Tips for organizers on inclusiveness in conference invitations.
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PRELIMINARY REMARK: I was telling people that "I wasn't doing any philosophy this year at the APA, just something on professional issues." But I think that's precisely *not* the right way to put it; this session *is* philosophy; it's philosophers using our philosophical skills to reflect on our everyday practices. Furthermore, that reflection is sorely needed, as one of the things we tend not to do is such reflection, because, hey, we're philosophers, so of course our daily practices are transparently rational and just.

So "reflection" is the first of three aspects of how I think we should go about inclusive conference organizing; the other two are clarification of audiences, goals, and budgets, and the invitations themselves. I'm going

to present them in steps but in reality there are and should be many feedback loops in the process.

STEP I. REFLECT ON CURRENT PRACTICES. The first thing we need to do is reflect on our normal practices (especially those having to do with "merit".)

Unfortunately, it seems many organizers just say to themselves, "let's get the best folks we can on topic X." I think this is so from a common response to a question about a poor inclusivity roster: "well, we invited Professor Householdname and Professor Bigshot but they were busy." To me this implies that the organizers used some sort of one-dimensional "merit" measure and then rank-ordered the people who come to mind on that axis, starting at the top [of whatever section of the list they thought they could conceivably afford / interest] and working their way down.

I want to make two points here.

First, just relying on who comes to mind sets us up for implicit bias via schemas of "what a philosopher is like" (as Kate Norlock sketched for us in her comments); this reliance on who comes to mind then reinforces the replication across time of the over-representation of certain social groups in our profession.

Second, merit ranking seems to me to involve a questionable metaphysics in which "merit" is seen as a property inherent in individuals that can be discerned, extracted, and then compared to others on a single scale. You could simply express this as an attribution error: you're making network position into a property of a person.

That is, there are complex relations among folks – position in hiring and citation networks and so on – that account for perception of merit, and it's a mistake to make those positions into properties of people. As my wife would say, "You can't take rejection personally; there are too many variables at work. [Wait two beats.] In fact, you can't even take *acceptance* personally!"

Or you could adopt Deleuzean language and talk about multiplicities and individuations. That is to say, there is a multi-dimensional matrix of philosophical qualities that each person individuates. A "multiplicity" is a Deleuzean technical term that I'm loosely adopting here; let's say that here it refers to the multiple dimensions of philosophical quality each of us condenses in our teaching, chit-chat, talks, essays, books, and so on. For instance,

1. Rigor and clarity of expression;

2. Breadth and depth of the field coverage;

3. Historical awareness of predecessors / analogues;

4. Originality: fine slices of an established field or establishment of a new field?

5. Etc ...

Okay, why the ellipses? This is what Judith Butler, at the end of *Gender Trouble*, calls "the embarrassed 'etc' ": it indicates the inability to ever completely list the dimensions of a multiplicity. (We're going to come up against the embarrassed etc later on.)

For now, let me offer an image whose benefits – and limits – show why I think a one-dimensional ranking is bound to do violence to the radical perspectivism or irreducible plurality or real multiplicity of philosophical quality.

Imagine philosophical quality is like a multi-faceted prism: turn it one way and look down one axis of sight and you'll see all the other dimensions seen from the perspective of that aspect; turn it another way and you'll see the other dimensions from that perspective. (If I knew music better, I could probably come up with a musical analogue here, something about a tune in multiple keys, maybe.)

Before anyone objects about holograms being exactly that which produces a single image condensing multiple perspectives, the limit of the prism image for our purposes here is that a hologram will put equal weight on each perspective [I think! I'm no expert on holography, so bear with me if the details are off], whereas there's no way to turn "scores" along all the dimensions of philosophical quality into a single ranking without making some judgment as to the importance of each dimension, and that's going to stack the deck for the ranking.

A final word about "merit." Merit is a very emotional subject. Even abstracting from the uni-dimensional vs multi-dimensional problem, we have lots of raw feelings here. Let's say, for the sake of argument that, notwithstanding some exceptions, merit is a necessary condition for placement and advancement in university philosophy programs (so, pace my wife, you *can* take acceptance personally). But it doesn't follow from that that merit is a sufficient condition; there are many talented people who end up in precarious academic labor. But this injection of sheer luck into placement and advancement is hard to accept for some people; they want to think that those who end up in precarious labor deserved it somehow; the reason they didn't make it was some lack of merit on their part. In other words, some folks just don't want to accept that we have a tragic job system where bad things happen to good people.

