



the future of
philosophy

towards the 21st century

EDITED BY OLIVER LEAMAN

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THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Each of the essays in *The Future of Philosophy* is written clearly and free of jargon, making for a collection which requires no prior knowledge of philosophy. The collection will intrigue anyone who wants to explore the future development of intellectual themes.

- ‘The future of philosophy’, by Oliver Leaman
- ‘The history of ancient philosophy’, by Harry Lesser
- ‘The history of modern philosophy’, by Catherine Wilson
- ‘The future of ethics’, by Peter Edwards
- ‘Political philosophy’, by Lenn Goodman
- ‘Philosophy of the postmodern’, by Seán Hand
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- ‘Feminist philosophy’, by Gill Howie
- ‘Philosophy of religion’, by Oliver Leaman
- ‘Philosophy of language’, by Gerard Livingstone
- ‘Philosophy of mind’, by William Lyons

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THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Towards the twenty-first century

Edited by Oliver Leaman



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PREFACE

I received a telephone call a few years ago from Zia Sardar, one of the editors of the journal *Futures*, who suggested that I write an article for the journal on the future of philosophy. At first I was perplexed about the whole idea. How, I wondered, could one possibly write about the future of a discipline like philosophy? Once I got down to the task, however, it seemed less improbable, since even if one's speculations about the future go awry, it is interesting to stand back from the subject and consider it as a changing body of thought and arguments. We can all reflect on what we think have been positive changes and what future developments seem likely, even if we disapprove of those developments. It was with that thought in mind that I approached a number of philosophers with the invitation that they write on the future of their own particular area of the discipline. There has been no intention to cover every single part of philosophy, which would have called for a very weighty tome indeed, but to deal with some of the main areas.

I should like to thank my fellow contributors for their work and for their timely presentation of manuscripts, which made my editorial life much easier. The contributors have each approached the topic from his or her own view, and there has been no attempt to produce a party line. The only thing we have in common is that we think that it is important to think about the future of philosophy, an opinion which I hope the reader will come to share with us.

Oliver Leaman
Liverpool, February 1997

THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Oliver Leaman

There are some events which have a future that is easy to predict. Many of the phenomena of natural science fall into this category, and their regularity has lent to the theories which describe them an enviable status. After all, if one can start off with a few observations, and then use a theory to make a prediction about what future observations will be like, and if one is invariably right, one can have great confidence in the theory. Once we move away from the natural sciences, though, it becomes much harder to predict the future. We may be able to form vague generalizations, but that is all. Philosophy is in a particularly difficult position here. It is not difficult to explain the changes in philosophy *after* the event, although even then the explanations may seem implausible. The trouble with predicting what is going to happen in philosophy is that the history of philosophy is rather like old-fashioned history with its fascination with outstanding individuals. The history of philosophy emphasizes the role of 'Great Thinkers', and it is impossible to predict the arrival of a 'Great Thinker' or the direction that he, and it generally is a he, will take. After the event one can find some sort of explanation for the existence of a cultural context which provides the background for the thinker's ideas. But the explanatory power of a theory which operates only after the event is very weak, and is hardly worth trying to discover.

The position would be a bit better if there was some way of linking ideas with material events in the world, perhaps along the lines of some of the cruder Marxists. They sometimes argued that there was a close link between the material basis of a particular culture and that culture, so that by examining the former one could work out what was going to happen to the latter. One of the advantages of such a theory is that it downgrades the status of the 'Great Thinkers'; these individuals only seem so remarkable because we do not properly understand how natural is their emergence from the material base. But this attempt at establishing a link between the material base and the cultural superstructure never really worked, and successive Marxist theories only succeeded in making it progressively more sophisticated, and less like an explanatory hypothesis.

We might try to link philosophical ideas with history in some other way, of course, and there have been plenty of theories which have done this. The idea that history is basically rational, and so its structure can be extrapolated into the future, is surely the basis on which most ordinary lives take place. We often tend to expect the future to mirror the past, or at least follow a comprehensible pattern, since otherwise it would be difficult to explain behaviour such as my writing this introduction, which is based on my past experience that the writing of chapters results, eventually, in the publication of books. More complex views of the nature of the future would make such assumptions less attractive. As Wittgenstein suggests:

When we think of the world's future, we always mean the destination it will reach if it keeps going in the direction we can see it going in now; it does not occur to us that its path is not a straight line but a curve, constantly changing direction.

(Wittgenstein, 1980:31)

PHILOSOPHY AND FASHION

Philosophy, like everything else, has its fashions. When one visits the philosophy section in secondhand bookshops one sees interesting-looking books written by people who were important in their time, and in which there is no interest at all today. The dust lies in undisturbed layers on these books, and eventually they are probably thrown away regardless of the grand university crests on their spines or their splendid titles. Yet why are these books now of little interest (actually, of no interest) while others of the same period, and much earlier, are of greater and continuing interest? They are no longer of any interest to any but the historians of thought because they do not raise the sorts of questions which currently interest philosophers, not necessarily because they no longer raise interesting questions. There are few more embarrassing sights than that of a philosopher expounding views and principles which simply no longer interest his or her audience. It is a bit like watching a speaker who appears to be good at what he or she is doing speaking in a language which no one in the audience can understand.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Is there anything about philosophy in the twentieth century which distinguishes it from earlier periods, and which indicates likely future developments? If a philosopher from thousands of years ago were to arrive today and observe the philosophical scene, would he feel at home? On

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thewhole he probably would. Plato and Aristotle would find that there is still an enormous amount of interest in their views, and in trying to get straight what their views really are. Even the Sophists would find much to support in the views of the deconstructivists, especially the idea that there is no privileging of particular points of view. The Presocratics might be pleasantly surprised at the amount of attention which is paid to their views today. Political philosophers from the past would discover that we are still interested in working out what the principles of the just society are, as are moral philosophers in the nature of duty and the ethical concepts attached to it. Epistemologists are still trying to work out what we can be said to know, and philosophers of religion continue to think about the nature of God and his attributes.

Of course, there are some new techniques and theories which would interest the visiting philosopher from the past. The whole area of symbolic and mathematical logic would probably perplex the visitor just as much as it does most of us who are not familiar with those areas. In general, the professionalization of philosophy has led to its departmentalization in ways which would seem strange to the visitor, and the fact that many philosophers today only write on one, perhaps quite narrow, area of philosophy would be novel. After all, most philosophers in the past covered a whole range of ideas and problems in their work, and would have felt it strange to be expected to deal with only a restricted number of topics. This is again a function of the size of the profession today, which consists largely of teachers who are paid to expound the views of others, rather than their own views. Perhaps this vindicates the views of Socrates, who claimed that there was no merit in philosophers being paid for their work. He argued that if philosophers were paid, then they would tend to produce ideas and arguments which they felt would be appreciated by their paymasters, and would no longer be able to range as widely as they would like over philosophy as a whole and express whatever views they wanted.

PROGRESS IN PHILOSOPHY

Does the fact that the visiting philosopher from the past would feel at home today mean that there is no such thing as progress in philosophy? One might think that if there is a constant examination and re-examination of the same questions with no generally acceptable conclusions, then this means that no progress has taken place. This is certainly how many in the public see the situation, especially when they compare philosophy with what they see as the progress which has taken place in the natural sciences. Philosophers seem to be arguing with each other over the same sorts of issues all the time, and equally intelligent individuals appear to be unable to come to any generally acceptable conclusion. The public tends to suspect this

sort of activity, which they often identify with politics, and they cynically attribute impure motives to politicians' variety of opinions. Of course, the fact that philosophers do not tend to agree with each other does not prove that there is no such thing as progress in philosophy. There may indeed be progress, and the fact that many in the profession are too benighted to appreciate it is neither here nor there.

There is a very popular trend in philosophy which does not look for progress in philosophy, but values the fact that the subject consists of variety and constant disagreement, and that is the trend which emphasizes the notion of philosophy as a form of literature. After all, we do not seek to criticize Tolstoy's *War and Peace* on the grounds that it fails to make much progress in our understanding of human conflict as compared, say, with Homer's *Iliad*. We accept that in different times different authors have expressed a range of views on important personal and political affairs, and we do not look to progression here as a criterion of success. After all, many would argue that a work of art can be deeply flawed morally and yet remain a considerable work of art (although there are others who for philosophical reasons would argue against this view). The notion of philosophy as a form of literature has the disadvantage of making it seem subjective, but this serves as an explanation for its apparent inability to come to any final conclusions about the main issues which it raises. After all, if philosophy really is just a form of literature, a particular type of cultural expression, then we should not be surprised that it does not lead to any final denouement.

Much philosophy does not see itself in this way, though. Most of what we call the Anglo-American tradition of analytical philosophy, although analytical philosophy really has far wider scope than this description suggests, regards philosophy as an objective enterprise, and the conditions of the validity of arguments are indeed quite hard and fast. The rules governing *modus ponens* in logic, for example, are hardly a matter of taste. This is not only the case in logic, but even extends to areas like ethics. A colleague of mine once got so fed up with being told in his ethics class by his students that 'everything is relative' that he marked the essays of the students by tossing a coin. If it came out heads he gave the particular essay an A, if it came out tails he failed it. When the students complained he replied that 'everything is relative', and so there could be nothing inherently unfair about his procedure. Indeed, he could have argued that his procedure had the merit at least of being entirely consistent, and not potentially favouring some students over others because he knew them to be good performers in class, or because he preferred the presentation of their essays. Many adherents of the analytical tradition are prepared to come to definite decisions about which arguments work and which do not, and also about which moves in philosophy have had a positive effect on the subject and which have not.

Yet even they would be reluctant to talk about progress in philosophy. They may think that a particular solution works, and so a longstanding problem has now been resolved, but they will often still respect the views of those who differ from them. That is, they will regard those views as irretrievably flawed, but not as a result to be dismissed. After all, it is the force of the flawed views which brings out what is held to be desirable in the correct views. They will also (usually) accept that someone might not be able to see what is attractive about the right view and yet remain a decent philosopher. This makes philosophers sound like a rather charming collection of liberals, people who admire the views of others even when they disagree with them. This is not necessarily the case, and there can be little doubt but that philosophers are given to exactly the same prejudices and irrationalities in their private lives and opinions as are the rest of the community. On the other hand, there is a general respect which philosophers have for those who pursue the *process* of philosophy, regardless of where that process takes them in particular. It is the theoretical nature of the subject which makes this possible, of course. Car mechanics and dentists tend to be very critical of each other's work, at least in front of clients and patients, but then something is going to happen as a result of that possibly bad work. A repair which is not done properly will result in the car not working, or something dropping off. A metaphysical error, by contrast, will upset the person who thinks he or she has discovered it, but nothing in real life hangs on it.

PHILOSOPHY AS TRIVIAL

Is philosophy then a trivial activity? It looks as though the argument here is that it is divorced from real life so anything goes. A better approach would be to suggest that philosophy tends to take place at such heights, or depths, of abstraction that it tends to skip the real world. Wittgenstein pokes fun at the strangeness of much philosophy when he gives this example:

I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again 'I know that that's a tree', pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: 'This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy.'

(Wittgenstein, 1969: §467)

The moral philosopher Richard Hare once gave a talk in which he suggested that Oxford philosophy was so committed to understanding particular instances of real life because of the duties of the Oxford Fellow. This individual, on top of his regular academic tasks, had duties to his college which might involve climbing up a ladder to examine a roof (although

not presumably the task of actually carrying out the reroofing!) or examining the solidity of drainpipes in the quad. As a result of this, he argued, the English philosopher tends to have his, and it generally was his, feet on the ground, as compared with the continental variety who spend all their time in cafés drinking coffee and expatiating on the meaning of being and death and similarly airy concepts. One of the aspects of this talk which is amusing is the assumption that the life of a Fellow of an Oxford college is indeed one immersed in the practicalities of the everyday world, but it had a more serious point also. What is the relationship between philosophy and the ‘real world’?

There is the romantic conception of the philosopher as the other-worldly being who has no interest in practical matters at all. There are reports of the early Greek Sceptics actually living their scepticism, and not acting on any evidence which could be doubted. They apparently kept on falling into holes, since the observation of a hole in front of them could not be regarded as incontrovertible evidence of an actual hole, and they had to be rescued by their disciples who followed at an appropriate distance to ensure that they came to no serious harm. The disciples also had to persuade the sceptics quite forcefully that they ought to eat, since the latter were not convinced that there was real knowledge of the connection between eating and staying alive. Most philosophers do not live in accordance with their philosophies, though. Most modern sceptics are happy to sit on chairs and get into cars without constantly checking that they really are chairs and that the cars have engines in them, and it is unlikely that moral philosophers, for example, spend any longer on deciding what to do than do other members of the public. When new entrants to the profession go to their first conferences and see groups of philosophers huddled together deep in conversation they assume they must be engaged on some protracted philosophical issue, only to discover on coming nearer that they are discussing premature retirement, or who applied for the latest vacancy and did not get it.

We should not be surprised at this, since philosophy is far removed from the activities of the everyday world, in just the same way that the study of linguistics is very different from the actual practice of language. Philosophy is even more abstract in that it usually does not seek to describe the ways in which people use language, but rather sets out to evaluate those uses. An awareness of what goes on in the real world is useful in providing examples of issues to be considered theoretically, but it is not as though those examples will *lead* the theory. This loose relationship between philosophy and the practical world makes it look again as if philosophy is a trivial activity, a subject in which virtually anything can be argued since there are no criteria of validity which range over the subject as a whole. But what we should bear in mind is that philosophy

should really be seen as a process rather than a series of products, and the variety of processes which exist in the subject is a sign of philosophy's richness, not evidence of triviality.

PHILOSOPHY IN THE FUTURE

Will the nature of philosophy in the future change? This is unlikely. For one thing, the main effort in philosophy remains the understanding of the thought of past philosophers, and this will no doubt continue in much the same way as it has in the past. Even those thinkers who are intent on creating a new way of looking at philosophical issues, or philosophy itself, will tend to use some of the ideas of past thinkers as at least their launching pad. Of course, how the history of philosophy is going to be carried out may well change, as readers will discover in the first two chapters of this book, but there can be little doubt about the continuing importance of this area of philosophy. One of the interesting aspects of recent developments in the history of philosophy is the growing importance of trends and thinkers who once were regarded as only of secondary importance. To a certain extent this may be because philosophers are looking for something new to discuss, but more plausibly there is a feeling that many of the decisions which have been taken about what is to be studied in philosophy are rather arbitrary. For example, in the Anglo-American tradition there tends to be something of a leap which gets us from Aristotle right up to Descartes, as though there was little between ancient philosophy and modern philosophy worth studying. Even within ancient philosophy itself there is now increasing interest in the Presocratics and in the Hellenistic and Neoplatonic thinkers. The effect of this is to broaden what we think of as 'Greek' philosophy and bring in a range of issues and developments which are generally ignored.

It will be said that this is a damaging development, in that the primary concentration in the study of philosophy ought to be on the 'Great Thinkers', those whose ideas have played the leading part in shaping the subject. There is also the related point that students cannot be expected to cover everything in detail, and if there is a choice between studying the thought of one of the 'Great Thinkers' or a group of lesser philosophers, then the former should take priority. On the other hand, there are also good arguments for allowing people to concentrate on whichever thinkers they find the most interesting. Once they have been introduced to the ideas of the 'Great Thinkers', surely they should be allowed to concentrate upon those philosophers with whom they feel the greatest rapport. Sometimes their decisions will doubtless surprise or even shock their teachers, but they should be respected none the less.

'ACADEMIC' VS 'POPULAR' PHILOSOPHY

One of the features of philosophy as a subject which may horrify the teacher of the subject is that it has a far wider sense than academic philosophy. It is fun to look in the philosophy section in libraries and bookshops, since a large number of books which one finds there have little or nothing to do with academic philosophy at all. In most bookshops in North America and Europe today the sections on philosophy are smaller than the sections often next to them, or even integrated with philosophy, on 'Mind and Spirituality'. The latter usually exists as a section independent of 'Religion', which tends to concentrate on the traditional religions. There is a great deal of interest in issues of spirituality in the *fin-de-siècle* world. Now, it might be thought that this has nothing to do with philosophy; it is just a series of vague and rambling thoughts about how one might live one's life and how that relates to the meaning of existence. It all seems to be very subjective, with little argument or analysis, the sort of thing that much philosophy has traditionally opposed. Yet in the mind of the public this is what philosophy is primarily about, and the public is not entirely wrong here. What 'popular' philosophy talks about is quite similar to much of 'academic' philosophy, although the style is very different.

In the future these two ways of doing philosophy are likely to come closer together. This is because of the rapid growth in the education of the population generally throughout the world. As societies become wealthier, they invest more in education, and their populations become more capable of reading, and of reading more complex material. Societies which become wealthier also tend to become more concerned with understanding themselves and the directions in which they are going, which leads to an interest in philosophical and spiritual issues more widely diffused among the population. The globalization of capitalist economic values is likely to lead to a reaction against those values, in the sense that their emphasis on the individual and on increasing levels of private consumption will often be felt to be features which require questioning. Perhaps this is why we have the current explosion of interest in issues such as self-development, spirituality and the occult. People are looking for ways to challenge the ethos of the society of which they are a part, since that ethos seems to be devoid of any values which go beyond the practical.

FUTURE ISSUES

Although we may well be entering a postmodern society, we are certainly not entering a post-philosophy society. There have been periods in the past

when it looked like the only way in which philosophy could survive was by identification with the sciences, but in the future it is through emphasizing the distinctions between philosophy and science that progress is likely to be made. The benefits of scientific advance are all around us, as are in most parts of the world the advantages of the free market economy, and yet these material advantages do not address what is often labelled as the spiritual dimension of humanity. Many people think, perhaps wrongly, that there are a range of questions and problems which are not resolved by their increasing material well-being, and it is these questions for which a wide variety of answers is likely to be proposed. Some of these answers will come from 'popular' philosophy, and the academic subject has an important potential role here in getting more involved in trying to address these issues in ways which are accessible to the public at large. Unless we do, we are leaving the field to the puzzled and puzzling, and missing out on an opportunity to establish a major connection with the cultural events of the future as these are experienced by the majority of the population. Lest we despair of the ability of that population to understand what we say, it is worth remembering that future societies are going to be increasingly well-educated, and so will be more ready to understand the arguments and theories of academic philosophical thought.

Philosophy in the future should be seen as more than a reaction to the materialism of everyday life, though. Philosophy should seek to understand and conceptualize that materialism. Although there have been thinkers who have defined and defended the principles of liberalism in politics and economics, this is still a rather unstudied area as compared with authoritarian and socialist philosophies. The coming hegemony of the free market will require conceptual investigation. The apparent ending of the clash between different political systems may lead to a decline in the interest in political philosophy, and the free market may through its ubiquity become almost transparent in its effect upon our society and characters, but this would be a shame. A vast range of important philosophical issues arise in the structuring of any form of society and economy, and it is incumbent on philosophers to address these issues. If we do not, then they will be left to others, and philosophy will be seen to retreat from the leading aspects of our daily life and experience.

One of the conceptions of philosophy which was criticized earlier was that of the thinker cut off from the realities of the practical world. Of course, there is such a subject as practical or applied philosophy (see Chapter 7) and philosophers have usually applied themselves to the practical issues of the day. In the future this may be expected to increase. A wealthier and better educated society will also be a society which wants to think more about what it is doing, and this will necessarily involve philosophers. There are certainly present trends which look as though they are going to carry on in this way. It is unlikely that this growing involvement with

the public will change philosophy itself, but it will increase the public image of the profession. As issues of dispute in society become increasingly about how to ensure ever-higher levels of consumption at acceptable levels of exploitation of the environment, philosophers will be involved in the complex ethical calculations which need to be made here. At present not nearly enough philosophical input enters into these and similar discussions, although there is some. As a result, these issues tend not to be dealt with as competently as they might.

Let me give an example. There are often panics among the public about things which are supposed to be bad for them. Many people in Europe have given up eating beef because of the perceived risk of acquiring a fatal illness from BSE animals, once the possible implications of this disease on human health was publicly acknowledged in the 1990s. In the past there were similar panics about other foods, and no doubt in the future there will be panics about different products. Yet the public is not encouraged to evaluate the risks which are involved in activities such as eating their ordinary diet as compared with other activities they select which may easily have a far higher risk. Or take a similar example involving risk. A lot of public money is put into deterring people from what are perceived as harmful and risky activities such as smoking, taking drugs and indulging in unprotected sex. Attempts are made to persuade the public that these activities should be avoided, since they are dangerous and are likely to end in the premature death or disablement of those who ignore the warnings. What makes these strategies often unsuccessful is that many members of the public have a different notion of what counts as an acceptable risk as compared with those warning them.

What counts as an acceptable risk? This is not just a technical question, but a philosophical one also. Is it affected by one's domestic responsibilities? Are there not some activities in which the risk is a part of the nature of the activities, so that without the risk they would no longer be worth doing? What is our attitude to our deaths? How far is it better to have a longer but less interesting life as compared with a shorter but more enjoyable existence? These are the sorts of questions which those who resist the urgings of the government contemplate when they rationalize their unwillingness to give up their risky behaviour, and they are serious questions. The questions are going to be asked more and more as the human lifespan is progressively extended and as governments try to reduce the health bill. It is important that philosophers enter this area of debate, or rather, it is important that part of the cultural climate makes informed discussion of these sorts of issues possible. It is difficult to think that this will not happen given the vacuity of the present discussion of these sorts of issues, and the availability of philosophical techniques which can offer the debate sophisticated and also accessible conceptual tools.

THE FUTURE AND WORLD PHILOSOPHY

There is likely to be another effect of the increasing homogenization of the world's culture, and that is the widening of the traditional philosophical curriculum. At the moment in the West there is little knowledge by philosophers of traditions of philosophy which stem from the East, especially where this involves the Far East—Japan, China and India. There is even little knowledge or interest in the philosophy which has been produced by non-Christian thinkers in the West, in particular Jewish and Islamic philosophers. Yet while the teachers of philosophy tend to be uninterested in these forms of thought, their students are often very interested, and students in the East are themselves very curious about the sorts of philosophy produced in the West. As the world becomes culturally far more unified it is difficult to think that philosophy will not follow, and that some aspects of the philosophical creativity of the East will not enter into the curriculum in the West. There is a tendency for Western philosophers to think of Eastern philosophy as just a part of Eastern religions, or far too tied in with mystical forms of thought, but there is just as much, if not more, conceptual variety in what is taught in Eastern philosophy as there is in the West. In some ways there is more, since Eastern philosophers are interested in Western thought, a compliment which is rarely returned.

It is anticipated that several of the major countries of the East will become economically very powerful along with Japan in the future, and this may have the effect of whetting the curiosity of the rest of the world about their cultural output. This is a very positive possibility, since it is about time that we stopped teaching philosophy as though it were the preserve of a few Western thinkers. The philosophy of the East has entered the West through the channels of 'popular' philosophy, but this has only succeeded in giving a partial and inaccurate view of the riches which are to be found in the East. In economic and political terms the countries of the world are coming closer and closer together, and there can be nothing but advantage in philosophers seeking to understand and use each other's theories and ideas. In such a way they may contribute to the process of different cultures understanding each other, which in the past has proved to be such a potent catalyst of intellectual progress. It is often when one culture tries to work with a concept from a different culture that new possibilities become evident, and fresh life is breathed into both cultures. We may with some confidence hope that this will occur if and when different philosophical traditions come into contact.

Many will say that an even further weakening of the basic philosophical curriculum by the introduction of entirely different ideas and traditions will be damaging to the status of philosophy. It certainly is true that the students in higher education who are today studying philosophy do not in

most cases have the same grasp of the original languages in which much philosophy is written as compared with their peers in previous generations. Even students who are reading a philosopher in their own language, but of an earlier period, will often have difficulty in understanding the language, let alone the ideas. Would it not be the case that bringing in philosophy from all over the world will make the student aware only of a general flavour of a range of ideas and theories without being able to enter deeply into a narrower range of work? This is possible, but it seems both inevitable and not to be feared. The days when students could be expected to read texts in the original languages, where these are not their own, are gone, since the education system in much of the world, East and West, no longer provides that basic education in the classical languages which were available, albeit to limited numbers, before. It may even be the case that the nature of what is studied in higher education should change accordingly, and we should not expect students to spend a lot of time concentrating upon particular texts at undergraduate level, but rather to encompass a wide variety of texts which provide them with an accurate view of some of the leading theories from all over the world. If they decide to do further work in the subject at a higher level, then they can specialize in a particular area, and can be expected to acquire the technical background to enable this to happen.

One of the problems of the present system of specialized philosophical education at undergraduate level is that it often neither prepares students to engage in depth with particular ideas or arguments, nor does it introduce them to the richness of world philosophy. It certainly may attempt to do the former, but since their earlier education has not really made them able to acquire the skills which the philosopher urges on them, few students are successful in doing what is required. Since a philosophy programme is often presented in a very *ad hoc* way, students are presented with arguments out of context, as though they came from nowhere. It is only through presenting a view of philosophy as an aspect of cultural history that many students will be able to get to grips with the arguments involved, and weak students will at least get some idea of the range of views which have been produced across the world over time. In fact, the students themselves often have a much wider interest and even knowledge of world philosophy than do their tutors, and although those of us who were brought up in very different times by different methods may regret the weakening of philosophical depth as a result, we might think that there is something to be said for an increase in philosophical breadth. After all, the understanding by students of the variety of theories which exist in world philosophy will prepare those who wish to continue with the subject at a higher level with information about what they will need to learn to make this possible. Those who wish to acquire some understanding of philosophy and its history will obtain a grasp of the role of philosophy in the world

as a whole. As a result they will be encouraged to view themselves as part of a world of ideas, not as members of the only part of the world which appears to have produced ideas.

Philosophers require a sense of history, of the history of their subject and the context within which that subject takes place. Not many people would disagree with such a claim. But we also need to think about where our subject is going, and what implications our present concerns have for the future. That is not to say that our ideas about the future have to be accurate. To quote Wittgenstein again, ‘You can’t *build* clouds. And that’s why the future you *dream* of never comes true’ (1980:41). Thinking about the future is very much part of thinking about the present. Our experience of material objects is in a sense thicker than those experiences themselves, because we assume that the objects have more features than we actually experience. Similarly, our views on how philosophy should be conducted do not just apply to the present but go back into the past and also into the future. Thinking about the future helps us to see where we are now, and the following chapters invite us to reflect not only on the arguments of philosophy, but also on where it is going.

RECOMMENDED READING

One of the most interesting publications which was still being completed while this chapter was being written is the Routledge *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward Craig, which is going to contrast radically with the earlier Macmillan publication edited by Paul Edwards in having very substantial accounts of philosophy from around the world. David Cooper’s *World Philosophies: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) is a relatively concise and very clear account of the richness and variety of world philosophy.

THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

Harry Lesser

The future of the study of ancient philosophy looks hopeful; and there are reasons to think both that there will be more and better scholarly understanding of these philosophers and that there will be more attempts to apply their insights to present-day issues and problems. For the study of the history of philosophy, when done as part of philosophy, contains two elements: the understanding of what the philosophers of the past said and meant, and the attempt to determine what in their philosophy is true. History of ideas, as a discipline, confines itself to the first of these: to understanding how a particular thinker was affected by earlier thinkers and by their historical situation, how their writings are to be understood and interpreted, and what their influence was on later thinkers and on practical action, whether private or social. This is a valuable task, whether undertaken by people who regard themselves as teachers of political theory or of philosophy. But it puts on one side the question of the truth of the views, with which philosophy at some point needs to be concerned.

However, the problem with the way the history of philosophy has been studied for much of this century—though, as we shall see, things have greatly improved in the last generation—is not that people have ignored the question of truth, but that they have tended to go straight to it, without first taking the trouble to understand what was actually being said. This has had in the past various bad effects on the study of ancient philosophy; and it is these that I now want to consider. It is my contention that one of the main developments in this field in the last twenty years or so has been the overcoming of these bad effects to a considerable degree, and that we may look forward to their elimination.

The first problem is that of language—the fact that, particularly in the field of abstract ideas, words in different languages have different connotations and often fail to correspond exactly, which is especially the case when the cultures and languages in question are separated in time as well as space. Of course, when the philosophy is studied by those who

know the original language, or at least study with a teacher who is so equipped, this problem can be met and acknowledged. But there have been those who have ignored the problem or even denied its existence: it is not unknown for the demand that serious study should be in the original language to be dismissed as ‘mere pedantry’. One example is, I think, enough to show that this is mistaken—we may take the Greek word *psyche*. *Psyche* is translated ‘soul’, and this is probably the best translation. But its connotations are very different from ‘soul’ in English: its root meaning is roughly ‘life-principle’, and, though the possession of *psyche* would be a necessary condition for the possession of consciousness and intelligence, it is not a sufficient one. This means, for example, that it is appropriate to attribute *psyche* to plants, as Plato and Aristotle do, since they are alive, without this implying that they are conscious. It also means that the existence of *psyche* is not in dispute, as the existence of ‘soul’ might be, since living things manifestly exist: the question for Greek philosophy is not *whether* there is *psyche* but *what* it is that produces life, and whether or not it is physically based or to be identified with some physical element or structure. None of this can be understood unless we realise that, even though we probably have to translate *psyche* by ‘soul’, the terms are not equivalent.

A second source of misunderstanding has been the failure to grasp, or take proper account of, the historical context. This does not mean that the values of earlier periods have to be accepted uncritically (any more than our own should be): it is right to regret the Greek attitude, for example, to women, slaves and foreigners. But it does mean that criticism should be reasonable: it is inappropriate, for example, to blame Greek political theorists for not having a concept of human rights, when no such idea existed in their society. Again, Plato’s view that prolonged medical treatment makes a person a burden to themselves and others, and that the poor, who have to get well or die, are in this respect better off than the rich, has to be seen in the context of a society where medicine was in its infancy and as likely to do harm as good, and where the absence of anaesthetics other than alcohol made it essential for people not to be oversensitive to pain, in themselves or others.

PLATO TODAY

More serious than misplaced criticism is the reading back into ancient philosophers of a position on later issues and controversies. This is not in itself impossible, or even undesirable; but its careless use can lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentation. One can, for example, reasonably regard Plato and Aristotle as both, in different ways, ‘realists’ with regard to the status of ‘universals’, i.e., as both holding that there is a correct use

of general terms (such as ‘human’ or ‘horse’), which refers to a class of things that really exists as a class, and is not merely the result of how we have chosen to define our terms. But one must bear in mind that the dispute between ‘realists’ and ‘nominalists’ began a very long time after Aristotle, that he himself did not even have these terms (or their Greek equivalents), and that even if there is enough in his position on universals to justify the title ‘realist’, the fact that he resembles the later ‘realists’ in some respects does not mean that his view is identical with theirs, or can be translated into theirs without distortion.

Even more serious is the way some writers and teachers have restricted what they cover to those parts of ancient philosophy that they regard as from the modern standpoint genuinely philosophical. In the first place, they have commonly treated one view of philosophy as if it were universal: the view I have heard expressed (admittedly some years ago) that ‘modern philosophers are interested only in arguments’ has only ever been true of *some* twentieth-century philosophers: arguably, not the most interesting of them. In any case, the effect is arbitrarily to exclude much interesting material—whether or not it is by modern standards philosophical—from discussion. It also distorts one’s perception of a writer’s philosophy as a whole if one ignores major parts of it: I know one writer on Plato who was taken to task for spending more time on the *Laws* than on the three dialogues *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Philebus* put together, and whose very reasonable response was ‘So did Plato’. Perhaps worst of all, ignoring some parts of a person’s work can distort not only one’s general perception of the author but also one’s perception of the work one is committed to studying. In particular, our understanding of Plato has suffered from a quite excessive concentration on the *Republic*: though the *Republic* is a metaphysical and religious book, as well as a political one, and contains something relevant to most aspects of Plato’s philosophy, the *Republic* on its own cannot even give one an adequate account of Plato’s political theory (for that one needs the *Laws* as well), still less a full picture of Plato’s thought. The *Republic* gives one an intellectualist and authoritarian Plato: these are certainly elements in his thought, but a reading of, for example, the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, will show that there are others.

But the worst effect of losing, or ignoring, the historical context has been the attempts, unconscious or wilful, to rewrite the ancients, especially Plato, in ways supposedly more congenial to modern philosophical taste. Sometimes this is small-scale: attempts have occasionally been made, despite the explicitly homosexual framework of the *Symposium*, to portray Plato’s theory of erotic love as heterosexual. (It is perfectly in order to apply what Plato says to heterosexual love, and it is perhaps a measure of the merit and power of the *Symposium* that to be heterosexual is not the slightest bar to appreciating that work; but to present the theory as if Plato himself put it in a heterosexual form is an unwarranted distortion.)

On a larger scale, one still occasionally meets with a Christianised Plato, though this is something found mainly in older works: again, there are certainly grounds for regarding Plato as a monotheist of a kind, and anyone who believes in the truth of Christianity (or Islam or Judaism) can make a good case for the view that Plato anticipated that truth without knowing it; but it is historically wrong to put this in a way that implies that Plato held a monotheistic view precisely of the kind espoused by the three religions.

Such an approach to Plato is today, rare, though not quite extinct. More widespread has been the attempt to deny that Plato was a transcendent metaphysician, that is to say that he held that we could make our experience of the world intelligible only if we posited entities that were beyond this experience (i.e., 'Ideas' or 'Forms'), though not beyond all possible experience. Sometimes it has been held, against all the evidence from Aristotle, that Plato gave up this view in old age; sometimes the Theory of Forms has been so played down that Plato appears as a logician or philosopher of language rather than a metaphysician. The essential point is that one may radically disagree with transcendent metaphysics, and believe the whole enterprise to be misguided (though this will have to be argued), but one should not deny either that Plato was a transcendent metaphysician or that, if one reads his work carefully, one finds serious reasons—people may or may not find them compelling—for agreeing with him.

This brings us to another point. Even when Plato's metaphysics has been taken seriously as a system there has been all too often a failure to consider what questions or problems it was designed to answer: there are honourable exceptions, but very often Plato's commentators have presented the Theory of Forms on its own, with no indication as to why Plato thought it necessary to develop it; and this makes it very difficult for the theory to be understood, since it appears as an artificial intellectual construction rather than a proposed solution to real issues. This is not a matter of *historical* context in the exact sense, i.e., of neglecting the values of concerns, and beliefs and assumptions, of a writer and his society; but it is another way in which the work is taken out of context and hence misunderstood.

GREEK PHILOSOPHY IN CONTEXT

Finally, there are the ways in which the position of the work in the history of thought can be forgotten. A good example concerns the interpretation of Heraclitus. Heraclitus declared that 'everything is in flux', and the ancients interpreted him as holding that everything is in a state of permanent change. Yet it has been argued that we ought not to suppose that he meant that rocks, for example, were constantly undergoing minute changes, because

this would be a ‘gross departure from common sense’. Aside from the fact that we know now that what Heraclitus said was true, which seems to make the claim inappropriate in any case, there are two further errors. One is to suppose that Heraclitus was in any way concerned to make his philosophy consistent with common sense, if ‘common sense’ means our ordinary prephilosophical view of the world: he certainly considered it correct to start with how the world appears to our senses, but he used that, not to show us what the world is really like, but to provide evidence from which one can infer its real nature. The other is to suppose that Greek ‘common sense’ was the same as ours: if we look at Aristotle, who sometimes, though not always, made use of what he regarded as common-sense ideas, particularly in his moral philosophy, we find both notions that are still parts of common sense and other notions that now seem very dubious—such as his assumptions about women (as inferior to men), slaves (as inferior to free men) and foreigners (as inferior to Greeks).

Another, rather different, example concerns Aristotle’s scientific work, and Greek science in general. One finds here, sometimes, criticisms of the crudity of Aristotle’s biological taxonomy, by people who have not considered what can reasonably be expected from the person who was laying the foundations of the science from scratch: it is worth noting that Darwin, in contrast, praised Aristotle highly. Again, one sometimes finds mockery of Aristotle’s scientific mistakes, which overlooks the fact he was often putting forward possible theories (rather than ‘pontificating’) and that these theories were consistent with the information available to him.

More generally, Greek science is often said to have been purely theoretical, disregarding empirical evidence. It is true that the Greeks lacked any method of really precise measurement, and also lacked any real conception of a controlled experiment: indeed the attitude of Bacon, who spoke of getting information from nature by ‘torturing’ her and ‘putting her to the test’, might well have struck an ancient Greek as both impious and dangerous—dangerous because it was impious. But it also appears that they made what observations they could: they inherited from the Egyptians and Babylonians all, or nearly all, the astronomical observations that can be made with the naked eye; and even in biology, though the observations were often later shown to be wrong, they were when possible thoroughly made.

The passages quoted against this view, and in support of the view that the Greeks despised empirical observation, do not in fact show this. Plato made fun of people who simply looked at the heavens without trying to understand the real movements of the heavenly bodies, but he wrote at a time when observations had all been made and the problem of astronomy was to construct a theory to account for them; apart from the fact that any scientist would agree that a ‘magpie’ collection of observations with no unifying theory is of little value. Russell’s assertion in *A History of Western Philosophy* that Aristotle says that men have more teeth than women is

simply false, like much else in that work: possibly he misunderstood, through overhasty reading, a passage in *On the Parts of Animals* (III, 1), which is in fact about how in many horned species either only the males have horns or their horns are bigger than those of the females.

THE FUTURE OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY

I have tried to show, in this extended account of the kinds of mistakes made in interpreting ancient Greek thought, the importance of reading the philosophy of past ages—in this case, ancient—in a way that keeps in mind the language they were using and what it meant to a contemporary, the social and political background, the ideas they inherited and replied to, the problems and issues they were concerned with and the range of possibilities open to them at the time. The reason I have laboured this is that I think that in the study of ancient philosophy we can hope to look forward to a future in which misinterpretations due to the neglect of these points become increasingly rare, so that the general standard of scholarship continues to rise. Neglect of the historical context is not extinct—a recent work on Plato refers to his ‘stuffy conservatism’ and ‘militarism’ as if the role of the army in a Greek city-state and a modern dictatorship was identical—but it is to be found much less often than a generation ago. We may also hope, I think, that attention to the context not only removes mistakes but also opens up new and significant interpretations that have been previously overlooked: for example, although valuable work has been done on the history of Greek mathematics and Greek medicine, and some applications of this have been made, in particular to Plato, more needs to be done to try, for example, to establish firmly whether Plato’s Theory of Forms should be given a mathematical interpretation.

But the improvement in scholarship is not the only favourable development in this field. Another very welcome one is the widening of the whole area of study, so that ‘Greek philosophy’ now includes post-Aristotelian and ‘late antiquity’ philosophy, and ‘mediaeval philosophy’ includes the Islamic and Jewish philosophers as well as the Christian ones. Also, as was mentioned above, there is more attempt to look at the whole corpus of a philosopher’s work, so that Plato is not simply the *Republic*, and the importance of Aristotle’s philosophy of science has been increasingly recognised.

Another development has been the widening of the perspectives from which the work is considered, so that seeing Greek philosophy in context does not necessarily any longer mean seeing it from the point of view of a free Greek upper-class male. In particular, there has been much interesting work from a feminist viewpoint, asking such questions as how far Plato’s

advocacy of equality of opportunity between men and women, in his construction of an ideal *polis* in the *Republic*, constitutes a full acceptance of sexual equality. (I take it that seeing Plato in context does not preclude asking such questions, provided one is aware of the background to his thought.) Feminism is indeed the main new perspective to have been introduced, but there are others. In particular, though Aristotle was too ‘anthropocentric’ (an anachronistic term, but one he probably would not have objected to!) for his theories to be a totally suitable basis for environmental philosophy, there are a number of Aristotelian ideas, such as that of nature as a system of interdependent living beings, which can be given an ‘environmentalist’ reading and incorporated in this rapidly growing philosophical area. A third example is the emergence of a psychoanalytical investigation of Greek philosophy, and particularly Plato’s myths: this has sometimes been combined with feminism, as in the work of the French feminist Luce Irigaray. Finally, there are those, usually writers on ethics, such as Martha Nussbaum in the United States, who combine the study of Greek philosophy and Greek literature, especially drama, in order to investigate Greek values: this is not in itself new, but previous work of this kind tended to be predominantly a study of religion or of Greek society in general, which drew on the philosophers for help, whereas recent work to some extent reverses this and uses the literature to give us a deeper understanding of the philosophy.

The range of questions asked has also widened. Two examples may be given. One results from the fact that it is now possible to consider homosexuality objectively, so that one can ask whether Plato’s homosexuality affected his philosophy, or whether Socrates’ claim to be deeply attracted to beautiful young men was genuine or ironical. The other is the possibility of asking how far Greek philosophy was influenced by the thought of other cultures, such as Egypt or India: until fairly recently, the chauvinism of most classical scholars (as if the Greeks themselves were not chauvinist enough!) meant that this was usually (not quite always) very much played down—the references in the ancient sources themselves made it impossible to deny it completely. Now, however, though lack of evidence may make it impossible to give any certain answer to the question, it can at least be put. One could say perhaps that not only is it more widely recognised that thought must be studied in context, but also that the notion of context itself has been widened, to include not only the social background of the text in question, the tradition of thought of which it is part and the preoccupations of the writer, but also, where necessary, other influential traditions of thought, less obviously philosophical ideas stemming from religion or from myth, and the writer’s psychological orientation.

All this has so far mostly concerned only the first part of the study of the history of philosophy—the attempt to work out what exactly the philosophers of the past were saying, or at least could reasonably have

been saying. Ultimately, the more important question, to which this is a necessary prelude, is that of what in their philosophy is important, either because it is true (the best of reasons for being important!), or because it raises a vital question, even if it gives the wrong answer to it, or because it in some way provides an argument, or a technique of argument or inquiry, or a way of looking at a philosophical problem, that enables us to make some progress with solving it. The question then is: which parts of ancient philosophy are most likely to be found useful by philosophers of the next century?

