

Service Responsibilities: When to say "YES" --- How to say "NO"¹

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In order to answer these questions, it seems we may need to start with three central propositions, all of which rest on a normative base(s). First, I would like to suggest that perhaps never before in our history have universities been expected to play a more substantive role than they are today in the co-evolution of economy, society and nature. In fact, our very survival may depend on the co-evolutionary world view, and we as university professors perhaps need to carry this idea out to others. As a result, service and outreach have also perhaps never before faced such opportunity, but also such significant challenges, in order that we do this well. It really is your challenge, and your opportunity, as the new arrivals to the academy, all freshly trained in the best that science has to offer, to really take the leadership, and plot the course, as we wonder into this largely new territory. And, while we have some experience in this kind of ground (e.g., the long-standing interaction between U.S. universities and the food system), nothing that has been done in the past can be totally relied upon as the way to help the evolution in the future: We drive the one-way arrow, on which we can only go forward.

Second, as noted in Hilliard and Lynne (2000, p. 2) "it is appropriate to expect faculty to demonstrate scholarship and creativity as essential components in the evaluation of their research teaching and outreach," and we might add "service" to this list. I would like to focus on the scholarly dimension of this expectation. It seems to me that what distinguishes a university from other kinds of organizations, and, also then that which distinguishes what we each do as professors from what it is that others do in other lines of work, is, in a word, *scholarship*. It follows that whatever we do, no matter the activity with which we become involved, yes, including even the committee work that often characterizes service, that a scholar's approach needs to be taken to at least providing the broad outlines of the action, if not the details.

Third, the challenge is to find a way to symbiotically balance the private and the public scholarship, the latter characterizing what it is we do in outreach and service. Perhaps it is not about saying yes or no, in a dichotomous choice kind of way, but rather about finding that distinct and special balance.

On the Co-evolution of Economy, Society and Nature

Regarding co-evolution and our role in it, consider that in the economic dimension, we are living through a revolution in the way we organize ourselves to do business. Tremendous consolidation in the business world is at work: The Rule of Three is very much operant. Yet, we see up-start, small businesses all around us, as in the "dot.com" world. We move toward monopolies while simultaneously seeing more opportunities

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than ever for individual entrepreneurs, helped by the computer and information revolution. And, on a more macro scale, we live in a time during which the strengths of capitalism have been only recently acknowledged by many millions of people around the world as arguably perhaps the best way for individuals to organize the economic system that is embedded in the larger social and natural system in each of these places. This line of thinking has gained substantive support in light of the grand social experiment in Europe (and other regions of the world) with collectivism and socialism of various kinds, which has largely failed. We as university faculty, perhaps even more than in the past, need to be very much in touch with these happenings, and help lubricate the conversation about same, and perhaps influence the trajectory. It is, seemingly, one of our greatest challenges in the realm of outreach and service to help make this new capitalism, or whatever variant on it that emerges, good.

In the social dimension, within which the economic is embedded, we see ever more expectations that university faculty will have something important to say about everything from family and marriage, divorce issues, through crime and violence, designing business organization needed in the new capitalism, and onward to building community. Robert Putnam's book "Bowling Alone" (Putnam, 2000), an elaboration of his 1995 Journal article that introduced this terminology, characterizes the situation in the U. S. wherein we have lost community. Putnam has focused attention in the sciences on something called social capital. Community needs to be re-built and built on all scales, from local to international. Social capital is about improving the networks and helping involve more appropriate norms within all communities (including the university community) within society. It seems that we as scientists have a special purpose, a special role, in lubricating the kind of conversation that builds the cement of local, state, national and international society as represented in these networks and norms.

In the natural dimension, the natural world, we are finally starting to fully grapple with Kenneth Boulding's metaphor, that of "spaceship earth (Boulding, 1985)." Both economy and society are embedded within this natural system on this spaceship. It has become abundantly clear that thermodynamic laws cannot be violated, that we cannot rid ourselves of anything and that every step we take we lose useful work in the planet's natural system. Thus, it has become essential that we seek ways to minimize the throughput in our production systems, and thus better ensure the longer term sustainability of our planet. As Norgaard (1995), the current president of the International Society of Ecological Economics would have it, we coevolve, market, society and nature and we need to combat the ignorance that has often guided that coevolution in the past. Yet, we would not participate in sustaining the planet through service and outreach activities unless we see the normative value of it. The mission motivates engaging the question with the best we can bring forward from our individual sciences.

