



Australasian Association of Philosophy

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www.aap.org.au

The Honorable Christopher Pyne MP
Minister for Education
P.O. Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Professor Graham Oppy FAHA
Chair, AAP
GPO Box 1978
Hobart TAS 7001

September 20, 2013

Dear Mr. Pyne,

I write to you as Chair of Council of the Australasian Association of Philosophy (AAP). The AAP is the peak body for philosophy in Australasia.

In a media release on 05/09/13, Jamie Briggs announced that a Coalition Government will (a) reprioritise funding over four years by shifting \$133 million from the ARC to the NHMRC; and (b) audit 'increasingly ridiculous research grants ... that leave taxpayers scratching their heads wondering just what the Government was thinking'. Among four examples of the types of grants to be targeted under audit, two belong to philosophy: a \$595,000 grant on 'The Quest for the 'I''', and a \$443,000 grant on 'The God of Hegel's Post-Kantian Idealism'.

This announcement raises several concerns.

First, the grants in question were awarded by the ARC on the basis of expert peer review. The significance of the *independence* of the ARC and the *expertise* of those engaged in the review process should not be downplayed. On the one hand, the government cannot properly rely on the outcomes of research as evidence for policy making if it is involved in decisions about which research to fund. On the other hand, the ARC College of Experts is clearly the best-placed body to determine which are the most meritorious applications for funding.

Second, it is impossible to gauge an adequate idea of the merit of a grant application from the project title, the budget bottom line, and 100 word summaries of the project and its benefits. If this were possible, the task of the ARC College of Experts would be enormously simplified, since ARC Grant applications typically run to more than 50 pages in length.

Third, the budgets of the two grants identified are almost entirely devoted to salaries: one funded a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship; the other currently funds a Future Fellowship. The expenditure of this money is primarily justified by the value to the nation of having a world-class philosopher conducting philosophical research in one of our universities.

Fourth, Australian philosophers make a valuable contribution to the nation and the world. Universities are, in part, centres of higher learning which, as Tony Abbott has said, embody the liberal tradition of ‘searching for truth, shaping free minds, empowering individuals, and fostering civic engagement’. Philosophy has an important role—as one discipline among many—in the mission of universities; and, as it happens, Australian philosophy has a particularly strong international reputation for its teaching and its research.

I am happy to enter into further discussion of these issues with you. I am prepared to travel to Canberra if you would like a face-to-face meeting; I am also open to further discussion by phone, or other electronic medium.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Oppy

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