

- Anthony Comegna: [00:19](#) Welcome back to Ideas and Progress where we will be spending this weekend next with three scholars who recently helped us moderate a graduate research workshop. These conference style programs feature grad student projects, but our faculty also get the chance to tell us all what they're up to, where they're going, and why it matters. First up, it's philosopher, Brian Kogelmann and political scientist, Gary Uzonyi. All right, Brian, thanks for joining us. Can you start out by just defining PPE for us?
- Brian Kogelmann: [00:52](#) So that's actually a little difficult because that's something PPE scholars fight about. They fight about what the definition of the term is and how to understand the research program. So when a lot of people talk about PPE in terms of a research agenda or terms of undergraduate education, a lot of them just mean, "Well, it's people who know a little philosophy. They know a little political science. And they know a little economics. So they know a little bit of all three disciplines."
- Brian Kogelmann: [01:18](#) On that definition there's really no account of how they fit together with one another. There's other ways of thinking about what PPE is and I'm partial to my own definition of what a PPE scholar is. So when I think about PPE, I think it's people who are asking questions that have been traditionally the domain of political philosophy. Normative questions, moral questions, ethical questions about the nature of justice, the nature of the state, the nature of legitimacy, things like that.
- Brian Kogelmann: [01:49](#) But in answering these questions, they realize that the philosopher's toolkit wasn't quite enough. And to answer these questions they also use the tools of economics, and they also use the tools of political science to answer them.
- Anthony Comegna: [02:02](#) Is it essentially what we used to call political economy back in the 19th century days?
- Brian Kogelmann: [02:08](#) Moral science and political economy. So that's Adam Smith, David Hume. I actually think there's a reason why a lot of PPE folks, when everyone has their favorite folks from the history of political thought, the history of economic thought. We tend to like Smith. We tend to like Hume. We tend to read our *Wealth of Nations* and our *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and all that kind of stuff.
- Anthony Comegna: [02:30](#) And when exactly did the break occur when scholars started treating these as specialized and separate cloistered disciplines?

- Brian Kogelmann: [02:41](#) I think probably right after Adam Smith. Right? I mean one of the interesting things is that ... so I'm a philosopher and if you think about the discipline of philosophy, philosophy used to mean just everything. It used to just mean academic inquiry very, very broadly construed. And what happens is as parts of philosophy, as subjects of philosophy, like biology, which was a part of natural philosophy or physics was a part of natural philosophy, as they get their own method and as they get their own more sophisticated tools, they sort of branch off and become their own discipline. Probably somewhere in the 16, 17, 1800s hundreds, right? Economics. It gets its model, it gets its tools of rational choice theory and it gets its mathematical rigorization and after that it sort of breaks off and it leaves philosophy behind.
- Brian Kogelmann: [03:29](#) So right now philosophy is just all the things in which there's not a sophisticated method yet, but people who do PPE think, "Look, you know, it's fine that economists are out doing their own thing, but the philosopher, she still needs the economics to do her job well."
- Anthony Comegna: [03:45](#) Are there any good reasons to treat these disciplines separately, do you think?
- Brian Kogelmann: [03:49](#) Absolutely. Opportunity costs, right? Opportunity costs are everywhere you look. I consider myself a scholar of PPE, a PPE scholar, and I'll be the first to admit that I'm probably not the best philosopher because of it. I'm not completely apprised of all the philosophical literature because I spend a lot of time reading, studying and learning economics and political science. In saying that, a lot of philosophical questions need other disciplines to be answered. Well, it doesn't mean that all philosophical questions need other disciplines or that all philosophers should use them. It's just saying, "Hey, there's a certain subset of questions over here by which if you want to give compelling, thoughtful answers of the kind that Smith or Hume used to offer, then you're going to need some of that economics. You're going to need some of that political science, too.
- Anthony Comegna: [04:40](#) Do you think you could give us an example of a philosophical question that would not benefit from some sort of integrated approach?
- Brian Kogelmann: [04:48](#) Not benefit?

