

Philosophy in the Service of Humanity

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Near the start of Plato's famous work *Republic*, as the characters quarrel about how to define justice, Socrates reminds them: "Remember: it is no chance matter we are discussing, but how one should live." Political philosophy, as practiced in the Western tradition and also in the traditions of East Asia, South Asia, and Africa, has always been a practical discipline, seeking to construct a theoretical blueprint for just and decent lives in a world full of division, competition, fear, and uncontrolled catastrophes. In this lecture I hope to provide some reasons for thinking that philosophy continues to play an important role as we work together for a better world. I'll then propose some criteria for valuable philosophical work on urgent human issues.

I

First, why do we need philosophy? Most of the world carries on without it. In discussions of domestic priorities, philosophical theories of justice have received at least some respectful attention from politicians and economists. Thus John Rawls's theory of justice is known, in at least its main outlines, to leaders in most Western countries, and the ideas of Jürgen Habermas about democratic discourse are well known in Europe at least, and have influenced at least the aspirations of the public debate. The Utilitarian views of nineteenth century thinkers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, though mostly misunderstood by today's economists, have a vast influence on that profession all over the world.

When we turn to the global arena, however—to debates concerning welfare, human rights, and how to compare the achievements and quality of life of different nations—things are otherwise. Economists hold center stage, and philosophers, until very recently, were utterly ignored. To some extent this neglect is caused by the fact that economics is a fully international profession, with shared standards, whereas philosophy is far more varied, and speaks differently in different cultures. In part, the neglect is due to economists' impatience with work that is discursive and non-mathematical: economics today has invested so much in highly sophisticated mathematical models that it attracts young practitioners who are basically mathematicians, and lack interest in normative reasoning. They certainly don't like to be told to go back to square one to rethink the normative ethical foundations of their enterprise, and they are not trained to do such rethinking. Finally, the neglect is also due to a certain arrogance among economists, who feel emboldened by the deference with which nations treat them, and who therefore don't feel they need to cooperate with any other profession, surely not a humanistic one like philosophy.

This neglect is new. Early economists such as Adam Smith were themselves philosophers. Even

much later, great economists such as John Maynard Keynes and Friedrich Hayek took a very keen interest in philosophy. Today, the disconnect is almost total. Of recent winners of the Nobel Prize for Economics, only Amartya Sen, with whom I have been privileged to collaborate, is also a philosopher. And, as I recorded in my acceptance speech for the Inamori Ethics Prize last year,¹ even students and supporters of Sen frequently neglect philosophy when they consider how to forward or fittingly honor his ideas. I note that the great Japanese economist Kotaro Suzumura, is a wonderful exception: he has continuously fostered the intersection between the two fields through seminars for younger scholars and in his own distinguished work. His younger colleague Reiko Gotoh, now a leading economist in her own right, is another exception: she has organized conferences and books dedicated to exploring these interactions, and she plays a pivotal role in the Human Development and Capability Association, an association dedicated to bringing philosophical insight to bear on the problems of development economics. (Amartya Sen and I are the two Founding Presidents of this Association, but the real work has been done by a group of younger scholars within which Gotoh is prominent.)

Why, then, is philosophy needed in debates about global welfare and inequality? It is useful to start by describing what development economics was like without philosophical input. For many years, approaches to poverty in the international development and policy-making world were obtuse in human terms. They focused on economic growth as the primary goal of development, and measured quality of life simply by looking at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. That crude measure, of course, did not even take distribution into account, and thus was utterly useless in confronting nations with a lot of poverty and high rates of inequality. And it was actually worse than useless, because it gave high marks to nations that contained huge inequalities, encouraging people to think that such nations (for example South Africa under apartheid) had done things right.

Moreover, as that example shows, the GDP approach also failed to take cognizance of other aspects of the quality of life that are not well correlated with economic advantage, even when distribution is factored in: aspects such as health, education, gender and racial justice. And once again, by suggesting that things were well done when nations increased their GDP, it positively distracted attention from these factors.

GDP, in short, eclipsed what really matters for people, which is the ability to lead lives that they value. As the late Mahbub Ul Haq, the distinguished Pakistani economist who inaugurated the UN Development Program's Human Development Reports, wrote in 1990, "The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth."