ARISTOTELIANISM IN THE FUTURE

The answer must be a guess. My own guess is that it will be Aristotle and the philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition, such as St Thomas Aquinas. The other ancient traditions have much to offer, but in different ways. Socrates and his predecessors will always be an inspiration—Socrates and the Sophists an inspiration to serious thinking about ethics and politics, the early philosophers an inspiration to imaginative scientific and metaphysical thinking; but they are in the main (though not exclusively) a source of inspiration, and to some extent of technique, more than of philosophical ideas that can be developed. The Platonic tradition asks all (or most) of the right questions, and there will always be some who agree with some version of a Platonic answer; but though there are Platonists in every generation, they seem always to be a minority. Materialism still has its followers; but advances in science have so changed our conception of matter, and of forces and fields, that the ancient conception of perfectly solid atoms clashing, coalescing and rebounding is now only of historical interest. Much can be learnt from all these traditions; but none are likely to be substantially adopted by many twenty-first-century philosophers.

This leaves Aristotelianism. The strength of this tradition is that it provides an alternative to what appear to some people to be ‘dead ends’ in modern philosophy: the next century will determine whether they really are dead ends. Platonism could also do this job, but Aristotelianism makes fewer metaphysical demands, or at any rate makes metaphysical demands more in line with common sense. There are at least four interconnected areas where, in my opinion, Aristotelianism will continue to have much to offer. These are its conception of explanation, its philosophy of mind, its ethics and certain features of its political theory.

First of all, Aristotelianism offers an alternative to purely mechanistic explanations of the world, because it regards the notion of purpose or end or goal (not necessarily conscious) as a necessary part of understanding, and holds that it is impossible to understand even physical processes, let alone the actions of conscious beings, purely in terms of events causing

other events, without reference to, as Aristotle would have said, ‘that for the sake of which’. Pregnancy, to take an obvious example, can only be understood if one realises its end is birth (even though some people miscarry); and the eye can only be understood as an organ whose function is to see (even though some people are blind). Once one acknowledges the possibility of such ‘teleological’ explanations, three crucial questions emerge. One is whether mechanism is possible as a sufficient explanation of the natural world, or whether some form of teleology must be adopted, and, if it must, in what areas of study. The second is whether, if this is so, the natural world must be conceived of as containing values, since for the Aristotelian everything aimed at is good (at least in some respect and at least for the being aiming at it) and everything avoided is in some respect bad. The third is whether or not this requires us to adopt a view of the natural world that is, in the widest sense, religious. All these questions, however answered, will, I think, be increasingly back on the philosophical agenda.

Aristotelian philosophy of mind, in particular, offers an alternative to the current, arguably distorting, philosophical views of mind and body. The main alternatives are dualism and various forms of materialism; but they nearly all involve splitting a person into mind and body, or events of consciousness and physical events, whether or not the two are then at some point identified, or the mental regarded as dependent on the physical. Those who feel that this splitting is implausible, as many have done, may be able to use parts of Aristotle’s theory of the soul to establish the notion of a person as something that is both physical and mental but cannot be analysed into a physical and mental part, still less identified with one and not the other.

In the third area, that of ethics, one finds not only ideas taken from Aristotle or from Thomism, but also attempts to advance this whole way of thinking, for example by endeavouring to construct a version of Thomist ethical and legal theory without metaphysical presuppositions (John Finnis’s *Natural Law and Natural Rights* is an excellent example). Contemporary ethical theory tends to be either utilitarian, holding that it is right to do as much good and as little harm as possible, and typically defining good as the satisfying of wants and desires, other people’s counting equally with one’s own; or deontological, holding that rights and duties (e.g., not to murder, not to lie) exist independently of our wants and must be followed accordingly. Aristotelianism agrees with utilitarianism that the aim of moral action is human happiness, but defines happiness as human fulfilment, as the satisfaction of needs rather than of what a person simply happens to want. Many people find this a more plausible basis for morality than the utilitarian one, though they share the merit of giving a reason for morality (human happiness) rather than regarding doing one’s duty as simply good in itself.

Moreover, this notion of ethics, as fulfilment of the most important human needs and impulses, provides, in principle, an objective basis for ethics (though working it out in detail is far from easy) and also makes a connection between facts and values, between what is the case and what ought to be the case, thus getting rid of a problem—how to derive ‘ought’ from ‘is’—that has dogged much twentieth-century philosophy. It does, though, have its own problems, and is not likely to be endorsed in the form Aristotle or St Thomas themselves gave it.

There are two particular objections to ‘Aristotle’s version of Aristotelian ethics’, if one may call it this. One is that it focuses too exclusively on human needs and concerns. It is true that, since we are human, it is appropriate for us to be particularly concerned with humanity. But, this does not justify ignoring the needs of other species, or even of always giving preference to human needs—though this may well be right under certain circumstances. Second, human needs seem to be so bound up with the needs of other species, and even of the biosphere as a whole, that to separate them out is impossible: *perhaps* it was possible once, when our impact on the world around us was much less and much more temporary, but it does not seem to be possible now. Aristotle, after all, would have been the first to say that people cannot meaningfully consider themselves as isolated beings, but only as members of some community or other: the same can be argued of the human species as a whole, that it has to see itself as part of the biosphere.

The second problem is that Aristotle himself does not value all human potential equally, but sees men as superior to women, intelligent men and those able to be ‘managers’ as superior to the less intelligent, and, as if this were not dubious enough, philosophers as superior to non-philosophers! A contemporary version of Aristotelian ethics is thus, presumably, going to have to develop in a way that not only avoids metaphysics (though it is a disputed matter whether metaphysics is essential to it, particularly if one goes to Aristotle himself rather than Aquinas) but also avoids the hierarchical and anthropocentric qualities of Aristotle’s own theory. We should note, however, that to base ethics on human nature does not require one to be metaphysical, anthropocentric or hierarchical.

Although I have devoted most space to this aspect of Aristotelian and Thomist ethics, it is worth noting that for ‘neo-Aristotelians’ two other aspects are equally important. One is the emphasis on virtue and the virtues; the other is the working out of a theory of natural law and natural justice. Both of these are held to be features of moral and political philosophy that other traditions have neglected, and that need to be restored. One might add the hope that Aristotle’s account of the voluntary and the involuntary, which is in many ways more subtle than most philosophical discussions of free will and determinism, will also play its part in enriching future moral philosophy.

Finally, there is political philosophy. A key contemporary issue is the dispute between ‘liberals’ and ‘communitarians’ over the question of the appropriate relationship between individuals and society. This has led various ‘communitarians’ to go back to Aristotle’s notion of a political community. In contrast to the ethics, but like the philosophy of science and philosophy of mind, this is a return to Aristotle himself rather than to the later tradition. But, as with the ethics, the theory needs to be rethought or recast, partly because of Aristotle’s prejudices, which have already been noted (the fact that we are no doubt blind to equal prejudices of our own does not mean that we have to adopt his as well), partly because Aristotle wrote for a very different kind of society—and indeed would probably be the first to remind us of this and counsel caution in applying his ideas to a very different political situation.

So what, then, of the future of the study of ancient philosophy? This chapter has by no means done justice to the topic; but I have tried to give evidence that there is hope for the future. We may, I think, look forward to a deeper and richer understanding of the philosophers themselves and their historical context, and to a careful and imaginative use of their ideas—especially, but certainly not only, those of Aristotle and his followers—to help with contemporary problems and issues, practical as well as theoretical. Time will show whether this optimism is justified.

RECOMMENDED READING

Three good introductions to ancient philosophy are: for the Presocratics, J.Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987); for Plato, D.Melling’s *Understanding Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); and for Aristotle, J.Barnes, *Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

For a taste of more advanced, but accessible, modern approaches to ancient philosophy there is M.Durrant (ed.) *Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’ in Focus* (London: Routledge, 1993). Some authors show how ancient philosophy and its mediaeval offshoots can be applied to modern problems, and notable here are J.Finnis’s *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) and A.Kenny’s *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1993).

THE HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Catherine Wilson

Once upon a time, the history of philosophy was conceived as a repository of timeless wisdom, higher truths, fundamental concepts and perennial problems. The study of the history of philosophy and its founding and contributing figures was an essential component of the education of anyone who aspired to excellence in law, science, medicine, art and literature. Few people questioned that education was for the elite and by the elite, and especially prized by elites was useless and speculative knowledge, knowledge the possession of which confirmed their freedom from utilitarian concerns, their concern with higher and purer things: God, the Soul, the Forms, their own higher and purer status. Even philosophical sceptics and empiricists wrote from the standpoint of those for whom the utility of their thoughts was a matter of indifference. Once upon a time there were few leisure activities, and not many books, and many of the books that existed were philosophy books.

Today's gentlemen-equivalents in economic terms are not idle *rentiers*, but businesspersons, doctors, lawyers, professors, in a busy world of goods and services. They are no longer insulated from contact with material things by the invisible hands of servants who dress them and drive them. They are fascinated by the purchase and operation of mechanical and electronic devices. Most are no longer strangers to the dirt and debris of daily living. For their leisure hours, amusements, besides reading, abound, and if one wants to read, there is much to read besides the old philosophers. There is insightful literature—scientific, psychological, political. There is uplifting literature and pessimistic too—astronomical, financial and medical.

In such a new world—busy, democratic, specialized—a world in which the notion of dateless wisdom already has an anachronistic ring, does the history of philosophy have a future? Do Plato's Theory of Forms and Kant's Noumenal Will have an irreplaceable place and role? Or will the history of philosophy become an academic subspeciality pursued by a few remaining enthusiasts as a scholarly hobby? There are some people who like anything

which is old: old cars, old medals, old houses, old wines, and there will always be some people who like old philosophers, for much the same reason as other hobbyists like their special subjects: because they are different, because they are fun, because they bring aesthetic satisfaction, because of the spontaneous veneration humans feel for their departed ancestors. But is that all there is to it?

In this chapter I will describe some actual trends in the study of the history of philosophy and then return to the general question of where philosophy fits in in cultural and intellectual life—given that cultural and intellectual life can no longer be conceived as they once were.

As this chapter is being written, the history of philosophy as an academic discipline is in a state of expansion and contraction, depending on whether one looks to its place in the life of young students, activity in specialized branches of research or its place in literary culture. It is probably fair to say that in North America there has been a shift to problem-based rather than historical-systematic modes of instruction in philosophy which has followed the tendency of the field to divide into professional specializations. The typical undergraduate specialist in philosophy knows less of the history of philosophy than he or she did a generation or two ago. History is taught indirectly: nowadays a student takes a course called ‘philosophy of mind’ and learns about Cartesian dualism, or a course in ‘metaphysics’ and learns about Aristotelian substance, or a course in ‘ethics’ where Mill is discussed and so on. One might think that most people who have been to a university could reel off the names of the ten ‘greatest’ philosophers, with only minor quibbling. One would expect a list something like this: Plato, Aristotle, St Thomas, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. One might expect as well that people who have been to a university could name a few non-living twentieth-century philosophers. When I polled a small class of five Canadian university students, mostly in their second year, asking them to rate their knowledge of the canonical and non-canonical figures named below, I obtained the following results. (The method of scoring awarded a figure zero points if the respondent had never heard of him, three points if the respondent was able to give the main ideas associated with the philosopher, and one or two points for name-recognition or ‘some vague ideas’.)

Gassendi	1	Leibniz	6
Dewey	2	Hegel	7
Malebranche	2	Bacon	8
James	3	Rousseau	10
Ayer	4	Kant	10
Wittgenstein	5	Hobbes	14
Parmenides	5	Descartes	15
Schopenhauer	6		

Admittedly this study suffers from the size of the sample; and the names of representative philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Bertrand Russell, studied in the course, were not included. (Descartes was included as a control, as the students had just finished with him.) But what emerges is that political philosophers are better known than metaphysicians, and that twentieth-century history of philosophy is not as familiar as seventeenth and eighteenth-century history: note that the Presocratic Parmenides is tied with Wittgenstein at rank 5. These same students insist that they would like to know more about the history of philosophy, and one can even find some graduate students who complain that they are not taught enough history of philosophy.

There is a reason for this perceived lack, which explains why the history of philosophy may have the glamorous appeal of forbidden knowledge. With the specialization of professional philosophy into its 'philosophy of' branches, a distinction became current in the 1960s and 1970s between 'real philosophy' and 'history of philosophy'. The 'real philosophers' have proceeded light and unburdened in the conviction that, like science and unlike literary studies, philosophy comes into existence by disowning its past—frequently by revealing the vacuousness of what was just said five minutes ago. In the most prestigious international journals of the profession—*Journal of Philosophy*, *Mind*, *Philosophical Review*, *Synthèse*, *Nous*—there are few papers dealing with historical subjects to be found, and those which are to be found deal with a limited range of what might be called OK authors—chief among them Aristotle, Descartes and Kant. This is a fascinating development. As Alasdair MacIntyre argues, it seems to amount to 'nullification in advance,' for the real philosophers of today are precisely the ones in whom only historians will be interested in a hundred years. Now, there is no contradiction involved in wanting to be the author of a wonderful paper of no enduring interest—a momentary flare lighting up the darkness. No one thinks a firework or a flower or a butterfly less beautiful or worthy because that one will not be remembered tomorrow. But, it might be objected, this is only because we remember fireworks, flowers and butterflies. They are popular subjects for photography and poetry, which seek to fix and preserve them. And so, in caring about philosophy at all, it seems we have to care about the genus, and about the persistence at the momento.

At the same time as general knowledge of the history of philosophy has declined, specialist work in the history of philosophy has reached an extraordinary degree of sophistication. There is no paradox here and indeed similar observations have been made about natural science. It is often complained that there is less and less science in the school curriculum and little laboratory work, yet this scientific incompetence at the undergraduate level coexists with extraordinarily refined research accomplishments. In the case of science, however, there is popular interest and a fair degree of

knowledge about such quasi-scientific subjects as hormones, cancer, climate, black holes and so on, while there has been little or no trickling down from specialist history of philosophy to journalism. The similarities and differences are easily explained. To make original contributions in the study of the history of philosophy or in natural science has become extraordinarily difficult and the steps leading up to such discovery (the quantitative aspects of natural science, the philological aspects of history of philosophy) are regarded as boring and irrelevant by many clever schoolchildren and young students. Yet people perceive a benefit in *someone's* practicing natural science and believe that those enthusiasts who are willing to undertake it should be lavishly supported, where there is no general feeling that vital human interests are served by philosophy. This was not always true. The old philosophers believed they were dealing with matters of vital interest (happiness, salvation, political organization). And, before modern times and the absorption of these questions by science and social science, they were.

THE VALUE OF THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

What did philosophers before the twentieth century actually have in common? For Bertrand Russell, it was that they performed a function between that of science and that of theology: 'Like theology [philosophy] consists of speculation on matters as to which definite knowledge, has, so far, been inascertainable; but like science, it appeals to human reason' (Russell, 1945:xiv). On Russell's view, it is certain perennial questions—Are there minds or only matter? Is life pointless? Must the good be one and eternal?—which form the stable subject matter of philosophy. The philosopher's role was to think more rigorously and systematically than ordinary people about troublesome questions which neither the priest (because he accepted certain dogmas as a matter of faith or revelation) nor the natural scientist (because, although his inquiry was free, he could not deal with insensibilia and the supramundane) could address. The closest relative of the philosopher on this view is the doctor: through knowledge, he heals.

The philosopher as physician of the soul

Worrying is a natural human characteristic and we are able to worry not only about mundane eventualities but bigger issues. Do I and those around me have free will? Could the universe suddenly go out of existence? Is it ever right to lie? If I dedicate my life to accumulating experiences and

possessions, is it worthless? The old philosophers all have quite a bit to say, not all of it of a reassuring nature, about these questions.

Now, if one had a medical problem and consulted a number of eminent physicians, each of whom gave a different diagnosis, ridiculed the diagnosis offered by other physicians and insisted on a different course of treatment, one would quickly grow cynical about the medical profession and its pretensions to wisdom. Doctors as we know them would not exist. Yet, somehow, the lack of consensus in the history of philosophy on questions of substance, causation, immortality and right conduct, does not lead to cynicism, and attempts to reconstitute the discipline, aiming it towards a requirement of consensus, have been short-lived. A second disanalogy is evident between doctors and philosophers. One does not consult a variety of experts in order to assemble materials to make up one's own mind or to construct one's own version of an adequate diagnosis and course of treatment, in order that is to medicinize as a layman; one looks for the right diagnosis to be handed down from a reputable authority. In philosophy, however, it has always been thought that individuals, not just professional philosophers, will philosophize for themselves, and that the old philosophers will help them to do so.

It could be argued, however, that the notion of the philosopher as the physician of the soul survives because disenchantment with this ideal must be experienced by every individual for himself. There is always a fresh crop of new readers, eager for answers to the perennial questions, and by the time they have discovered that the authorities are in ineradicable disagreement, they have achieved a full course of study. Some of them are now philosophers themselves, and, at this point, the absence of authoritative opinions does not bother them: the rest do not stay around to criticize.

No doubt this is one reason the history of philosophy survives. But another reason is that there is beneath the surface less disagreement than one might initially have thought. The canonical philosophers have a quite standard position on hardships and adversities which befall individuals. Their basic advice is not to mind so much, not to take things personally, to put things in a wider perspective, to leave speculation on the hereafter to theologians and to live modestly and contentedly. As writers of prudential articles in popular magazines on financial planning for retirement know, one cannot repeat certain truisms too often, to the same or different people, especially when the advice, like the advice of the old philosophers, conflicts with people's natural tendencies to take everything personally, to imagine that the world revolves around them, to ascribe a radical and perverse freedom to others while seeing themselves as constrained by fate and circumstances.

I conclude that there is some reason to think that the history of philosophy provides definitive wise answers to perennial questions, but that this wise guidance can never sink in far enough to become unnecessary. Human

folly creates the need for philosophy and at the same time cannot be satisfied by it.

History of philosophy as a vehicle of understanding

Russell argued that ‘To understand an age or a nation, we must understand its philosophy’ (Russell, 1945:xiv). This claim seems to be either unsubstantiated—can’t I know quite a bit about manners, mores, politics, dress, poetry, the legal system, etc. of Victorian England without knowing anything about Mill or Sidgwick? —or else trivially true—like saying that really to understand a nation, we should understand its form of government. The more I know about anything, the more I am in a position to understand it, but it would be an error to suggest that I can’t understand Victorian politics or sexual morals without understanding Victorian philosophy.

More common is the claim that to understand ‘our’ own age, its politics, its values, the assumptions on which its daily life rests, we must be familiar with its predecessors and the alternatives they pose, and we must understand the sequence of stages by which our own views and practices have emerged. Often, such claims have amounted to nothing more than nationalist propaganda, or crudely ideological efforts at legitimation. Not too long ago, for example, most Europeans and North Americans believed, as a result of their having received a proper secondary and an enlightened liberal university education, that the political, legal, moral and religious organization of Western Christian liberal democracies, as well as their scientific, medical and literary accomplishments were, in a perfectly objective sense, superior to those of all other civilizations and that it was a supremely worthwhile endeavor to examine how these ideas arose from ancient Greece (the ‘top culture’ in its own time). Why would one want to study anything else (or want to study anything else ‘first’) when all other cultural products were objectively inferior? These views are currently regarded with dismay in many quarters. For Western European superiority appears as such mainly in terms of standards and values employed by Western Europeans and North Americans, except where military force, which is universally recognized and admits of easy comparisons, is concerned. Second, it is increasingly recognized that this history is perfused by non-Western influences—for instance, Islamic and Chinese—and that the idea that the history of Western philosophy was a purely internal development of Greek ideas (that, as A.N. Whitehead claimed, the history of philosophy is a footnote to Plato and Aristotle) is highly contentious. Third, this history is replete with horrific and brutal ideas—ideas about the exercise of power, conquest, justifiable subordination, the accumulation of wealth and property, as well as ideas about equality, tolerance and mercy, so that blanket admiration seems unjustified. As Walter Benjamin claimed,

‘There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism’ (Benjamin, 1969:256).

However, a study of the history of philosophy is fully compatible with a critical attitude towards its presumptions and their positive reception. I do see the philosophical ideas behind North American or Western European market economies in a revealing light when I learn how these emerged in the eighteenth century and supplanted earlier notions of justice, fairness and morality. I do understand current conceptions of the mind better for seeing how these arose in reaction to Cartesianism. And I do understand how democratic ideals arose in reaction to philosophical conceptions of excellence. There is material for evaluation when origins and alternatives are known, and when it is understood just how controversial assumptions we take for granted (liberty of conscience in religion, the emancipation of women) were when they were originally proposed.

History of philosophy as a field for mental exercise and recreation

A quite different view has it that history of philosophy is not valuable because it provides moral guidance, or provisional answers to perennial questions or even a useful account of how things came to be as they are now, but only because it presents an array of intriguing arguments. These arguments can be used by young students, and indeed by anyone, to sharpen their skills and to become better, more effective arguers out in the world, where arguing is constantly going on—in the newspapers, in the law courts, with tax inspectors, spouses, children and so on. Apprentice-arguers may consider Zeno’s paradoxes of division and composition, Descartes’ dream-argument, Spinoza’s proof that there can be only one substance, the arguments of Aristotle and Leibniz against material atoms, the ontological argument for the existence of God, the set-theoretic paradoxes and so on. While contemporary philosophy is also a repository of arguments—indeed contemporary philosophy is uniformly better and more closely argued than the philosophy of former centuries—many of its arguments are simply refined versions of the older arguments, which therefore furnish a better starting point.

This is a shockingly cynical answer to the question of why it is worthwhile to study the history of philosophy. For at least since Plato claimed that there was a distinction between rhetoric—persuading people and winning arguments—and philosophy—pursuit of truth, it has been accepted by many (not all) philosophers that these are different tasks, and, meanwhile, the history of philosophy shows that the most powerful arguments in logico-semantic terms—those which I listed immediately above— generate conclusions we can scarcely believe to be true. The idea that one ought to equip oneself intellectually to win arguments or

to produce arguments no one can refute, rather than to discover the truth, is morally unjustifiable. For often one believes things that are simply not right, and having good or unanswerable arguments does not make them right. It is important to detect *non sequiturs* in reasoning, to uncover the assumptions upon which practical recommendations depend, but persuasive and critical behaviour cannot substitute for knowledge of the world, which ought to determine our beliefs and guide our actions. The study of arguments is better justified on the grounds that arguing is an innate human ability worthy of development, and that it can produce gratifying moments of insight. How many delightful hours have been passed with the argument below.

Anything I can experience, I can also dream that I am experiencing. I have no certain way of determining whether I am dreaming at any given moment. Therefore what I call life may only be a dream.

(Descartes)

Or with this one:

The future tends to resemble the past, but not always. I have no rational argument for why the future should resemble the past. So, for all I know, the sun may not rise tomorrow.

(Hume)

Philosophy, especially old philosophy, is more than arguments: much of what philosophers do and did is explain things, issue commands and malign their contemporaries and predecessors. The history of philosophy takes a number of literary forms—essays, polemics, letters, dialogues, treatises, proofs—and by studying them, one learns how to extract meaning from them and even to master them oneself. And the history of philosophy is full of beautiful ideas and images: Plato's Forms, Leibniz's living mirrors and pre-established harmony, Berkeley's Ideas, Descartes' incorporeal thinking substance, Hume's bundle of impressions and so on. If the historian John Dunn is right to say that much practice of the history of philosophy considered as a literary exercise consists simply of the exhibition and juxtaposition of delightful quotations, Richard Rorty is right to protest that this is an innocent practice which there is no need to suppress, and indeed every reason to encourage. Though such writing does not express or produce 'new knowledge' in the narrow technical sense of thoughts previously unthought by anyone, it leads to the constant production of new knowledge in the minds of individual readers who are following the path of the author and putting things together for the first time—for themselves.

CHALLENGES TO HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AS
A DISCIPLINE

The history of philosophy thus appears to have a number of functions, satisfactions and rewards. Memory and rumination, as Nietzsche, the former philologist knew, is not only a burden but a source of enjoyment, and the tendency to chew over the past is a cognitive habit few can resist. The veneration of great men who are thought to stand higher in the scale of wisdom and discernment than their contemporaries and nearer to the great mysteries gives rise to the desire to be near and familiar without violating their *lèse-majesté*. Scholarship permits this, and so, in their own way, do popular books and lectures. Nor is the charisma of the great philosophers mere charlatanism: however much the surrounding culture must co-operate in their making by admiring and assisting, the force and sweep of their reasoning, their ingenuity and inventiveness, their ability to turn the familiar world upside down, their famous tranquility and acceptance, are the reasons for the esteem in which they are held. Yet the history of philosophy is currently an object of suspicion. This has in part to do with the rise of science and its separation from metaphysics, but also to do with democracy, to which philosophy stands in an ambivalent relationship, and finally with some features internal to the practice of history of philosophy as a scholarly undertaking.

Science and philosophy

Russell's description of philosophy as a subject intermediate between science and religion makes sense when one considers the range of questions the old philosophers dealt with. But questions such as: What is natural and essential to humans? Does the soul survive the body and, if so, what are its capacities when it is separated from the body? What is the best form of government? now appear to have a certain empirical dimension. We expect sociologists and biologists to inform us about the former, economists and jurists to have something to say about the latter. And we expect philosophers to be consistently more idealistic than scientists or social scientists. As contemporary philosophy detached itself through the 'linguistic turn' from substantive and metaphysical questions about what is essential and what is best, and turned to questions about meaning, truth and reference, a gulf opened up between current preoccupations and former preoccupations. The result is that the relationship of contemporary philosophy to its history resembles more that of contemporary science to its history and less that of contemporary political theory—in the idealistic, anti-empirical or 'theological' sense—to earlier political theory. As the polarization between the descriptive, analytical face of philosophy and its theological face increases

through the development of the sciences and the social sciences as autonomous disciplines, the history of philosophy tends to become part of the prehistory of the natural and social sciences.

Russell's assignment of traditional philosophy to an intermediate position between theology and science becomes increasingly problematic as we come to doubt that such a position can meaningfully be occupied. In any case, despite some theoretical and institutional continuities, it has become harder to treat 'the history of philosophy' as the history of what we, nowadays, call 'philosophy.'

Participation and value

The study of values through the history of philosophy has been criticized as perpetuating certain ideologies. For if well-positioned people are taught that there have always been intrinsic differences between higher and lower forms (between Forms and Material Objects, between Reason and Pleasure, between Theology and Physics, between Philosophers and Barbarians), they acquire new means of justifying the social arrangements which give them a privileged place as eternal, reasonable, divinely inspired and formally correct. In modern times, the non-professionally-directed liberal arts education in humanities subjects has become increasingly compensatory. It has increasingly been directed to persons whose lives will, in fact, leave them little room for contemplation and non-applied reasoning, and it has become a vestige of symbolic leisure, a cultural decoration which affords brief moments of pleasure and mutual recognition among the educated classes.

At the same time, the disappearance of honorific systems of self-presentation which do not depend on money has made the ideological distinctions (Form vs. Matter and so on) bound up with the practice of philosophy itself less immediately available and attractive. Materialism, though officially a position 'within' philosophy, is at the same time a position outside philosophy, which attempts to render philosophy of the old sort obsolete. The opening up of academic studies to previously excluded groups—women, foreigners, former members of the working classes—has eroded the strong association between the study of superior qualities and the possession of superior qualities. When such illogical creatures—or at any rate, such creatures rooted in immanent existence, as Sartre would put it—purport to study the transcendently rational, there is inevitable destabilization. The devaluation of the great philosophers has come about from the scepticism of some members of the newer generations of historians, who are aware of how both geniuses and the stupid are made by parents, teachers and reviewers, but also from the very enthusiasm with which members of the lower orders have embraced the study of the history of philosophy. Hands which once held the spade or the embroidery needle

now write out their criticisms of Aristotle and Kant, and this generates perceptions of contamination which drive down the perceived value of the subject. When women enter theology in large numbers, I predict, men will cease finally to believe in the Gods.

The costs of specialization

History, like religion, is easy to understand when you have only one text, or few texts. A few generations ago, it was apparent who the canonical philosophers were and what their major works were. Comparative studies were rare and of a general nature, and it was not thought interesting or important to put philosophers into political, scientific and religious context, or to address their relationship to their contemporaries. This context-setting is *de rigueur* in contemporary historical studies and requires linguistic, textual and even paleographic skills, as well as work outside the discipline of philosophy. It is difficult and time-consuming to acquire this knowledge, and, consequently, historians have lost philosophical sophistication and familiarity with current issues in philosophy as their scholarship has gained in precision. This is the third reason why history has cut itself off from philosophy. It is difficult to see how these trends will be reversed, but I shall suggest below how this may eventually happen.

SOME TRENDS IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY

The presentation of the history of philosophy has changed over the last few academic generations, and this may offer some clues as to where it is going.

History as teleology

Beginning in the nineteenth century, the historiography of philosophy ceased to be a mere comparison among various competing schools—sceptics, dogmatists, atomists, etc. —each of which was supposed to have equal presence and took a Hegelian turn. The historian—following Hegel's own *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1995)—described the adventures of the human mind as it made its way through history creating and overcoming contradictions in its world-view. The historian attempted to create a sense of wholeness and to show how successive philosophical movements came into being in response to the deficiencies of their predecessors, then collapsed under the weight of their own internal incoherencies. Cartesian dualism could thus be seen to lead to Leibnizian or Berkeleian idealism, once it was recognized that Descartes' various

attempts to prove that there exists a reality outside of my mind were weak and unconvincing. Journal articles were devoted to tracing influences and breakdowns, to making comparisons in terms of similarity and difference. For truly imaginative students, there was a charm in the reading of these histories, which were like novels in which vigorous characters, ‘The Transcendental Deduction,’ ‘The Principle of Utility,’ ‘The Principle of Sufficient Reason,’ ‘The Dream Argument,’ wove their way through the story, acting and suffering, dying and coming back to life, sometimes appearing in an entirely different novel. This form of historiography gave way to the following.

History as the arguments of the philosophers

When philosophy of language, with its quasi-empirical, quasi-formal attention to problems of reference, predication and ambiguity came into prominence, philosophers interested in these subjects no longer saw themselves as continuing to find out the truth about the hidden natures of humans and their world. Rapid advances in technology, applied mathematics and logic heightened the sense that the study of the history of philosophy was the study of failure—a failure which could not be ascribed to the lack of intelligence or application on the part of humans, who were busily inventing bombs, radios, antibiotic drugs and so on. Philosophy was not progressing, and this failure was ascribed to the ill-formed nature of the questions it dealt with, or to the fact that its answers were elaborate evasions or snippets of myth and poetry. Yet some people were not prepared to throw out their old texts. It was suggested that philosophy was about ‘arguments’ — not world-views. The dialogue form in the history of philosophy was especially fruitful as a repository of arguments, so that Plato, Hume and Berkeley were turned to eagerly. History of philosophy was a place to ‘practice’ the detection of errors in inference, equivocations, wrong conclusions drawn from ambiguities in the scope of modal operators and so on, so that suitably honed young minds could be turned to the solution of the truly soluble problems. The preface to book after book declared defensively that the author was not interested in the philosopher’s metaphysical system or the philosopher’s theological assumptions, but in the arguments. People no longer ‘read’ entire books in philosophy, nor did they study all of a philosopher’s ‘works’; rather they looked for the arguments. As the interesting arguments were fairly few in number and, once identified, could be returned to repeatedly for citation, no special language abilities or paleographic skills were needed to talk convincingly about a philosopher. It was clear that the study of the history of philosophy was not a speciality within philosophy—everyone with a reasonably decent education was capable of it. This position eventually created a rebellion on the part of those who believed themselves to be specialists and who set out to illustrate the

incompetence of these casual, opportunistic historians. They did not however bring back systematic history of philosophy, rather, they introduced the following.

History as the study of ideas in context

A criticism of the analytic history of philosophy which attended exclusively to arguments was that, unlike Hegelian or systematic history, it made no effort to reanimate the thought of the philosopher for the reader or to awaken feelings of awe and respect. On the contrary, it succeeded in arousing in young students feelings of superiority towards utterly hopeless cases. Something between hero-worship and contempt seemed appropriate—what was it? One idea was that the historian’s task was neutrally descriptive: it was not to uphold the superhuman genius status of the author nor to reveal him as a ninny who blundered his way through mostly meaningless metaphysics occasionally producing an ‘argument’ which any first-year student could see to be inadequate. It was to see the philosopher as a highly intelligent but at the same time fairly ordinary human being in a coping mode: this philosopher faced problems, social tensions, inadequate foundations, lack of progress in certain fields, moral laxity in the population and had a repository of inherited tools—arguments, world-views—and tools of his own invention to try to deal with them. Meanwhile, he faced external pressures: censorship, opprobrium, unpopularity—and internal pressures. The philosopher was no longer seen as dealing with supposedly perennial questions like ‘What is Justice?’ or ‘Does God exist?’ but questions of a finer grain, like ‘How can I reconcile my belief in atomism with my creationist leanings?’ The individual ‘projects’ of the philosophers, in a neo-existentialist sense, rather than their arguments became the focus of interest. What was Descartes actually trying to accomplish in his *Meditations*? What did Hume really think about human nature and the limits of reason? The immediate result was a revalidation of the history of philosophy as a specialist subject matter: now languages, a knowledge of the history of science, political, social and theological history were relevant, and the ability to conduct archival research to uncover evidence of the philosopher’s actual project was a prized talent. New translations and editions were undertaken in the interests of authenticity and accuracy; the practice of producing original-language citations took hold. This indeed is the methodology which guides most articles written in specialized history of philosophy journals and indeed even in general interest journals. Yet there are signs that contextualism’s hold is weakening, and it can be predicted that it will weaken further.

First, although contextualism arguably raised the status of the history of philosophy relative to where it had been under analytic history of philosophy, its demands were crippling. To track down all of an author’s

sources, to come to a full understanding of his context, to give citations which met strict standards of accuracy and to produce comprehensive bibliographies, one had to be very fast, work very hard and confine oneself to a narrow area. The expansiveness and tranquility of philosophy went by the board; analytic philosophers who could worry for a whole seminar about a single sentence on the blackboard were foci of envy. While historians formed strong networks because of their specialization, networks in which they shared discoveries and advice as intensely as those laborers in mathematical, scientific and analytic fields, they became isolated and found few students who had the linguistic training and solitary habits needed to carry on.

Second, the notion that philosophers had projects which it is the historian's job to reveal is becoming increasingly problematic. Diligent research is constantly turning up new evidence that philosophers were often torn by conflicting desires and opposing pressures which made them incapable of focusing on a single project, that their interests and loyalties sometimes changed, that they behaved opportunistically.

Third, there is a sense in which philosophers deal with the realm of the fictional, in which their theory-production is not quite like the theory-production of chemists or biologists, but like story-telling. Talk of commitments and beliefs becomes doubtful when we turn to the most fanciful of their ideas: Descartes' separable soul, Leibniz's slumbering monads, Kant's community of rational beings. Their projects, one might argue, are not projects but para-projects, based on para-commitments and para-beliefs, and our attitude towards them can only be one of para-acceptance. While some people today will declare that they are 'Kantians' this usually turns out to have a restricted meaning. Modern Kantians have not absorbed a Kantian project embracing theology, history, epistemology and natural science. Rather, Kantians are people who think that moral principles should be deployed impartially. It is debatable whether this thought is an example of commitment or para-commitment.

THE FUTURE OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

What genre of the history of philosophy might lie beyond contextualism? And what relationship will it find itself in *vis-à-vis* philosophy? I shall venture some predictions below.

1. The mere participation in the practice of commentary and interpretation by those who were historically philosophized about who did not themselves philosophize will ensure that genealogies and significance are written and assessed differently. As Rousseau studied the development of civilization as a story of decline, so the opening up of the formal

study of the history of philosophy will produce analogous critiques and exposés. What philosophers say about power and value and how domination and evaluation appear in their works will be minutely examined. This brand of criticism will provoke admonishments to a properly philosophical tranquility and reminders of the occurrence of egalitarian ideas in philosophy throughout its history and of its role as a counter-cultural force of resistance.

2. There will be a re-evaluation of who or what is a canonical author or text, but this will not in the end go very far. It is true that we have no objective way of establishing that just these are the great minds. With philosophers we cannot appeal to the number of philosophical thoughts thought, or the number of things proved. What matters is that their readers should find their thoughts interesting and expect to be rewarded by reading them, yet they are thought interesting and read with the expectation of regard because these are the great philosophers. Although we have in some sense the ones we have—they have fitted us to like them—historians will continue to argue for a while about the importance and originality of ‘minor’ figures.

3. Contextual history will become more sophisticated, and, to some eyes, more strange and arbitrary, as the history of philosophy is raided by literary theorists and cultural historians. The juxtaposition of objects and texts from a variety of cultural areas, which do not exist in relationships of mutual influence, but in uneasy relationships of obscuring and avoiding, will make its way from literary studies to philosophy. The contextualist idea that history seeks to recover the intentions of the author will be expanded to take into account intentions of which the author was not fully aware, the unconscious problematics of his society. It will no longer be assumed that there is a univocal intention, thus a univocal meaning, and curious and even anachronistic readings will proliferate. The history of philosophy will be analyzed as a literary technology, as performance, and the relationship between philosophical absorption and philosophical theatricality might well be explored.

4. If younger generations of readers continue to feel a selective disenchantment with certain notions of progress and productivity as they become more aware of their toll on human life and health, the sceptical and anti-materialistic strains in the history of philosophy will come to interest them deeply.

5. ‘Real’ philosophy will be forced to examine further its relations to the history of philosophy, as more of its current territory is drawn off into psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, anthropology, sociology and literary and legal theory. As it becomes more difficult to justify the existence of separate philosophy departments, rather than the placement of individual ‘theorists’ in various departments and faculties, on the grounds of a common methodology or a well-defined set of problems, the role of a common set

of texts which are considered interesting in a certain way to philosophers will become more important. Real philosophy may thus find itself in a suppliant position in a period of interdisciplinary reshuffling.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche was warning his contemporaries that, if steps were not taken, man would be overwhelmed by his historical sense. 'The great and ever greater weight of the past... oppresses him and bends him sideways, it encumbers his gait like an invisible and sinister burden.' He continues in this vein. 'There is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical sense which injures every living thing and finally destroys it, be it a man, a people, or a culture' (Nietzsche, 1980:9–10). One might worry that an excess of memory will eventually destroy both philosophers and philosophy. But there are no signs that the dreadful human propensity to talk endlessly about what we remember is in danger of crushing free inquiry. Nietzsche's is, historically speaking, an interesting speculation, and it can be examined for its inner logic, for its origins and meanings and for the system of valuations behind it. And therein lies the paradox. Predicting and recommending—speculating and valuing—are the activities of philosophers, historically positioned, but struggling to speak beyond their position, so that we can also choose whether to take them as specimens to be explained, interpreted and brought down to earthly levels by distinct and recognized methods of analysis, or to treat them, as generations of readers and students have always done, as intimate voices, so close that they seem always to have been within us.

RECOMMENDED READING

Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* (tr. H.Zohn, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968) contains important and sometimes enigmatic reflections on culture and civilization. Jorge Garcia discusses the controversies in how to approach the history of philosophy in his *Philosophy and its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (tr. P.Preuss, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980) presents impassioned warnings in Nietzsche's inimitable style. *Philosophy in History*, ed. R.Rorty, J.Schneewind and Q.Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) surveys the area as a whole. An influential argument about how to understand historical figures is presented in Quentin Skinner's 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8 (1969):3–53.

THE FUTURE OF ETHICS

Peter Edwards

‘Ethics’ is generally speaking concerned with those standards of behaviour that authorise attitudes of admiration and condemnation, respect and disdain. These standards may apply throughout a whole society, comprise a code of honour or apply to the professional practices of a particular group. *Moralis*, the Latin origin of the word moral, was coined by Cicero in order to translate the Greek word *ethos* (habit, custom), and derives from *mos, mores* meaning custom(s).

Philosophical ethics or moral philosophy—terms used interchangeably here—is concerned with broader questions of value and involved at various degrees of abstraction in the analysis and elucidation of its subject matter. Theories are constructed, varying considerably in their particular ambitions, degree of comprehensiveness and systematic elaboration. Concepts with which we try to make sense of ourselves, of our activities, of our lives, of the nature and scope of deliberation, of such matters as the significance of death and the unforgiveable—need to be analysed and understood. Similarly, investigations into the values we seek to realise in various types of social relationships need to be conducted. For example, it may be a mistake or corrupt to think of personal relationships such as love or friendship as constituted by roles and goals. These questions may involve inquiry into or a search for, fundamental principles which offer guidance for practical conduct. Moral philosophers investigate the role of ideals in practical deliberation and activity, and address such questions as what it is reasonable to do, or what one should do in particular cases (‘casuistry’ applies general moral principles to each case, ‘situational ethics’ treats each as a separate matter), what goes beyond and what falls short of certain norms and standards of conduct; and such standards are themselves objects for which justification may be sought. Moral philosophy also inquires into the nature and significance of virtues and vices and concepts of self-evaluation such as honour, pride, guilt, shame humiliation, embarrassment and ‘face’, operating in more and less specific contexts. Certain virtues and vices, such as honesty and deceit

in relation to ourselves and to others, have a special significance in relation to self-understanding, and therefore in relation to integrity and *akrasia* (personal irrationality/weakness of will). In the field of ethics, investigation is carried out into what is, or could be found to be, evil, bad, sordid, unbecoming, meretricious, acceptable, good, fine, interesting, excellent, wondrous or otherwise moving. Our attitudes and evaluations need to be explained and justified.