- Anthony Comegna: [04:49](#) Yeah. Something where you could do a sort of pure philosophy and it doesn't really detract that you're not including insights from economics or politics or something else.
- Brian Kogelmann: [05:01](#) Yeah, so I think one thing that philosophers like to do, less now than they used to, but philosophy was about conceptual analysis, right? So we have a concept. We have the concept of justice or we have the concept of rights or the concept of mind. And the question is what does that concept mean? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions that something would have to satisfy in order to be an embodiment of that concept? So that's very, very, very abstract thinking. It's not clear what the economist adds there. It's not clear what the political scientists adds there, but there's a lot of questions besides those that philosophers ask as well.
- Anthony Comegna: [05:41](#) Yeah. What about the historian? It sounds like the historian would have a lot to say about the way we develop our concepts, the context in which we develop.
- Brian Kogelmann: [05:51](#) The cheeky philosopher's answer is that how we came to understand the concept of justice or how he came to understand the concept of mind is independent of how we got there. So she would say, "Well you don't really need ... If you want to understand what the meaning of the concept is, you need to know to understand how it came about or how it changed over time. It's just a purely intellectual exercise that we can figure that out. Now, you might disagree with that, you might reject that. And I think as a part of that, there's a bunch of commitments there about the nature of concepts and there's certain ontological and metaphysical commitments there. But certainly the pure philosopher would say, "Well we don't really need the history to answer our questions."
- Anthony Comegna: [06:30](#) So, and forgive me cause I am just a lowly historian.
- Brian Kogelmann: [06:35](#) Well no, I mean, I'm not an abstract philosopher as well. So I think for the kinds of things I'm interested in, I think there's plenty of room for history.
- Anthony Comegna: [06:43](#) But so is the argument that you could have for example, a pure concept of justice that isn't somehow related to the specific ways in which people developed?
- Brian Kogelmann: [06:58](#) Absolutely.

- Anthony Comegna: [07:00](#) How do you have an idea about what justice is without practicing it somehow in the real world first.
- Brian Kogelmann: [07:07](#) An analogy would be for folks who kind of think like this is that truths about justice or truths about ethics or truths about the nature of knowledge or being, these are similar truths, like truths of mathematics, right? So we don't need to know the history of how algebra was developed. We don't need to know the history of how geometry was developed to learn truths of mathematics. Right? It's a purely intellectual, purely abstract exercise.
- Brian Kogelmann: [07:33](#) A lot of philosophers see themselves as saying, "Hey, when we're doing philosophy, when we're asking philosophical questions, it's just like that." So she would put it back at you and say, "Look, do you need to know history to make advances in mathematics?" Well, if the answer is no there, why is it different for philosophy, if you're doing the very abstract, conceptual analysis kind of philosophy.
- Anthony Comegna: [07:56](#) Yeah. I don't exactly want to get into the kind of historical imperialism. This is every discipline. Even mathematics is really about power dynamics, the way that ideas are created historically or something like that. But does that mean then that unless you take this integrated PPE style approach, you are doing some sort of cloistered philosophy. Like people say that Mises was the armchair economist, right? Then he never got much into other disciplines, ability to say contribute empirical knowledge and understanding to what economists do. I mean, are you sort of condemned to that isolated position?
- Brian Kogelmann: [08:43](#) Yeah, I think so. I think one interesting sociological feature of the profession is you have a lot on the one side, you have the abstract philosophers who are interested in the conceptual analysis and all that. And the other side you have people who are more interested in the PPE interdisciplinary work. It's not that we don't get along, but a lot of times we don't necessarily understand one another's work, right? So I've had people who are very pure philosophers. I'll give a paper and I'll ask a philosophical question, then I'll build an economic model and I'll show how the model can help us better answer the question. And then they'll say, "Well, what was the point of the model? I didn't understand any of this." It's like, well ... the approaches are so different that it's not clear to what extent the two can still talk to one another, have meaningful conversations.
- Anthony Comegna: [09:32](#) So how do you make sure that you're doing that then when you're working within the PPE paradigm. How do you make sure

that your work is actually reflecting all aspects of those different disciplines?

Brian Kogelmann: [09:42](#) I actually don't think that's something an individual has good control over. Right? I think we're all biased in our work and I think we all want to say, "Yeah, I know enough economics. I'm a competent economist even though I don't necessarily have a PhD in the discipline."

Brian Kogelmann: [09:58](#) I think the big thing for PPE to progress as a field of academic studies, you need to have institutions that do quality control around it. So you need journals. You need a sufficient reviewer pool who are competent in PPE scholarship to be able to review PPE style papers. You need conferences, and that's actually something we've been building.

Brian Kogelmann: [10:20](#) There's a new society, The PPE Society, that it's going to have, I think it's fourth meeting this March in New Orleans. there's a journal called Politics, Philosophy of Economics. I say Philosophy, Politics and Economics, but the journals switches it around there. So we have journals and we have editors and we have reviewers who are competent in this stuff. It's about ... in any academic and enterprise, it's not necessarily you policing yourself. We're part of the Republic of Science. We police each other. And I think that's how we make sure we're doing good scholarship and we're getting the philosophy right. We're getting the economics right. We're getting the political science right and all that.

Anthony Comegna: [10:57](#) So what about some of the smaller member states of this republic then? Disciplines like sociology or psychology, geography, literature, things like that. How do they fit into what you do and what other people in the PPE world are doing.

