

The PPE Enterprise: A Substantive Research Programme

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* This draft has benefitted from comments on an earlier draft made by participants in the PPE seminar held in New Orleans in March 2008, and also from further discussion with Geoffrey Brennan and Hartmut Kliemt.

1. Introduction

Consider the following list: Brian Barry, James Buchanan, G.A. Cohen, James Coleman, Ronald Dworkin, Jon Elster, John Harsanyi, Amartya Sen, and Michael Walzer. What do these people have in common? Clearly they are/were all distinguished academics, and all are also men, but these are not the common features I wish to emphasize. I want to argue that a major part (but not all) of the research output of these scholars can be seen as contributions to a research program that I will call PPE. This is not (just) to say that these academics work in the specific disciplines of Politics, Philosophy and Economics (or specified sub-fields of these disciplines) – since some of them might easily be labelled with other disciplinary tags, and there are many other distinguished political scientists, philosophers and economists whose work does not fit within the research program that I identify as PPE. Nor is it (just) to say that their work is in some sense ‘interdisciplinary’, ‘multidisciplinary’, or ‘cross-disciplinary’, since at least some of the work that lies within the PPE research programme is most obviously categorised as lying within a single discipline – although it will generally have some resonance in other disciplines¹.

In order to locate and begin to defend the claim that there exists a substantive and valuable PPE research program, I will need to give some more precise and substantive account of the boundary conditions that define that research program²; and I will attempt this task below, but first I want to say something about the use of ‘PPE’ as a label.

Perhaps the most obvious use of the label ‘PPE’ relates to undergraduate degree programs in Philosophy, Politics and Economics that owe their origin and title to the program introduced at the University of Oxford in 1920. This program was novel in Oxford since it allowed, for the first time, the study of philosophy without the study of Latin and Greek and was designed, in part, to fit the needs of graduates entering the civil service and public life, where it was felt that the traditional classical education was of diminishing relevance.

¹ Of course, the list of names with which I began is intended only to be illustrative and it would be easy to extend it, in resisting that temptation I do not intend any claim of priority for those included over those excluded.

² I leave the discussion of the disciplinary and historical dimensions of PPE to the companion papers by Brennan and Kliemt respectively.

The Oxford program also reflected the rapid growth of Economics programs at a range of British Universities including Cambridge, where the Economics Tripos was established in 1903³. But I want to use the label PPE to indicate a research program, rather than a program of undergraduate study (although I will return to the possible connection between the two). And the choice of the label PPE for this research program is not entirely natural - in particular, while I do want to argue that the research program I identify ranges across disciplinary boundaries and that it includes contributions from philosophy, politics and economics, I do not want to restrict the research program to these three disciplines, or any particular mix of them. On the one hand, there are elements of several other disciplines present in the research program that I seek to identify – including at least Law, Sociology and Psychology. On the other hand, the research program allows of a relatively wide range of specific contributions some of which are mono-disciplinary, while others operate in more complex relationship to traditional disciplines.

Alternative possible labels for the research program I have in mind might include ‘moral sciences’⁴ and some version of ‘political economy’⁵; but the former now seems hopelessly quaint, while the latter is so widely and variously used as to be almost meaningless. A neologism might be in order - but PPE is both reasonably familiar and relatively neutral in that it does not carry any particular ideological baggage and so I settle on this term, but warn the reader that I will feel free to be stipulative with regard to this specific use of the term.

³ For discussion of the then new Economics Tripos at Cambridge, see Gay, E.F. 1903. The New Economics Tripos at Cambridge University. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 17(3): 492-496. For general discussion of economics, ethics and political economy in the late 19th and early 20th century see Coates, A.W. (1996). *Utilitarianism, Oxford Idealism and Cambridge Economics*, . In P. Groenewegen (Ed.), *Economics and Ethics*. London: Routledge.

⁴ For use of ‘moral sciences’ see Boulding, K. 1969. Economics as Moral Science. *American Economic Review*. 59(1): 1-12. The parallel German language term was used by Simmel, G. (1892). *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft: Eine Kritik der ethischen Grundbegriffe*: W. Hertz.

⁵ On the various uses of ‘political economy’ see Groenewegen, P. (1987). Political Economy and Economics. In J. Eatwell, M. Millgate, and P. Newman (Eds.), *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*. London: MacmillanWaterman, A.M.C. 2002. New Political Economies Then and Now: Economic Theory and the Mutation of Political Doctrine. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. 61(1): 13-51., and Waterman, A.M.C. 2002. New Political Economies Then and Now: Economic Theory and the Mutation of Political Doctrine. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. 61(1): 13-51.