The question of why a person has, and—an honourable and ancient question, if not always the safest—that of why *people* or *a people* have the attitudes, make the judgements and act in the way that they do, are posed with the aim of furthering self-understanding, and may lead on to a more general demand for explanations of a shared human nature. These explanations take us in different directions and often prompt us to seek help from disciplines that up till then have not been considered relevant to moral philosophy at all. The subject invites questions regarding the sort of life one wants to live, about the priorities one assigns to the projects and commitments which it does or may come to include and how one is to treat various categories of other people; for example, how it is decent, honourable or admirable to treat human beings anywhere, strangers in one's own society, or one's own children. Important questions concern the different kinds of conflict between such sources of interest, how these are to be resolved or otherwise dealt with, and so to what degree and in what respects it is reasonable to expect to be able to bring about overall harmony in one's habits, commitments and aims.

If it is unlikely that philosophy can alter our most fundamental ethical ideals and values, and philosophical skills are, at most, tenuously related to our ability to acquire the practical dispositions we admire in others, it can enable us to clarify and see some of the implications of what we believe and value. As in other branches of the subject, philosophical thought in ethics may begin with the puzzled realisation that one doesn't understand something that is very familiar. In such a spirit, even the most conservative philosophy is committed to setting little store by the worldly confidence which arises from the knowledge that one's opinions are shared by those with whom one fraternises, and whom one admires or wishes to impress. Though philosophers may have more time and opportunity and have learned certain skills with which to pursue a solution to such puzzles, anybody can and most people do ponder such problems, and if curiosity is sufficient to make one suspicious of the obvious, then philosophy may begin.

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

From the canon of great works of moral philosophy, it is unlikely that a place will not be found for those of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and St Thomas,

through to Hobbes, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche and Mill. This is not just a secular fact about the likely contents of university curricula. As with the growth of any serious engagement in most disciplines, initial enthusiasm, interests and curiosity are deepened by study of, reflection on and a respect for past human enterprise. It is in such study that we are properly made aware of the different presuppositions—the different metaphysics of morals and of the person—that have shaped philosophers' conceptions of ethics. Moreover, whereas history never in fact repeats itself, ignorance of the previous employment of philosophical ideas in moral arguments, as of ideas generally, is much more likely to make one prone to mere repetition. In this respect, ethics differs from, say, modern astronomy or bio-chemistry. In ethics, it is not expected that successor theories make redundant and explain the shortcomings of their predecessors relative to a shared reality that each is trying to explain and understand (the notion of a 'shared reality' is, of course, the subject of much controversy).

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, alongside deontological or duty-based moral theory based on some version of Christianity or of a more purely formal Kantian character, consequentialism, in its Sidgwickian and most systematically elaborated utilitarian form, had established itself as the main type of moral theory. One of Sidgwick's main concerns in *The Methods of Ethics* was the attempt to reconcile utilitarianism and intuitionism, and it is one that aptly draws attention to a general loss of confidence in common-sense judgements and the greater acknowledgement in late twentieth-century ethics that moral pluralism is at large.

In England, T.H.Green's Hegelian-inspired idealism disappeared amid the derision of those who could not accept a vocabulary of self-sacrifice, philanthropy and honour after 1918. A noteworthy feature of this Hegelian influence, however—and this is even more so in Bradley's thought—is the greater concern with the separateness of the individual. Despite attachment to the moral/non-moral distinction and the different implications that Bradleyan self-realisation and Nietzschean 'coming to be who one is' have, it may not be too quirky to see Bradley's interest in philosophical psychology, his concern to admit the social embeddedness of individual life, and his antipathy for general moral theories such as utilitarianism, as prefiguring some of the positions Bernard Williams has taken in our own time.

The fourth strand in the moral philosophy of the time was the evolutionary naturalism of Spencer, and though his ethics are unlikely to play much of a role in future speculation about the origin of ethics, evolutionary theory may establish that there is a genetic *basis* to a great deal of cooperative interpersonal behaviour. There remains the problem of how to relate such findings—what Williams has called 'the representation problem'—to conceptual thought, and to the historical cultures within which our practices are woven.

The most influential moral theories during the period between the World Wars and up till quite recently have been the Intuitionism associated with G.E.Moore, H.A.Prichard and W.D.Ross; Emotivism, whose main spokesman is C.L.Stevenson; and Prescriptivism, whose leading advocate is R.M.Hare. Though there are many differences between them, taken together these theories departed in a significant way from most previous forms of moral inquiry in being so exclusively *meta-ethical* in character. The primary purpose of such theories is to conduct investigations that arrive at some account of the most general logical rules governing the use of ethical utterances in any morality. These may take the form of making assertions, or judgements (in Hare's, but also Kant's ethics, these must be *universalisable*), or of employing some other means of persuasion. For an emotivist, what makes a judgement about someone a moral one is that its expression arouses feelings which modify other people's attitudes in the direction of approval or its contrary. If, say, it informs us about the person's likely or past behaviour, the truth or falsity of this descriptive element is irrelevant to its moral status. Such theories are little, if at all, concerned with substantive issues or with the exploration of moral phenomena (Warnock, 1967; Urmson, 1968).

Part of the motivation for the meta-ethical turn in early and middle twentieth-century ethics was the powerful influence of Hume's fact/value distinction, shorn of its ironic context (Hume, 1978). This fallacy takes the deduction of what ought to be or of what one ought to do (for example, one's duty) from premises that state only what is the case (facts about the world, say) to be an error *in every instance*. However, certain technical judgements, such as those made in games and sports, etiquette and law, don't seem to commit this fallacy. For example, where agreement obtains about the criteria, or authority is accepted from the referee, regarding the concept under which the object is being evaluated, of 'fair play', say—as in the case of the second-row forward's stamping his studded boots onto the downed opposing fly-half's ankle—the naturalistic fallacy does not infect the judgement that the second-row forward's action constituted 'foul play'. Seen in this positivistic light, the rules of games can be modified and the law changed as a result of the relevant authorities reaching agreement by following certain procedures. In sport, rules are sometimes changed in order to increase the excitement of spectators, and legal rules are altered as changes in values, ways of life and technology present new circumstances in which the law is required to operate. The problem with ethical judgements is that the above conditions simply don't apply.

Meta-ethical theories contrast with normative ethics—which is a branch of moral philosophy that inquires into the content of moralities, into their ends, virtues, vices, principles, into how different ethical demands may be harmonised or come into conflict, and into how to articulate and perhaps resolve ethical conflict.

In the English-speaking tradition, the heavy emphasis on meta-ethics (concerned with the *nature* of ethics) over much of the first two-thirds of the twentieth century must bear some of the responsibility for the fairly widespread dissatisfaction in the subject a generation or so ago. In addition to the complaint that meta-ethics dominated the field too much, those complaints that surfaced were various: that it dealt in trivia, confining attention to such questions as the wrongfulness of failing to return a library book, that there was an absence of investigations of the concept of a life, of character and of the virtues, and that, despite the prominence of emotivist theories of ethics, scant attention was being paid to the significance of the emotions in their own right, or to their individual distinctness. Philosophical ethics was, or for various reasons had become, detached from invigorating domains of interest such as might be discovered or rediscovered in the social sciences, humanities or other branches of philosophy. Alongside these discontents was the claim that it was the ideal of clarity of expression itself which effected an exclusion of issues of substance. Many philosophers shared some of these misgivings.

Antagonism towards the ideal of clarity raised, and continues to breathe life into, a debate about the proper boundaries of English-language analytic or—a term less commonly heard now—‘linguistic’ philosophy. Though the thoughts that inspire a question are often anything but clear, the attempt to clarify one’s thoughts in order to promote understanding is an honourable aim for any form of intellectual inquiry. Ambiguous representation is often the proper aim of skilful literary device; it cannot be that of philosophical explanation. The source of a related and not uncommon confusion that seeks to condemn analytic philosophy, or any other discipline that holds the—admittedly contestable—concept of clarity to be an ideal, is the belief that ‘style of exposition needs to or should resonate with its subject matter’, but this is just false. A biography of Robert Maxwell is not obviously improved if written in an irresponsible manner, nor an account of Shakespeare’s ‘lost years’ in a mysterious one.

Much depends on the precise expression given to this scholarly ideal. One is the pithy and, for many brought up in the analytic tradition, reassuring dictum attributed to John Searle: ‘If you can’t state it clearly, you don’t understand it yourself.’ Yet there are many familiar practical contexts in which two or more people understand very precisely what’s at issue, but for reasons of delicacy or physical incapacity say, can’t indicate this verbally. The conversation between Edward and Elinor in Chapter 40 of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, or communication among the deaf and dumb provide examples of these commonplace human practices (Scharfstein, 1993).

These sources of discontent, mostly referring to the fact that or implying that worthy issues and concerns were being unjustifiably excluded from the subject, are nowadays comparatively subdued, and, on the whole, for

good reasons. With enthusiasm rather than smugness, it may be claimed on the whole that the reasonable complaints have been attended to, and that in the course of these developments the discipline taught in universities as moral philosophy has broadened its interests very considerably. This enthusiasm might be greater were the analytic tradition to cast its net into oceans presided over at present by 'comparative philosophy'. Perspective gained from cultures in which the legacies of the Abrahamic religions are less evident may well prove invigorating.

UTILITARIANISM, AND THE IMPERSONAL FUTURE

In hibernation for the first half of the twentieth century, utilitarianism has been the source of ambitious speculation in the second. Outside philosophy, requirements in modern economics, public bodies and strategic planning agencies have seen little alternative to the adoption of a philosophy that promises sophisticated means to precision, and however inadequate cost-benefit analysis is, it provides some way of transforming non-quantitative values into quantitative ones. Additionally, on account of the teleological simplicity (the idea that all moral activity is commensurable) which confines its account of practical deliberation to means, it has been ready to take advantage of the inadequacy of common-sense judgements before the many novel dilemmas thrown up in modern life. This is especially so in that increasing number of contexts in which modern technology has made what was previously barely dreamed of now possible. Within moral philosophy, utilitarianism has been an influence on and inspiration to much ingenious work, as well as receiving considerable critical attention (Lyons, 1965; Sen and Williams, 1982; Griffin, 1986). In addition to the modifications, technical refinements and exposure in branches of 'practical ethics', one of the main differences between late Victorian utilitarianism and its modern descendents has lain in the latter's more confidently revisionary aspirations. Indeed, William Godwin in his *Political Justice* (1793), was one of the few philosophers previously to have explored the consequences of accepting utilitarianism in a form least flattering to what are, from that doctrine's point of view, 'the prejudices of common sense'.

The single most subtle, provocative and discussed work of utilitarian theory since Henry Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics* appeared in 1874, is Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* (1984). Parfit's work is best seen in the light of the sustained interest in problems of personal identity and the nature of the self that has characterised analytic philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. This interest stems from Descartes and Hume and has been more recently stimulated by Strawson's *Individuals*, and the work of Shoemaker, Williams, Wiggins and others.

It has also been an expression of quite general concerns external to analytic philosophy.

For many, Part III of *Reasons and Persons*, on 'Personal Identity', where a reductionist view of persons and of their identity over time is set forth, is the most arresting part of the book. The deflationary aspirations seek to convince us that the way most people conceive of their own and others' selves and of the lives that they lead is delusory. Rather than the strict but fictitious personal identity that our concepts presume, the lives of 'people' are better compared to the histories of nations, since personal and national identity are similarly a matter of degree. The contrast with common-sense intuitions appears sharp. For, as Nagel put it, agreeing with Williams, when asking of any future experience, 'Will it be mine or not?' we seem to need an uncompromising yes or no answer (Nagel, 1986:34). However, even if, as is common in life, we cannot always have what we need, Parfit's response is to argue that we do not anyway need 'the simple view', and that some of our current intuitions provide better support for his own 'complex view'.

Parfit claims that 'what matters' is not personal identity, but *Relation R*, which is constituted by psychological connectedness and continuity. Connectedness is the more important relation, holding to different degrees and involving memories of previous experiences over longer stretches of time, whereas continuity is formed by 'overlapping chains of strong connectedness' (between two consecutive days, say). Parfit suggests that when connections are much reduced, 'when there has been a significant change of character, or style of life, or of beliefs and ideals—we might say, "It was not *I* who did that, but an earlier self" (p. 305). The general aim is not only diachronic—to get us to accept that the relations between our present selves and (what we ordinarily think of as) our past or future selves is a matter of degree—but also synchronic, for it applies equally to the differences of character and personality between ourselves and what we ordinarily think of as other people. The metaphysics Parfit proposes seeks not merely to provide the correct explanation of the nature of our human presence in the world, and thus to get us to revise our conception of ourselves, but thereby to secure conviction that the motivations rationally open to us are more impersonal than we may have supposed.

Even if Parfit's ethical revolution is not forthcoming, a few brief remarks may suggest why his arguments do and will continue to invite a multitude of challenging questions, many criticisms being lodged by those whose fundamental moral sympathies are strongly connected to the Parfit who wrote *Reasons and Persons*. As Zemach has noted, questions arise on account of the reduction of 'personal identity' to something as impoverished as an R-relation and the admission that *any* cause is sufficient for the connection to be made (Zemach, 1987). A consequence of exclusively R-related selfhood or 'spells of living' is that one's attitudes become those

of stoical or saintly detachment from what makes most of us persist in or decide to discontinue our activities. There may be a suspicion that self-deception is involved here. Moreover, even if we really do admire such ‘saints’, is our admiration for them not itself very significantly detached from any desire to emulate them?

Other difficulties arise from the intrinsically meritorious ‘stretching’ and contesting of our concepts. This occurs, for example, in Parfit’s deploying a Lichtenberg conception of subjectless mental life and a consequently externalist perspective on agency *within* a network of ideals, expectations and concepts such as autonomy, desert, responsibility and commitment, in which there is presumed an indeterminate but none the less enduring self. Such tensions show through in some of Parfit’s examples. Thus, a Russian nobleman’s doubts about the sustaining of his youthful idealism—he is supposed to intend to give his estates to the peasants when he inherits—is secured by legal documentation revocable only by his wife from whom he has extracted a promise to disregard the requests of his ‘later corrupted self’, should they be forthcoming, for these will not be those of the man who asked her for the promise. One wonders how a man who *at the time* conceived of his own beliefs as likely to be a product of ‘youthful idealism’ could take his own ideals seriously, or expect his wife to do so. Involved here is a dualism of practical foresight with authority vested in an impersonal perspective that is held to be separate from, threatening to the authenticity of, yet strangely uninvolved in, the young nobleman’s present deliberations. Moreover, why are we told the later self is a corruption *of* the earlier one? We customarily think that the link between ourselves in the present and ourselves in the future is stronger than the link between ourselves and other people. Parfit argues that it is a merit of his view that this distinction collapses. However, even if this distinction is collapsed, it is difficult to see how even the future of oneself can be a corruption of one’s present self, since this would amount to one person’s being a corruption *of* another person. For similar reasons, why is the nobleman’s wife any more likely to be constant in her keeping of a promise than her husband in sustaining his ideals?

THE FUTURE OF ‘DESCRIPTIVE METAPHYSICS’

We may think that inquiry in the philosophy of ethics, especially of a general theoretical kind, tends to be more fruitful when the disillusionments that it courts are restrained by reflection on the significance of those features of ordinary interpersonal experience that may express a shared human nature. As Strawson stressed, in his discussion of how a general theoretical conviction of the truth of determinism might be supposed to require a suspension of the reactive attitudes we bear one another: ‘it is

useless to ask whether it would not be rational for us to do what it is not in our nature to (be able to) do' (Strawson, 1968:89). However, it can be difficult to know when we've reached epistemic rather than merely psychological conviction, to what degree certain moral dispositions are shared across cultures, whether there really is or could be convergence in our concepts, how much such success and failure matter and, if the possibility of convergence exists, at what degree of abstraction such agreement might be obtained.

THE EMPTY, THE DULL AND THE AUDACIOUS

As well as investigating the effect of general theories which threaten or appear to threaten the possibility of ethical life, moral philosophers have been concerned with certain more and less schematised figures, such as 'the egoist', or, more interestingly, 'the amoralist'. The resilient and somewhat mocked-up figure of the egoist is employed in discussions of one or other (psychological or ethical) version of egoism. Psychological egoism, propounded most notably by Hobbes, is the doctrine that 'human nature ensures that people act exclusively with self-serving motives'. There are many different ways in which psychological egoism can be phrased, but since every desire or emotion alleged against it can be claimed by the proponent of psychological egoism to be the token of some unconscious selfish desire, the doctrine is—like the psychoanalytic theory of needs—*indefeasible*.

The adherent will claim of President Allende, say, that when he refused at gunpoint his signature from the document that would have lent legitimacy to the military junta, and was killed in consequence, this is to be explained by reference to his unconscious desire to preserve his own self-image, or some such notion. We might similarly claim that every human act is in fact performed in the belief that it was furthering the interests of others, but that it just doesn't always *look* that way. The psychological egoist tends to play fast and loose with the distinction between the ownership ('*I want...*') and the object of the desire (...you to enjoy yourself), and to confuse the satisfaction of a desire with the satisfaction of its owner. As anyone who acknowledges imperfections of character will admit, satisfying our desires does not always induce satisfaction with ourselves. None the less, the psychological egoist's convictions rest on an observed fact of human nature: we sometimes seek to conceal our motives from ourselves. Even here, the convinced adherent is forced into claiming that when a person's demeanour is such that his lights remain hidden under a bushel it must be universally the case that his conduct is motivated by a desire for some barely detectable 'inner glow' of selfish satisfaction. However, a person not given to meekness or false humility, in making a 'cold'

error of judgement about his own capacities, may demean them in consequence of a merely cognitive error. If so, the explanation of such errors of self-evaluation need not make reference to the moral quality of the motivation at all (Nisbett and Ross, 1982).

Moreover, if, as the psychological egoist claims, it is true that, however we behave or express ourselves, we cannot act from motives other than selfish ones, then it follows that if psychological egoism is true, it cannot serve as a practical guide. Quite independently of its being of no practical use, even were psychological egoism true, we would have no good reason to believe that the evidence of our own perceptions and experience systematically misrepresents our understanding of our own and others' motives. Given our experience of, and attachment to, the many and diverse human characteristics we believe to be motivated by something other than solely self-interest, and given, too, the literary representations—in Dickens and Dostoyevsky, say—we have of people who despise such characteristics, there is no good reason to be attracted to the doctrine. Utterly unconvincing as it is, psychological egoism is not entirely harmless. Even if psychological egoism cannot serve as a practical guide when true, it does not follow from this that believing psychological egoism true when it is false can't affect the behaviour of the person who believes it. It follows, then, since it cannot serve as a practical guide if it is true, there is no point in believing it. If false however, it could serve as a practical guide, but because it is false we had better not believe it. Either way, there is not much point believing psychological egoism.

Ethical egoism, or the doctrine of so-called enlightened self-interest can, like utilitarianism, apply to particular acts or to general rules. Thus, it may take a direct or indirect form. It states that 'it is morally justifiable to act in one's own interests, and the more one does so the better is one's life'. Interests may take the form of satisfying desires or preferences over time. The doctrine advises little apart from *technical* prudence or farsighted calculatingness, though these, in turn, urge a corresponding demand for self-control. Generous emotions or sentiments likely to conflict with one's moral obligations to one's interests would need to be curtailed. The motivation for such a theory lies in the evident fact that so many of our actions, when not undertaken in order to serve our interests directly, bring us material or psychological benefits in one indirect, perhaps self-deceiving, way or another. None the less, if we think that sometimes we just find ourselves moved on hearing of the plight of other people's bad luck or wretchedness, of the fate of perfect strangers in our own country or people in very different types of societies than our own—people whose silent suffering or defiance or noble resistance may shame us—why should we think that acting on behalf of such people's interests is to be disdained while the fastidiousness displayed in filling out our pension forms is so much more worthy of admiration? Might not such a repertoire of

sentiments be as much a part of our nature as anything else, and, if so, why try to stifle it? The powerful contemporary answer may lie in ethical egoism's being a fitting ideology for individualistic capitalism (Hirschman, 1977).

It is important not to confuse the egoist or the self-seeking hedonist with the figure of the amoralist. Plato's *Gorgias* makes it very clear how fruitful it can be to test the spokesmen for morality and justice against different kinds of opposition. First, the considerations that can motivate the amoralist lead us away from the bleak picture of practical life that pretends that the only motives people might act on are either egoistic or altruistic. In denying 'moral' value to what fails to meet the conditions of untainted altruism, one is led to admit that brushing one's teeth or tying one's shoelaces are egoistic activities, and the point of using a term like 'egoistic' or 'selfish' is lost, for their role is to pick out behaviour which, in seeking to benefit oneself or one's own (e.g., family), is *unjust* to others. Second, whereas the life of the egoist is prohibited to no one, the amoralist's indifference to the trump-card effect of the moral may be born of his having a real alternative rationally denied to most of us. Third, confidence in the supremacy of moral considerations may lead moralists to assume that their opponents' views of life are irrational or unimaginative. A tendency to underrate the rational capacities of the amoralist may stem from presuming that rationality commends risk-minimisation or demands the maximisation of harmony in one's practical affairs, or that the grounds for his self-respect be confined to what *we* can imagine ourselves possessing in similar circumstances. Amoralists can manifest many different kinds of character. There is no good reason to suppose the amoralist a 'wanton'. He may exercise higher-order desires that exhibit a partiality that pays scant attention to a great many of the ordinary duties and obligations of social life, and unless one takes a highly moralised view of the dispositions that constitute love and friendship, there is no reason to think that his amorality must impede his having such relationships. He and his friends may simply not care that they are unjust outside them.

Other sorts of amoralist *may* gain our admiration and leave us with uncomfortable thoughts, as Williams has urged us to recognise over the past two decades (Williams, 1981). It is a familiar feature not only of the world of creative and performing artists, but also of that of many sporting activities, or of others where spectacle is especially significant, that there can exist a glaring gap between a person's self-frustrating, callous, inane or otherwise abject behaviour in ordinary life and his ability to display in a confined domain talents so stupendous and apparently effortless as to invite wonder and inspire awe. Moreover, it is by no means obviously true that we always admire more those whose greatness in a confined field is combined with a dutiful respect for the decencies of ordinary life. It is often, rather, the unpredictability with which the greatest of talents are

displayed, their fragile nature and their vulnerability to everything outside them, that captivates and wins our admiration most. Such thoughts are surely worthy of further exploration.

ETHICS AND OTHER BRANCHES OF PHILOSOPHY

Close to the frontiers of and partially overlapping with ethics, other branches of philosophy, such as those concerned with politics, law, education and historically, though to a lesser degree nowadays, religion, offer systematically different perspectives when inquiring into the justification of various kinds of social institutions, sources of authority or ways of reaching decisions. To epistemology, philosophical psychology and the philosophy of mind, however, moral philosophy bears a pervasive and intimate responsibility, because these are the *loci* of inquiries into so much of its conceptual basis. Some of the sorts of confusions which philosophers spend considerable amounts of time trying—rarely wholly successfully—to avoid, are simply much more likely to occur and persist with seriously disabling results when such responsibilities are not heeded. Yet moral philosophy does not merely bear a responsibility to the philosophy of mind and action. Developments in the latter have proved inspirational for moral philosophy too. Such a source of stimulus has been a particularly striking feature of some of the developments within moral philosophy over the past thirty-odd years (two of the most seminal works being Elizabeth Anscombe's *Intention*, and Donald Davidson's collection of papers on action theory and weakness of will, *Actions and Events*). Some of the influence has been not only direct as in *Emotion* by William Lyons (and Rorty, 1980a), but rerouted through discussions in ancient philosophy (Rorty, 1980b; Nussbaum, 1986).

An important area of investigation has been that of *akrasia* itself (Pears, 1984; Mele, 1987). The point at which a decision to act differently is made, at which one changes one's mind, is not the only one at which, in Amelie Rorty's words, 'the akratic break' takes place. Moreover, it may take place in the most self-interested of concerns. The exploration of how *akrasia* and self-deceit come to occur in practical life—of the processes involved—perhaps requires a larger ambit than act-weighted theories of morality and self-understanding grant them. As David Velleman says in his reductionist account (*Practical Reflection*, 1989), we almost always know what we are doing; when we do not, we come to a stop. Thus, in familiar cases such as, 'going upstairs for something' and then completely forgetting why, one follows such actions with a moment of inertia that gives way to 'thinking what one should do next', or to just 'retracing one's steps' and anticipating a return of what it was that one had had in

mind to do. If we wish to explain *how* self-deception works, a longer timespan is sometimes needed. We want to explain how we came to act unreasonably while seeming to know what we were doing throughout.

We often seek such explanations in the emotions and the fantasies they sometimes cause in us. An emotion might lead us into deceit about someone, our misleading image of that person bringing about in us a pattern of attention, a channelling of curiosity and expectations that we have projected onto him, and which in turn leads us to act in certain unreasonable ways. Such fantasy is compatible with our 'knowing what we are doing' in the above sense. However, this latter 'knowing of what we were doing' conflicts with our 'having known it' under a description arrived at reasonably. Though it is true that people have very different capacities for controlling how they see situations, it is sometimes inaccurate to say afterwards 'I didn't know what I was doing'. This becomes clearer if, for instance, the right kind of help in seeing one's situation accurately is at hand, as it sometimes can be—and one rejects it. For then it is not always easy to explain by reference to incapacity why one rejected the help.

There may be reasonable grounds for rejecting the reasonable view. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen's representation of the character and situation of Marianne Dashwood invites us to understand how a person with a certain kind of nature was predisposed to the later influence of the novels of romantic sensibility, and that this general susceptibility is likely to mislead her in her understanding of Willoughby. However ill-disposed Marianne's sensibilities are for reckoning Willoughby's constancy, it also suggests how close she was to being right, and yet how, had her feelings been more under control, and had she trusted her own intimations less, she'd have been not nearer to, but further still from, an accurate appraisal of Willoughby's feelings for her (Chapter 44).

The relation between moral philosophy and the philosophy of art and aesthetics is rather different. Both are concerned with investigating the metaphysical status and nature of value, with whether there is such a thing as aesthetic or moral knowledge, and with the conditions or possibility of making objective value-judgements. 'Facts' seem to enjoy a different status in the two kinds of judgement. At first, we may think that some types of judgement cannot but be subjective, while others are objectively right or wrong, as in the following: 'My new-born baby is beautiful'; 'King Lear is a better play than Titus Andronicus'; 'Suttee and female genital mutilation are acceptable rites of passage in certain cultures'. These questions may not get easier, the worse we think the behaviour is, whether it is Lord Kitchener's inauguration of the concentration camp, Japanese bacterial warfare experiments on human subjects in the 1930s and 1940s or the Holocaust. If we think one or more of the above judgements is objectively right or wrong, what kind of account can we give of such purported objectivity? The question of what is at issue in asserting that objective

judgement is possible in ethics or aesthetics, and the need to be clear about what conception of objectivity is under discussion, interests us because it will affect what we think it is reasonable to think, say and do, and what account we think captures best what it is that people are doing when they make such judgements.

One common, but hopeless, way to proceed is to appeal to ‘depth of inhibition’, for our inhibitions are evidently unreliable guides to what we ourselves regard as important. If it turns out that objective judgement cannot be had, what is there left for us to say about such matters, and what kind of authority might what is said have? Much depends on what conditions it would be necessary to see satisfied in reaching objective judgements in ethics, an issue we shall return to shortly.

More than in fields where value is properly conceived more narrowly, such as logic, the law or technology, the terms we use in attempting to make sense of aesthetic and moral value are shot through with ambiguity. The term ‘value’ itself is one of these, for we may employ it variously. It may convey an object’s cardinal or ordinal worth. Economic value is usually thought of in this quantitative way. Value may be *attributed*. We describe someone’s action as ‘courageous’, or a piece of music as ‘moving’. Axiologically, the value of a holiday may be said to lie in its ‘freedom from routine’ or that of a marriage in its ‘companionship’. More particularly, although it is generally agreed that it is no part of its *aesthetic* merit that an object has practical value, some of the (emotional) responses called forth in our experience of many of the representational arts may comprise a form of ethical education. The fact that an art object possesses this power attests to the skill employed in its design. A painting or the enactment of a character’s role may achieve an illusion the success of which is registered in the correspondence between our reaction to it and to the reality of what it represents. Thus, with the cautionary influence exerted by the philosophy of mind, comparisons between ethical experience and the appreciative experience of art can prove a source of mutual illumination.

ETHICS, INVESTIGATION AND THE WIDER WORLD

Besides discussions in works of moral philosophy, ethical values are explored and challenged in imaginative literature, social anthropology, history and manuals of professional conduct, as well as in the ordinary, sometimes humorous, observations of mankind. Indeed, the primary function of aphorisms is like that of the best teachers: not to state truths, but to get us to think for ourselves. In different ways, each of the above may succeed in representing, and so enabling us to understand better, how a person confronts

the complex moral demands that chance or predictable circumstance, his actions or his mere existence, bring about. Yet it can be difficult to honour the obligation to convey the most ordinary and complex situations of life with the weight they deserve, and especially when one's task involves querying that very weight. By good fortune, some of us are largely shielded from circumstances that most severely put to the test a person's allegiance to his values and ideals, and this may leave us poorly placed to imagine our own reactions—be they feckless pliancy or staunch resistance before the pressures of the environment. Lives are not corrupt for being lived by people who recognise their practical options to be very limited. It is in helping us to recognise *when* our options are not foreclosed, or in mustering the courage to see the redundancy of our perspectives on our circumstances—brought about by large-scale political events far beyond one's control perhaps—that the morally invigorating fantasy that existentialism can be, may prove valuable. However, the issue of *how* to bring the representations of such complexity into fruitful partnership with the necessarily more abstract demands of philosophy amounts to a dilemma about how to do moral philosophy. The quandary strikes at the claims the subject has to being distinctive and important, and at various times one or other and occasionally both of these claims have been challenged.

There is, however, no hard and fast rule for deciding at what level of contextual detail to conduct inquiry. This will depend on the phenomena under scrutiny, and the choices will reflect the interests of the particular philosopher. Too much contextual detail may result in little more than third-rate novel writing or armchair anthropology and deprive one of the possibility of drawing useful comparisons. Too much abstraction in what is represented may succeed in shearing off the very facts in which the moral problem is embedded, with the consequence that our ability to imagine realistically the protagonist's thoughts and feelings is vitiated. It is not that, in themselves, minimally conceived circumstances offer too restricted a role for the imagination. Such a representation of a state of affairs might, in leaving rather too many options from which to choose, run the risk of failing to be a predicament at all. Imagination constrained by insufficient facts may encourage mere fantasy, and though its exercise can in various situations enhance life and compensate for the unobtainable, its efficacy is lessened when urgent moral demands are pressing. Here there is a contrast with the aesthetic, where the value of an object is sometimes held to reside in its indeterminacy.

If the philosophical investigation of ethics has a special claim on our attention, then this must be because its investigations involve the use of techniques and the pursuit of purposes which are, respectively, distinctive and important. Philosophical investigation is committed to the employment of a particular kind of persuasive device: argument. Moreover, though it is itself a matter of contention what types of argument are acceptable in

philosophical ethics, there are forms of persuasion that are arguments in a loose sense, in that they involve the statement of propositions or facts for the purpose of influencing someone's mind which are none the less not regarded as philosophically cogent. Many such 'arguments' found in modern advertising practice are of this kind. However, whereas the purpose of a series of images, say, is to induce in a person a disposition that favours the purchasing of a certain good, *that* the person understands how and why such images induce him to desire the good in question is a matter of interest only in so far as it serves or hinders the strategic ends of the advertiser.

Our recognition of and response to ethical value, like our understanding of someone's speaking or writing a language, or occupying a social role, is guided, rather than fully determined, by standards. The inculcation of grammatical rules, of a role's responsibilities and duties, or of the norms of practical conduct more generally, are a means that further the spontaneous production of accepted linguistic and other forms of practical behaviour, but they neither create new values nor capture all existing ones. For these reasons, the investigation of ethical value must retain a keen sense of the significance not only of the unpredictable, of life's vicissitudes, but of the uncomfortably and disarmingly admirable, of what we really value in the world, and of how this sometimes comes about in ways that involve the suffering of innocent people. It must address the question of how we are to think about and act towards those thus harmed or exploited. Such a sensitivity may express itself in scepticism, when more general theoretical preoccupations threaten to discount, or unduly confine, the scope of what is worthy of respect or admiration.

If it is to be interesting, a practice such as the philosophical investigation of ethics, in which speculative aspirations and analysis can be harmoniously pursued, cannot fail to inquire into the apparent justifications for current practices, into those justifications that might be adduced to support them, into the possibility of introducing plausible alternative standards of practice and into qualities of character that predispose people to choose and act well. Speculation and analysis are often out of place in the throes of actual moral turmoil, when time is at a premium, and the effort expended in keeping unreasonable hopes and fears at bay joins forces with whatever adroitness, powers of synthesis and confidence one can muster. Making do with the limited experience, wisdom and powers of discernment one has, and trusting to what one's intuitions and imagination deliver, one acts on the best reasons, or on those acceptable in the circumstances. An important branch of ethics is devoted to the investigation of those dispositions of individual character (virtues) that raise the probability of living a worthwhile life and promote attendant states of the world in which such lives can take shape.

THE FUTURE OF VIRTUE ETHICS

Unlike a teleological ethics of acts and consequences, such as utilitarianism, and despite sharing an agent-centredness with Kant's deontological ethics, in which the Categorical Imperative, derived from the concept of rationality itself, is sovereign in specifying general and particular duties and obligations, virtue ethics inquires into the various dispositions of character that enhance, or aim at the perfection of, practical life. Albeit pessimistic about the prospects, Anscombe's 'Modern Moral Philosophy' (1958) has been remarkably prophetic regarding both the requirements for a flourishing Godless ethics of virtue, and for its mainspring being Aristotle. In particular, Aristotle thought that virtuous dispositions were of a special kind, that they were concerned with choosing, and that unlike mere skills, actions done in accord with virtues are performed in a certain condition, that is, knowingly, are chosen on their own account and proceed from a firm and stable character (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105a17–b4).

This latter condition is shared by most theories of virtue, and importantly distinguishes them in taking the long-term project of character-formation within a life as the focus of attention (Foot, 1978). Thus, a great merit of virtue theory, and another departure from utilitarianism's concerns, is its focus on qualitative questions respecting kinds of life, one that runs through much of Charles Taylor's work (1989).

Unsurprisingly, many contemporary writers in the virtue tradition have tended to give the social sciences and history a prominent position in their work. This has made for enormous richness and a variety of approaches. However, the role of history, and the underlying assumptions as to its significance, differ markedly in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (1985; 1988; 1990), Taylor (1989) and at some remove, Williams (1985).

The pessimism and hostility to liberalism in MacIntyre's work must be seen against the requirement not only that the virtues should exist within the context of a shared morality, but that morality be highly determinate—and the virtues unified—such that deliberation may successfully extrapolate, from more to less familiar situations, thereby preserving the coherent narrative of a life led in a well-ordered society. MacIntyre's affinity with Aristotelian ethics is much closer than is the case for Taylor and Williams. This view of the intellectual and social prerequisites of morality has informed MacIntyre's work from its earliest period, and surely motivated his critique of the role of the fact/value distinction in so much twentieth-century analytic philosophy (1956, 1971).

It is not just in the more kaleidoscopic, less determinate view of narrative resources that Taylor differs from MacIntyre. That view may itself be motivated by a greater trust in Platonic 'self-mastery', though vision and imagination are allotted a more creative role in articulating and

discriminating desires in relation to the kind of life to which they contribute (Taylor, 1977). It is partly in this different response to Plato, or at least Plato's Socrates, that Taylor's and Williams' concerns differ. For Williams, misgivings about the nature, the significance and the fact of Socrates' successes—especially in the *Gorgias*—perhaps provide an additional motivation for moral scepticism over and above the doubts shared with MacIntyre regarding the moral possibilities of modernity—its lack of appropriate foundational conditions. All three philosophers share an awareness of how any ethical values likely to prosper, and so ones which persons can identify with—though should not be the servants of—must be guided by (different kinds of) facts about the world. They differ again over the perfectibilism rarely absent in virtue ethics, for though a live current in the thought of Taylor, it is absent in Williams and almost notional in MacIntyre.

OBJECTIVITY, UNDERSTANDING AND ETHICAL CONCEPTS

The attempt to construe an unobjectionable account of the epistemological status of ethical value is at least as difficult as it is important and there is an array of different conceptions of objectivity, rationality and ways of understanding relativism, that lie beyond what might be alluded to here. However, if the only permissible notion of objectivity is run together with what Williams has called an 'absolute conception' of the universe, a conception that is independent of 'the world as it seems peculiar to us (human beings)', then there will not be any plausible objective judgements in ethics or aesthetics, since we cannot suppose that these concepts are not anthropocentric. We might wonder how there could be such a conception which we shared alongside any other (i.e., non- or super-human) investigators, since it may be that the capacities of the others—an indefinite number of them perhaps—including capacities for extending the capacities with which they receive information and individuate objects, might always massively outstrip our humbler human ones. If this were so, it would be difficult to see how we could know we were sharing in the enterprise. The idea of such 'an absolute conception' is, of course, itself controversial and Williams has himself indicated that a more elaborate treatment of this and associated concerns is in prospect (1995b).

Some philosophers believe that a less abstract conception of universal anthropocentric judgements can be converged upon. Vulgar forms of relativism apart, practical judgements must be guided by facts about the world, the world we discover as well as—unconsciously or otherwise—create. One way of presenting reasons for action is the method chosen by the greatest novelists; that of 'showing' rather than 'telling'. Ideally, within

an ethics of virtue, such ‘showing’ might be comprised in, or *be*, one’s upbringing. The cultivation of virtue would be a matter of learning how to discriminate and respond appropriately to the more and less familiar features of one’s world. Deliberation is here confined to a caretaker role or, as on a common interpretation of Aristotle, a means-determining role. From within such a culture, the ethical world looks to be objective. Disagreements can be settled by appeals to ethical knowledge; that is, there would be a non-accidental linkage between belief in the judgements made and their truth (Williams, 1985:142–3).

What, for MacIntyre, for example, anchors ethical knowledge, and so gives determination to virtuous practical activity, is the existence of ‘practices’. Indeed, it is his belief in their absence from modern societies that partially explains his moral pessimism. A ‘practice’ involves the socially established, co-operative realisation of goods internal to an activity which is complex and coherent and which aims at standards of excellence that systematically extend human powers and goods, and partially define the practice (MacIntyre, 1985:175). Even if at certain times and places such conditions obtain, since there is a plethora of virtues across and within the history of human cultures, these cannot all be brought into inclusive harmony at any one time and place. However successful the tropes, rhetoric, indoctrination or coercion that effect a particular instance of convergence in ethical judgements, it will not be a convergence on our shared ‘human nature’, but on some representation of it, one fashioned by the selection and exclusion of other human traits.

In seeking to establish reasons for action, any general moral theory runs into ‘the dilemma of context’, as Scharfstein has called it (Scharfstein, 1989). Seeking to span any situation of ethical choice, a theory of very general ambition invokes concepts such as ‘duty’, ‘pleasure’, ‘happiness’ or ‘flourishing’ which are neutral with respect to different local contexts. Yet, since a person can’t just go out and indeterminately perform duties, flourish, pursue happiness or pleasure, some local motivations—such as those found in ‘practices’—need to be introduced to provide reasons for action. Convergence on prohibitions and restraints may seem more plausible. Apart from the most general of prohibitions, however, equity requires that they are understood on the basis of local identifications and conditions.

In explicating his anti-realist ethics, Williams has employed the *thick/thin concepts* distinction (originated by Ryle, and elaborated in anthropology by Clifford Geertz). *Thin* concepts are the stock-in-trade of ethical theories in modern societies (e.g., right, good, obligation), whereas *thick* ones specify feelings, actions and characterisations of persons at the level of local identifications in which ‘factual’ and ‘evaluative’ elements are inseparable (e.g., courage, loyalty, brutality, lying). The claim is that in (modern) societies where reflection has destroyed ethical knowledge of the thick concepts

(obtaining in hyper-traditional ones), ‘confidence’ can be its replacement (Williams, 1985:139–48; 1995a:184–8, 206–9; 1995b:205–10).

Besides investigating the knowledge/confidence issue, there are other questions to pursue. There may be non-hyper-traditional societies in which ethical knowledge did not need to be destroyed by reflection. Perhaps ethical knowledge was never presumed, or, if possessed, was not undermined by reflection. Ethical confidence, let alone knowledge, may be difficult to maintain in modern liberal societies without a degree of coercion incompatible with the flourishing of liberal values such as personal autonomy and ethical diversity. What may sustain ethical confidence in cultures that discourage such values—in Japan, for instance—is reflection coupled with the belief that unauthorised possibilities possess merely notional status.

Warren Quinn was surely right to query the nature of the thick/thin distinction, the aid it generates for ‘mentalism’ (anti-realism), and the all-too-convenient term ‘perspective’—which cries out for further investigation. He also attempted to construct a broader conception of rationality with which to defend an objectivist ethics against relativists (Quinn, 1993). Quinn claimed that ‘moral rationality could not be shameless’ (p. 220), but this is to seek alliance with a chameleon and play into the anti-realist’s hands. For shame—like honour and reputation—does not denominate objective value. It is an ethical ‘parasite concept’. Shame is an *index* of self-respect, and so of the standards by which it is lost or kept. One may be shamed by one’s diminutive stature, by one’s cowardly truth-telling that loses one’s family its reputation, or by ignominious defeat in the local head-butting joust.

Whether within or between societies, understanding is often a matter of degree or difference in depth. Such differences may be explicable as a result of the different experiences people have, and it’s a moot point how far imaginative literature, say—which some pretend is like life—can take us. Finding incomprehensible aspects of others’ behaviour under a concept we understand, such as trust, loyalty, irremediable guilt, grief, love or friendship, may simply betray the limited repertoire of experience that our own imagination has available. Most people understand the notion of guilt, but not everyone is unfortunate enough to have had Macbeth’s experience of it. Moreover, there are some forms of human behaviour, necrophilia, say, that someone—a morgue attendant, for instance—might be able to give a detailed account of, yet we might still not *understand* such behaviour—because we could not imagine it. We may also fail to understand another person owing to a difference of temperament. A common error in those proficient in exercising control over their feelings, for instance, is to judge ‘sentimental’ those less capable of control than themselves, the counterpart error being for the latter to judge the former bereft of feeling.

