



Introduction to Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, Vol. 3

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In 1916, the midst of the First World War, a remarkable student arrived at the LSE. B.R. Ambedkar was born in 1891 into a Dalit—“untouchable”—family in India. Because his father worked in a local military school and had risen to the rank of officer, Ambedkar’s family had managed to escape the worst effects of the dehumanizing practices towards Dalits that were common in India at the time. Nonetheless, throughout his life, he experienced searing instances of exclusion. These motivated him to make members of privileged castes fully aware of the unconscionable treatment of Untouchables and to strive to, in his words, “annihilate” the caste-riven society he was born into (Ambedkar 2018, pp. vii-xi). Education was his path to the knowledge and influence he required for this reformist project. He became the first Dalit to enrol in the University of Bombay, where he took a degree in Economics and Political Science. In 1913 he was awarded a scholarship and moved to Columbia University, New York, where he completed a Master’s and a PhD thesis in 1916. But he wanted to expand his knowledge of the history of Indian finance and its currency, and this led Ambedkar to do a second Master’s at LSE, which had already established itself as a leading place of study of the social sciences and as an uncommonly welcoming place for international students (Donnelly 2016). Unfortunately, he was recalled to India for war service after only one year, and following the war and subsequent global pandemic, could return to the LSE only in 1920. He stayed to submit his second PhD, *The Problem of the Rupee*, in 1923. Reports claim that “the thesis was too revolutionary and anti-British for the examiners,” and it was not recommended for acceptance. However, a revised version was accepted later that year. Besides his training in economics and political science, Ambedkar spent his time in New York and London studying philosophy and law. On his return to India, he taught at university, practiced law, founded several periodicals, and joined and came to lead organizations for the independence of India and the liberation of Dalits. Following India’s independence in 1947, he became the country’s first Law minister, and was charged with drafting the Indian Constitution. His philosophical writings, legal acumen, and political action earned him widespread recognition as the “father of the Indian Constitution.” He is memorialized by a bust in the LSE Atrium and is an exemplar for how a multidisciplinary education can help one understand and change the world.

Many of the contributions to this year's volume of *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* concern topics central to Ambedkar's thought and political action.

The research papers in this issue were written for *PPE Applications*, an interdisciplinary course which runs in the final year of our four-year B.Sc. in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). Each student wrote two formative papers on which they received comments from staff and at least two anonymous student editors. They then submitted a revised version of the best of these two essays, along with a response to reviewers, as a summative assignment. Here, we collect some of the papers which stood out for their novelty, interdisciplinarity, relevance to current social problems, and careful analysis.

The opening two papers investigate the ways in which the rights of asylum seekers and refugees can be safeguarded while fairly and efficiently allocating the duty to process their applications and meet their needs. Ambedkar addressed related questions during the large-scale migrations after the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, when he lobbied the then Indian Prime Minister, Nehru, to remove the obstacles to the free movement of Dalits from Pakistan to India, and to combat the discriminatory treatment Dalits received on entry into India (Vaishali 2020). Our two contributors, Loubna Marfouk and Maurice Hirt, focus on those who seek, or who could be offered, asylum in the EU. They examine a proposal by the economists Jesús Fernández-Huertas Moraga and Hillel Rapoport that the EU should adopt co-called Tradeable Refugee Quotas. These involve assigning each member state an initial share of all the asylum seekers in the EU and then permitting member states to pay other states to take on the obligation of caring for these asylum seekers in their stead. Moraga and Rapoport argue that the initial quotas could be set in line with countries' social and economic capacities, ensuring that every country would make a substantial contribution to processing asylum claims and caring for asylum seekers. Moreover, they argue that the ability to pay other countries to take on these obligations will ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are allocated to those countries who can meet their needs at lower cost, or who have a greater willingness to accept them. Our contributors evaluate this proposal differently. Marfouk argues that the proposal threatens what she calls "protection efficiency"—the number of asylum seekers whose rights are properly protected. It does so because countries' option to pay other countries to fulfil obligations provides incentives not to enforce adequate standards of care. Moreover, she argues, the institutionalization of the market may corrupt the motivation to care for refugees. In contrast, Hirt argues that given the large differences in costs of hosting asylum seekers and refugees between countries, the proposal's gain in allocative efficiency can be used to benefit refugees, as far more can be aided for the same total cost. He argues that this is to be welcomed on egalitarian grounds. He shares Marfouk's concern that a market in refugee quotas may feed problematic attitudes towards refugees. However, he argues that this is not a necessary effect of this market, and that such corruption of our moral sentiments can be prevented if states adopt and publicly defend the proposal on egalitarian grounds.

