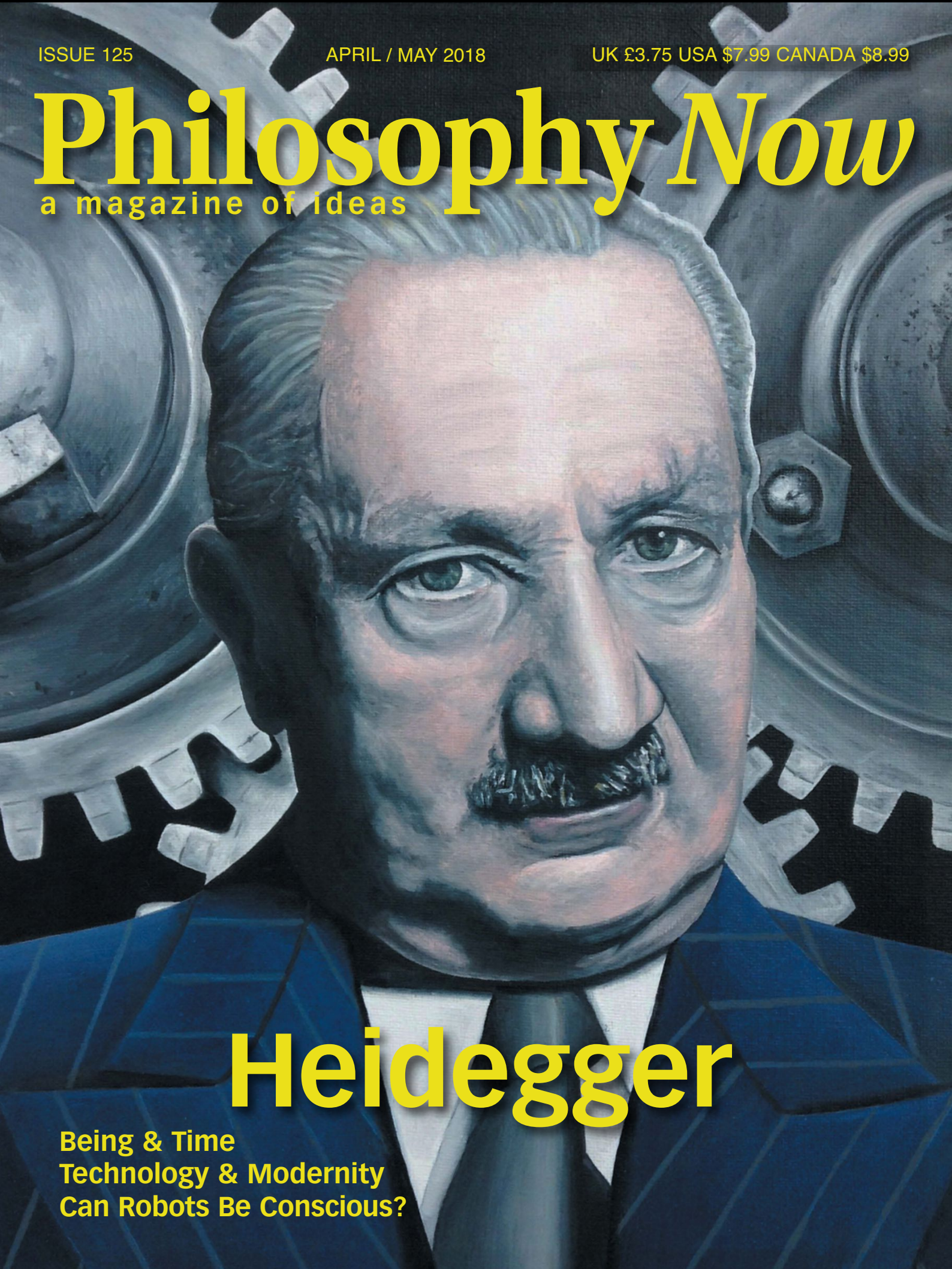
ISSUE 125 APRIL / MAY 2018 UK £3.75 USA $7.99 CANADA $8.99

Philosophy *Now*

a magazine of ideas



Heidegger

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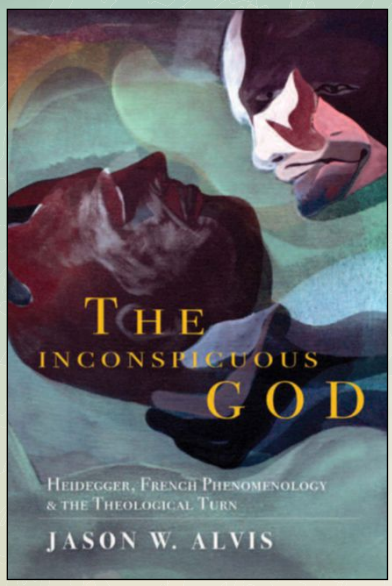

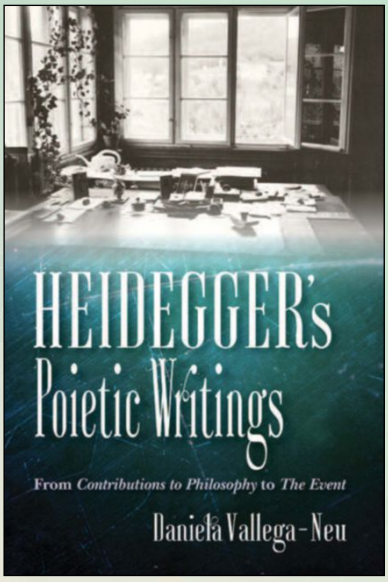

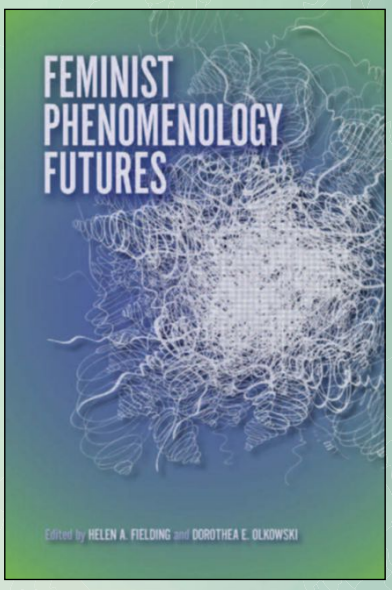

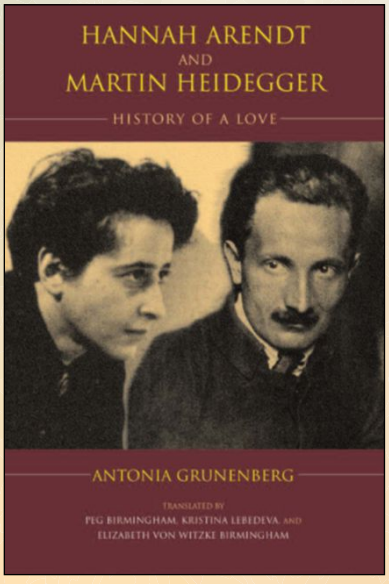

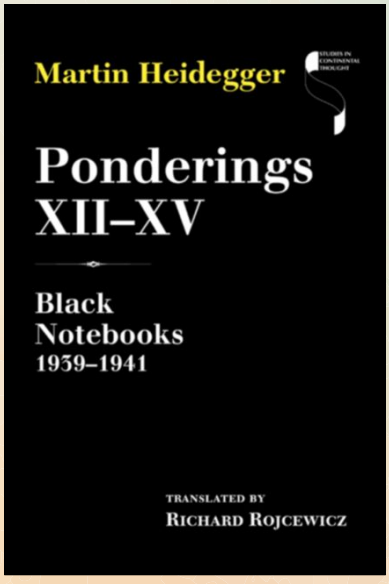

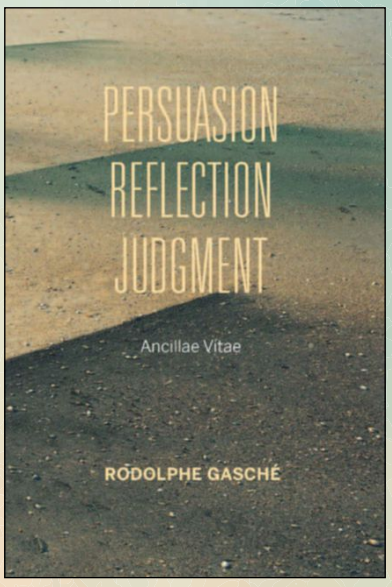

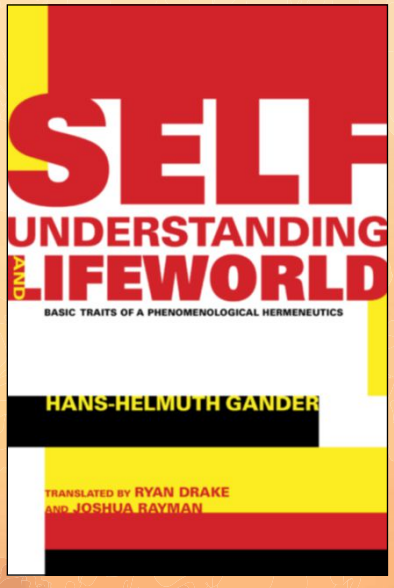

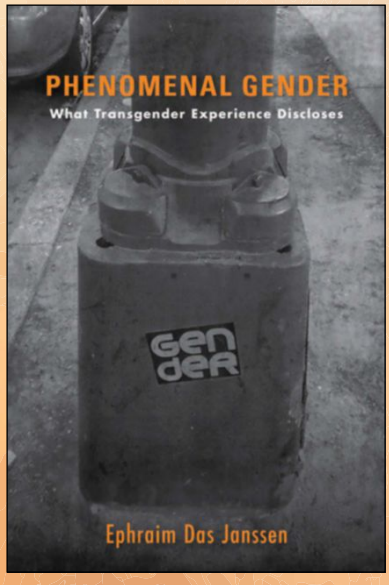

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Philosophy *Now* ISSUE 125 Apr/May 2018

Philosophy *Now*,
43a Jerningham Road,
Telegraph Hill,
London SE14 5NQ
United Kingdom
Tel. 020 7639 7314
editors@philosophynow.org
philosophynow.org

Editor-in-Chief Rick Lewis
Editors Anja Steinbauer, Grant Bartley
Digital Editor Bora Dogan
Graphic Design Grant Bartley, Katy Baker, Anja Steinbauer
Book Reviews Editor Teresa Britton
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Marketing Manager Sue Roberts
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Advertising Team
Jay Sanders, Ellen Stevens
jay.sanders@philosophynow.org
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Cover Image *Martin Heidegger* by Ron Schepper 2018. (editor@textura.org)

Printed by The Manson Group Ltd
8 Porters Wood, Valley Road Industrial Estate, St Albans AL3 6PZ

Worldwide newstrade distribution:
Intermedia Brand Marketing Ltd
Tel. +44 1293 312001

Australian newstrade distribution:
Gordon & Gotch pty
Level 2, 9 Rodborough Road
French's Forest, NSW 2086
Tel. 02 9972 8800

The opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or editorial board of *Philosophy Now*.

Philosophy *Now* is published by
Anja Publications Ltd
ISSN 0961-5970

Subscriptions p.52
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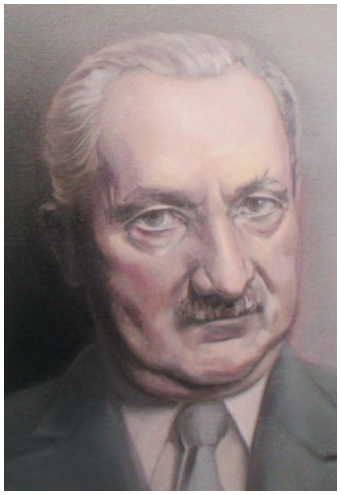

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Editorial

The Fight for the Soul of Philosophy

"The most thought-provoking thing in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking."

This quotation voices a frustration that many great thinkers have expressed in their own ways, from Heraclitus to Nietzsche and beyond. What makes this one special is that it comes from the most controversial of all philosophers, Martin Heidegger. That he was thinking is beyond doubt: he was one of the greatest philosophers the Western tradition has seen, more about that later. He was however, also one of the most flawed. Some of his central life decisions show him to be an opportunist without loyalty to his friends, his students and even his mentor, the great Husserl, not to speak of his wife. His private notebooks contain a few unambiguously anti-Semitic passages. He was a Nazi sympathiser from 1933 onwards, believing himself to be the defender of academic thought and the university in a new era. He remained unrepentant throughout his life. My old philosophy professor and longtime *Philosophy Now* contributor Peter Rickman used to sarcastically remark that it seemed Heidegger couldn't see that it had been his fault, rather, it looked like he expected Hitler to rise from the grave and to apologise to him for not having met his expectations. So, Heidegger, were you yourself taking a holiday from thinking here?

I've known many philosophers and most are lovely people. But not all. Being a professional philosopher correlates with cleverness, rather than niceness, and a glance at the history of ideas reveals geniuses who were also difficult and sometimes untrustworthy. Yet there is a difference between simply not being a nice person, which can happen to anyone, and making a terrible judgement as a consequence of deep deliberation and with all the tools of top quality thinking at your fingertips. The former is a shame, but the latter is a monumental crisis. In the good company of Plato, Kant, Bertrand Russell and many others, I deeply believe in the potential of good quality thinking to improve the quality of public discourse and public life. This is why Heidegger as a person has been such a frustrating enigma to me. What is the point of philosophy if it can't even save a philosopher of Heidegger's calibre, who, to add insult to injury, had thoroughly studied Plato and Aristotle, from making such terrible life choices and judgements? I asked some Heidegger scholars about this; you can read their replies in 'The Trouble with Martin'.

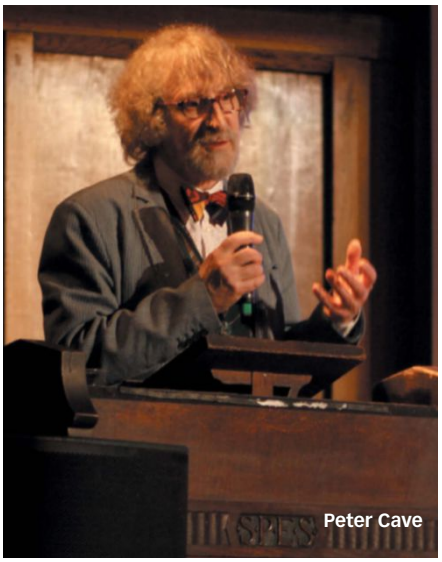
This isn't the only way in which Heidegger makes us reconsider the meaning and limits of philosophy. Heidegger believed the question "What is?" to be central to philosophy itself. What distinguishes humans from other animals is that they have language and this means that they have a special way of relating to Being, in other words, the potential for philosophical activity. Heidegger asks the question of the meaning and definition of philosophy again and again throughout his life and in different contexts. One such context is the history of philosophy. How can we do justice to the undeniably historical character of philosophy without becoming mere administrators of the past? Heidegger emphasises that philosophy is more than its tradition, and this leads him to the question of 'Being', an issue which, as Plato says, inflames a "battle, like that of the gods and giants." He has a vision of the unique way human beings exist in and relate to the world, and how this affects who we are and how we interact with everything. This is utterly fundamental to all philosophical enquiry. His ideas here have deeply influenced virtually every thinker who came after him in the Continental tradition. You see why he matters so much? Andrew Royle explains these core ideas of Heidegger in our lead article.

What was Heidegger like? Accounts of the handsome young philosopher with the charming and fascinating personality stand in stark contrast to the wooden photos that we have of him. He was an accomplished, almost professional skier. He felt most comfortable in nature and spent much of his time up in the mountains, in a sparsely furnished hut. Water had to be drawn from a nearby well. Heidegger cherished the solitude. Only his love of philosophy and his need to pursue it in an academic context chased this natural recluse away from his Black Forest isolation into the busy life of the university. Here, he was a star; his *Being and Time*, though understood by only a few, became a bestseller. Matthew Barnard's article discusses this celebrity philosopher's perspective on celebrity. Still, he was always keen to avoid the big city, declining an offer of a professorship in Berlin, spending all his professional life in the smaller, less frantic, cities of Freiburg and Marburg. He was a popular but difficult lecturer, his measured way of talking revealing the carefully prowling thinker: intense, focused, relentlessly digging deeper and deeper into a problem, never giving up, never distracted.

Heidegger didn't believe mass media to be an appropriate means for philosophical discourse. He preferred one-to-one dialogue. Books too fulfilled this condition, since the reader can engage with them on their own terms, whereas TV or radio are not conducive to understanding. This ties in with a more general scepticism of technology (please read Bob James' article). Heidegger didn't dislike technology but worried about its unreflected, uncritical acceptance. He was adamant that we must make an effort to fully understand this life-changing aspect of our human existence.

I leave him here for you to judge, the man who is so impossible to understand, the philosopher who helps us understand so much.

Anja Steinbauer


Peter Cave

The Philosophy *Now* Festival 2018

Report by our Special Correspondent

Outside it was a cold, damp January day in central London, but inside Conway Hall was warmth, fellowship, the buzz of conversation and the crackle of ideas. Children in facepaint headed for their own philosophy workshops (run by the Philosophy Foundation) or mingled with their elders in the hallways and café.

The 4th Philosophy Now Festival on 20 January 2018 ran for the entire day from 10am to 10pm, and consisted of more than thirty separate philosophy-related events – philosophy talks, workshops, debates, activities, panels discussions and games. The Festival is held every two years, and as usual we were the guests of Conway Hall in their magnificent building. Numerous organisations took part including Philosophy For All and Oxford University's Uehiro Centre for Ethics, and the day was powered by the enthusiasm of dozens of speakers and volunteers.

The Great Balloon Debate

One of the Festival's most popular attractions, as always, was the Balloon Debate. The idea is this: imagine a hot air balloon is crossing the Alps with four world-famous philosophers in the basket. Unfortunately it is overladen, and will crash unless somebody is thrown out. Which philosopher should be ejected first? Which should go next? Each of the four is represented by a modern-day philosopher who speaks on their behalf, explaining why they should not be hurled from the balloon. Then the audience votes on who to eject. This year the four airborne sages were: Bishop Berkeley, The Buddha, Søren Kierkegaard and Bertrand Russell. Their representatives waxed eloquent about their philosophical and personal merits. After three rounds of voting only Bertie Russell (represented by Anja Steinbauer) remained aloft.

Fun and Games

Major highlights included Peter Cave's George Ross Memorial lecture on 'Myths, Morality and McTaggart's Cat'. The Royal Institute of Philosophy's Director, Professor Anthony O'Hear addressed a packed lecture room on 'Philosophy: Limits and Vocation'. There was a roundtable discussion on 'Artificial Intelligence, the Singularity, and the Future', and another on 'Nationalism and Multiculturalism'. Sevenoaks School sent a group of sixth-form students who gave impressive and intriguing five-minute talks on topics from Time Travel to Sartre. Activities included 'The Anti-Philosophers' (come and have an argument with us!); a workshop on mental toughness and a session in which people were helped to explore what, for them, constituted happiness. Talks covered topics including mathematical knowledge; philosophy of science; personal identity; reality, and even 'David Bowie and Philosophy'. Naturally, there was a Café Philo session hosted by Christian Michel, who runs them regularly at the Institut Francais.

Against Stupidity Awards

Every year since 2011, *Philosophy Now* magazine has given a trophy for Contributions in the Fight Against Stupidity. Due to the timing of this year's Festival, it was decided that both the 2017 and the 2018 Awards should be made at the event.

The 2017 Award was given to magician and investigator James Randi. Known during his stage career as The Amazing Randi, he increasingly turned his skills to investigating paranormal and pseudoscientific claims. For many years Randi made a speciality of exposing fraud by purported psychics and televangelists. He was given the 2017 Award for entertainingly highlighting two universal human characteristics that he says are essential to the magician's trade: the ability of people to be fooled, and the willingness of people to fool themselves.

The 2018 Award went to biologist Professor Robert Sapolsky, who accepted it via a live but patchy video link from California. Sapolsky was given the Award for the originality and brilliance of his expositions of the connections between biology and human behaviour, including his Stanford University lecture courses which are available online. His many books include *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* and *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. Scientists sometimes change the way we think about the world. Sapolsky changes the way we think about the way we think (and feel, and behave).

Next year's Award will be presented in January 2019. Nominations are open!

Live Stream

One problem with the Philosophy Now Festival has always been that it tends only to involve people who live in or near London. We've been working on that. This year, for the first time, some of the Festival events were livestreamed to the *Philosophy Now* website so that they could be watched in real time anywhere in the world. You can see the videos now at philosophynow.org/videos or on the *Philosophy Now* YouTube channel.

Heidegger portrait © Woodrow Cowher 2018 Please visit woodrawspictures.com

Heidegger's Ways of Being

Andrew Royle introduces Heidegger's key ideas from his classic *Being and Time*, showing how they lead towards his concept of Being-towards-death.

"If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life – and only then will I be free to become myself."

Martin Heidegger

This article considers aspects of the philosophy of the German phenomenologist/existentialist Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), finally applying them in the context of bereavement. As Heidegger's writings are filled with many highly technical terms, I'll provide some background to his thinking, drawing from two rather technical texts: Heidegger's 1927 magnum opus *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*] (Joan Stambaugh's 1996 translation), and *The Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters*, edited by Medard Boss (1987).

