Author's Response

Michael W. Mosser

Writing an essay in which one advocates a viewpoint or policy position—especially if the essay is part of a symposium where competing perspectives are put forth and debated in print—should come with an advisory sticker: "Warning: Entering Intense Discursive Zone. Check Egos at Door." The symposium surrounding the essay on "puzzles versus problems" is no exception. It was exciting to put into words many of the ideas on the perceived split between the academy and the policy community that I had developed via personal experience or conversations with colleagues. I knew, however, that to do so would be a salutary check on any inflated sense of self-worth those ideas may have generated. The notions that I had held close for so long would be exposed to the depth and breadth of intellectual critique. They would have to stand on their own.

Whether or not they did so is a judgment which I cannot make, but I am honored that such an august group of scholars chose to respond to my essay and to put into practice the dialogue which I advocate. The responses to the essay are universally robust, absolutely candid and unquestionably intellectually rigorous, and I am grateful to both the scholars themselves and the editorial staff of *Perspectives on Politics* for taking a chance and publishing this symposium. To me, the value of a debate-in-print is self-evident, but the seriousness with which the scholars debated the propositions outlined in the original essay speaks highly of the state of intellectual curiosity in contemporary American academe. That said, I would like to respond to the critics of the essay, and to do so in a way that I hope furthers the discourse we all advocate. I do not intend to engage in a Python-esque "Argument Clinic" where the only response to a logical proposition is a contradiction. Rather, I would like to lay out the rationale for the ideas in the original essay and to make a few remarks in their defense.

'But first I want to engage in a bit of meta-critique. It is fascinating to see the authors' own perspectives on the issue of academic "relevance" (some of which have been represented elsewhere in print and online) appear in their responses to this piece. In fact, it seems as if the original essay served as a kind of "therapist's couch" whereby the commentators could project their own feelings and opinions on the state of the relationship between the academy and the policy world.

The commentaries themselves are all insightful and incisive. Some are pitched more as essays themselves, while others are more direct responses to the original essay in the style of a debate-in-print. The general essays are fascinating and serve to raise deeper questions about the place of scholarship in contemporary society and the relationship of that scholarship to policy or practice. To comment on them in the manner they deserve, however, is far beyond the scope of this response.

From the essays that serve as rejoinders to the original essay, it appears that there are three themes—two general and one very specific—that arise. To my mind, the general ones are the most interesting. The first broad theme is what the commentators almost universally see as the *false* dichotomy I draw between puzzles and problems, or between theory and practice. This is at its heart a deeply philosophical argument, and was the original point of the entire essay. But, oddly enough, most of the commentators appear to have missed that point entirely. My contention in the original essay was that the "gap" is as much in our minds as it is in reality, and when reifying it through professional standards and practices we do nothing but perpetuate it. In fact, one of the commentators reinforced my original point by insisting that the divide remain in place, while others say the divide is not there, or never was.

The issue of perception is a key element of the original essay. Regardless of its veracity, many scholars in typical American institutions have the view that the US military, and especially the US Army, is philosophically opposed to the kind of intellectual rigor that we take for granted in the civilian academy. My use of military schools such as the U.S. Military Academy, West Point or the School of Advanced Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth, was meant to show how the reality differs from that perception. My point was this: If such a traditionally hidebound organization as the U.S. Army is making an effort to bring intellectual openness and honesty to its educational institutions, shouldn't the academy at least applaud the effort and make its own effort to meet it halfway?

doi:10.1017/S1537592710003269

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710003269 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Moreover, the metaphor of "puzzle" versus "problem" appears to have resonated strongly with many of the commentators. Their points are well taken; problem-solving is not confined strictly to military practitioners, and puzzles abound in scenarios confronting military officers and soldiers. Carrying any metaphor too far exposes the bones of its own internal contradictions, and the "puzzle/problem" metaphor certainly fits that mold. Of course there are instances of the "puzzle-solving military officer" and the "problem-solving academic." Those are easy points scored against a brittle allegory. But I would like to raise a toast to it nonetheless for having served the purpose of generating dialogue and discourse among the responses. I still contend that it is a useful, though idealized, metaphor for exploring the differences between the uniform and gown (as one response so adroitly put it).

The second broad theme concerns the specifics of the essay's portrayal of the academy and the military themselves. This argument is more practical. The majority of the responding authors take issue with my assertion that the academy needs to work on more "militarily relevant" questions and not the other way around. Most believe the essay is unbalanced, and that I turn a blind eye to major issues. A few of the respondents take me to task for failing to call for the military to make itself more "academically relevant," rather than placing the burden solely on the academy. Others see the academy (especially the field of international relations, or IR) as already working on policy-relevant questions without fear of placing one's academic career in professional jeopardy. Finally, at least one critic calls attention to my inability to adequately portray the incentive structures embedded in the military. That point is fair enough: I have never served in the military and have only worked alongside those who have. Clearly, I am at a loss to explain its incentive structures in a way that reflects the reality of serving in the contemporary American military. That is yet another benefit of participating in a symposium. The details lacking in the broad brush strokes of the original essay can be filled in by those who know better of which they speak.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most controversial specific element of the essay is the section outlining the Department of Defense's Minerva Initiative as an example of the academic/policy bridge-building I advocate. With respect to what one commentator calls my "full-blown defense" of Minerva, I offer a few thoughts. First, I contend that Minerva is either a catalyst or a poison to academic research in a particular set of issues. If it is a catalyst, and the funding provided by the Department of Defense promotes vigorous academic research into areas of significance to national decision-makers, then I welcome its impact. If, however, it is a drop of poison in the pristine well of the academy, then the entire well is contaminated. The academy will become increasingly subservient to the state, to the detriment of both. So, which is it? Will the infusion of Minerva money jumpstart or poison academic research? It is one of those (in)famous "unknown unknowns." But a look at the funding streams of the academies of other OECD countries (or even our own natural sciences) shows that the American social science academy may be guilty of a Pollyanna attitude towards our research funding. Many countries have explicit ties between government and the academy, and some (Australia comes to mind here) have Minerva-like funding that comes from their equivalents to the Department of Defense. The existential crisis provoked by Minerva in the American social science academy is simply unfathomable to our foreign colleagues. Finally, I would ask a question of the Minerva critics: What evidence do scholars critical of the project need to confirm/disconfirm preconceptions of bias from Minerva funding? I speak only from my own limited experience with Minerva funding when I was part of the project on climate change and African political stability (CCAPS) at the University of Texas. UT received its grant in the category of "exploratory" research; there are no expectations of findings consistent or inconsistent with US national security objectives. Were that to change in any way, I guarantee that the scholars affiliated with the project would return their grants and walk away.

Finally, a few words about the tone of the essay. From the outset, the essay was intended to be provocative. The ideas are drawn in broad strokes, and qualified only where necessary to keep the basic point from venturing into caricature. Nuance is not a hallmark of the essay, for good reason. To engender debate and discussion, one must stake out a position from which it is possible to retreat a bit to achieve common ground without compromising the essential spirit of the original idea. Nonetheless, a few of the commentators felt as if my essay was a personal attack on the very idea of scholarship. Nothing could be further from the truth. "Pure" scholarship has its place: to question underlying assumptions and to prod society from its complacency—in short, to do nothing less but speak truth to power. But the state and its representative policymakers are not going anywhere. And the contemporary American academy should not miss the opportunity to engage the two wherever and whenever possible. This symposium is a solid start. Let us hope the momentum generated here will carry forward to a more collaborative future.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710003269 Published online by Cambridge University Press