Brian Kogelmann: [11:15](#) Deirdre McCloskey, I think she's a PPE person and she does a lot of literature. So I think certainly that's welcome. No, I think the driving force behind PPE scholarship is recognizing that for the kinds of questions we're interested in, we're not interested in the philosophers very abstract, conceptual, analysis questions. We're more interested in what sorts of institutions should we implement. What rules should we live by. What rules will help us live better together? Right? So for those sorts of questions, philosophy's not enough. We need other disciplines to help us. The big contributors are economics and political science. But that's really not to say that other disciplines will be not necessary or not helpful in that project as well. It could be that history has a lot to offer. I read some sociology, I read a little anthropology. I wish I had time to read more.

Brian Kogelmann: [12:10](#) But again it's the PPE perspective I think is really one of humility. It's saying, "Okay, for what we're trying to do here, the tools we have aren't enough. So we need to go look at what other people are doing."

Anthony Comegna: [12:23](#) Now the program coming up this weekend is a research workshop for graduate students featuring their ongoing research and their own contributions to the sort of research agenda that you mentioned early on. I wonder if maybe you could sketch out. If you are a grad student and you're looking forward for your career 30, 40 years from now and you're thinking that you need to start building your own research agenda within the world of PPE right now, how do you start doing that? And what kinds of questions do you ask yourself to actually construct that?

Brian Kogelmann: [13:02](#) So there's a couple of things you can do. I think first off, if you're a graduate student in the coursework phase of your PhD, a lot of PhD programs will let you substitute courses from other majors or other disciplines on campus as a part of yours. If you're going to PhD in philosophy, there's a chance your program will let you take any econ class or a political science class or even a history class, and let you count that towards your degree.

Brian Kogelmann: [13:27](#) So the first thing is if you see the opportunity available, start branching out more. Beyond that, I think a big thing for the young PPE researcher is to attend a lot of IHS events and also I'll plug, attend a lot of Mercatus Center events as well, which is sort of a sister organization. In particular, the Adam Smith Fellowship Program at the Mercatus Center is a great place for an interdisciplinary scholar to learn some economics.

Brian Kogelmann: [13:53](#) So not only when you go to these programs will you be pushed outside of your own field. So if you go to an IHS seminar you're going to learn more than just philosophy. This weekend we're going to have lectures in political science and economics. But the big important thing is the network, the connections you make and the network you establish.

Brian Kogelmann: [14:07](#) I have a paper, sort of a PPE paper that uses general equilibrium models to make sense of Locke's Theory of Appropriation. So Locke is a great philosopher. He says all these things about the nature of property acquisition and I sort of thought, "Hey, a formal model can help us get insights on this stuff." But I lacked the capacities to build that model on my own, so I looked for a coauthor to do it. And in fact the coauthor that I ended up writing with it, Benji Ogden, we met at an IHS event in the

summer of 2010. We purely know each other through the IHS. And I said, "Hey, I want to write this paper. It needs a model. You're an economist, can you help me out?" And he said, "Yeah, sure." And we wrote the paper and it became a pretty big hit.

Brian Kogelmann: [14:57](#)

So beyond the fact of learning from other disciplines at these sorts of events, the big thing is meeting other people who also have similar interests to you.

Anthony Comegna: [15:05](#)

I want you to know I'm very strongly resisting the urge to attack John Locke. We'll just move on.

Brian Kogelmann: [15:12](#)

What's wrong with Locke?

Anthony Comegna: [15:13](#)

He defended slavery. We can't get into that.

Brian Kogelmann: [15:17](#)

That was bad. That was bad.

Anthony Comegna: [15:20](#)

Okay. So maybe perhaps on that note, what do you think are the most important contributions that classical liberals could or should be making in the next five to 10 years?

Brian Kogelmann: [15:33](#)

That's a good question. I mean this is just an intuition, but I think it has to do with understanding the justification for democracy. A lot of what classical liberals did since the birth of these IHS sort of movements in the late 20th century is they came to a defense of the market. The market was not a popular thing. It was getting bad press and what a lot of classical liberals did say, "Hey, no, it has all these wonderful properties. It leads to prosperity. We can offer moral justifications of it." I don't think many serious people these days doubt the power of the market. So even very, very left wing economists like Paul Krugman, they still believe in the power of the market. They just want to regulate it more than other other folks will. But still fundamentally believes in the market.

