

## Visibility in Philosophy

By Susanna Siegel

General thoughts: It is good to know who else works in your specific area. This includes graduate students, junior (= untenured) and senior (tenured) philosophers. And for different reasons, others philosophers want to know who you are. Tenured philosophers, especially as tenure time recedes into the past, like to keep abreast of who new people in the field are. Graduate students often want to get a feel for how contemporary discussions of a problem or topic compare to older discussions. Other junior people in your area may be pleased to have someone to talk with about their research. Professionally, it's mutually beneficial to cite each other. By learning what other junior people in your area are working on, you take the temperature of the zeitgeist that you are collectively creating.

It's also true that lots of people want to know more women philosophers. You've probably seen the discussion on various blogs (Feminist philosophers, Leiter Reports) about numbers of women in the profession. We know that mechanisms of exclusion are operating, but it is such a kicker to figure out what those mechanisms are. Nonetheless there are things people can and do try to do to reverse those mechanisms, even without knowing what they are. One of them is invite more women to speak at conferences and colloquia, and to contribute to volumes, to serve as editors and referees. A central factor in putting yourself in the firing line of these efforts is to have an online presence. So if you haven't already....

- Make a website where you post your papers, a short description of your research interests, your CV.
- Link your papers to philpapers.org, a database of papers organized into finely grained categories. You can select multiple categories for each paper.
- In addition to learning who the other people in your specific area are, get to know those people themselves when you can.

How do you learn who the people are working in your area? Besides meeting people face to face at conferences or the APA, there is a lot you can do online. First, there's philpapers.org. Another is through the ever-proliferating philosophical blogs, many of which are group blogs listing contributors on a sidebar. Leiter links to many of them. To list just a few, in philosophy of mind/epistemology/metaphysics, there's brainpains (from SMU), lemmings (by berit brogaard), garden of forking paths (free will/action theory), feminist philosophers, certain doubts, thoughts-arguments-and-rants, experimental philosophy, and many others. (Those are just the ones that I happen to know about. Confession: I rarely read these any more, unless I come across a link to one from someplace else. But I used to and I discovered people I wouldn't know otherwise). A third way is through David Chalmers's website, which

lists philosophers working in different areas who have online papers. (Most if not all of this information has gotten subsumed into philpapers.org).

So far, the suggestions (above) are ones that I think everyone has good reason to follow. They are quasi-obligatory, in the sense that if you don't make your work and your existence knowable on line in some way (either via a website or philpapers or both), you're making it much harder for anyone to get to know who you are.

The suggestions that follow below are probably best thought of differently. They are various ways to navigate the route from being less visible to being more visible.

Do you know the notion of an affordance from Gibson, the psychologists? It's roughly: a possibility for action that the environment makes vivid to you. So different creatures, and different individuals, will experience different affordances from the same external situation. For a kid, sand on the side of the road affords playing, for a biker it affords slipping. These suggestions are meant to help you see what affordances that are there for you, sort of like trails that you could potentially follow if it seems right.

- If you read a paper by someone and you have questions about it, don't hesitate to correspond with them by email. Doesn't matter if the paper (or the philosopher!) is old or new. People often like to receive these emails. It's nice to know someone is reading your work.
- Start or join a working group of junior people on a topic that you know a lot about, want to learn more about, have ideas about that you want to share, want to talk about. It can be more like a reading group or a forum for informal presentation or a combination. A model: the Moral Psychology Research Group, which has met once a semester for about several years, and came to define the field of experimental philosophy. Philosophers from all over who are interested in x-phi meet at a different place each semester to present their papers to each other. Another model: the grads at MIT have something they call the Epistemology Reading Group. Sometimes someone picks a paper by someone else (published or unpublished) to discuss, sometimes people present their work in progress, other times people distribute paper in advance to get comments on it. Such working groups can end up shaping the course of a debate.
- Consider contributing to comment threads on blogs in your area, or to discussion threads on philpapers.
- It can be useful when your department is hiring to know graduate students working in your area. It is also useful to know graduate students are If you are the chatty/curious (or let's call a spade a spade – gossipy) type, you might even end up with useful information about other people that your department will appreciate. So if you have an easy opportunity to attend a grad conference and there's a paper or two of interest to you, go for it.

- Keep an eye on conferences in your area. Go to them when you can. Submit a paper or poster if you can. Ask questions at talks and talk to people afterward if they didn't answer your question well enough, which they probably didn't. For instance, in epistemology, the Rutgers Epistemology Conference is held every other year (at Rutgers). In philosophy of mind, some good conferences to attend are Tucson Consciousness Conference, Society of Philosophy and Psychology (SPP), European SPP, Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness. In metaphysics, Laurie Paul of UNC sponsors a conference every June designed to bring young people interested in metaphysics into contact with other people working in that area. (She is an example of a senior person in the field who loves to get to know new untenured people in her field, especially women). Other conferences not specific to area include: Central States Philosophical Association, Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference, Florida Philosophical Association. Those are just the conferences I happen to know about. Those are just the conferences I happen to know about. But there are many others. You can find listings of conferences on the APA website.
- If you have time off and it's feasible, visit another department for a chunk of time when you can attend seminars that interest you. Likewise, if it's feasible, go to talks that interest you at other departments nearby your institution when you can.
- Talk to your dean about mentoring and ask what resources are available for you to improve your visibility and standing in the field. It is in the interests of the institutions for their professors to be well-connected and productive. You can exploit this point if there are things you want to ask for, such as research money to go to conferences, leave time, or money to organize a conference at your institution where you bring the people you want to meet to you.
- Make friends with your dean. Get good at explaining your research to non-philosophers. Often deans who aren't philosophers have no idea what we do. They don't often have a good channel of information about the value of philosophy to the university, or the specific strengths of your department, its needs, etc. You may think this is the exclusive province of the chair but deans often want to hear from others as well. At smaller places this may be less of an issue. But even there, it is a good idea to be on good terms with the dean. If you organize a conference, invite them, let them know about it, explain what it's about. They may not come, and all told, you may not truly want them to come, but it is good for them to know what you are up to.
- Consider editing a volume in your area, if you think one is needed. A way to go about this is to write up a proposal and ask Peter Momtchmiloff at Oxford if he would be interested, or an editor at another press. Peter is at every APA and keeps a close eye on what people are doing – more so than other

philosophy editors I know. It is good to get to know him if you have a book project in mind.

- Volunteer to be a category editor for philpapers.org. When you go on their website, by poking around you'll soon get a sense of how finely-grained the categories are. Many of them need editors. This is a great way to keep on top of new work in your subfield.
- Submit papers to the APA and volunteer as a commentator.
- The NEH sponsors seminars for junior faculty every summer. They are designed for junior faculty and are often rewarding ways to deepen what you know and discuss it in depth with others. Keep an eye on the announcement of summer seminars.