The formidable task that Heidegger sets himself in *Being and Time* is to respond to the question 'What is Being'? This 'Question of Being' has a long heritage in the Western philosophical tradition, but for Heidegger, to merely ask *what* is Being? is problematic, as that emphasis tends to objectify Being as a 'thing' – that is to say, it separates off 'Being' (whatever it is) from the questioner of Being. This for Heidegger is making unhelpful assumptions of the nature of Being even before interrogating

what Being actually is. Therefore, rather than asking 'What is Being?', Heidegger begins with the question '*Whom* is asking the question of Being?' This question – the whom of Being – includes the possibility that the questioners themselves may actually contribute in some way to the Being under question. Heidegger's starting point thus asks *whom* is this Being "that in its Being is concerned about its very Being." (*Being and Time*, p.11)

To mark this starting point, and perhaps recognizing that referring to a 'Being that in its Being is concerned about its very Being' is a bit of a mouthful, to refer to this Being Heidegger coins the first of many neologisms: *Dasein*. This German word translates into English in many ways, including 'there-being', or my preferred used, 'there is': there is… a question, there is… a questioner, there is… in the question, a concern about Being. There is, it seems, something – but what is 'there is'? He reserves judgement for now, but nevertheless gives the Being-questioning Being the name *Dasein*. Heidegger's creative approach towards language use here is intended to avoid the unhelpful psychological and philosophical associations had by using such terms as 'subject' or 'ego' – especially as these will become the very concepts that Heidegger will later subvert. English-speaking Heideggerians tend to use the term 'Dasein' untranslated.

Being There

Heidegger gives two core characteristics of Dasein:
i) Dasein *exists*: "the essence of Dasein lies in its existence" (p.42).
ii) Dasein is *mine*: "the Being, whose analysis our task is, is always mine" (p.42).

The first, seemingly obvious point, is that Dasein, the Being that is concerned about its Being, can only *be* first of all if it exists: it is essential that it *is*.

By referring to 'essence', Heidegger begins to articulate what he means by is-ness or Being. For example, take a table: the essence of a table is the very thing that makes a table a table and not something else, whatever this is. We may for instance say that a table is a table if something can be placed upon it, and if it doesn't fulfill this criteria then it is not a table. In the same way, the essence of Dasein – what Dasein is – is that it exists. If it doesn't exist, then it is not Dasein. Without existence, Dasein wouldn't have any ground (or Being) to ask the question of Being at all. Later Existential philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, have referred to this primacy of existence as the 'first principle of Existentialism': as Sartre put it, 'existence precedes essence'. For Heidegger, the essential quality of Being is found in its very existence.

The second characteristic of Dasein, its 'mineness', refers to the 'whom' of existence. Things do not simply float around in the world in detached ways. Rather, it is *me* that is writing this paper; *I* am thinking about Heidegger; it is *my* fingers that type at the keyboard. (In the German, 'mine-ness' is *Jemeinigkeit*, which can translate as "always my own or in each case mine" (p.450).) If the *is* of 'there is', of Dasein, concerns the general ground of existence that all things must have in order to be, then the *there* of Dasein's 'there is' concerns a particular perspective of Being – my view, his thoughts, their Being… Moreover, I do not hear questions in a 'universal' or abstract way, but rather I hear questions in a particular language: I also hear them at a particular place and time, which gives contextual meaning to what is heard. For example, I hear somebody speak 'on a train', or 'in a tepee', or 'in a lecture hall' – each carries contextual associations that informs the meaning of what I hear and how it's heard. I may also hear something 'in the middle of the night' differently to how I hear it 'in the middle of the day', for example.

That I have an existence that is 'mine' is Heidegger's hallmark of Dasein: it is what he calls our *Being-in-the-world*. But let me be clear about this: Heidegger's Being-in-the-world does not mean that Dasein is in the world in the same way that water is in a glass or a dress is in a closet: he is not arguing that 'Dasein' exists in one place and 'the world' in another place next to it. On the contrary, Heidegger says that this erroneous 'relationship of location' is the big mistake of Western Philosophy, and one which he is seeking to put right. Such an error has meant that we tend to think of people as inner 'subjects' separated from outer 'objects', and philosophy has tended to focus on the discrepancy between these inner and outer worlds. Heidegger's radical philosophy argues against this separation of Dasein and the world, and instead argues for an 'entangled' [*verfallen*] Being. We might say that Dasein is entangled in the world it is with.

Hammering Heidegger Home

To explain our entanglement further, Heidegger uses the example of a workman using a hammer. A workman reaches out for a hammer, instinctively weighs it in his hand, and begins to work. Each blow is hammered out with tiny, imperceptible adjustments of velocity and trajectory – adjustments that the workman does automatically and is barely aware of making. In fact, the more competent the workman, the less aware he is of the hammer at all: he simply hammers away. The movements in his hand are realized in movements of the hammer in such a way that the hammer serves as an extension of the workman's hand. In this way the hammer and the workman are together, entangled. The moment the workman begins to contemplate the hammer as a separate object or 'thing', something gets in the way: something doesn't work properly, and the very Being of the hammer itself gets lost. To simply stare at the hammer, to think about it as a separate 'thing', does not reveal anything of the *Being* of the hammer. In this way, the Being of the hammer is disclosed in its utility, its use: it is *with* the workman, in hammering, that the Being of the hammer is revealed.

By extension, Heidegger argues that it is through what Dasein *does* that Dasein comes to understand itself and its Being: our Being comes to us in what we do. I understand myself as a 'workman' through my actions as a workman – through actions such as hammering. In this way, there is no escape, we cannot think our way out of our Being-in-the-world – we are committed to it as our precise way of Being.

Heidegger further explains that Dasein's has 'relevance' (*Verweisung*) by virtue of its Being-in-the-world. 'Relevance' here means "to let something be together with something else" (p.82). The workman is a workman not only due to his hammering, but also due to everything work-related that he is together with, that is, everything is relevant to him as a workman. This includes such things as wood, saws, nails, chisels, carpentry, artistry, commerce, craftsmanship, and so on. The Being of the workman is entangled *with* such objects, states, and entities, even though he may be some distance from them, and even

> For Heidegger, we do not exist as isolated individuals; just as we are committed to Being-in-the-world, so too we are committed to Being-with-others.

if they don't have material existence (NB Heidegger's phenomenological philosophy is contrary to a materialist paradigm). A specific act of hammering discloses Dasein's Being-with (*Mit-sein*) status: it discloses not only that 'there is' workmanship, aesthetics, trade, and so on, but also that Dasein has relevance to such aspects, that is, is with such aspects in its Being-in-the-world. Such wider aspects of the world as craft, skill, trade associations and commerce are there, in what Heidegger calls 'circumspection', meaning that they are there in the surrounding world relationally. Just as the workshop is there surrounding the workman, so in a similar way is the world there and with Dasein. In Heidegger, the part not only relates to the whole, but works to disclose the whole, just as the whole relates to and discloses the part.

Switching The Light On

Let us remain with our workman in his workshop, and now imagine that the workman reaches out for a hammer and finds instead an empty space. In now looking for his hammer, the workman starts to notice his workshop, which has been *there*, surrounding him, all the time. He casts an eye over the shelves, seeing dust; he spies a cracked window; becomes aware of a spider moving across the ceiling; he notices the detritus of uncompleted tasks and worries about deadlines. Heidegger says, in this 'looking around', the referential context of Being is 'lit up' (p.74). By virtue of the space of the missing hammer it's as if a light switches on and Dasein sees the world that has been *there* all along.

The important point is that this light is not switched on 'out there' in the world; rather, Dasein switches on a light for him/herself, in the doing, in his/her interaction with the world. Generally, the world is categorized and created for the workman in the context of his particular concerns: he 'sees' a missed deadline in a half-finished barrel, or he 'hears' his boss's rebuke through the space of the missing hammer. The empty space becomes a disclosing ground for Dasein to conjure and create the world. In doing this, Heidegger describes Dasein as a '*Lumen Naturale*' (a natural light), which lights up its Being-in-the-world "in such a way as to be its [own] there" (p.129).

Being-With-Others

In a similar way to Dasein's entangled relationship with world, so too is Dasein entangled with other people. For Heidegger, we do not exist as isolated individuals; just as we are committed to Being-in-the-world, so too are we committed to *Being-with-others*. For Heidegger, it is impossible for an "isolated I without other to be given" (p.115). This is because, whatever I am – a son, father, husband, or bereaved, etc – necessarily refers to and infers the existence of others – a parent, child, wife, or a deceased loved one. So at the same time that I claim my existence, my 'mineness', I also necessarily declare the incontrovertible existence of others.

Let us not underestimate the profound significance of Heidegger's move here, which is a direct refutation of René Descartes' solitary introspection some three hundred years earlier, reversing Descartes' sceptical starting point for philosophy. Descartes asks, How can I be sure that the world and other people actually exist? He replies to himself that whilst I may doubt the world and others, whilst doubting, I am at least thinking – I cannot doubt *that*. "I think therefore I am" writes Descartes famously. Yet from a Heideggerian perspective, it is a contradiction-in-terms to say "I doubt the existence of others", since the very positing of 'I' necessarily refers to (in Heideggerian terms, has relevance to) a 'you' or an 'other'. Just as Heidegger's workman claims his existence as a workman in relevance with the world of his workshop, so too does each Dasein claim its I-hood from the world of others that it is necessarily with and which is relevant to it: the I necessarily posits the not-I, because Dasein comes to understand itself from the world of things and of other people. In this way, 'other' is intimately predicated by and entangled with Dasein. Heidegger therefore states that "Dasein is essentially a Being-with" (p.170).

Although Heidegger's argument works to abate Descartes' solipsism, at the same time it opens up a new problem. Whilst the 'I' (or 'ego') was indubitably alone for Descartes, it was also secure, untouched by others, whereas in Heidegger's philosophy, the with-ness of others becomes a problem to be negotiated. What is the sphere of influence of the 'other'?: could the other undermine my own agency, or even my 'mine-ness' *per se*? So for Heidegger there is a danger to Dasein of the power of the ubiquitous 'they'. In Heidegger's terminology, 'the-they' (*Das Man*) "articulates the referential context of significance" (p.125). This means that the-they are there in the background of thought, just like the unseen background to the workman's hammering. It is the-they which informs us, implicitly or explicitly, what is to be done and how it is to be done. The influence of the-they comes through (or is *disclosed*) when Dasein does what *one* does, such as when a workman hammers the way *one* hammers; or when a person drinks tea the way *one* drinks tea; or when somebody is shocked, delighted or appalled by what *one* is shocked, delighted, appalled by. Yet to act merely by virtue of the perceived injunctions of the-they runs the risk of what Heidegger calls 'inauthenticity' (*Uneigentlich*). Dasein becomes 'inauthentic' in its denial of its mine-ness. In inauthenticity, Dasein stands at the risk of being levelled down, psychologically neutered, and appropriated by the 'they-self', so that '"everyone is other and no one himself" (p.124).

This is not to say that Heidegger regards inauthenticity as a 'lesser' state of Being to authenticity (p.42). The workman may

hammer the way *one* hammers for expediency, to get the job done; it may be prudent and civil to go along with social customs – the way *one does things* – say in a job interview or meeting prospective in-laws for the first time. Authenticity is not an imperative. Rather, authenticity and inauthenticity denote two modes of Being with differing emphasis on 'mine-ness'. Heidegger describes these two modes of Being in terms of seeing and light. Authenticity relates to the *Lumen Naturale* – the lighting-up of Being – whereas inauthenticity conceals or covers the light of Being in its acquiescence to the 'foresight' of the-they.

Being-Towards-Death

However, there is an aspect of Dasein's Being that remains definitely mine, that refuses to acquiesce to the-they: *Dasein's own death*. Death provides a cornerstone to mine-ness, as it is a non-relational aspect of Dasein that remains out of reach of the-they. Death is what Heidegger calls one's "ownmost, nonrelational possibility" (p.241).

Death for Heidegger is not merely an event that occurs at the end of Dasein's life. Death is not to Dasein like a distant railway station is to a train; not merely a future point or place that becomes arrived at. Rather, Heidegger describes death as ripeness is to a fruit: the fruit ripens as it exists – ripening is what the fruit is 'doing' in its very being. Just so, death is the 'ripening' of Dasein. In this way, death is liberated from being seen as an end-point or final event. Rather, death is always there for Dasein. Heidegger describes death as an 'eminent imminence' (p.240) – as soon as we are born, we are old enough to die. Or Dasein "always already is its end" (p.236). Heidegger calls this state of Being in which Dasein exists, a *Being-towards-death*. Being authentic, for Heidegger, is to *resolutely anticipate* death – to claim it and use it as a resource against the crushing influence of the-they. Accordingly, Being-towards-death constantly provides the possibility for Dasein to authentically claim mine-ness.

Claiming one's Being-towards-death – which is no easy task, says Heidegger: "Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety" (p.255) – involves 'taking care' (*Besorgen*). 'Taking care' implies "carrying something out, settling something... and getting it for oneself" (p.57). Yet taking care is not about willful, dogged determination. On the contrary, Heidegger exhorts Dasein to listen to the 'call' to take care, much like the poet Seamus Heaney's invocation to our listening in *Clearances*:

> The sound of that relaxed alluring blow,
> Its co-opted and obliterated echo,
> Taught me to hit, taught me to loosen,
>
> Taught me between the hammer and the block
> To face the music. Teach me now to listen,
> To strike it rich behind the linear black.

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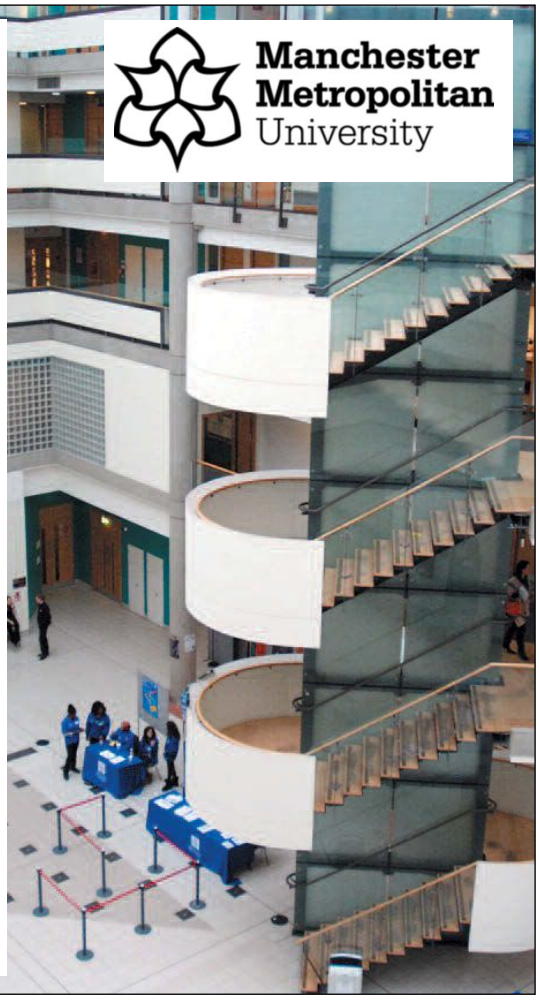

Heidegger describes the call of care as like nothing else in the world: there is silence and stillness in care's call. Care (*Sorge*) does not stimulate enquiry, but arrives, says Heidegger, with no 'relevance' to the world. In this way, care creates space apart from the networks of connections to other things and other people in the world. Consequently, Heidegger describes care in the negative: "nothing is called to the self which is summoned" (p.263). However, in its nothingness, care affords space for Dasein from the 'clammer and chatter' of the-they, enabling Dasein to gain a freedom from habits and practices. It is akin to the workman losing his hammer and not looking for it. This lack of 'relevance' is not to say that the call of care is alien or even spiritual: Heidegger is not arguing for a transcendent or divine awakening in the call of care. Rather, says Heidegger, the call comes "from me and yet over me" (p.265). In doing so, the call of care reaches or discloses previously untapped areas or resources of Dasein's Being: it is 'mine', in a way that has not been mine before. It is also formative of 'mine-ness' itself.

Heidegger uses the term 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) to describe the space that is disclosed in the nothingness of the call of care. Like a clearing in the forest, space is rendered possible, as Dasein's own authentic Being is thrown into relief against the inauthentic Being of the-they. In this way, Dasein is disclosed in (its own) light of the clearing. The clearing is authentic since the possibility for it was *there* all along. In a letter to Swiss psychiatrist Medard Boss, Heidegger writes:

> "A clearing in the forest is still there, even when it's dark. Light presupposes clearing. There can only be brightness where something has been cleared or where something is free for the light" (*Zollikon*, p.12).

In the marginalia of later editions of *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to being 'cleared' by the Greek Ἀλήθεια (*alethea* – truth), and adds the further qualifiers of 'openness': 'clearing, light, shining' (p.129). Similar to the lit-up space of the workshop, in the clearing, Dasein has the space to light up its own Being and is therefore disclosed *with* the world. Being duly 'cleared', for Heidegger, is a freeing process, in which Dasein becomes 'unlocked' (p.74), able to claim its *Being-in-the-world-with-others*.

Being Bereaved

The Heideggerian invocation to 'take care' concerning the Being-towards-death that is 'mine' becomes vividly prescient within the context of bereavement. Our own death itself is never something we shall actually experience – there is simply no more 'mine' at the point of death in order to experience it. Therefore, it is only with the death of others that we come close to experiencing death. It is because of this, says Heidegger, that the death of others is all the more 'penetrating'.

Let us take a moment to consider this use of the word 'penetrating'. (Heaney also uses the word in *Clearances*, Chapter 1.) The English word 'penetrating' derives from the Latin *penetrare*: to go into, which suggests that something enters into the bereaved. The problem is that this begins to take the form of the subject/object split which Heidegger has strongly argued against, with the bereaved as occupying a subjective state that is penetrated into. However, let's look at Heidegger's original German. Heidegger uses *eindringlicher*, which is translated as 'penetrating' by Stambaugh. Yet, the German verb *eindringlich* is more often translated as 'urgent, powerful, forceful or forcible' (thanks to Prof M. Jefferies of Manchester University for that). From a Heideggerian perspective then, we can say that bereavement reaches us with an urgent force – a force not only of the death of a loved one, but of our own Being-towards-death too. And in bereavement, death that was felt to be merely 'future' comes crashing into the present. In doing so, the bereaved is catapulted out of what Heidegger calls inauthentic 'vulgar time' – time as a series of discrete and separated 'nows', which we might conceive of as clock time. Instead, the future, past, and present, are all rendered *there*, disclosed through the *ecstatic moment* of temporal unity that unites and discloses time as an entangled past, present, and future. In these ways, bereavement initiates us into authenticity, we are forced into 'taking care', and we are cleared by it. Bereavement clears the ground for a radical shift in Being.This is the strange inheritance of the bereaved – an altered yet authentic liberty, in which the bereaved are duly cleared. So in Heidegger's philosophy, bereavement comes with the consolation of the possibility for Dasein of authentic self-disclosure – the possibility to hand "itself down to itself" (p.366). It's an unenviable but deeply liberating task which knocks at the door of the bereaved.

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Andrew Royle is a dramatherapist, working with the bereaved, in private practice in London. aroyle@thedramatherapyspace.co.uk

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Heidegger & Faulkner Against Modern Technology

Bob James sees similarities in the two writers' dark perceptions of industrialisation.

In December 1941, William Faulkner mailed his New York publisher the fourth and final part of a forty-thousand-word short story from his home in Mississippi. In a separate note, Faulkner apologized to the publisher for being late with the manuscript, but said "there was more meat in it than I thought." 'The Bear' – soon to become the most famous of Faulkner's short works – appeared seven months later as part of *Go Down Moses And Other Stories*, in May 1942.

Eleven years later, in November 1953, Martin Heidegger stood before an audience of students and teachers at the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, and delivered a lecture he had reworked from a talk delivered four years previously to a group of businessmen in Bremen. Published the following year in a brief collection of essays and lectures, 'The Question Concerning Technology' would soon become one of the philosopher's best-read and most-talked about shorter pieces.

While the two men never met one another or, to my knowledge, never read one another's writings, Faulkner and Heidegger shared a common distaste for the twentieth century's technological innovations. Both stuck close to their rural homes for most of their days, shunning radios, TVs and electric appliances, and dressing for roles more like those of their neighbors of earlier times: in Faulkner's case, a horse farmer; in Heidegger's, a rural peasant. And both men rankled over what literary critic Leo Marx would in 1964 call 'The Machine in the Garden' – the banishment of the pastoral idyll by the intrusion of technology-driven consumerism.