There's a wrinkle here: if you don't win the early TT job lottery [this is a strong way to put the anti-"merit as sufficient condition" position, but what the hell, let's go with it], your work conditions are going to be such that your productivity will suffer and it will look, retrospectively, like

you always lacked the merit that would have warranted your getting a TT job. But this lack of productivity is produced by external circumstance as much as – or better, more than – it is an exhibition of some inherent quality of the person. So we're back to our critique of the attribution error. Or, my final invocation of Deleuze: for him, the above critique of the attribution error of making network position into the property of a person rests on the externality of relations to their terms.

In other words, there's nothing about you, Asst Prof X, that would let you show your merit in a precarious labor position. (Again, this is an extreme formulation, and probably should be reworked along population thinking lines – the odds of any one randomly selected early TT hire placed into a precarious labor position being able to gain the publications and citations that would allow a "merit" perception would be much lower than that of a randomly selected precarious labor person placed into a TT post getting those publications and citations. But in any case, a critique of the TT sector of the political economy of philosophy instruction is not really what the talk is all about, so let's move on.)

STEP 2: CLARIFY YOUR AUDIENCES, GOALS, AND BUDGET. The choice of invitees doesn't occur in a vacuum. So *even before* thinking about whom to invite, organizers should think about the audiences, goals, and budget of their project. And these aspects are multi-dimensional and intertwined (many cases of the "embarrassed 'etc' " here!), so here especially you shouldn't think individually in a serial fashion but you should work collaboratively with others and build in time to loop back to the other dimensions as your project begins to crystallize out of its multiplicity.

AUDIENCES. Among the dimensions for audiences are those concerning the philosophical profession, social groups, other academic disciplines, and the public and administrators.

When it comes to the philosophical profession you should consider age, areas, positions, and genres. 1) Age: UG, grad, junior, mid-career, senior, emeritus (we can't overlook ageism here). 2) Areas: the "core analytic" areas of course: M&E, Mind, Language; but also Ethics, Politics, Aesthetics; Social Theory: Feminism, Disability, Queer Theory (and their intersections and "etcs"). 3) When it comes to positions: naturalist /

anti-naturalist; realist / anti-realist; historicist / anti-historicist; ideal theory / political embeddedness ... And then 4) Genres: AP, CP, pragmatism, Asian, African, Comparative ...

Social groups within philosophy: the over- / under-represented groups, as they intersect with the above dimensions. How many intersecting dimensions of the social multiplicity can you consider, keeping always in mind "the embarrassed 'etc.' "? Among the main ones currently of concern are race, gender, class, and disability, but the embarrassed etc here can concern religion, ethnicity, language, ...

Other academic disciplines: we're often complaining – when we're not taking perverse pride in it – about the way other academics don't get what we're doing, that they don't want to collaborate with us. Well, here's a chance to include them from the start in planning our projects!

Finally, the public, including administrators: would it kill us to include an outreach session in our conferences? (Craven pandering to those holding the purse strings? You say that like there's something wrong with that!)

GOALS: As to goals, many conferences / volumes seem to have only an implicit horizon of benefit to "the profession" (abstractly conceived) and the narrow circle of invitees.

So you could sum up one of the main points of my comments here as: do we really have to have all our conferences be about cutting edge research?

That is, if there's a settled consensus as to what the problems are in a field, do we really need another round of fine distinctions? I'm not saying we shouldn't have some sessions at conferences be specialized, nor that we shouldn't have specialized volumes, but do all of them have to? Maybe we should treat consensus on the basic questions not as the occasion for a gathering to hash things out more, but as a warning sign that we're getting too complacent, and that we could stand some reflection on the implicit assumptions behind our research programs, our canons? Can they be challenged, contextualized, overturned?

I know there are a lot of things to say here, about adopting a scientific model for incremental progress via a division of labor, paradigms vs revolutions, the modesty of the scientific model as opposed to the hubris of the *maître-penseur* model, and so on.

Leaving that to one side (yes, I know there's a sort of "Other than that Mrs. Lincoln" vibe here), we should consider the ways in which benefits to audiences and invitees might be explicit goals in our conference planning.

