

## SCOTT PRATT ON THE USES OF AN ABSOLUTE PRAGMATISM

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**ABSTRACT:** Scott Pratt has argued that we might turn to Josiah Royce for a version of pragmatism that would underwrite decisive political action in troubling times. In the background of his proposal lies the hope that philosophers might do more to combat things like climate change, incarceration, or authoritarianism. I reply by considering the political position of philosophers who are employees of public universities, and I present some skeptical qualifications to his argument. Royce himself serves as a classic example of the philosopher as a professional, and it is no coincidence that he was also a defender of the political status quo of his time.

**Keywords:** pragmatism, Scott Pratt, Josiah Royce, Leonard Harris, insurrection

In “Absolute Pragmatism,” Scott Pratt has written the kind of essay that we should applaud from any colleague: rooted in sound historical scholarship, it has both a clear argumentative purpose and a real-world application. Briefly, he claims that a pragmatism modeled on some of Royce’s later ideas might serve as a normative ground for decisive action in troubling times. Even the most critical response should thus be sympathetic with his effort, since whatever is true in Pratt’s claim would be a boon to philosophers, or at least to pragmatists. Many people would very much like a philosophy to help us through the mess of climate change, war, genocide, and authoritarianism. And we should forgive a colleague for any failings in thus executing what has only very rarely succeeded among the best philosophers.

What are the broadly political uses of pragmatism? Can a specifically Roycean pragmatism be of any use in 2025 or beyond? Pratt worries that classical or pure pragmatism is a politically indecisive tendency in philosophy, and that the purest pragmatists are *eo ipso* reluctant to “take a side.” But he thinks that a Roycean turn, according to which an absolute pragmatism is actualized through transparently irrevocable action, corrects this

shortcoming. The Roycean pragmatism consists precisely in decisive side-taking, because it is decisive action that is the mark of the absolute. In this essay I hope to extend Pratt’s inquiries into these questions with a series of skeptical problems, drawn from historical sources cognate to Pratt’s own, about the uses of philosophy in responding to problems of the sort posed by fascism, climate change, genocide, and the seemingly endless list of difficulties faced by us citizens of the twenty-first century.

### Academic Philosophy and the *status quo*

Philosophy has a long and distinguished history, and so has served many masters. We can find a diversity of such uses of philosophy merely by perusing the syllabi of undergraduate courses in the history of philosophy. Some of the more interesting developments stem from antiquity, with stories about people like Socrates and Diogenes who refused to put their philosophies into the service of particular masters such as Athenian democracy or Alexander the Great. In her early work, Martha Nussbaum focused on such real-world applications of ancient Greek philosophy, in one important case contrasting the relative rebelliousness of Diogenes with the political quietism of the Stoics.<sup>1</sup> Nussbaum took it for a flaw in traditional stoic cosmopolitanism that it was unable to inspire social change. Moreover, the strictest and most loyal practitioner of classical stoicism will be marked by a distinct lack of real political action, as the Stoic sage views all these larger events as beyond its sphere of control. We should allow this kind of objection against a philosophical school: if adopting a particular philosophy prevents one from acting in the real world, then that is a significant mark against the philosophy. So if Pratt is correct that classical or pure pragmatism is also politically powerless, then it is both a good objection and one with classic company in Nussbaum’s work on ancient cosmopolitanism.

<sup>1</sup> These essays date from the early 1990s, but reappear as chapters 1 and 3 of her recent collection Nussbaum 2019.