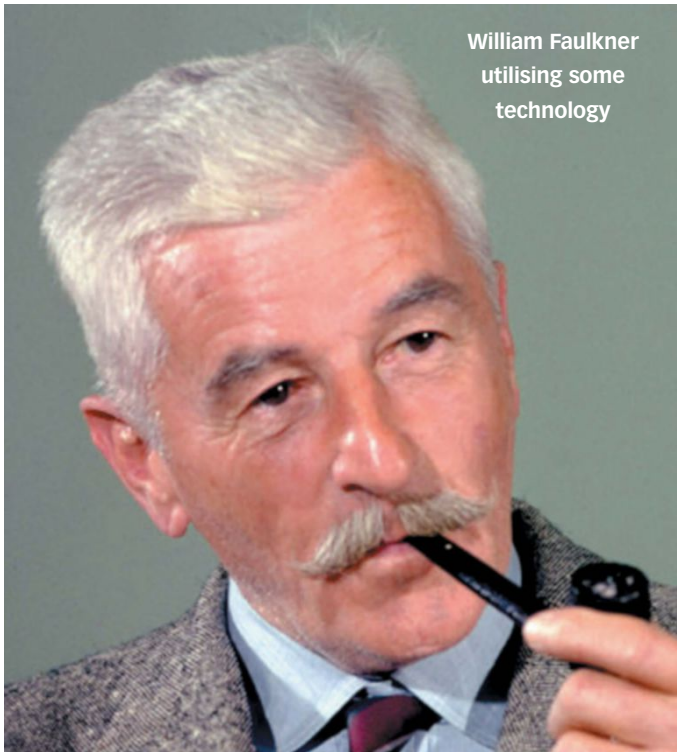
That both, living nearly five thousand miles apart, with wildly different upbringings and without contact between or influence over one another, would arrive at essentially the same critique of technology, says a lot about the *zeitgeist* of the Twentieth Century.

Devouring The Wild

Faulkner was asked by a university student in 1958 if 'The Bear' was his reproof of progress. "Change can destroy what is irreplaceable," he answered. "If all the destruction of the wilderness does is to give more people more automobiles just to ride around in, then the wilderness was better."

The bear in the title of Faulkner's story is Old Ben, a "big old bear with one trap-ruined foot." Old Ben, Faulkner says, is "shaggy, tremendous, red-eyed, not malevolent, but just big, too big for the dogs which tried to bay it, for the horses which tried to ride it down, for the men and the bullets they fired into it; too big for the very country which was its constricting scope." He wanders a hundred-square-mile section of the 'big woods' – a "doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with axes and plows who feared it because it was wilderness, men myriad and nameless even to one another in the land where the old bear had earned a name, through which ran not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life which the puny humans swarmed and hacked at in a fury of abhorrence and fear like pygmies about the ankles of a drowsing elephant." On the lookout for Old Ben is the cental protagonist, the boy Ike McCaslin, who for two weeks each November joins a hunting party comprising his father and several other white gentlemen from town; a black helper; an Indian tracker named Sam Fathers; and a half-breed named Boon Hogganbeck. Each year, they pack up their rifles and lead their hounds deep into bear country, their aim never specifically to hunt, but "to keep yearly rendezvous with the bear which they did not even intend to kill."

The story follows the hunt for Old Ben over several seasons. But most pertinently for us, the final part of 'The Bear' flashes back to the year Ike turns eighteen. We learn that the hunting party has disbanded, its annual pilgrimage ceased. Feeling nostalgic, Ike returns one more time to the big woods. What he witnesses causes "shocked and grieved amazement, even though he had had forewarning." A lumber company has built a vast mill and is clear-cutting the old-growth forest. Smoke churns from a railroad engine, and train whistles shriek through the once-silent woods. Ike comes upon the graves of Sam Fathers and the tracker dog Lion; but his reverie is interrupted when a huge snake, "evocative of all knowledge and an old weariness and of pariahhood and of death" suddenly glides between his legs. He leaves the graves, only to stumble into the mad Boon Hogganbeck, who sits under a gum tree eyeing the squirrels that are the big wood's last remaining game. "Get out of here!" Boon screams. "Don't touch them! Don't touch a one of them! They're mine!"



William Faulkner utilising some technology

Commandeering The World

"Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it," Heidegger famously says at the start of 'The Question Concerning Technology'. Since there is no unplugging or opting out, Heidegger argues, the sole chance we stand of escaping technology's dominion (assuming that we wish to do so) lies in philosophy. But modern philosophy, which considers technology not a monster but as a means to an end, "makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology."

To grasp what Heidegger means here, we must turn to ancient philosophy, and specifically, unearth the root of the word 'cause'. The word derives from the Latin noun *causa*, which stems from the verb *cadere*, meaning 'to fall'. Thus the Romans believed that a result 'falls' from a previous event. The Greeks thought about cause differently – they used the word *aition*, 'debt', for cause, believing that a result was 'indebted' to another thing. So to Aristotle, who is famous for describing four different types of causes for something, a chalice would be indebted to: the silver from which it was made (its *material* cause); to the silversmith who made it (part of its *efficient* cause); the idea of chalice or 'chaliceness' that makes it the type of thing it is (the chalice's *formal* cause); and to the ends or purposes that a chalice serves (its *final* cause). But not all causes are created equal, says Heidegger: apart from the silversmith himself, the other three causes "owe thanks to the pondering of the silversmith." That is, the smith's handiwork 'releases' the other causes to 'bring forth' the chalice, like a flower bursting into bloom. According to Heidegger, this bringing-forth is the 'primal meaning' of *cause*.

Next, we learn that bringing-forth such as the smith's is the 'essence of technology': "Bringing-forth, indeed, gathers within itself the four modes of occasioning – causality – and rules them throughout," Heidegger says: "Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing." The word 'technology' in fact stems from the Greek *techne*, to make or to fashion. Heidegger affirms that "*Techne* belongs to bringing-forth," and that from even before Plato's time "is linked with the word *episteme* [to know]," noting that Aristotle distinguished *techne* and *episteme* by claiming that *episteme* revealed things that already existed, whereas *techne* was about revealing things that didn't previously exist. A homebuilder, to this way of thinking, doesn't just build a house, he *reveals* it; and a homebuyer realizes it's a house because it's no longer concealed in its materials: it has been 'unconcealed'. As Heidegger says, "Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place."

So why do we feel oppressed by technology? Because, Heidegger says, modern technology *is* oppressive. That is to say, modern technology's manner of 'revealing' is monopolistic and imperious. "The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging," he says.

For Heidegger modern technology has but one aim: *to extract resources from nature in order to store them*. Ancient technologies, such as the windmill, didn't do that: rather, they used aspects of the cycle of nature and so were part of that. By contrast, modern technology 'reveals' the Earth as a source of uranium; the sky as a source of nitrogen; the Sun as a source of solar energy; the river as a source of hydroelectricity; the farmer's field as a source of cheap food; the ancient temple hilltop as a tourist destination. Modern technology commands the world to 'unlock' itself: "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering," Heidegger says: "We call it the standing-reserve." All the old wonder has been driven out of things; each is a mere stock-part. Moreover, in this revealing, modern technology also commands us to conform our manner of thought to its will. So whereas the Greeks revered things, we order or compartmentalize them. Heidegger calls this mental habit which "reveals the real as standing-reserve" an 'enframing'; and this enframing of the world is the very "essence of modern technology." This enframing emerged in the Seventeenth Century with the rise of modern science, which "pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces."

However, recognizing our modern mental state can be liberating: "When we once open ourselves expressly to the essence of technology [that is, recognise our enframing], we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing claim." At this juncture of recognition, man is free either to be "nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve" pretending to the role of "lord of the earth", or he is free as the Greeks were, to let "what presences come forth into appearance" – to "enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth." In this latter role, man plays the role of true steward of technology and "keeps watch over the unconcealment" – over technology's revelation of the world as orderable – controlling our own thinking and will, and in the process discovering our "highest dignity" and "saving power":

> "It is precisely in enframing, which threatens to sweep man away into ordering as the supposed single way of revealing, and so thrusts man into the danger of the surrender of his free essence – it is precisely in this extreme danger that the innermost indestructible belongingness of man within granting may come to light, provided that we, for our part, begin to pay heed to the essence of technology."

Pairing Faulkner & Heidegger

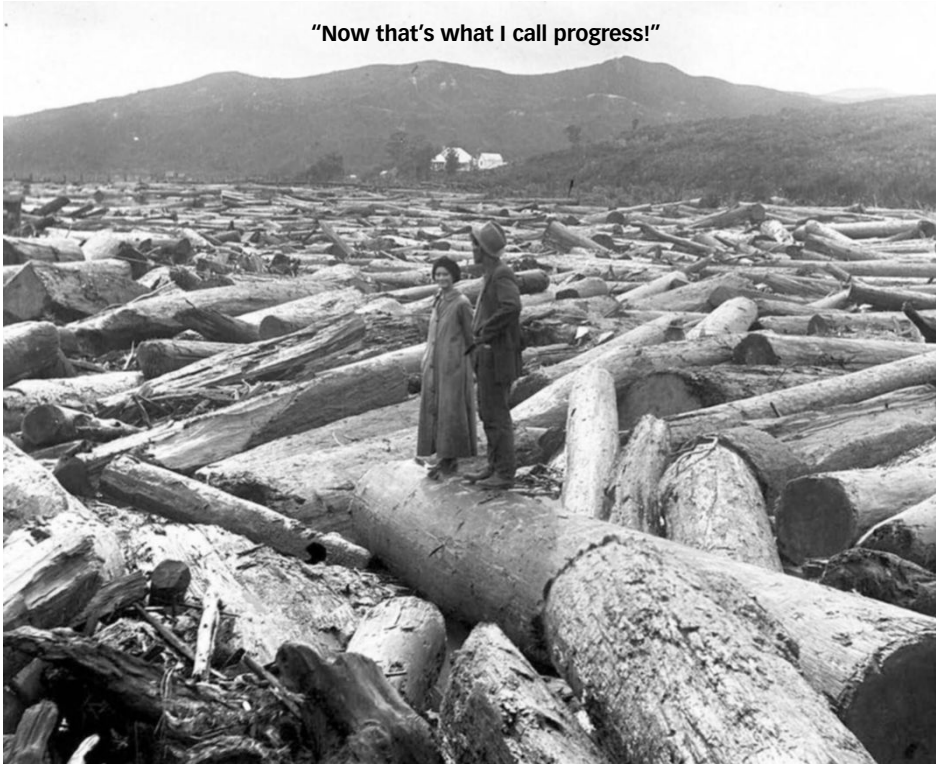
Faulkner was also asked by a student in 1958 if he wanted to win readers' sympathy for Old Ben. The writer insisted not: "Change must alter, must happen, and change is going to alter what was," he replied. "No matter how fine anything seems, it can't endure, because once it stops – abandons motion – it is dead." He said that rather, his goal was to elicit his readers' compassion for the wild itself: "It's to have compassion for the anguish that the wilderness itself may have felt by being ruthlessly destroyed by axes, by men who simply wanted to make that earth grow something they could sell for a profit, which brought into it a condition based on an evil like human bondage. It's not to choose sides at all, but to be compassionate for the good, splendid things which change must destroy; the splendid, fine things which are a part of man's past, part of man's heritage, too. But they were obsolete and had to go."

In 'The Bear' Faulkner describes the big woods in terms of which Heidegger might approve: 'ancient', 'timeless', 'musing', 'eternal', 'markless', 'impervious', 'somber', 'immemorial', and 'impenetrable.' And in the final part of 'The Bear' we can also readily imagine Heidegger's voice being used to narrate Ike's response to the destruction and reordering wrought on the woods by the lumber company in only two short years. Ike is 'shocked and grieved' by

> "a new planing-mill already half completed which would cover two or three acres and what looked like miles and miles of stacked steel rails red with the light bright rust of newness and of piled crossties sharp with creosote, and wire corrals and feeding-troughs for two hundred mules at least and the tents of the men who drove them."

Ike climbs into the cupola of a log-train's caboose to escape the sight, but then "the little locomotive shrieked and began to move: a rapid churning of exhaust, a lethargic deliberate clashing of slack couplings traveling backward along the train, the exhaust changing to the deep slow clapping bites of power as the caboose too began to move and from the cupola he watched the train's head complete the first and only curve in the entire line's length and vanish into the wilderness, dragging its length of train behind it so that it resembled a small dingy harmless snake vanishing into weeds." How reminiscent this attitude is of Heidegger's description of a hydroelectric plant:

> "It sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity. In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station."



"Now that's what I call progress!"

Whither The Wild & The Wonderment?

Should we ask with Faulkner, has man's greed doomed the wilderness? And should we ask with Heidegger, has technology's push for standing-reserve doomed nature's wonderment?

Although not religious himself, Faulkner nonetheless allows his characters to speak in pious terms, because he lets them size up their situations in terms intelligible to the country folk of the Nineteenth Century American South. For instance, Ike McCaslin tells his cousin that God never intended anyone to own the plantation that had been set to be Ike's inheritance – nor any land on earth:

> "He told in the book how He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man. He made the earth first and peopled it with dumb creatures, and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name, not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread."

Heidegger answers the modern world in equally pious terms, with all the ethereal phrasing endemic to his writings. And despite modern technology's dominion over rivers, fields, skies, and mountains, he says there is still a way man can be 'astounded': "in the realm of art" and "in poetry, and in everything poetical." For, as Heidegger's hero Hölderlin wrote, and as Heidegger quotes, "Poetically dwells man upon this earth."

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Bob James holds a Masters in Philosophy from Georgetown University. He lives in Washington, DC, with his wife Ann, and a decidedly empiricist cat named Berkeley.

HANNAH ARENDT and the Human Duty to Think

Shai Tubali considers the roots and implications of Arendt's active philosophy.

In 1964 German journalist Gunter Gaus interviewed Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) for his TV show *Zur Person*. The conversation began with a peculiar exchange: Gaus kept insisting on defining Arendt as a 'philosopher' while she kept gently pushing back the title. Gaus looked perplexed. Arendt no doubt came from the rich tradition of German philosophy, and was the direct student of giant philosophical minds such as Martin Heidegger and Carl Jaspers. She was the acclaimed author of major philosophical classics such as *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *The Human Condition* (1958), and everything she had written had clearly been an intense dialogue with the ideas of Socrates and Kant, Hegel and Heidegger. So why would a thinker of such a high stature and depth deny being a part of the philosophical world?

The reason was never as superficial as merely arguing about her exact field of inquiry. Arendt's insistence on being considered a 'political theorist' rather than a 'philosopher' held a great meaning for her. It was her stance in the world, her fundamental life-statement around which her entire… well, philosophy, revolved.

Arendt & Heidegger

An easy way to approach the distinction she made would be to observe her growing distance from her most influential teacher, Martin Heidegger. Arendt's early encounter with Heidegger at the University of Marburg in 1924 was thrilling: indeed, so thrilling that it led them to a four-year secret love affair, between a thirty-five-year old married teacher and an eighteen-year old student.

Heidegger did not thrill Arendt alone. Students flocked to his lectures, as the rumor spread that here, once again in history, 'thinking has come to life'. In Arendt's words, the spiritually hungry students shared the feeling that finally, "there exists a teacher; one can perhaps learn to think." Forty-five years after her initial encounter with the great philosopher, she beautifully wrote:

> "People followed the rumor about Heidegger in order to learn thinking. What was experienced was that thinking as pure activity… can become a passion which not so much rules and oppresses all other capacities and gifts, as it orders them and prevails through them. We are so accustomed to the old opposition of reason versus passion, spirit versus life, that the idea of a passionate thinking, in which thinking and aliveness become one, takes us somewhat aback."
> (*The New York Review of Books*, p.51, 1971)

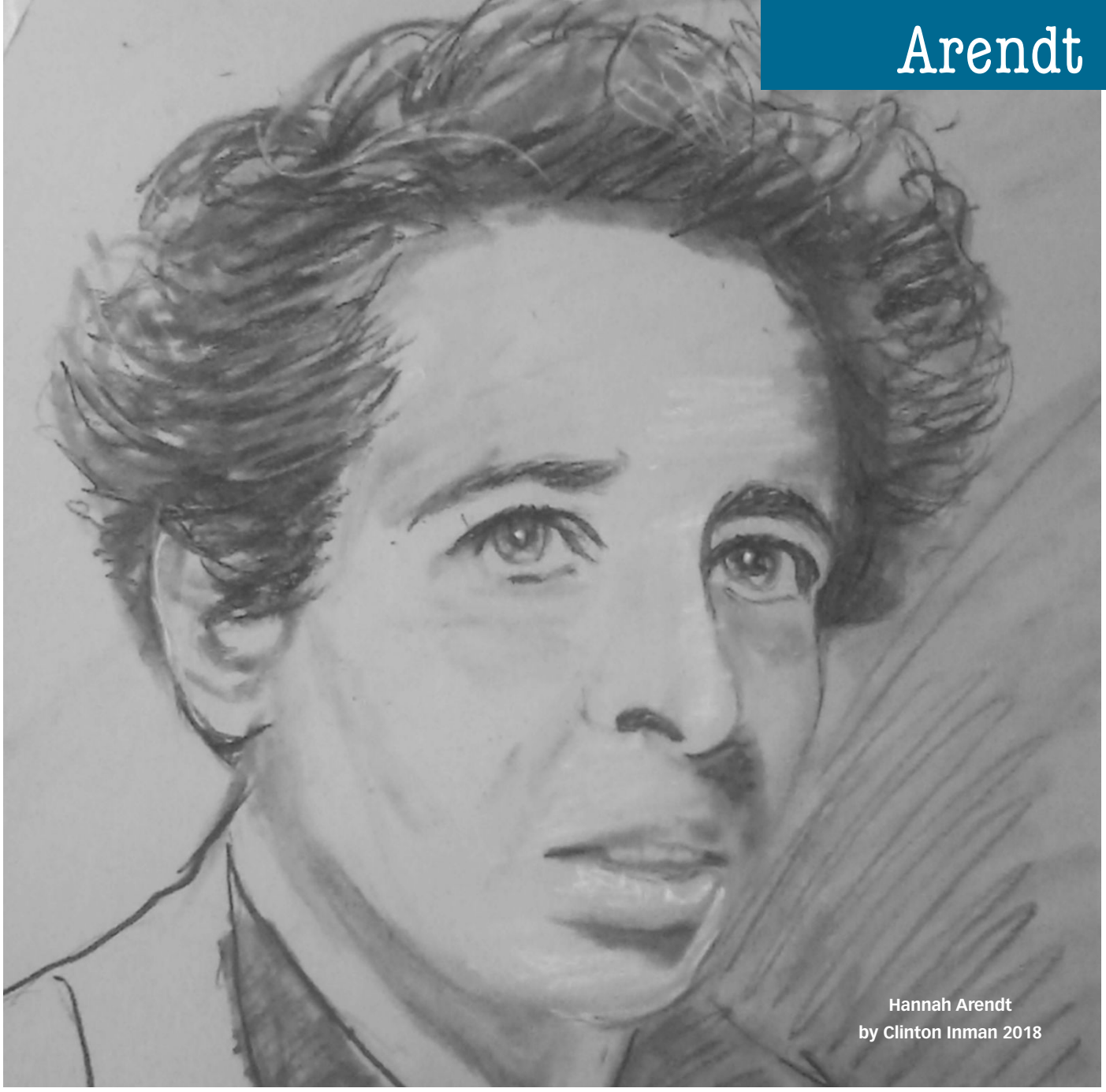
However, 'thinking as pure activity' – which in so many ways is the definition of 'philosophy' – was gradually to be revealed as quite far from Arendt's own interest in the act of thinking. Throughout the years she began to develop a critical distance from philosophical introspection, Heidegger's in particular. As she grew aware of her own unique mode of thought, she became more and more disturbed with what to her seemed to be a profound lack of *concern* on Heidegger's part – a self-immersion so remote from the actual world that its most essential characteristic is "its absolute egoism, its radical separation from all its fellows" (*The Partisan Review*, p.50, Winter 1946). Arendt was troubled that this type of thinking, that kept contemplating only itself, was like a closed circle which is blind to the world and one's relationship with it. Heidegger's explicit involvement with the Nazis, especially his appointment as the Rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933, although not directly linked, exactly proved this point. In this, it seems, he confirmed Arendt's sobering realization that doing philosophy, as deep as it may be, does not automatically lead to a moral engagement with the world.

This demonstration of the break between philosophy and the world surely shaped her thinking: without the bridge that could enable thoughtful action, the two were different domains. Twenty years after their separation Arendt forgave Heidegger for his Nazi past and the two resumed their friendship, which lasted until Arendt's death in 1975. However, her own perception of the role of thinking would never return to the idea of the purity of philosophy as she had learned it from him back in 1924.

The Heidegger of her youth, had been "the hidden king [who] reigned in the realm of thinking" (*Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, p.44, 1982). But Arendt found other influences which slowly but surely forced her out of this king's realm. For instance she could not ignore Heidegger's own Master, the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who called for a quiet revolution in philosophy, away from pure introspection: "Back to the things themselves!" he proclaimed. And when she moved from Freiburg to the University of Heidelberg to be tutored by Heidegger's friend Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), she experienced a revelation under the impact of Jasper's concrete approach: "Philosophizing is real as it pervades an individual life at a given moment" (*Theory of World Security*, Ken Booth, p.198, 2007).

Arendt began to realize she could not sympathize with Heidegger's introspection, which she defined as thinking which "rebounds back upon itself and finds its solitary object within the soul" (*Arendt*, Rahel Varnhagen, p.10, 2000). Introspection to her meant isolation: one ceases to be interested in the world and finds only one interesting object, the inner self. In this isolation, "thinking becomes limitless because it is no longer molested by anything exterior; because there is no longer any demand for action" (*Ibid*). Introspection can also fill up a life when the world and action have been rejected: "It annihilates the actually existing situation by dissolving it in mood, and at the same time it lends everything subjective an aura of objectivity, publicity, extreme interest" (*Ibid*, p.21). This tendency towards introspection, Arendt felt, was her youthful error.