Though our understanding of ethical experience in our own culture is imperfect to an unknown degree, this doesn't put a stop to our understanding ethical concepts we don't use for the purpose of evaluation. We may *understand* the concept of an alien or embarrassing characterisation of persons, of an activity or of an emotion, recognise how it is used, and be adept at picking out behaviour that conforms to it (e.g., suttee, sin, lady, gentleman), but we need not thereby be employing such a concept as an expression of our *own* evaluative responses. None the less, even though we may recognise that the justification of our ethical concepts differs from recognition of colours and other secondary qualities—if we shrink from using a term such as 'baby blue' or 'nigger brown' it is not because of a quaintness or offensiveness that attaches to colour *qua* colour—we still lack an adequate account of just what ethical value is.

RECOMMENDED READING

Objectivity and Cultural Divergence, ed. S.C.Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), contains a collection of accessible essays that perfectly illustrate the title. Ben-Ami Scharfstein's *The Dilemma of Context* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), is one of the few philosophical treatments of the notion of 'context', combining analytic clarity with a catholicity of interests illustrative of the topic. Roger Crisp's collection, *How Should One Live?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), brings together new articles on interesting topics by some of the foremost writers in current virtue theory, including the important relationship between feminist concerns and virtue theory. Tu-Wei-ming's *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), would provide an excellent way to explore and be guided through central ideas in Confucian ethics. William Ian Miller's *Humiliation and other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), is an imaginative, wholly jargon-free exploration of conceptions of self in the sagas of ancient Iceland and medieval England, and a wonderful source for stimulating uncomfortable thoughts in the present. Owen Flanagan's *Self-expressions: Mind, Morals and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), explores a wide range of topics appropriate to the vast number of ways human beings express themselves, and manages to establish a suitable partnership between the lively concerns of modern life and current concerns in philosophy.

For a succinct summary and incisive criticism of Intuitionism, Emotivism and Prescriptivism, see G.J.Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1967), and for a more sympathetic but equally lucid treatment of emotivism, see J.O.Urmson, *The Emotive Theory of Ethics* (London: Hutchinson, 1968).

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Lenn Goodman

Imagine a historian of political theory who was inclined to write off the first half or three-quarters of the century now drawing to an end, as a time of intellectual drought, in which not much of moment occurred by way of serious political thinking. Ignoring fascism and the deadly Nazi ideology of the 1930s and 1940s, this historian might then look through or past the radical anarchist and neo-Marxian movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but stop respectfully to credit John Rawls with reviving political discourse on a philosophical plane. Taking for granted the outcome of the largely unexpected anti-communist revolutions of the late 1980s, the same historian might go on to predict a mode of political discourse for the coming century that would continue to dot the *is* and cross the *ts* of the familiar Lockean canon—much as physicists on the eve of the Michelson-Morley experiment were predicting that little more would be done in physics beyond filling in the values of the key Newtonian constants with ever-increasing precision. Teaching efforts might be expended in encouraging undergraduates to write opinion pieces on the casuistry of abortion and euthanasia, setting graduate students to dissertations on the Lockean roots and Kantian commitments of Rawls, and urging future political thinkers to explore the legal and economic implications and applications of liberal theory in, say, health-care economics.

Bad history makes for bad prognostics and bodes ill for an unblinkered vision of the future. In looking toward the future of political philosophy one needs to start by acknowledging the causes of the intellectual dustbowl that obscured the acreage in the 1920s and 1930s. The chief cause, clearly, was positivism. But it would be a near tautology to ascribe positivism to scientism. The philosophers of the Vienna Circle turned toward science and away from metaphysics in part because they rejected religious and other traditional normative standards. But part of what moved them to a value judgment devaluing all value judgments was a very natural reaction against the authoritarianism, atavistic nationalism and anti-semitic chauvinism of established thinkers on the right. Seeing the high ground of post-Hegelian ideals and idealism seized by the most unsavory of

adversaries, many liberal and progressive-minded thinkers foreswore metaphysics, dismissed normative discourse globally, as emotive palaver, and set up in its place a hedonic calculus that referred questions of social policy to social planners, whose authority would derive proximately from social science and ultimately from the ballot box.

LIBERALISM

The normative spring that powered such thinking was hidden beneath the surface, in premises like Ralph Barton Perry's equation of values with the object of any interest. It was assumed, in contravention of all global rejections of metaphysical and moral claims, that where there was no person as an interest bearer there was no interest and hence no value to be served; yet the interests of human beings (still understood subjectively) did deserve to be served. Indeed, since the desired polity was liberal, two further assumptions were made: the moral equivalence of all interest bearers and the intertranslatability of their desires.

These premises voiced the heart of the liberal program, while quietly excluding the idea that state or church, neighborhood, family or tribe—let alone anything as abstract as culture or the environment or as problematic as the will of God—could be a locus of value independent of the desires of some living human individual. Desires were assumed to be about objects; and objects, for the most part, were material and had some price that could be measured in money, human efforts or further objects.

The moral equivalence of the subjects who did the desiring was treated as a formal rather than a material principle. What once might have been called the sanctity of the soul or dignity of the person was now held above question or even affirmation, not in virtue of the value assigned to it but by virtue of its placement in the role of valuer. Perfectly acceptable as a dogma of civics or a shibboleth of popular rhetoric, the presumption of human worth was kept out of sight in academic theory, treated effectively as an axiom rather than a postulate that needed to be anchored, defended or defined in some conception of, say, the demands of God or the entailments of human nature.

Chiming with the givens of liberal rhetoric in England and America, the premises of liberal positivism gained added weight in the wake of the Second World War, when they were drafted for service in the worldwide battle against fascism. Denunciations of objective moral standards, metaphysical reasoning and religious commitments—all of which were called 'absolutes' and thus linked with the totalitarian claims of political absolutism—took on symbolic significance as a special kind of war work. Ramified corollaries could be derived from the core premises, but those doctrines themselves rarely needed to be justified. To question them was

to fall in with the enemy. And positivists from Chaim Perelman to T.D. Weldon made no attempt to justify their underlying commitments but simply announced them as their biases or preferences. Richard Rorty continues in this posture today. But the style is well worn. By the 1950s, Machiavelli had metamorphosed from the *bête noire* of moralistic historians to the culture hero of value-free social science. Students of domestic (and largely domesticated) politics had turned to voting behavior and political institutions as the objects of study, and internationalists were using notions of stability and growth as scientific-sounding surrogates for the more overt and morally rooted value notions of the past.

The positivists who set the tone for much of Anglo-American political philosophy were in no position to argue for their liberal commitments, since value judgments, if they were facts, were subjective facts; to seek warrant for them would be simply to descend into the same metaphysical maelstrom from which many positivists had only just escaped, by the grace of logic, scientific thinking and various international committees for the rescue of those few continental refugees who had the good fortune to be academic intellectuals.

Rawls too did not justify his core normative commitments. The argument by which he breathed new life into the discourse of political philosophy was carefully couched in descriptive language, designed to satisfy those who saw philosophy as the analysis of concepts embedded in the linguistic categories and performances of a given community of language users. Using the terms ‘veil of ignorance’ and ‘original position’, Rawls called on his readers to conduct a thought experiment: imagine a group of rational individuals founding a society; try to envision the rules they would draw up, if they had no idea in advance what roles they themselves would play in that society.

The approach is not radically new. It develops Plato’s strategy in the *Republic* of discussing public justice before addressing justice in the individual, so as to objectify the question and cut away from the Sophists’ claims that one’s idea of justice depends on one’s role—that there is no definition of justice until we know whose ox was gored. Rawls’ conclusions too are not new. They are a recasting of Lockean liberalism. What the thought experiment is meant to reveal is that rational choosers will always preserve their own power to choose, thus never suspend or surrender their own liberty. Once that is assured, however, they will compromise their equality—but only insofar as the resulting arrangement benefits the least advantaged. For the rational ego must always be open to the thought: there, but for my choice in the original position, go I.

What dates Rawls’ argument to the mid-twentieth century is that in drawing his conclusion Rawls referred not to fairness or unfairness *per se* but to what we who conduct the thought experiment would *call* justice or injustice. Rules that rational persons under the veil of ignorance would

not freely choose, Rawls argues, are not rules that we would call just. The appeal is to common usage—in some ways, on a par with the well-known apocryphal argument of an ordinary language philosopher that English is clearly the best language for philosophy, since what in Latin is called *equus* and in Greek *hippos*, in English is called a horse—which is exactly what it is.

If Rawls did not prove much, his reasoning did strike many resonances. From his original article, ‘Justice as Fairness’ (1958), Rawls’ brief grew to a full-scale treatise (*A Theory of Justice*, 1971) that carefully appraised all manner of antecedents and alternatives and many possible counterarguments. Rawls’ conclusions now resonated with ideas about compensatory justice that were being widely discussed when his book appeared. Reaching a broad audience, in part because it seemed to give an academic and non-Marxist imprimatur to egalitarian social and economic proposals, the book was taken up by political theorists for quite different reasons: it signaled the end of the drought. Here was a respected academic making what for all the world looked and sounded like normative judgments about political policy. Other thinkers felt liberated and hailed Rawls for reviving the normative discourse of political theory in the West. Even Isaiah Berlin—who had, in fact, offered substantive arguments (‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, 1958) for preferring political liberalism to any corporate ideology, raising important suspicions about the idea of corporate identity and about the legitimacy of any ruler, however benevolent or sympathetic, who seeks to define for others who they are and what their inmost desires might mean—had generally presented himself as an historian of ideas and bracketed his moral *aperçus* in historical exegeses or analytical remarks like, ‘The answer to the question “Who governs me?” is logically distinct from the question “How far does government interfere with me?”’ (Berlin, 1958:14).

THE SEARCH FOR RIGHTS

Now, with the success of *A Theory of Justice*, the floodgates were opened, and other thinkers with views about political rights and wrongs felt licensed to offer their own arguments. The social sciences, after all, had not made good on the promise that value-free inquiry would somehow right the world’s wrongs. Normative judgments were no longer off limits. The time was right for them, the scandal of Watergate demanded they be made, and colleagues would not scorn the very syntax of such judgments, since even Harvard philosophy professors used it.

Among the curious after-effects of this atmosphere of academic liberation, Robert Nozick, a junior colleague of Rawls’, published his own book (*Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 1974), advocating a baldly libertarian egoism

as an alternative to Rawls' political vision. Rawls himself now laid claim to a Kantian heritage—although, when pressed about the possible parochialism of his ideas of rationality, he would acknowledge in the end that he spoke out of one tradition of political thought. He was the exponent of an ideology, not the discoverer of an argument that would convince outsiders and the unconvinced, the harder task that philosophers since Socrates have tried to shoulder, to differentiate themselves from sophists and other hired guns.

Political theory, of course, was not dead in the 1950s—any more than it is true that politics died in the 1980s, with the fall of the Soviet Union. Fascism grew from an ideology, and so did communism, anarchism and the many-branched and seasonally flowering tree of liberalism. There are today a wide variety of philosophically argued political ideals in circulation, and we can get some idea of the future of political thinking by examining the potential and vitality of these, their practical and conceptual limitations and complementarities. If liberalism is still a live option for many, so are anarchism and corporatism for others. Natural law thinking shows surprising life after twenty-five centuries or more. Marxism today is in retreat, but we probably should not rush to pronounce it dead. Environmentalism is alive and well; it bears close examination, since its metaphysical underpinnings are at odds with, and at times radically inconsistent with, the humanism to which liberals (and even radicals in liberal settings) have traditionally appealed.

ENVIRONMENTALISM

Let us consider environmentalism for a moment. It has certainly earned a place at the table in political philosophy and will undoubtedly figure prominently in future discussions of state policy. Environmentalism is readily confused with ecology, but ecology is a science or family of sciences devoted to the study of living populations interacting with their environment, including other populations. Biology, examined in this interactive sense, has proved critical to our understanding of genetics, evolution, the constitution and stability of the biosphere at large and the various ecosystems that make it up. Environmentalism is the political demand that we take account of the delicacy and value of such systems—lest, in our ignorance we make a wasteland of the planet. More demandingly, it asks us to preserve the earth's ecosystems intact, or take active measures to see to it that they are sustained.

Environmentalism can be prudential, but it need not be. It might argue that human welfare, quality of life, even survival, depend on sustaining, restoring or not disturbing the rainforests, the polar icecap or the ozone layer. Or it might argue that the beauty, complexity, fragility or power of

the earth's species, rivers, rock formations, habitats or eco-niches should be preserved, not simply for our sake but for the sake of these creatures or features themselves. Environmentalism makes contact here with the defenders of animal rights; but no firm alliance results, since environmentalists, like conservationists, care about species and systems, not necessarily individual creatures and their sensibilities, the cynosure of animal rights activists and theorists.

Environmentalism brings to politics a set of concerns that is in some ways very new and in some ways ancient. The concern with waste, spoilage and pollution is at least as old as the Bible, with its commandments not to despoil the trees surrounding a besieged city (Deut. 20:19–20) or overburden the soil (Deut. 15:1–10, Lev. 25:1–7). But in voicing a concern for non-human, even inanimate beings, environmentalism poses radical challenges to those varieties of political thinking that vest all rights and interests in human individuals. When trees, forests, even phenomena like biodiversity or species-distinctiveness (non-hybridization), are given political standing, new political categories are needed. When the *prima facie* or immediate interests of native or migratory populations come into conflict with the desire to preserve a forest from logging or a game preserve from hunting or farming, not only the resourcefulness of game-keepers and policy-makers is taxed but the resources of political theory itself. Indeed, some political theorists have trouble finding the moral vocabulary and syntax in which to render canonical the interests of future human generations, let alone the rainforest. But their predicament is not an argument but an expression of poverty.

Some deep ecologists, perhaps out of an inner revulsion against the advanced stages of a civilization they abhor, now equate human population with pollution and envision humanity as a kind of pest or infection on the surface of the earth, that it will slough off if irritated much further. We can see that environmental political thinking will be a major topic in the coming century; its work will surely involve the quest for common normative standards that will recognize the value of non-human beings without in the process diminishing humanity to something nugatory or negative. The challenge here is to find a way of assigning relative value to all beings without degrading the special worth of human beings.

ANARCHISM

Anarchism, like environmentalism, is in part a romantic philosophy. It is reactive against urban regimentation, appealing to fantasies of a Promethean self that will forge its own law—to be obeyed, of course, only by its author, and then only when the spirit so moves one. Academic or philosophical anarchism is the notion that government *per se* cannot be

justified. That claim is of little relevance to the governed, or to those who govern them, since neither group traditionally feels the need for a radically coherent and well-grounded theory of rule. Politics is justified, for these two critical groups, the governed and those who govern, not by theory, by and large, but *de facto*, by the acquiescence of a critical mass within the polity.

Such acquiescence cannot be taken for granted, as the rulers of the Philippines, or Romania or Iran discovered, to their cost. But rotten theory is only symptomatic of the issues that can turn acquiescence into revolution; and shared theory, if something as coherent as a philosophy is intended, is a chimera when it is sought within an entire populace or polity. Shared myths are relevant to the coherence of a society. But such myths are rarely coherent. That is part of what makes them myths. As anthropologists discovered long ago, no two tellers of a myth will tell the story quite the same way, let alone draw from it the same theme or moral.

What makes practical anarchism by and large a fringe phenomenon is the general recognition of human beings, in their various nations and communities, that some government is better than none. Many might believe that the government that governs least governs best; but the attempt to extrapolate from such a nostrum to the thesis that the ideal government would be none at all does not work. For the restrictions that chafe most in one quarter are those most demanded in another.

Does this mean that political anarchism has no future in political philosophy? Not at all. The romantic tendency is universal. Besides, anarchism has a role to play, like that of solipsism in metaphysics, as a kind of extreme case or regulative idea. But we can expect anarchism to thrive in a highly ordered environment; anarchists will continue in the future, as we have all done in the past, to take for granted the comforts and conveniences of civil life, even while disparaging the institutions through which those amenities—including basic civil rights—are protected and secured.

FASCISM

Corporatism is a polite word for fascism. The fasces was a bundle of sticks that formed the ax handle of the ceremonial weapon carried by the honor guard of Roman lictors, as a symbol of the strength in unity. In folk parables the fasces was not easily broken, but in Roman practice and subsequent iconography, its sharpened blade was emblematic of the fact that bonds of unity can be violent and oppressive as well as unbending. European fascists may be remembered for their tactics—the nasty habit of Mussolini’s Blackshirts, for example, of forcing lethal doses of castor oil down the throats of adversaries and critics. But what distinguished fascist parties

conceptually was that they sought representation for churches, unions, universities and other groups, rejecting the individualism that is the living core of the liberal tradition. The Soviet system, by this standard, was definitively fascist, since its molecular entities were committees of workers, peasants and soldiers. The nexus between group rule and castor oil politics is a subject worthy of sociological and psychological investigation, and indeed has not been neglected by empirical investigators and by theorists like Zevedî Barbu (*Democracy and Dictatorship*, 1956).

Is fascism finished? I fear not. The rising tide of ethnicity, evident from Bosnia to Rwanda and Somalia, is fed by passions that show no signs of withering away. Wherever there are calls for ethnic as opposed to individual representation, we see the core of fascism. And representation is not the real issue but only a sanitary way to speak of hegemony in a divided society. The invidious constitution of Fiji, which limits the civil rights of ethnic Indians, is fascist in tendency, as was the Apartheid constitution of South Africa. It is because divisions feed on themselves in the dialectic of vengeance and clan warfare that the world must take note of tribalism as a living and growing force whose poisons are not safely contained, along with various tropical diseases, in the hamlets and favellas of the Third World. On the contrary, as the sequel to the Sarajevo Olympics shows us, Switzerland will become the Lebanon of Europe before Lebanon becomes the Switzerland of the Middle East.

But what has that to do with political philosophy? Can't the political thinker take refuge in thought, like the Philosopher in Halevi's *Kuzari* who sets philosophy above all bloodletting and mayhem? Regrettably not. The discrediting and defeat of fascist governments in the Second World War did not lead to the abandonment everywhere of corporatist ideologies, any more than the discrediting of communist governments in the 1980s led to the universal abandonment of Marxist ideologies.

COMMUNITARIANISM

Setting aside those movements that are drawn to fascism more by the trappings of violence and nostalgia for its symbols—or by a morbid fascination with the games, disciplines and terrors of an imagined apocalypse—than by any articulate political ideal, we find corporatism most alive in the thinking of communitarians, who, like all corporatists, shun and fear the impersonality of industrial individualism, the anonymity of the unbridled marketplace and the anomie of urban landscapes. Stunned at the devastation that deracination can wreak, they make modest proposals about closing neighborhood streets to outsiders, about shared management in corporations, and collegiality and consensus on campus. They do not trace all values to the individual but find liberalism at fault for doing so.

Liberals, for their part, eager to be generous or progressive, often accept corporatist arguments about, say, communal responsibility and recompense. As individualism wanes and the doctrine of the invisible hand continues to lose adherents, we can expect corporatist thinking to gain ground and become a powerful voice in the next century. The danger it bears now as in the past is in the risk of submerging the rights and even the identity of the individual in the demands of the group that claims to speak in his or her behalf.

Communism was a species of corporatism. The group for whom it claimed to speak was the working class, although the presumptive constituency was broadened, for political purposes, to include peasants, the oppressed of all nations and all peace-loving peoples—even those whose lives were organized on tribal lines and knew nothing of the dictatorship of the proletariat. From the inception one might have wondered about the prudence of communist plans. If there is any wisdom at all about politics, it might have warned against placing military, political and police power in the same hands, or making the owners and administrators of property one and the same with the labour unions entrusted with protecting workers' rights and interests.

The creation of an impersonal bureaucracy to oversee capital that is in theory commonly owned seems an unlikely means of overcoming the alienation that Marx first analyzed as the inevitable outcome of the division of labor. Indeed, the notion that socialism—meaning state ownership of the means of production—was compatible with democracy was tellingly refuted by Hayek (*The Road to Serfdom*, 1944), on the grounds that a demand economy would siphon off the lifeblood of political independence. This prophecy of Hayek's was distinctive in several ways: it was philosophical in that it rested on a synthetic argument, bolstered in this case by Hayek's understanding of political economy; it was not impeded by positivist inhibitions from drawing normative conclusions; and it proved true, verified by the consummation of the trends that Hayek saw early on.

The Marxist-Leninist states of the Soviet bloc fell as a result of popular revulsion at the failure of their economies. Civil liberties had been sacrificed on the altar of savings and in the name of equality. The economic welfare that was to have resulted was sacrificed in turn to grandiose militaristic schemes, political corruption and a party god that devoured its own children. Spiritual, intellectual and artistic liberties were casualties officially unmentioned and unregretted, but the muffled outcry of smothered spirits and the desperate efforts of the unfree to escape made it increasingly undeniable that the vast experiment had failed.

The market economies, for their part, far from grinding the faces of an ever-increasing impoverished class, were flourishing. The rival societies that Khrushchev had threatened to bury in peaceful economic competition had not succumbed, as prophesied by Lenin. And they had not sacrificed

economic well-being for the masses to the civil liberties that Marxist ideologues dismissed as bourgeois luxuries, privileges of a political elite. On the contrary, liberty and justice seemed to flourish together and sustain one another. With the spread of information about living conditions in the West and the deepening of the Soviet crisis, the communist bloc imploded—ideology first.

One might think, after that denouement, that communism would not rear its head again in the twenty-first century. But I suspect that such predictions would be mistaken. There are those who still claim, contrary to popular rumor, that the great communist experiment has not yet been tried. But, for the moment, most academic communists have taken refuge in neighboring territories, like that of deep ecology, where they find themselves hiding out in the same woods with some rather druidical former adversaries. For progressives—socialists and Marxists—were traditionally anti-Malthusian in theory. They tended to pooh-pooh fears about the despoliation of the environment, even as their political offspring were fouling the environment with a vigorous abandon that dwarfed the pollution of the earlier Industrial Revolution.

But the appeal of communism, like that of anarchism, is perennial. What Aristotle said on the subject is probably still true:

Such legislation may have a specious appearance of benevolence; men readily listen to it, and are easily induced to believe that in some wonderful manner everybody will become everybody's friend—especially when someone is heard denouncing the evils now existing in states: suits about contracts, convictions for perjury, flatteries of rich men and the like, which are said to arise out of the possession of private property. These evils, however, are due not to the absence of communism but to wickedness. Indeed, we have seen that there is much more quarreling among those who have all things in common, though there are not many of them when compared with the vast numbers who have private property.

(Politics II 5, 1263b 15–26)

NATURAL LAW THEORY

Which brings us to natural law theory. The theory, whose formal articulation can be traced back to the political thinking of Aristotle—although it has biblical roots as well—originates in a kind of oxymoron or paradox of Plato's. For the Sophists with whom Socrates so often clashed wits used a dual strategy to allow them to argue either side of a case. They would appeal either to nature (*physis*) or to law (*nomos*), taking it for granted

that law was a matter of artifice or convention. Thus, in defending an embezzler, they might say he only did what came naturally, what could be expected of a man when temptation was placed in his way. In prosecuting the same man they could say that he had violated all the sacred bonds of trust upon which civilization depends. They could press their defense in some technical case by urging that laws (e.g., the tax code) are just a rarefied tissue of conventions, devised to the advantage of the privileged class—or prosecute by urging that without such niceties there would be little point in distinguishing civilized men from wild beasts. The same duality, of law and nature, could be used politically, both for and against revolution, by arguing that states exist only to coddle the privileged, at whose whim the laws are formed, or by claiming that the strong, after all, rule by nature and rise to the top by their excellence.

Plato undermined the bivalence of Sophist argumentation by rejecting the dichotomy of law and nature, finding a law within the operations of nature and finding a nature at the heart of all things that lays down the inner principle of their law. The core of the argument by which Plato could weld *nomos* and *physis* into the idea of natural law was the discovery of an inherent goodness and rationality at the root of being itself. This was the same goodness and rationality that positivist utilitarians would later try so hard to bury in the teleological premises of their thinking. Conceal it they must, because its metaphysics embeds religious insights quite alien to their thinking, although not to that of Plato, of Aristotle, or their many medieval followers and admirers.

The philosophical staying power of the natural law idea, as a political concept, rests on the stability of human nature. While other political outlooks might be bound to the particularities of one or another culture, this one finds anchor in the constants of human character and interdependence. If there are no such constants, or even if ethnic, national or cultural differences cut somehow closer to the bone, natural law theory stands refuted. But if there are enduring human needs, strengths or weaknesses, these lay a common basis for political theory, even if they do not prove to lay a basis for a common human polity.

Radical environmental meliorists like Robert Owen and radical existentialists in the Nietzschean tradition disclaim such characteristics. But when Owen wrote that ‘Any character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by applying certain means; which are to a great extent at the command and under the control, or easily made so, of those who possess the government of nations’ (1963:14), it is clear from the terms of reference that he was speaking of characters within a well-defined range of parameters. These are the real *loci* of human nature. And when Nietzsche rejected appeals to human nature as too easy an apologetic for unreflective thought and uncreative action, he too was speaking

rhetorically, almost homiletically. For the self-creation he called for was not a wholly unstructured reinvention of any random variety of entities but a self-directed affirmation of volitional identities that can redefine themselves *vis-à-vis* a determinate past.

Naturalists can, with Spinoza, accuse of utopianism any theorist whose political dreams presuppose a transformed human nature. And, with Hobbes, Machiavelli, Locke, Marx and even Aristotle, naturalists can argue that there are certain circumstances that human nature will not bear. It was this rooting of rebellion in human nature that allowed Locke's disciples in the American Revolution to speak of certain rights as inalienable and God-given. Even Camus in *The Rebel* qualifies his existentialism similarly, recognizing in the human situation, if not in human nature, that there are certain breaking points. One cannot help but recall at this point that defining moment in the Romanian revolt against Ceausescu when a woman pushed to the front of the rebellious crowd facing the government rifles and, presenting her pregnant belly, shouted, 'Here, shoot here!' — she had nothing more to risk or lose to the state, its dictators and army, once her condition had become as desperate as it now was.

The definition of human rights and their derivation from the contested and unstable territory of human nature will continue to be disputed in the coming century. But, despite the absence of any official movement or organized party that can claim the natural law heritage, despite the use of the title by some fringe groups and the deflation of the concept by some mainstream academics, who think that naturalism has made natural law as a concept obsolete, the idea will remain active and alive as long as individuals or groups can be found who will predicate their own worth on the answer to the question, 'What am I? What are any of us after all?'

DEMOCRACY

Democracy is, for this reason, the one area that will most assuredly continue to offer gainful employment, conceptually and professionally, to political philosophers throughout the coming century. The concept is rich in moral and emotive appeal, and in ambiguity. So it will not leave rhetoricians or philosophers idle. Popular thinking in America has difficulty differentiating democracy from constitutional or representative government—or, for that matter, from free enterprise, patriotism or the flag. The idea that the jury system is America's most purely democratic institution would surprise many who had not thought analytically about politics, and the Socratic claim that in a genuine democracy all offices would be filled by lot would be simply confusing. In other times and places, democracy has been equated with the vanguard ideology of a radical and perforce violent movement. It was often argued on the fringes

that votes are not nearly so important in articulating popular sovereignty as a willingness to kill or be killed for revolution. And in Cambodia the seeming vacuity of the idea of a populist revolution was given deadly force and material content by the holocaust of some two million souls, whose only crime against the nation was typically no more than literacy or possession of a high school education.

For Plato democracy bore the same odor as fascism does for us. He had witnessed the excesses of democratic rule and could find little to choose between those excesses and the lawlessness of his own kin's faction when it came to power as an oligarchic junta. Yet he could acknowledge that the glory of democracy is liberty, although its shame is license. It may be true that human history is the history of liberties bartered and sold, but humanity has yet to find a better guardian of individual liberties than that amorphous beast the people.

Democratic ideas are embedded in the utilitarian presumption that no individual's sensibilities matter more than another's—although the premise is camouflaged by the assumption that what matters about the individual is his or her pleasure and pain, rather than his or her dignity or fulfillment. Democratic ideas floated in the air when thousands of Chinese defied their people's government and people's party at Tiananmen Square, even erecting a makeshift idol to the goddess Liberty. Democracy hovered tantalizingly, it seemed just out of reach, when the world watched a single student stand in the path of an oncoming tank, as if his dangerous dance were some mere corrida.

Philosophers, like the general public, are still not perfectly clear and agreed about just what the nexus is between democracy and freedom, between democracy and populism, or nationalism. The news from Rwanda or Bosnia, Algeria or Iran, Egypt or Somalia, Mexico, Spain, Wales, Ireland, Quebec or the United States, shows us that these are not abstract or purely academic questions. When does the demand for national sovereignty become racist or oppressive? When does the presumption of equality at the core of the democratic idea make legitimate claims against property rights, and when are such rights and others that depend on them legitimately upheld as bastions of human liberty and dignity? When does individualism make way for the work of family and community, on which the life and welfare of the human individual depend? When does the democratic idea of equality take root in some positive notion of the worth and inviolability of the human person, and when do efforts on behalf of human dignity become oppressively paternalistic, undercutting the very values they should serve?

It is not just apologists and time-servers but serious philosophers who have sometimes sidestepped, shirked or ignored questions of this kind about the moral demands and political implications of the idea of democracy. But it is not just because of positivism, even in its heyday, that such questions

have been shirked. Too often, in fact, political philosophers have played the role of apologists, or collected their checks as time-servers.

FUTURE ISSUES

Among the terms that political philosophers must learn to use effectively are two that are already well known to journalists: warlord and *Shariʿa*. Ethnic factionalism and Islamic populism are rising, not withering forces, and both must give pause to Machiavellian notions about the nexus between right and power. In the political thinking of ancient China, that nexus was called the Mandate of Heaven, evoking a double-edged thesis, cynically or idealistically echoed in the naming of Tiananmen Square. The underlying thesis was at once accommodationist, pragmatic, triumphalist and prophetically, homiletically monitory. The polyvalency of such thinking, which is deeply rooted in the West not only by the adversarial legal work of Sophists but also by the efforts of serious philosophers like Plato and Aristotle to gain dialectical purchase on the slippery and evasive moves of such thinkers, has now come back to challenge the ancient philosophers' successors. Notions of popular sovereignty that were once effective warnings to willful or unwitting tyrants about the nexus between the *vox populi* and the will of God have now become dangerously ambiguous and problematic. As a result, political philosophers trained in a post-Lockean or even post-Hegelian tradition have perforce begun to recognize the need to school themselves in normative discourse, lest they remain lexically disadvantaged in the devastating sense of being unable to distinguish the moral power of democracy from its excesses and perversions.

One might say that political philosophers in the coming century will have their work cut out for them. But, truth to tell, much of the basic cutting—the conceptual analysis by which philosophers earn their bread—remains to be done. There is perhaps no area of philosophy in which the accuracy and indeed the sense of style with which such cutting is done will matter more to the general fit and comfort of the resulting suit of clothes.

RECOMMENDED READING

Aristotle's *The Politics* is widely available in a variety of editions, and has been translated in a Penguin edition by T.Sinclair. It is the fruit of Aristotle's study of 158 Greek constitutions and their associated historical and social settings, and is perhaps the most penetrating work yet written on political thought. Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960) is the core statement of the modern idea of political sovereignty.

Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1512/13) is the founding document of *Realpolitik* and of the tradition of civic virtue that is subtly intertwined with it. Many editions have been published recently by Oxford University Press and Penguin. An important manifesto of the centrality of community, cultural and intellectual tradition, and the human virtues in political thought and life can be found in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1985).

John Rawls provides an influential restatement of the core argument for Lockean liberalism in his *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

PHILOSOPHY OF THE POSTMODERN

Seán Hand

ENDS AND BEGINNINGS

There are almost as many definitions of the term ‘postmodern’ as there are manifestations of the practice designated by the label. It forms part of the vocabulary of several different disciplines which often have little in reality to do with one another: literature, art and architecture, media and cinema, politics as well as philosophy, even science and theology. And in each case, the term designates a trend or stage that is in many respects particular to that discipline. But we cannot simply say either that there is for us a ‘postmodern’ related uniquely to philosophy, since one of the common effects associated with the term is what we might call the permeability of a genre, that is to say, the way in which the history of philosophy, to a postmodern sensibility, is the history of a discipline that has repressed and exiled supposedly non-philosophical forms of sensation, reasoning and expression, in order precisely to bring itself into being as ‘philosophy’. For this reason, some of the key writers we shall look at here would not be termed philosophers by many more traditional practitioners and commentators. Yet, in terms of the postmodern, it is precisely these scandalous or inadmissible voices who can be said to provide philosophy with a future. To paraphrase a surrealist term, this future will be ethical, or it will not be at all. These voices from beyond the pale will act as the moral conscience of philosophy as it approaches a new century, and reflects on the past one hundred years of technological change, mass destruction, absolute dehumanization and totalitarian systems.

For all the vagueness and multiplicity of the term, then, we can see that it carries a number of basic features that are common to any context, and which arise out of the major intellectual and political movements of the twentieth century and of one’s fidelity to one or more of these movements. Two such movements, above all, are indispensable here: modernism and Marxism. In a sense, to define the ‘postmodern’, we need

first of all to understand clearly what we delineate with the terms ‘modern’ and ‘modernism’. Needless to say, these terms can be as variously interpreted as the term ‘postmodern’. In general terms, then, modernism refers to the philosophy and culture of the Western societies from about 1850 to 1950, that is to say, an explosive period during which a post-revolutionary, bourgeois society made enormous technological and intellectual advances, suffered two World Wars, and witnessed the complete urban transformation of living conditions and social relations. The philosophy and culture of this period reflected the experimentation and alienation that were hallmarks of these new forms of living and thinking. Literature, music, art and painting all came to examine their own structures and content, and to explore, in an increasingly formal or abstract way the limits and goals of their own means of expression.

If we now relate the term ‘postmodern’ to this extremely schematic view of modernity and modernism, we can see that the ‘postmodern’ presents itself both historically and critically with regard to modernism. While we might say that the society associated with modernism is basically the one in which we are presently living, we would add that we are already aware of how this society has changed so fundamentally during the period of modernism, and is changing so rapidly before our own eyes and in our own lives as a result of the collapse of so many historical certainties, that modernism is coming to an end. From this historical apprehension, we must therefore admit that the postmodern exists as our late experience of modernism, and as our intellectual, ethical and aesthetic reaction to that ending. This basic historical claim of the postmodern leads quite naturally to its critical relation to modernism. The reaction to modernism’s end not only takes the form of a new experimentalism, which may manifest itself as a challenging or a rubbishing of convention and authority, and an embracing of the new, the scandalous or the exotic. It also presents itself as the opportunity to abstract the underlying assumptions and powerful agencies of the modernist vision, and to subject these technical and ideological agents to an explicit (and, of course, equally technical and ideological) analysis.

Some of the key notions which postmodernism is interested in isolating and exposing are: the supposed origin or original of an established idea or subject; the unity or completeness or coherence of that subject; the immediacy or incontestable presence of the subject; and the equally incontestable or transcendent nature of the ideas and values on which the subject rests or which it illustrates (see Cahoon, 1996:14, for a discussion of these terms). We shall see how each of these challenges affects the nature of the postmodern approach to knowledge in the philosophical authors I shall examine in more detail. But we can already observe at this point how one important feature is to be found in each of these technical approaches: temporality, or becoming, as opposed to presence, or being.

Postmodernism consistently exposes the temporal complexities inherent in a subject's or idea's emergence, pointing up the unfinished, belated, differentiated state of being of the supposedly closed and complete object of analysis. Any such object, with an apparently resolved temporal logic, is shown by the postmodern analysis to be the unstable phenomenon of a plurality of energies, the product of unsure and even forced or repressed relations designed to present an illusory integrity. As such, the postmodern bears a peculiarly close relation to the general question which we are asking of forms of philosophy, namely the question of the future. And indeed, it is a hallmark of postmodern philosophy to problematize such a question at once, by seeking to show how the projection of the idea of a philosophy's future is designed to confirm the coherent emergence and development of that philosophy, from a logical past or origin through a stable present or self-presentation, towards the already predicted, and hence tamed, future. Paradoxically enough, the future of postmodern philosophy is intimately associated with its working practice, and so in one sense is very explicitly given to us as a theme or idea. But as postmodernism is interested always in unpacking the ways in which a theme or idea has ended up being presented to us as a unified and self-present entity, the future of philosophy, in the philosophy of the postmodern, is in itself constantly reviewed as an idea, referred back to the stages of its construction, and hence kept in a destabilized state, as the permanently plural and immanent possibility within each philosophical postulation. All of this of course raises the stakes for any simple prediction of the likely futures of postmodern philosophy! It is for this inherent reason that in thinking of the future of philosophy in terms of the philosophy of the postmodern, I shall show how the notion of the future task is already given in the present practice, and shall therefore explicate the process by which these thinkers conceptualize the future in order to illustrate succinctly how a future of philosophy is predictable in these areas.

POSTMODERNISM AND ITS BACKGROUND

I mentioned earlier that two movements, modernism and Marxism, are indispensable to an understanding of what is meant by the term postmodern. In discussing the first of these, modernism, I sought to sketch in some of the history suggested by the 'postmodern', as well as certain common critical attitudes which that history has helped to produce for it. A recognition of the second term, Marxism, is the point at which we now need to add that postmodernism, both as a general view of history and as a specific philosophical practice, provokes extremely critical reactions, not least from intellectuals inspired by Marxist or more generally Hegelian forms of thinking and evaluation. For these critics, postmodernism is in no way simply the

chronological and intellectual consequence of modernist structures. On the contrary, it is presented as a retreat from the intellectual ambitions and political implications of modes of analysis resolutely geared towards a totalizing vision of lived relations. Such a totalizing philosophy is necessary to a Marxist critic, for example, as the intellectual counterweight to the totalizing, capitalist economy of late modern society. Only a complete programme of change and contradiction, presented by a complete form of analysis that is materialist and dialectical, can remain independent in spirit and exact in detail, in its exposure of the laws governing the development of human society and thought.

Far from seeing postmodernism as providing this completeness and independence, Marxist analysis frequently denounces it as a mere by-product of late capitalist society. In its eyes, it resembles the objects and media of consumerism. That is, it retreats from political abstraction and commitment into an aesthetic and self-indulgent practice of playfulness or cynicism. It is no more than the philosophical equivalent of the game-show, content to toy with surface effects, paradoxes and contradictions, ambiguities and differences. Its interest in the performance or event of a meaning, from a Marxist perspective, never gets beyond the stage of being a performance or event itself. As such, its problematization of truth, presence, time and value makes it merely the quasi-philosophical version of the comfortable postmodern lifestyle. This inability to disengage from the totalized capitalist society in order to point out that society's development to this point and to argue for a committed future, has been summed up most memorably by the leading critical analyst of postmodernism, Frederic Jameson. In his introduction to *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, he opens with a powerful and unequivocal criticism of what you get when the process of modernization is complete. He therefore presents the concept of the postmodern as 'an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place' (Jameson, 1991:ix). This reduces postmodern consciousness, in his view, to a perpetually ahistorical task of 'theorizing its own condition of possibility, which consists primarily in the sheer enumeration of changes and modifications' (ibid.). Professing an exasperation with this 'historical deafness', he goes on to suggest the scientific or technical uselessness of the postmodern reaction to society or contemporary philosophizing, since as a theory it tries in his view 'to take the temperature of the age without instruments and in a situation in which we are not even sure there is so coherent a thing as an "age", or zeitgeist or "system" or "current situation" any longer' (Jameson, 1991:xi). At best, then, postmodernism for Jameson will be dialectical only to the extent that it concentrates on this sense of uncertainty itself, and follows that sense as the thread that leads out of the philosophical labyrinth of the modern condition. Except that, as Jameson

witheringly remarks, it may turn out not to be a labyrinth after all, but perhaps only a shopping mall.

Jameson is probably the most impressively eloquent of a number of critics who basically view postmodernism as a by-product or transitional period within the history of capitalism, rather than a philosophical or critical analysis of that history. But that is not to say that a postmodern response cannot point to a number of features and assumptions in Jameson's vision of postmodernism. In a self-confirming process which reduces the postmodern to the level of a patient or symptom, Jameson justifies his historical pronouncements by denying that postmodernism is able to think historically (for itself). He grants it the dialectical level of mere lived experience, but denies it the instrumental capacity to analyse and abstract that experience. He sees it as stupid, confused, uneducated. In short, he displays an intellectual arrogance and scientific pretension towards the 'postmodern' which in themselves, in their explicitly totalizing, and implicitly metaphorizing, tendencies constitute a symptom of the modernist methodologies which a postmodern enquiry seeks to bring out. Jameson's ethical criticism of postmodernism's irresponsible refusal to mature from living through changes to establishing and measuring coherence can therefore be turned back upon itself, and viewed as an unethical exclusion of discourses different from its own. In designating the age as postmodern, but refusing to entertain postmodern analysis, Jameson can be said to be guilty of an historical deafness of his own. It is a deafness that allows him to continue to reinforce the nature of his own voice: to acknowledge the postmodern as the object of his discourse while repressing the ways in which it controls and modulates that discourse. Rather than turn to examine the fantasmic structure of the postmodern within what he has authored, he exteriorizes 'the postmodern' as an object of criticism in order to reassert himself as the author of an inner logic. The conflict of past and future models of cultural and economic structure has here been internalized and resolved by turning the postmodern into kitsch, and therefore no future at all. In refusing this historical refusal, Jameson the author shows that he represents the real future for thinking, a future which none the less continues vigorously with present (modernist) structures of thought.