One step up, in terms of adequacy, is another common economic approach that measures quality of life in a nation by looking at either total or average utility, where utility is understood in terms of the satisfaction of preferences. The Utilitarian approach has the merit of caring about people: it measures

quality of life in terms of how people feel about their lives. And it has the great merit of equal concern that Jeremy Bentham, the founder of Utilitarianism, expressed by saying: “Each [is] to count for one, and none for more than one.” That is, the satisfaction of person A counts for the same as the satisfaction of person B, even if A is a peasant and B is a king. Each gets one vote. So the theory is potentially quite democratic—even, in the context of established hierarchy, radical. That is exactly what Bentham intended. People who denigrate Utilitarianism as cold-hearted, or in league with big business, often wrongly forget its radical origins and commitments.

Intentions are not everything, however, and there are four difficulties with the Utilitarian approach, when used as a measure of quality of life in a nation, that make it both less democratic than it seems and a misleading guide to public policy.

First, like the GDP approach, it aggregates across lives. A nation can get a very high amount of average or total utility so long as a lot of people are doing quite well, even if a few people at the bottom of the social ladder are suffering greatly. Indeed, the approach could justify the infliction of a very miserable life on an underclass, so long as this strategy raises the average satisfaction level. Even slavery and torture are ruled out—insofar as they are—only by uncertain empirical arguments claiming that slavery and torture are inefficient.

Second, like the GDP approach again, the Utilitarian approach aggregates across components of lives. The term “satisfaction,” like “pleasure,” the other term often used by Utilitarians as an all-purpose metric, suggests singleness and commensurability, where real life suggests diversity and incommensurability. Think about the satisfaction one feels in eating a good meal. How can that be compared to the pleasure or satisfaction one gets from helping a friend in difficulty, or raising a child, or listening to a harrowing but profound piece of music? If you were asked, “How satisfied are you with your life?” —the sort of question Utilitarian social scientists are fond of asking—you would be strongly inclined to say something like, “Well, my health is great, my work is going well, but one of my friends is sick and I’m very worried about that, and, besides, I’m very upset about racial justice in my country.” Utilitarian social scientists, however, do not permit that sort of normal complex human reply.

In short, the Utilitarian approach seems to care about people, but it doesn’t care about them all that deeply, and its commitment to a single metric effaces a great deal about how people seek and find value in their lives. I note that John Stuart Mill, Bentham’s critical follower, already made these two objections, and it is unfortunate that economists do not acquaint themselves with Mill’s work.

A third objection focuses on the social malleability of preferences and satisfactions. Preferences are not hard-wired: they respond to social conditions. When society has put some things out of reach for some people, they typically learn not to want those things: they form what we call *adaptive preferences*. Sometimes adaptation happens after the person wanted the thing initially: Jon Elster’s book, *Sour Grapes*, takes its title from the fable of the fox who starts calling the grapes sour after he finds that he can’t reach

them. Sometimes, however, people learn not to want the good things in the first place, because they are put off-limits for people of their gender, or race, or class. Women brought up on images of the proper woman as one who does not work outside the home, or who does not get very much schooling, often don't form a desire for such things, and thus they may report satisfaction with their state, even though opportunities that they would have valued are being denied them. By defining the social goal in terms of the satisfaction of actual preferences, Utilitarian approaches thus often reinforce the status quo, which may be very unjust.

A fourth and final objection notes that the Utilitarian approach focuses on satisfaction as a goal. Satisfaction is usually understood as a state or condition of the person that follows activity; it is not itself a form of activity, and it can even be achieved without the associated activity. For example, a person can feel satisfied about a job well done even though she has done nothing, but has been deluded into believing that she has. Philosopher Robert Nozick made this point vividly by imagining an "experience machine": hooked up to that, you would have the illusion that you were loving, working, eating, writing, and you would have the experiences of satisfaction associated with those activities—but in reality you would be doing nothing at all. Most people, bets Nozick, would not choose the experience machine. They would prefer a life of choice and activity, even knowing in advance that many of the activities would end in frustration. Most of his readers agree.

In short, the Utilitarian approach undervalues agency. Agency can be valued as a means to satisfaction, and here there can be agreement between Utilitarians and capability theorists, since we too emphasize the instrumental importance of freedom. Freedom to choose and act, however, is an end as well as a means, and it is this aspect that the standard Utilitarian view cannot capture.