In my years of teaching ancient philosophy, Diogenes was the figure to whom a certain strain of student – those who were captivated by punk culture or prone to political activism – were most drawn, and that by virtue of having read Nussbaum’s essays on him. But the towering figure of Greek philosophy is Socrates, and it is to him that we should look for a guide on this subject. Unlike the Stoic sage, Socrates was indeed a sort of political actor, and he was that precisely by means of his philosophizing. Leonard Harris, on whom Pratt leans for a critical voice in his essay, offers a powerful illustration of this issue with a simple thought experiment. He imagines Socrates in our context:

Imagine Socrates as a citizen of a nation that represents about 4.4% of the world’s population but with a prison population that constitutes around 22% of the world’s prisoners, citizens who own more weapons than any other nation, its soldiers having killed more ‘enemies’ in various wars than any other nation, its citizens using more opiates than any nation its size and eating meat voraciously. Then imagine Socrates describing this population as only caring about good jobs, cheap health care, and discovering piety’s essential form through pure and practical reason. (2018, 19–20)

I take the point of this passage to be that we cannot easily imagine Socrates, or any suitably Socratic individual, living peacefully in modern-day America while also upholding the status quo. Socrates would have to engage in some kind of philosophical rebellion, were he among us, because our society is thoroughly unjust in regard to incarceration, militarization, war, drug use, and (I fear less obviously) meat consumption. The major premise of Harris’s argument is then something like Nussbaum’s: a philosophy that will not underwrite an insurrection, under relevant conditions, is not a good philosophy. The minor premise, with which Pratt also agrees, is that (pure) pragmatism cannot underwrite an insurrection. So the conclusion that pragmatism is not a good philosophy is very tempting, and much of Harris’s own career has followed this line of thought forward.

The rhetorical aspects of Harris’s conclusion (“good jobs, cheap health care”) seem to suggest an interpreta-

tion that is sociological or institutional as well as purely philosophical: not only can we not imagine a pragmatist Socrates, but we also cannot imagine one who holds a job as a Professor of Philosophy in a public institution in America. Would Socrates accept a salary funded from the same sources as the corrupt institutions that Harris offers in his abridged list? In any case, he would not consider his job *qua* philosopher (professor or not) to consist mainly in reciting arguments by Dewey or Kant while seeking publications in the most highly ranked journals. Pertinent to this observation, I take it, is that Harris, Pratt, and I are all Professors of Philosophy at public universities in the United States of America. None of us have, to my knowledge, engaged in insurrections of a significant sort. And acknowledging that Socrates, the person most readily identified with our intellectual pursuit, would indeed engage in insurrection (were he alive and American) might pose a challenge to our professional self-understanding.

There are various ways to align with a status quo, and we should distinguish at least two of them. Another writer from the African American intellectual tradition once made stronger claims against academic philosophy, claiming not merely that it is powerless against the status quo, but rather that it played a positive justificatory role in reinforcing it:

the philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching. (Woodson 1933, 5)

Carter G. Woodson does not, in this brief passage, take aim specifically at pragmatism, but rather at the discipline of philosophy as it operates in “our educational system.” His book was about miseducation, particularly in the case of Black Americans: there was nothing for the likes of Woodson in academic philosophy (or any other extant discipline), because he pretty obviously could not abide the four evils he mentions. Woodson was thus no pragmatist, though he was familiar with the movement. He attended Harvard for the PhD in History near the end of Royce’s career, and there he met with the common

doctrine that Africa had no history.<sup>2</sup> Later he claimed that it took him decades to unlearn whatever he learned at Harvard, and he spent only a year in residence there (by contrast with Royce's thirty-four). Woodson was close enough to the sources of pragmatism to have known whether this movement presented a counterexample to his problem. It evidently did not.

In our modern political moment of 2025, we are rather familiar with a third position on the relationship of academic philosophy to the status quo. A standard canard has it that, *pace* Harris and Woodson, academic philosophy is a left-leaning enterprise. Vice-President Vance has claimed generally that "the professors are the enemy," and this belief has underwritten much of the financial and legislative attack on our universities in these past six years (2021). Since Harris's essay in 2018, many dozens of laws have been passed curtailing the speech and teachings of professors, particularly around race and gender issues. More recently, the full and expanding powers of the Executive have aimed rather at middle-eastern politics, and professors of philosophy – should any exist in the near future – might well be required to declare allegiance to the state of Israel in its actions in Gaza and elsewhere. It is pretty clearly the case that the American government wishes to push the professorate to the right, or at least eliminate any so-called leftist indoctrination.