The major part of this essay is divided into four further sections. In the next section I provide a rough sketch of the PPE research programme - a sketch in the sense that I aim only to indicate the general shape of the enterprise, its boundaries and its features. In section 3, I offer a slightly more detailed account of some aspects of the PPE programme, in the hope that the combination of a sketchy overview and one or two more detailed close-ups will serve to characterise the program. Section 4 then attempts to defend the claim that there is some value in recognizing PPE as a research program and refers back to the linkage between PPE as a research program and PPE as a degree program. Section 5 offers some final thoughts.

2. A Sketch

The idea of a research program is not particularly well defined - and I will attempt no formal definition here⁶ - but I intend to use the phrase in a rather generous way. One might, for example, think that any well-organized scholar has a 'research program' when considering and planning her own research work over the medium term horizon; one might also think that a distinct research program can be defined in relation to each well-specified research question, regardless of how many, or few, individual researchers are engaged on the task. Both of these thoughts are reasonable, but I want to focus on a broader idea of a research program: one that extends, at least potentially, over many specific research questions as well as over many individual researchers and over time; and one that might be composed of a significant number of sub-programs or themes, but one that is still sufficiently integrated as to be recognizable. The relatively recent emergence of bio-engineering or nanotechnology might serve as examples of the sort of thing that I have in mind. Both share the characteristics of bringing together a variety of elements from a range of approaches and disciplines to confront a particular class of research questions that have both theoretical and practical significance, and I want to suggest that PPE can be seen in a similar way, although the fact that PPE might be argued to pre-date the more specialist disciplines that we now take for granted makes the analogy less than perfect. The examples

⁶ This is certainly not the place to address the Popper/Kuhn/Lakatos debate on the nature of scientific progress and the nature and role of research programs.

of bio-engineering and nanotechnology also have the property that they are capable of re-invigorating and re-informing relevant standard disciplines and at the end of this essay I will suggest that PPE may also be able to play this role.

So, what is the general shape of the PPE enterprise? I want to suggest that this question is best answered by reference to a class of substantive research questions and the connections between those questions, together with a set of broad commitments regarding appropriate approaches to those questions - this in contrast to an approach which might proceed by reference to specific disciplinary intersections or methodological principals. I do not want to suggest that I have in mind a very specific list of detailed research questions and approaches that delimits the PPE enterprise - in fact, I will try to do no more than identify a broad family of research questions that, in my view, identifies PPE, and insist that it is also relatively ecumenical in its willingness to embrace methodological variety⁷. Of course, the danger is that in emphasizing the breadth of the PPE enterprise I will encourage the belief that it might include almost everything, so that it is also incumbent upon me to say something about what PPE, as I conceive it, excludes. But I will begin by making a few general points that are intended to locate PPE in relation to some of the more obvious landmarks.

My first point is that PPE takes seriously both the individual and the polity - and is concerned with the connection between them. That is, it recognizes that many of the specific research questions of interest can be asked at multiple levels and that the answers given at these various levels must inform each other. Of course, within the PPE enterprise some sub-programs may work from the individual level toward the socio-political, while others may work in the opposite direction, but in general those engaged in PPE will accept that the relationship between individual level analysis and social or political level analysis is both crucial and complex. Another way of putting this point is that the PPE enterprise recognizes the force of both agency and structure - and specifically recognizes that many of the most interesting research questions lie at the fault line between these two forces.

⁷ So that PPE is identified as a cluster of activities that share a 'family resemblance' rather than a set defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for inclusion.

A second and similar point is that PPE takes seriously both the normative and the positive aspects of analysis - and again is concerned with their interconnection. This involves recognizing, at a variety of levels, the interplay between the feasible and the desirable, and therefore the interplay between the analysis of individual and political behaviour and the analysis of appropriate normative criteria.

A third, and more methodological, point is that PPE is committed to a broadly analytic and propositional approach. While a variety of styles of analysis and detailed approaches are certainly represented within PPE, there is at least a common grammar of argument that allows communication across these various styles - so that while researchers within the PPE research program may differ in their substantive views on both positive and normative issues, their disagreements can be expressed, and their points of difference analysed, in a manner that is meaningful to all. For example, while there are differences in the extent to which PPE researchers will regard rational choice theory as a valuable contribution to either positive or normative political theory, the debate on these questions can be conducted within bounds that are generally acceptable to both sides. As a group, PPE researchers are not dogmatic in insisting on the purity of any particular position (whether methodological or substantive) but are, in principle, open to a variety of argumentative starting points and content to let the argument lead where it may. In this way PPE is certainly not a doctrine.