A popular alternative to the Utilitarian approach is a group of approaches that urges the equal (or more equal) allocation of basic resources, understanding wealth and income to be such all-purpose resources. This approach has the merit of caring greatly about distribution. However, it, too, encounters formidable objections. First of all, income and wealth are not good proxies for what people are actually able to do and to be. People have differing needs for resources, if they are to attain a similar level of ability to function, and they also have different abilities to convert resources into functioning. Some of the pertinent differences are physical: a child needs more protein than an adult for healthy physical functioning, and a pregnant or lactating woman needs more nutrients than a non-pregnant woman. A sensible public policy would not give equal nutrition-related resources to all, but would (for example), spend more on the protein needs of children, since the sensible policy goal is not just spreading some money around, it is making people able to function. Money is just an instrument.

Some of the pertinent differences, moreover, are created by persistent social inequalities, and here the resource-based approach, like the approaches previously considered, proves an ally of the status quo. In order to put women and men in a similar position with respect to educational opportunity, in a society that has strongly devalued female education, we will have to spend more on female education than on male

education. If we want people with physical disabilities to be able to move around in society as well as so-called “normal” people, we will need to spend extra money on them, retrofitting buildings with ramps, buses with lifts, and so forth. In neither case does the resource-based approach tell us enough about how people are really doing. It could give high marks to a nation that ignores the protests of marginalized or subordinated groups.

Income and wealth are not adequate proxies for ability to function in many areas. They are especially bad proxies for social respect, inclusion, and non-humiliation. Even if we equalized wealth and income completely, that would not get rid of stigma and discrimination. There are some goods, moreover, that might be completely or largely absent in a society in which wealth and income are both reasonably high and pretty equally distributed. Such a society might still lack religious freedom, or the freedom of speech and association. Or it might have these and yet lack access to a reasonably unpolluted environment.

It was in response to these ethical deficiencies that the Capabilities Approach was born. Drawing insight from Aristotle and from the British socialists T. H. Green and Ernest Barker, Sen and I argued that the key question development needs to ask is, “What is each person able to do and to be?” Capabilities are defined as the substantive opportunities people have for valued choices. The first achievement of the Capabilities Approach is thus to shift the *space of comparison*: when nations are ranked and compared, we urge ranking them by capability, not GDP or satisfaction.

But which capabilities are the most important? Given my interest in normative theories of social justice and in constitutional law, I have taken the next step, asking *which capabilities should be the focus of our concern if our aim is to design a minimally just society*. Any use of the idea of capabilities for the purposes of normative law and public policy must ultimately take a stand on substance, saying that some capabilities are important and others less important, some good, and some (even) bad. Adam Smith, thinking of children deprived of education, said that their human powers were “mutilated and deformed.” If we imagine, instead, a child whose capacity for cruelty and the humiliation of others is starved and thwarted by familial and social development, and inhibited by the criminal law, we would not describe such a child as “mutilated and deformed,” nor would anybody suggest that all people had a constitutional entitlement to the free exercise of cruelty. Again, suppose that we were told that a particular child was never taught to be capable of whistling “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” while standing on her head. We would not say that this child’s human powers have been “mutilated and deformed,” because, even though the capability in question is not bad, like the capability for cruelty, it is just not very important.

My well-known Capabilities List is a provisional attempt to supply this ethical content, saying that the protection of ten central capabilities, up to a minimum threshold level, is necessary for any society that is going to claim to be even minimally just. I connect this threshold to the idea of human dignity, saying that only the protection of these ten capabilities gives people lives worthy of the (innate and inalienable) human dignity that all possess. I shall not discuss the contents of the list here, but I simply note that it is humble

and revisable, and that ample room is left for each nation to specify its thin content in accordance with its history and circumstances.² More recently, I have also extended this approach to address the entitlements of nonhuman animals.

From this account of my theory of justice it is possible to get a sense of why philosophy matters in the development debate. But justice is not the only philosophical issue development practitioners need to consider. They need, as well, to develop sophisticated and philosophically informed accounts of other key notions well treated by philosophers, such as: the nature of freedom; the meaning and significance of ethnic and religious pluralism; the nature of human welfare and happiness; the concepts of desire, preference, and emotion. There is also the over-arching meta-question about how one ought to attempt to justify an ethical or political theory (for example whether by seeking some indubitable foundation, as Plato thought, or by seeking the greatest fit and coherence among all the contending concerns, as John Rawls thought). We will not make progress unless we continually wrestle with all of these large questions, and economics, as I've said, has an unfortunate tendency to seek premature closure so that mathematical sophistication can take its happy course.