Professors usually balk at the notion of left-wing indoctrination, and there is indeed much caricature in it. But there is also a grain of truth, and we should grant that truth while also clarifying the interpretation needed for it. Politicians might reasonably expect that, in a discipline such as philosophy at a publicly funded institution, we might find such things as arguments at least potentially in favor of our various political and social formations. Philosophers might then give reasons for our statistically high levels of incarceration, defenses of our military actions abroad, or of our drug policies. To my knowledge this is not at all com-

mon, though I do not doubt that some professional philosophers are working in this more actively status quo-justifying vein. That it is not especially common, however, may be seen if we update the list of evils in the Woodson passage by substituting them with Harris's examples:

the philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified incarceration, gun ownership, war, and drug addiction.

The substitution does not work, at least as a broad characterization of our discipline or our institutions. So academic philosophy in our own context, while admittedly not as insurrectionist as Harris begs us to be, is not the mere defense of the status quo that Woodson purports that philosophy was a century or more ago. We are in fact generally somewhat left-leaning, but probably only in a very soft or symbolic, perhaps even feeble, way. Something like this, I take it, lay behind Harris's claim: he seems to expect a principled agreement about the injustices he lists, and notes only that qua philosophers we do very little to mitigate them. His argument suggests that we are indeed, on the average, theoretically opposed to mass incarceration, imperialism, and the opioid epidemic, but that we do nothing about them.

So among the three basic relations of academic philosophy to the status quo, it seems that our current predicament lies somewhere under this third banner, specifically as at once *in principle opposed to the status quo* but also *in practice complicit with it*. We professional philosophers are, as Harris suggests, divorced from concrete political action in the areas he mentioned. And pragmatism, he further argued, cannot help them. Pratt agrees with this assessment as regards classical or pure pragmatism, but he thinks he has discovered a way out of the dilemma through the writings of Josiah Royce.

### Josiah Royce in Historical Context

Royce is an interesting choice for Pratt's article, and I wish to take that choice seriously especially in regard

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<sup>2</sup> Woodson attributed this to Royce's longtime colleague, Edward Channing. See Goggin 1993, 21-5.

to Royce's status as one of the founders of the modern philosophical professorate in America. What Pratt does not explicitly say in his essay, but which he well knows, is that Josiah Royce of Harvard was precisely the sort of philosopher that Woodson might have had in mind in the quoted passage from *The Mis-education of the Negro*. Royce, in other words, did not belong to the species of philosophy professor who remains merely inactive in the face of harrowing political choices, but rather to the class identified by Woodson when he claimed that philosophers had defended the status quo in American history. This is true at least of the Royce of his loyalty period of 1900–1908, who:

– defended British imperialism in Africa and American expansion in the West. (2009, 223-7)

– at least apparently opposed miscegenation. (2009, 56–7)

– favored a specific form of racial segregation (though not the Jim Crow kind that marks our actual history). (2009, 56–8)

– proposed an aggressive model of cultural assimilation for Europeans who are not Anglo-Saxons, with adoption of the English language and Anglo-Saxon customs as requisite. (2009, 236–42)

– while not exactly defending slavery, remarked on the subject in accord with a broadly providentialist version of the Lost Cause narrative; he did not seek a return to slavery for Black Americans, but he viewed the progression of slavery-emancipation-reunification as a beneficial process that produced a stronger union and republic. (2009, 51–2; 228–9)

To be sure, Royce stopped well short of any defense of Woodson's fourth evil, lynching. He was generally opposed to violence and especially opposed to mob activity.<sup>3</sup> Royce's social scheme sought rather to pursue by peaceful means what others have sought by violence. Most of the essays in which Royce makes these points have been reprinted in the modern edition of *Race*