It follows that outreach and service need to be elevated to the attention of more than something we do in our spare time to something that is deemed a substantive part of what it is we do as scholars. Such effort is best carried forward by someone with a studious temperament and who loves to teach, two primary attributes of a scholar (Anderson, 1996, p. 34), and now extended to the realms of the outreach and service audiences. It

also requires a healthy mix of the other attributes of a scholar (see Glassick et al., 1997, pp. 63-66), that of courage (particularly when raising value issues), perseverance, and, above all integrity, especially as the latter relates to revealing the value presumptions upon which we both choose and rest our work. Perhaps it is a unique time, a post-modernist time, to recognize the value basis for what we do as scholars, especially in outreach and service activities. What specifically, then, does this mean, to do outreach and service as scholars, especially on a normative base?

On Scholarship in Outreach and Service

I see the answer to the question of "When to say 'YES' " and, perhaps, I would rather say it, "*When*," rather than "*How*, to say 'NO' " (the *How* seems to have more to do with tact, and interpersonal relationship building than it does with criteria on which to base that interaction), as largely resting on the problem of symbiotic balancing as between private and public scholarship. Intriguingly, it is perhaps a balance that only we each can strike, only we as individuals can find, knowing we have found it by achieving a peace of mind about it. To help us think about this internal balancing, we need some definitions and characterizations of just what we mean by public and private scholarship.

Wolf (1997) characterizes private scholarship as what we do in conjunction with our students and colleagues, and, actually, mainly by ourselves, while studying, researching, and then elaborating the literature on a topic holding considerable intrigue to us and to our disciplines. It is that which often holds our attention, wherein our curiosity is the greatest, and where we believe we will someday be the expert if we are not already such today. I am reminded of the professor friend of a colleague of mine some years ago who perhaps knew (and still knows, I suspect) more about spiders than anyone else on this planet. In private scholarship, we seek deep knowledge, and wisdom, about specialized topics, the subtleties of which are perhaps only understood by a very few individuals in the world. We have to keep in mind that perhaps less than 2-3% of the world's population at any one time has ever been, or ever will be, a professor. Far fewer have the depth of understanding in each specialized area. Indeed, only a very few in the population have the persistence to be experts of this nature, and it is our responsibility to be so persistent. It is only a very few that have the predisposition to be perpetual students, and teachers to everyone, the students, colleagues, and audiences that they engage.

Yet, this has its dangers, especially when it leads to carrying the activity to the point of *rigor mortis*, or, as Maslow (1954, esp. pp. 15-17) had it, *means centering (rather than problem centering) in science*, with its attendant "apparatus scientists" rather than question askers; overvaluation of quantification as an end in itself; participating in perpetuating the inappropriate hierarchy of science; helping segregate one's science from the other, with claims on having the only truth, rather than encouraging the truth seekers.

As Steven Fuller, who has countered Kuhn's contention that paradigms naturally split apart and re-form in more appropriate ways, says it, we have to guard against being captured by the paradigm and its methods (quoted in Sharlet, 2000, p. A19; also see Fuller, 2000)

So there's a paradigm. And you've got the keeper of the paradigm, the department heads and so on. So, what happens to you as a scientist? You become acculturated, and you apprentice with these guys, and you become certified to do science. And that's what you do, in a protected space, for the rest of your life. Filling out the world picture behind the paradigm.

So, the individual scientist is conditioned, during the tenure process, to become dedicated to the discipline. As Wolf (1997) says it, in defending such private scholarship, "... as a scholar, I have only one principal obligation: to my quest for understanding," which to most means an obligation to understanding the world from the perspective of the paradigm within the discipline. Intriguingly, perhaps the greatest antidote to this means centering tendency is outreach and service, in that real people have problems and universities have departments.

