



Australasian Association of Philosophy

Monday 30th June 2008

Preamble to ERA Consultation Paper

The Australasian Association of Philosophy (AAP) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the ERA initiative. This submission provides responses to questions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 & 15 in the ERA Consultation Paper. It also provides a more general description of the discipline of philosophy in order to show that a proper evaluation of research quality and research outcomes in philosophy must use and adopt indicators in a way that recognises the international and interdisciplinary dimensions of philosophical research.

Philosophical research spreads over and contributes to most other disciplines. Australian philosophers are making interventions into a number of disciplines across the range of all eight disciplinary clusters identified by the ERA initiative. (See Appendix) One trend in current philosophical research is the development of critical theoretical and applied links with a range of other disciplines (including physics, evolutionary biology, cognitive science). Philosophers have worked closely with scientists, for example, in ways that have both challenged and extended the theoretical assumptions of that area of science and have drawn on data from rapidly developing areas of science to test the robustness of their theoretical work to explain the data. Moreover, the broad sub-disciplines of philosophy: epistemology; logic; ethics or moral theory; social, political and legal philosophy; applied ethics; philosophy of language; history of philosophy; philosophy of religion; aesthetics and metaphysics, overlap with each other and with the disciplinary focus of their objects of inquiry in complex ways (e.g. work in moral psychology on what it means to have a concept of the 'self' may explore moral theory, epistemology, cognitive science and abnormal psychology, in trying to provide an explanation of what is "missing" in the autistic person who appears incapable of recognising another person as another "self", but is present in those who are not autistic.) One important characteristic of philosophy and philosophers is that conceptual work done in coming to grips with one set of theoretical problems can be drawn on to shape responses to a much wider range of conceptual issues.

Consequently, philosophers frequently publish across several sub-disciplinary areas: e.g. aesthetics and epistemology, and the research grants awarded to philosophers may not be specifically coded to philosophy, rather they may be coded to areas such as cognitive science, history of philosophy and science etc. In order to properly recognise the interdisciplinary nature of philosophical research, the ERA framework should recognise that research outputs may be evaluated both as philosophical research and as having significance in shaping emerging scientific or applied research. If evaluation of philosophical research were to count only those outputs coded as philosophy, it would miss the important contribution that philosophers make and would obscure the importance of interdisciplinary work by the discipline. This position informs the Association's responses to questions 3, 4 and 9 of the ERA Consultation paper.

Philosophy in Australia is a small discipline. There are approximately 150 philosophers in continuing T&R (148 in 2006) or Research only positions (2 in 2006) and approximately 40 in contract Research only positions (in 2006 27 at level A or B, 7 at level D or E—QEII, APF, Fed Fellows). Yet, it does well in the number of ARC grants, Federation Fellows and other peer assessments relative to its size. Evidence of the excellence of philosophical research is found in the number and range of successful ARC applications involving CIs who are philosophers, including those which have an interdisciplinary focus. The standing of philosophical research has also been recognised through the establishment of ARC Special Research Centres, such as the Centre For Time at University of Sydney and the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics.

Australian philosophical research is recognised as internationally competitive.¹ Given the international focus of philosophical debates, Australian philosophers are as likely to have close research associations with researchers (philosophical or in other disciplines) in overseas institutions, as they are to develop links with philosophers within Australia. In addition several excellent Australian researchers frequently publish their work first in languages other than English, whether because the research is of global significance (as in the case of Thomas Pogge at CAPPE), or because their research is in Continental (European) Philosophy (as in the case of Paul Patton). Therefore appropriate ranking of international and non-English research publications and internationally recognised indicators of research quality are vital to the accurate evaluation of philosophical research. In cases where there are no ready metrics available, international peer review is a better indicator of quality and is preferable than assessment by non-philosophers. This position informs the Association's responses to questions 3, 4, 9, 10 and 13 of the ERA Consultation paper.

¹ On example of this recognition is that Australian philosophy programs (Australian National University RSSH, University of Sydney, University of Melbourne) are included in the top 50 Faculties in the English Speaking World in *Brian Leiter's Ranking of Graduate Programs in Philosophy in the English Speaking World*. <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/overall.asp>

Appendix

Australian philosophers are making interventions into a number of disciplines across the range of disciplinary clusters:

Discipline cluster 1: philosophers working on philosophy of physics (e.g. the USyd Centre for Time) inform and are informed by research in quantum physics, classical physics;

Discipline cluster 3: a range of philosophers are working on the ethical issues associated with biomedical engineering and nanotechnology (e.g. CAPPE, ACES);

Discipline cluster 4: political philosophy falls under the scope of political science, and there are philosophers making significant contributions to issues in philosophy of economics (e.g. Thomas Pogge's work on global poverty) and policy (e.g. Dodds on democracy and bioethics policy); psychology (Jeanette Kennett at CAPPE; Catriona Mackenzie at Macquarie)) and cognitive science (Sutton's contribution to Cognitive science)

Discipline cluster 5: philosophers working on philosophy of mathematics and cognitive science shape the developments of the disciplines of pure mathematics and artificial intelligence (e.g. Mark Colyvan's work in theoretical mathematics,)

Discipline cluster 6 Kim Sterelney's work at the ANU is shaping the understanding of evolutionary biology, as is and Paul Griffith's (USyd) Biohumanities project on the significance of genetics identifies conceptual shifts in this rapidly developing area of science.

Discipline cluster 7: Australian philosophy is well-regarded for its contribution to a wide range of issues in bioethics (Peter Singer, Julian Savelescu, Justin Oakely, Dodds) and it is also working closely with researchers and clinicians on issues in Neuroscience and neuroethics (Neil Levy and Jeanette Kennett)

Discipline cluster 8: Philosophers (within and outside of philosophy departments) are shaping understanding of the responsibilities of nurses and those in caring professions (Peta Bowden at Murdoch, Stan van Hooft at Deakin) and public health ethics (Wendy Rogers at Flinders)

About the AAP

The AAP is the professional association for philosophers in Australasia. The aims of the Association are: to promote the study of philosophy; to promote the exchange of ideas among philosophers; to encourage creative and scholarly activity in philosophy; to facilitate the professional work and protect the professional and academic interests of philosophers.

Among its professional obligations, the AAP holds an annual conference and publishes the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. The AAP collects data on the profession, recommends policy to academic philosophers and organises an annual heads of philosophy program meeting. Through its website, the AAP, provides information about jobs, conferences, mailing lists and the academic study of philosophy

The AAP also organises various public lectures and other events. It has run press lunches, and in other ways facilitated communication between journalists and philosophers. In conjunction with Taylor and Francis, it awards an annual AAP Media Prize for the best philosophical piece published in the popular media in Australasia during the previous calendar year. The Association has produced a short film, entitled 'What is Philosophy?', which explains for the general public what philosophy is, and the benefits of studying. It has also produced documents about the generic skills philosophy graduates obtain as part of studying a philosophy degree.

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