

Obligations in public philosophical discourse

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Four papers are included in the Open Section of this November 2018 special issue. In the first paper by Bjørn Hofmann and Siri Granum Carson entitled *Filosofiens rolle i det offentlige ordskiftet: Hvordan har debatten om sorteringssamfunnet i 2017 påvirket forholdet mellom filosofi og samfunn? En innholdsanalyse* (The role of philosophy in public debate – A content analysis of the debate on the "sorting society" in Norway in 2017), the authors address the recent increase of attention that philosophy and ethics have gained in Norwegian media. They point to the need to prevent philosophy from becoming a new form of sophism ("art of deception") by adhering to the ideals of the profession that uphold making our claims, perspectives, arguments, and conclusions clear and comprehensible, and the willingness to revise or withdraw these claims if clarity and comprehensibility are not achieved. This call to professional integrity was sparked by what the authors observed as a tendency to adapt philosophy to media discourse, which inadvertently eliminates academic reservations and nuances. In particular, they worry about the trend of neglecting hidden assumptions, lack of consistency, conceptual and evaluative uncertainties, as well as ignorance of empirical premises, counter-arguments and important implications. They warn that these gaps in public discourse could result in poorer public debate, an impoverished society, and a weakened reputation for philosophy as a discipline. They apply these warnings based on a content analysis of the Norwegian debate on "the differentiation/sorting society" (*sorteringssamfunnet*), initiated by Aksel Braanen Sterri's statement in connection with the issue of introducing non-invasive prenatal screening (NIPT) that persons with Down syndrome cannot live full lives. The authors welcome the impact of that debate to the revival of public interest in philosophical discussions, uncovering unspoken intuitions and stimulating improved reasoning in the public realm, but they warn that public provocation through the media needs to be balanced by analytic restraint as espoused by the Socratic tradition in philosophy, lest we succumb to a new sophism.

In the second paper *Provokativ offentlig filosofi* (Provocative Public Philosophy), Aksel Braanen Sterri responds to Bjørn Hofmann and Siri Granum Carson's call for restraint and argues that it is inappropriate for epistemic and ethical reasons. Sterri claims that contrary to the criticism that provocative public philosophy is harmful, imperialistic, erodes trust in philosophers and creates too much (or unnecessary) noise, well meaning public philosophers do and should challenge consensus and delve into issues that stir emotions to promote clarity of thought. These two articles in this special November issue of *Etikk i praksis* remind us of the long-standing metadepbate about how philosophers should engage the public and media. They revive the discussion on how inclusive we should be of diverse issues, as well as on approaches

to public deliberation of these diverse issues. Should we ban certain forms of reasoning that are identified with specific ideologies because they seem to threaten the ideals of neutrality or objectivity that protects the integrity of public discourse (Alvarez 2014)? Or should we promote a more open and inclusive discussion that engages even topics or methods that some may consider 'harmful' to public discourse (Thorseth 2006)? Tolerating the discomfort of including deliberative approaches or potentially offensive taboo topics in order to avoid marginalizing these topics, so that their adherents do not resort to harmful outlets if they are not allowed to vent in public, has now become an all too familiar dilemma in our current political climate. It is timely to continue discussing these metadebates to enhance our understanding of how to responsibly engage the public.

In the third paper in the Open Section, Steinar Bøyum's *The Democratic Duty to Educate Oneself* presents an argument that democratic citizens have a duty to educate themselves politically. It turns the locus of responsibility for political education from the all too common agency of public intellectuals and political philosophers to individual members of the public. This discussion is another apt piece in our troubled times of distressing politics. Bøyum establishes a case for the moral importance of individual competence for voting and maintains that the substantial content of the required competence must remain open. His interesting analysis is a welcome contribution to a constructive, if not politically therapeutic, practical way forward in overcoming the worries that election results around the world indicate a declining competence among electorates in choosing the right leaders and making all-important decisions that impact their collective wellbeing. Bøyum's assessment of Jason Brennan's idea of epistocracy merits a closer look. The notion of the right to a competent electorate, its validity and the corresponding modest duty to educate oneself politically (without the need for legal reinforcement) is a must-read if we want to carry on with society's democratic project. Readers are encouraged to reflectively engage in this timely discussion towards a more constructive and therapeutic approach to our troubled political times.

Finally, Jonas Jakobsen and Kjersti Fjørtoft's *In defence of moderate Inclusivism: Revisiting Rawls and Habermas* concludes this issue's Open Section with another interesting and related discussion. The authors revisit the debate on inclusivism specific to religious reasons. After reviewing Rawls' and Habermas' theories of deliberative democracy that focus on the question of religious reasons in political discourse, they identify that Rawls and Habermas both defend what Jakobsen and Fjørtoft call a "fully inclusivist" view of using religious reasons in deliberations in the 'informal public sphere'. Jakobsen and Fjørtoft then defend what they call a "moderately inclusivist" view that only requires a 'conversational translation proviso' where citizens' duty to supplement religious with proper political arguments is only required if they are asked by their co-discussants to do so. This is an interesting update to what Bohman and other authors have explored in previous discussions regarding the role of what can be considered "private" reasons in public debate (Bohman 1995).

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