However, it is not enough to say, "The world needs philosophy." For philosophy takes many forms, some of those not conducive to a useful global dialogue about the enhancement of human welfare. To the task of supplying some norms for my own profession, I now turn.

II

Philosophy is many things. There are many world philosophical traditions, and in each there are different, usually opposing currents. More needs to be said, then, about what type or rather types of philosophy can really help the progress of humanity. In this section of my lecture I shall set out six criteria for philosophical work that can be truly helpful.

1. Rigor and Transparency

Philosophy, as I understand and love it, begins with the Socratic commitment to careful and explicit rational argument, and to transparency of speech. Socrates' aim was to show people the inner structure of their own thought, or, at times, the lack of clarity in their thought. He did this by eliciting hidden assumptions, arranging the premises in order, and showing what conflicts and contradictions emerged when all was set forth in the open. At every step, Socrates and the person being questioned have to agree: indeed Socrates famously insisted that he himself added nothing. He was simply a "midwife," eliciting thoughts that belonged to the person he talked to, and setting those thoughts in a perspicuous order.

This commitment to reason has social importance. As Socrates saw, most thought in political life is

sloppy, full of unclearly defined terms, fallacious reasoning, and hidden or non-so-hidden contradictions. When thought is sloppy, we don't make progress; we talk past one another rather than understanding one another and really deliberating. Socrates said that he was like a "gadfly," a stinging insect, on the back of the democracy, which he compared to a "noble but sluggish horse." In other words, making clear and rigorous arguments is a way of waking democracy up so that public deliberation is conducted in a more productive and less confused way.

Clarity in argument is also a way of respecting other people. Nothing is concealed, and nothing relies on privilege or esoteric knowledge. Rational argument is common to us all, and Socrates insisted that rational argument must be forthright and not marred by hidden areas of secrecy and privilege.

What this means is that philosophical argument in the public square should be written in a manner that is comprehensible to any person who makes a serious effort. Socrates approached people of many types and he always spoke in a way that all could understand, not just a small elite. Plato dramatizes this in the *Meno* by having Socrates speak with a slave boy, who, because of the oppression of enslaved populations, could not read or write. Nonetheless, this boy is able to understand quickly the structure of Socrates' argument, and he proves able even to come up with a complicated geometrical theorem, when suitably prompted.

What does this mean for philosophy today? For hundreds of years, in the Western tradition, political philosophers more or less followed Socrates—but in the early modern era they did so often by necessity rather than by choice. Social outsiders and nonconformists, including philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill, were not able to hold university positions, which required statements of orthodox Christian belief; so they were forced to publish in journals of popular opinion, or to write popular books. They kept their writing style clear because they knew that they had, and had to have, a wide public audience. With the growth of the modern university we have gained a lot. Those of us who are lucky enough to teach in rights-protecting liberal democracies have a secure income. If we once attain tenure, we cannot be removed for political reasons, or indeed for any reasons short of criminal misconduct; and we have guarantees of academic freedom. These things are very precious, and we must fight to retain them. But with that freedom has gone, at times, a tendency to write for elites only, for one's own professional in-group, and to refuse to use a transparent language that addresses all people.

I have no objection to dense and even technical arguments, which are frequently valuable in political philosophy, as in economics. Philosophy should not leap ahead to attractive conclusions, forgetting about the deep theoretical issues that are often an integral part of justifying one's conclusions or the complicated matter of working out the details of an argument. Nor am I saying that even public philosophy should not be difficult. Most great works of political philosophy, from Plato's *Republic* to John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, are very difficult books. But they are not esoteric books: they are routinely taught to undergraduates. Furthermore, a philosopher who writes a long and difficult treatise is also, I believe, then

obliged to create a more accessible version for the general public (as Rawls did, for example, in *Justice as Fairness*); and that more public version must be one that respects readers, and argues with them, rather than urging them to join a little elite cult. It's hard to teach young philosophers to write such public books and articles, when newspapers and journals are rapidly turning away from intellectual content, and when the places that will publish serious philosophy are becoming fewer. But we should all care about this and learn to do it well.

Above all, there are two types of philosophical writing that are not helpful to the progress of humanity. The first is cultish writing, writing that does not respect the reader as an equal. Philosophers are flawed human beings, and many of them want power over others. It is all too easy for them to succumb to the lure of esotericism, saying: "Become my follower, my initiate, and only then can you comprehend the important truths that I intend to reveal." That form of philosophy, however, is totalitarian; Socrates, however much he criticized the actual practices of democracy, was a democrat.