DE-AUTHORIZING THE PRESENT

We now need to look at specific authors and texts which will help illustrate some of the general remarks which have been put forward so far. To repeat, these examples would be contested in some quarters as having nothing to do with philosophy proper. And it is precisely this improper nature that the postmodern approach to philosophy would stress as an ethical awareness. The postmodern challenge to some of the features which

remain in Jameson's criticism of the postmodern would first of all begin with the way in which he writes speculations on past, present and future through the unifying force provided by his resolute authorship of his discourse. A by now classic essay by Roland Barthes (1915–80), 'The Death of the Author' (in Barthes, 1986) provides an exemplary instance of a postmodern analysis of the structures and assumptions at work in authorial utterances, as well as a first indication of how such an interrogation comes to recognize its own status as performance or event which, if it is not to contradict its message, must go through certain transformations of its own related to the structuring of knowledge and the self-postulations underpinning that presentation. Barthes presents the unconsciously confident overview and enumeration of social duplicity given by Balzac in his short story *Sarrasine*, before breaking off at a point where the text talks about Woman, in order to ask:

Who is speaking in this way? Is it the hero of the story...? Is it Balzac the individual, whose private experience has given him a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author, professing 'literary' ideas about femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology?

(Barthes, 1986:49)

To a significant extent, Barthes puts these questions in relation to Balzac not because of any idiosyncratic nature in Balzac's writing but precisely because he is a canonical figure in modern Western culture and as such a key example of the ideology of authorship at work as much in philosophical as in literary postulation. The authority of the author here, as Barthes' questions suggest, is symptomatic of the ability to think historically and of the confidence with which 'society' or 'history' can be invoked in an unproblematic and univocal way as the signified element of a discourse, the ultimate and incontestable reference-point of a discourse and its illustrations.

The questions with which Barthes interrupts the flow of Balzac's authority first of all have the effect of bringing out what is absorbed and submerged within Balzac's authorship, namely, the multiplicity and incommensurability of discourses within his attempt to think historically, and the way in which the synthetic presentation of history by his work was born out of and inspired by deeply unhistorical speculations on character and motivation. Moreover, Balzac's enumeration of feminine traits, with all their changes and modifications, as Jameson might put it, provokes from Barthes not a single incontestable historical resolution, which is problematized in advance by Balzac's own historical vision, but an equally suggestive and unresolved enumeration of possible identities for the author or 'speaker' of these universal truths. What is important is that the authorial

nature of Balzac's assumptions is not contested by a repetition of a similar kind of authorial assumption. Instead, the multiple assertions regarding Woman by Balzac provoke a multiplicity of questions about the constituent elements leading to the emergence of this univocal and all-embracing historical thinking. These questions are to a degree all the more useful and pertinent for being as duplicitous as the society Balzac is presenting (Barthes is not seriously suggesting that fixed views on 'Woman' emanate from 'universal wisdom'). And, equally importantly, the rest of Barthes' essay continues to throw out ideas, in both senses of the phrase, in a fragmentary and non-sequential way, bringing to the fore by abandoning the inner logic holding together but also holding back the historical thinking still inhabited by that history's own most tenacious structural and intellectual assumptions. Barthes' message, then, is ultimately not just that Balzac's historical vision is composed from the irresolvable pluralities and ambiguities of discourses, but that a philosophical presentation of modernity which willingly demonizes and reduces this plurality in the name of historical thinking is in fact complicit with the ideological frameworks of that historical period. In breaking open the authority of Balzac's text in order to pose a series of unanswered questions, not all of them serious, Barthes is not being merely playful or pathologically caught within the mimicry of consumerism; on the contrary, his form of discourse is precisely the one which responsibly seeks to stand back from the totalizing narrative form of a novelistic or philosophical dialectical exposition of complete meaning. The ideology of the institution of philosophy as well as literature is called into question by Barthes' decision. And it is a formal break with ethical consequences. As his essay famously ends, the birth of the reader is at the expense of the death of the Author. This signals the responsibility with which we have to contest the totalizing representation. Henceforth, Barthes' theorizations try to embody the alternative to such a totalization. And, more generally, the philosophy of the postmodern is to keep alive as an ethical vigilance and in a technical approach this same spirit of resistance.

OF THE ORIGINS OF ORIGIN

In a parallel way, this ethical resistance to normalizing narratives (including ethical ones), and the exposure of the power-relations inherent in these systems of thought, has been carried out in the work of Michel Foucault (1926–84). Foucault's work, which is ostensibly sociological, historical and political in its concerns, has greatly influenced a philosophy of the postmodern through its analysis of how discursive practices, philosophy included, are indissociably bound up with the exercise of social and political power, such that the univocal postulation of historical thinking is revealed

to have the effect of encouraging or maintaining a normative social grouping. He is famous for his analysis of the historical presentation of the insane, criminals and sexual deviants. Notwithstanding the occasional charge of the idealization of real pathological conditions, this analysis perhaps most importantly suggests that as power-relations are ingrained in the history that has produced modernity and are perhaps inevitable in any historical emergence, a postmodern philosophizing would work in its own practice to generate more fluid forms of historical thinking which would aid the dissipation of oppressive reasoning. One effect of this is precisely the difficulty we have already commented on when it comes to classifying the genre within which Foucault is working. As he is really interested in uncovering what is at work in the relations between statements, he cannot in advance postulate the unity of a particular discourse, since that would be to presuppose the permanence and uniqueness of the object that the discourse, by its choice of object and its own self-constitution as a corpus of statements, is seeking in a self-fulfilling way to confirm. It is precisely this discursive formation which is Foucault's real object of analysis, and as such what he offers philosophizing is another exemplary practice of postmodern self-regard. This self-regard has nothing narcissistic about it; it is a practice aware of its emergence and postulation as a practice, a regularity acutely aware of how its existence projects meaning into history.

The notion of a genealogy, and the examination of the origins of ideas of origin, is crucial to Foucault's archaeological exploration of the generation and storing of knowledge. By 'genealogy' Foucault means that history is always written in the light of contemporary preoccupations. It is therefore 'effective' in the literal sense of the term, in that it effects a change in its own time. This means, though, that if history is always an intervention in its own time, it is not itself opposed or immune to history and can in no sense be allowed to stand as a meta-historical deployment of ideal categories and unchallenged teleologies. This notion of genealogy, inspired by Nietzsche, is therefore opposed to the search for an origin. Indeed, 'what is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity' (Cahoone, 1996:363). Genealogy has the liberating and effective means to permit the historian to break with a deference towards an established temporal order and the institutional obligation to confirm an unbroken continuity that supposedly operates beyond the dispersion of things and the accident resulting in their disappearance. As a result, history is freed from the ideological function of tracing the evolution of the idea to be enforced and the destiny to be confirmed. Effective history affirms, instead, how it is a perspective on knowledge, and can and should denounce those historians who 'take the unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences

in a controversy—the unavoidable obstacles of their passion’ (Cahoone, 1996:372). This admission of the act of cognition, with all of its passion, in the emergence of historical knowledge is revolutionary in its potential for philosophical speculation, not least in its implications for the presentation of temporality which underlies the project of this book. Indeed, Foucault at this very point suggests that the historical consciousness which he is seeking to embody in a particular formation is the vanguard of a revolution that can then go on to affect philosophy. As he states:

History has a more important task than to be a handmaiden to philosophy, to recant the necessary birth of truth and values, it should become a differential knowledge of energies and failings, heights and degenerations, poisons and antidotes. Its task is to become a curative science.

(Cahoone, 1996:372)

DECONSTRUCTING PRESENCE

Foucault’s closing remark indicates the liberating effect which he hopes the archaeology of the silenced and the banished elements of grand history will have on us as a social organism. But in its revolutionary tenor, its stark oppositions and its celebration of violent energy over dusty knowledge, it offers a clear illustration of the distance which Jacques Derrida (1930–) maintained, in his deconstructive practice, in relation to the identification Foucault feels with what has been excluded from history. Reviewing Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* (1961), for example, Derrida asked how it is possible to write a history of madness if history is already a rational concept, and equally how Foucault imagines that he will not simply reinforce a structure of exclusion in claiming to speak for something—madness—that by definition must none the less remain excluded as a concept, within the rational closure of what still is an archaeology (Derrida, 1978). Derrida’s point here is that within Foucault’s desire to highlight discursive practices, there remains the task of deconstructing the structures of differentiation upon which Foucault’s call to recognize effective history still depends. Here, as elsewhere, Derrida is concerned to bring out how the Western metaphysical tradition has been fashioned out of a series of polarities and dualities, such as mind versus matter, identity versus difference, nature versus culture, or speech versus writing, where one term is in fact prioritized over the other in order to privilege identity, unity and presence over deferment, difference and dissimulation. Derrida subjects this determination of Being as presence to an intensely close reading of the operations by which this idea is confirmed in order to challenge this systematization.

He does not simply produce a reversal of the polarities by, in each case, relying crucially on the notion advanced by Ferdinand de Saussure that language is a system of differences without positive terms (which means that 'dog' means a dog because, within the system, it does not mean a cat and it does not mean a log); he shows that the privileged term already takes its significance from the repressed half of the opposition and is thus already inhabited by whatever is supposedly secondary or subordinate to it. This means, for example, that the supposed originality and spontaneity of speech in relation to the temporally and spatially deferring phenomenon of writing, is in fact part of a huge operation designed to present the origin and goal of Western metaphysics as the reconstruction of a self-present Truth. This postulation of the immediacy of speech collapses, however, once we become aware of how it is in fact constituted by all the elements associated with writing, but uses all those elements negatively connoted— death, distance, difference—as the repudiated means by which to present itself as the self-evident origin and end of Being, an immediate intuition defiled by the supplementary work of writing. Once this apprehension of presence exists, the sentiment of exile and the necessity of a return, negatively associated with the task of writing, exist with it.

For Derrida, Western philosophy, up to its modernist culmination, has therefore consistently celebrated the immediacy of presence in a nostalgic manner, constructing out of the effective repression of its own differential structures the continued postulation of a self-evidence as the origin and goal of philosophical thinking. Derrida coined the by now famous term *différance* to designate this simultaneous reality of differing and deferring which arises in the instant that there is meaning. Significantly, only in the written, rather than the oral, form of the word can we discern the double meaning of the term, a modest, but not untypical indication of the writing practice which Derrida brings to the history of Western philosophy in order to foreground its hidden metaphysical assumptions and the fact that it has naturalized its own highly motivated figurations. Derrida stresses in even his early work that he is not here offering one more polarity—the nostalgic postulation of impossible presence versus the affirmation of playful possibility and endless indecipherability—to be advanced as the grounding for a new, more Nietzschean metaphysics. The inhabitation of one polarity by the other makes choice here illusory. But Derrida does conclude his influential *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* with an important postmodern lesson for the future of philosophy, namely the necessity not to ignore or exclude whatever challenges systematizations as an as yet unnameable entity, something which can proclaim itself only 'under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity' (in Derrida, 1978: 293).

DELEGITIMATIONS

This survey, however preliminary and incomplete, cannot fail to mention in passing the work of Jean-François Lyotard (1924–) and in particular his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. The subtitle would seem to indicate an essential difference from the ethically inspired visions of the future contained in the previous texts we have looked at. But given its emergence from Lyotard's earlier Marxist and Nietzschean phases, it in fact represents an ethically driven postmodern vision of the possible future concerns and limits for knowledge, in a technologically totalized society which places the criterion of performativity on knowledge. Lyotard's main idea here is that advanced capitalist economies such as our own give less and less credence to the meta-narratives or grand narratives which traditionally have given a society a sense of identity, purpose and value, and crucially have legitimated the roles of science and knowledge in relation to society as a whole. Postmodernity, then, with its collapse of hierarchical rules governing the transmission of knowledge, produces a blurring of the distinctions between genres of discourse and the multiplication of acceptable forms of argumentation. This produces a number of self-referential language games, no longer organically related, and in particular does two things to science: it makes it a language game that no longer requires a narrative for its legitimation; and it subjects it to the principle of performativity, which results in technology being viewed as the most efficient means of obtaining scientific proof. As a result, the end itself becomes justified on the basis of its performance indicators and the market-driven notion of productivity underlying any funding mechanism. The legitimacy of science becomes immanent rather than transcendent: that is, it is legitimized through the pursuit of a grant rather than a truth. It is at this point that Lyotard begins explicitly to articulate the pressing need for the emergence of a desire for justice and a practice of justice that could flourish within this postmodern proliferation of disassociated language games. Lyotard's slightly lame recommendation sounds like an early apology for the Internet: the free flow of information would permit the emergence of a virtual politics 'that would respect the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown' (Lyotard, 1984:67). This represents for us little more than an apprehension of the possible evolution of a new philosophical medium on the technical level. But on the ethical plane, it again indicates an abiding concern with the possibility of justice in a totalizing programme.

BEING-FOR-THE-OTHER

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that a major influence on the philosophy of the postmodern and a powerful model for the ethical

basis for philosophy's future is the work of Emmanuel Levinas (1908–95). It was Levinas who introduced into France the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger which was to influence a generation of philosophers around the period of the Second World War. But this knowledge was tempered by his Judaic inheritance, which led him increasingly to challenge the view of existence as a project in Heidegger, with his own assertion that only through responsibility for the other person does a human existence gain significance. Of particular relevance to the theme of philosophy's future here is Levinas' presentation of time and death in his work. He contests the existential time-span in Heidegger, which reaches its climax and point of absolute authenticity in the moment at which I achieve my goal of being-towards-death, in an intensely virile and solitary manner, with the evaluation of time in terms of the other's death. As a result, death is never a present, not just in the obvious sense of my never being able to experience my own, but more profoundly in the sense that it cannot be grasped and subordinated by me. It exists as an absolute exteriority, like the future, through which I entertain a basic and permanent relationship with the other person. As Levinas puts it, death 'is the impossibility of having a project', as a result of which we are all together 'in relation with something that is absolutely other.... My solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken by it' (Hand, 1979:43). This gives us a future for philosophy which is absolutely ethical: my inability to be absolved of responsibility for the other's death, since we are all in relation through this absolutely other, means that this future is not to be thought of (as previous Western forms have presented it) as the potential of the present. It is 'what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us' (Hand, 1979: 44). The future of philosophy is for Levinas encapsulated in the face of the other person through whom I come into contact with infinite responsibility, that is, with a future that remains future. This ethical revelation of the absolute future in the present both enhances the previous postulations of a future we have looked at, and presents them with the impossible challenge of remaining open (and yet philosophically rigorous) in the face of the absolute mystery of the necessarily irreducible future. In a sense, Levinas' work represents the limit-case of the future of philosophy as an unlimited responsibility to exist beyond the power of its own free self-expression for the sake of a supreme allegiance to what is Good. But the absolute inequality of this relationship does more than guarantee philosophy a future that too quickly is achieved or ridiculed; it obliges it to hold to an impossible future. In the plethora of possible futures for philosophical speculation in the next millennium—from eco-feminism to cybernetic enthusiasm—Levinas' lesson is exemplary: the future of philosophy should be denounced only because it is not sufficiently futural. Only a philosophy based on the recognition of the ungraspable, absolute alterity or otherness of the future will remain a philosophy.

RECOMMENDED READING

David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) is a powerful and tenacious study of the social and economic bases which the author sees as underlying postmodernity. *Postmodernism and its Discontents: Theories, Practices*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: Verso, 1988) is a useful collection of essays which locate various postmodern practices in the social circumstances of contemporary life, including class, gender and media.

APPLIED PHILOSOPHY AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

Heta Häyry and Matti Häyry

During the first half of the twentieth century Western moral philosophers did little to earn the respect of their fellow human beings. Totalitarian governments seized power in Italy, in the Soviet Union and in Germany. Millions of people were imprisoned and killed in Stalin's attempts to uproot political opposition in Russia and the other Soviet states. Six million Jews were methodically murdered by Hitler and his collaborators in Germany and the neighbouring countries. Millions lost their lives in the Second World War, which reached its final culmination in the savage bombings of Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Allied forces. The world was in a state of chaos. But what did the majority of philosophers do amidst all this madness and mayhem? Many Italian, Russian and German academic thinkers joined the Fascist, Communist and National Socialist parties of their native countries. Elsewhere in Europe, intellectuals argued about the relative merits of the alternative totalitarian regimes. And in the Anglo-American world, analytical philosophers, had they been aware of the unpleasantness surrounding them in the first place, would most probably have wondered what it was that Hitler exactly meant by expressions like 'the final solution'.

THE MOVEMENT

Applied philosophy, which in its present form started to emerge in the 1950s and the 1960s, consists of various scholarly attempts to deal with the real-life moral, social and political problems that it had been the academic custom to ignore between the two World Wars. The primary growth area of this type of practical philosophy can be found in the English-speaking world, and it is therefore slightly surprising that the first postwar application of ethical thinking to a difficult moral problem can be traced back to France. In 1948 Simone de Beauvoir published in

the newly founded journal *Les temps modernes* (*Modern Times*) an essay entitled ‘An Eye for an Eye’, where she presented a spirited defence of retributive feelings and measures against the Nazi invaders of France in the wartime. The essay, which combines features of existentialism with certain elements of Kantian ethics, can be seen as the forgotten grandmother of all the works in applied ethics that have appeared since then. De Beauvoir herself went on to write *The Second Sex*, which soon became a classic in feminist and gender studies—a field of scholarship with many natural connections to applied philosophy.

The wider movement towards the study of real-life moral and political issues by philosophical methods was, however, born in the United States during the 1960s, and this movement was from the beginning closely linked with the view that a systematic theory of natural rights should be developed to regulate human actions. This starting point is well reflected in the opening paragraph of Richard Wasserstrom’s representative article ‘Rights, Human Rights, and Racial Discrimination’, which was originally published in 1964 in the *Journal of Philosophy*:

The subject of natural, or human, rights is one that has recently come to enjoy a new-found intellectual and philosophical respectability. This has come about in part, I think, because of a change in philosophical mood—in philosophical attitudes and opinions toward topics in moral and political theory. And this change in mood has been reflected in a renewed interest in the whole subject of rights and duties. In addition, though, this renaissance has been influenced, I believe, by certain events of recent history—notably the horrors of Nazi Germany and the increasingly obvious injustices of racial discrimination in both the United States and Africa. For in each case one of the things that was or is involved is a denial of certain human rights.

In keeping with the spirit of Wasserstrom’s observation, the scope of applied philosophy in the United States has been confined primarily to those issues which can be analysed by employing the concepts of equality, justice and natural or legal rights. The criticism of racial discrimination, which was the crux of Wasserstrom’s article, was soon accompanied by attacks against discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin and sexual orientation. The extension of these discussions to the rights of the unborn, the dying and the medically vulnerable marked the dawn of modern bioethics. The questions of international aid, justifiable warfare and capital punishment have also continually intrigued the bulk of American moralists.

At the beginning of the 1970s British philosophers joined the ongoing discussion which took place in American scholarly publications, notably in the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Richard Hare started this

exchange by presenting views on the morality of warfare and abortion. Hare's Australian disciple Peter Singer, who in the early 1970s was working in Oxford, began by addressing the questions of civil disobedience and international aid, and then went on to instigate a movement for the liberation of animals from the effects of what he called 'speciesism'. And John Harris, another Oxford moral philosopher, distinguished himself by presenting forceful and ingenious arguments against violence by omissions, or negative actions.

The Oxford utilitarians headed by Hare, Singer and Harris were not greeted with undivided enthusiasm across the Atlantic. Singer, whose plea for non-human animals can without difficulty be interpreted in terms of natural rights, quickly established his reputation as a pioneer of international applied ethics. But the commitment to universal altruism, or utilitarianism, shared by Hare, Singer and Harris has not gained much transatlantic popularity. Most American moral philosophers had by the early 1970s rejected the formerly popular doctrine of rule utilitarianism, and they had become convinced that social, political and legal morality should be centred on the rights of the individual rather than on the good of society as a whole. The publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971 marked the final breakthrough of this view to the American philosophical consciousness.

The primacy of rights and utility in normative ethics has been occasionally challenged by theorists who believe that virtues and vices rather than entitlements or contentment should form the basis of morality. The idea of Aristotelian virtues was examined by G.H. von Wright in his *The Varieties of Goodness* (1963), and further developed by Peter Geach in his *The Virtues* (1977) and by Philippa Foot in her *Virtues and Vices* (1978). While von Wright and Geach did not proceed to discuss the role of virtues in real-life situations, Foot has applied the views of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas to the problems of abortion and euthanasia. Her moderately conservative and distinctly anti-utilitarian views have not gone unnoticed in the United States—Foot was, in fact, a member of the editorial board of *Philosophy and Public Affairs* at the time Hare, Singer and Harris published their first contributions in the journal. The predominance of the concept of natural rights has, however, hindered the wider dissemination of virtue ethics in the North American continent, particularly after the publication of Rawls' *magnum opus*.

Another alternative to the normative ethical theories based on rights and utility is the Kantian view that duties and obligations form the core of our moral existence. In Britain, Ruth Chadwick has applied this view successfully to certain difficult questions in medical ethics. Genuinely Kantian approaches have not, however, been prevalent on either side of the Atlantic, perhaps partly due to the confusion created by Rawls, who in his book asserted that his essentially contractarian position can be

classified under the heading of Kantian ethics. While this interpretation may in some sense be valid, it ignores the fact that Kant emphasized the primacy of duties rather than the focal position of liberty and individual rights in the regulation of social life.

The publication of *A Theory of Justice* has, paradoxically, also hindered the development of rights-based applied philosophy in the United States. The inventive and complex theory put forward by Rawls has during the last two decades bewitched the majority of American moral philosophers, and the result is that they have ceased to pursue applied ethics as an autonomous academic subdiscipline. Some of them have focused their attention on the criticism and development of the views presented by Rawls, and others have set out to find alternative theories of justice and individual rights. There are also a number of American moralists who have specialized in the application of ethical theories to problematical real-life situations. But their work in what might be called ‘casuistry’, or the mechanical application of authoritative moral doctrines, has tended to create new semi-philosophical professions rather than to further the scholarly study of ethical issues. Bioethics, business ethics and professional ethics are examples of activities which are now beginning to live their own lives quite apart from any truly philosophical concerns.

THE QUESTIONS

The theoretical questions which are characteristic of applied philosophy always have a practical slant, but they are often also connected with deep metaphysical issues which lie at the heart of various ethical doctrines. The most important questions concern the value of human and non-human life, and conflicts between various moral claims.

The definition, value and meaning of human life have been central in debates regarding abortion, euthanasia, artificial reproduction, genetic engineering, quality-of-life measurement and the scarcity of medical resources. The relevant questions include the following. When does a new human life come into being? What gives a human life its worth? Are some lives more or less worth living than others? When does a human life end? How should we treat entities which could become, or have once been, living human beings?

Some philosophers have thought that these questions can be best answered by appeals to the doctrine of the sanctity of life, or by reference to the biological, social or metaphysical potential shared by certain living beings. Those who have assumed this manner of thinking have usually contended that it would be morally wrong to terminate a pregnancy or to give a lethal injection to a terminal patient who wants to die quickly and without excessive pain. This would, they can argue, violate the sanctity of human life.

Alternatively, they can say that practices like these would deny or prevent the realization, or actualization, of some of the potential possessed by the human beings whose lives are affected.

Other philosophers, in contrast, have maintained that the proper criterion for defining the beginning and the end of ethically meaningful human life can be found by focusing on consciousness, and that under most circumstances the best way to measure the value of individual human lives is to consult the individuals themselves. The first part of this view is based on the observation that most adult human beings are aware of their own continued existence as subjects of beliefs, expectations, hopes, fears and other mental states. If the hopes and expectations of these individuals to continue their existence are frustrated by taking their lives, they are obviously wronged by the deed. But the situation can be different when it comes to beings who have never been, or will never again become, aware of themselves as subjects of mental states. According to the consciousness view, individuals like these cannot be genuinely wronged by terminating their lives, and this is why abortion—along with decisions not to keep irreversibly comatose patients alive—should be morally condoned.

The second part of the view states that individuals are usually the best judges of their own lives and their own life quality. If they see their lives as good, then it is not the legitimate business of others to intervene without explicit permission. Similarly, if individuals deem their lives to be worthless, and wish to hasten their death, other people should not automatically try to keep them alive, or condemn those who are willing to help them to die quickly and easily. An important task within a view like this is, of course, to define clearly the circumstances under which individuals should be allowed to make drastic decisions concerning their own lives. According to a standard interpretation, people should not be granted the right to full self-determination if they are very young, or if they suffer from severe mental defects or senility. Furthermore, individuals should not be given a decisive say in matters which have to do with their well-being, if they lack sufficient psychological control over their choices due to temporary emotional disturbances, lack of knowledge or the undue influence of other people.

In debates regarding abortion and euthanasia the most important philosophical questions centre on the definitions of the beginning and end of life. But when the advantages and disadvantages of artificial reproduction and genetic engineering are discussed, another set of queries arises. Is it, for instance, always good to bring about new human lives? From the viewpoint of an individual who does not necessarily even exist yet, can we say that it is always better to have a life, however miserable, than not to have a life at all? Another contentious issue is, can others decide that an individual's life is more or less worth living than somebody else's? In more general terms, is it always right to try to improve the average quality of human life? And

what roles do the concepts of ‘health’, ‘normality’ and ‘naturalness’ play in the decision-making process?

For those who have assumed the sanctity-of-life view, the answers to the first four questions are relatively easy to find. Life is always valuable, and it is always better to have a life than not to have one. Everybody’s worth is, in principle at least, the same, and it is therefore not a commendable idea to try to improve the overall quality of human life by choosing between prospective individuals. But the view can run into difficulties when it is applied to the enhancement of the lives of individuals who will be born anyway. Is it wrong to remove a hereditary disease which would otherwise plague the person’s life in adulthood? If it is not, then why not alter some other physical qualities in order to make the individual stronger or prettier, as well? The answer is often based on ideas concerning what is healthy, normal and natural in human development.

The champions of the consciousness view can usually explain with less difficulty why and how the lives of individuals may be altered. If the manipulation makes the future person happier, it is legitimate, and for that reason. What causes problems to this doctrine is that it does not seem to respect the lives of particular unborn individuals. If a potential human being—an embryo or a foetus—can be replaced by a ‘better’ one, this can and should be done. This is a conclusion that many defenders of more traditional views have found disturbing and immoral.

When applied philosophers move away from the sphere of *human* life and turn their attention to matters like the welfare of animals and the protection of our natural environment, a new type of value-related question comes to the fore. The worth of human existence has predominantly been seen to flow from one of two sources. The human-centred, or anthropocentric, view states that since people are the only value-setting beings in the universe, the worth and meaning of life are purely human concoctions. The supporters of the God-centred view, in their turn, hold that life’s value is an aspect of its divine origin. But many ethicists who emphasize the independent value of living organisms have argued that both these claims are false, and that the value of all life is intrinsically embedded in life itself, whatever the more specific form it takes. This view has been labelled as biocentric, and it presents interesting challenges to the way in which the established philosophical schools see the worth of individual animals, species and other biological entities such as rain forests, mountains, rivers and oceans.

The questions regarding life and its value are important to bioethics, which is at the moment the most advanced area of applied philosophy. Other prominent fields of study include professional ethics, business ethics and the critical examination of issues related to war, famine, pollution and other human-made or natural catastrophes and conflicts of basic interests. In addition, practices like racial discrimination, capital punishment

and censorship have been visible in ethico-political debates. But although there are important conceptual issues at the heart of each of these fields, the discussion has not yet fully reached them. Instead, most ideological exchanges have been confined to disagreements concerning the general political and moral theories which ought to be applied to problematical situations.

THE THEORIES

The most important present-day doctrines of social and political philosophy can be classified by employing two distinctions concerning theories of rights and the nature of liberty. The first division is between views which rely on what Isaiah Berlin in an influential essay called the ‘negative concept of liberty’ and the ‘positive concept of liberty’ (Berlin, 1958). Those who believe that freedom means the absence of restrictions can be said to uphold a *negative concept of liberty*, while those who believe that freedom means the presence of certain rationally, emotionally, politically or morally justifiable restrictions can be labelled as supporters of a *positive concept of liberty*.

The second distinction concerns the existence and legitimacy of a category of rights which can be called ‘positive claim-rights’. These are rights which entitle their bearers to the positive help of others in situations where they cannot cope with matters by themselves. One set of moral and political philosophers hold that positive claim-rights can only be valid in situations where they can be supported by *prior contracts, covenants, promises, natural hierarchies between individuals, or their special relationships with each other*. Another set of philosophers argue that there is a further reason which alone can make positive claim-rights truly valid, namely *need*.

When the two distinctions are crossed, the result can be presented in the schematic form seen in Figure 1.

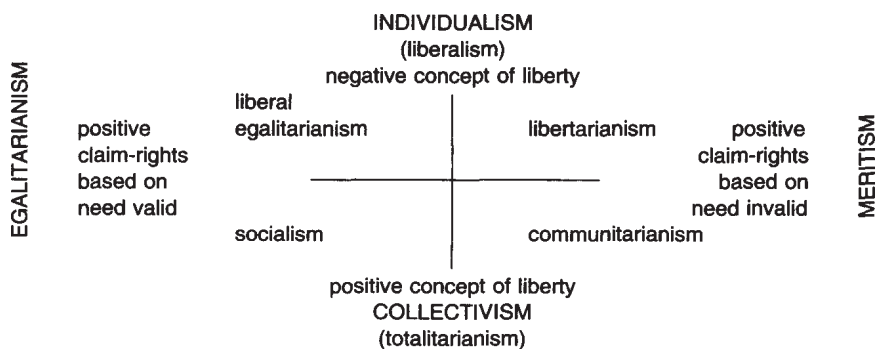


Figure 1 Contemporary political philosophies

The social and political philosophies that uphold the negative concept of liberty can be classified under the labels ‘individualism’ and—with some hesitation—‘liberalism’. The supporters of the positive concept of liberty, in their turn, place collectives before individuals, and sometimes also the totality—that is, the state or community as a whole—before its parts or members. The use of the epithets ‘collectivism’ and ‘totalitarianism’ is, therefore, justified.

When positive claim-rights are not based on needs, they must be based on ‘natural’ distinctions, status differences, deserts or other kinds of inborn or acquired merits—this is why we have employed the phrase ‘meritism’ for the theories on the right-hand side of the figure. When, on the other hand, positive claim-rights *are* based on needs, everybody’s dues are measured equally according to need—thus ‘egalitarianism’ is an apt name for the views on the left.

The four views we have singled out in the figure—libertarianism, socialism, communitarianism and liberal egalitarianism—are examples of modern social theories which can be found at the opposite ends of the ideological continuum. The attitude towards real-life political issues is different on each view.

According to libertarian thinking, the ideal for social and political life is that individuals appoint for themselves a minimal governing body whose only legitimate task is to protect the negative claim-rights of their citizens to life, liberty, health and private property. By a ‘negative claim-right’ we mean the liberty of individuals to live, to be free, to remain healthy or to enjoy their private property without the undue interference of others. Within the libertarian model, those in government should not take any redistributive measures—they should not collect tax money from one group of people and then spend it on services which satisfy the needs of another group.

The core idea of socialism, at least in its democratic form, is that the majority should form an extensive system of government which aims at securing everybody’s positive claim-right to the equal satisfaction of vital needs. The purpose of purely socialist policy-making is to provide people with all the social services that they genuinely need. When resources are scarce, as they frequently are in real life, the more basic needs of the population should be met first, leaving the more derivative and cosmetic needs, or desires, to be reckoned with in the future.

Many philosophers have during the 1980s and the 1990s chosen to believe that the main mistake of all forms of liberalism is an overstated respect for individuality, and that the most fatal flaw of socialism is its emphasis on the equal satisfaction of needs. These philosophers have found their spiritual home in communitarian thinking.

According to communitarian theorists liberalism is a skewed doctrine which should either be rejected or at least made to respect more traditional

values than freedom and autonomy. They argue that human beings are not primarily individuals who are responsible for their self-determined choices, but rather members of their societies and communities, occupiers of their socially and culturally determined roles, and moral agents whose ethical values are defined by the linguistic and historical context in which they live. Liberalism, these theorists maintain, is an immoral view in that it does not recognize the need of human beings to belong to groups and to form their identities and ethical responses within these groups.

Rawls in his theory of justice as fairness placed himself right in the middle of the picture, stating that freedom is in some sense a negative and in another sense a positive concept, and that positive claim-rights are sometimes based on needs and sometimes on merits. His view became, understandably, the target of much criticism, and, furthermore, a prolific source of misunderstandings. His early socialist critics saw him as a libertarian, libertarians regarded him as a socialist, and communitarians have attached to him almost every feature of modern social philosophy they themselves resent.

A revised liberal alternative to communitarian thinking would be to go theoretically to the other extreme, and combine needs-based positive claim-rights with the anti-paternalistic, negative concept of liberty. The resulting view, which can be called liberal egalitarianism, states that individuals should be left free to make their own choices, provided that their decisions are not likely to have a negative effect on the basic interests of others.

In addition to the various political ideals held by philosophers of competing schools, there are also traditional lines of thinking about individual morality which have reappeared in scholarly discussion with the rise of applied ethics. The most important of these are the teleological, deontological and consequentialist moralities, which all provide different answers to two basic questions, namely, 'What is human nature like?' and 'How should individuals behave in order to be moral?'

The proponents of the teleological model hold, essentially, that all human beings have a natural telos, or a goal towards which they are ideally inclined to move or to develop. The telos can be secular, in which case the natural goal for human beings can be a good life in a just society, or, beyond that, an elevated state of intellectual contemplation. The telos can also be theologically determined, in which case it is likely to be identified with an after-life of everlasting joy. Within the secular reading of the teleological model individuals are required to live their lives according to the rules of a just society, to be virtuous and to strive for the complicated pleasures of social life and intellectual perfection. The theological version states that people should adjust their lifestyles to the received wisdom handed down to them by their parents and religious authorities.

The basic deontological view of human nature, partly shared with some forms of teleological thought, is that there are two conflicting principles which guide human action—desires and a sense of morality. This view is open to alternative interpretations when it comes to defining how people should find the moral guidance they need in their lives. Within the intellectualistic version, *reason* commands us to obey the moral law, usually against our own desires, whereas the emotionalistic reading states that *feelings* tell us what to do in each particular situation. The natural normative outcome of the intellect-based model is that individuals should obey the moral law. If the emotion-directed path is taken, people are required to act in accordance with their innermost feelings.

The way proponents of consequentialist thinking see human nature, people want to attain pleasure, happiness or well-being, and they want to avoid pain, suffering and misery. Individuals are equally capable of egoism and altruism, that is, of thinking only about their own well-being, and also trying to take the happiness of others into consideration. According to this doctrine, individuals should strive to be universally altruistic, either by trying to maximize the happiness of humankind or by trying to minimize suffering. The first norm is the main principle of ‘positive utilitarianism’, and the second belongs to ‘negative utilitarianism’.

The political and ethical categories sketched here are mutually overlapping in that teleological moral thinking often coexists with communitarian or socialist ideals, and deontological ethics can usually be linked with communitarian or libertarian politics. Consequentialist philosophers have since John Stuart Mill’s time in the nineteenth century attempted to formulate a credible form of liberal egalitarianism, but it is not theoretically impossible that some revised versions of teleological and deontological moralities could also be subjected to the intensified demands for individual liberty and social equality.

THE METHODS

There are three main ways in which philosophers have thought that ethical and political doctrines can and ought to be applied to real-life moral problems. The identification of these approaches is essential to the definition of the good and bad turns that applied philosophy can take in the future.

The first way consists of the mechanical application of moral doctrines to the problems introduced by concerned citizens, professionals and public decision-makers. This approach is open to many thorny questions regarding the identification of moral problems, the scope of ethical enquiries and the impartiality of moral philosophers. As Arthur Caplan noted in 1983 in his article ‘Can Applied Ethics be Effective in Health Care and Should it Strive

to be?’ there are three features which have been regarded as crucial to applied philosophy, especially in the field of medical ethics. First, philosophers are supposed to master the practice of conceptual analysis. Second, it is often assumed that they possess a body of knowledge concerning ethical theories which can be directly brought to bear on real-life moral and social problems. Third, the ethical expertise of philosophers is sometimes believed to be intensified by the fact that they are disinterested and neutral about the moral events that they examine.

In his article Caplan argues that the first-mentioned ability is liable to turn philosophers into a conceptual police force, while the second quality is apt to make them technicians applying a bulk of pre-existing information to practical situations. The third feature, in its turn, likens philosophers to the ideal legislators and arbitrators of popular eighteenth-century ethical theories. When these characteristics are put together, and when the philosophers who answer to Caplan’s description are put to work, the result is what he calls the ‘engineering model of applied ethics’.

Caplan voices three objections against applying the ethical engineering model to everyday work in hospitals and medical centres. First, there is the question of identifying moral problems in clinical surroundings. When applied ethicists are seen as experts in their own field, and only in their own field, it is natural to think that the clinico-ethical problems are selected and introduced to them by medical professionals. But since it is far from obvious that doctors and nurses are capable of competently identifying the moral dilemmas of their profession, important ethical questions may be overlooked by house philosophers who rely on the information given to them by their medical colleagues. Second, if applied ethicists are seen as engineers, they will be expected to solve problems more or less mechanically, on the basis of certain externally determined premises, instead of extending their concern to the validity of those premises. It is, however, often difficult and sometimes impossible to find moral solutions to dilemmas which have been created, or at least aggravated, by political decisions or administrative principles. Third, applied ethicists who work within the health care system are not in fact as impartial as their alleged role as ideal arbitrators would demand. House philosophers, in their white coats and with their personal beepers, are much more likely to identify themselves with physicians and hospital administrators than to side with patients, nurses or visitors in conflict situations. Caplan concludes that since ethical engineering in the clinical setting mostly leads to incomplete analyses and biased recommendations, it would be best if philosophers of this type kept out of hospitals and medical schools altogether. We can only add that they should be excluded also from other areas of applied philosophy.

The second method for employing theoretical considerations in practical situations is what Tom Beauchamp and James Childress have advocated in their *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (1994) as *mid-level principlism*. The

idea introduced and defended in the book is that four principles—the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, respect for autonomy and justice—cover most ethical considerations which are relevant to the practice of medicine and to the provision of health care. Beauchamp and Childress do not claim, in the way the proponents of the engineering model would, that all answers to moral questions can be directly deduced from these principles. Their view can be seen, instead, as an attempt to combine the kind of case-to-case ethical intuitionism which is typical to the professionals in any field with an eclectic form of deontological thinking.

One of the main difficulties of this solution, as seen by other philosophers, is that it mixes contradictory moral intuitions and deliberately underdeveloped principles in a hotchpotch which does not in the end provide proper answers to ethical questions. It is, of course, true that justice and autonomy are important, and that people should be benefited rather than harmed. But what exactly does it mean, say, to respect a person's autonomy? The answers given to this question vary according to the different notions of freedom and self-determination assumed by different people. And what should be done in situations where two or more principles are in conflict with each other? Principlism does not provide satisfying answers to questions like these.

The third way to apply philosophy to moral problems is to follow the method introduced in its initial form by Jonathan Glover in his *Causing Death and Saving Lives*, published in 1977. According to our own view, which is a slightly modified version of Glover's theory, the proper work of applied philosophers can be divided into three closely related tasks, which include the description and assessment of moral responses as well as the analysis of conceptual coherence and logical consistency. We have coined the phrases 'mapping', 'cognitive deprogramming' and 'rational reconstruction' to denote these tasks.

As to the idea of mapping, all human action takes place in an empirical moral reality, where judgements and assessments are constantly made by public authorities, professionals and concerned citizens. Consequently, the philosopher's first task in studying moral dilemmas is to uncover the principles and codes which have been applied previously to the issue in hand.

When the mapping of the existing rules and beliefs has been completed, the work can proceed to the stages of conceptual and emotional cognitive deprogramming. By cognitive deprogramming we mean the critical assessment of prevailing ethical views which have their roots in laws and statutes, common-sense morality, personal convictions, religious doctrines, professional codes, philosophical theories and in fragments of scientific thinking. Conceptual cognitive deprogramming consists of the analysis and critical assessment of the terms and arguments which have been used in the formulation of everyday moral rules and principles. If the terminology in use is ambiguous, or if the inferences made are invalid, the rules and

principles in question must be either reformulated or rejected. Emotional cognitive deprogramming, in its turn, centres on the use of idealized or imaginary examples. These examples are normally designed to portray how, under particular hypothetical circumstances, apparently reasonable moral rules and principles lead to actions which have intuitively unacceptable aspects or consequences. Imaginary cases cannot normally be employed to establish moral views, or to refute them absolutely, but if they are well chosen they can in many cases provide good grounds for abandoning previously accepted ethical rules and principles.

Successful cognitive deprogramming may create a momentary moral vacuum, which must then be refilled with new ideals and new rules of conduct. If called upon at this point, applied philosophers can continue their work by trying rationally to reconstruct ethical principles and theories to replace the refuted ones. Rationality in this context means that the norms and rules arrived at must be intrinsically consistent, mutually compatible and on the whole reasonably acceptable. But the criteria of consistency and acceptability cannot always be set from outside, or from above. While conceptual consistency and logical soundness may yield to objective criteria, intuitive acceptability is often a function of the deep values which prevail in the community under scrutiny. The conclusions of the applied ethicist are in these cases of the form: 'Since your own basic norms, values and beliefs are this-and-this, and you presumably wish to be consistent, you ought to consider it your duty to do, or your right to have, that-and-that.' Rational reconstruction proceeds in stages which are closely analogous to the steps taken in cognitive deprogramming. The starting point is a survey of at least some of the axiological and normative principles which have been applied to relevantly similar cases in the past. When the mapping of these has been completed, the potential solutions must, once again, undergo the tests of consistency and intuitive acceptability.