So she began a journey away from traditional philosophy. But her final transformation she owes to a far greater movement



Hannah Arendt
by Clinton Inman 2018

Arendt portrait © Clinton Inman 2018 Facebook him at Clinton.inman

in history, an intervention from the outside world which troubled her thinking and propelled her to become engaged in previously unimaginable ways.

"I could no longer be a bystander"

"When I was young" recalled Arendt in 1963, "I was interested neither in history nor in politics. If I can be said 'to have come from anywhere', it is from the tradition of German philosophy" (*The Jew as Pariah*, p.245, 1978). However, this naïve apolitical approach was steadily changing during the early 1930s as she caught an anti-academic mood that made her focus more and more on current affairs. When the Nazi Party demonstrated its increasing power in the German elections during that time, her tolerance for thinkers who seemed indifferent to this darkening political situation weakened. But it was only in 1933, when the Reichstag was burned down, leading to a series of arrests, that Arendt's philosophical thinking was completely overturned.

One can think of that year as the beginning of a union between thought and action for Arendt, demonstrated by her courageous choice to stay in Berlin. Although she had been considering emigration for months, she felt she could no longer be a bystander. She offered her apartment as a way-station for people fleeing Hitler's regime. For the first time she felt satisfaction not from thinking but from acting.

In her interview with Gunter Gaus, Arendt explained that the period of illegal arrests during 1933, which led finally to the cells of the Gestapo or concentration camps, was "such a shock to me that ever after I felt responsible" (*Hannah Arendt& the Law*, Marco Goldoni, Chris McCorkindale, p.3, 2012). This newfound sense of responsibility, she added, wiped away any trace of innocence.

Another, more personal, type of shock made her even more disengaged from academic thinking. Arendt, who was ethnically Jewish, found out to her horror that friends she had known and trusted were now collaborating voluntarily with the Nazis. "This wave of cooperation," she says, "made you feel surrounded by an empty space, isolated. I lived in an intellectual milieu… and I came to the conclusion that cooperation was, so to speak, the rule among intellectuals… I left Germany guided by the resolution

that 'Never again!' I will never have anything to do with 'the history of ideas' again. I didn't, indeed, want to have anything to do with this sort of society again" (*Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, p.108, 1982). Arendt then started to search for an understanding of evil, as well as for the conditions from which right judgement and action can emerge. This was her entrance into the political domain, and her shift from the intellectual, apolitical thinker, into a fully engaged human being with an unambiguous political and historical stance. She strongly felt that philosophy failed to offer a substantial meaning to the world insofar as it vehemently ignored the core of human reality – man as an acting being. Its focus on speculative and metaphysical thinking made it unable to offer anything of substance to the political realm where people come together, judge and act.

Active Thinking

Escaping to Paris, Arendt immersed herself in anti-war as well as pro-Jewish and pro-Zionist activity. She began to think not in individual but in collective terms. From one who had perceived herself as a world-citizen, she moved to recognizing that "when one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew." Rejecting the type of thinking that put the individual subject at the center of existence, Arendt started to tell her story historically, as a part of a 'we' consciousness. The person was a part of general structures, shaped fundamentally by the conditions of one's birth, by one's neighbourhood, and by the group of which one was a part. The problems of the human condition, Arendt concluded, lay in those general structures, or, in other words, in the political sphere.

For exactly the same reason, Arendt felt strongly that any real change of the human situation – any revolutionary renewal – can take place only in the political realm. A movement, she felt, which does not enter into the political arena, and does not translate its ideology into concrete goals that promote changes in the actual situation, would remain abstract and ineffective. So to act in the world one had to get politically involved. When for example Jewish hopes collapsed in 1937, and many Jews began to propose to 'return to the ghetto' – withdrawing from the European cultural community to Jewishness – Arendt saw this as the completely wrong response at a time when the enemies of Jewry were only growing in power. She believed instead that Jewish reconstitution could only come about in a political context, in a struggle against the forces that threatened it.

So as we see, Arendt's thought was completely overturned not by some inner revelation independent of external events and circumstances. Indeed, the uniqueness of Arendt's thinking is already marked by the way she was transformed: through the historical and political shift that took place in Europe. Her type of thinking then became deeply intertwined with the world, with the flux of world changes. It was an *active thinking*.

Active thinking is a highly engaged form of thinking that prepares one to act in the real world. But more than that, active thinking is in itself already a form of action, since in the very act of thinking in this manner, one is aware that one is a responsible participant in the world. While often thinking is conceived of as a form of retreat from the world, disengaging from the flow of events and shifting to a silent introspection, active thinking is like a commitment to think responsibly: to move away from the comfortable bystander perspective and understand that it is only through engagement that we can rightly judge.

Thus for Arendt, thinking became a tool with which people can bring new awareness into their actions. This is the opposite of the aimless and involuntary type of thinking. With Arendt, thinking has become a powerful tool of engagement.

However, Hannah Arendt's political thinking was not limited to what one would usually consider politics – members of government negotiating certain decisions on behalf of voters. To her, politics is the realm of public mass exchange, interaction and dialogue. It's the public realm in which people come together, judge, and act. And one's ability to think politically is the ability that makes one capable of judging and acting in the real world.

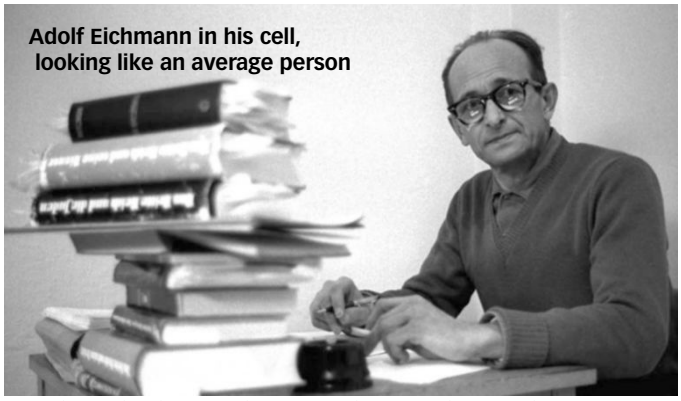
Arendt claimed that what in Ancient Greece had been rather inseparable – philosophy and politics – gradually separated, until eventually philosophy became pure thinking, completely detached from worldly affairs. However, this was to her so much more than just a philosophical problem, since it meant the individual tends to become uninvolved and irresponsible, unaware of their crucial role in the world. Put bluntly, ordinary philosophical thinking is almost like non-thinking. Arendt hoped to liberate thinking from the hands of thinkers, so to speak, and to hand it down to the individual for the development of their capacity to actively think.

The Man Who Stopped Thinking

Those who do not have this ability to actively think, Arendt warned, will go wrong. Her most controversial example of this was the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann, whose war crimes trial in Jerusalem in 1961 she covered in a series of articles for the *New Yorker*.

Until then, Arendt had investigated the evil of totalitarianism as a general phenomenon. With the case of Eichmann, who had been pivotal in organising the Holocaust, she found the opportunity to look evil in the eye and search for the deeper forces that constituted the preconditions for the emergence of totalitarian forms. While she, like everyone else, was prepared to meet an inhuman monster, she was shocked to realize that there was really nothing there. Indeed, she concluded, it was the absence, the vacant space, the lack of thought, which had enabled Eichmann's evil. His evil seemed to lack all depth into which one could delve and explore. Watching Eichmann with great intensity, Arendt eventually came to realize that her earlier notion of 'radical evil' – a demonic evil inherent in human beings – should be revised. The deeds of the Nazis could not be simply explained away by portraying them as monsters and demons who had engineered the murder of millions. There was something else, perhaps no less fearsome and no less 'word-and-thought-defying' that had made this possible, that constituted *the banality of evil*. This was Arendt's phrase summarising the nature of the human capacity to do wrong after depriving oneself of the act of thinking.

When confronting extreme evil, claimed Arendt, it is of course tempting to "indulge in sweeping statements about the evil nature of the human race" and yet one thing is sure: "that everyone could decide for himself to be either good or evil in Auschwitz" (*Hitler and the Germans*, Eric Voegelin, p.39, 1999). However, she found that people like Eichmann simply turned


Adolf Eichmann in his cell, looking like an average person

off their thinking/judging faculties, and were therefore men without real motives. Eichmann had been devoted to mindless extermination through the sense of belonging to a movement much more than he had thought about and believed the ideology behind the movement.

At his trial Eichmann revealed himself as having no capacity to think or to will independently. He had renounced responsibility, and even this renunciation was none of his concern. (He could however mechanically recite moral maxims – which only shows how useless a moral maxim is without thinking.) When testifying factually and remorselessly that he had only obeyed another's will, he was saying that he was not a real person. For this reason, Arendt felt that Eichmann's deeds were both unpunishable and unforgivable: there was no person left whom one could forgive. More than that, noting Eichmann's bureaucratic mentality, she judged him incapable of telling right from wrong, and so, at least in a sense, not truly 'guilty'. To be considered guilty, Eichmann had to be conscious of the nature of his crimes; yet his deeper crime was that he had stopped thinking.

While many who read Arendt's articles on the trial felt that she was 'soulless', she felt that she was finally cured of the kind of emotional involvement which precludes good judgment. For her, this was a demonstration of the beginning of a new political morality based on the capacity to think in a way that would enable good judgement. And since only thinking could condition one against evil-doing, people had the moral obligation to deeply engage in thinking in order to rightly judge. However, even good people fear making judgments, often feeling that judging will make them seem arrogant and over-confident. To this, Arendt's poignant response is: "If you say to yourself in such matters: who am I to judge? – you are already lost" (*Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, James W. Bernauer, p.6, 2012).

Are We Thinking, Or Just Daydreaming?

Many complain nowadays that their thinking is *too* active. What they mean is they feel that their brain is chattering with itself too much; that there are too many thoughts of worry and distress, frustration and struggle, going on in their mind. They then try to quieten their stormy over-thinking through different methods of meditation or relaxation. Indeed, quietude in one's mind, especially when life's challenges are unbearably intense, sounds a very nice state to be in. However, Arendt's reflections tell us the very opposite: that our thinking is often *not active enough* – that people tend to *shut down* the activity of right thinking and judging. In light of Arendt's own thinking, it becomes clear that most of the time we are not really actively thinking, we are daydreaming. Daydreaming may be intense at times, yet it does not help us develop a thinking which leads us to wakefully engage with the world. Thinking as an act of gathering one's mental forces in order to understand or to realize something for oneself, is a relatively rare phenomenon in peoples' lives.

Interestingly, recent research affirms this criticism of human thinking. As research into cognitive bias informs us, the human brain does not really like to think. In fact, most of the time it puts itself in a mode of energy preservation. Most of the time, when things are relaxed, the brain/mind shifts to an 'automatic pilot' mode, a state of reaction without much creative thinking. We undergo the mental strain of reflective thought only when we don't have a choice – for example, when confronting new difficult tasks at the office or facing acute and demanding challenges elsewhere. The brain's natural effort is dedicated to maintaining an effortless state. Moreover, for the brain, the privilege of 'being lazy' implies much more: it means there is no threat, that everything is going well. That is why cognitive ease is associated with good mood and good feeling, and intense thinking with crisis.

Things become more complicated when we realize that cognitive ease is also associated with truthfulness, and that our telling right from wrong is too often guided by the hidden wish of the brain not to think too much about things. According to research, most of our judgments are made by the brain's lazy system of reactive thinking, not at all by our capacity to deeply engage in consideration and thoughtful observation. Therefore the brain's default position is that an easy answer is also a true answer, and that a quick judgment is a right judgment.

Things becomes even *more* uncomfortable if we take Eichmann and his ilk as examples of human possibility. Although Eichmann's evil is far more disturbing than any failure of judgment we're ever likely to make in our own lives, he is nevertheless presenting a mirror before us; an example of a man who preferred to put his thinking to sleep; indeed, a man who made a higher value for himself *not* to think and *not* to judge. The result, in his case, was of course devastating. Although not talking in such extreme terms, could we also find in ourselves a place where we prefer not to think too much, especially politically?

Arendt's genius lies not in her drive to make us all into philosophers, but rather in her drive to show us how the tendency not to think might weaken our humanness, our ability to fully participate in the world. In such a context, considering thinking either as something that belongs only to intellectuals or as an unnecessary activity as long as everything seems to go well, is *dangerous*. While these days everyone likes to think of themselves as an individual, Arendt tells us that only through volitional thinking – by going beyond the brain's tendency to minimally react – can one really claim a genuine independence of thought. For Arendt, an individual is someone who initiates thought-processes, passionate inquiries, and not simply someone whose brain functions just enough for him or her to react when needed in order to make hasty and superficial judgments.

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Shai Tubali is the author of more than 20 philosophy and psychology books in English, German and Hebrew. His writings integrate Western and Eastern thought, to offer a transformation of the human mind. Please visit shaitubali.com/en/home/

The Gift of Becoming Stranded

Amee LaTour argues we should sometimes welcome being run aground by life.

What do you want out of life? Happiness? Comfort? Security? Like many philosophers associated with existentialism, Martin Heidegger emphasizes the potential fruitfulness of varieties of experience quite contrary to these states, such as the discomfort and insecurity of becoming stranded. When we're stranded, we're stuck. We can't just move on. We're in a tough spot. Heidegger didn't explicitly advocate seeking the experience. Having no interest in moralizing, he instead explained why he thinks we're usually not stranded, and what happens in the rare moments when we are; but it lends itself to ethical reflection.

Being and Time, Heidegger's seminal work, is, among many things, a book of social analysis. In it Heidegger describes what he sees as the 'everyday' way we usually exist and speak, which is as highly influenced by those around us – by '*das Man*', which is Heidegger's phrase for the phenomenon of social influence. For Heidegger, the vast majority of what we think, do, say, and feel is delineated by *das Man*, commonly translated as either 'the they' or 'the One'. But both translations lend themselves to misunderstanding, since the concept means neither a group of people nor a particular person. 'The they' isn't people at all: it's something that happens within us, a way of orienting our thinking, a phenomenon that arises out of human sociality. To understand what *das Man* means for Heidegger, and what its alternative looks like, it's necessary to first get a grasp on a few other key concepts from *Being and Time*: understanding, attunement, and discourse.

Understanding, Attunement & Discourse

For Heidegger, human beings are different from other beings because we see the world in terms of possibilities. Rather than our behavior and thinking being determined by instinct we have options, because we have *understanding*. For Heidegger, understanding is a kind of 'sight' through which human beings see the world, themselves, and other beings within it in terms of possibilities. As a kind of sight that opens the world and human being itself up to possibilities, understanding is therefore 'disclosive' – it uncovers, reveals.

Because we are beings with understanding, Heidegger says we 'project' ourselves into the future, and in this way the future is incorporated in our present realities. If you think about it, almost everything we do has some future component to it. I get up so that I can go to a different room to do something, to pursue a possibility; or I type this so that you may read it later. Our current actions are so driven by considerations of the future that it doesn't seem quite right to think about the future solely in terms of it being something up ahead that hasn't happened yet, but rather, also as part of our present experience.

Another key disclosive element of human being for Heidegger is *attunement*. Attunement makes investment and engagement in the world and in life possible for us. For Heidegger our attunement is responsible for the fact that the world and our existence *matter* to us. It is a type of *mood* we have about the world and our being in it, in which a sense of meaning and purpose is disclosed to us. In rare moments our attunement also discloses to us the fact that we did not initially project ourselves into existence – we were, rather, *thrown* into the world, into existence, as the kind of being that projects itself into the future. The moods that most explicitly disclose our thrownness are unsettling ones such as anxiety or alienation; they remind us that we're not quite at home in the world – that we're projecting ourselves ahead, but we can't quite 'get back behind ourselves' to provide a stable foundation for our choices.

People also engage in *discourse* which is a third important mode of disclosure people participate in, according to Heidegger. Discourse occurs when we share aspects of our existence – for instance, possibilities and moods – with others, generally through language. This sharing consists both of understanding and attunement, and helps to shape our understanding and attunement in turn. We share the contents of our understanding and attunement, and the specific possibilities and moods we share opens one another up to them.

The They: Hijacked Disclosures

As beings that project into the future and are thrown into the world Heidegger sees human beings as susceptible to falling prey to *das Man*, but also capable of an alternative way of being, which he calls authentic existence. First, let's look at what Heidegger thinks is happening with our disclosive capacities – our understanding and attunement – when we're guided by 'the they'.

In the throes of they-hood, the possibilities an individual grasps in understanding and the moods she experiences are largely in sync with those around her: she is prone to identify not primarily as an individual with unique possibilities and a unique personal emotive engagement with the world, but rather as one of a group who pursues the possibilities that 'one' pursues, and who feels as 'one' feels.

Heidegger thinks *das Man* disincentivizes resisting its influence for most people in a number of ways. Perhaps most importantly our social environment gives us a sense that we're at home, secure, in ourselves, in our paths, our judgments, etc., just because there seems to be strength, and validity, in numbers. We think we know what we know just because it's what others know; we think we're doing what we ought to just because others are doing it, too. Thinking in terms of *das Man* thus creates the sense of groundedness that a thrown being craves. Without it, we would have to face a tremendous personal responsibility to take up matters for ourselves, potentially alone. 'The they' offers comfort.

There is a special place in *Being and Time* for the everyday discourse influenced by *das Man* which hijacks our ways of disclosing the world, ourselves and others. Heidegger calls this everyday type of discourse 'idle talk'. When we communicate in this idle way, we fail to engage our own understanding and attunement toward what is being discussed; we simply 'pass the word

along.' I interpret Heidegger to mean that when we engage in idle talk we don't think critically, but simply take on board what a group of people or some aspect of our culture says, believes, desires and judges, and we follow suit. Idle talk steers our choices, Heidegger claims, by dictating what is worth seeing and doing. He describes everyday life as a shallow sort of existence, drifting along with the current of 'the they', assimilating with others and failing to get in touch with our own capacities for understanding and attunement. Because discourse plays a key role in shaping our understanding and attunement, discourse driven by the they actually serves to cover up the authentic possibilities that could be grasped through understanding and attunement.

Becoming Stranded

The image of a human being as a 'thrown project' is highly useful in working out what it means to become stranded. A metaphor may help. Imagine yourself as a little boat that has been thrown into a fast but shallow stream – the stream is 'the they'. The rudder by which you steer is disengaged; however, the stream alone is not propelling boat-you; your engine is pushing you along as well. You're both projecting yourself and being carried along by the current. But in order to be truly in control of your course (that is, your possibilities), something needs to turn you toward your steering system.

Becoming stranded is the opportunity to engage your own steering system. When boat-you runs ashore – in other words, when something interrupts your 'just going with the flow' – suddenly, nothing is directing you. In the absence of outside direction, you can then become aware of the fact that you can steer your own thinking: that you have the ability to reflect, think and judge for yourself, see what possibilities actually lie before you, and tap into your unique emotional engagement with the world and others.

So how does one become stranded? Heidegger often discusses the disengagement from 'the they' as a spontaneous, fleeting occurrence that strikes out of the blue. We are assailed by some mood, such as profound boredom or anxiety, in which we realize that the security and comfort offered by 'the they' are false. In such moods we realize that we're only really grounded if we ground ourselves, as individuals, taking back our understanding and attunement, orienting ourselves toward our discourse, seeing possibilities beyond the status quo, engaging with our emotional investment in life and the world in a more personal way.

There are two approaches boat-you can take at this point of realization. You can plunge your rudder into the water and navigate your own way out of your stranded situation, returning to the world of things and people with a newfound sense of individual agency over your trajectory. This approach requires a lot of energy, responsibility, and, ultimately, struggling with the big questions. Or you could rush back to the current of 'the they' with its directive force, casting off the trials and tribulations involved in steering your boat-self, and opting instead for the more passive and comfortable approach to life. Just flowing downstream is the easier option; but steering your own thought is more authentic, because you actually are an individual with your own disclosive capacities.

Although Heidegger was conservative concerning the number of opportunities for becoming stranded, and skeptical of the lasting power of authentic being, I'm a bit more hopeful: I think that the stranded moments Heidegger attributed to special, rare moods, crop up constantly. For instance, we become stranded when a long-held belief is shaken or refuted. Or we become stranded when we ask where our long-held beliefs came from, or when someone else asks us this same question. We become stranded when we start to question why we're doing what we're doing. Of course, something has to disrupt our inertia – in keeping with the above analogy, has to run us aground – but this could be a book, an inspiring story, the death of a loved one, even a conversation. I don't believe that these disrupters are in short supply. We just have to be willing to become stranded long enough to hear ourselves, and brave enough to to engage our steering systems when we do.

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Amée LaTour has a degree in philosophy from Marlboro College in Vermont, and works as a writer.

Boat Image © Stepanps 2003

The Birth of Celebrity Culture out of the Spirit of Philosophy

Matthew Barnard comprehends & condemns celeb culture in Heideggerian terms.

I am about to argue something that ought to make your head turn: celebrity culture is philosophy. The often bemoaned idolisation of celebrities; the prevalence of talent shows such as *X Factor*; the popularity of reality TV shows; the phenomenon of 'being famous for being famous'; the fact that children have begun to choose their heroes not on the basis of their talent but on the mere fact of their fame, etc etc – all of this is philosophy.

