

Philosophical Pluralism in the Service of Humane Governance

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ABSTRACT: In recent times, the American Philosophical Association has been exposed in a serious way to the issue of pluralism in philosophy curriculums in the departments of philosophy of American universities and colleges. This conversation brings to the fore the fact that what is at issue in the [prospect](#) of pluralizing American philosophy departments is not merely the matter of deciding the discipline's boundaries of intellectual formation relative to the current generation of students, but the unforeseen consequences of pluralism which challenge both 'the American canon' and the profession's self-understanding vis-à-vis a 'Western' intellectual heritage that distinguishes the 'essential' from the 'marginal' by privileging essential figures, problems, and time-honored methodological commitments. Yet, to the degree that there is a quest for relation of differences, this need not presuppose the universality of philosophical discourse, comparative philosophy moving inevitably within a logic of opposition rather than a logic of mutuality. Our thinking is surely problematic if at this World Congress we find an occasion for a confrontation between 'the West' and 'the [margin](#),' the latter construed negatively as a

'mute, growing and menacing pressure.'

In recent time the American Philosophical Association has been exposed in a serious way to the issue of pluralizing the philosophy curriculum in the departments of philosophy of American universities and colleges. John Lachs, Philip Quinn, John Stuhr, and Kathleen Wright each contributed thoughtful discussions to the "issues in the profession" section of the November 1996 [Proceedings](#) and Addresses. (1)

As Lachs observed, there are those who conceive pluralism to mean "due representation of the analytic, Continental, and American philosophical traditions". Others who have explicit concern with the developing "sub-discipline" of comparative philosophy conceive pluralism to include "work in the complex traditions of Chinese, Indian, African, Latin American, Islamic, Jewish, feminist, and Native American thought, as well".

Quinn perhaps speaks for a majority of philosophers when he suggests that hardly anyone would deny that "it is a good thing to expose students to the many ways in which philosophy has been done in various places and at different times", that "it is a good thing to carry forward philosophical inquiry in the many traditions that have proved to be of enduring value". Thus Quinn favors a more inclusive pluralism, one which "would consist of a conversation that contains many more non-Western philosophical voices".

Notwithstanding Quinn's hopeful remarks, Stuhr noted that today pluralism is not widely endorsed.

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