Brian Kogelmann: [16:24](#)

I think one thing we're seeing both out in the real world with the election of Donald Trump and Brexit and all of that, and also with some folks in the Academy, is questioning why democracy? Why have democracy at all? The way I understand classical liberalism, it's about markets and democracy and property rights. It's about the kind of government established at the American founding. We did a good job with the market stuff, but now I think democracy needs some help. I think we need to pay more attention to that and think more about what could justify democracy? How can we make democracy better? Those sorts of things.

- Anthony Comegna: [17:22](#) Okay. Gary, Uzonyi, you're political scientist. So what do you and folks in your field, what do you tend to think that PPE or politics and philosophy and economics, what is that to you?
- Gary Uzonyi: [17:36](#) So PPE programs, I understand to be a way in which students can think about certain themes from across different disciplines. Political science, philosophy, economics, often times we address similar themes of interests, but we're going to take different approaches. And so a PPE program is one in which students can get insights that a political scientists might offer, that a philosopher may offer, and then an economist may offer.
- Anthony Comegna: [18:11](#) And do you, do you think that there's only benefits to an integrated sort of approach like PPE or is there any upside to doing scholarship in sort of a more isolated fashion? You know, like I'm thinking for example, if Karl Marx had just stuck to history, which is mainly what academics today still read of his, if he had just stuck to history, he might not have been so bad. But instead he had to do the economics. He had to get involved in politics and all this other stuff. Or if somebody like Thomas Jefferson had stayed with his political theorizing and not gotten all up in his agrarian economics and tried to promote that. Is there any sort of like a pure science of politics that might be beneficial?
- Gary Uzonyi: [19:00](#) I think so. So with PPE programs, usually we're thinking about how we educate undergraduates or individuals who are just coming along into these ideas. And so what PPE does is it gives them a wide range of ways to think about, or a wider range I guess I should say, ways to think about these topics. But what it doesn't do necessarily, is give them as much depth on a particular aspect or angle of thinking as it would to focus just on politics, for example. So one of the benefits to the students of just being in political science or just in econ philosophy, et cetera, is that you can get more about how these thoughts are developed, to why we think about things a certain way in our field. And so there's a sense of a better understanding of each given approach, rather than just the topic at a more shallow level.
- Gary Uzonyi: [20:09](#) Now I think part of your question though has to do with conducting research rather than learning about these topics. I think there are benefits to discipline specific research as well for largely two reasons. The first is just the incentives when it comes to the university structure. So if you're a graduate student and you're thinking about how do I get a job, how do I get tenure once I have that job, what's really important is publishing. And a large part of publishing is speaking the

language that your discipline speaks, right? Because what these publications are is largely a conversation between scholars.

Gary Uzonyi: [20:54](#)

And so if you enter a conversation and you speak a different language, it's going to be difficult for people to understand you or they might just not accept some of the basic premise from which you're beginning. And so by focusing on a certain discipline, you know that language, you know those scholars, you know those conversations. The structure of getting established, the structure of moving up in one's field, building those networks, is easier.

Gary Uzonyi: [21:23](#)

The other reason that it might be beneficial to focus on a specific discipline is because you are largely becoming an expert in something specific. Right? And so as you mentioned, there are folks like Marx or like Jefferson who tried to do research or make claims in an area that they don't know as well. So if you're becoming an expert, let's say in politics, you don't necessarily have the skills to conduct serious or rigorous research in philosophy or economics. By staying within your discipline, you can be careful and more precise about the claims you can make, about the understandings that we have and how things work together.

Gary Uzonyi: [22:11](#)

And so I think there is some value there. Even if I say I'm an expert in politics, I'm not an expert in let's say American politics and in Japanese politics and in Civil War and international law. I am an expert on a very specific slice of my discipline. And so broadening out even further into other disciplines, I think we can see where some of the trouble might develop.

Anthony Comegna: [22:34](#)

What do you think is one of the most important contributions that classical liberals could or should be making say over the next five to ten years?

Gary Uzonyi: [22:45](#)

One of the things that I think is quite important to think about is how classical liberals address the ever growing interconnectedness of the world when it comes to international security. Oftentimes I hear ideas about isolationism and I can understand these ideas from the classical liberal perspective. But as things like regional organizations or international organizations become more important, theorizing on how exactly these organizations interact with the individuals with a given country, how they promote ideas or we enforce certain political orders, I think is going to be quite challenging. I think this is a area where there's a lot of theory that can be developed. I think a classical liberal perspective might be informative to maybe how we think about how these

organizations work or how these interconnected actors work in establishing and maintaining a political order.

Anthony Comegna: [24:00](#)

We'll pick it up right back there next week. And Professor Uzonyi will tell us about his current ideas in progress. He'll be joined by economist Kathleen Sheehan rounding out our research workshop. Till then subscribe to the show and toss us a rating and review while you're there. Thanks for listening.