The next four papers deal, in different ways, with the topic of discrimination which was so central to Ambedkar's work. James Boucher asks what makes for the kind of wrongful discrimination that the law should, in principle, be used to combat. Some have argued for what he calls "context-sensitive views", which hold that some aspect of the social context is key to identifying discrimination that should be prohibited—e.g., that the discriminated group is and has been the target of widespread marginalization and oppression. Boucher rejects such views and argues that only a "content-sensitive" view—one which focuses on the intentions of the discriminator rather than on the social context and position of the persons discriminated against—can correctly delineate those forms of discrimination which the state should prohibit.

The legal prohibition of discrimination is, of course, an exercise of state power, and one which limits the right to decide whom we associate with. Andreas Snekloth Kongsgaard examines an argument which has its seeds in the work of the economist Gary Becker, and which promises the elimination of discrimination without infringing on people's right to freedom of association. The idea is that businesses who discriminate (in terms of who they choose to hire, who they purchase inputs from, or who they serve) will be at a competitive disadvantage, because they will incur higher costs or forgo lucrative business. In a sufficiently competitive environment, they will therefore be driven out of business in the long run, without any need to limit anyone's freedom of association. Snekloth Kongsgaard argues that this view is multiply problematic. For one, it requires those discriminated against to be willing to put up with behaviour that affronts their dignity for a considerable period. Second, the full protection offered to freedom of association in the proposal means that the state is committed to using force to back up people's right to discriminate, say, by having the police remove Dalit customers from a restaurant that refuses to serve them on grounds of their caste. This amounts, Snekloth Kongsgaard argues, to an indefensible prioritization of the freedom to associate over the right to be free from discrimination.

Ambedkar argued—most famously in his essay “The Annihilation of Caste”—that laws that oppressed and excluded Dalits were illegitimate (Ambedkar 2018). Jintao Zhu examines Martin Luther King Jr.'s argument to a similar conclusion—that we have no obligation to obey segregationist laws—in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”. King's test for a legitimate law was one that “squares with the moral law or the law of God” (1963: 3). Zhu argues that this test is unduly tied to one religious worldview and hence unsuitable for a pluralistic society. He attempts several reformulations of King's criterion to make it less reliant on Christian teaching but finds them all wanting. He concludes that we must find a different set of tests to determine which laws we do not have a duty to obey.

Those who, like Ambedkar, have argued in favour of a society of equals often appeal to the state's obligation to respect and protect human rights. It is a disputed question, however, whether these include the “right to health”, which in the preamble of the constitution of the World Health Organization was defined as the right to “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health” (WHO 1946: 1). Critics, including the development economist William Easterly, have held that, given limited resources, this right is far too capaciously defined, and that in granting everyone a claim to everything they might need to improve their health, it is a recipe for a free for all in which only the strongest and best-connected will have their claims met. Augustine Pellissier answers these critics. She argues that this right should be understood as granting people a claim to the outcome of a fair, transparent, and reasonably resourced system of priority setting in health. So understood, the right is compatible with fair priority setting. Moreover, she argues that it can be an instrument to combat prejudice.

The final two papers use insights from decision theory and behavioural economics to address social questions that arose only after Ambedkar's time: consent to private data processing and climate change. Kirsten McNally examines whether the consent that we give on a daily basis to firms' requests to collect, analyse, and commercialize our personal data is valid. She argues that a principal reason why it is not is that our common decision to take the path of least resistance and consent to the standard terms and conditions offered to us is strongly influenced by present bias. (This is our tendency to, at the moment of decision, give disproportionate weight to benefits that occur at that time in a manner that both in prospect,

and in hindsight, we would not want ourselves to do.²) McNally argues that present bias is likely especially influential in an online environment, when the potential benefits of agreeing to the processing of our private data often begin at once and are vividly presented, but the costs are less vivid and occur, if at all, at some future moment. She argues that to protect citizens from harm due to present bias and other cognitive limitations, an independent body should be charged with setting minimally revealing “default rules” for data processing.