The line between baneful esotericism and necessary difficulty is not obvious or undisputed. I consider Martin Heidegger to be a central case of baneful esotericism, and of course his ideas developed in connection with his adulation of Hitler and his desire to play a role in that fascist government. Transparency was not a goal that he valued. But Heidegger's great German predecessor Hegel is also often guilty of esoteric and jargon-laden writing. Although Hegel was certainly a liberal republican, not a totalitarian, and was also, I think, an important philosopher, he allowed the professionalization of philosophy within the German university to lead him astray into unsound habits—as was already observed by Goethe, in his *Conversations with Eckermann*. Because Hegel is both important and deeply flawed, we have had a whole industry of making Hegel available for the current conversation within political thought. The work of Charles Taylor, my predecessor in the Kyoto Prize for Thought and Ethics, is a central case of this reappropriation. But Taylor's task would have been easier had Hegel written more clearly!

The second thing that is not helpful is showy flashy writing. Philosophy is serious business, and when philosophers show off, drawing attention to themselves, trying to be pop stars in our era of evanescent celebrity, that too disserves the cause of philosophy. I shall not name names here, but it could be done!

2. Respect for Other Disciplines

When philosophy began in the Greek and Roman world (and also in the various philosophical traditions of Asia), it basically contained all rational inquiry. What was outside was tradition, mysticism, and so forth. But philosophy at that early date contained physics, chemistry, biology, cosmology, linguistics, and even history. Those disciplines gradually spun off, like planets from a star, and became their own separate disciplines. But until the twentieth century philosophy still contained what we now call the social sciences: economics, psychology, anthropology, political science, and sociology. The American

Philosophical Association at its founding in the late nineteenth century prominently included psychology, and early presidents of the association were psychologists, or, like the great William James, both philosophers and psychologists. As I mentioned in Part I of this lecture, economics was a part of philosophy in the time of Adam Smith in the eighteenth century (whose professorial chair was in Philosophy), and of Karl Marx in the nineteenth (whose doctorate was also in philosophy). And, as I've mentioned, this concern with philosophy continued into the twentieth century with the work of Keynes and Hayek.

As I've said in Part I of this lecture, this separation has had costs on the side of those social sciences, who too often forget that they might have something to learn from philosophy. But the same thing is clearly true of philosophers: being in their own separate department, they forget that they need to care about the other disciplines and to draw on them for illumination. The need for cross-disciplinary curiosity and learning arises in different ways in connection with different philosophical problems. Historians of philosophy have a particular need to understand the cultural and political history of the regions in which the philosophers they study lived and worked. Philosophers working on the emotions have an urgent need to understand the contributions of psychologists and anthropologists, and in my work on the emotions I have drawn extensively on these disciplines. Normative political philosophy of the sort I do, working on development issues, has an urgent need to understand what economists and political scientists have been doing in development studies, and it is not surprising that we now see graduate programs called "development studies" that promote this sort of interdisciplinary conversation—though too few of these programs give a secure home to philosophy.

I would add that political philosophers working on development need to learn a lot more history and politics—and law—than they usually do when they write about regions of the world not their own. When I began work on the book that later became *Women and Human Development*, I noticed that quite a few good philosophers were addressing the problems of women in developing countries—but typically they would take one example from Iran, one example from China, and so forth, without engaging in detailed study of any particular region of the world. The result was that they were unable to contextualize their examples, not knowing how regional, religious, cultural, legal, and historical differences within the country affected the particular case they observed. I decided to do things differently, and I engaged in a deep multi-regional study of India, its history, its political and legal traditions, before writing anything. From that time onward, I have always focused my work on India, and I learn more all the time. Other members of our multi-national Human Development and Capability Association contribute expertise about other areas of the world.

When knowledge was smaller and there were fewer disciplines, it was easier for philosophers to know what they needed to know. Aristotle was a great physicist, psychologist, economist, etc., as well as what we would now call a philosopher—although I note that even he drew the line at history: he asked his students to write up the histories of 153 known political communities so he could use the results of their

research. Even much later, it was possible for Adam Smith to be one of the greatest economists, a philosopher of distinction, and a professor of legal thought; it was possible, too, for William James to achieve eminence in both philosophy and psychology. But now that knowledge has expanded and the disciplines have separated, philosophers must contrive forms of collaboration and partnership to provide access to essential knowledge.