So far, these three points have done no more than give a vague flavour of the PPE research program as a flexible and analytic debate on the relations between the individual and society that incorporates both positive and normative analysis. This is a good starting point, but I must be rather clearer than this.

The major substantive themes within the PPE literature over the recent past (as exemplified, for example, by the papers published in the journal *Politics, Philosophy and Economics*) might be characterized as relating to four main clusters of concepts which we might summarise as: freedom/liberty/autonomy, social order/co-operation/conflict, justice/fairness/equality, and democracy/deliberation/public reason. Crosscutting these substantive themes we might identify a number of broad approaches - those stemming from a rational choice perspective, those stemming from a more traditional normative political theory perspective, an evolutionary perspective, a behavioural perspective, and so on. In

this way we might build up a matrix view of the PPE research program as illustrated below, where we might identify each element of the matrix as a particular sub-program within the overall research program.

But this matrix approach misses an important aspect of the PPE research program as I understand it. While it is true that PPE includes these various more specific research projects it is a key feature of the overall PPE program that it operates to bring these various elements into contact with each other in ways that might be seen to reshape the structure of the matrix, rendering the boundaries that distinguish one sub-field from another at least permeable and at best redundant. In this way it is the dynamic properties of the PPE program - its attempt to bring together approaches and debates - as much as its static properties - the particular approaches and debates that it encompasses - that are of definitional significance.

A matrix view of PPE

	Freedom...	Social Order...	Justice...	Democracy...
Rational Choice theory				
Normative political theory				
Evolutionary theory				
Behavioural theory				
.....				

3. Some Further Detail

In this section I offer a slightly more detailed picture of some particular aspects of the PPE research program or of some of the constituent sub-programs. This might be thought of as tracing a specific path through the more general PPE domain, but it should be clear that this path is only one of many.

The path I have selected might be termed "the winding road from good to right"⁸ and illustrates a structural relationship between, *inter alia*, elements of economic theory and decision theory on the one hand and the teleological approach to ethical theory and political philosophy on the other - as played out in the political context. This fits with the view that, in much PPE work, Politics provides the research question and institutional framework while Economics and Philosophy provide modes and methods of analysis. In terms of the matrix sketched above, we might be located broadly in the top two rows, but ranging over several columns. The two most basic ingredients to this structure are debates over theories of value and debates over theories of selection or choice at the individual and political levels. A theory of value has as its central core the identification of the good, while a theory of selection or choice is concerned with the way in which the good may be achieved; that is, the selection of the right means to the good end - perhaps by the choice of particular actions, policies or institutions.

In the setting of mainstream economics, the most familiar theory of value is most frequently expressed in terms of preference satisfaction and represented in the idea of individual utility, while the selection theory is provided by the theory of individually rational choice. These same ideas of interests and preferences on the one hand and rationality on the other have also formed a point of departure for a substantial branch of the modern ethical and political debate - although here there is much less acceptance of the appropriateness of any view that privileges either preferences or rationality. In the normative debate there are a wide range of theories of value competing for attention - or claiming their place within a pluralist view of value - while in the political debate attention has focused on democratic selection methods.

A simple list of questions will serve to illustrate the complexity of the winding road from good to right. What is the relationship between personal preferences, values and human well-being, are values subjective or objective, and how do preferences and values inform the notion of the good? Are preferences, interests or values comparable on a single scale,

⁸ See Griffin, J. (1993). The Winding Road from Good to Right. In R.G. Frey, and C.W. Morris (Eds.), *Value, Welfare and Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This sub-program was also a theme of the collection in Hamlin, A., Ed. (1996). *Ethics and Economics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. This section draws on the structure of the introduction to that collection.

and how are we to make comparisons of value across different persons? Does rationality imply certain interests, or is it concerned solely with the choice of means relative to any pre-specified set of goals, and what is the relationship between rationality and morality? What restrictions might there be on the idea of maximizing the good, can rights and other features of our moral intuitions be incorporated into the analysis? How can one account for fairness or equity as an aspect of the good, and how does it bear on the selection of actions and institutions? What is the good of democracy, and how is this accounted for by the institutions that constitute democracy? What are the links between rationality at the level of the individual and democracy at the political level?