*Questions, Provincialism, and Other American Problems*, of which Scott Pratt is a co-editor (2009). Moreover, all these points were debated in earlier discussions of Royce's philosophy of race from the loyalty period.<sup>4</sup> So I make no pretense of raising an original objection, but rather I only contextualize Pratt's argument: his appeal to Royce should be of that variety defended by Dwayne Tunstall, who argued that we have a right to distinguish "the good Royce" from "the bad Royce" (2021). Scholars have a right to be selective in their appeals to their deceased predecessors, and it is arguable that such selectivity is inherent to interpretation. So in following Pratt's tour through Royce's absolutist turn in pragmatism, we have to distinguish what Pratt wishes to take from Royce from other things we might find in the written record.

Most of Pratt's references to Royce in "Absolute Pragmatism" draw on works from the final, post-*Loyalty* period of the latter's career, so roughly from 1909 until his death in 1916. The highpoint of this era is *The Problem of Christianity* (1913), just as the era in which Royce backed versions of racism and colonialism culminates in *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (1908). Pratt appeals specifically to the 1911 lectures on Truth, to *William James and Other Essays* (1911), *The Sources of Religious Insight* (1912), and to the 1912/13 *Principles of Logic*. So it is possible to demarcate the Royce of Pratt's essay chronologically, such that the absolute pragmatism of which Pratt writes is a product only of Royce's final period.

The trouble with this picture is that the late-career Royce, which on my breakdown includes everything he wrote after *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, is marked by more rather than by less political commentary. In 1916 alone Royce penned at least four essays on the Great War, and particularly on the philosophical and historical significance of it. To my knowledge, Royce scholars have not sufficiently mined this material for a distinctive social or political philosophy that might contrast (or not) with the racial impe-

<sup>3</sup> On this see Curry, 2019, pp. 103ff.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Curry 2019 and Tunstall 2021.

rialism of the loyalty period.<sup>5</sup> I cannot say at this moment just what such a late Roycean social philosophy would include, though I can point to a few difficult passages.

The most troubling point, as I see it, is that in “The Hope of a Great Community” Royce defended a version of what we now call Christian Zionism (1916, 273). He argued specifically that the possibility of a great community should find its sources in ancient Israel, according to which “the redeemed and transformed Jerusalem of the future was to be the centre of a redeemed humanity, the spiritual ruler of a kingdom which should have no end” (273). That tradition was then transformed into the Pauline notion of community that forms the basis of much of Royce’s theorizing in this entire period, especially in *The Problem of Christianity*. In the 1916 essay he continues:

But the ideal city of Zion, the centre of a new heaven and earth, passed over as an ideal into the possession of the early Christian church. The Apostle Paul gave to its inner life the character which he called ‘charity’, and which he expounded to the Corinthians in one of the greatest documents of Christian literature. (ibid)

It is in terms of this Pauline notion that Royce then interprets his allegiances in regard to the Great War. He is not interested in one side or the other merely winning the war on the battlefield, but rather with the ultimate possibility of a true Pauline community of all humanity on the earth: “the outcome of the war promises to be either a victory or defeat, not for any one of the warring nations nearly so much as for humanity in its wholeness, and hence for what I shall venture also to call the church universal” (ibid, 272-3). So in response to the Great War, Professor Royce took an eschatological turn, not in any obvious way inconsistent with the culturally assimilative Americanism of the loyalty-period essays, but with a much more global and theological emphasis. He considers the possibility that the time for humans on the earth comes to an inglorious end (270), but he closes by ref-

erencing his scheme (elaborated already in 1914’s *War and Insurance*) of coordinated international finance that might well, if we are lucky, sustain something of a human civilization beyond the coming World Wars.

