The Review of Politics 78 (2016), 291–293.
© University of Notre Dame
doi:10.1017/S0034670516000073

Disjunctions: Theory and Practice, Teaching and Research

Edward Andrew

University of Toronto

Beiner's excellent book is the fruit of more than a dozen years teaching his Horizons course that introduced graduate students to a critical examination of a wide range of twentieth-century political philosophers, some familiar to most students, such as Rawls and Arendt, and some unfamiliar, such as Weil and Löwith. In the 1980s and 1990s, before he taught the course, some of my most enjoyable teaching experiences were team teaching with Beiner courses on Foucault and Heidegger, which provided background for his effort to create a twentieth-century canon in his Horizons course. Beiner has been a steadfast defender of canonicity in a university bent on diluting the core curriculum.

Political Philosophy could be said to be an archetype of the common mission statement of universities about the marriage of research and teaching. However, I would say that Beiner's writing and teaching fall outside the university's justificatory role. Research is not just learning or scholarship but aims to produce new knowledge, usually through a collaborative enterprise. Beiner mentions (231) that Habermas and MacIntyre think philosophy should become a collaborative enterprise. But it depends on what one means by collaboration. Philosophers don't think of themselves as groupies but all philosophy depends upon schools, and even the boyish attack on schoolmen by Thomas Hobbes was the product of his schooling. *Political Philosophy* is a superb example of a schoolman, a teacher at the University of Toronto, providing the basis for a twenty-first century political philosophy, but it is not a textbook for others to teach the canonical texts insofar as it is informed by Beiner's own political and philosophic judgments.

We might ask if philosophy is more like the impersonal discoveries of science or the personal self-exploration of a novelist. In most contexts, it would be inappropriate to label a scientific discovery "Canadian science" or "Jewish science" but not necessarily to describe Tom Thompson's art as "Canadian painting" or Mordecai Richler's fiction as "Jewish novels." Beiner has edited a book entitled *Canadian Political Philosophy* but he would be resistant to changing *Political Philosophy* to *Beiner's Political Philosophy*. Yet *Political Philosophy* told me about Beiner's intellectual odyssey; it is Beiner's (not everyone's) political philosophy.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670516000073 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Beiner rightly rejects the starting point of Rawlsian liberalism, namely, the fact of moral pluralism, and rightly holds it to be suicidal to be neutral on the question whether philosophizing or counting blades of grass is more worthwhile. The effects on public education of such a *pronunciamento* should be apparent. Beiner's philosophic monism seems to me at odds with the ongoing research prized by universities. A Rawlsian pluralist in practice, Beiner's god is philosophy; a monotheist, he worships philosophy, not philosophies.

He faithfully obeys the philosophic injunction to search for the components of the good life, and to reveal what makes life meaningful. Beiner rejects not only Rawls's insistence that goodness is subjective but also Weber's and Foucault's injunctions that research depends upon discipline; for them, knowledge does not progress by dwelling on being or searching for the good. One only advances knowledge by submitting to the discipline of confining oneself to a specific region of being and measuring, collecting data, and drawing correlations. When I taught a course with Beiner on Foucault I felt like a *young* anarchist degenerate relative to my colleague's *mature* judgment, and his marked distaste for the power/knowledge epistemology and whips-and-chains ethics of Foucault. One of the widest readers I know, Beiner is not one of the sixty million purchasers of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. In the course, and in *Political Philosophy*, Beiner argued that domination, bondage, and discipline are negative or destructive and not, as in a Foucauldian dialectic, both destructive and constructive. The sexual repression of the Victorian period, for Foucault, created the conditions of the feminist and gay movements. The domination entailed in lower-class females being forced to spread their legs before the objectifying gaze of upper-class male doctors, recounted in Foucault's *Birth of the Clinic*, produced obstetrics and gynecology, or doubled the life span of women in the past two centuries.

To return to the question of research and the epistemology of specialized disciplines, I would think the collaborative research that Habermas advocates depends on a narrowing of horizons, as Foucault concentrated on madness, criminality, and homosexuality, or contemporary research projects concentrate on migration, multiculturalism, or postcolonialism. Beiner has resisted specialization and university discipline and provided us instead with a vivid portrait of himself as a political philosopher, who is leading students from the cave of received beliefs and overlapping liberal opinions, toward the sunlight where they can think for themselves.

Arendt followed Heidegger's existentialism in rejecting the legitimacy of any questions or answers about what humans are, such as Aristotle's view of man as a political animal. The contemporary existentialist consensus manifests itself in liberal witch-hunters routinely sniffing out essentialists and shaming us as necessarily racist, sexist, logocentricist, Eurocentricist, classist, and homophobic, whereas we find it odd that emphasizing commonalities among human beings earns such censure. I am not sure whether Beiner is more Arendtian or Aristotelian with respect to our political nature, or the splendor of the political condition. Beiner writes, "*the common world* in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670516000073 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which we all have a stake felt as if it had collapsed when Bobby Kennedy or Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, in a way that it did not when, say, John Lennon was assassinated" (3, my emphasis). Some polling statistics would be instructive, especially with regard to age cohorts, to determine whether contemporary youth are more immersed in a musical or political culture, more shocked by the death of a pop singer or a politician. My challenge to him is: what is our common world to which he refers? Does the ambitious demand that Beiner places on philosophy depend upon the idea of a common world, as opposed to postmodern philosophies that reveal or construct the different worlds in which individuals dwell, or inhabit without dwelling on enduring questions of life?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670516000073 Published online by Cambridge University Press