In the face of such a barrage of questions, we might proceed by identifying what might be thought of as a sequence of staging posts on the road from good to right (although the order of these posts should not be taken to imply that there is a single well-defined route). The first such staging post questions the basic understanding of the ideas of preference and utility. Although the word 'utility' is central to the vocabularies of economics and ethics, and the concept of utility is central to the economic theory of value, there exists a lively and continuing debate as to the meaning of utility and its relationship to other key concepts such as preference, well-being, welfare and good. The link with preferences is especially important because of the role of preferences in the theory of rational choice, so that a foundational link between utility as a basis of value and preferences as the basis of rational choice would provide deep connections between the two major parts of the economic analysis.

The debate might be said to begin with the distinction between abstract and substantive accounts of utility and, within the substantive camp, the further distinction between the subjective and objective approaches. Modern economics formally subscribes to the abstract view of utility, but this does not prevent economists from sliding into more substantive usage (Broome. 1991; 1991; Sen. 1991). A key step in the debate then concerns the relationship between utility and the idea of the good of the individual concerned. At one extreme some might suggest that utility and good are extensionally equivalent, while at the opposite extreme some might suggest that utility and good are entirely independent of each other. As is usually the case, while these two extreme positions might find relatively few

supporters, the debate in the middle ground is unresolved (Broome. 1978; Ellsberg. 1954; Scanlon. 1975; Sen. 1981; Tversky. 1969).

The second staging post in our journey then introduces the idea of second or higher order preferences - that is, preferences over preferences - and the implication that individuals may exert at least some control over their first-order preferences. If such higher order preferences are recognized, how do they bear on the theory of value, or on the theory of rational choice? One way of thinking of this debate is in terms of its relationship to the abstract, preference based, theory of utility (and, possibly, value). Does the move to higher order preferences offer an escape from the criticisms of preference satisfaction theories and so provide a more reliable account of a preference based theory of value? In short, if I have both a first order preference or desire to **F** and a second order preference which supports the first order preference in the sense that I might rightly claim to desire to desire to **F**, do I value **F**? And if so, how do my values, so conceived, relate to the good? There are other issues that the move to higher order preferences may illuminate. The debate here touches on the issues of freedom of the will and determinism, and the discussion of weakness of will or akrasia (Ainslee. 2002; Frankfurt. 1971; Harman. 1993; Jeffrey. 1974; Lewis. 1989; Schelling. 1978).

A third staging post focuses on the issues of interpersonal comparability and commensurability. The question of the commensurability of values arises in any pluralist theory of value - that is, any theory which recognizes more than one value, while the question on interpersonal comparisons arises whenever we set out to take the distinction between persons to be significant. At one extreme, a pure utilitarianism might insist on complete commensurability of all aspects of value and across all individuals; at the opposite extreme some might resist any attempt to aggregate or trade-off distinct values or distinct lives, again, the middle ground between these extremes is much fought over (Chang. 1997; Elster and Roemer. 1991; Griffin. 1977; 1986; Raz. 1986; Sen. 1979).

By now, various connections between our staging posts are beginning to emerge - for example the move to render values more objective might be expected to reduce at least some of the difficulties associated with interpersonal comparisons of value - even though it is consistent with a hard pluralism in which values themselves may be incommensurable.

This is not to say that a position taken on any issue at one staging post will fully determine positions taken elsewhere - but merely to underline the interconnections across issues and the desirability of coherence.

A fourth staging post relates to the relationship between rationality and morality. The project of exploring the possibility of integrating rationality and morality - or exposing their incompatibility - has been a major theme of the PPE literature (Baier. 1977; Gauthier. 1967; 1986; Sen. 1974). A major theme of this debate has been strategic interaction among rational individuals and the ensuing collective action and related problems that may arise. The (in)ability of rational agents to resolve these problems (perhaps by reference to higher order preferences or other devices) and the exploration of the limits of rationality and the relationship between these limits and the ideas of conventions and social norms has provided fertile ground for analysis from a variety of perspectives (Elster. 1979; 1983; 1985; 2000). At the same time, the broadly contractarian approach to questions of morality and justice adopted (in very different forms) by Rawls, Harsanyi, Buchanan and Gauthier, among others, again drew parallels between rationality and morality.

As already hinted, the fifth staging post is provided by the topic of social norms and conventions. Rawls provides one of the starting points of the modern literature in this area with the fundamental distinction between the summary conception of rules and the practice conception of rules (Rawls. 1955), and the differing forms of argument which are required to justify rules of each type. Others attempt to link norms and rationality at the foundational level by suggesting that to think something rational is to accept a norm that permits that thing (Gibbard. 1985) or look for the link between rationality and norms at the social level of collective action and coordination problems (Pettit. 1990). Norms, on this type of account, emerge from the repeated interaction of rational agents and are sustained by rationality, so that a behavior pattern gains approval and becomes a norm which individuals rationally accept (Binmore. 2005; Skyrms. 1996; Sugden. 1986; Young. 1993).