### Royce on the Nature and Purpose of Philosophy

The previous section was intended only as a reminder about Professor Royce and so a call for caution. The philosophers of the past have already acted (or not) in their world, and we their descendants must decide what to do in ours. So far as I am aware, no one has written a detailed study of Royce’s responses to the Great War, such that we could measure this and consider it as an example for us to follow or not. Daniel Brunson has taken up the issue of insurance in a few essays, most recently in regard to our conception of nature and so with respect to environmental issues (2013, 2016). But irrespective of that, the classic accounts of Royce’s late philosophy retain the emphasis on logic and metaphysics, and Bruce Kuklick was not wrong when he wrote more than a half-century ago that logic and the foundations of mathematics were arguably Royce’s “main interest” after 1900 (1971, 349). Pragmatists especially have seized these texts, due to the more explicit (than in previous work) relationship to Peircean logic in them. But Pratt is caught in a difficulty of a kind that distinguishes his effort from the customary piece about the late Royce and his Peircean triads, insofar as he wishes to draw from these texts some lesson about real-world action: he must distinguish Royce’s logic and metaphysics from his later social philosophy, but draw a new inspiration for action on the basis of these principles. It is a difficult path to navigate.

That the path is a difficult one, however, does not entail that we should not walk down it. As Pratt signals clearly in his opening, we have only difficult paths before us. He opens by declaring that we face a number of “intractable problems,” that pragmatism in its purer forms is of no help, and that a turn to autocracy is unappeal-

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<sup>5</sup> In *Royce’s Mature Ethics*, Frank Oppenheim provides an overview of Royce’s last ethical philosophy, but he does not address the themes I mention here.

ing. So what are we to do? Pratt does not tell us exactly whether to engage in insurrectionist activity, nor especially when we should do so. That would be far too much to ask. What he does tell us is that certain types of actions are what James calls “live options”: history and the big world beyond us toss our way certain possibilities and not others (1896). Our choices are not infinite, nor indefinite, but rather limited. Moreover, they are not even limited by us, as individuals, but rather by historical context: I might join the resistance or not, but for that there must first be both something to resist and a movement to join.

In *The Sources of Religious Insight*, Royce writes that if “our purposes are definite,” and “if the issues of life are for us sharply defined,” then we are faced with peculiar situations in which we are forced to either act or not (1912, 153-4). Life presents us with real dilemmas, even for philosophers who spend most of our time in libraries. And our responses to these dilemmas are absolute in the sense that, once done, they can never be undone. I have either acted or not, resisted or not, rebelled or not. Each moment is absolute in respect of those options that we might call live. In peaceful times such dramatic descriptions of willing or acting might seem excessive, but in troubling times such as ours this description strikes rather with a sort of undeniability. Doing nothing then becomes more obviously a kind of something, an absolute and irrevocable choice not to respond. We will not get these moments back, and yet the possibilities of the future hinge at least partly on what we choose to do. Royce’s point seems to be that every real choice to act as well as every real tendency to dither has a significance that warrants the descriptor ‘absolute’. But *Pratt’s point* seems to be that especially troubling circumstances, such as we live in, reveal or make transparent something about willing and acting that Royce insists was there all along. Pratt’s point seems to be simply that Royce seems more right just now.

I will return to this, Pratt’s central problem, in the next section. Here I wish to reflect further on what role

philosophy in particular might play for us. Pratt closes with some quotes by Leonard Harris of Alain Locke, and so further aligns his absolute pragmatism with the Harris-Locke school. Locke claims, in the quoted passage, that philosophy is always engaged, always arising in the minds of particular persons faced with real-life problems, and yet for all that apparent relativism philosophy can never “ignore the question of ultimates” (2025, 18; 2018, 193). In a footnote, Pratt juxtaposes to this the opening reflections on the nature of philosophy from Royce’s *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*. I am fond of that passage and have quoted it myself, as I do here again: “You philosophize when you reflect critically upon what you are actually doing in your world” (1892, 1).