The idea that something is of value only insofar as it is popular is a well-known logical fallacy, a.k.a. the argument *ex consensus gentium*. Yet it is a contagious fallacy. Why is it so prevalent? I wish to answer by showing that the origin of the irrational praise of the popular lies in the philosophical tradition, when this tradition is understood in the light of Martin Heidegger's analysis of our intellectual history.

As I hope you've guessed, this analysis will be far from a vindication of celebrity culture. Calling something 'philosophy' does not necessarily amount to a compliment, even though philosophy is normally taken to be a good thing. Philosophy still retains a shadow of its former position as 'the queen of the sciences', to quote Immanuel Kant – so much so that to refer to a mode of thinking as 'unphilosophical' is taken to be an insult. For example, although there are many good reasons for saying that Buddhism is not philosophy but rather a unique mode of thinking in its own right, saying as much often leads to the charge of cultural bias. But if philosophy is seen as not necessarily a good thing, demanding that we treat Buddhism as unphilosophical might instead be saving it from misinterpretation.

Heidegger's Anti-Philosophy

The later Heidegger opposes himself to philosophy. He expands on Nietzsche's belief that European nihilism, the problem of our age, amounts to the devaluation of the values of Platonism, going further than Nietzsche by saying that *all* philosophy is nihilism. To overcome nihilism, therefore, we need to perform an 'inventive thinking' that is not philosophical – hence the title of his essay 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking' (1964).

Many readers of this argument find it absurd: they think that Heidegger is playing with semantics. He may not want to *call* himself a philosopher anymore, but what he's doing is clearly philosophy. However, to say this would be to overlook the fact that he has a very specific definition of 'philosophy': philosophy is a mode of thinking that emerged in Classical Greece and consists solely in the attempt to think the being of beings in terms of their being.

This sounds rather abstract, but that's only because it's a basic claim. A being is something that is. Sociology thinks beings insofar as they are a part of society; physics thinks beings insofar as they are determined by physical laws; and philosophy thinks beings insofar as they are beings *as such*. Therefore the sociologist will answer the question 'What is the human being?' in terms of its role within social relations. The physicist will answer the question either by thinking of it as a body in relative motion through time and space, or as a collection of atoms, waves, quarks, or strings. The philosopher answers the question by aiming at the being or essence of the human being.

Ed Sheeran

Essential Humanity

So what is the essence of the human being? A classical definition is Aristotle's *zoon logon echon*: the human is the animal with language. Whether we agree with it or not, this is an attempt at an essential definition. It defines the human by identifying a something that occurs with every human being and which no human being can occur without. So for Aristotle there are no humans without access to language and meaning. The obvious criticism of Aristotle here is that there are humans who cannot speak, but the present point is not whether or not whether Aristotle was correct to define human beings in this way, but that he tries to do so by identifying something he believes cannot be taken away from a human being and they remain human. Based on this tendency, found throughout the history of philosophy, Heidegger argues that philosophy always understands the being of a being as that which is constantly present alongside a being for as long as it exists.

A modern equivalent of Aristotle's definition, 'man is the rational animal', operates the same way: it amounts to saying that reason is present so long as the human being exists. (It's not that there is any scientific evidence for this definition – there isn't – but rather that we have inherited an understanding of human beings as essentially rational.) Or we might say that so long as a human exists, it thinks, and the end of thinking is the end of the human; hence the common understanding that death means the end of consciousness, the end of reason, and the end of the human. As such, human being means

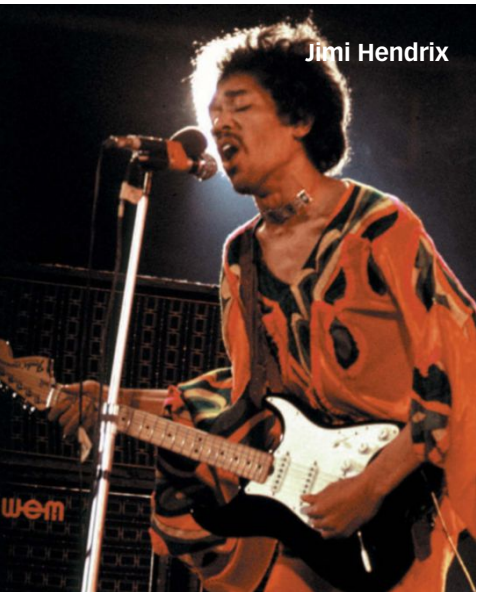
Ed Sheeran © Eva Rinaldi 2013

constant presence through thought. This is, in fast-forward, something that Heidegger takes many years to write many volumes to argue.

Heidegger's Onto-Theology

He also makes another point: not only does philosophy think being is constant presence, it also always posits a highest being, a 'most beingly being'. Although we tend to think of existence as a binary variable – something either is, or it isn't – being as a concept actually admits of degrees.

This is a difficult point, but hopefully an example will illuminate it. Take the statement, 'Jimi Hendrix is more of a guitarist than Ed Sheeran'. This statement is saying that both Hendrix and Sheeran have the property 'being a guitarist' as part of their being; but Hendrix has *more* 'being a guitarist' than Sheeran. The 'is' in 'Hendrix *is* a guitarist' carries more weight, more being, than the 'is' in 'Ed Sheeran *is* a guitarist'. Against this, someone might want to say that 'is more of a guitarist than' is a metaphor for 'is a greater guitarist than'. But even the latter itself means that Hendrix embodies the essence of 'guitarist' in a purer, more complete way than does Sheeran. Ultimately, no matter how we phrase the comparison, what we are saying is that there is more guitarist-being in Hendrix than in Sheeran – which can in turn translate as 'guitaristness' is *more present* in Hendrix than in Sheeran.



Jimi Hendrix

In this case, then, being admits of degrees. The measure of such degrees is presence. Something has more being if it has more presence, and less being if it has less presence. Further, true being is not just any sort of presence, but the highest possible degree of presence, *constant* presence. As said above, for Heidegger philosophy posits the highest possible degree of presence, the most present being, as the highest, most beingly being. This is, in brief, what Heidegger calls 'onto-theology'. Philosophy always thinks of being as constant presence (Greek *onto-*, pertaining to being) and always comports itself towards a being that takes constant presence to its extreme, an absolutely constantly present entity: the most beingly being. To say that philosophy worships this entity is going a bit too far, but it does always conduct its investigations with reference to it, even if this reference is only to deny its existence. Traditionally, this most present being is God (Greek *theos*), understood as an eternal entity present for all eternity in all possible worlds. For Heidegger, in modernity after Descartes this title of 'the most beingly being' moves from God to the human subject, the human being: it is the human that has the most being, the most presence. For this reason, humanism arises as the secular religion in the shadow of the death of God.

Ancient v. Modern Fame

To take this back to celebrity culture: celebrities are the most beingly beings of our society. Fame is what defines celebrity. To be famous means to be known by a lot of people. To be known by someone is to be present to them. To be famous is therefore to be present to a lot of people; and the measure of fame is how present the celebrity is to people, understood either as the amount of people that know about them or how constantly they are in the news, on TV, or followed on social media. The most famous people are those who are most constantly present to the most people, and as such we echo the philosophical tradition in idolising celebrity. The idea of being famous for being famous is therefore not a degradation of the essence of celebrity, it is its authentic completion. Fame becomes *itself* in being about being famous for being famous, because fame is simply being present to a large amount of people. It has finally been recognised that one achieves it just by putting oneself in the public eye: the means one uses to put oneself in the public eye are arbitrary. Constant presence is the goal, and it does not matter how it is achieved.

So if something is broken in this clearly nihilistic state of affairs, it isn't the concept of fame. Rather, it is the concept of the human being. After the death of God, the human desire for eternal life is thenceforth sought not in a comportment towards the constant presence of God in Heaven, but towards a devalued version of constant presence, insofar as this can be achieved in an impermanent world like ours: hence, fame.

On the one hand, this echoes Ancient Greek politics, which was all about doing great deeds and being remembered, thus gaining immortality. In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt maps well how this desire for immortality is, through the birth of philosophy, taken to its extreme in the desire for eternal life. Immortality means to linger in this world forever, whereas eternal life is about transcending this world and entering the next. However, this does not mean that celebrity culture, as the attempt to find constant presence in the material world, is a welcome return to the 'real world' after millennia of indoctrination by religious thinking. There is an essential difference between aspiring towards fame in the contemporary sense and achieving immortality through fame. This can be seen by pointing out that the Greeks wanted to be *remembered* forever, while a modern celebrity aims at being *constantly seen* forever. To be remembered already acknowledges one's death. We can only remember what is no longer present. The current desire for fame, in contrast, aspires to remain in presence indefinitely, an object of maintained public perception. So Greek culture aimed at becoming part of its descendants' past, while celebrity culture aims at enduring in our descendants' present – constantly present for all eternity. The former affirms the contingency of this world by aiming at entering history, while the latter attempts to escape history by remaining in the present. Thus celebrity culture is nihilistic, philosophical in Heidegger's pejorative sense, and needs to be overturned.

In short, I really don't like *The X Factor*.

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Matthew Barnard is Lecturer in Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University, and the Secretary of the British Society for Phenomenology. He specialises in the thought of Martin Heidegger. You can follow him on twitter @mattbarnardsays

The Trouble with Martin

Even his best friends thought he was a Nazi, so why should we pay any further attention to Heidegger's philosophical writings? We asked a selection of Heidegger scholars this question:

"Does Martin Heidegger's involvement in the Nazi Party and his anti-Semitism, as evident in the recently published Black Notebooks, make a difference to how we should regard him as a philosopher and engage with his work?"

Heidegger's Nazism and anti-Semitism were known about before the appearance of the Black Notebooks. But the extent of his anti-Semitism is made much clearer by the Notebooks, where he connects some of his key ideas to racist ideas in the Nazi period. For example, he links the difference between 'being' (things being intelligible at all) and 'entities' (the specific ways in which things are framed by a practice or a discipline) to "World Jewry, which, absolutely unattached, can undertake the deracination of all entities from being as a world-historical 'task'." He is referring to the transnational role of Jewish financiers in commodity exchange (which can in some respects be seen as turning everything into an exchangeable 'entity'). However, his claims are vacuous: instead of analysing the economic roots of the crises of his times, he tries to give deep philosophical significance to often trivial cultural phenomena. So we should now be more suspicious of his work. However, many of his influential ideas are close to those of philosophers not tainted by Nazism, like Adorno or Dewey. We need, therefore, to separate the discredited man from what we can still use some of his philosophy for, such as asking how modernity has led humankind to the brink of ecological and economic catastrophe. *Prof. Andrew Bowie*

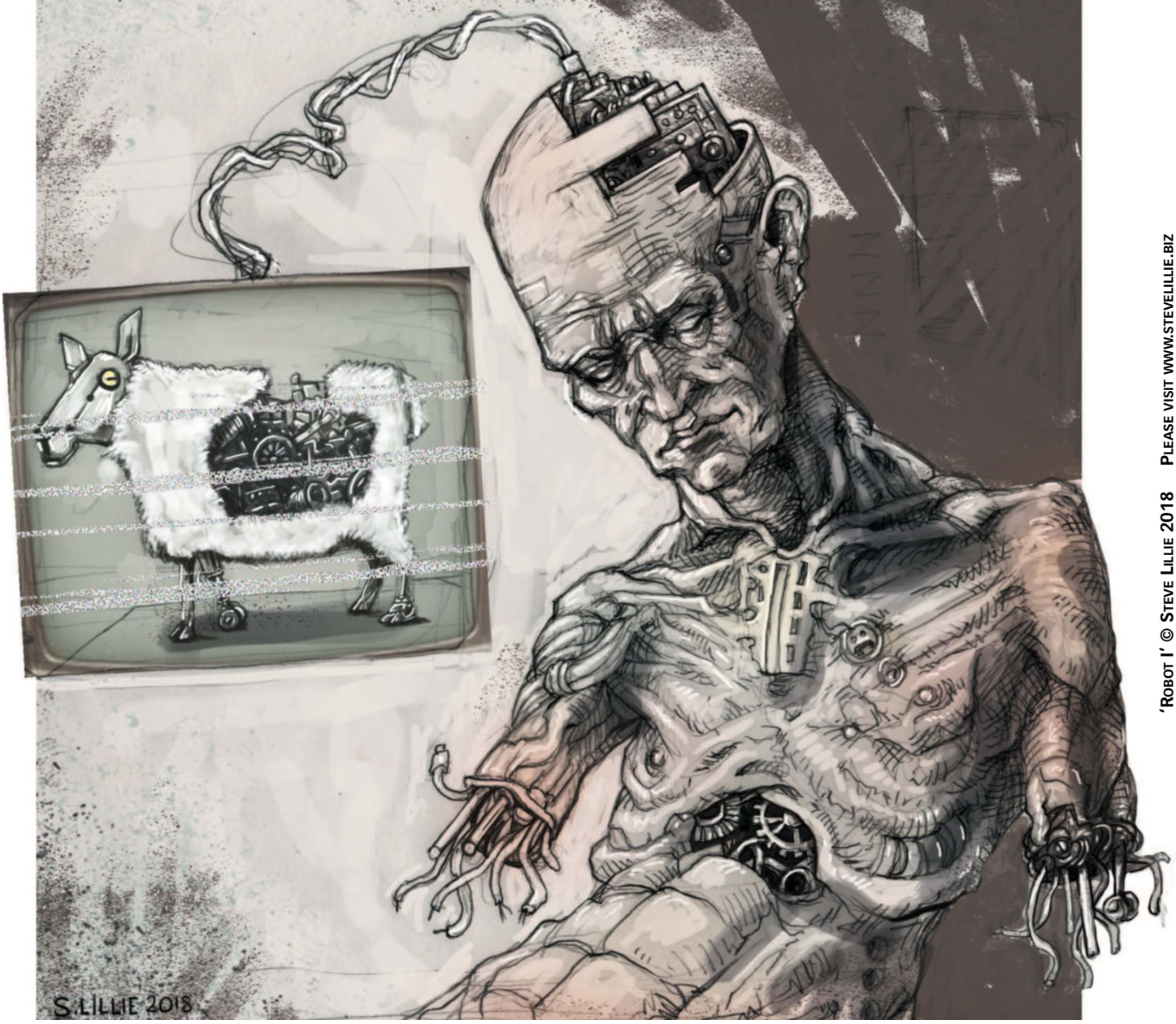
This situation is so bad – and it keeps getting worse as scholars continue to root through his unpublished manuscripts – that the political values of many people of good will lead them to refuse to read his work. Some even suggest relocating his books from the philosophy section of the library to the history of National Socialism. I understand the anger but that is a mistake. Here's the hermeneutical lesson: scrutinizing the author's biography for clues to understanding what was in his or her books is a useful place to start, even where it uncovers an inconvenient truth. But if it is a place to start, it is not a place to finish. Ultimately what matters is to understand not the authorial subjectivity but the author's subject matter. You ignore him at your peril. His influence reaches into nearly every corner of contemporary arts and culture. As maddening as this is to many, Heidegger remains the dominant figure of twentieth century continental philosophy – and there is no way around him. *Prof. John Caputo*

Heidegger's Black Notebooks are complex documents that have sometimes been characterized simplistically. On the one hand, they extensively critique Nazi ideology, especially its racism, as a form of "machination" (e.g. *Gesamtausgabe* 96: 56). After the war, Heidegger refers to "Hitler's criminal madness" (GA 97: 444) and denies he is anti-Semitic (GA 97: 159). On the other hand, several passages do express an ontologized version of conspiracy theories about "world Jewry," and in the late '30s Heidegger writes that Nazism must be "affirmed" even though it is not a new beginning (GA 95: 408); he may view it as the catastrophe that is required before a rebirth (GA 94: 277). He sees all political alternatives as bankrupt (e.g. GA 95: 406 on democracy), rejects postwar calls for justice (e.g. GA 97: 64), and shows no sympathy for the victims of dictatorship. The Notebooks require us to ask what Heidegger misunderstood about politics and ethics, but also whether there is any truth in his analyses of the metaphysics of political ideologies. It is irresponsible either to become a "Heideggerian" or to reject all his thought in advance. But this has always been the case – as it is for any philosopher. *Prof. Richard Polt*

My suspicion is that, fundamentally, the same character flaw that made Heidegger appallingly indifferent to the concerns of his Jewish colleagues and friends – and naive and reckless in publicly associating himself with the Nazis – is also the reason why his core philosophy is not systematically compromised by anti-Semitism. That flaw is that Heidegger did not care about the Jews or their fate. This same indifference underpins, I believe, his readiness to make causal though highfalutin philosophical remarks attacking Jews, as we see in the Black Notebooks. But I say 'casual' because of how few and far between these remarks are, for example in the Notebooks' 1,000-odd pages. If Heidegger had a serious concern about the Jews that he wished to express through his broader philosophical outlook, then it seems to me that he would have devoted much more attention to them than he did, especially in these private reflections in which, according to his brother Fritz at least, "Heidegger is completely himself." Marcuse wrote to Heidegger in 1947 that, though he "admired [him] as a philosopher", "we cannot make the separation between Heidegger the philosopher and Heidegger the man." My suspicion is – of Heidegger the philosopher – that his interest in Judaism and the Jews was marginal compared with his other preoccupations, and that – tragically for him and so many of those around him – the same was true of Heidegger the man. *Prof. Dennis McManus*

'Obviously,' to quote Alan Rickman's trademark retort as Severus Snape. It's old news for scholars that Heidegger was a Nazi (if rather swiftly discarded by the Nazis) and it matters that Heidegger was an anti-Semite, as Peter Trawny shows and not less that he was racist, and misogynist, too – in the fashion of professorial womanizers. Condemnation, righteous or not and despite being deeply seductive, takes so much energy that philosophy welters. And we're compelled to condemn. But to whom are we condemning Heidegger? Snape had Dolores Umbridge – but who disagrees concerning Heidegger? We've no patience for hermeneutics or context or really reading the notebooks themselves and the few bits we read are damning. What remains of the thinker? If Heidegger's philosophy is extraordinary, bashing Heidegger is a hobby horse that drives whole careers. The most durable consequence could echo an older dismissal: "A bad man," Gilbert Ryle once observed, "can't be a good philosopher." Yet from a logical point of view, Ryle's equation fails: a good philosopher may be liable to political error, anti-Semitism, racism, misogyny. These are things we need to think about. *Prof. Babette Babich*

In my view, Heidegger's ontological critiques of modern subjectivism and late-modern enframing helped establish his work as an uncircumventable critical touchstone of twentieth century 'continental' philosophy. And I say this while fully acknowledging that Heidegger deliberately and directly involved himself and his thinking with history's greatest horror (greatest thus far, at least), thereby rendering his work even more controversial than it would have been anyway. All of us would-be post-Heideggerians need to work through the significance of Heidegger's deeply troubling Nazism for ourselves, as I have long argued. Indeed, that critical task is new only to those who are new to Heidegger (or who have somehow managed to avoid it by bunkering down in untenable and so increasingly desperate forms of denial). Working through and beyond Heidegger's politics remains difficult nonetheless because, as I showed in my first book, the most insightful and troubling aspects of Heidegger's thinking are often closely intertwined. Disentangling them requires both care and understanding, and so a capacity to tolerate ethical as well as philosophical ambiguity (traditional scholarly skills that seem to be growing rare in these days of one-sided outrage and indignation). *Prof. Iain Thompson*



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Could a Robot be Conscious?

Brian King says only if some specific conditions are met.

Will robots always be just machines with nothing going on inside, or could they become conscious things with an inner life? If they developed some kind of inner world, it would seem to be like killing them if we scrapped them. Disposal of our machines would become a moral issue.

There are at least three connected major aspects of consciousness to be considered when we ask whether a robot could be conscious. First, could it be self-conscious (as in 'self-aware')? Second, could it have emotions and feelings? And third, could it think consciously – that is, have insight and understanding in its arguments and thoughts? The question is therefore not so much whether robots could simulate human behaviour, which we know they can do to increasing degrees, but whether they could actually *experience* things, as humans do. This of course leads to a big problem – how would we ever know?

In the Turing Test, a machine hidden from view is asked questions by a human, and if that person thinks the answers indicate he's talking to another person, then the conclusion is that the machine thinks. But that is an 'imitation game', as seminal computer scientist Alan Turing (1912-1954) himself called it, and it does not show that a machine has self-awareness. Clearly there is a difference between programming something to give output like a human, and being conscious of what is being computed.

We ascribe conscious behaviour to other humans not because we have access to their consciousness (we don't), but because other people are analogous to us. Not only do they act and speak like us, importantly, they are made of the same kind of stuff. And we have an idea of what we mean by consciousness by considering our own; we also think we have a rough idea what it's like for some animals to be conscious; but ascribing consciousness to a robot that could act like a human would be difficult in the sense that we

would have no clear idea what exactly it was that we were ascribing to it. In other words, ascribing it consciousness would be entirely guesswork based on anthropomorphism.

Much of what I'll argue in the following is based (loosely) on the work of Antonio Damasio (b.1944).

The Stuff That Electric Dreams Are Made On

There are three ways a robot could be made, and these differences may have a bearing on whether it could be conscious:

1) A possibly conscious robot could be made from artificial materials, either by copying human brain and body functions or by inventing new ones.

