

Farewell address 2017

Good afternoon, my name is Asger Sørensen. I presently serve as the chairman of the board of Danish Philosophical Association, and as it has become customary, the chairman delivers a short farewell address. And adding to the brevity is the fact that I am both speaking as chairman of the association and on behalf of the local organizing committee

Last year, admittedly, my farewell address was rather long, making the attempt to make a final philosophical argument;¹ this year it will not be the case.

Last year we said goodbye to each other after a successful meeting at the University of Copenhagen in the shadow of the threat to dismiss distinguished philosophical colleagues. The general assembly – and thus the association – chose to protest, and so did many other good people, but apparently that made no impression at the university management. The result was that a number of professional philosophers lost their job in the past year, and not just at the University of Copenhagen, but also on other universities, and along with hundreds of university researchers from other fields, most of them having faculty positions that would be tenured in other countries. It must therefore be emphasized that tenure does not exist in Denmark. It never has, but for years university employees were protected as civil servants. This is not the case anymore, and therefore there is no job protection apart from what is offered by the Danish flexicurity model, and as it is well-known, this is not very much. Sadly therefore faculty dismissals have become a commonplace at Danish Universities, and there are only few signs that things will change.

Only a few days ago, two very distinguished Danish professors argued in a newspaper column that the lack of job-security is a greater threat to the integrity of science and humanities than political and religious fundamentalism.² Without job-security, specialized academics do not dare to claim the freedom of expression, less even academic freedom. Of course, one can never know if people tell the truth. But one can know, that without job security, the likelihood of scientists and scholars telling the truth to the public will be even lower. To have a scientist give his or her best and well considered opinion, and thus strive to tell the truth, is more probable when he or she is feeling safe. Fear and insecurity is simply not beneficial for the willingness to tell unpleasant truths.

This being the general situation, it is more important than ever to maintain independent organizations in the civil society such as academic associations, societies and academies, such as for example the Danish Philosophical Association. Only such ideal associations have a chance to maintain independent voices in relation to public matters such as the present conditions of the sciences and humanities in modern democratic societies. This does not in itself prevent university managers to dismiss scientists and scholars – as many of us know, one of the victims last year was one of my distinguished predecessors as chairman of our philosophical association, and this autumn the vice president of the Royal Danish

¹ See here at the webpage of the [association](#).

² See [Niels Kærgård and Peder Andersen: "Ingen ytringsfrihed uden tryghed i ansættelsen", *Berlingske*, 21th February 2017, 1st section, pp. 24-25.](#)

Academy of Science and Letters was dismissed from the University of Copenhagen.³ However, without independent societies, associations and academies, it becomes even more difficult to awake the public and to argue the principled worth of the sciences and the humanities. Therefore, as the chairperson of such an association, I am extremely pleased to see how many people every year people chose to meet at the annual meetings. And let me therefore stress that this association according to its purpose has only one interest, namely to maintain and develop the interest of philosophy, in Denmark and abroad, developing the links from Denmark to philosophy in other countries.

However, academic associations such as ours are not enough. Without strong academic unions, faculty does not stand a chance in relation to modern university management. The only real societal counterforce is the union. It is the union that right now is negotiating with University of Copenhagen concerning the dismissal of the vice president of the Royal Danish Academy. It is only when organized, only when one is not being left alone, that one has a chance in the confrontation with the authoritarian management of modern corporate universities.

Therefore, on behalf of the association, let me first thank our academic union, Danish Association of Magisters – Dansk Magisterforening – that have wisely chosen for now more than five years to support small independent scientific societies such as ours, knowing very well that academics, apart from being employees in often large organizations also take a strong interest in their scientific and scholarly disciplines.⁴

Let me also thanks the backbone of the conference, that is, organizers of all the parallel sessions – in Denglish: the ‘rope holders’ – some of whom has volunteered for that indispensable task for many years: without you the annual meeting of the association would be impossible. Your names are in the program! Let us give them a hand!

Changing now to representing the local organizing committee, thanks also to the new volunteers from our dedicated philosophy of education students and candidates, and their names are not in the program: Ditte Skinnerup, Sara Kristensen, Selina Paldan, Stephanie Bisgaard and Esben Møller – and to Mia Skjold Tvede Henriksen for organizing them. Thanks to Luna Christine Christensen for taking care of the contact to the students bar.

Thanks to the local philosophy of education colleagues here at DPU, who have stood by when needed. Especially to Jørgen Huggler who took care of the contact to the ‘rope holders’. Thanks to the School of Education for providing facilities for this meeting, especially to Anette Eriksen for a lot of help along the way, organizing a lot of details, remembering things that only a professional would remember, such as, f.i., the video recording of Paul Standish Friday, and not at least for organizing the contact to the canteen and especially the Friday dinner.

³ See, e.g., “Corporate culture spreads to Scandinavian institutes”, *Nature*, 14th December 2016 (no. 540, p. 315 (December 15th 2016) [doi:10.1038/540315a](https://doi.org/10.1038/540315a)) and Quirin Schiermeier: “Sacking of prominent geoscientist rocks community”, *Nature*, December 5th 2016 ([doi:10.1038/nature.2016.21095](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2016.21095)).

⁴ See the description of the project at the DM [webpage](#).

A special thanks to Mikael Carleheden, University of Copenhagen, [Centre for Anthropological, Political and Social Theory \(CAPS\)](#), for generously funding the keynote talk that Rainer Forst just gave and to Rainer for having come here to speak for us philosophers on these very humble conditions.

And thanks to all of you who came and made up this meeting – some by presenting your own philosophical work, in fact more than 90, and each donating a little to keep things going. If you are not a member already, do join the association. I must mention that [Danish Yearbook of Philosophy](#), established 1964, has survived and is now being published internationally by the distinguished international publisher Brill in Leiden, proudly dating itself back to 1683, and all members of the association receive their own copy. The coming issue, vol. 50, will be on Kant's political philosophy, in particular on *The Perpetual Peace*. It is for the members 2016-17, and last chance to sign up for the membership that automatically secures you this brilliant issue is this coming week – just write to the association! Mail addresses on the home page.

And then it is just say that next year we will meet at Roskilde University, the first weekend of March, as usual. Some of us have very good experiences from that area, having attended the festival down there – and now the association is coming. So let's ask, as they do when presenting the next band: "Are you ready, Roskilde?"

Thanks for your attention and see you next year.