To use some more academic terminology, I call the position expressed in that line, and the subsequent parts of the Preface to *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, metaphilosophical gradualism. The latter expression is just a multisyllabic ‘ism’ meant to express the idea that there is a graduated shift from the passing thoughts we have on a park bench (Royce’s setting) to the rigorously ordered thoughts in a philosophy lecture. But that is just one of Royce’s metaphilosophical orientations. The other is a more classic approach that we might find in various lectures by him. I choose an example nearly randomly, as there are many such in Royce’s papers: “Philosophy is an effort to get a reasoned solution of the most fundamental, that is, of the ultimate problems of human life” (1897, 5). Royce distinguishes ultimate problems first from passing practical problems like finding the best path home, or selecting a dinner menu; next, he distinguishes them further from social problems such as “what is to be the future of the British Empire” (*ibid.*, 4-5) or of scientific questions. So on this Roycean perspective, philosophy is more abstract and apparently detached from life questions. Philosophy deals with ultimate problems, not trivial ones or even political ones.

Royce, of course, is a philosopher of an older school, and he is very much an old-fashioned philosopher who

proposed theories not only in general metaphysics and logic, but he also had a theory of psychology that supplements his idealism, a system of ethics both pure and applied, and a full-scale social philosophy that ties more or less neatly to his ethics. I take this point up again in the next section. Here I just want to add one further problem that makes it difficult to square Pratt's arguments with Royce's texts: Royce is a decidedly anti-individualist philosopher, and that fact is one of his most consistent tendencies from his earliest writings until his death. To illustrate the point I refer again, for convenience's sake, to "The Hope of a Great Community." In that text he dismisses Bentham's utilitarianism as too individualistic to matter in regard to the war, and without prescription in regard to any hopes for a great community: a great community is precisely not a matter of "endeavoring to alleviate the pains of individual men or collections of men." (1916, 278). But Pratt's appeal to James's argument in "The Will to Believe" threatens to align Royce with an individualist argument, and even Royce's formulation of the absolute nature of action – as quoted from *The Sources of Religious Insight* – are individualist. So I note here merely one problem that needs to be worked out: is an absolute pragmatism a matter for individual or collective action?

#### **Irrevocable Actions and Pratt's Absolute Pragmatism**

Most of us professors of philosophy are not altogether principled like Socrates, and to consider this I wish to reverse the Leonard Harris thought experiment that I quoted earlier: imagine us in Socrates's situation, rather than him in ours. I cannot speak for Pratt or Harris, but for my part I undertake very few of my activities on the basis of a self-conscious decision that forms the conclusion of a profound philosophical argument. Were I offered a trial and faced with execution on the accusation that my activities, pedantic such as they are, run contrary to custom, morality, or the public good, I could not give so great a speech as Socrates is alleged to have given, nor

would anyone (let alone several people!) write an *apologia* for me. My actions have generally fallen short of being philosophical in this Socratic sense.

While I do not think that Professor Royce is very much like Socrates – Socrates belongs to the insurrectionist school that Harris lauds, whereas Royce falls among those defenders of the status quo targeted by Woodson – he does align with Socrates on an even broader division of philosophers: Royce is among those whose real actions were indeed philosophical, so that Royce and Socrates may both be contrasted with the bulk of modern professors of whom I concede that I also serve as an example. To do Royce any justice, we need to discern the sense in which even his defense of a status quo, as a kind of deliberate action selected from among live options of which insurrection was an alternative, was a deeply philosophical decision.

The text in which Royce deals with this problem most explicitly is "The Eternal and the Practical," which has the additional value of aligning institutionally with our professional context. It was initially delivered as the Presidential Lecture to the American Philosophical Association, at only its third meeting, and then published in *The Philosophical Review* – still considered the most prestigious journal in our profession all these years later - in 1904. It is thus the eminently professional text by Professor Royce. In it he provides a version of the argument that I believe Pratt to require: we are all pragmatists insofar as we are philosophers, or truth-seekers, at all, because our beliefs and our actions cannot be separated (1904, 118). Philosophy, even in an apparently merely formal setting such as a professional conference, is already kind of action. If it seems rather that our cogitations about "pure practical reason" – to echo Harris's invocation of Kant as the inactive or ineffective caricature of the professor – are nonetheless deep expressions of our will. The existence of a class of detached professors is thus a kind of illusion, about which Royce proceeds to disenchant by explaining over an additional twenty pages about how

the entire knowledge process is guided by the will.