The argument that this activity could lead to conscious robots is *functionalist*: this view says that it doesn't matter what the material is, it's what the material *does* that counts. Consider a valve: a valve can be made of plastic or metal or any hard material, as long as it performs the proper *function* – say, controlling the flow of liquid through a tube by blocking and unblocking its pathway. Similarily, the functionalists say, biological, living material obviously can produce consciousness, but perhaps other materials could have the same result. They argue that a silicon-based machine could, in principle, have the same sort of mental life that a carbon-based human being has, provided its systems carried out the appropriate functional roles. If this is not the case, we are left saying that there is something almost magical about living matter that can produce both life and consciousness.

The idea that there's something special about living matter was common in the nineteenth century: 'vitalism' was the belief that living organisms are fundamentally different from non-living objects because they contain some extra stuff. However, the discovery of the physical processes that are involved with living, reproduction, inheritance, and evolution has rendered vitalism redundant. The functionalist's expectation is that the same will happen with ideas about the specialness of consciousness through the organic brain.

2) Another way to make conscious robots could be to insert artificial parts and materials into a human nervous system to take the place of natural ones, so that finally everything is artificial.

Looking at medical developments, one can see how far this possibility has already advanced. For example, chips are being developed to take the place of the hippocampus, which controls short term memory and some spatial understanding (see *Live Science* Feb 23, 2011); or special cameras attached to optical nerves can allow blind people to see; nano technology can operate at a cellular and even a molecular level. However, the question is whether we could continually replace the human brain so that we are left with nothing that was there originally and still have a conscious being. Would replacing, say, bits of the brain's neuronal circuitry until all the neurons have been replaced with artificial circuits mean that at some point 'the lights go out' and we're left with a *philosophical zombie*, capable of doing everything a human can do, even behaving in a way indistinguishable from normal human behaviour, but with nothing going on inside?

3) A robot could be made of artificial organic material. This possibility blurs the line between living and non-living material, but would possibly be the most likely option for the artificial production of a sentient, conscious being capable of feeling, since we know that organic material can produce consciousness. To produce such an artificial organism would probably necessitate creating artificial cells which would have some of the properties of organic cells, including the ability to multiply and assemble into coherent organs that could be assembled into bodies controlled by some kind of artificial organic brain.

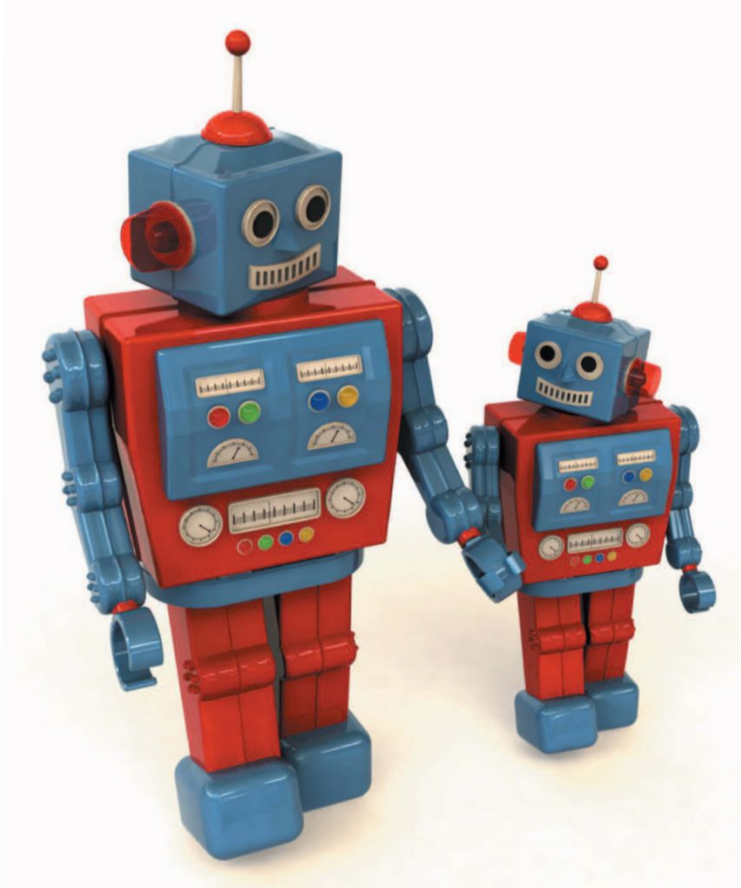
Aping Evolution In Cyberspace

While it might be able to act and speak just like us, a robot would also need to be constituted in a way very similar to us for us to be reasonably certain that it's conscious in a way similar to us. And what other way is there of being meaningfully conscious, except in a way similar to us? Any other way would be literally meaningless to us. Our understanding of consciousness must be based on *our* understanding of it. This not so much a tautology as a reinforcement of the idea that to fundamentally change the meaning of the word 'consciousness', based as it is on experiences absolutely intimate to us, to something we do not know, would therefore involve talking about something that we cannot necessarily recognise as consciousness.

The reason we would model our robot's brain on a human one is because we *know* that consciousness works in or through a human brain. Now many neuroscientists, such as Damasio, think that the brain evolved to help safeguard the body's existence *vis-a-vis* the outside world, and also to regulate the systems in the body (*homeostasis*), and that consciousness has become part of this process. For example, when you are conscious of feeling thirsty you know to act and get a drink. That is, while many regulatory systems are automatic and do not involve consciousness, many do. The distinction between doing something unconsciously and doing it consciously can be illustrated in the example of you driving home but having your conscious attention on something else – some problem occurring in your life – so that you suddenly find yourself parking in your driveway without having been (fully) aware that you were driving – not having your driving at the front of your mind, so to speak. Similarily, the question of robots being conscious can be rephrased as to whether they can 'attend to' something and be aware of doing so. Conscious, attentive involvement seems to have evolved when a *complex* physical response is required. So while you can duck to avoid a brick being hurled at you before you are conscious that it's happening, you need to be conscious of thirst (that is, *feel thirsty*) in order to decide to go to a tap and get some water.

So one thing that's special about organic/living stuff, is that it needs to maintain its well-being. But there is no extra stuff that makes physical stuff alive; instead there is an organisational requirement that necessitates the provision of mechanisms to maintain the living body. So to have a consciousness that we could recognise as such, the robot's body would also have to be a system that needed to be maintained by some kind of regulatory brain. This would mean that, like our brains, a conscious brain in a robot would need to be so intimately connected with its body that it got feedback from both its body's organs and also the environment, and it would need to be able to react appropriately so that its body's functioning is maintained.

The importance of the body for consciousness is reflected in



Damasio's definition of it. In his book *Self Comes To Mind* (2010), he says that "a consciousness is a particular state of mind" which is *felt* and which reveals "patterns mapped in the idiom of every possible sense – visual, auditory, tactile, muscular, visceral." In other words, consciousness is the result of a complex neural reaction to our body's situation, both internal and external.

It could be further argued that emotions and feelings stem from two basic orientations a living thing can have – attraction towards something, and repulsion away from something. This is denoted in conscious creatures by pleasure and pain, or anticipation of these in the experience of excitement or fear. Feelings are the perception of the emotions. They are felt because we tend to notice and become emotionally involved with those situations which have a bearing on our well-being, and consciousness has developed to enable us to have an awareness of and a concern for our bodies, including an awareness of the environment and its possible impact them; and to deliberate best possible outcomes to preserve their well-being. So our emotions and feelings depend on us wanting to maintain the well-being of our bodies. To argue that a robot has a mind that would however be nothing like this because the robot's body is not in a homeostatic relation with its brain, would therefore, once again be ascribing to that robot something that we could not recognise as consciousness. While a robot could mimic human behaviour and be programmed to do certain tasks, it would not be valid to ascribe feeling to it unless it had a body which required internal homeostatic control through its brain. So unless robots can be manufactured to become 'living' in the sense that they have bodies that produce emotions and feelings in brains that help regulate those bodies, we would not be entitled to say that robots are conscious in any way we would recognise.

Humans Understanding Human Understanding

These points also relate to the third question mentioned at the beginning – whether robots could actually *understand* things. Could there be a robot having an internal dialogue, weighing up consequences, seeing implications, and judging others' reactions? And could we say it understood what it said?

Certainly, robots can be made to use words to look as though they understand what's being communicated – this is already happening (Alexa, Siri…). But could there be something in the make-up of a robot which would allow us to say that it not only responds appropriately to our questions or instructions, but *understands* them as well? And what's the difference between understanding what you say and acting and speaking *as though* you understood what you say?

Well, what does it mean to understand something? Is it something more than just computing? Isn't it being aware of exactly what it is you are computing? And what does that *mean*?

One way of understanding understanding in general is to consider what's going on when *we* understand something. The extra insight needed to go from not understanding something to understanding it – the achievement of understanding, so to speak – is like seeing something clearly, or perhaps comprehending it in terms of something simpler. So let's say that when we understand how something works, we explain it in terms of other, simpler things, or things that are already understood that act as metaphors for what we want to explain. We're internally visualising an already-understood model as a kind of metaphor for what is being considered. For instance, when Rutherford and Bohr created their model of the atom, they saw it as like a miniature Solar System. This model was useful in terms of making clear many features of the atom. So we can see understanding first in terms of metaphors which model key features of something. This requires there to be basic already-understood models in our thinking by which we understand more complex things.

As for *arguments*: we can understand these as connecting or linking ideas in terms of metaphors of physical space – one idea *contains* another, or *follows on* from other ideas, or *supports* another. This type of metaphor for thinking is embedded in our own physical nature, as linguistic philosopher George Lakoff and others have argued. Indeed, many metaphors and ideas have meanings which stem from our body's needs and our bodily experiences.

There is also the kind of understanding where we understand the behaviour of others. We have a 'theory of mind' which means we can put ourselves in others' shoes, so to speak. Here perhaps most clearly, our understanding of others is based on our own feelings and intentions, which are in turn based on the requirements of our bodies.

It is possible then that our conscious understanding boils down to a kind of biological awareness. In other words, our experiences of our embodied selves and our place in the world provides the templates for all our understanding.

So if there is a link between consciousness and the type of bodies which produce sensations, feelings, and understanding, then a robot must also have that kind of body for it to be conscious.

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Brian King is a retired Philosophy and History teacher. He has published an ebook, Arguing About Philosophy, *and now runs adult Philosophy and History groups via the University of the Third Age.*

Hail, Malthus!

Toni Vogel Carey on how easily and dangerously poor reasoning can become accepted wisdom.

A specious argument, says *Webster's Dictionary*, is one with "deceptive attractiveness or allure," giving "a false look of truth or genuineness." Here is a case in point, one that plunged England into depression for half a century and that had serious, even fatal, consequences for real people.

The Principle of Population

In 1751 Benjamin Franklin predicted that the population of America would double in 20-25 years, so that in another century "the greatest number of Englishmen will be on this Side of the Water." It was understood that America was unique, with a small population and almost limitless arable land. In Europe, by contrast, Adam Smith noted in *Wealth of Nations*, "the population cannot be expected to double in less than five hundred years."

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) used the American doubling statistic to argue against Condorcet and William Godwin's utopian vision of a world with "no war, no crimes… no government," in which everyone "will seek…the good of all." Malthus's own father shared this vision; so we have to wonder what Dad thought of Thomas's first book (1798), *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as It Affects The Future Improvement of Society*, eight chapters of which were aimed directly at Godwin and Condorcet.

In the first chapter Malthus cites Adam Smith and others on the American population, which "probably without parallel in history…was found to double…in 25 years" or less. He was evidently not aware of Franklin at that point, but included him in the second edition of the *Essay* in 1803, at which point a U.S. census confirmed that population in America was indeed doubling approximately every 23 years.

For Franklin and Smith this was a cheerful statistic; but it sent Malthus into a funk. "I have read…speculations on the perfectibility of man and of society," he wrote (meaning Godwin and Condorcet – and Dad, of course), and "I ardently wish for such happy improvements. But I see…unconquerable difficulties in the way to them."

Malthus begins with two "fixed laws": first, "that food is necessary to the existence of man; and second, that the passion between the sexes is necessary." The problem is the "obvious truth," noted by Smith and others, that "population must always be kept down to the level of the means of subsistence." And if passion is not restrained, Malthus argues, population will increase "in a geometrical ratio" (meaning multiplication times 2: 1,2,4,8…), whereas the food supply can increase "only in an arithmetical ratio" (meaning addition by 1: 1,2,3,4…). Given these premises, Malthus says, "the argument is conclusive against the perfectibility of the mass of mankind."

Misery and Moral Restraint

Six editions of his *Essay* were published during Malthus's lifetime, plus a long entry in a supplement to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1823), and a posthumous condensed *Summary View of the Principle of Population*, published in 1830.

In the first edition Malthus stresses what he calls positive checks on population growth. Some are caused by nature, which he puts under the heading of "*misery*," and calls an "absolutely necessary" result of unchecked population growth. Others, which he considers almost as necessary, are caused by *ourselves*; and he puts these under the heading of "*vice*." Misery includes conditions like "severe labor… insufficient food [and] clothing…diseases and epidemics." Vice includes wars and "excesses of all kinds [that are] in our power to avoid." He does not mince words:

> "The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation… and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence and plague advance…and sweep off…thousands and ten thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks…and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world."

Malthus was soon having doubts, however; and in 1803 he published a second edition, more than four times as long as the first. He began giving less attention to misery and vice, and more to "moral restraint." In polite society one did not even speak of abortion or contraception, so moral restraint simply meant chastity. Malthus described it daintily as "abstinence from marriage, either for a time or permanently…with a strictly moral conduct towards the [opposite] sex in the interval."

The second edition was intended to mitigate some of the "harshest conclusions" of the first. But Malthus continued to maintain that without serious and deliberate checks on population, his geometric and arithmetic ratios "remain in full force." These ratios appear in all editions – at least six times in the *Summary View* alone. And the second edition contains very harsh warnings:

> "If any man chose to marry without a prospect of being able to support a

Thomas Robert Malthus, portrait by John Linnell

> family, he should have the most perfect liberty so to do. Though to marry in this case is, in my opinion, clearly an immoral act…the punishment [is] provided for it by the laws of nature…Parish [local government] assistance should be denied him, and he should be left to the uncertain support of private charity. He should be taught to know that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, had doomed him and his family to suffer for disobeying their repeated admonitions."

Compared with what Malthus considered a softened message, Godwin and Condorcet can sound positively moderate. Godwin (1756-1836) thought, for one thing, that the sex drive could to some extent be sublimated to intellectual pleasures. He also argued in 1820 that given the rate of childhood deaths at the time, in order for the population to double in 25 years, every couple would have to have eight children. He didn't believe this would occur, and so did not accept Malthus's geometrical ratio.

Condorcet (1743-94) didn't live long enough to read Malthus's *Essay*, having died in a Parisian prison during Robespierre's reign of terror. But he wrote this optimistic pre-rebuttal:

> "Might there not… come a moment when… the number of people in the world finally exceeding the means of subsistence [we reach] a point… beyond which… the perfectibility of the human race…may never go? ...Such a time is still very far from us…But even if we agree that the limit will one day arrive…we can assume that by then men will know [not] foolishly to encumber the world with useless and wretched beings."

In 1805 Malthus was appointed to the first professorship of Political Economy in England, at the new East India College in Haileybury, where he remained until his death. His *Principles of Political Economy*, published in 1820, was much more upbeat than the population *Essay*. Here, in fact, Malthus saw food production sufficient for centuries to come. Yet he did not alter later versions of the population essay accordingly. And those who controlled all the major journals in the field of economics ignored – indeed snubbed – his *Principles*. Thus when Thomas Carlyle dubbed economics the "*dismal science*" in 1849, it was due to Malthus's population theory, not his economic theory.

Tautology and Tendency

At Cambridge University Newton was still revered second only to God. And Malthus, a Cambridge graduate, was doubtless trying to emulate Newton with his population formulas. These were hardly of the caliber of Newton's abstrusely mathematical *Principia*. But his ratios could be understood by anyone with a modicum of education, and in the eyes of the public they took on the aura of mathematical certainty, even tautology; they *had* to be true.

There were a few naysayers, to be sure. John Maynard Keynes, who had high praise for Malthus's economics, dismissed his population formula as "pseudo-arithmetical." And he had a point.

There are at least two big problems with the Malthus formulas. One is the arithmetic premise itself – which, after all, is half the theory. And the geometric ratio was old news; so without the arithmetical one Malthus had nothing new to say. But what was his basis for the arithmetic premise? Malthus seems to have simply dreamed this up. Neither Franklin nor Adam Smith had said anything about food increasing arithmetically. And while he repeats it in all later versions, by page 2 of the second edition Malthus is already contradicting it:

> "It is observed by Dr. Franklin that there is no bound to the prolific nature of *plants or animals* but what is made by their crowding and interfering with each other's means of subsistence. Were the face of the earth…vacant of other plants, it might be gradually sowed and overspread with one kind only, as, for instance, with *fennel*." [my italics]

The opening sentence of the *Summary View* reads: "We cannot fail to be struck with a prodigious power of increase in *plants and animals*." In fact "their natural tendency must be to increase in a *geometrical* ratio" [my italics].

The real problem, then, is not food; it is *land*. Malthus himself says in the *Summary Edition* that one thing distinguishing "man from other animals is the power…of very greatly increasing" his means of support; "but this power is obviously limited by the scarcity of *land*" [my italics]. And land has no tendency at all to increase.

The term 'tendency' brings me to Malthus's *other* big problem. Newton refers at the beginning of the *Principia* to "the forces of gravity with which bodies tend to the sun." What he means, of course, is not that these bodies are likely to crash into the sun, but that they experience a pull towards it, which is counteracted by other forces. By contrast, when ordinary people say that the 8:15 commuter train tends to be late, they mean that this is all too often what *does* happen. Similarly, when Malthus says in the first *Essay* that the existing English poor relief laws "tend to increase population," while doing nothing to increase the food supply, he thinks he is describing the actual world.

The problem is that the term 'tendency' is ambiguous between the way Newton uses it and the way it is used in ordinary discourse. As Antony Flew and others have noted, Malthus trades on this ambiguity. When he says in the first *Essay* that "population *tends* to increase geometrically," he means that stringent restrictions must be in place or it *will*. In later editions, though, his message is that notwithstanding the "prodigious *power* of increase in vegetables *and* animals, *their actual increase is extremely slow*." In fact, "it very rarely happens that mankind continue to increase in a geometrical progression, [and] it is useless and absurd to lay any stress upon *tendencies* which *never*, for any length of time …produce their natural effects." [some italics added]

Problem? What problem? In the end Malthus is posing a hypothetical, not an actual problem. And hypothetical problems don't require draconian solutions.

Besides, it's not as if the existing Elizabethan Poor Laws, in force since 1601, were generous. Nonetheless the New Poor Laws of 1834 tightened the screws, mandating that workhouses be built in every parish as the sole source of poor relief, and that conditions there be worse than what the poorest free laborers could find on their own. Husbands and wives were separated from each other, lest they continue to multiply, and even from their children. Yet even so, workhouses could be better than life outside.

The situation provided plenty of material for Charles Dickens. In *A Christmas Carol* (1843) Ebenezer Scrooge is asked to donate to the poor. "Are there no prisons," he snaps? "Are there no workhouses?" But "many cannot go there," he is told, "and many would rather die." Scrooge: "If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population." As one Dickens scholar remarks, "Malthus hung over England like a cloud."

Franklin, Smith, Malthus and Darwin

The idea of geometrical population increase was handed down from Franklin to Smith to Malthus, and thence to Charles Darwin – another Cambridge man who would naturally be drawn to mathematical formulae to give his theory a Newtonian cast. But Darwin never mentions the arithmetic ratio. What drew him to Malthus was solely the idea of geometric increase, which leads to a "struggle for existence," a phrase used both by Malthus and as the title of Darwin's third chapter of *The Origin of Species*.

In September 1838, Darwin would later recall, "I happened to read… Malthus on *Population*, and… it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones… destroyed. Here, then, I had at last got a theory by which to work." Malthus, of course, could never have reached this conclusion; his geometrical ratio merely sparked the last piece of the puzzle to fall into place for Darwin.

It has long been a cliché to describe this struggle as "red in tooth and claw." But the struggle for existence may involve nothing more violent than a plant peeking through a crack in the pavement to get a little sun. And even when the struggle *is* red in tooth and claw, Malthus seems to miss the fact that humans eat animals, and animals eat other animals. The natural historian Buffon had written in 1751 that if large numbers of herrings were not consumed each year, they would soon cover "the whole surface of the sea." But then they would be hit by famine, so it is natural and "necessary" that animals "prey upon each other."

To be sure, population growth *is* a problem; but it's not a problem *everywhere*. The dominant trend in Western countries today is population *decline* – adults marrying later and having only on average 1.7 children, not enough to replace themselves. The Chinese government imposed a population decrease, which brought its own miseries. But what explains the *unforced* decrease in the West?

In *Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith emphasizes "the desire to better one's condition," a desire that "comes with us from the womb and never leaves us till we go into the grave." Why have immigrants historically flocked to the U.S.? To better their condition. Malthus repeats this Smith phrase many times; but he does not factor it into his calculations. His position is that a rise in living standards leads people to have *more* children. But as Smith dryly remarks in *Wealth*, "a half-starved Highland woman frequently bears more than twenty children," while "a pampered fine lady is often incapable of bearing any, and is generally exhausted by two or three." And the Highlands woman, Smith adds, may fail to have "two who survive."