One way philosophers can learn what they need to learn is by being part of an interdisciplinary university community, and I have always found being partly in a law school especially fulfilling in that regard, since it then is possible to work and teach with economists, historians, and experts in a variety of other areas. Co-authorship is also valuable, though too rare in philosophy. I especially value my co-authored projects with legal economist Saul Levmore, which have taught me a great deal and made my work more fun. I teach Global Inequality with another economist, and I teach issues of discrimination and sexuality with an expert in constitutional law. The modern university is fond of hyper-specialization, and we must each find our own ways of avoiding being trapped.

3. Respect for Religious Belief and Practice

For much of its history in the Western tradition, although not during the medieval era, philosophy has been a skeptical critic of dominant forms of religious belief and practice. The pre-Socratic philosophers challenged traditional religious accounts of natural phenomena, which invoked the activity of gods in our world, by producing naturalistic causal accounts of how things happen. Socrates was charged with subverting the gods of the city and inventing new gods. Aristotle's god was an abstraction, totally different from the gods that most people worshipped. Most leading philosophers of the eighteenth century, similarly, were Deists: that is, they accepted the existence of some type of god, but understood God in a rationalistic way, as an immanent order in nature. Immanuel Kant held that religion should be practiced within the limits of reason. Rousseau sought to substitute a Deist "civil religion" for the existing religions, Catholic and Protestant, of the France of his day. In the nineteenth century, philosophers such as Auguste Comte, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill went even further: they argued that religion had no social utility and would soon wither away, to be replaced by a humanistic philosophical doctrine of human brotherhood. Although Karl Marx's views were in many respects very different from the views of this group, Marx agreed with them that religion was a primitive force, an "opiate of the masses," and he anticipated its demise.

Today philosophers should not think this way. We observe that under conditions of freedom, and indeed wherever there is not brutal repression, people in every part of the world turn to religions for insight, community, meaning, and guidance. Many people reject religion, but many reasonable people do not. Moreover, among the people who consider themselves religious in some regard, there is not much

agreement about what that commitment entails.

Some religions are rationalist in the manner of eighteenth century Deism. Among those I count my own religion, Reform Judaism, which was inspired by the rationalist ideals of Immanuel Kant and Moses Mendelssohn. Those religions have an easy time reconciling their commitments with those of secular philosophy. The same is at least in principle true of nontheistic religions such as Buddhism and Taoism. Among the Christian faiths, Roman Catholicism has a profound rationalist aspect, and typically values secular philosophy very highly. For example, all the major Catholic universities require extensive preparation in philosophy for all undergraduate students, separate from any requirements they may impose in theology. But some religions are made deeply uneasy by philosophy's claim to understand the world by reason. Among those I would count most forms of Christian Protestantism, particularly in the evangelical form so common in the U.S., and I would also classify here the form of Mormonism that is practiced today, although in an earlier era Mormonism was far more rationalistic.

Respecting one's fellow citizens means respecting their choice to live their lives in their own way, by their own doctrines, so long as they do not invade the basic rights of others. This idea of respect, which John Rawls has called the idea of "political liberalism", requires a lot from political institutions. First, it requires extensive protections for freedom of religious belief and practice, wherever that freedom does not violate the rights of others. Saying what those limits are is a very difficult matter, and my own nation is currently embroiled in struggles over what people may do in the name of religion to express their disapproval of gays and lesbians, or transgender people. Often that disapproval expresses itself in ways that many, including I myself, take to violate those people's fundamental rights. But these disputes are far from settled.

Second, equal respect requires a vigilant opposition to any form of established church—which, even if it does not invade the liberty of non-adherents, does always send signals of hierarchy and exclusion to outsiders. And, third, it also requires, in connection with that idea of non-establishment, that basic political principles must be formulated in a neutral language, neither that of any particular religion, nor even taking sides in the larger dispute between religion and non-religion. Principles must be abstemious, expressed in a thin sort of minimalist language, not using metaphysical concepts that belong to one tradition rather than another. Otherwise, even if freedom is respected, we get what I have called "expressive subordination," where society announces that one doctrine is preferred and others dispreferred. And in order to respect religious liberty sufficiently, principles must also be narrow, not pronouncing on all matters on which citizens differ.