Fairness and Equality form the central themes of our sixth staging post – as well as an entry point into the wider debate on distributive justice. As with each of our staging posts the debate here begins from conceptual clarification (or, less optimistically, conceptual disagreement) and moves toward attempts to interrogate the normative and practical

significance and status of those concepts. Basic question such as, ‘what constitutes fairness?’ (Broome. 1990) or ‘equality of what?’ (Cohen. 1989; Sen. 1980) have led to detailed explorations of issues that illustrate, and depend on, aspects of all of our earlier staging posts (and other matters). How does the value of equality, or fairness, fit with other values? What accounts for the good of equality, or fairness, and is that goodness appropriately conceived as belonging to individuals? To what extent does equalizing the distribution of good provide a constraint on the maximization of the good? (Arneson. 1989; Cohen. 1989; Dworkin. 1981; 1981; Roemer. 1986; 1987; Scanlon. 1986).

Our seventh and final staging post relates to democracy. Here we return explicitly to the social or political selection mechanism, with the central questions including: how to conceive of democracy and how to establish its normative credentials? Is democracy best considered as a process for aggregating interests, as a means of uncovering the public interest or as a forum for deliberation? What are the relationships between democratic structures and likely political outcomes? What are the responsibilities of individuals within democratic societies? (Barry. 1982; Brennan and Hamlin. 2000; Estlund. 2002; Mackie. 2003)

Having done little more than provide a whistle-stop tour of these seven staging posts on a journey from preferences to democracy, I simply want to stress that my primary intention here is to indicate the interconnections among the ideas and literatures referred to and the sense in which the development of the literature over recent decades provides evidence for the *de facto* existence of the broad research program that I identify as PPE. Indeed, one of the reasons that I have been keen to explicitly cite at least some of the major contributions over a time frame that stretches back at least 30 years, is precisely to indicate that this research program has been developing and gathering pace over at least that period.

4. Why Bother?

Does the identification of a PPE research program matter? Suppose that I could convince you that a reading of the relevant literature supported the idea of a coherent PPE research program that has its roots in classic scholarship but has become much more active in recent decades, and that reading the literature in this way - that is, following ideas across

disciplinary boundaries, charting the impact of one discipline on another, and emphasizing the links between sub-programs, added some value that was hidden by taking more disciplinary and/or topic-based slices through the literature - would this be just an exercise in the history of social science, or would it have some further implication?

I want to suggest that there is some forward looking implication that follows from the recognition of the PPE research program, but I want first to emphasize a point that is sometimes obscured by interdisciplinary talk - that PPE needs disciplinary specialists. Specialists are an essential input into the process of genuinely interdisciplinary research - so whatever I write in the following paragraphs should certainly not be taken as any form of attack on the basic idea of disciplinary specialization – rather it should be taken as an argument for the recognition of some of the potential costs of specialisation, and a suggestion as to an appropriate way in which those costs might be managed.

One issue for the PPE research program is where it gets its researchers from. To date, the supply of researchers in this area has relied on the more or less accidental emergence of particular interests in individual researchers from the various constituent disciplines. The emergence of researchers from all relevant disciplines has been something of a happy accident - or perhaps an example of spontaneous order. But the increasing professionalization of the academic disciplines - in respect of both graduate level training and the career prospects of researchers - might be argued to artificially entrench the distinctions between disciplines and reduce the likelihood of real interdisciplinarity (for detailed argument on this point see Brennan's companion paper). Of course, this is not necessarily an intended effect, but it may nevertheless be an effect.

At the same time, we see a marked increase in what might be termed within-discipline specialization - even at the level of postgraduate training. Within economics, individual researchers are most likely to identify themselves with a relatively small number of sub-fields (labour economics, monetary policy, applied econometrics, etc), and similar trends are visible in politics (formal theory, American politics, international political economy, etc) and philosophy (aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, etc) rather than the discipline as a whole. At the broad brush level, these two trends toward disciplinary entrenchment and sub-disciplinary specialization suggest that the evolution of disciplines is toward ever

greater specialization - with sub-disciplines emerging within the existing disciplinary boundaries. But the danger is that the cross cutting themes that are associated with the PPE program may suffer disproportionately - both because the PPE program by its nature require a certain breadth of vision - so as to recognise and value a range of material from different perspectives - and because it would require each of the constituent disciplines to spawn and value an appropriate sub-discipline if the essentially multi-disciplinary nature of PPE is to continue.