THE FEARS AND THE HOPES

After all the preliminary considerations and distinctions we have presented here, it is easy to state what our fears and hopes for the future of applied philosophy are. Our greatest fear is that the study of contemporary moral problems will be reduced even further in the direction of principlism and ethical engineering. Both approaches have a decided tendency to ignore the deep philosophical questions involved both in bioethics and in other fields, and to concentrate on the temporary solution of practical issues as they are pointed out to ethicists by their employers. Another worry is that the main normative frameworks in which social and political problems are tackled will continue their contemporary slide towards meritism and collectivism.

The topics which will probably hold the attention of applied philosophers in the near future include the dangers of genetic engineering and biotechnology, the impact of hitherto unknown communicable diseases like the acquired immune deficiency syndrome, AIDS, and the protection of humankind and our natural environment against natural and human-made disasters. The theoretical questions related to these issues have been listed in the preceding subchapters. Among the most important of them are the ones regarding the value of life and the significance of morality, freedom and responsibility. It would also be appropriate to examine whether humanity or the environment are, in fact, worth saving at all costs.

Several new topics which applied philosophers should pay attention to are linked to globalization, commercialism and cultural diversity. The expansion of the influence of private corporations and financiers has led to a situation where states are less of a factor in economics and politics than they used to be—and would no doubt still like to be. This raises some intriguing questions. Are nations entitled to control the economic wealth that is accumulated within their territories? Even if they are, can anything be done to enforce this entitlement? It is, after all, possible that the history of the world is driven by inexorable forces which cannot be halted by human actions.

If, however, this is not the case, ethicists ought to consider the legitimate extent of commercial activities. Should there, for instance, be some limits to the free market when it comes to the commodification of the human body? Or should people be free to buy and sell vital organs and other parts of living bodies whenever they want to do so? Furthermore, if this is acceptable to the Western way of thinking, then what should be thought about more traditional habits which involve operations on the human body? The circumcision of infant boys and the mutilation of the genitals of preadolescent girls for religious or cultural reasons come to mind as examples.

Another set of rising topics in applied philosophy centres on the image that human beings have of themselves and others. Many people in the affluent West already strive to improve their physical appearance by strenuous exercise or plastic surgery. Others try to alter their personalities by sensitivity training or by pharmaceuticals which are supposed to remove depression and make them happy. And yet another group attempts to disentangle themselves completely from their bodies and their personalities by preferring computerized communication to face-to-face social contact. It would be interesting to know what effects these practices are likely to have on the individual psyche and the collective images we have of humanity and personhood.

In conclusion, our primary methodological hope for the future of applied philosophy is that deep questions rather than superficial topics will reign in the field. The practical issues, after all, come and go, but the theoretical

deliberations with which they can be analysed persist over time. Our secondary normative wish is that the doctrines that we have called here ‘meritism’ and ‘collectivism’ will in the years to come fall into disrepute and leave room for the development of liberal and egalitarian solutions to real-life moral and political problems. The implications of the ideas of positive freedom and status-based justice have been fully worked out during the past twenty-four centuries in traditional ethical doctrines. The third millennium could, we hope, begin a new era of practical philosophy which could be characterized, at least tentatively, by the notions of individual liberty and social responsibility.

RECOMMENDED READING

R.Chadwick (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998): so far, the most comprehensive collection of articles in applied philosophy. H.Häyry, *The Limits of Medical Paternalism* (London: Routledge, 1991): a liberal egalitarian analysis of the concepts of freedom and autonomy, and an examination of the implications of this analysis in health care. M.Häyry, *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1994): a study of the roles of consequentialist ethics and applied philosophy in the liberal egalitarian tradition. M.Häyry and H.Häyry (1995) ‘Artistic Value as an Excuse for Spreading Cinematographic Filth’, *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 29:469–83: an application of philosophical methods to a topic which is not normally covered in textbooks—the censorship of artistic but offensive movies. J.Rachels (ed.) *Moral Problems: A Collection of Philosophical Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979): a representative American collection of essays on contemporary moral issues. P.Singer (ed.) *Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986): a representative British collection of studies in applied ethics.

FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

Gill Howie

WHAT IS FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY?

Academic philosophers often assert that one can be a woman and a feminist and that this not only need not, but also should not, have any philosophic consequences, either in terms of the types of questions raised or for the method used to ascertain conclusions. Indeed it is also stated that feminist philosophy is at best parasitical on traditional philosophy and at worst 'mere sociology'. In her article 'Feminism and Philosophy' Grimshaw wishes to draw an explanation for why there are so few women in philosophy from an analysis of the philosophical canon. Her argument is that it is not incidental that within philosophy the concept of the 'feminine' carries specific connotations and that there are, and have been, proportionately fewer female than male academic philosophers. In order to understand the connection, she argues, one must analyse the construction of the philosophic canon and consider philosophy as a social practice. An analysis such as this would fall under the rubric of feminist philosophy. Both types of assertion are premised on specific understandings of what philosophy is and an acceptance of general criteria which academic work needs to meet in order to count as 'properly philosophical'. It is clear that there is disagreement concerning the relevance of social and sexed location to philosophy.

I will be arguing that the connection is a complicated one, dependent on the contextual and constitutive values of philosophy as a practice. The constitutive values of any practice are the methodological principles which guide those questions that are considered relevant, and so guide how research proceeds. For feminist philosophers questions relating to subject identity are of primary importance. If the way in which the identity of the subject is formed is linked to particular earlier events, then the relevance of an analysis of social conditions comes to the fore. But if such content is deemed, by the rules of the philosophic game, unphilosophical, or illegitimate, then the research will proceed elsewhere. This distinction, between legitimate and illegitimate philosophic enquiry, is itself a

consequence of the constitutive values of the practice of philosophy. Yet philosophers do argue about 'subject identity' and ascribe essential characteristics to that subject, just as scientists have held particular, and supposedly justifiable, beliefs relating to the nature of the subject. It is the feminist contention that although unified subject identity is a consequence of antecedent factors, the assumption of an irreducible sexual difference has played a key part in the sexual division of labour and power. Thus because feminists are concerned with the practical matter of the constitution of a just social organisation, feminist philosophers do not consider the necessary content of their analysis 'unphilosophical material'. Indeed, the argument is that the constitutive values embedded in the philosophic canon, values which determine questions like suitability and unsuitability, are an effect of the contextual, social and historical values of the philosophers. To demonstrate the relevance of sexed and social location to philosophy, I will first sketch the three stages of the feminist movement and outline feminist poststructuralism: the third and current stage. Taking sex-gender identity as the primary question for feminist philosophers, I go on to explore feminist epistemology which, taking on board a number of points raised as postmodernism, investigates the relationship between belief and justification. I will apply the insights of feminist empiricism to scientific claims and argue that what appears to be a natural identity between sex and gender is better explained as a consequence of antecedent social factors. I will then return to an analysis of philosophic practice and suggest that arguments which conclude with the claim that location is irrelevant, either to subject identity or to argumentation, are based on a belief that the empirical and the intelligible belong to different realms of enquiry and thus different disciplines. I will further suggest that these arguments also display a general disinclination to reflect on the purpose and methodology of philosophic enquiry.

WOMEN'S TIME

Kristeva, in her now seminal essay 'Women's Time', argues that the feminist movement can be divided into three historical phases. Rights were high on the political agenda of the first phase, which she associates with suffragists and existentialist feminist philosophy. Common to liberal and existentialist feminists was the belief that there is no essential or relevant difference between the two sexes which might entail the ascription of different values. In fact, by assuming that the subject is essentially rational, both could argue that this, and not the accidental or contingent feature of gender, is the relevant quality for participation in the decision-making processes characteristic of nascent political democracies. Without such participation, liberal and existentialist feminists argued, women would

continue to be political subjects, in the sense of being subject to political authority, without being active political agents who determine the legitimacy of political authority. So, in their attempt to gain a place in the linear time of historical narrative, to reveal that which had hitherto been excluded, these feminists adopted the language of rights and equality, based on a philosophic conviction that the concept 'subject' could be defined as autonomous rational agency.

Distrust and disappointment with this political programme led second stage feminists to question the soundness of this conviction. Concentrating on the specificity of women's experience, values and psychology, second-stage feminists argued that not only was there an irreducible, perhaps essential, difference between the two sexes, but also that the two had distinct moral voices. Third-stage feminists turned to psychoanalysis and to deconstructionism to explain this appearance of irreducible sexual difference. By examining how gender differences emerge from prior linguistic discrimination, as well as from political or social conditions, these feminists developed de Beauvoir's insight in *The Second Sex*, that one becomes a woman. As a consequence of the analysis of the relationship between language, meaning and power, third-stage feminists turned to metaphysics, or more precisely ontology, to investigate the concepts of essence and identity. The third and current stage has thus been dominated by poststructuralism and a variety of offshoots, loosely classified as postmodernism.

From a particular analysis of language and meaning many feminists have accepted the deconstructivist claims that Western thought is logocentric. The logos is at once the intelligible form of the world, the manner of presenting, reflecting or knowing the form and the forms which are supposedly embedded in the world. Logocentric thinking has three principal characteristics. The first is that the principles of discrimination and their justification somehow stand apart from, or outside, the system. The second characteristic is that logocentric thinking proceeds according to logical principles, purportedly necessary, and in the process structures experience itself. Finally, the logical principles of identity and the law of the excluded middle implicates binary distinctness: form-matter, reason-emotion, mind-body, culture-nature, animus-anima, production-reproduction, male-female.

This logocentric thinking can also be described as phallogocentric. It is described as phallogocentric because one term, the masculine, is privileged over the other, the feminine, and all other privileged terms are associated with the concept of masculinity. Without detailing the Lacanian psychoanalytic explanation for this I would like to draw out two pertinent points. First is a Derridean comment that each dominant term is actually dependent on the subordinate term: it gains its place both in terms of meaning and ascendancy due to and through the relation. It would be impossible to define what it means to be 'male' without reference to activity and reason, and both these terms are dependent on an original distinction from female,

passivity and emotion. As discourse analysis, poststructuralism is an attempt to subvert the hierarchy and to demonstrate the relation of dependency. If we were to read, for example, Rousseau's *Social Contract* with this in mind, the binaries and the hierarchical relation, public-private, universal-particular, reason-emotion, culture-nature, become apparent, as does the critically important theoretical work of the concept of the feminine and the family. Quite literally, and with this Rousseau would agree, without the exclusion of women from the polity, the republic would collapse.

The second point of interest is that given the hierarchy it is obvious that one term, or a token of the designated type, will benefit. The male individual will, when making judgments, use the beliefs, concepts, categories and conative senses already in place *because* these enable the assertion of stable identity and thereby a semblance of power over both the self and the other. This is made possible by prior linguistic or conceptual discrimination and the belief in the principle of identity. If one posits constant or stable identity then one believes that there is something which stays the same throughout change and alteration. When the subject is identified with sex, referring to biology or physiology, then it is this which is supposed to remain the same throughout alteration. The disposition to behave in specific ways, gender, might then be considered to be a natural consequence of physical states. The principle of identity would thus allow us to assert that an individual is either a man or a woman with consequent and distinct dispositions to behave in classifiably different ways and the assignment of gender roles would seem perfectly reasonable. On the other hand, if we were to define the subject as a rational and moral agent then we could argue, as did the existentialists and liberals, that no assignation of role follows. The third stage retort would be twofold. First, the argument for transcendental rational agency is flawed. Second, because the binaries and hierarchies are still in place the assignment of roles and labour cannot be separated from cultural beliefs, conceptual schemes, forms of representation or legal and social structures.

The argument is that apparent unified subject identity is a consequence of antecedent discrimination and psycho-social processes. The challenge for third-stage feminists is to express, and perhaps to experience, subjectivity without the limits imposed by logocentrism which means, in effect, outside or without the binary—which itself is taken to impose the categorical distinction between masculine and feminine and which enables the assignment of gender roles to particular bodies. However, it is accepted that ‘the limits of language are the limits of our world’ and that ‘we cease to think when we do so outside the constraints of language’; thus the strategy adopted is one that demonstrates the fluidity, or vagueness, of conceptual discrimination. One of the political consequences of this is that because the concept ‘woman’ is taken to be an organisational category facilitated by the logics of identity, the feminist movement could be criticised for adopting the same logic,

since it takes the category to have a reference, rather than being merely a term with a life in a discourse. This referential requirement is compromised within poststructuralism for three main reasons. The first is that the logos designates the ontological features of the world which include stable identity, without which there could be no referential success. Second, the process of inference involves the three principles of logic outlined above and if we abandon our faith in these then it would be impossible to argue that one inference is either more secure or more successful than another. Lastly, the explanation for why someone would assert a proposition to be true is a psychological one: *s* believes *x* to be true because *s* wishes *x* to be true. This is often further reduced to an assessment of the implications and consequences of the assertion. The answer to the question ‘Why does *s* believe *x* to be true?’ is answered in terms of whether or not *x* is in the interests of *s*. A paradox emerges which discredits the positive contention that subject identity is a consequence of antecedent processes. An account of the justification for this belief could be entirely reduced to the psychological state and interests of the, now ‘de-centred’, individual, which, given the above analysis of phallogocentrism, is an effect of the same system. The distinction between sex and gender permits a positive analysis of the antecedent processes which result in subject identity, yet the exploration of this requires us to move beyond discourse analysis into an examination of the specifiable features and processes of organisation.

ESSENTIALISM AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The insight that it is the assumption of sexual division into two kinds—dimorphism—which precedes, and is consolidated, by social and political organisation, an assumption which might well appear to be confirmed by the observation of behaviour, has led to a radical reassessment of central components of traditional epistemic enquiry. It has led to a review of the formation of hypotheses and justifications based on reliability and evidence as confirmation. Feminists, by questioning the status of the belief in sexual dimorphism as a true and justified belief, have begun a detailed examination of epistemic assertion. Sceptical of justifications grounded on confirmation and reliability, feminists tend to argue that explanations for apparent sex-gender identity are inadequate and the inadequacy is explained as a consequence of the scientific belief in the ‘view from nowhere’. There are thus three principal concerns which cut through all feminist epistemological enquiry: how to take subjectivity into account, the prepositional presentation of knowledge claims, and a social and historical analysis of the practice or apparatus governing the assertion and application of knowledge. Here I will present two feminist epistemologies, feminist standpoint theory and

feminist empiricism, in order to discern the impact they may have on traditional epistemology and their relevance to feminist theory.

Feminist standpoint theorists argue that it is the case that causal tributaries to a subject's belief bear on the belief's warrant, in the sense that what one believes, and what one believes counts as good evidence for that belief, will depend on the location and experience of the subject. There are two kinds of feminist standpoint theorists: relativists and objectivists. The first group can be further split into three: cultural relativists, conceptual relativists and perceptual relativists. Cultural relativists suggest that cultures and groups have held consistent but differing beliefs about the world. These beliefs are justified or not within the historically situated paradigm, theory or world-view. Different beliefs count and have counted as foundational and different reasons have counted as good reasons for supporting beliefs. We cannot however, from our standpoint, make judgments across the paradigms—the process of justification is internal to each historically situated, culturally specific set or web of beliefs. When such adjudications are made it has to be with the understanding that there is no 'final court of appeal': even to the court of rational philosophical argumentation. Conceptual relativists add to this that different cultures and groups order their experience by means of these concepts, the implication being that the ordering is not given directly from experience and that differing schemas incorporate vastly different, perhaps incommensurable, phenomena—witches, druids, chaos theory, theories concerning creation, religious beliefs. A perceptual relativist would argue that what we see cannot be explained by the nature of the object perceived. Language in some sense determines or constructs what is perceived; our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality, in fact what we perceive in the world, is given for us in the language we use.

If gender is a relevant factor then the feminist relativists have two possible moves. The first is that from the above analysis one could claim that the grounding of beliefs is authorised from a particular standpoint. That standpoint is not only male but also partial. This would suggest that how we take the world to be, what we see as the ontological furniture of the world, is fundamentally biased and thus the universality claimed for epistemic assertion is incorrect. A second move might be that men and women have different world-views, differing epistemic authorities, distinct perceptual experiences and consider different reasons to be good reasons for believing a proposition to be true. A derivative implication is that the gender of a subject is essential to the characteristic 'inner feel' of an experience and that experience is relevant to epistemic assertion.

There are two points to make before moving on. The relativist tends to hold a coherentist theory of justification. If the second move is made then the relativist theorist will be pressed to argue that there is a radical indeterminacy of translation: men and women not only occupy different

world schemes but also, translation between the schemes is impossible, and the male and female standpoints would not be commensurable or compatible given accepted rational criteria. This could be avoided if the relativist accepted that patterns of inference are explicable and maybe hold across schemes but this would undermine the original relativist assertion. The second point is that if the coherentist view is taken then the relativist theorist would need to accept that both gendered schemes explain 'experience' and no adjudication between them is possible, which seems to contradict the assumption of epistemic privilege attributable to standpoint. The implication is not that due to an underdetermination of data two theories equally well explain experience but that the theory delivered from one standpoint *better* explains experience. The pertinent question is whether the relativist theorist needs to, and can, reject realist requirements concerning the nature of experience or whether they are reduced to contending, first, that women's experience can only be explained by women and, second, that women's experiences simply need to be respected: a contention which itself can only be warranted within the particular standpoint—a difficulty further compounded by the fact that there is no 'unified' female perspective and experience or single cognitive framework.

In order to explain why one standpoint is privileged, the objectivist feminist standpoint theorist would argue that certain social situations are scientifically more hopeful than others as a place to begin one's research (Harding, 1993). Taking scientific practice as a paradigm example for knowledge claims, Harding suggests that once we situate the practice and practitioner and orientate research to the standpoint of the marginalised, our epistemology is more likely to be objective. She claims that this would affect what evidence warrants belief assertion, how problems are selected, how research projects are formulated, how hypotheses are formulated, how research is designed, how data is collected, selected, ordered and interpreted and, finally, how the decision about when and why to cease particular research topics is made. The contentious claim is that the standpoint of the marginalised provides a scientifically more hopeful position to begin research. As one justification for this, she alludes to the epistemic privilege asserted by Hegel for the slave in the master-slave relationship and to the privileging of the proletariat by Marx. However, it is central to Marx's materialist reading of Hegel that the laws of exploitation can be discerned, investigated and presented scientifically, that 'experience' is the result of objective social and economic factors. If this is an analogous model then the objectivist theorist would need to accept that 'experience' is a consequence of antecedent factors which can be explained objectively and that priority is asserted for standpoint only because the 'marginalised' are more likely to recognise the evidence which ought to count scientifically. But given that most accept the construction of the feminine, an explanation is lacking for why epistemic privilege can be asserted from a position

already constructed where there is no clear notion of objective scientific investigation.

Tackling the problem of adjudication, why the ‘marginalised’ are more likely to recognise sound scientific evidence, feminist empiricists argue that we must review the relationship between objective scientific method and realism. A philosophic sceptical attitude leads the feminist empiricist to argue that even when a theory is internally consistent there is no guarantee of the truth either of the belief or of the set of beliefs. Visibly, the problem for the feminist empiricist is twofold: whether or not coherentism can allow for empirical evidence and the breadth of the conceptual scheme which we are considering. Pure coherentism would be a theory such that there is nothing external to the belief set which could discriminate true from false beliefs. Thus truth, or better justification, would be a matter internal to the set of propositions. A weaker version of coherentism would present the case that the set of propositions can always be revised and added to, hence ‘truth’ is something which might or might not be attained. The feminist empiricist, if pursuing a coherentist thesis, would need to argue that weak coherentism allows for revisability and this is because sensory evidence, an external relation, persuades the scientist to revise his or her beliefs. This would be to draw a distinction between evidence and background assumptions, the latter constituting not only the current scientific hypotheses but also the fundamental realist beliefs concerning the existence and effect of an external world.

There are many examples from ‘natural’ science which are good evidence for the feminist empiricist claims of inherent bias, unreasonable hypothesis confirmation and perceptual blindness. However, because the intention is to distinguish that which is parochial from that which is universal in the scientific impulse, the feminist empiricist is less likely than the feminist standpoint theorist to evade a detailed examination of the process of justification and belief acquisition. When pursuing a coherentist thesis, the feminist standpoint theorist tends to argue that due to specific hegemonies the scientist will hold a belief to be true even in the face of the most recalcitrant material. He will do so because, due to his standpoint, he is perceptually inured to such evidence and because the process of justification is simply a matter of the confirmation of prior beliefs. But if we are to deal with specifics rather than with generalities, it is just not the case that all experimental ‘success’ can be explained in these terms. Similarly, and of consequence for the feminist, the argument that certain assertions of true belief have proved unreliable, or false, falls if we are without adequate criteria entitling us to adjudicate between beliefs. Rather than the relation between belief and the object of belief proving to be an insurmountable problem for the feminist empiricist, it is this relation which begins to explain how and why specific beliefs are revised, even though ‘truth’ or justification may still be an internal relation.

With feminist empiricism it is possible to maintain that a belief is false *and* it enables the oppression of women, rather than being reduced to claiming that a belief is false or unwarranted *because* it enables such oppression; although it might be the case that the consequent application of a belief has a causal relation to the psychological motivation to entertain the belief or hypothesis. The end result of this analysis is that the concept 'experience' is given an almost phenomenalist interpretation: experience is the synthesis of external material and concept. If the conceptual scheme is located then, *de facto*, experience is always situated. But the fact that 'experience' is a synthesis does not mean that the concept overdetermines the material and the existence of recalcitrant material is proof enough of this fact.

There is one further conceptual discrimination to make which concerns the relevance of social location to scientific practice. If we argue that location, and this includes historical, economic and gendered factors, influences scientific practice, then we need to clarify whether or not the influence is relevant to scientific investigation and the significance of gender to that influence. Otherwise put, it would not be convincing to argue that social location is always liable to have some influence, that gender is the significant factor of location and that therefore gender has always the significant influence on scientific investigation. We can, though, argue that social location must influence science in relevant ways. A distinction suggested by Longino (1989) between constitutive and contextual values helps here. Constitutive values are those which are internal to science and are the source of the rules determining what constitutes acceptable scientific practice or method. Contextual values are the personal, cultural and social values which are part of the background scheme and which influence the expectations concerning the outcomes of investigation—to which I would add the instrumental demands placed on science *qua* economic practice. We know that the historical location of the scientist is of direct relevance to hypothesis formation and belief acquisition but the contentious point is that location affects scientific methodology. If, for the moment, we separate methodology in terms of the pointers suggested by Harding from inference patterns, we can begin to see how scientific methodology will be affected by social and historical location. If we accept a confluence of constitutive and contextual values there is also room to argue that scientific practice has its own internally moderated system of checks and balances. These are partly due to the fact that it is not the individual scientist who is the unit of interpretation but the scientific community. There will be times when a sociological exclusion of women from the practice will directly affect this process of interpretation and moderation, and thus the methodology. If we can take it that location is relevant to scientific investigation then the next step is to argue whether gender is the significant influence.

Historical evidence for the emergence not only of specific beliefs but also of the scientific community itself, enables the feminist epistemologist to investigate the curious and complicated relationship between belief and institutional practice. In ‘Are “Old Wives’ Tales” Justified?’ Dalmiya and Alcoff survey the nineteenth-century transition from midwifery to obstetrics, recounting the facts that male doctors introduced barbaric birthing practices and caused thousands of deaths. There are two questions to be raised here. First, were the beliefs held by the doctors true, justified or both? Second, did the midwives hold true justified beliefs concerning successful delivery? In answer to the second, Dalmiya and Alcoff suggest that midwives did hold beliefs which could be justified in terms of reliability but they would have been hard pushed to explain the reliability. Their knowledge was skill-based, a know-how rather than a knowledge-that. The transition between midwifery and obstetrics occurred at a time when medical practice was formalised. This formalisation included the consolidation of medical knowledge which could then be taken as ‘received wisdom’. There were two main effects of this. First, a coherentist point, in order to count as justified new ideas would either have had to add to the coherency of the set of medical beliefs or be inferred from existing beliefs. What would then count as a good reason for believing that p would have been that p was consistent with a prior hypothesis or proved, along with other beliefs, to be a reliable indicator of events. For a given time, with the above example, it was certainly the case that the process of justification took place within a group bent on confirming their hypotheses. The second effect of the canonisation of medical knowledge was that beliefs which could not be presented in propositional form, and a set of entailments or inferences between propositions, no longer counted as properly justified; and thus counted not as knowledge but mere hearsay. The sociological exclusion of women from this canon meant that they were unable to justify skill-based knowledges in scientifically approved ways. Hence we can see the importance of understanding that medicine is an institutional and social practice. For it was the intersection of the medical practice with educational practices and dominant, cultural beliefs which created the exclusion and in turn justified the belief that what women had to say was irrelevant because it lacked proper authority. The dominant cultural discourse, which aligned nature with emotion and irrationality, lent weight to this justifiable indifference.

However, the identification of ‘childbed fever’ as a medical problem, the ensuing diagnosis and cure were also the results of the same scientific practice. The hypothesis that hanging a woman from a tree would enable swift delivery was revised in the light of scientific discoveries and non-confirmation—although it does have to be noted that stirrup delivery is still with us. The male practitioners were prepared to revise beliefs if confronted by, even if somewhat severe, recalcitrant material. Thus we could argue

that the doctors held beliefs which they considered to be true but were prepared to revise these beliefs given further information. There are two points to be learnt from this. The first is that although there is a difference between ‘know-how’ and ‘know-that’, the latter provides a good ground for the justification of the former, whereas the former, if reliable, can direct scientific investigation: this does require taking subjectivity into account. The sociological exclusion of women from the scientific practice resulted in the formation of hypotheses which were highly partial—it is improbable that a woman, certainly not a midwife, would have believed that trampling on the abdomen of a woman in labour would aid delivery. The second point is that the social location of the practice and practitioner are relevant to the formation of explanatory hypothesis but are not sufficient to explain scientific discovery. These two points intersect and lead to an analysis of the instrumental nature of knowledge, where the means and ends of a practice come into question. If either the means or the goals of the medical practice, in the above example, was efficiency, then we can explain one reason for the male doctors considering the ‘feel’ of birthing to be irrelevant to the matter of delivery. If the goal, however, of medicine was to alleviate suffering then this belief was unreasonable. Discussion and negotiation of practical ends is inconsistent with sociological exclusion.

A NEW ESSENTIALISM

If one accepts as a working assumption that there is a basic sexual dimorphism then it would be reasonable to infer patterns of behaviour which would correspond to this original classification. From this it would also be reasonable to infer dimorphic social and labour roles. Given the tendency to theoretical reductionism, these general scientific laws are first encountered in biology and then further reduced to the laws of chemistry or physics. Biological explanations for the origin of sexual dimorphism, and the corresponding patterns of behaviour, are frequently encountered in sociobiology within an evolutionary framework. The explanation for original dimorphism is given in terms of special development (differences rather than identical patterns is a more hopeful survival strategy) and the ensuing entailment concerning behaviour is likewise explained according to survival strategies. Thus each sex is thought to have evolved attributes which would increase its reproductive interests (Symons, 1979) and each sex is supposed to inherit a genetically based programme, or biogram, which predisposes it to behave in certain ways (Tiger and Fox, 1978). The contemporary allocation, on the basis of sex, of different activities considered to be useful and necessary is then given an explanation which both identifies sex with gender role and claims that that identification is necessary: the necessity being a causal relation between genetics and

behaviour explained according to more general scientific laws. The disposition to behave in specific ways is further explained by the physical or chemical effect of dimorphic sex-hormones.

Philosophical problems with such theoretical reductionism are well documented (see for example Garfinkel, 1991). That aside, we have already encountered the philosophical argument concerning subject identity and can see here its scientific mirror. Both the sex-hormone and evolutionary hypotheses are designed to explain dimorphic social behaviour given an essentialist premise. The appearance of scientific neutrality disguises the fact of this original, and organisational, assumption and, at the same time, these inferences, concerning sex-gender identity, play a key and significant role in arguments relating to a sex-based division of labour. If we take into account the location of the practice and practitioner we are able to accommodate the partiality of arguments concerning domestic roles and family-social structures. Feminist empiricists might well allow into their explanations specific theoretical entities which through confirmation and experiment gain status as real entities, such as hormones or genes. However, the sceptical attitude comes to the fore as a countervailing principle so that antecedent conceptual discriminations can be analysed, along with their organisational effect on hypothesis formation and inference patterns. The probability of the conclusions would thus be weighted and no causal necessity asserted for sex-gender identity. The sceptical attitude is at its strongest when it is known that the conceptual determination of the material under question is at its most biased.

The reluctance to accept theoretical reductionism is not only a sign of good scientific practice but is the result of finding sex-gender identity assertions unconvincing. Where there is enough general material, the feminist empiricist would argue that this apparent, and far from uniform, identity is better explained according to laws which are irreducible to either biology or to physics. Better explanations for a connection between specific patterns of behaviour (gender), and biology (appropriately sexed body) emerge from hypotheses which include within the explanatory framework such entities as 'the family', 'the state' or 'culture'. These entities designate something actual and the laws which govern the identification of sex with gender are described as 'processes of socialisation', 'psychological processes' or 'cultural processes'. Although these processes can be investigated and assessed scientifically they are processes, which means that only a method which can accommodate change, non-conformity and difference has sufficient explanatory potential.

If these above-named processes designate something actual then one can still claim that there is a relation of identity holding between sex and gender, but that this identification is due to antecedent conditions and that unified sex-gender identity is a consequence rather than a starting point. Because the processes govern the acquisition of subject identity in particular

ways this is politically charged. Not only can we see that identification is contingent, rather than necessary, but also that where identity is a fact: 'it is also a sign with a long history that has conceptualised difference as pejoration or lack' (Braidotti, 1989:101). This claim can be evidenced through a detailed examination of the historical and actual assignation of gender roles, labour and economic privilege. The centrality of role assignment to formal, and informal, political and economic organisation then highlights the critical nature of the investigation into all postulations concerning sex-gender, in fact subject, identity. Braidotti argues that, due to the above, the concept 'woman' is a referential, and not merely discursively operative, term. In effect she claims that by accepting that I, as woman, have an historical essence I can begin to take political responsibility for the processes of identification and begin to change the rules of the game by holding the discursive order accountable.

CONCLUSION

Finally I wish to return to the question raised by Grimshaw concerning the relevance of gender to philosophy. Taking for a moment the model outlined as feminist empiricism and applying this to philosophic practice the answer to the question is clarified. First, does social location influence philosophic practice? Second, given that gender is a factor in social location, when is it a significant influence in philosophy? Let us recall the distinction between constitutive and contextual values. The former are the values internal to a practice and the latter are the background values, psychology or beliefs of the individual philosopher and the instrumental demands placed on the practice as a social practice. If the constitutive values direct methodology and we separate methodological questions into those referring to inference patterns or reasoning and others then an examination of these other methodological features is required. Taking Harding's pointers as an initial place of departure, we are called to formulate which research projects are considered to be properly philosophical or interesting, what evidence is considered to warrant philosophic assertions, how research is designed, which ideas or arguments are 'fashionable' and the process of philosophic argumentation. This last point is the nexus of the argument.

Definitive of feminist theory is the belief that enquiry must always be oriented to practice, that sophistry is a game played by those content with, and probably benefiting from, the current organisation which includes the process of identification. To confuse the quality of an argument in terms of its soundness with its quality in terms of merit is to repeat a Kantian mistake; a mistake compounded by the linguistic turn in both Anglo-American and continental philosophy. Strawson argues, in the *Bounds of Sense*, that in

his attempt to resolve the Third Antinomy Kant made a basic error when he conflated the appearance of the timelessness of reason with the person who reasons. This basic error is the same error as the conflation of abstract reasoning with matters of interest or relevance, the quality of an argument in terms of soundness with merit, and is premised on an original split between the empirical and the intelligible. Thus constitutive of the values of philosophic practice is the organisational principle that empirical matters are for psychologists, sociologists, cultural theorists or economists and that the philosopher ought to be content with an examination of the intelligible or with the rationality of other sciences. This distinction excludes from consideration, except in the ‘softest’ areas, the practical aim, ends or orientation of philosophic enquiry.

Let us consider for a moment how the location of a philosopher effects philosophic methodology. Ideas or arguments become ‘fashionable’ for a reason: it is not incidental that eliminativism is the most fashionable position in the philosophy of mind and that there is a growth in the communications industry, multimedia and an economic tendency to globalisation— all of which place technology and computational programming high on the funded intellectual agenda. Yet the examination of this coincidence is ruled out by the above classification designating which questions are of philosophic relevance. It is also the case that certain beliefs concerning the feminine, and connoted or inferred beliefs, have held currency either as beliefs of direct interest or for historiographic interest. Had Wollstonecraft’s arguments against Rousseau’s description of essential differences been considered of interest to the philosophic community at the time, a more interesting and informed debate would have ensued and, subsequently, one must ask how often Wollstonecraft is taught alongside the *Social Contract*? Reflection on methodology should encompass not just the types of questions raised, or considered relevant, but also how questions are raised, posed or disputed. The cut and thrust of the adversarial game, or philosophic argumentation, coincides with individual psychology, comments made in the lecture hall, seminar teaching, remarks in the staff room and coded expectations of gender behaviour. Since the individual is not the unit of interpretation, philosophy has, as does science, an internal system of checks and balances. There are times when a sociological exclusion of women has a direct effect on philosophical methodology. Likewise, the discussion and negotiation of the ends or aims of a practice is part of a more general revision of its constitutive values: a discussion which would only be possible through inclusion. The question of inclusion will refer us to practical matters of higher education and funding policy, as well as to a revision of our own constitutive values. It is unfortunate that this reflection tends to be ruled out as being of ‘no relevance’ to philosophic enquiry. Yet it is the case that such concern with matters of justice will also need to be a concern with matters of fact and, treading somewhat

lightly over the *Gorgias*, I would argue that the future of feminist philosophy ought to be the future of philosophy.

RECOMMENDED READING

For an introduction to terms currently used within feminist philosophy, see Maggie Humm's *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (London: Harvester, 1989). For a good, thorough and accessible overview of feminist theory, see Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Sydney: Unwin Hyman, 1989). As an introduction to the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' as they have been used within the philosophic canon, see Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984). For an introduction to the deconstruction of these terms, see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1985). L.Alcoff and E.Potter have edited *Feminist Epistemologies* (London: Routledge, 1993) and K.Lennon and M.Whitford edited *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology* (London: Routledge, 1994), both of which are useful collections of introductory articles on feminist epistemology. Linda Alcoff's *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) provides informed and more detailed arguments for the relevance of social location to epistemology.

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Oliver Leaman

THE DISTINCTNESS OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

One of the very different things about the philosophy of religion, one might think, is that it has a particularly strong link with the personal. Many thinkers have a particular attitude to religion, which may be either positive or negative, and they may see their philosophy of religion as having more than just a theoretical importance. After all, to a believer it is more than an academic interest that it is possible, perhaps, to express the principles of her religion in a rational manner, or even to establish them by proof as valid. Many believers are encouraged to undertake such a task, since it would be strange were they to commit themselves in philosophy to taking a rational approach to issues over which argument is possible and yet not apply that rationality to their own faith. Indeed, one imagines that there are philosophers who may abandon a personal belief in a deity because they come to believe that there is no good argument for the existence of such a being, and they may then think it is inappropriate to believe in it as a consequence. Similarly, there may well be philosophers who start off without religious belief but who come to be convinced that God exists through logical argument.

One of the differences, then, between the philosophy of religion and other divisions of philosophy is that the former relates closely to the personal attitudes of the philosophers themselves. But before we accept this we might wonder whether there is really such a difference. After all, one of the motivations which drive philosophers in moral philosophy is often the desire to put on a rational basis their personal moral beliefs, and no doubt this is equally true of political philosophy. In fact, one could extend this argument to aesthetics, and even to the history of philosophy, where one might feel obliged to support particular thinkers because one was impressed with aspects of their personality or lifestyle. So philosophy of religion is not really very different after all from other kinds of philosophy, and does not portray itself as such. A version of the ontological argument,

the argument for the existence of God from the concept of God, goes in this way:

- 1 the fool in his heart says that there is no God;
- 2 but he accepts that what he means by God is a being which is greater or more perfect than any other being;
- 3 now, a being is greater or more perfect if it exists in reality as compared with merely existing in thought;
- 4 therefore, the fool is obliged to accept that God exists, since it follows from the concept of God that he must exist.

The important thing to note about this proof is where it starts. It starts with the fool who says in his heart that there is no God. So this proof is designed to convince anyone at all, even the most stubborn denier of God's existence, that God exists and even must exist. The fool who starts off with no commitment to that existence ends up having to acknowledge it, if he accepts the argument. That is how it should be, of course, in that philosophy should lead us to challenge our initial ideas and subject them to rational investigation, and by the end of the reasoning we discover which ideas we can hold onto and which must be abandoned. It would be a mistake to imagine that philosophers are as a result any more rational in their everyday lives than 'ordinary' people, and any acquaintance with them will soon bring this out very clearly. But it is very much part and parcel of philosophy that it challenges deeply held beliefs and obliges the individual to consider those beliefs from a rational point of view, perhaps for the first time, however close they are to what he holds to be sure.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

This brings out one very important style of philosophy of religion in the twentieth century, which might be broadly called conceptual analysis. Such an approach seeks to improve the understanding of the concepts used in arguments about religion, so that ancient disputes may be settled, or at least illuminated. Some philosophers have used very sophisticated logical machinery to analyse issues in religion, and as a result we certainly do understand far more about the logic of those issues than was the case before. On the other hand, it is difficult to see how such logical machinery could *resolve* such controversies, since logic itself is hardly a realm of pure agreement, and there is a tendency for those who are attracted to a particular religious view to be attracted to a logical theory which goes with that view. To take an example, the ontological argument which we have just mentioned owes a lot of its force to the notion of existence being a property of things. If existence is a predicate or something which can be added to something,

and if we define God as the being who has the most qualities (positive ones, presumably), then the ontological argument looks as though it proves that God must exist. How could he not have this property of existence if he is going to be defined as the greatest or most perfect being? But is existence a predicate, that is, does it really tell us something about a subject in the same way that saying the subject is green says something about it? This is not the place to enter into this controversy, but it is worth pointing out that sophisticated logic will not solve the problem in itself. Those critics of Anselm nine hundred years ago would be able to express their logical objections in slightly different language today, but the essential issues of logical controversy remain the same. Philosophical logic is just as riven with dispute as is the philosophy of religion, so the former is unlikely to resolve the problems of the latter.

One way in which philosophy of religion has traditionally taken place is as a continuation of the arguments and issues of previous centuries and generations. Religion itself is often an ancient institution, and the issues which arise today have been worrying people for a long time. Conceptual analysis has been very useful in helping us understand these ancient arguments, since one effect of such analysis is to show that an ordinary way of looking at a problem is too simple to pass rational muster. For example, philosophers have often spoken about the argument for the existence of God from the facts of design. According to this argument, we can develop a rational faith in the existence of God since there is evidence for such existence, and if there is evidence for the existence of something then belief in it is rational. There is evidence for the existence of God in the way in which the universe, and what is in it, has been formed. This provides examples which could only have been designed by some all-powerful and all-knowing being. Now, since Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* it is difficult to accept the argument from design in the ways in which it had often been understood. If Hume is right, then he shows in his book that what can be meant by design, and how that design can be used as evidence to argue to the existence of something else, is far more complicated than had previously been thought to be the case. We do not have to accept that everything which Hume says is right to accept that he has shown how convoluted the issue is. A determined defender of the argument from design would have to take Hume's criticisms into account and present a version of the theory which saves it from at least some of those criticisms.

RELIGION AS A FORM OF LIFE

There is another approach to the philosophy of religion which has been popular in the twentieth century, and that is to stress the arational aspects

of religion. Religion is a form of life, a way of behaving, and it is a mistake to see it as attachment to a set of propositions. That is the way in which philosophers tend to see it, since philosophers like to break things down to their basic propositions, but religious belief is a matter of commitment to a way of life, not a series of specific beliefs. We should be better employed as philosophers not in defending religion, but in exploring the ways in which what we call religion helps us make sense of how we act. A classical problem in the philosophy of religion relates to the issue of prayer. Many people think when they pray that someone is listening to them or may listen to them, and indeed they may hope for a response from the listener. They may even think that they have received a response even though the nature of that response remains entirely mysterious to the non-believing observer. The problem for much philosophy of religion is that there is a difficulty in understanding how God could really be aware of the prayers of individual human beings, or how he could be expected to respond to those prayers. On many definitions of God he is unchanging, and yet were he to listen to prayers and have to wait for information from us before knowing how he was to act, then he would change, and have to wait for us to suggest to him how he should change. It might be suggested that he would know from the beginning of time what we were going to ask for, and how he was going to respond, but there are then problems about how free we are to decide to pray and raise particular issues with him.

An advantage of the view of religious belief as being more about action than about belief is that one does away with these sorts of problems. Religion is then a matter of our behaving in a particular way, and there being certain rules and ways of going on which are appropriate to that type of human activity. In fact, religion is a term which can be replaced by a number of other ideas, ideas relating to how we see life, what our moral and social ideals are, what our view of the meaning of the world is. This sort of view has often been identified with Kant and Wittgenstein, but it has wider adherence, and may even be attributed to a degree to thinkers such as Levinas. Levinas argues that our primary decisions are ethical and not ontological. What he means by this is that when we start to work out who we are, we have to confront immediately the question of who we are in relation to others, and this involves working out what our obligations to them are. We have to determine the nature of the obligations first, even before we know exactly what our other characteristics are. Levinas is attracted to those parts of the Bible in which the Jewish people are referred to as doing before hearing, in accepting that they should make a choice before they know precisely what that choice is going to be about. We would normally think of such behaviour as the ultimate in irresponsibility, yet Levinas argues that it is for just this sort of behaviour that the Jewish people are rewarded by God in the stories of the Bible. This is because they are acknowledging that the first thing they

have to determine is the nature of their moral links with the rest of reality. Once they have worked that out, they can later determine what the factual nature of their relationship with everything else is.