Some today take a more depressing view even than Malthus, and unfortunately, perhaps, a more plausible view. If over-population doesn't get us, they say, the desire to better our condition will. That is because it leads us to demand more and more material goods, depleting the planet of resources and leading to its destruction by global warming. We are doomed, it seems, if not by want, then by plenty.

Moral

Scholars often consider editions 2-6 of the population *Essay* radically different from the first. *All* editions, though, feature both geometric and arithmetic ratios. And it was the first edition that caught everyone's attention and had the lasting impact. The only entry for Malthus in *Bartlett's Quotations* is the population formula given in the first edition. Malthus could have

changed public opinion by speaking out publicly, and retracting the arithmetic ratio before the New Poor Law was enacted in 1834. But he kept mum.

That's the bad news. The good news is that his word soon ceased to matter much, because although technically English workhouses were not abolished until 1929, and the Poor Law system until 1948, economic growth soon made their harsh measures a thing of the past, and Malthus along with them.

Not until 1968 did the spectre of Malthus rise again, when Paul Ehrlich's book *The Population Bomb* predicted that during the 1970s overpopulation would cause the death of hundreds of millions. Many today can remember, as a result, feeling duty-bound not to have more than two children, lest they add to the population. Few remember that in 1980, having survived the '70s, the economist Julian Simon called Ehrlich's dire population predictions "an Oversupply of False Bad News." Simon made Ehrlich a bet, giving him the choice of ten commodities he predicted would increase in price dramatically over the next decade, due to population pressures. Ehrlich chose mostly metals, whose price *decreased* by about 30% by 1990. Yet at 85, he is apparently still at Stanford, still defending and even doubling down on his position.

Next came Malthus on *Broadway* – in a *musical*, no less, with the repellent title *Urinetown*. This show ran from 2001-03 and won Tony awards for best book and best score. The plot, long story short, is that because of a severe water shortage, everyone has to pay to pee; and if they can't pay, they're sent to Urinetown, which seems to be code for death. All this is supposedly hilarious; and it ends with a rousing "Hail, Malthus!"

More than two centuries have now passed since Malthus first warned of a dire population problem. So how's he doing? As you might expect, population has risen mostly in poor countries, and spending on consumption (which has more than doubled since 1970) mostly in rich ones, where people can afford to satisfy their every desire for McMansions and whatever else they think will better their condition. According to a United Nations report in 2001, world population more than doubled in the previous half-century. That sounds bad; but it means doubling exponentially (growth of about 1½ percent per year) in 50 years, which falls way short of doubling geometrically in 25.

I am a philosopher, not a demographer. But Malthus's thesis stands or falls on the worth of his argument; and argumentation is the purview of philosophy. So is ethics; and there are moral as well as logical lessons to be learned from the example of Malthus:

- Don't use a specious argument just because it sounds good.
- Don't continue to use it after you know it's wrong.
- Don't create 'alternative facts' (like that food production grows arithmetically).
- And don't multiply problems beyond necessity.

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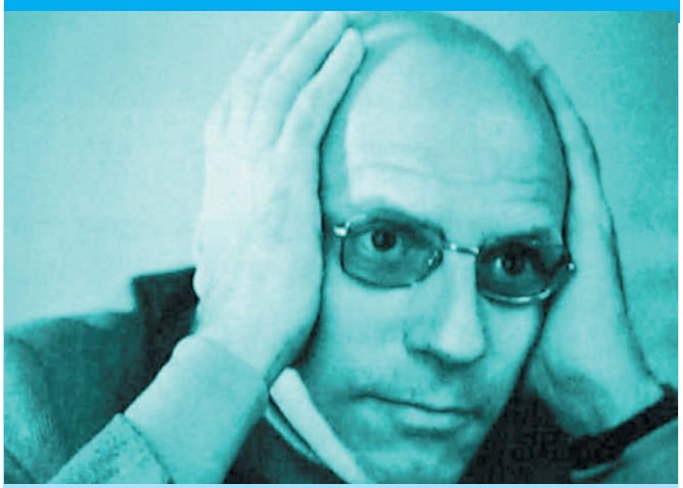
Toni Vogel Carey has been a regular contributor to Philosophy Now since 2002 and serves on its US advisory board. She is an independent scholar who publishes in scholarly journals, gives papers at scholarly conferences (Oxford, Sorbonne, Princeton, Aberdeen, Toronto, Rotterdam…) and is concurrently at work on three books.

Philosophical Haiku



MICHEL FOUCAULT (1926–1984)

Dig into the past
Reason, madness, punishment
Knowledge disinterred

As a boy, the French philosopher Michel Foucault had a flair for Greek, Latin and history. As a young man, he had a flair for the macabre: his bedroom at his boarding school was adorned with images of torture and war, and he reportedly once chased a fellow student with a knife. For some reason, he had few friends.

When he wasn't contemplating violence and death (including his own), Foucault was usually found reading works by Hegel, Marx, Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger. One of the unfortunate outcomes of being influenced by such generally obtuse writers was his own tendency to write in a way that obscured his ideas. This has led some detractors to suggest that his works are pretentious waffle.

Perusing obscure manuscripts from the past, Foucault hoped to shed light on the present. He was, he said, like an archaeologist sifting through the broken shards of bygone ages with a view to helping us understand ourselves. His primary concern was with unearthing the foundational knowledge of customs, theories, and institutions which marked out one epoch from another. Looking at the history of what he called the 'discourses' of such practices as biology, politics, and medicine, he asked how a particular discourse emerges, how it changes, and how it structures the way we see the world. In particular, Foucault believed that science and the discourse of reason were a way for the establishment to wield power – by constructing categories we can label people, and then treat them accordingly. For instance, homosexuality was for a long time categorised as a form of illness, and those 'diagnosed' with it could then be subjected to all sorts of 'cures'. Similarly, Foucault argued that 'madness' is only a social construct used as a form of control: if you were deemed 'mad', then certain treatments awaited you (and they weren't going to be fun). These interests in turn led to his inquiries into the nature of punishment, particularly in schools and prisons. Punishment is, after all, the manifestation of power *par excellence.*

For what it's worth, in my view, you don't have to be mad to read Foucault, but it helps.

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Terence is a writer, historian, and lecturer, and lives with his wife and their dog in Paekakariki, NZ. hardlysurprised.blogspot.co.nz

The Golden Rule Revisited

Paul Walker & **Ally Walker** wonder if the Golden Rule could be a stand-alone ethic.

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Each of us, when faced with a moral decision, is aware at some level that there is a better choice and a worse choice that we could make. Can the Golden Rule be a stand-alone ethical code to guide our behaviour, and by so doing, enhance our flourishing as human beings?

The Golden Rule as Jesus formulated it is: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31). There is a similar idea in most moral traditions. For example, in Confucianism: "what you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others" (*Analects/Lunyu* 12.2 and 6.30); in Buddhism: "hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful" (*Udana-Varga* 5,1); in Hinduism: "this is the sum of duty; do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you" (*Mahabharata* 5,1517); in Islam: "no one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself" (40 *Hadith of an-Nawawi* 13); in Judaism: "what is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary" (*Talmud, Shabbat* 3id), amongst others.

Many people are likely to agree with the sentiment in this rule, and feel a certain resonance with the implied mutual respect of each others' personhood and rights as human beings. As a stand-alone code it need not be the correct solution for *all* ethical dilemmas; but as George Hunsinger has said of a common morality, "it need not do everything in order to do something worthwhile" ('Torture, Common Morality, and the Golden Rule', *Theology Today*, 63, 2006, p.376). One may have a relatively unsophisticated understanding of autonomy, benevolence, non-maleficence, justice, and other ethical principles, but still intuitively apply them to oneself, forming the basis for an ethical code which one then applies impartially to others. It follows that it is not always necessary to philosophise very deeply upon what ethical principles actually mean in order to behave ethically. This frees us to just go out and act on our ethical code rather than deliberate too much about the details. We are speaking of an ethical code that requires empathically walking in the shoes of another. Arguably, the Golden Rule is a candidate for such a code, being an irreducible ethical truth, or 'ethical epistemic primitive' – by which we mean an ethical idea that is so fundamental it cannot be subject to further testing or doubt.

Universalizability: Kant & The Golden Rule

Can the Golden Rule be applied to everyone? Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative says that we should act only upon maxims which we could rationally generalise so that they apply equally to everyone; or in other words, only do what we could rationally want any other person to do in the same circumstances. Kant argued that the Golden Rule is inferior to this imperative: that since the Golden Rule does not contain principles of duties to one's own moral will, nor principles of "strict obligation to one another", it could not be a universal law.(*Groundwork For The Metaphysic Of Morals*, 1785, p.51). As an illustration, he suggests that many might willingly forego help from others if that means they will not need to help others themselves. That is compatible with the Golden Rule; but the rule 'there is no need to help others' could not rationally be generalised as a universal law.

By contrast, Harvard ethics professor Michael Sandel offers an example where the Golden Rule may give an ethically more appealing argument than Kant's categorical imperative (*Justice*, 2009, p.127). Consider a situation where your brother has died in an accident and your elderly mother asks for news of him. The dilemma is whether to tell her the truth (with the shock of it), or

to spare her from it. For Kant the categorical imperative means that your mother's human dignity requires that she be told the truth, since you can't rationally wish that dignity be ignored. (And apart from not being free to lie to her, arguably, you are using her merely as a means to an end – a basic moral wrong for Kant – the end being her own contentment.) The Golden Rule instead exhorts us to ask how we ourselves would want to be treated. The answer is highly contingent – some would want to be told the truth, while others would not.

However, while the Golden Rule most obviously implies a choice to do good things, it could be interpreted as condoning doing hurtful or harmful things too. A person who likes to be aloof could be justified in being unfriendly to others; one who likes to be provoked into an argument could go about provoking others into arguments. The Golden Rule also potentially loses objectivity and impartiality: arguably under the Golden Rule, an individual would have "only to consult his own tastes and needs to discover how he ought to behave toward other people" (L. J. Russell, 'Ideals and Practice', *Philosophy*, XVII, 1942), rather than making ethical decisions by appealling to, for instance, John Rawls' 'impartial spectator', or R. M. Hare's 'all-knowing archangel'.

Reciprocity

Kant also suggests that a criminal might use the Golden Rule to argue that the judge should not send him to prison, because the judge herself would not wish to be incarcerated. The judge however could answer that, indeed, she would not want herself to be incarcerated – *unless* she had committed a crime. Similarily, Derek Parfit describes a situation where a white racist hotel owner bans non-whites from his hotel, justifying himself by saying that he would accept the reciprocity of non-white hotel owners similarly excluding whites from their own hotels (*On What Matters*, 2011, p.323). However, the white hotel owner misunderstands the Golden Rule. It means that he ought to treat black people only as he himself would be willing to be treated in their position. And to be in their position, either he himself is to be black and excluded by most hotel owners, or most hotels are to be owned by blacks who exclude whites. Hence, Parfit restates the Golden Rule as "We ought to treat others only in ways in which we would rationally be willing to be treated, if we were going to be in these other people's positions, and would be relevantly like them" (p.324). His 'and be relevantly like them' means that a strict application of the Golden Rule may be morally inappropriate when the circumstances of the other person are significantly different. Consider a doctor explaining the grave prognosis of a disease to a patient who has the strength and family support to prepare for his own death, as the doctor himself might be, compared with doing the same to another patient who has neither the personal nor the family resources to hear the full truth.

The Golden Rule may however be useful when used to check that one is not making an unjustified exception of oneself. This should not however mean that one could not perform acts of heroic bravery that go beyond what is morally required, despite the fact that another may not be able to do the same thing.

Inversion

The negative formulation of the Golden Rule is something along the lines of 'Do not do to another that which you would not have them do to you'. The *inversion* of the Rule, however, is different. The inversion of the Golden Rule is 'Do unto others as *they* would have you do unto them' (M.G. Singer, 'The Golden Rule', *Philosophy* 38, p.294, 1963). As another Singer – Peter – notes, taken at face value, the inversion implies perfect altruism: it implies that you should acquiesce to the request of another to, for example, hand over your property, to become their slave, and similar untenable requirements – because that is what the other would like you to do for them. Following the inversion, and sacrificing one's own happiness, one's true wants, in order to promote the welfare of others, Kant writes, "would be a self-contradictory maxim if made a universal law" (*Groundwork*, p.117). However, the inversion of the Golden Rule may be a more apposite formula for medical dilemmas, where patient autonomy is important. Respecting a patient's autonomy in decisions around, for example, end-of-life withdrawal of support, or heroic surgical intervention, revolves around what it is that *they* would wish for you to do unto them, and not what *you* might wish in the same situation.

Value Pluralism

While intuitively appealing, brief, easily understood, and hence attractive as a stand-alone ethical code, arguably the Golden Rule is less useful in our current era characterised by rapidly increasing access to information technology throughout the world, which has resulted in a much wider knowledge of different cultures, ethics, and ways of living. With widespread travel and immigration, there is now a pronounced diversity of peoples within our communities with accordingly diverse cultures, religions and values. This means that doing unto others as you would have them do unto you may sometimes not be at all appropriate, since the values which are important for you and for the other person may be widely different, and may indeed be mutually unknown or unknowable.

So although not without brevity and intuitive appeal as a common moral principle, the Golden Rule is insufficient as a stand-alone ethical framework in our era of pronounced value pluralism, where even with the best of intentions, the values which are important to one person may be unwanted by another.

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Paul Walker is a surgeon in Newcastle, NSW, and received his PhD from the University of Newcastle in 2016. Ally Walker is a final year social work student at the University of Sydney, NSW.

The Not So Golden Rule

Dan Flores argues that the Golden Rule can't be followed, even in principle.

The Golden Rule is (roughly) as follows: *treat others as you would have others treat you*. Philosophical reactions to it vary; it has both supporters and detractors. In any case, almost nobody who thinks critically about morality takes the literal version of the Golden Rule seriously, since there are just too many problems with it. To demonstrate this, I will look at a literal version of the Golden Rule espoused by John C. Maxwell, a well-known and influential motivational speaker, and briefly discuss some of the obvious problems that it faces. I will then examine a more sophisticated version of the Golden Rule espoused by philosopher Harry Gensler. While able to overcome some of the problems of the literal Golden Rule, Gensler's version nevertheless shares a common difficulty with it: in both cases, the moral agent is asked to imagine themselves in the place of another. Maxwell thinks this is easily done, and Gensler asks for vividness and accuracy in this act of imagination. I wish to show that any version of the Golden Rule that takes seriously the need to imagine oneself in the place of another is to ask one to do the impossible, so any versions of the Golden Rule that require this should be rejected.

An Argument For The Golden Rule

In *Ethics 101* (2005), John C. Maxwell claims that the Golden Rule should be accepted for the following reasons (pp.18-23):

1. The Golden Rule is accepted by most people.
2. The Golden Rule is easy to understand.
3. The Golden Rule is a win-win philosophy.
4. The Golden Rule is a compass when you need direction.

Therefore

5. The Golden Rule should be accepted.

The claim that the Golden Rule is accepted by most people is arguably the most common feature of just about any discussion of the Golden Rule. Indeed, many religions and moral systems, from Islam and Christianity, Nigerian proverbs to Jainism, do have some version of it. And what could be simpler than to treat others as you would want to be treated? To do so, just imagine yourself in the place of the other; if, while in the place of the other, you would want to be treated as you were treating them, then treat them that way; if not, then don't.

Further, as Maxwell reflects, "When you live by the Golden Rule, everybody wins. If I treat you as well as I desire to be treated, you win. If you treat me likewise, I win. Where is the loser in that?" (p.23). The point is obvious: presuming all of us want to be treated well, faced with a choice of a world where individuals are treating others as they want to be treated, or one where they are not, it seems obvious to choose the world where everybody is acting in such a seemingly reciprocal way. Plain enough. Thus, Maxwell's Premise 3.

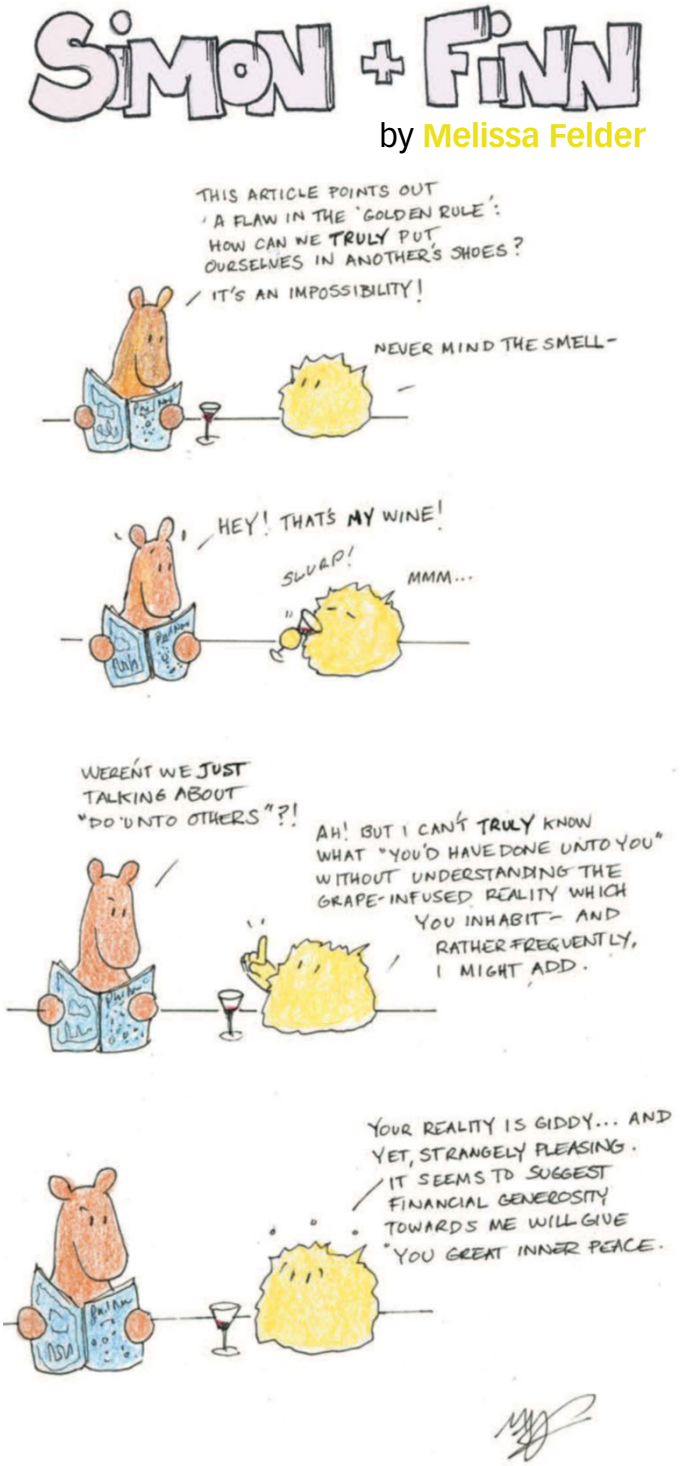
Maxwell's fourth premise is a type of guidance step, if you will. He writes, "In a world with much uncertainty, I think many people are seeking direction." (p.27). Now certainly this is true. Maxwell continues, "The Golden Rule can provide that. It never changes, even as circumstances do. It gives a solid predicable direction every time it's used. And best of all, it actually works." What better to have when lost, than a compass? So when morally lost, who would not want a moral compass? On these grounds, Maxwell would have us believe that the Golden Rule is a standard of morality and that we should act in accordance with it.

Literal Golden Rule Problems

I take Maxwell's version to be the traditional, literal version of the Golden Rule. It is more-or-less the version that most of us have grown up knowing and loving. Yet, as is the case with so much of what is traditional, following the traditional Golden Rule is an unreflective reaction to inherited customs. "The Golden Rule," writes, Neil Duxbury in the article 'Golden Rule Reasoning, Moral Judgment, and Law' in the *Notre Dame Law Review* (2009), "is a routine principle of action... the Rule usefully serves as an interruptive tactic, like counting to ten to prevent losing our temper, or as a way of checking our standards... But most of the time the Rule is practiced unreflectively – the spontaneity of so much social action makes this inevitable" (p.84). So be it. And as is true with so much of what is traditional, the Golden Rule comes with some very traditional criticisms.

Consider, Maxwell asks, where is the loser in following the traditional Golden Rule? Well, as an obvious example, the loser is the victim of somebody who wishes to be treated brutally who abides by the Rule; or the person on the receiving end of someone who wishes that others would always be nothing but honest with them at all times. In such cases, abiding literally by the Golden Rule would violate what Harry Gensler, in *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction* (2011), calls 'regular moral norms' – what I will call 'ordinary moral principles' – norms and principles each of us would normally accept so that we would agree that the violation of them would be morally wrong or, at least, inappropriate. Yet treating somebody brutally would be to follow the traditional Golden Rule literally, if that's how *you* want to be treated. This is a rather large loophole. And hot on its heels, another common criticism of the Golden Rule is that it does not say in what specific ways any given person should act, nor does it explain why some action is morally correct or incorrect.