For UG and G students, conferences are a chance to experience philosophy on the spot. Here we can talk about two dimensions of performance: 1) the sheer intellectual content of the talks; and 2) the affirmation, via exhibition, of the affective dimension of philosophy. Letting students see how our eyes light up when the words get flowing and the ideas take a hold of us: there's absolutely nothing wrong with showing that – indeed it's really one of the most attractive things about philosophy, our ability to get carried away!

Now, addressing the role model / schema / implicit bias issue, conferences are also an opportunity for UG and G students to experience the actual real diversity of philosophy and philosophers.

For academics in other fields, conferences are also a chance to experience philosophy. This might help them and us see chances for interdisciplinary work, which might, again, help chip away at our isolation (assuming we can get over that perverse pride in that very isolation).

Let's move now to the ways conferences can benefit the invitees. I think we need to be able to make a positive goal of our conferences the professional development of junior and mid-career academics via expert feedback on their work, and the confidence that comes from (hopefully positive experiences) of personal contact with other people at all ranks: junior, mid-level, seniors, and emerit(a)(us).

As for benefits for seniors and emerit(a)(us) people, let's not forget that an opportunity to help mentor young folks can also be a form of professional development, especially for those who don't teach in

graduate programs. Of course, there's also a chance to hear new folks and maybe freshen up their work, and let's not forget, a chance to catch up with old friends – and there's nothing wrong with that!

Finally, there are also some temptations to be avoided: Are you sure you don't just want to invite some pals and / or show off how many big shots you know?

BUDGET. That brings me to the budget, and here I want to thank Jenny Saul and Teresa Blankmeyer Burke for comments on the notes I posted at New APPS prior to this talk. The important thing here I think is to be aware of how the default setting for costs in most venues assumes an able-bodied person without child care, so that inclusivity along disability and child-care lines (disproportionately a burden on women) is going to be seen as an "extra expense." Also of note here is that relying on self-reporting of "special needs" along disability lines can be discouraging, and should be replaced ahead of time with concern for picking venues with Universal Design (UD), so that inclusivity is built into the social environment of the conference, and not something special that is dispensed on an individual basis.

There's a lot here to be said about a political vs individualized pathology concept of "disability," but let's just say that we should take it upon ourselves to familiarize ourselves with these debates, and the concept of UD, as a normal part of our preparation for conference organizing, not something we scramble to do at the last minute if someone asks for "special treatment."

Having said all that, it's precisely because UD is not the norm that we need to familiarize ourselves with accessibility issues. (On US university campuses there will be an ADA compliance office; if you're going to use university facilities, you should be in touch with them early in the planning process. If you're thinking of using a hotel venue, you'll need know what kinds of questions you need to ask: about wheelchair accessible hotel shuttle from the airport, for instance.)

You should also look to hidden ableist assumptions in your scheduling. Some folks are just not going to have the stamina to go 9-5 with 90 minutes for lunch and then bang, right back at it for the 2 pm session (Good Lord, how I hate the 2 pm session after lunch. Can I get a witness?), and then another 60 minutes at 5 for the reception, then hey,

we've got that dinner reservation at 6:30 at a basement restaurant 4 blocks away, so we better get going now!

STEP 3: INVITE FOLKS. Invitations can and should take all the above into consideration. Also, if we don't just aim for world-famous folks doing cutting-edge research, we can avoid the overload on senior folks in under-represented groups. If we're not just inviting those few senior people, it's because we recognize that professional development is a valid criterion, so that our invitations can look to benefit colleagues in under-represented groups and at junior and mid-level without having to worry about "diluting merit" or something along those lines.

I'm not saying you shouldn't invite senior people or people from over-represented groups. But here are some other considerations: Are your invitees open and eager to engage in the Q&A? Will they actually try to engage with and even mentor junior folks, and be good at it too? If Professor Householdname just shows up for the keynote and spends the rest of the time at the museum, in the hotel pool, and in fancy restaurants, well, sure, you got 75 minutes of their time. Is that worth the honorarium and travel you shelled out?

FINAL CONSIDERATION: Finally, make sure you have a good process: make sure you have a wide-ranging organizing committee with people knowledgeable about the dimensions we discussed above, and circulate drafts of your conference audience, goals, and budget to others, as well as drafts of the invite lists once you've clarified the audiences, goals, and budgets.