Wolf (1997) helps us understand that public scholarship is practicing as a scholar ... while engaging people outside the academy in the issues of the day, with the standard scholarly commitments "to openness, tolerance, intelligence, and fairness." We must recognize that this approach in the public realm can create all manner of difficulties, in that some do not want certain things openly discussed, as in value debates. It is noteworthy that he decides in this particular piece, that the energy needs to be put primarily into private scholarship, although he probably would encourage a problem centering rather than means centering focus. Wolf (1999), in another article, also calls for doing the moral inquiry, engaging the normative dimension as also having a scientific dimension. As Boyer (1990, p. 65) sees it, although he was addressing all the things in which the new scholars must participate, but with seeming direct application to outreach and service, "tomorrow's scholars ... must think creatively, communicate effectively, and have the capacity and inclination to place ideas in a larger context." Perhaps this is no more true than in the realm of engaging in public scholarship, especially once we see the normative dimension of that larger context.

On Symbiotic Balancing

The latest research in neuroscience, evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology (see Cory, 1999; 2000 for an overview) suggests that every individual, professors no different from the rest, face the daily tensions and conflicts in symbiotically balancing as between the egoistic and the empathetic ranges within our very own brains. Stress arises when we seek to feed only the ego, or when we cater only to the empathy, and subsides only when we find the balance between the egoistic driven urge to-do-what-we want and the empathic urge to-do-what-we-ought-to-do, with the balance quite unique to our own psychology. So, when to say "yes" and when to say "no", is perhaps that point at which a distinct state represented in a certain peace of mind is achieved, one that exceeds the

understanding of all others. This point is, indeed, a quite individual matter. Yet, this does not mean that it is easy, in that department heads and the tenure committee may have quite different ideas on what the balance needs to be. It thus becomes important to proactively engage them, in the hope that some common ground can be found, while never losing site of self.

It is my suspicion that this balance may even vary to some extent by disciplines. Perhaps sociologists, e.g., especially of the Durkheimian persuasion, being quite focused on norms and networks in the approach, may well expect the balance be shifted toward the empathic others-interest and away from the egoistic self-interest. Economists of the mainstream, University of Chicago tradition, in contrast, may see it quite irrational for new entrants to the academic unit to pursue anything but the self-interest, and would not deem it inappropriate that one focused almost entirely on furthering one's own stature in the profession. I cannot give specific guidance to individuals who are outside my own realm of experience, which is largely in the social sciences, other than to say that it is wise to be a sensor in your own unit as to what is deemed an appropriate balancing of these two primary interests.

Beyond the need to balance, we also know that some stress is good, and that we must find and only avoid exceeding the dangerous thresholds, each unique to every individual. It is seemingly essential to know thyself on this front, and seek professional-help if mentors are not available or do not have the understanding of your particular situation. It is good to not try to do this on your own, and seek out soul mates among your peers, perhaps someone you will meet during this event today.

Conclusions

Seemingly we now have a conceptual framework for addressing the question regarding yes and no, at least as it pertains to outreach and service outside the academy. In some ways, such activity is exactly what is needed in order to counter the tendency to stay within the paradigm, which may well stifle creativity, and perhaps, even the very self. Yet, as we move to problem centering, we must not become so mired in the value debates inherent in public scholarship as to lose our capability to do private scholarship: As Wolf (1997) noted, we must ultimately put our energy into understanding, which is the principle obligation. Private scholarship is the overriding base on which the answer to the question rests. We have all gained an appreciation for that which is scholarly in approach and outcome, else we would not be professors, so perhaps what remains is to ferret out the normative dimension, which seems crucial to moving down the path to answering the questions posed for this session. The exciting aspect of the question is that the answer is internal to the self, as long as the individual is engaging others with empathy, as we move toward that distinct state. So, the question of when to say yes and when to say no can be approached in a systematic way, as long as one sees the macro forces at work, and takes courage in making a difference in influencing same, while always making the normative base a visible part of it all.

We perhaps also now have a hint regarding an answer to the question this commentary has tried to skirt, namely “how” to say no. Perhaps this, too, flows from the realization that we need to seek balance in the ego and empathic tendencies that are in tension, very much about what it means to be human, and again try to empathize with the department heads and tenure committees with the hope that such empathy will be reciprocated. Perhaps it is on the base of empathy on which the search for answers to the outreach and service questions of all kinds needs to rest.

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