The interesting thing about these sorts of approaches to the nature of religion is that many of the traditional issues which are problematic drop out. God is no longer to be seen as a kind of person, the after-life is no longer a form of existence which continues after our death, and perhaps most importantly, traditional theology no longer is a repository of interesting philosophical problems. Theology is actually quite misleading: it is based upon a simplistic notion of religion which interprets it in far too human a way. The trouble with theology is precisely that it purports to be theology, which deals with the concepts relating to *God*. What it should be about is how *we* relate to God, not about God himself. Talking about God as a person is to confuse the ethical with the ontological, it is to replace questions about how we should behave with questions about what exists. This brings out another feature of the philosophy of religion which is rarely noticed, but which is of the first importance. That type of philosophy is irretrievably linked with a certain tradition of theology. The theology is largely that of Judaism and Christianity. Other theologies do occasionally enter Western philosophy of religion as a sort of curiosity, to be examined with a wry smile and then swiftly replaced on the shelf of unimportant ideas. Yet what a knowledge of a range of theologies does is to bring out the vast variety of views which exist on a range of philosophical problems in religion, including the nature of religion itself, views which challenge the dominance of a particular problematic as *the* subject matter of the discipline.

PHILOSOPHERS AS THEOLOGIAN

One of the problems with much contemporary philosophy of religion is that it steers rather too close to theology. This might seem a strong objection, since philosophy is after all what is often called a second-order activity. It deals with a particular subject matter which already exists, so that philosophy of science relates to science, and philosophy of law deals with law. Why then should not philosophy of religion seek to analyse the subject of religion, and its systematic discipline theology? The answer is that there is no reason why it should not, but there is a danger here which does not occur so clearly in, say, the philosophy of science or the philosophy of law. The philosopher of law is clear that she is not actually doing law, but philosophy of law, while the philosopher of religion often gives the impression of not being sure what he is doing. That is why a good deal of philosophy of religion is rather closer to theology than is perhaps advisable. This is hardly surprising, since there is such a close

resemblance between philosophical techniques and theological ways of working. They both rely on argument, and an abstract form of argument, and they both seek to deal rationally with particular premises, following up the logical consequences of those premises and showing what the implications of those premises are for a particular philosophical or theological point of view.

This can be a dangerous process, though. Although philosophy and theology resemble each other closely, they are different. The thinkers in the Middle Ages were very perceptive on this topic, as on so many other topics. They argued that philosophical reasoning was very different from theology, since the former is demonstrative, while the latter is dialectical. What they meant by this is that philosophy starts with premises which are valid for everyone, and seeks to show what follows from those premises. Take the case of the ontological argument which we considered earlier. If 'God' has a particular meaning, then it follows that God exists, and it does not matter whether one starts off by believing in the reality of God, or whether one has no idea of what 'God' is at all. Once the validity of the reasoning process is established, if it is, then the conclusion follows and has entirely general application to every use of 'God'. Theology takes a different form. It starts with premises which are only generally acceptable, or premises which are acceptable within a particular religious tradition. For example, if one accepts that Jesus died to save humanity, then one can work out what that implies, but many people do not accept that premise. This does not debar them from being interested in how one might get from that premise to other premises, but it does weaken what that argument can be taken to show. All it can show is that *within* Christianity, a particular argument has force. That argument has no relevance to anything outside of that religion, since it only applies to the religion's premises.

Now, one might think that this is not much of an objection, since the form of the argument in theology and the form of the argument in philosophy is just the same, or should be just the same, and it should take the form of a logical argument. That is true, but a lot more than just the form of the argument comes into theology. There is what that argument means for the lives of believers, for example, or how it fits in with how believers wish to look at the world. That is, there is relevance in looking at the *emotional* aspects of such arguments. A neat logical solution to a theological problem which has no emotional resonance is unsatisfactory. For example, it has been a traditional theological problem to explain how a god in a particular religion can allow suffering to innocents, and it is a familiar philosophical problem how a deity with the characteristics of omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence can be reconciled with the sorts of suffering we find in our world. The important thing about the theological conclusion is that it will only work if it leaves space for an emotional relationship

with God to persist. It might be argued that the only way in which we could account for innocent suffering in our world is if God is a limited being, and not really all that different from his creatures. Now, this may have advantages as an answer to the problem, but it is difficult to see how it could work on the emotional level: why people should be expected to base their lives and hopes on a limited being, someone who does not contrast powerfully with them.

This brings out another important distinction between theology and philosophy. Theology changes over time, in that it becomes possible for people to conceive of God and their faith in different ways and places as their circumstances change. The Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides was very good on this point, arguing as he did that one of the points of religious law is to wean the community away from its previous practices, practices which were based on a cruder version of the truth. So for example at one time the Jews approached God through sacrifices, today (he wrote in the twelfth century) they approach him through prayer, and in the future maybe quiet contemplation will be enough. What is important about this process is that it is a process, and we cannot expect people to change radically their attitude to God just like that. They have to change over time. God could miraculously change their attitudes and practices immediately, of course, but then there would be no merit in our struggling to bring about our own changes. The point of religious ritual, Maimonides argues, is to allow us to change gradually, to help us take control of how we are to change. To take an ethical example, he recommends a miserly person to change not by giving a lot of money away all at once: by gradually giving small portions of money to charity he will over time acquire a generous disposition.

This brings out a feature of theology which differentiates it sharply from philosophy. Theology has to respond to different social and historical circumstances, since otherwise it fails to make sense of the ways in which people react to their surroundings, as they perceive them. Philosophy, by contrast, does not seem to change a great deal, and this is because it can concentrate on the structure of arguments, rather than be concerned with the ways in which the conclusions of those arguments might be used to help believers, or non-believers, to make sense of their lives. On this point we might use an argument which was often applied by Averroes to the debate in medieval Spain about the respective virtues of philosophy and theology. According to Averroes, what made the Prophet Muhammad such a great prophet, indeed the seal of the prophets, was his ability as a politician. He could get over the truths which the philosophers could only think about and discuss among themselves to the public at large, and this was because he had an excellent grasp of the sorts of languages which work when speaking to people at large. These are political skills, and Muhammad created a political community out of what started off as a relatively small

band of believers. In different times different lines of interpretation are obviously going to be important, since sticking to just one understanding of a text is going to cut no ice within conditions where that understanding no longer strikes a resonance with the public. A faith is successful if it is flexible enough to change to take account of changing circumstances. By contrast, philosophy should not be expected to change in these ways (although of course it does change with fashion) since the structure of the arguments which philosophy considers are largely the same throughout historical changes. The only criterion which philosophy has to satisfy is that of validity, while theology has one eye on validity, and the other on what would make sense of the religious and other experiences of human beings at a particular time and place.

THEOLOGIAN AS PHILOSOPHERS

Of course, the main problem in trying to make a sharp distinction between theology and philosophy is that the former provides the subject matter for the latter, and if the latter is to have a real grasp of religion it must work with the ideas which theology produces. On the other hand, there is a tendency for much theology to seek to establish a common line which a religion must follow, if it is to be *the* religion, and for philosophy to mimic this. This has the result that much philosophy of religion presents what it calls 'the Christian view of...' or 'the Islamic view of...' particular topics, even though an understanding of these religions should make clear that there is no one view which can be taken to encapsulate the whole of the religion's attitudes to a complex, or even a simple, issue. It is perplexing that philosophy should take on this sort of generalising role, since the theology which it studies emphasises the varieties of views which exist in the religion. Much theology will push for a particular interpretation of such a view as the best interpretation, or even the only plausible interpretation, but this is not a strategy which philosophy should follow. Philosophy should seek to stand back from these internal debates within religion and examine the form of the arguments which are used. But here, as so often, it is difficult for philosophers to detach themselves from the nature of the debate since they may well have some personal commitment to one side or another in the controversy. If they have not managed to distinguish sharply enough between theology and philosophy then they will not be sufficiently aware of the dangers which lurk here, and there is only too much evidence of this taking place in the philosophy of religion. Many philosophers have, to use the language of colonial administration, 'gone native'. They have become so much part of the theological debate that they are unable to distinguish between that debate and what they say they are doing, pursuing a philosophical enquiry.

Surely this is a far-fetched criticism, it may be said, if we expect philosophers of religion to understand the nature of religion. To do the latter, they have to grasp all aspects of the nature of the religion, and it is hardly surprising that many of them are committed to a particular version of religion as the truth. Perhaps if they were not then they would be unable to understand in depth the nature of the religion itself. This is wrong, though. To understand a form of life there is no need to accept it as it sees itself, although it is helpful to understand how its followers see it. This is a problem which in philosophy is pretty uniquely that of the philosophy of religion. After all, it would be difficult for the philosopher of art to mistake what he does for art itself. It would be difficult for the philosopher of mathematics to confuse it with mathematics, or even for the philosopher of the kitchen to confuse what he does with cooking and eating. Yet it is easy for the philosopher of religion to confuse what he does with theology and religion. His motivation for pursuing that approach may in itself be religious, and often is, and religion is something which he may take to govern all aspects of his life. Moreover, the structure of theology and religion itself is often highly philosophical. We often talk about the clash between Athens and Jerusalem, or between reason and faith, yet it is worth remembering that many religious texts are themselves highly influenced by the philosophical problems which were current in their time. This compounds the problem, and makes it even more important for philosophers of religion to try to detach themselves from the emotional and personal aspects of what they are examining in order to look at the logical structure of the concepts involved.

THE RELIGIOUS AND THE PERSONAL

Surely, though, it will be said that it is the personal aspects of religion which make it religion. If someone is unable to experience the religion as having an impact on her, then she does not really understand the nature of that religion. This is going too far in stressing the practical implications of faith. It is probably true that unless one can understand what makes a religion attractive to potential followers then one has not got much of a grasp of the religion, but that is quite different from claiming that one has to take an internal view of the religion. This is one of the many features of religion which make it so difficult to study dispassionately. Understanding what makes a religion attractive is quite different from accepting it, and indeed some of the best accounts of religion have been produced by those coming from an entirely different perspective. This is even more the case with philosophy of religion, where coming from outside of the religion helps to detach the philosopher from the subject she is pursuing. And yet it may be that something in her personal religious baggage is going to affect

the nature of her enquiry into the topic. This is only a problem if we are unaware of how our religious, or anti-religious, assumptions may enter our conceptual investigation of issues in the philosophy of religion. Often we are unaware, and this sort of ignorance ought to be avoided at all costs.

If there is one feature which serves to distinguish Anglo-American philosophy from continental thought it is the treatment of the personal. In the Anglo-American tradition we tend to treat the personal with some suspicion, probably stemming from Socrates' arguments with the Sophists. We try to think in objective rational ways which discount the personal as anything but a starting point of a reasoning. The continental tradition tends to go about this rather differently, in that the personal is often viewed as the source of metaphysical truth. We go more awry the further we get from the personal, and the closer we keep to it the better. Yet actually there is not much difference between these different philosophical methodologies. Both seek to use rational argument, and both eschew subjectivity for objectivity, at least in the sense that their conclusions are supposed to apply universally, and not merely as the personal reflections of particular individuals. The personal enters philosophy of religion in two ways. First, there is a personal link with the religion which is being investigated, and this has a momentum of its own of which the philosopher should be aware. Second, the religion itself has a contingent link with the thinker, and in that sense impinges itself on her personality. For example, the fact that we have been brought up within the context of a particular religion, or religions, is entirely a matter of who we are, when and where we live, and so our links with those faiths is a matter of who we are as persons. That is not to say that we are limited in our philosophical work to the religions with which we are familiar, which is certainly not the case, but those religions are going to frame our enquiry into whichever religions we end up investigating. We may be limited by this to think that the particular problems of particular religions are *the* problems of the philosophy of religion, and this can indeed be very limiting.

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION OR PHILOSOPHY OF A RELIGION

It could be, of course, that this is not much of a problem since all the main religions share a basic set of conceptual problems which then can be analysed quite impartially by the philosopher. This would be very neat and tidy, and surely occurs in many of the other areas of philosophy. For example, whatever different communities think of as beautiful may well be different, but the rules which the philosopher of art applies to the meaning of the term 'beautiful' are the same regardless of the culture. It does not matter that different people call different things 'beautiful' so

long as what they have in mind by using that term is more or less the same. What the London bus driver, the Peruvian housewife and the Eritrean farmer regard as sound reasoning may differ, but the logician can produce rules of sound reasoning which apply entirely generally, whatever these different people might think. Surely this is also the case with the philosophy of religion, in that the different conceptions of the particularities of faith resolve themselves in terms of general concepts which can then be discussed and related back to the faith. Of course, there are differences between religious beliefs, but the basic conceptual machinery must be the same. There are big differences between different kinds of automobile, but the principles of the internal combustion engine are the same.

Yet when one looks closer this seems increasingly implausible. First, some religions seem to share no basic doctrines about the deity at all. Some religions even seem to get by without this notion, or with the notion of gods rather than a God, and for those religions the traditional debates about the nature of God have no purchase. Some religions do not accept the existence of miracles, so that whole discussion is rendered nugatory, while others reject life after death. The basic agenda which exists in Western philosophy of religion looks very strange from the point of view of radically different faiths. The attitude, which has bedevilled multicultural education in the West, that all religions are basically doing the same sort of thing, albeit in different ways, is just wrong. Even within the boundaries of a particular religion there may easily be communities who are nominally part of the same religion, but with ideas and practices which make it obvious that they are not.

But is it not the case that there are often close links between particular religions, and that one can extract similar concepts from them as a consequence? This is deceptively attractive as a strategy. It might be said on the contrary that where religions look most similar, they are in fact most different. Let us take as an example the links between Christian and Jewish views on the nature of evil, and God's responsibility for it. It is a traditional problem in the philosophy of religion that God is able to prevent evil occurring to the innocent, and yet he apparently does not. The next move is to find some explanation for this phenomenon, and it often takes the form of arguing that God has some good reason for allowing the evil to take place. In the Book of Job, for instance, the evil is there to test him, although one might think it is rather tough on Job's children who perish as part of the test. Christians have often seen the Book of Job as pointing the way towards a redemptive figure such as Jesus who bridges the suffering of this world and the perfection of the divine world, something which never really happens in the Book. Job in the end is confronted by an omnipotent deity who tells him that human beings cannot understand why the world is set up in a particular way, and so there is no point in trying to fathom why God allows evil to occur as it does. Interestingly, it

is Job's companions who produce the rather tendentious justifications of suffering so characteristic of many religions who are punished, while Job, who challenges God to respond to him, is rewarded.

Christians are often rather puzzled why Job is satisfied with the sort of response he gets from God, which is hardly a direct answer to his question. Christians argue that what Job needs is a direct intermediary between heaven and earth, someone to link the impassivity and the perfection of the divine with the suffering and contingency of this world. That figure is Jesus Christ, and the notion of God participating in our sufferings is taken to be an advance on the idea that there is an unbridgeable gap between where we are and where God is. As Hegel rightly pointed out, Judaism is so determinedly monotheistic that it drives the divine entirely out of the everyday world, and places it wholly above the world. Here the close links between the religions emphasises rather than hides the distinctions between them, in that on a topic so apparently universal as the topic of undeserved suffering Judaism and Christianity have very different views. There is no *one* view on undeserved suffering which can be studied in abstraction from its religious context if it is to be a genuine attempt at answering formal problems which occur within religion. We have to respect the variety of ways in which religions understand these issues, and not try to assimilate them all to some grand overriding set of propositions.

This seems to go in the opposite direction to the earlier argument that it is important to distinguish between theology and philosophy. What seems to be argued here is that one cannot sensibly distinguish between these two disciplines, since the philosophy of religion will be the philosophy of a particular religion, and hence linked with its theology. But the argument was that it is important to distinguish between philosophical and theological forms of argument, not that philosophy should not concern itself with theological issues. Theology is very much the subject matter of philosophy of religion, in just the same way that art is the subject matter of aesthetics, and always has been. But this should make us aware of the ways in which our philosophies of religion should take account of theologies, not theology. This link sometimes makes philosophy of religion look very parochial. As one would expect, philosophy of religion in the West is largely concerned with the theologies of the West, mainly Christianity with occasional forays into Judaism and Islam. Yet this is extraordinarily limiting. Buddhism is often called a religion, yet it does not on the whole adhere to a notion of a deity which bears much resemblance with the Christian God, nor does it have doctrines in the ways in which Christianity has doctrines. The whole notion of a personal God, or even god, is puzzling to many followers of Indian religions, and what makes the universe spiritual from a Confucian or Taoist point of view is quite distinct from the Christian approach.

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIONS

Surely, though, it will be said that if the philosophy of religion starts to delve into all these areas, it is going to become very vague and general, and be unable to bring enough analytical weight upon a particular problem. It will become like the history of ideas, a compendium of different ideas and practices, with some form of explanation connected loosely to it as a sort of theory. It is better, it will be argued, to know a lot about a particular religious tradition and its philosophical implications rather than a little about many such traditions, with its inevitably shallower grasp of what they mean philosophically. Perhaps this is true, and the best way to explore the philosophies of alien cultures may be to start by understanding a good deal of one's own, in just the same way that the best way to understand many different languages is to start with a good grasp of just one language. Yet this is just to argue for a particular starting point, not where one is to end up. There is so much interest in exploring some of the philosophical implications of religions which are radically different from 'Western' religions that this should not be seen as an exotic but remote possibility. It gives us the opportunity to see how far we can apply our familiar philosophical ideas to unfamiliar territory, and allows us to test the generality of those ideas. Perhaps one of the reasons why we are reluctant to take this route is that we suspect that the ideas which we hold out to be entirely formal and general are in fact rooted in a particular theological and religious tradition, and cannot be used to discuss concepts from radically different religious traditions.

We are right to be worried here. It is a familiar problem for many religious believers to reconcile the particularity of their faith with the universality of humanity. It is an even more pervasive problem to reconcile the particularity of our culture with the universality of culture as a whole. There is a good deal of suspicion that this is a recipe for superficiality, since it is hard enough to understand one religion and its culture, let alone the entire religious agenda of the world. One of the annoying features of many conferences which discuss religion is a certain practice of 'me tooism', where one speaker describes what sorts of arguments, say, Zen thinkers use to make sense of the existence of suffering among the innocent, and someone else puts up their hand and relates a similar, or different, strategy employed by Sufis, or some other completely different group. It is, of course, interesting that similar issues are dealt with sometimes in similar and sometimes in dissimilar ways within different cultural and religious traditions, although hardly surprising, and acquiring knowledge of groups of such beliefs falls into the category of education which is identified with the compiling of lists rather than understanding. It is all too reminiscent of a group of actors discussing the same performance, but really only being interested in their own individual performances.

Bringing in a variety of religious traditions does not have to take this form, though, and nor does it on many occasions. It is possible to use an alternative religious tradition and its philosophy as a potent conceptual mirror for the ideas and arguments with which one is already very, perhaps too, familiar. In the future there is likely to be a wider use of the concepts of the world's religions as part and parcel of the philosophy of religion. It may be that this widening of the curriculum will lead to a narrowing of the analytical power of what is produced, but there is no necessity for such a pessimistic conclusion to be drawn.

RECOMMENDED READING

An excellent guide to the whole area is Brian Davies' *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). It has a very useful bibliography. A good example of how to write philosophy within a particular theological tradition is provided in *Idolatry* by Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). The collection of essays in Thomas Morris (ed.), *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) is interesting because it combines the personal beliefs of the authors with their philosophical arguments.

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

Gerard Livingstone

When people first venture into philosophy, they often arrive expecting philosophy of language to be a field dominated by Wittgenstein's views on meaning. His influence looms so large in our intellectual culture—and language is supposed to be his special preoccupation, is it not? So new arrivals are sometimes surprised that the part of the forest designated philosophy of language seems to have fallen into other hands. The local tribes are given over to practices and projects which Wittgenstein would apparently have detested.

If we can explain what these disagreements are about, we can hazard some rash predictions *vis-à-vis* what happens next, in this neck of the woods. And to explain the nature of the disagreements, we need a summary of how they developed—how it all got like this.

PUTTING AWAY CHILDISH THINGS

Gottlob Frege was not the first to raise philosophical questions about the nature of language and meaning. But his work in this field—defining what the problems are, and proposing a framework of solutions—gave the philosophy of language a new importance: issues about language became the centre of philosophical attention in the twentieth century.

The new perspective introduced by Frege was organised around two key points: that meaning is something public; and that meaning is structured in certain ways. To appreciate what is involved in these points, we need to glance at the background Frege was reacting against.

There had been earlier attempts to say, in general, what it is to understand an expression (word, phrase, sentence), or what it is for the expression to have the meaning thereby understood. But the persistent tendency had been to take such understanding to be a matter of associating the expression with an appropriate mental image (see Aristotle, *De Anima*, or Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*—Locke uses the term 'idea' for images in this connection). That is, a hearer would correctly grasp what a

speaker means by a word only if the word evokes, in the hearer, a mental image just like one the speaker links with the word.

In that case, how can we be confident that we understand each other's words correctly? Well, only by comparing your mental images with mine. But a mental image is a subjective, private affair—an 'inner' experience. If *you* wish to know what sort of mental image *I* am having now, you need to rely on my reports of it (and vice versa, if I wish to know about your imagery). But the current question is whether there are grounds for supposing that we understand each other's utterances. In the attempt to cite such grounds it cannot simply be presupposed that we understand a range of each other's utterances (namely, reports of imagery). That would be helping ourselves to the very point that was to be established.

So if understanding of an expression were taken to consist in having an associated mental image, this would jeopardise our right to think of ourselves as communicating successfully. Frege removes any such threat, by breaking decisively with the received conception of understanding as an inner experience.

And if understanding is not a subjective, private phenomenon, it must apparently be a public, objective affair instead. Thus, when Frege characterises the meaning or sense of a sentence as the thought it expresses, he insists that such a thought is to be something objective and interpersonally available, in that, first, different people can have the same thought (by contrast, you cannot have my mental image). And not only can different people entertain and formulate the thought, but they can comprehend each other's formulations. Thoughts are conveyed or communicated: 'mankind has a common store of thoughts which is transmitted from one generation to another' (Moore, 1993:26).

Such chains of communication are viable only if one speaker's meaning is manifest to another: meaning has to be public in the sense that it is open to public display. That is, it must be possible to discern what meaning a speaker associates with an expression (if it is a sentence, which thought is expressed) from the speaker's use of the expression (practices or skills with it), in the context of other activity. Now we are on territory that tends to be ascribed to the later Wittgenstein: the idea that an expression's meaning must be fully manifested in the use made of the expression, or that the meaning *is* the use.

But, as noted, Frege has already taken the crucial steps in this direction. Once he rejects any conception of meaning or understanding in terms of the presence of an inner experience, the account of meaning has nowhere else to go, except towards the view that understanding and meaning are fully displayed in the overt use of the expressions concerned.

But insistence on the public character of meaning is not the only way in which Frege changes the ground rules, in this area of philosophy. There is also, as noted earlier, a new concern with ways in which meaning is

structured—and one could scarcely overstate how far this becomes a preoccupation of the new regime. To Frege it is beyond dispute that our language is a structured system, a network of meanings which we exploit for communicative and other purposes. To explain such a conception, one would begin from the idea that the meanings of sentences are determined by the meanings of the words in them: a word's meaning would be conceived here as a repeatable contribution or input to the meanings of sentences—so sentences will have interlinked meanings whenever they share one or more constituent words, and the language as a whole will form a network of these criss-crossing semantic connections. Frege's work is animated by a conviction that such semantic organisation in our language does not have to remain mysterious—that one can clarify what it is and how it works. As yet we have given only a prefatory clue to the sophisticated model of structure which he develops.

One can already discern, however, that there is as much of a break with the past in acknowledging that meaning is structured, as in insisting that it is public. How could the pre-Fregean account of meaning and understanding, in terms of mental images, allow that our utterances have structured meanings? The story would have to be, it seems, that the utterances have structured meanings by virtue of evoking structured mental pictures. Harry tells me that he's been motorcycling, and I form an image of an appropriate complex—Harry on a motorcycle. But picturing is *not* a medium which can deal with the range of meanings allowed by language. We cannot here rehearse all the reasons for such a conclusion, but just consider how my image of Harry biking would have to be varied, if he had said just that he intended to go biking, or that he went biking to fulfil a promise, or that he did it of his own free will.

SENSE AND REFERENCE: A REQUISITE WALK IN THE HINDU KUSH

Frege's requirements on meaning, that it be both a public and a structured affair, seem at first to converge upon an uncomplicated account of some expressions, such as proper names. For any expression smaller than a sentence, the upshot of the structure requirement is, as noted, that the expression's meaning should be its input to sentence-meanings. And the contribution of a proper name in a sentence seems to be that of picking out an individual—person, place, object—about which the rest of the sentence proceeds to say something. As for the *public* character of meaning, what could be more public than the named person, place or thing? So the requirements seem jointly to suggest that a name has meaning by *standing for* or *referring to* some item in the world, or that the meaning is this item.

However natural this equation of meaning with reference might sound, it is—as Frege was the first to realise—in apparent tension with another homely maxim: that an expression’s meaning is what you grasp when you understand the expression. Try putting these innocent ideas about meaning together.

Suppose there are two names which stand for the same individual, and that I have mastered both names—I am fully competent in the use of both. For example, I have a colleague, Smith, who also has the nickname ‘Bodger’. I know there is only one individual involved—I know that

Smith is Bodger

—but consider *how* I know this. My mastery or understanding of each name is supposed to be a grasp of its meaning, and the meaning is in each case supposed to be the reference—the name’s link with a particular individual. So my competence with the names would apparently give me enough of a basis for appreciating that they have the same bearer, i.e., for knowing that *Smith is Bodger*. Well, knowledge sometimes does seem to be based just on a grasp of meanings (compare knowledge that vixens are foxes, or that $2+2=4$). And that may fit our intuitions about the present case. For if I am competent with both names, there seems to be nothing else I need to do, or find out, in order to know that the names have the same bearer.

But Frege was sharp enough to notice that this pattern does not always obtain. For in some cases two names may refer to the same thing, and you may be fully competent with both names, and yet this competence does not disclose to you that the names have the same bearer. Instead, further empirical investigation is needed, before you can know that the names co-refer.

In one of Frege’s examples of this type, an explorer in a remote region sees a mountain far to the north, and gives it the name ‘Afla’, whereas another explorer in an adjacent region sees a mountain in the south, and names it ‘Ateb’. The usages become established, and there is much chat back at the Travellers’ Club about whether to send an expedition to Afla, and about what might lie beyond Ateb, etc. But eventually, when the whole area is properly surveyed, it is discovered that only one mountain is involved: *Afla is Ateb*.

Now, why does it require another expedition to the area, to establish that Afla is Ateb? Each of the names, once it is introduced, has a perfectly meaningful use—it is used in making definite claims, some true, some false, about a particular mountain. So, we can apparently reckon that speakers grasp the meaning of each name. But the other current assumption about names is that meaning is reference. So why can’t the speakers recognise, just on the basis of their grasp of the meanings, that the names have the

same reference—i.e., recognise that Afla is Ateb? Why should discovery of this fact await a further expedition to the area? But the discovery certainly does require another expedition, and this indicates that there is something amiss with our assumptions—at least one of them must be revised. We cannot maintain both that mastery of an expression involves a grasp of its meaning, and that this meaning is the reference.

Frege envisages two distinct factors: the sense of a name is what you grasp when you understand (are competent with, have mastered) the name, while the reference is what the name stands for. And the relation between the two (we stick to the orthodox reading of Frege here) is that the sense is a way of identifying the reference. That is, the sense provides a criterion or condition which an item must meet, in order to count as the reference of the name. Accordingly, names which have the same sense must have the same reference—if the criteria of identification are the same, the same item will be picked out. (A nickname like ‘Bodger’ is quite likely just to borrow identifying criteria from the pre-existing name: let’s call Smith ‘Bodger’, chaps.)

But names with the same reference may differ in sense. For the same item may be picked out by way of different identifying features. So it is in the affair of ‘Afla’ and ‘Ateb’, according to Frege. His diagnosis is that the names have different senses—one name is associated with one mode of identification (the mountain visible in the north from...), the other name with another (the mountain visible in the south from...). A speaker who has mastered both names—grasped their senses—will not be able to work out, merely on the basis of what is thus grasped, that the names refer to the same mountain (i.e., that Afla is Ateb). For it is entirely contingent that the different identifying criteria are fulfilled by a single mountain (there might have been two mountains, each obscuring the view of the other, from the different perspectives). So further observations are needed, before it emerges that the names have a common reference—that Afla is Ateb. For this is not some trivial truth, evident to anyone who understands the meanings of the terms involved (like, say: vixens are foxes). On the contrary, it marks an empirical discovery.

To those who have struggled up through the foothills of Frege’s argument, to the very pinnacle of Afla-Ateb, all manner of unsuspected vistas now beckon.

UNSUSPECTED VISTAS

What has happened to the idea of a *network* of meanings? We were encouraged to think of the language as an interconnected system, in which the meanings of sentences depend on the meanings of words. And the plan was to describe this semantic structure.

But that was before our homely maxims about meaning went spinning off in different directions. At first we glibly presumed that a term's meaning could be *both*:

what you grasp when you understand the term,

and

what the term stands for.

Now that the presumed unity here has been dismantled by Frege into separate properties of sense and reference, what happens to semantic structure? Does it belong to the realm of sense? Or to the realm of reference?

To both, according to Frege. He envisages two distinct levels of semantic structure—one relating to sense, and the other relating to reference. It is as though there are parallel semantic networks, ramifying in tandem across the language: the sense of an expression—a name (say)—plugs into one of these networks, while its reference plugs into the other (not that the two networks are unrelated).

For when Frege has distinguished between the sense and the reference of a name, he finds that these connect respectively with *different* features of sentences. The point can be made by focusing again upon a pair of names like 'Afla' and 'Ateb', which have the same reference but differ in sense (sense is, recall, the particular *way* of picking out the reference). For we can consider what happens when one of these names is substituted for the other, in the context of a sentence. We may for example change the sentence

Afla is wooded

by such a substitution to

Ateb is wooded.

So far as the names here are concerned—if we consider for a moment only what fills the name-slot—the substitution preserves reference, but changes sense.

But there is also both a continuity and a discontinuity (which we are about to describe) at the level of the whole sentences. The continuity at the level of sentences reflects the preservation of reference in the name-slot, while the discontinuity reflects the change of sense in the name-slot.

To take the continuity first: what do the two sentences

Afla is wooded

and

Ateb is wooded

have in common? Truth or falsity. If one of these sentences is true, so is the other. And if one of them is false, so is the other. They are true, or false, *together*.

There may be afforestation on the mountain, in which case both sentences are true, or there may not be, and then both sentences are false. Putting this in the jargon, the two sentences have the same truth-value (there are two truth-values, truth and falsity). And this preservation of truth-value not only accompanies the preservation of reference in the name-slot, but depends upon it: if in

Afla is wooded

the name were replaced by one referring to a *different* mountain, say, 'Kilimanjaro', we would no longer have a guarantee of substitution preserving truth-value.

In short, provided the references remain constant, we seem to have a guarantee that truth-value remains constant too: alter the references, and truth-value may also vary—you lose the guarantee of continuity in this regard. To Frege such patterns suggest a set-up of this sort: whether a sentence is true or false (i.e., which truth-value it has) is a product of the references of the expressions contained in the sentence. The references combine to determine whether the sentence is true or false.

The point can be better understood when we have some idea what reference would be, for words other than names: we shall soon explain how to generalise the idea of reference. But a popular notion (not Frege's own) of what reference would be, for a predicative expression like '...is wooded', is that this would refer to the set of items (mountains, valleys, counties, whatever) which are wooded. Then the structure works like this: the sentence

Afla is wooded

is true (i.e., has *that* truth-value) if the item to which the name refers belongs to the set to which '...is wooded' refers; otherwise the sentence is false.

So we get an indication of the semantic network involving references and truth-values, when in the replacement of

Afla is wooded

by

Ateb is wooded

the continuity of reference between the two names is echoed by a continuity of truth-value between the sentences.

But we also said that the two names have different senses, and that this is reflected by a discontinuity between the two sentences as wholes. How, then, do the two sentences differ?

The two sentences express different *thoughts*, according to Frege. As he sees it, any two sentences formulate different thoughts, if there are possible circumstances in which you could consistently accept one sentence as true, and reject the other as false. Such a possibility can be envisaged in the present case. Before the discovery that only one mountain is involved, people could consistently believe that

Afla is wooded

is true, but that

Ateb is wooded

is false (for one thing, the forests might be all on the southern slopes). So these sentences will express different thoughts.

This difference between the sentences must apparently be attributed to the change of sense in the name-slot. For there seems to be no other difference between the sentences which would account for the change of thought (the names have the same reference, for example). To Frege, this is one intimation of a structure in which the senses of words combine to determine which thoughts are expressed by sentences.

The outlines are as yet indistinct, but two levels of structure have loomed into view—two types of semantic relation between a sentence and its parts. The senses of the parts determine which thought is expressed by the sentence, and the references of the parts determine whether the sentence is true or false.

One can see how the rationale for such a two-storey model would go. Our language—our linguistic conventions, or ways of using words—may confer senses upon those words, and thereby associate our sentences with the thoughts or statements they serve to formulate. But the semantic features at the other level (truth, reference and the like) would depend not only upon our linguistic practices, but also upon the world beyond our language. Our own conventions may ensure that an uttered sentence expresses a thought, or says something; but whether the sentence is *true* will depend upon reality

as well—upon whether the world is as it is thought or said to be, in the utterance. Similarly, whether a name succeeds in referring seems to depend not only upon our practices, but also upon whether the world obliges, with the presence of a suitable individual. For we can be under a misapprehension that an entity exists (such as the recent erroneous belief that a planet had been discovered, orbiting one of the nearer stars), and we may then adopt a name which misses its mark.

If the structure of senses and thoughts reflects our practices, and the structure of reference and truth reflects the interface of those practices with reality, how are the two levels related? In multiple ways. For each word, its sense is supposed to provide a criterion for identifying its reference.

But Frege thinks you find this relation recurring at the level of sentences. He wants to say that the thought expressed by a sentence is the sentence's sense (so that word-senses determine sentence-senses), and that the truth-value of a sentence is the sentence's reference (so that word-references determine sentence-references).

The second of these proposals will sound odd, when our prototype of reference is the relation between a name and its bearer. The notion of reference plainly has to be generalised, if it is to be applied to sentences, so that the name-bearer relation will appear as just a specific instance of the general notion—the particular form reference takes, for that type of expression.

But the general notion of reference is already to hand. We have described one of Frege's levels of structure—the level that is not entirely a product of our conventions—in these terms: a sentence's truth-value is determined by the references of the sentence's parts. So, take that as our definition of reference. An expression's reference will be its input or contribution to determining truth-values of sentences in which the expression occurs. In the case of a name, the contribution would be a matter of the name picking out its bearer: for when a name occurs in a sentence, as in

John runs,

whether this sentence is true or false will depend upon the antics of the individual to whom the name refers—whether he is running or not. But the point would be that expressions of other types would also contribute to determining the truth or falsity of sentences—i.e., they would also have reference—but not in the way that names do. We have already mentioned the idea that a predicate '...is wooded', '...runs', '...swims' has reference by picking out a *set* of items.

The next step is to notice that, once we have used words as building-blocks to form sentences,

John runs,
Bill swims, etc.,

we can then use these sentences themselves as building-blocks in the formation of larger sentences. We can do this by way of operations like negation (we shall underline component sentences),

It is not the case that John runs,

or conjunction,

John runs and Bill swims,

or disjunction,

John runs or Bill swims,

or conditionalisation,

If John runs, then Bill swims,

and more besides.

Since a sentence such as ‘John runs’ can occur as a component within larger sentences, we can pertinently ask how it contributes to determining whether those larger sentences are true or false. This is to ask what the cited sentence’s reference is, under our present usage. And we can soon appreciate why Frege answers this question in the way that he does: namely, the sentence’s reference—its input to determining the truth-values of larger sentences it occurs in—is the sentence’s own truth-value.

For consider how the truth-values of the larger sentences will be determined. The negation

It is not the case that John runs

will be true if and only if the contained sentence is false. The conjunction

John runs and Bill swims

will be true just in case both the contained sentences are true. The disjunction

John runs or Bill swims

will be true just in case at least one of the contained sentences is true. The conditional

If John runs, then Bill swims

will be true if and only if the truth of the first contained sentence is always accompanied by the truth of the second.

So there is some basis for describing a sentence's truth/falsity as its reference, provided this is just the feature by which the sentence affects the truth/falsity of larger sentences containing it. To borrow a phrase (from the American philosopher, W.V. Quine), truth is chased up the tree of grammar.

Now notice some advantages of the position Frege has reached. The sense of an expression is supposed to offer a criterion for identifying the expression's reference. So if a sentence's reference is its truth-value, the sense should provide a basis for recognising whether the sentence is true or false—say, a condition which is met just when the sentence is true. And the original point about an expression's sense was that it is what you grasp when you understand the expression. So we now have this result: you understand a sentence by grasping under what condition the sentence would be true. That is rather plausible. You understand a sentence like 'It's raining' because you know what type of situation would make it true. Consider how you might break into the language of some exotic tribe: a key method would be to connect their sentences with situations in which the tribe consider them true.

We are also now better placed to appreciate what Frege is getting at with regard to the level of structure comprising senses. The sense of a name should provide a criterion for identifying its reference—say, a condition which an item must meet, to qualify as the reference of the name. Similarly, if the reference of a predicate is the set of items to which the predicate applies, the predicate's sense will impose some qualifying condition for inclusion in that set: the condition will be possession of the relevant feature or property. And we noted just now that a sentence's sense would provide a condition under which the sentence is true. So when we are told that in a sentence like 'Afla is wooded', the sense of the name combines with that of the predicate, to fix a sense for the sentence, the upshot is: if you have an ability to tell whether something counts as the reference of the name, and you have an ability to tell when an item is one of those to which the predicate applies, then you have an ability to tell when a situation is one in which the sentence is true. That is (by virtue of the connection between sense and understanding) a gloss on the idea that understanding of the name and of the predicate jointly confer understanding of the whole sentence.

A wide area of the language comes within the scope of the foregoing account of semantic structure. Frege's treatment of generality takes things

further, but we have space only to allude to it. The vocabulary for generality ('all', 'some', 'none', 'everything', 'something', 'nothing' and related expressions) had been a source of perplexity to logicians, but Frege was notably successful in dispelling the mists. One gets a hint of the method if one thinks of a generalisation, say, 'Everything moves', as having truth conditions like those of a conjunction of singular statements, each concerned with one of the relevant instances ('Something moves' would be correspondingly related to a disjunction of those statements).

Frege's treatment of generality extends the explanation of semantic structure to encompass scientific and mathematical theories, and much else besides: the explained area is usually reckoned sufficient for formulating the natural sciences, and for other talk about inanimate physical things. It is just when we exhaust that category of subject matter, and turn to the language for describing a new range of topics—notably, thinking subjects, and their mental states or points of view, that we find the semantical model outlined so far is no longer working—it needs significant modification. We have already noted that the two sentences

Afla is wooded

and

Ateb is wooded

appear to express different thoughts, in that someone could judge the one true and the other false. Suppose Ralph does. Suppose that

(R1) Ralph believes that Afla is wooded

is true (for Ralph accepts the statement 'Afla is wooded'), but that

(R2) Ralph believes that Ateb is wooded

is false (for Ralph rejects the statement 'Ateb is wooded').

So we are in territory where the substitution of co-referring expressions appears no longer to guarantee preservation of truth-value. Replacement of 'Afla' with 'Ateb' changes a truth, (R1), to a falsehood, (R2). We needn't conclude that in these realms of the language there is no semantic structure, but only that the structure is harder to find, and more interesting for that. Frege himself suggests an elegant solution to the present problem (namely, that substitution no longer preserves truth-value in the cited contexts because the names have different references there, referring to their senses, which differ).

If the plan is to trace semantic structure across the entire language, many further types of context have to be considered. Statements about what is necessary or possible, statements about causation, subjunctive conditionals, adverbial locutions, adjectival constructions, plural quantifiers ('many' etc.), use of tenses, fictional and metaphorical utterances, and a range of other types of context, all raise distinctive semantical problems.

FIN-DE-SIÈCLE: SCARY MONSTERS

The mainstream of opinion in the philosophy of language is broadly sympathetic to the project of describing semantic structure. There are disagreements within this mainstream, often about aspects of the Fregean model—what should be retained, and what needs revision. But there are also counter-currents of hostility to the whole structure-discerning project.

Let us, however, begin among the structure-fanciers. To many of them it has seemed that Frege keeps a rather crowded house. Is there really a justification for envisaging two levels of structure, one relating to sense and one to reference, across the full extent of the language? Sense is supposed to be purely conventional, a creature of our practices, while referential features are supposed to depend also upon the state of reality. But we are assured that sense, not reference, is what one grasps when one understands expressions. So understanding becomes disconnected from the state of the world—from what the world actually happens to be like, or actually contains. Here the guiding motivation appears to be the idea that the existence of our linguistic skills should not *of itself* guarantee that our attempts to depict the world are successful: there has to be a possibility other than success.

But does this motivation require a sense/reference contrast for *every* expression? Consider names again. According to Frege, mastery of a name is a grasp of its sense, which provides a criterion for identifying the bearer: so the sense of the name 'Blériot' would apparently be given by a description expressing his salient characteristic, namely, 'the first person to fly across the English Channel'. Then it seems to be true *by virtue of meaning*, that

Blériot flew across the Channel.

So it should be no more conceivable that Blériot did not fly across, than that vixens are not foxes, or that $2+2$ is not equal to 4. Yet, on the contrary, it seems entirely possible that Blériot might never have started messing around with flying machines, but have occupied himself differently.