As noted at the beginning of this essay, PPE is alive and well as an undergraduate program of study - indeed there is some evidence of growing popularity of such studies relative to both more specialist programs (for example in the UK) and less structured programs (for example in the US). But even here we need to read the message with some caution, for many undergraduate PPE programmes (at least in the UK) are built on the model of 'pillars' rather than 'bridges' - where a 'pillars' approach simply presents students with each of the three disciplines as independent entities (and made up of their own sets of sub-fields) rather than attempting the building of 'bridges' or dialogue between disciplines. On such a 'pillars' program, students may end up studying, for example, epistemology, macroeconomics and American politics without ever really coming into contact with the PPE research program as identified here. While undergraduate PPE programmes may certainly provide a significant input into the PPE research program in the longer term, since at least they provide students with a range of relevant ideas and modes of thought, they do not provide a direct route for potential researchers to follow. And the situation at the graduate level is still more specialized, with little opportunity for students - whether in Philosophy, Politics or Economics programs - to specialize in anything like the PPE research programme. Of course, (I must repeat) this is not to argue for the creation of a distinct class of PPE researchers (or trainee-researchers) who do not see themselves as disciplinary specialists, but rather for the possibility that PPE (from the distinctive perspective of a particular discipline) might be recognized as an appropriate sub-field, alongside other sub-fields in the process of graduate level education in each of the relevant disciplines. So that graduate level students might, in studying such a sub-field, be exposed to literature of the sort cited in this essay, which addresses themes of common interest for a

variety of perspectives, and so also be exposed to different approaches and styles of argument.

I want, finally, to offer a very different argument for why the PPE research program may matter - an argument which again stresses the inter-relations between the PPE program and the constituent disciplines, but one which points to the existence of feedback effects. I suggest that the constituent disciplines themselves benefit from the sort of cross-fertilization of ideas that takes place within the PPE debate - that is, even the core of a discipline (P, P or E) can benefit from developments in the PPE sub-field that might trace their origin to another discipline. Indeed, I would suggest that each of the constituent disciplines has gained in precisely this way from the debate briefly mapped out above, although the debt is not always acknowledged - for example, economists have certainly been encouraged to take ideas of the emergence and force of social norms into account in their models - even where those models are deployed in sub-fields removed from PPE; similarly political theory has recognised much more clearly the value of formal modelling in at least some contexts, while relevant parts of philosophy have absorbed the strategic structure of game theoretic decision models. These are just a few examples of the way in which the cross-disciplinary nature of the PPE debate can help to re-invigorate the constituent disciplines in ways that are not just about the transmission of techniques or the trading of ideas, but are also about the value of different perspectives, so that all disciplines can benefit from such trade. To return to the language of 'bridges' and 'pillars', if PPE is conceived in terms of the bridges between specialist disciplines, then these bridges can carry the traffic that constitutes mutually advantageous trade between these disciplines - after all, the benefits of the division of labour largely depend on the existence of such trade.

5. Finally

I have tried in this brief essay both to argue for the existence of a PPE research program that is valuable in a way that is not fully captured by its value to each discipline taken separately, and to suggest that there is some reason to be concerned for its future. The basic idea is one of PPE as a distinct (if rather loosely defined) research program that provides

flexible and analytic debate on the relations between the individual and society that incorporates both positive and normative analysis. I have attempted to put some flesh on these bones, but would resist the temptation to fully categorize the PPE program by means of a matrix made up of a variety of approaches cutting across a range of specific subject matters, since this tends to overlook what I take to be a central but somewhat elusive element of the PPE program - which I have tried to explicate in terms of a willingness to engage with arguments regardless of their mode of presentation or their discipline of origin.

Beyond attempting to sketch the contours of the PPE research program I have suggested that it requires rather special conditions in order to thrive. These conditions include the attention of disciplinary specialists and the recognition of the disciplines as organisational structures, but also the willingness of disciplinary specialists to engage in a sub-field that spans disciplinary boundaries. There is some doubt as to whether these conditions can be accommodated satisfactorily if current trends towards sub-disciplinary specialization continue. Some way of incorporating PPE as a recognised sub-discipline within each of the major constituent disciplines seems to be the best way to ensure that the PPE research program thrives. But the evolution of academic organisations does not guarantee this result.

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