Political philosophers, then, should operate in that restricted space. They ought to argue for principles that could ultimately prove acceptable to all citizens in a pluralistic society, in what Rawls calls an "overlapping consensus," without requiring them to abandon their religious commitments or to convert to some dominant religion in order to accept the principles. The principles philosophers propose should not

denigrate or marginalize any on grounds of their religion. This will require a practice of political philosophy very different from that of Marx, Mill, and Comte, and even the Deists. Philosophers should not proclaim that we live in a post-religious age, or that religion is the opiate of the masses. They should not even support policies such as French *laïcité*, which favors non-religion and strongly disfavors religion in the public square. They should seek principles that can ultimately be embraced by all citizens who endorse basic values of equal respect and are willing to respect the good-faith views of others.

How could such a meeting ground possibly be found? The answer already exists in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other founding documents of the international Human Rights movement: namely, in ethical ideas of human dignity, human equality, and right—and, I'd add, human capabilities. As the framers of the Universal Declaration discovered, these ideas can unite people otherwise different in religion and world-view. Some will interpret the idea of human dignity in connection with a religious doctrine, some will not. But the ethical idea itself all can accept. And religions must agree to accept the constraints of that political idea of equal human dignity.

But why should religious people accept an idea that does not have religion in it? Doesn't this express a skepticism about religion, or willingness to give it a minor role? Not at all. As Catholic thinker Jacques Maritain, one of the framers of the Universal Declaration, wrote, the reason for not including your own religious ideas in a political doctrine that involves other people who don't share your religion is not skepticism or frivolity, it is respect. Respecting other people means respecting their equal freedom to choose a doctrine by which to live, and they will not be fully free if the political core doctrines announce that a particular religion is the preferred basis for the political ideas.

For these reasons I have insisted that the capabilities list is not a comprehensive account of the worthwhile human life, but, rather, a narrow and non-metaphysical list for political purposes that can ground political entitlements in a pluralistic society. Although my interpreters often ignore this part of my argument, I consider it especially important.

4. Curiosity about and Respect for the World's Many Philosophical Traditions and Interest in Establishing a Cross-Cultural Philosophical Dialogue

All departments of philosophy in the U.S. and Europe are really departments of Western philosophy. Only rarely is there any inclusion of the philosophical traditions of Asia and Africa. If those traditions are taught it is usually in other departments: religion, South Asian Studies, East Asian Studies, Near Eastern Studies, etc. But of course that is itself distorting, leading to a neglect of the mainstream philosophical issues within those traditions: for example to a focus on mystical religion in the study of India and a neglect of India's traditions of logic, epistemology, and philosophy of science. Above all, there is little dialogue between scholars who pursue Western philosophy and scholars expert in these other traditions. A further

problem is that, while Western philosophy gets coverage over its entire history, Asian philosophy is thought to be truly Asian only when it is very old: thus people think about Confucius and Mencius when they think about “Chinese thought,” but neglect the creative work being done by contemporary Asian philosophers; or they consider ancient Hindu and Buddhist thought to be truly Indian, while neglecting the great twentieth-century Indian philosopher Rabindranath Tagore. Western philosophers don’t make the same mistake about their own traditions: they know that philosophy is a living and growing set of arguments, that John Rawls is a part of the tradition that began with Socrates.

There is no easy “fix” for these problems. In particular, I am a stickler for linguistic expertise, and I will not even consider for a faculty appointment anyone who does not demonstrate the highest level of expertise in the original languages of the philosophers he or she studies. That’s hard enough: but then you have to insist on the same standards for Ph.D. students. So it probably makes no sense for any but the largest departments to try to be pluralistic in the historical traditions they cover, since it’s hard enough to find graduate students competent to work on Plato or Descartes in the original languages, and it would right now be impossible to find a critical mass of U.S. graduate students who had the linguistic preparation to work on Buddhist logic or on Mencius. (Tagore is different, since he wrote all his philosophical works in English.) The study of Islamic philosophy is only slightly different: there are indeed quite a few excellent scholars of ancient Greek philosophy who also know Classical Arabic, and who can therefore work on the dialogue the Arab philosophers had with Aristotle and Plato. Still, few of their students are equipped to follow them; and typically the scholars themselves are not very interested in more recent philosophical work in the Islamic tradition.

So what do I recommend?

First, I recommend much greater awareness of the one-sidedness of our current approach. Thus, the expression “ancient philosophy” should never be used as it now is in the U.S., to refer to the Greco-Roman tradition. If that’s what people mean, let them say, “Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy,” as I have long insisted and annoyed my colleagues into doing. And if people try to use the word “classics” to mean “the Greek and Roman classics,” I give the same reply: you don’t mean the Sanskrit or African or Chinese or Japanese classics, so you should say what you mean. Precise language makes us aware of the partiality of our own approach, and the rich plurality of the world.

