy of the United States. I will stumble and make mistakes in my role as editor-in-chief and I ask for you to be patient with me in the years ahead as *Axiomathes* becomes *Global Philosophy*.

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