Cameron Hardman’s paper addresses how policymakers should assess climate policies given their lack of knowledge of the outcomes of these policies. In welfare economics, such a lack of knowledge is commonly dealt with by (i) assigning precise probabilities to the possible outcomes of every policy under evaluation; (ii) assigning a value to each of these possible outcomes; and finally (iii) recommending the policy with the highest expected value (the probability-weighted sum of the values of its possible outcomes). Hardman points out that when dealing with climate change, policymakers are unable to compute precise expected values because they lack a reasoned basis for assigning precise probabilities to the possible outcomes of the policies they must choose between. The reason is that the complexity of the issue and the room for judgment left by the evidence are such that it is impossible to non-arbitrarily capture current climate-scientific knowledge by assigning a precise probability to key propositions, such as the claim that in a “medium emissions scenario,” the Earth will warm by more than 2.0 degrees centigrade. For this reason, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assigns only ranges of probabilities to such propositions. It reports that in one medium emissions scenario, “warming is likely to exceed 2.0 degrees centigrade,” where “likely” means “has a probability of between 66% and 100%” (IPCC 2014: 10). For such cases, Hardman defends a model of decision-making that makes use of such probability ranges to compute ranges of expected values (rather than a single such value). He also defends the idea that decision-makers are permitted to use this range in a cautious manner in arriving at an overall verdict on a policy, in the sense that they may give extra weight to the worse expected values consistent with the data. (For example, using the IPCC’s probability range and assuming that more warming is worse, in evaluating the medium emissions scenario, this would involve giving more weight to the idea that warming would, in this scenario, be certain to exceed 2.0 degrees than to the idea that it would merely have a 2/3 chance of exceeding this threshold.) Hardman’s defence is significant, because such caution should, he notes, prompt us to be considerably more proactive in reducing carbon emissions.

This issue also includes a new section of book reviews written for the third-year PPE Research Seminar. In this course, PPE students are placed in reading groups to discuss recent books by scholars working at the intersection of Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Each group organizes a research seminar on their book and writes a collaborative review. We have included four sharp, engaging, critical reviews. Lucius Maltzan, Vithushan Sivanathan and Siwen Wang give an incisive analysis of the strengths and shortcomings of Elizabeth Anderson’s *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don’t Talk about It)*. They focus on ways in which Anderson’s suggestions for ending domination of employees within the workplace fail to address issues that arise in the new gig economy. Shaan Amin, Chloé Blyth and Jai Patel tackle Tommie Shelby’s *Dark Ghettos*. They defend his work against the criticism that it does not offer enough by way of policy prescriptions. For, they argue, it performs a necessary prior step: of sweeping away the “medical model” on which the inhabitants of ghettos are to be “treated” with a suitable “intervention”. Next, David Abadir, Max Schachermayer and Joshua Weinert critically analyse a book that has no such

² More precisely, when considering a trade-off between well-being at time t and well-being at a later time $t + n$, a present-biased person gives more weight to the well-being of time t when t is the present than they do when making this trade-off at other moments (O’Donoghue and Rabin 1999: 103).

qualms about prescribing treatments for the social ills caused by inequality and social discontent: Eric Posner and Glen Weyl's *Radical Markets*. Abadir, Schachermayer and Weinert argue that far from curing what ails society, the book's market-based proposals are likely to undermine people's sense of community and thereby deepen their disaffection. Efe Erciyaz, Marianne Hii, Katrina Zhang complete this issue with their perceptive discussion of *Why Nations Fail* by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson. While they endorse the book's key message that inclusive institutions generate broad-based growth and extractive institutions throttle it, they argue a point that Ambedkar, who strove to build inclusive institutions in an independent India, would no doubt have endorsed: that any analysis of the causes of development and of the global pattern of wealth and poverty must also account for the way in which countries with relatively inclusive domestic institutions were often enriched by the extractive institutions they set up abroad, in their colonies.

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