So the view has gained ground that a non-Fregean treatment of names is needed. A return to equating a name's meaning with its reference would appear to restore the difficulties from which Frege offered escape. To Frege

it seemed an evident defect, in the idea that the co-referring names ‘Afla’ and ‘Ateb’ are thereby equivalent in meaning, that we would then have to regard the statements

Afla is Afla

and

Afla is Ateb

as equivalent in meaning, when speakers could verify the first by reflecting for an instant, but the second only through an expedition to a remote region. But some new anti-Fregeans accept this with equanimity, as an indication that semantics and epistemology are different matters, that the same meaning can co-exist with altogether different ways of recognising truth. But if meaning is thus severed from ways of acknowledging truth, there is a question of how meaning will be displayed in use.

These and related controversies have been pursued in a changed context since the 1960s, when the project of discerning semantic structure assumed a new form. Under the stimulus of Chomsky’s plan for a systematic grammar, showing how sentences are formed from the basic vocabulary, Donald Davidson proposed a semantical counterpart, showing how the meanings of sentences are determined on the basis of structure. This would be a semantical theory, which would specify what the semantic properties of words and grammatical constructions are: one would then be able to deduce, for each sentence of the language, a specification of its meaning (truth conditions, for Davidson as for Frege). The theory would reflect the practice of speakers, because it would formulate knowledge sufficient for understanding the language. The theory would contain enough information about words and constructions to allow interpretation of any sentence formed from them.

Since the theory is to specify knowledge sufficient for understanding, we would expect it (in terms of Frege’s categories) to specify senses. But as usually conceived, the theory appears to identify only references, starting from patterns of referential structure rather like those set out in our previous section. About the name ‘Afla’ the theory would typically be expected just to say that

‘Afla’ refers to Afla.

But if identifying the reference correctly were all that mattered, there could not be any objection to dealing with the name ‘Ateb’ thus:

‘Ateb’ refers to Afla.

If the two names are dealt with in the cited ways, the theory, when presented with the sentence

‘Afla is Ateb’,

will accordingly diagnose that this means that, or has the truth condition that

Afla is Afla.

We have noticed opponents of Fregean accounts of naming who would apparently accept that

(A) ‘Afla is Ateb’ means that Afla is Afla.

But Davidson and his sympathisers insist on the connections between meaning and thought, and between thought and behaviour. In imputing meanings to speakers’ sentences we ascribe thoughts to the speakers, and these ascriptions are credible only if they suit the speakers’ behaviour. The trouble with (A) is that it leaves one supposing that the people in question had to mount an expedition to a remote region before they could acknowledge the truth of ‘Afla is Ateb’, even though it expresses a trivially obvious truth. So although Davidson favours a semantical theory which appears merely to specify references of words, he imposes restrictions on how this is to be done, to ensure that sentences are interpreted in a way that makes the speakers’ behaviour seem rational. (This would exclude

‘Ateb’ refers to Afla

and other such oddments.)

Davidson’s project gave a new impetus to the search for semantic structure, leading in particular to attempts to trace referential structure in problematical contexts, and show how these integrate into the semantic network. But in addition to this wave of enthusiasm for the project, there was answering dismay in other quarters.

In particular, there were those who felt that the project of revealing semantic structure was a vampire with a stake through its heart, placed there by Wittgenstein in Part I of his *Philosophical Investigations*. Davidson, apparently unaware of this, had fetched the monster from the crypt and was trying to revive it.

Wittgenstein’s critique of the structure-discerning programme is broad and varied, but it is centred upon his distrust of the idea that a sentence’s meaning is *determined* by the meanings of its parts. In this he detects a pernicious conception of rules: that a rule fixes in advance what is to

count as following the rule, in all the possible cases which can arise. That is, it does so independently of what *we* do in relevant cases. The rule is like a set of rails, independent of us and guiding what we do. And in the images of rails and guidance there seems to be a mechanistic conception of mind—mental wheels kept on track, a mental mechanism functioning properly. Wittgenstein warns us away from the images, and the confusions they encourage: the independent rails are mythical—we are the highest court of appeal on whether a rule is being maintained; and the mind is not some sort of interior mechanism. Wittgenstein commends instead the notion of a rule as a customary practice: a regularity in our activity, associated with normative features—ratification of compliance, criticism of transgression, etc.

Followers of Wittgenstein have sometimes simply assumed that these points are effective against the project of Davidson and his sympathisers—on the grounds, presumably, that the semantical theory is intended as a formulation of rules used by ordinary speakers in understanding utterances. Since ordinary speakers cannot themselves formulate the theory—it is too technical—they would be conceived as having an implicit knowledge of its contents: this would be a mental mechanism which expedites their comprehension of utterances. The theory could be said to capture rules of the language only in the pernicious sense: rails which guide the mental operation of comprehension.

In fact Davidson and his collaborators make it abundantly clear that they are *not* invoking a notion of implicit knowledge (they had seen Chomsky get into trouble that way): they do not purport to describe covert mental operations involved in everyday comprehension. Their purpose is more indirect: to try to shed light on such comprehension by showing how it could be simulated. The semantical theory is supposed to formulate knowledge sufficient to confer understanding of the language— but there is no implication here that native speakers possess this knowledge in an implicit form. The point is only that a non-native theorist could, on the basis of an explicit formulation, in his own language, of the gist of the theory, arrive at comprehension of native sentences via artificial means: namely, explicitly inferring what these sentences mean, from their structures. The theorist might be viewed as thus establishing explicit interpretative practices: but he need not be regarded as following rules in a dubious mechanistic sense to which Wittgenstein could object.

This is not to say that Davidson and company have given a satisfactory account of the point of trying to discern semantic structure. If the aim is just to outline knowledge sufficient for the theorist to understand native sentences, why should he not get this from knowledge of a more orthodox translation-manual, which shows him how to map natives' expressions onto equivalent expressions of his own, without broaching questions of semantic structure? To map 'and' on to an equivalent expression in the

theorist's language, you do not have to describe how the truth of a conjunction relates to the truth of the conjuncts. So what is the description of semantic structure *for*? Why try to discern such structure? In fact the dispute about Davidson's suggestion, regarding the point of trying to discern semantic structure, proceeds further than we can follow it here. But the outcome still seems to go against his suggestion.

At *fin-de-siècle* the philosophy of language is in a quiet phase. The wave of activity generated by Davidson's project has subsided, for more than one reason, but mainly because of the absence of clear purpose. When Davidson's own attempt to supply such a purpose proved unsatisfactory, some turned their attention again to the notions he had anxiously shunned—implicit knowledge, implicitly known rules and the like. The use of language is a rational activity, and, on the face of it, the notions of implicit knowledge and of rules could be needed for tracing the patterns of rationality in that complex activity. It is starkly unobvious that any appeal to those notions in this area must involve speculation about mental mechanisms. At any rate, the philosophy of language will recover its vitality when a persuasive rationale emerges for the pursuit of structure.

RECOMMENDED READING

Frege's article 'On Sense and Reference' can be conveniently found in A.W.Moore (ed.), *Meaning and Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Davidson's articles are collected in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), but are difficult. There are inclusive treatments of the philosophy of language in Bernard Harrison, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (London: Macmillan, 1979) and in Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

William Lyons

INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century philosophy of mind in the analytic tradition has been an arena not merely for lively debate but also for profound and even disturbing change. What is more important, I believe that such change has amounted to real and significant progress which looks like continuing into the next century.

In 1890, the American philosopher and psychologist William James began his *magnum opus*, *The Principles of Psychology*, with the words, ‘Psychology is the Science of Mental Life’ and then went on to explain that our mental life consisted in a stream of consciousness whose fluid states, while having a direct if labile relation to brain processes, should nevertheless not be identified with those brain processes. For James advocated a dualism of consciousness and brain, which dualism traced its origins to the more stark and uncompromising dualism of soul and body that the French philosopher and mathematician, René Descartes, ‘the father of modern philosophy’, had advocated in the seventeenth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, most philosophers would have agreed with Descartes and James in advocating either a dualism of mind and body or something very close to it. As late as 1925, in the popular text, *Our Minds and Their Bodies*, John Laird, the Regius Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Aberdeen, wrote that ‘the most probable theory would appear to be that spirits in their partnership with living bodies exhibit the mutual influence of [these] two orders’ (Laird, 1925:117). However, towards the end of the twentieth century it has become something approaching a settled orthodoxy that we humans are monistic (or ‘made of just one substance’) in a purely physicalistic way. We are constructed entirely of physical bits and pieces formed into a complex biological unity. There are no minds or souls either hovering about or incarnated. What remains for psychology and philosophy of mind is, first, to substitute an ontology of biological powers and capacities for the Cartesian ontology of faculties of the soul with their proprietary activities.

Then the task becomes one of selecting the new vocabulary that is best suited to describing and explaining those powers and capacities and their interaction with the environment through perception and behaviour.

In its most uncompromising form, this adoption of monistic physicalism has included the doctrine that we must replace our outdated ‘folk psychological’ talk of mind and body, intellect and will, consciousness and memory, with an up-to-date neuroscientific vocabulary. Thus, in the ‘Closing Remarks’ to her book, *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind/Brain* (1986), the Canadian philosopher Patricia Churchland declared in an assured matter-of-fact tone that ‘mental processes are brain processes’ and that ‘it is already evident that some deeply central folk psychological concepts, such as memory, learning, and consciousness, are either fragmenting or will be replaced by more adequate [neuroscientific] categories’ (Churchland, 1986:481).

Here I want to look more closely at this dramatic change from the Cartesian, or for that matter Platonic or Judaeo-Christian, position that it is simply common sense and more or less incontrovertible that humans are composed of a soul or mind which is in some way ‘housed’ in a body, to the uncompromising claim that we are nothing but physical bits and pieces unified into a complexly functioning biological whole. I want first to identify the main avenues of enquiry that seem inexorably to have led philosophers to this current view about the nature of our mental life, and then to speculate how these enquiries will develop in, at least, the immediate future.

Sometimes I will suggest that certain enquiries have not yet been developed very far and so I will speculate about where they might go; others, I will argue, have reached the terminus and that the tracks themselves might need to be ripped up.

REDUCTIONISM

Philosophers love reductionism. As it involves getting rid of things—usually reducing one sort of explanation or description or theory to another already existing and better established explanation or description or theory—it has the nuance of clearing away rubbish or of getting rid of superfluties. So it has a methodological probity and purity that seems to match the logical purities with which they conduct their arguments and speculations.

Philosophers of mind are no exception. They too yearn to satisfy their reductionist desires. Thus a number of philosophers have suggested that our common-sense or ‘folk psychological’ explanations of our mental life (or, at least, of our ‘higher’ cognitive life) in terms of the common-sense notions of belief and desire and hope and intention and realization

and love and hate, and so on, have had their day. Thus Eliminative Materialists, like the husband and wife team of Paul and Patricia Churchland, urge us to discard altogether our common-sense explanations of human actions and reactions in terms of the 'prepositional attitudes'. The so-called 'prepositional attitudes' are attitudes, such as those of belief and desire and hope, that, when linguistically expressed, take the form of a verb of attitude operating over a content expressed in propositional form. For example, a particular belief (or 'attitude of believing') might be expressed typically as 'She believes *that it is going to snow*'. Or a particular hope which someone has might be described as 'She hopes that she will not catch the 'flu'. As we have just seen, the general form of such expressions is of *an attitude* governing a *that-clause* or *proposition expression*, hence the term 'prepositional attitudes'. At any rate the Eliminativists argue that these concepts and categories, and even the propositional attitude expressions of belief and desire, are nothing but the obsolete metaphysical and linguistic detritus of our misbegotten Cartesian heritage. To try to do professional psychology or serious philosophy of mind in terms of such concepts is like trying to do contemporary physics in terms of such discredited concepts as that of the ether, calorific fluid and phlogiston. To draw another analogy, our 'folk psychology' is to what real psychology should be, what mediaeval alchemy is to modern chemistry. Furthermore we should abandon altogether, *at all levels* and *for any purpose*, even for ordinary social purposes, *any talk* in terms of beliefs and desires and their like, in the same spirit as a society emerging from a primitive existence might abandon all talk of witchcraft and demons.

But there are less severe and more subtle reductionists than the Eliminative Materialists. Daniel Dennett, for example, in his paper, 'Intentional Systems' (1971), suggested that our explanations in terms of the 'propositional attitudes' are useful explanations for ordinary purposes, but not, at least eventually, for scientific or professional purposes. To put it another way, it is useful in ordinary social intercourse to take up 'the intentional stance' whereby we explain the behaviour of ourselves, or for that matter that of our car or cat, in terms of the 'intentional attitudes' (which phrase, while having different emphases, for our purposes may be taken as a synonym for the phrase 'propositional attitudes'). This 'intentional stance' is nothing but a heuristic device that enables us to explain human behaviour in a swift, neat and easily comprehensible fashion. But we must not think that we really possess mental states or that there really are processes called 'belief' and 'desire', any more than we should believe that there really are an equator and lines of longitude and latitude. We take up 'the intentional stance' to humans in much the same spirit as a chess grand master, like Kasparov, might take up 'the intentional stance' to a computer when he is trying to defeat it at chess. Just as Kasparov, when confronted by the latest chess-playing computer, might say to himself, 'I fear that the

computer realizes that my queen now threatens its king, so I'd better...', so you might say the same thing to yourself when playing against your grandmother.

Of course a better explanation and prediction about what the computer will print out, as its next move, given a certain input, would result from Kasparov's taking up 'the design stance' in regard to the computer, if that were feasible, that is, by taking account of the program and electronic design of the computer. Kasparov's explanation and so prediction of the computer's responses would be even better grounded if he could take up 'the physical stance' whereby he would be able to explain matters by reference to fundamental physics. Taking up either of the latter two stances is probably impossible for any ordinary person, and may be so for any single person operating over a reasonable amount of time. So Dennett does not advocate the total elimination of the quotidian vocabulary of our ordinary common-sense or 'folk' psychology.

More interestingly, from our point of view, is the fact that, in regard to these reductionist moves, there has arisen a series of philosophical 'refuseniks' or non-cooperative protesters. What is more, I think that not merely time but also the tide of good argument are moving in their direction. The future lies with them.

The 'refuseniks' I have in mind are such philosophers as Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, Jerry Fodor and John Searle. While their refusals to go down the reductionist path have quite different origins, they can be said to be in broad agreement on that negative anti-reductionist point at least. Davidson, for example, believes that it is a gross misunderstanding even to imagine that our common-sense psychological vocabulary of belief and desire could be reduced to something else. For this vocabulary (to invent a new Dennettian stance), arises as a result of our taking up 'a normative stance' to humans whereby we see them as basically rational, consistent and coherent agents. Indeed, if we want to understand and so get on with our fellow humans, we cannot do otherwise. But to see it in this way is to realize that such a stance is indeed 'normative', that is, that it involves a deliberate tidying-up (or artificial regimentation) of our explanations of human behaviour according to the norms of rationality, consistency and coherency. So, to attempt to reduce these highly complex and highly sophisticated explanations to some sort of 'scientific' explanation at the level of neurophysiology or fundamental physics is like seeking to reduce an economist's explanation in terms of inflation, increase or decrease in money supply, and level of employment, to fundamental physics. To attempt to do so, in both cases, is simply to miss the point.

To take one more example of a 'refusenik' about reduction, John Searle has argued that our mental life is nothing but our conscious life which in turn is a higher-level 'emergent' property (or 'novel property' that is not predictable from the lower-level properties from which it emerges) of

certain sorts of activities of certain sorts of brains, namely those of humans and the so-called higher animals. Thus to reduce or eliminate talk of our mental states and processes is to reduce our *sui generis* mental life to something which it clearly is not and cannot ever be. Or else, in a fit of something like deliberate waywardness, it is to refuse to discuss our mental life at all.

‘SCIENTISM’

The most radical development in the history of modern philosophy has been the comparatively recent bifurcation of styles and methods of engaging in philosophical enquiry into ‘analytic philosophy’ and ‘continental philosophy’. The rise of continental philosophy can be traced to that extraordinary German teacher of philosophy, Franz Brentano, via, especially, his most famous pupil Edmund Husserl. For Husserl was the founder of Phenomenology and was the teacher of the key figure in more recent continental philosophy, the German, Martin Heidegger. The rise of analytic philosophy can be traced, in the main, to another series of German-language philosophers, namely to that extraordinarily gifted band of philosophically inclined physicists, mathematicians and social scientists who met in Vienna in the 1920s and 1930s under the leadership of the German philosopher, Moritz Schlick, and became known as ‘The Logical Positivists’ of ‘The Vienna Circle’. In effect their positivism was that of the nineteenth-century positivists with an infusion of modern logic and philosophy of language, a great deal of it from their interpretation of the much admired text of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921).

It was the diaspora from the Vienna Circle that put together most of the ingredients of modern American philosophy which, in turn, has put together most of the ingredients of modern philosophy of mind in the analytic tradition. (In Britain, which was the other main arena for analytic philosophy, there were other influences at work or at least *in addition*, namely the influence of Moore, Frege, Russell, ‘the later Wittgenstein’ and Ryle.)

Now one of the central doctrines of nineteenth-century positivism, which can be traced right through these historical and geographical gatherings and dispersals, to current analytic philosophy of mind, is the belief that the paradigm of proper knowledge is the data and theories of natural science, and that the paradigm of proper procedures for gaining proper knowledge is the procedures of natural science. Moreover, particularly under the influence of the doyen of modern American philosophers, W.V.O. Quine, who in turn was influenced by one of the great figures of Logical Positivism, Rudolf

Carnap, the paradigm of natural science, and so of exact positive knowledge, has come to be seen as physics.

Now philosophers of mind in the analytic tradition, like most other analytic philosophers, have also been infected by this 'scientism', that is, by this epistemological veneration of science in general and of physics in particular. One result of this piety, as we have already seen, has been the tendency to attempt to reduce talk about *any* events at a higher level to talk about micro events at the level of fundamental physics. Thus, in philosophy of mind, we have seen a concerted move to show that, at least eventually, we should seek to reduce our ordinary discussions about the nature of mind, in terms of beliefs, desires and the other prepositional attitudes, to talk about events at a lower level which will either be, or be a way-station on the line to, the terminus of giving descriptions of mental events in the language of physics.

In the last few decades of the twentieth century, this 'scientism' has been championed under a different banner, even if the end result is much the same. What I have in mind is what has become known as the 'naturalizing' tendency in modern philosophy of mind. The use of the term 'naturalizing' in modern philosophy of mind implies a reference to the desire and consequent programme of reducing descriptions of mental events to descriptions in terms of *the* or *a* natural science, that is, in terms of the natural science or sciences which are deemed appropriate to the scientific investigation of what goes on inside human heads. For that is where, with our naive 'folk psychology' of mental events, we (correctly, the 'naturalizers' would say) locate mental events. If now we can successfully 'naturalize' our talk about minds and mental events, then 'minds' will have successfully been interwoven with the rest of nature, and a genuine 'science of the mind' will have become a reality. The last vestige of that religious and Cartesian desire to have human 'souls' as something special and transcending the purely natural, will have been removed. Seeing matters in this way has made some philosophers, such as Ruth Garrett Millikan, David Papineau and Colin McGinn, turn to evolution and biology as the scientific basis for this process of 'naturalizing'. For evolution is a source of blind and uncompromising egalitarianism in so far as it explains how every type of living thing, including humans, and including human minds, is the result of the selective pressure of the environment acting upon the variety of species thrown up by evolution. This pathway to the 'naturalizing' of mind has gained in favour with the discovery in 1953, by James Watson and Francis Crick, of the structure of DNA (or the biochemical carrier of the genetic code). For this discovery, consonant with the rediscovered earlier work of Gregor Mendel in the nineteenth century, and building upon the work of many others in between, explains in much greater detail and with immense cogency how the essential step of 'a variety of

species being thrown up' can be brought about through the recombination of genes by sexual interaction and through chance genetic mutation.

Other philosophers of mind, such as in the 1960s, Place, Smart, Feigl and Armstrong, have realized the programme of 'naturalizing the mind' in a different direction. For, directly or indirectly, they have been greatly impressed by the remarkable advances in neurophysiology since Paul Broca's discovery of the brain mechanisms for the production of speech and Carl Wernicke's discovery of the main cortical region associated with the understanding of speech, in the nineteenth century. To those philosophers, encouraged very often by brain scientists themselves, it has seemed as if it is only a matter of time before all types of explanation in terms of mental events can be explained entirely by seeking the referents of mental terms at the level of events in the human brain.

So where will this 'scientism' lead us in the twenty-first century? One real possibility is that some philosophers of mind will say, 'Well, we've shown you the direction in which things must go. We've also shown you who are the ones that, professionally speaking, have a licence to travel in that direction, that is, the scientists from disciplines such as biology and neurophysiology and biochemistry and, perhaps, even physics. We shall just have, finally, to admit that psychology and philosophy of mind are now redundant. Their job has been done. Just as in the past the philosophical cosmologists had to hand over their subject to the astrophysicists and astronomers, so now psychologists and philosophers of mind should hand over their subject to these natural scientists of the mind.' However, another possibility, which may well be brought about, is that philosophers will say that physics and chemistry and biology and neurophysiology have had their chances, for a long time now, to take over philosophy of mind and psychology, but it simply has not happened. The best way of explaining most things in psychology, of a higher human cognitive sort, is still to do so in terms of beliefs and desires and the other 'prepositional attitudes'. What is more, the redundancy of such explanations, through the advance of neuroscience or some kindred natural science, does not look any more likely to happen in the next hundred years than in the last hundred years. While the physicists each year learn more about physics, and biologists about human biology, and neurophysiologists about the human brain, these gains have had little effect upon human psychology. What light on psychology and philosophy of mind has been shed by the sciences—to an extent by neurophysiology and biochemistry but not at all by physics and hardly at all by biology—has been shed, not upon the nature of beliefs and desires and the other prepositional attitudes, but upon the relation of brain processes to sleep, memory and sensation, and the relation of failures in brain mechanisms to organic mental disease or breakdown.

There are reasons for claiming that, just as was the case in Aristotle's time, psychology (and, for more theoretical purposes, philosophy of mind)

still seems to be the right level at which to investigate and explain the nature of those human mental powers and capacities which we call 'believing', 'desiring', 'loving' and 'hoping'. For in regard to these powers and capacities it might only be possible to individuate and understand them at that level at which we, ordinary folk, encounter them. When we talk about the 'prepositional attitudes' it may be that we are noticing and so talking about 'irreducibly macro slices' of another human's life or of our own life. For example, for us and for psychology as well, the vicar's belief in God might be his proneness to go to church, his readiness to preach to his parishioners about God and his disposition to pray to God for help whenever things go wrong. It might not make sense, even for professional psychology, to reduce this medley of dispositions to a lower level of description such as one involving reference to brain activities or, *a fortiori*, to one involving reference to events described and explained by sub-atomic physics. To put this another way, in so far as these items, belief and desire and love and hope, are 'natural', they might occur 'naturally' *only* at this high and macro level. So the 'natural science' that is best able to deal with them will be the one best suited to that level, namely psychology (and, for certain theoretical tasks, philosophy of mind). More generally speaking, this discovery may force us to widen our perspective on what we count as 'natural' and 'natural science'. In the future psychology, while still being seen as a *social* science, might again be viewed, incontrovertibly, as also a *natural* science.

CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the 'bogeys' of modern philosophy of mind is consciousness. If only we humans were not conscious, things in philosophy of mind would be so much easier and smoother. The common philosophical 'game plan' of 'naturalizing' the mind, by 'reducing' it to items which occur in and which we can explain fairly readily in terms of biology or neurophysiology or physics, would be made so much more plausible. But all philosophers of mind, as well as those involved in the brain sciences, have had to admit that we are completely confounded by consciousness. No scientist has even begun to make sense, say, of how it is that consciousness has evolved, or how it is that consciousness arises out of and is maintained by certain types of brain processing but not others.

Seen from another angle, consciousness spoils that sea of tranquillity we call 'objectivity'. By 'objectivity' is meant that procedure for gaining knowledge and that state of having gained knowledge which we associate with the procedures and data of the 'hard sciences' such as physics and chemistry. Their procedures and data are 'objective' because the procedures involve experiments or observations which are empirical, public and

replicable, and the ensuing data are mathematically quantifiable and testable by further experiment or observation. Consciousness, on the other hand, only exists as the particular stream of consciousness of a particular person, and its phenomenal contents are only directly knowable by that same person. That is, consciousness is subjective in both its mode of existence and in the way in which it can be known. Consciousness confounds our objective enquiries by its intrinsic subjectivity.

Continental philosophers are amazed that analytic philosophers are left dazed and confused by consciousness for, of course, that seminal movement of continental philosophy, Phenomenology, was all about consciousness and what one could learn about and from it. Sometimes, at least in its psychological mode as Introspectionism, it was seen as *the* specialist experimental sub-science of consciousness. At other times, in its more philosophical developments, it was depicted as a transcendental enterprise (i.e., one which transcended a mere empirical science because it involved the discovery of facts that depended on pure, non-empirical processes of reasoning or 'intuition').

Arguably, in modern analytic philosophy, it was the American Tom Nagel, soon to be aided and abetted by Colin McGinn and John Searle, who reintroduced 'the subjectivity of consciousness' as a fact that philosophy of mind would neglect at its peril. John Searle has suggested that modern philosophy of mind has been left for dead by this 'problem of consciousness' and that what we need to do is to bring it back to the centre of our discussions in philosophy of mind, for he believes that everything we call 'mental' is only mental in so far as it is either a part of consciousness or related in some way to consciousness. Colin McGinn, on the other hand, has voiced a note of despair, by suggesting that no type or style or method of philosophy will ever be able to solve the essential questions about consciousness, namely how it can arise from and causally interact with the undeniably physical commerce of brain processing. Most likely, he suggests, we will be the victims of 'cognitive closure' in respect of these central questions about the nature of consciousness, in much the same way that an infant suffers 'cognitive closure' in regard to any understanding of the Theory of Relativity. However our 'cognitive closure', because it is based on a permanent deficit in regard to the requisite conceptual powers, will be permanent.

The 'reductionist' philosophers, as one might expect, have suggested that consciousness is not anything special. It is just a product of a clever sort of manipulation of representations by a neurophysiological 'virtual reality' machine, the brain. Or else belief in consciousness is just an illusion that has been foisted on us by our wilful adherence to an outdated Cartesian vocabulary. Or else a belief in consciousness is a result of a sort of logico-linguistic fallacy, 'the phenomenal fallacy', that we can all fall into because of the way we express our ordinary perceptions of the world around us

and subsequently mishandle these expressions for philosophical or quasi-philosophical purposes. We can be seduced by such ordinary expressions as ‘I seem to see a red streak in the sky’ into adopting the philosophical view that perception involves the possession, somewhere in our head, of ‘seeming red streaks’ or ‘moments of red-streak consciousness’.

At any rate, I fear that ‘the problem of consciousness’ will not go away. One sign of hope for the future is that almost all those who say that an adequate account of consciousness is the most pressing need in philosophy of mind, or for that matter in psychology and neurophysiology, see consciousness as one of the products of the evolution of the purely physical world. And most of those would go further and support the view that consciousness is likely to be itself purely physical. It is on this point that, in the future, I expect to see philosophers of mind seeking help from philosophy of science. For to make plausible the claim that consciousness is physical, yet not physical in, say, the way that brain states and processes are, philosophers are going to have to investigate how and whether it might be possible to widen the concept of the physical beyond its present scope. Put more baldly, philosophers of science would have to provide grounds for a rather more catholic view, than is currently on offer, of what can be subsumed under the term ‘physical’.

The obverse of this tendency on the part of contemporary philosophers of mind to be sympathetic to seeing consciousness as just another part, albeit ‘a peculiar part’, of physical nature, is that there are very few—and these usually have some religious dogma to defend—who would set consciousness apart from the rest of the evolved natural world. So it is, I think, reasonable to assume that, in the future, philosophers of mind will not be returning to a Cartesian account of consciousness as being the core of a *sui generis* non-physical substance.

‘DUALISMS’

I would be prepared to wager my last *de profundis* dollar on the prediction that mainstream philosophy of mind will never again embrace a full-blooded dualism of soul (or mental substance) and body (or physical substance). However, as a betting man, that would be the extent of my taking up a financial position against dualism. For one does not have to peer too far back into the mists of philosophy of mind over the last hundred years or so to discover that it is deeply impregnated with other, non-substance, dualisms.

William James himself set the tone for this ambivalent combination of a reluctance to take on substance dualism while at the same time embracing some other form of dualism. While at least giving the impression that he was not happy with full-blooded substance dualism, James seemed to

feel that a dualism of a stream of consciousness contrasted with its underlying brain processing was unavoidable. Historically, other dualisms came on the scene some time after the rejection of the Jamesian version. For it was after the advent of Behaviourism in both philosophy and psychology, and after the brief reign in philosophy of the Identity Theorists (who bluntly proclaimed that minds were *nothing but* brains), that the philosophical microbe of dualism reinserted itself into the bloodstream of modern philosophy of mind.

Thus early classical 'Computer Functionalism' in philosophy of mind, of the 1960s and 1970s, associated, say, with the early papers of Putnam on Functionalism, advocated a dualism of functional description (into which pigeon-hole mental state descriptions, such as talk about beliefs and desires and intentions, were to be placed) and of structural or physical description (into which pigeon-hole talk about brain states and brain processing was to be located). The analogy that was sometimes drawn at that time, to illustrate this dualism (of function versus structure), was the contrast between talk about a computer's 'software' (its program) and talk about a computer's 'hardware' (its electronics). Thus one could have functional isomorphism (or 'sameness of task performed') between a human engaged in a certain task, saying alphabeticizing a list of students in the Junior Freshman class, and a digital computer engaged in the same task. For while they are both carrying out the same function and so merit the same abstract functional description, the human and the computer are obviously made of different 'stuff' and so would be described quite differently at the level of physical or structural description.

Later Functionalists, such as, say, Fodor or Dretske, would prefer their dualism to be made, ultimately, in terms of the contrast between two sorts of brain processing. One sort of brain processing was that which in an essential way involved representational brain states that interacted causally, with one another and with other non-representational states, in virtue of the semantic (or meanings of the) contents represented. The other sort of brain processing involved brain states which were not representational and so had a purely non-semantic causal role. Our mental states belonged with (and were usually held to exhaust) the class of brain processes involving representational states.

Others endorsed a dualism (or even a 'trialism') but did so in a much more guarded way. Daniel Dennett, as I have already mentioned, identified the mental life of humans with that class and type of human behaviour which could usefully be picked out by our deliberately taking up an 'intentional stance' to humans. The 'intentional stance' was taken up or assumed when a person treated another human as an 'intentional system', and an intentional system was one whose behaviour could be 'explained and predicted by relying on ascriptions to the system of beliefs and desires (and hopes, fears, intentions, hunches...)' (Dennett, 1995:191). This

‘intentional stance’ was to be contrasted with ‘the design stance’ (whereby one sought to explain and predict a system’s behaviour by reference to its ‘blueprint’ or organization or design) and with the ‘physical stance’ (whereby one sought to predict a system’s behaviour by reference to its physics or chemistry). Eventually, Dennett suggested, we may be able to reduce descriptions made from the intentional stance to descriptions produced from either of the other two stances. Certainly we should aim at doing so, given that the substituted lower-level description is not too prolix or detailed to be useful.

Donald Davidson, perhaps the subtlest of all modern modified and reluctant dualists, proposed—more implicitly than explicitly—yet another version of this dualism of descriptions. Davidson suggested that the intentionality of our mental descriptions was not just a matter of taking up a ‘stance’ for pragmatic purposes, for the intentionality of such descriptions cannot, ever, be reduced to any level of non-intentional descriptions. But, nevertheless, the intentionality is more in the description than in the human brain or even, perhaps, in the human person. For this form of description is forced upon us. We could not cope with the necessity to interact with other humans unless we looked upon them as believing-desiring creatures. However, to operate with such belief-desire type descriptions, in such a way that they also deliver useful predictions, we have to infuse such intentional descriptions with normative components. We attribute a belief or a desire or any other propositional attitude to a human against a background of assuming, somewhat charitably perhaps, that humans are rational, consistent and coherent as regards their attitudes. Often, of course, humans are not all that rational, consistent and coherent in their attitudes, but we must think of them as if they are, if we are to make sense of them. Besides, if we did not make such an assumption, we could not produce neat and usable intentional descriptions. However, while admitting that all there is to humans, ontologically speaking, is physical ‘stuff’, we should not seek to reduce our intentional descriptions to physical descriptions such as descriptions of brain processes. For a start there is no echo at any physical level of the normative aspects of our intentional descriptions. Furthermore, there are no strict causal *laws* at the level of intentional explanations, nor between the level of belief-desire descriptions and brain-process descriptions. Strict causal laws only apply at the level of the brain process descriptions or, at least, some level of physical description. The autonomy of psychology, at least of that which is carried out in terms of the intentional attitudes, is thus assured, but the price to pay is that the ‘science’ of this sort of psychology will not be on a par with the strict causal-law sciences such as physics and chemistry.

Of late, John Searle, especially in his book *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, has suggested what might be called ‘a dualism of physical properties’ or, perhaps more accurately, ‘a dualism of the biological’. For just as

liquidity is a higher level or macro emergent property of water which cannot be found at the level of the hydrogen and oxygen micro components of water, so it may be that the correct way to look at consciousness (which Searle more or less identifies with our mental life) is as a macro property that emerges from certain sorts of micro brain processing. So Searle is proposing that consciousness, and so our mental life, only emerges out of biological creatures such as humans and other higher organisms. No machine, which is not biological, no matter how sophisticated, will ever exhibit that duality of consciousness and brain processing. Searle's dualism, then, has some affinities with that of William James. The difference between the two is that James would not want to refer to consciousness as biological or physical. In that sense, James was much closer to Cartesian dualism than is Searle.

All the contemporary analytic philosophers who have explicated the nature of our mental life in terms of some dualism (or, at times, a 'trialism?'), have been unabashed physicalists. That is, they have not sought to explain our mental life as essentially different from the physical but, rather, as different from ordinary ground-level physical events. They have all felt the need to separate off mental physical events from other physical events or, at least, to separate mental descriptions of physical events from other descriptions of physical events. Conversely, they have resolutely eschewed any temptation to make human minds 'special' in the sense that human minds should be thought of as 'outside evolution' or 'specially created by God' or 'mysteriously emergent'. Even someone like Searle, who would be willing to describe consciousness as 'emergent', would not want to deny that there will come a time when we will be able to explain its emergence by means of some future neurophysiology or biology or physics. The philosopher who comes nearest to describing at least some aspects of our mental life as mysterious would be Colin McGinn, when he writes that the conceptual and cognitive capacities of humans might be such that they will suffer, forever, a form of 'cognitive closure' as regards how consciousness arises out of certain sorts of brain processing.

However, many contemporary philosophers of mind, if not of one mind, have been at least loosely convergent upon the view that a human's mental life is different from his or her non-mental life. Some, as we have seen, namely the 'refuseniks', have argued it is so different that the former will never be reducible to the latter.

From the point of view of my attempt to peer at the dark side of time, it seems reasonable to assume that some form of dualism-of-the-physical is essential for any adequate explanation of the mental life of humans. In what terms this dualism should be described, no one can say. But the options have become clearer over the last half-century. The dualism in question might amount to a claim that mental descriptions are purely *instrumental*—that is, one adopts mental descriptions, as distinct from

the ordinary physical descriptions of some natural science, as useful for a specific purpose, but one must not think of such descriptions in any stronger way. Or the dualism might be one which gives mental descriptions the status of *higher level descriptions* in comparison with 'lower level' neurophysiological or biological or physical descriptions. Given that view, then one has to decide whether such 'higher level descriptions' are reducible or irreducible to other levels, and if irreducible, why that might be so. Then the dualism one chooses might be one of *emergent properties or processes* versus non-emergent properties or processes. If one goes along that path and identifies mental properties and processes as emergent, then one must be prepared to explain how such events and properties could emerge, or else give good reasons why no such explanation is, or perhaps can be, forthcoming.

An alternative possibility is that in the future philosophers of mind will turn their back on these existing alternatives and try and construct new ones. For example, philosophers might want to try out a dualism of *modes of the physical*. That is, mental events might be contrasted with brain events as two distinct 'modes of the physical'. This would mean that both mental events, including conscious events, and neurophysiological events are physical events (and both, presumably, biological events as well) but that they are physical *in different ways*. For example, they may be both 'modes of the physical' in the way that, in certain parts of physics, matter and energy are considered to be two different but not incompatible modes of the physical. Perhaps nature (the physical 'stuff' of nature) is inevitably 'shot through' with dualities of various kinds. This way of embracing dualism in nature would have the benefit of making it clear, conceptually clear, that there could be causal interaction between the particular duality of brain processes and consciousness, while at the same time making it clear that there was a biological dependence of consciousness upon brain processing. It would also make it clear that consciousness is not to be identified with brain processes of any sort. Finally it would indicate an optimism about the possibility of finding a scientific explanation of how consciousness could be a non-mysterious product of evolution.

However, this whole focus upon dualisms will wane in importance if our interest in consciousness wanes once again. While realizing that we need some sort of dualism in order to explain the consciousness/brain-process distinction, we may feel that 'a dualism' is too confining a conceptual scheme to cope with the whole of our mental life. Philosophers might be forced into adopting a much more radical and complex picture of our mental life, one which might be more 'pluralist' than dualist. Maybe our mental life should be seen, as some have already seen it, in a much more biological way. By this I mean, however, not the attempt to define the terms of our mental vocabulary in biological terms, but the attempt to view our mental life as much more of a continuum with the

mental life of animals and infants than we usually do. Perhaps we should get away from the practice of taking our folk psychological vocabulary of the prepositional attitudes as the starting point of an enquiry into the nature of the mental, and instead start with the study of the embryonic or proto-mental life of very primitive organisms. Perhaps, as Darwin would have said, our mental life is far more continuous with the mental life of other species than we usually care to acknowledge or investigate. In fact the strong focus on the 'prepositional attitudes' over the last thirty or forty years may turn out to have been a misleading emphasis. For the 'prepositional attitudes' may be closer to being 'conceptual kinds' (kinds carved out by our 'conceptual schemes', that is, by distinctions of fact made on the basis of a set of conventionally agreed, distinguishing concepts) than 'natural kinds' (kinds selected by evolution). And so, perhaps, they should be equated only with items generated by the highly sophisticated mental life of persons in cultures which have a highly developed conceptual language and so a 'folk psychology'. The answers to the real 'core questions' about our mental life, about consciousness and about our ability to bring information into 'our system' through the senses and then to process it in such a way as to produce purposive actions and reactions, may only reveal themselves through a study of animal psychology and the biology of primitive organisms.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Let me try to influence the future a little. What I would like to see—though I fear it will take some time to be realized—is philosophers of mind also discussing topics other than just 'the mind-body problem' or 'the problem of intentionality'. I would like to see a return to serious and scholarly and scientifically informed investigations into such topics as memory and, especially, imagination. Imagination seems to be the neglected orphan of modern analytic philosophy of mind. Emotion and perception have fared a little better than memory or imagination, but not that much better. Possibly for no better reasons than sheer exhaustion from and stultifying boredom with yet more discussions about intentionality and the mind-body (or consciousness-brain) problem, I believe that, eventually, mainstream philosophy of mind will again discuss these other topics in philosophy of mind.

As philosophy of language recedes further from the centre of analytic philosophy—it has already been pushed from the centre by philosophy of mind—and as Frege, Wittgenstein and the Logical Positivists become historically more remote from the present, philosophy of mind will become less focused on our mental vocabulary as 'the way in' to philosophy of mind. Since philosophy of mind has probably got as much as it can, at

least for some considerable time, from neurophysiology, that 'way in' will also fade in importance. So other 'ways in' will be explored. I have already suggested biology as a possible avenue. Another might be developmental psychology or ethology.

As do all models that are employed in philosophy of mind, so will the digital computer (and its more abstract relative, the Turing Machine) fade in importance as a model for the mind. This process is already in progress. Connectionist, and in general non-representational information processors, are already replacing the digital computer as a model for the hardware of our cognitive and appetitive life. There is no reason to think that, over the next hundred years, some completely new model, say one taken from new research in biology, may not be the dominant one for explaining the brain's relation to our mental life.

However, there is no denying that philosophy of mind in the twenty-first century will be very much the Lamarckian offspring of philosophy of mind in the twentieth century. Philosophers of mind in the twenty-first century will not be able to avoid learning some clear lessons from the last hundred years, much of it about what roads not to take. For example, I doubt whether mainstream analytic philosophy of mind will ever again seriously consider the exaggerated bifurcation of Substance Dualism, or the resolute anti-dualism-of-any-kind that was characteristic of Behaviourism, the Identity Theory or Eliminative Materialism, as possible solutions to the mind-body problem. For, with that hubris that comes with hindsight, these 'solutions' to the mind-body problem now seem unsubtle and unattuned to the complexity of our mental life, and so destined for the philosophical scrap-heap.

In more positive vein, on the Darwinian model of the survival of certain organic species and the extinction of others owing to the selective pressure of the environment in the evolutionary process, I think that the last hundred years have narrowed the options as regards what is to count as an adequate theory of mind by extinguishing quite a significant number of theories. The options thrown up in the twenty-first century will be even subtler variants of those subtle accounts that have survived the selective pressure of philosophical debate and are still being seriously discussed today.

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RECOMMENDED READING

The anthology, *Modern Philosophy of Mind*, edited by William Lyons, (London: Everyman, rev. impr. 1996) contains classical articles by most of the philosophers mentioned in the foregoing chapter, together with an introduction which gives a brief history of modern philosophy of mind from William James to the present.

Good recent introductory textbooks in philosophy of mind are Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness: A Contemporary Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984); Jenny Teichman, *Philosophy and the Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); and Stephen Priest, *Theories of Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991). All are now available in paperback editions. Excellent, though more challenging, introductions to the very recent debates in philosophy of mind are Georges Rey, *Contemporary Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Frank Jackson and David Braddon-Mitchell, *Philosophy of Mind and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); and Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1996).

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