Royce explains that we are already acting politically, and he thereby proposes a revision to my initial delineation of three types of philosophers, viz., insurrectionists like Socrates, defenders of the status quo like Woodson's professors, and the detached professors like myself. There are no detached professors. Those of us who are not insurrecting are defending the status quo, contributing not directly by our theories but rather indirectly by our actions to whatever list of ills we grant to our current society. The choice is absolute. Pratt is correct, at least if Royce is correct. What Pratt adds to the point is the notion of irrevocability: we already have acted in our world, and to whatever extent we have not insurrected we cannot rightfully claim anything but that failure. But the effect of either Royce or Pratt being correct is minimal, since Royce is not so much providing a normative ground for our actions as he is telling us that such a normative ground already lies in our will.

Royce indeed calls this a kind of pragmatism, but his alignment with the self-identified pragmatists is also minimal. He opens his lecture with references to James's *The Will to Believe*, which Pratt also references, as well as to the contemporaneous texts by Dewey and Schiller (1904, 1903). His point is that, contrary to the notion that these pure pragmatists hold so dear, their school of thought is nothing new. Pragmatism, in this absolute rather than pure sense, is an ancient school of thought, and it is also the school followed implicitly by every thinking person. In that sense I should withdraw the point with which I opened this section: even my decidedly non-insurrectionist actions are deeply philosophical, and the fact that I can give no grand *apologia* for my actions is now a different kind of shortcoming.

#### Philosophers after Academic Philosophy

I used to teach survey courses on the "History of Ancient Philosophy" and the "History of Modern Philosophy," and

it is from those courses that I drew a few of my opening reflections. They were my primary curricular assignment when I was hired fifteen years ago for the job that I still hold. We read Martha Nussbaum describe the ancient Greek sages as real-world actors and assess their performance. Diogenes was better than the Stoics, she argued, but still far from ideal. In "Modern Philosophy" we read Naomi Zack's *Bachelors of Science*, which follows similar motives (to use Roycean language) but moves in a different direction: philosophy was enacted in the early modern period mainly by people in very specific situations, by men who belonged partly to the class of servants and partly to the class of nobles, insofar as they were enlightened European men who worked as advisors to aristocrats and as tutors to their children (1996). Her title notes, in its play on our academic credentialing, that the early modern philosophers were a special class of men (somewhat emasculated by social position at that, and hence bachelors). Philosophy, on Zack's account, was enacted only in these very practically limited circumstances. These were also the men who generally defended the status quo of their time, including European imperialism and so implicitly (at least!) slavery and genocide.

I no longer teach such courses, not as a result of my private will but rather of the collective will of the state of Indiana. The legislature has gutted our philosophy program along with many other academic offerings. Probably if they better understood the content, if they had followed the arguments of Naomi Zack or Martha Nussbaum let alone those of Socrates or Carter Woodson, they would have eliminated the courses sooner. It would all seem, from their standpoint, a kind of left-wing indoctrination. At the same time, however, the pedagogy was probably not very Socratic even where it was "Socratic": it does not seem to me that any real insurrectionist actions took place as a result of them, and the students who took those courses are now lawyers, doctors, journalists, and other contributors to the American empire that Harris reminds us incarcerates our fellow humans at more

than five times our share of the world's population. So I close with a revision of Pratt's main question: what kind of philosophy will guide us through these times without the context in which Royce proposed so much of his absolute pragmatism, which is to say without the support of public institutions that might expect that we defend them? Socrates, after all, claimed in his *apologia* that we may pursue justice, in an unjust society, only by private and never by institutional or official means (*Republic* 32a).

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