Second, and more substantive: philosophers should search for opportunities for dialogue and learning. One avenue is co-teaching, often a way to learn more about an unfamiliar tradition without having to learn the languages. I’ve co-taught courses with colleagues in the South Asian Studies department, for example. Another strategy is conferences. I recently attended a very illuminating conference on the philosophy of crime and punishment in Hong Kong, at which we had illuminating discussions comparing Asian and Western traditions. My university is hosting a conference on African philosophy this spring, inviting a group of leading experts in that area, most of them from Africa, to exchange ideas with those of

us whose primary orientation is Western, and to see what avenues of cooperation might be opened up. This sort of thing is really essential, if global problems are to be confronted on a basis of mutual respect and understanding.

5. Concern with Previously Excluded Voices

Western philosophy has not simply excluded the rest of the world, it has excluded, for the most part, and for most of its history, the voices of women and racial minorities, and of people with disabilities. Today this is much less true, and a great part of my own work in philosophy is feminist in nature. Feminist philosophy today is an influential part of philosophy, and it is internally diverse, containing many approaches and arguments. The same is true of the philosophy of racial equality and the philosophy of disability. These changes in philosophy were long overdue, and they have been extremely valuable. However, they are not yet sufficiently integrated into the whole work of the profession, and this integration, and the perpetual atmosphere of healthy critique it prompts, must continue, if philosophy is to contribute justly to the service of humanity.

6. Concern with Real Human Life in All Its Messiness and Complexity

Philosophers are often fond of neat and highly general theories that omit a great deal of the complexity of life. General theories can illuminate, and we need them; but in the ethical and political area they will impede understanding if they omit too much of the messy detail and complexity of real human life. This is one reason why I have long insisted that philosophy needs a partnership with literature. But philosophy itself should educate itself to understand the messier aspects of human life better.

Study of the emotions and the imagination, once central topics in Western philosophy, from Plato straight through the medieval period to the eighteenth century fell out of fashion for more than two hundred years, and this was an immense loss. I've tried to restore the area of emotion to the center of philosophical work, where it was when Aristotle wrote the *Rhetoric* or the Stoics their major ethical works.

I think this insurgency of mine has succeeded, and there is currently a lot of good work in the area of emotion, and, more generally, what is known as "moral psychology." But we always need to beware of simplification and reduction. We need, for example, to bear in mind the fact that emotions are in part social artifacts and vary with the cultural tradition within which people grow up. This makes their study very difficult. But complexity and difficulty should not prevent us from confronting the whole issue!

Another important aid to philosophy at this point is a partnership with the study of literature. I have spent part of my career fostering this partnership, and am currently engaged in the related enterprise of bringing literature into legal education. Literature needs the normative guidance of philosophy if it is to

help humanity. Literature can embody bad values, such as misogyny and retributivism. Indeed it is safe to say that one of the main sources of pernicious retributivism in modern culture is the almost universal popularity of literary works that teach small children that it is a great thing when wrongdoers get some gruesome punishment. Here I want to comment the great Japanese artist Hayao Miyazaki for creating a different type of art for children, a world that is full of gentle, well-intentioned people, where there are no villains who must be punished, and the creative imagination soars. In any case, a dialogue with literature, both admiring and critical, seems very important for any philosophy that intends to come to grips with the complexity of human life.

Philosophy can serve humanity. And indeed it ought to. The world needs the ideas that good ethical and political philosophy contains; and we who lead privileged lives in the academy would be selfish if we did not try hard to bring those ideas into the world where social and political decisions are made. But philosophy also needs to criticize itself, and in some ways to change itself, if it is to serve the world well, and it is fortunate that today there are so many young people eagerly taking up that challenge.

¹ Different versions published as “Philosophy and Economics in the Capabilities Approach: An Essential Dialogue,” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 16 (2015), 1-15, and as “Economics Still Needs Philosophy,” *Review of Social Economy* 74 (2016), 229-47.

² Here is the list:

1. Life.

Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. Bodily Health.

Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

3. Bodily Integrity.

Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought.

Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one’s own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one’s mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.

5. Emotions.

Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. Practical Reason.

Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s

life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

7. Affiliation.

A. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)

B. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

8. Other Species.

Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. Play.

Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control over one's Environment.

A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.

B. Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.