Another criticism is that just because some version of the traditional Golden Rule can be found from culture to culture and religion to religion does not mean that people within that culture or religion *actually* believe it to be true, much less practice it. To add to this, even if we had some universal understanding of what it is to be treated well and poorly, it simply isn't true that we all want to be treated well. Some people might (even rationally) think that they do not deserve to be treated well; others may not understand what it is to be treated well; some



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may simply not care one way or the other.

So insofar as far as the Golden Rule is a compass, I dare say that as Maxwell presents it, it is a broken compass, always pointing in the same direction, because, as I mentioned, it says nothing about A) The way others want to be treated relative to one's own desires of how to be treated; B) Which preferences are morally superior to others; and C) What *makes* certain preferences for behavior morally superior to others. This is hardly suitable for a moral precept.

On these accounts, Maxwell assumes far too much for his argument to work.

So much for the Golden Rule taken literally, then.

Gensler's Golden Rule

I take these criticisms of the Golden Rule as standard and, with the exception of my metaphor of Maxwell's broken compass, I take no credit for them. The fact is, these criticisms are obvious, so it may seem that I'm swinging at some low-hanging fruit. In his chapter on the Golden Rule, for example, Gensler is quick to note that one of the problems with it is that it does not take into account the fact that people stand in different relations to each other and in different sets of circumstances: it does not take it into account that you and I will be in a different situation with different beliefs, attitudes, and cultural practices. Second, the Golden Rule does not take into account the fact that the follower of the Golden Rule may well have 'defective desires'. If the masochist were a follower of the Golden Rule, their reasoning could be formulated as follows (following Gensler): 'I want to be tortured by Xavier; therefore, I should torture Xavier'. But, of course, any form of torture is usually unwanted, unwarranted, and morally wrong. Thus, the Golden Rule taken literally can lead to absurdities.

So, Gensler reformulates the Golden Rule. He begins by noting three key features of it:

1. A *same situation* clause.
2. A *present attitude* clause.
3. A *don't combine* clause; Do not combine the following:
   a. I do something to another.
   b. I'm unwilling that this be done to me in the same situation.

The question for the Golden Rule, then, is not, 'Am I now willing that this be done to me in my present situation?' Rather, the question surrounding the Golden Rule should be, 'Am I *now* willing that if I were in the *same* situation, then this be done to me?' As Gensler writes, The Golden Rule "is about *our present reaction to a hypothetical case*. It isn't about how we would react if we were *in* the hypothetical case" (p.84). There is a subtlety here. Imagine the case of a judge sentencing a criminal. The Golden Rule says 'Treat others as you would want to be treated'. Criminals want to be free, not incarcerated; therefore, if the judge were to put herself in the place of the criminal, the judge would want to be free; therefore, the judge should not incarcerate the criminal. This is obviously wrong-headed. Imagine now a case where the judge imagined herself in the place of the criminal, but with *the present attitudes and beliefs of the judge*. The judge/criminal would realize that as a criminal she poses a threat to society, and that as judge, the best thing for society would be to be incarcerated. Thus, the judge/criminal would hold that "While I do not want to be incarcerated, I nevertheless realize that I should be; I, therefore, consent to being incarcerated." And, so, by stipulating a same-situation and present attitude clause, Gensler's version of the Golden Rule is able to avoid the problems of the diversity of desires that the traditional Golden Rule faces.

A Conceptual Flaw

Although Gensler is trying to be fair and consistent by taking into account relevant differences of situations, it remains unclear whether what he is asking a moral agent to do is actually possible. Consider:

> "To apply the Golden Rule, we need to *know* what effect our actions have on the lives of others. And we need to *imagine* ourselves, vividly and accurately, in the other person's place on the receiving end of the action. When combined with knowledge and imagination, the Golden Rule is a powerful tool of moral thinking." (p.84).

So we are to 'vividly and accurately' imagine ourselves in the place of another. Maxwell holds the same condition. My question is, even if your imaginations have been vivid, how can you *know* that you have *accurately* imagined yourself in the place of another? If we are to take the 'vividly and accurately' criteria seriously and yet it cannot be met, then the Golden Rule cannot itself be met and, therefore, it cannot be a suitable moral standard.

Being John Malkovitch image © USA Films 1999

In the movie *Being John Malkovich* (2000), one of the characters, Craig, realizes that by entering through a small door he can experience whatever the actor John Malkovich experiences. Now a puzzle arises – let's call it the 'Malkovich Dilemma'. Presumably, whoever Craig is, Craig is that person and no other. In the parlance of the metaphysics of identity, one might say that what it is to be X is that it stands in relation to another thing Y such that X is not Y and Y is not X. Given such an identity condition, 'each thing is what it is and is not another thing' (a phrase attributed to Bishop Joseph Butler). If this is so, and Craig (X) pops into John Malkovich's (Y's) mind and experiences precisely what Malkovich experiences, then how can it be said that Craig is still Craig and not John Malkovich? This is the Malkovich Dilemma. Conversely, if Craig has Malkovich's experiences and yet Craig is still very much aware that he is Craig (as is the case in the movie) then Craig, as a separate mental, conscious being, could not *know* that the experiences he's having are the ones Malkovich is having, because, after all, Craig is not Malkovich. Furthermore, if Craig were *apparently* having the same experiences as Malkovich, but reacts differently to them, it seems clear that Craig wouldn't *actually* be having the same experiences, since our reactions to our experiences are still part of the web of our experiences. If X had exactly Y's experiences, then this would include all relevant experiences for the same duration, with the same vividness and meaning, otherwise it wouldn't be the same experience. But if X truly does have Y's experiences, including the precise reactions that Y would have, how is X different from Y? There would simply be no difference between the two. Indeed, there would only be one experiencer, since strictly the same experiences could not have both difference and identity.

So, why does this fancy metaphysics spell trouble for the Golden Rule? Well, if what I will call the 'identity condition' – that one must be able to imagine one's self in the place of another – is meant in a strong sense, as Maxwell and Gensler imagine it to be, then if the identity condition is an impossibility, so too is the Golden Rule. And since it *is* impossible to truly imagine one's self in the place of another in a strong sense, even a modified Golden Rule is thus an impossibility.

One final consideration. Perhaps you think I am being unjustly dismissive of the idea of putting one's self in the place of another, and that I should be a little more charitable toward Gensler. After all, Gensler tells us that when I am imagining myself in the place of another, I am to imagine myself only as having those properties of another person "that I think are or *might be*" relevant to the situation (p.84, my emphasis). However, even if we were to adopt a softer, more charitable interpretation, the simple fact of the matter is that as long as I am allowed to act on what I merely *think* are the relevant properties and circumstances, then I can no longer be asked to *accurately* imagine myself in the place of another, if 'accurately' means what we normally take it to mean – 'being precisely factually true'.

Conclusion

We can be even more charitable with Gensler. He tells us that the Golden Rule is a 'consistency principle', and that "It does not replace regular moral norms" (p.81); and so, "the Golden Rule does not compete with principles like 'It's wrong to steal' or 'One ought to do whatever maximizes enjoyment.' The Golden Rule operates on a different level":

> "The golden rule captures the *spirit* behind morality. It helps us to see the point behind moral rules. It engages our reasoning, instead of imposing an answer. It counteracts self-centeredness. And it concretely applies ideas like fairness and concern. So, the Golden Rule makes a good one-sentence summary of what morality is about." (p.89).

Here however the problem with the Golden Rule is fully exposed. It is precisely because 1) It is not an 'infallible guide' to what is right or wrong; 2) It doesn't say what specific acts to do; 3) It "does not replace regular moral norms"; and 4) It asks that the moral agent do something impossible, that any version of the Golden Rule that would still be recognizable as the Golden Rule doesn't really *do* anything.

Notice that when somebody follows the Golden Rule to the letter and by doing so does something morally bad, our default position is to say, "Well, they clearly had defective desires," or "They made a mistake because they did not take everything into consideration." In other words, the Golden Rule defers to our ordinary moral principles. Consider further, if the default position in cases where the Golden Rule fails is our ordinary moral principles, then the Golden Rule cannot ground our ordinary moral principles. If ethics is the inquiry into the basic claims of morality, then upon philosophical scrutinization of the Golden Rule, we find that, in the words of Quine, "there is nothing to scrute" after all. We should focus our attention on ordinary moral principles instead.

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Dan Flores teaches philosophy and humanities and is the Director of the Northwest Honors College at Houston Community College.

Letters

When inspiration strikes, don't bottle it up!
Write to me at: Philosophy *Now*
43a Jerningham Road • London • SE14 5NQ, U.K.
or email rick.lewis@philosophynow.org
Keep them short and keep them coming!

Garbled Anti-Relativism?

DEAR EDITOR: Ray Prebble concludes his article 'Are You a Garbled Relativist?' in Issue 124 with a series of questions aimed to intrepidly bolster his pronouncement that 'nobody's really a moral relativist.' Dr Prebble couches his questions as a tool for challenging the moral beliefs of other cultures, to see if they're sound. Let's assume, then, that I were to allow Prebble to borrow the time machine stored in my garage so he can travel back to the pre-Columbian era, where he meets an Aztec priest at a temple. There, Prebble looks on aghast while the official unflinchingly sacrifices one prisoner after another by cutting out their hearts.

Now let's consider at Prebble's five questions intended to debunk moral relativism – in this particular instance, the Aztecs' fervent belief that human sacrifice is indeed moral. Prebble: "Why do you think that?" The priest's response: "The gods expect sacrifices, as well as the resulting blood, as an offering of nourishment. Human blood makes for the ultimate sacrifice." Prebble: "How can you justify doing that?" Priest: "The sacrifices ensure, among other benefits, agricultural abundance and good weather." Prebble: "What consequences will that decision have?" Priest: 'Society will be looked upon favorably by the gods, leading to our citizens being richer, better fed, and more powerful in the face of enemies." Prebble: "Haven't you just contradicted yourself?" Aztec priest: "No. And if you keep pestering me with questions, you might shortly find yourself on the sacrificial block."

So what have Dr Prebble's five questions – his purported litmus test of moral soundness – actually proven by way of his assertion that moral relativism is garbled? After all, the Aztec priest, confident in his ostensible morality, substantively and logically answered all of Prebble's test questions. So if, despite the priest's answers, Prebble still insists upon scorning the morality of sacrificing humans to the gods, doesn't he need to come up with a yardstick other than those questions for ascertaining which societies' beliefs and behaviors are moral? Or instead, might moral objectivism, not moral relativism, be what's garbled?

KEITH TIDMAN
BETHESDA, MD

DEAR EDITOR: In his article 'Are You A Garbled Relativist' (*Philosophy Now* 124), while Ray Prebble makes some good points (e.g. that it is very hard to find a robust enough sense of 'culture' to make cultural relativity a robust notion), his main line of attack fails. The trouble starts in the very first sentence of his article. "A relativist" he says, is someone who says things like "There are many truths, many ways of seeing things." But it surely obvious to anyone that there *are* many truths: I know some of them, no doubt Prebble knows others, and no doubt there are very many other truths which no one knows. It is equally obvious that there are many ways of seeing things. An engineer might admire a bridge for its engineering ingenuity, a factory owner might welcome it for the economic benefits, an environmentalist might deplore it for the damage it causes to wildlife. If this is what relativism is, then I, and surely the huge majority of people, including Prebble himself, are relativists.

There may well be some good arguments against relativism, but before they can even be proposed, we would first need a sensible definition of what relativism is – and by 'sensible', I mean a definition that does not show *immediately* that relativism is obviously true, or that it is obviously false.

NICK EVERITT
SEASCALE, CUMBRIA

Rocks and Chairs

DEAR EDITOR: In Issue 124 Quentin Mareuse wondered: "When a rock breaks, you get two rocks; but when a chair breaks, you get two parts of a chair. Why the difference?" I found his article 'Splitting Chairs' to be thought-provoking, and these are the thoughts it provoked.

The first relates to the nature of a chair. If I buy a flat-pack chair from IKEA (other stores are available), have I bought a chair or the potential for a chair? If an artist requires a broken chair for their installation, so they make a chair and break it as part of the production process, did they make a chair? And is the resultant object a broken chair? (Most of my IKEA experiments go from chair kit to broken chair without encountering chairiness on the way, but that's another story.)

The second thought relates to the nature of a rock. If I break a rock, I could end up with two rocks; but if I do it enough times I end up with gravel; even more times, I end up with motes of dust. At which point does breaking a rock not produce more rocks?

The third relates to temporality. The chair existed before it was broken, but the act of breaking causes it to cease to exist and pieces of a chair to come into existence. It is only our way of experiencing the world that causes us to insist that an object before an action is continuous with objects after an action.

And this leads on to the big thought: what about language? "A rose is a rose is a rose" is true if each of those 'rose' words refer to the same object. But I think that utterance is saying something different – that the nature 'rose' coexists in multiple objects. It is referring not primarily to objects, but to our social agreement to negotiate meaning, in this case a meaning of 'rose'. This is the power of language that the ancient (and some modern) philosophers seem unwilling to accept: language is not a device for exchanging meanings, it is a tool for negotiating towards a shared meaning; and those meanings do not need to be anchored in what Karl Popper described as World 1, the world of physical things. Language operates partly in his World 3

(abstract ideas), but mainly in World 2 (living thought). Language is also not primarily about truths. This makes it (as Gödel recognised) incredibly inefficient at doing logic, and so, philosophy.

A chair is not a 'natural kind' of thing, it is a cultural idea we've agreed to share – some cultures don't have or need the idea. A 'broken chair' is even more not a World 1 thing, it is a World 2 description of a World 3 meaning. Whether we see this meaning as related to other meanings with different descriptions (e.g. former chair, kindling, chair kit) is down to us, and has absolutely no effect on World 1 – unless, of course, we act on our meanings.

MARTIN EDWARDES,
STRATFORD, LONDON, WORLD 3

Non-Free Thinking

DEAR EDITOR: Professor Filice believes that the existence of free will cannot yet be excluded ('Free Will Is Still Alive', Issue 124). He uses a series of analogies to encourage us to think that all is not lost because the complexity of any neurological explanation must, in his view, leave space for there being some other way of explaining how I am doing the choosing. Nowhere, however, does he actually describe in what manner our decisions may be made if not randomly or as a result of a deterministic process. Towards the end of his article he argues: "What if... non-chosen motives are many and suitably complex; and what if they generate routine indecisions?... the accumulation of split-decisions over time might prompt me to develop one side of myself more than another, and unpredictably." But no justification is given for the sudden appearance of this unpredictability nor how it may differ from randomness.

Earlier in the article Professor Filice says: "Micro-level changes do, of course, affect the higher levels. Specifically, neurons do affect person-level thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. But the reverse also seems incontrovertible to me." Well, it is to me as well, because, as we know, the brain is plastic in its functioning and able to adapt to new information supplied to it. We spend all our lives supplying this and our characters, and therefore our motivations, change in consequence. I'm certainly not the person I was, but this is hardly an argument for free will. Indeed all that Professor Filice's article succeeds in doing is to describe a very complex being, complete with feedback pathways. He then, however, infers without any evidence that its complexity must somehow hide an alternative to determinism or randomness; an alternative which he signally fails to characterize or explain.

THOMAS JEFFREYS, WARWICKSHIRE

Confusing Pictures & Words

DEAR EDITOR: In *Philosophy Now* Issue 124, Peter Adamson called Wittgenstein, Frege and Russell great philosophers. In this context I wondered what is 'great', and, further, what is philosophy, anyway?

What makes philosophy worthy? Fundamentally, it must convey enlightenment to the intelligent reader. This implies that its narrative must be understandable: it must be, as far as possible, in 'street' English (if we are in an English-speaking context).

This led me to the notion that there are, essentially, two types of philosophy: academic philosophy and street philosophy. They seem to be defined by their readership. In the former, the narrative utilises jargon which overwhelms street English, frequently to a point beyond which an outsider fails to be enlightened. Street philosophy (and of this, the content of *Philosophy Now* is a representative example), on the other hand, is understandable, enlightening and, importantly, intellectually accessible. [Thanks, Ed.]

This begs a further question: What is philosophy for? Is it to be a narrative encapsulating the secret semiotics of a particular cohort of thinkers, by those thinkers, and exclusively for those thinkers? Or is it to intellectually engage, stimulate and enlighten the thinking 'man/woman in the street'?

Given that the philosophers of ancient Greece aimed essentially to identify and capture the right and good way for citizens to live their lives, academic philosophy and philosophers should take lessons from 'plain English' proponents, and the thinking citizen should buy *Philosophy Now* [agreed, Ed.]. In this way, philosophers would be *really* great, and philosophy would enrich the many, not just the few.

CEDRIC RICHMOND, NOTTINGHAM

Being Embodied

DEAR EDITOR: Raymond Tallis's 'On Looking at the Back of My Hand', Issue 124, reminded me that Schopenhauer writes to the effect that my body is the one object in the universe I can experience both from the outside and the inside.

In his 1983 book on Schopenhauer's philosophy, *Bodies and Wills*, Bryan Magee wrote (p.122), "This material object here [my body], and this one alone, I can know with a direct, non-sensory, non-intellectual knowledge from within: everything else in the universe I can know only from without, via the representations of sense and intellect, which are themselves functions of physical organs which are parts of this body of mine." My body is thus the one exception to Kant's contention that we can know material objects "only in the subjectively determined modes of our own perceiving and thinking and not as they are in themselves." The exception has been under our noses all the time, says Magee, who writes that it is 'astonishing' that Kant could have overlooked this, "with its radical consequences for his philosophy." He speculates that Kant's oversight might be related to the fact that we don't like, or find it difficult, to think of ourselves as material bodies.

BRIAN ROBINSON
MILTON KEYNES

Perceiving Prejudices

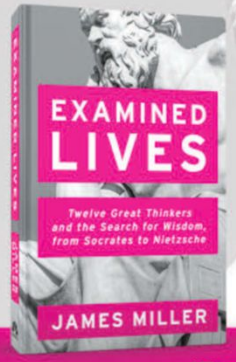
DEAR EDITOR: *Philosophy Now* Issue 123 concentrated on Prejudice and Perception. Despite thought-provoking contributions about the nature of prejudice, and how to deal with it when it appears, I could see nothing about the mechanics of the dissemination of prejudice. As electronic media gain an ever more powerful grip on our culture there will be an increasing tendency to mix news, comment and drama, all served up as 'entertainment'. Does there not need to be a clear divide established between fact and fiction,using clear guidelines ? Or will society be defenceless against brainwashing by an all-powerful communications industry and the prejudices which power tends to collect around itself? Does philosophy have any response to this?

MEURIG PARRI
CAERDYDD

Conscious Response

DEAR EDITOR: I enjoyed the letters in Issue 122 in response to my panpsychism piece in Issue 121, and I have written a response on my blog. Please visit conscienceandconsciousness.com/2018/01/30/responding-to-some-recent-criticisms/

DR PHILIP GOFF,
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY
BUDAPEST



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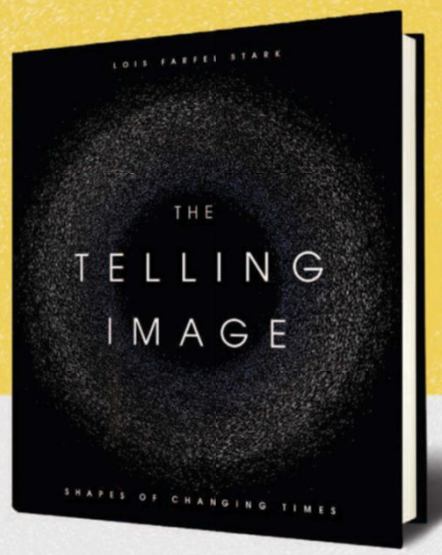

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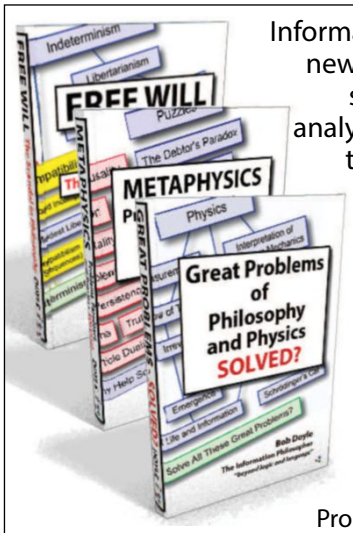

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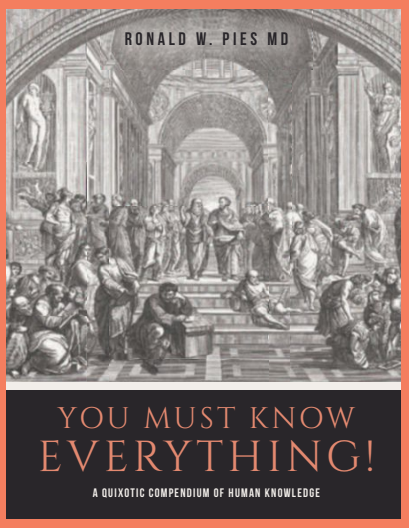

Ronald Pies MD is Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, NY; and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Tufts University School of Medicine.

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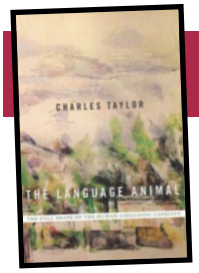
Books

Roger Caldwell looks at **Charles Taylor's** views of language, and **Nick Everitt** considers **Colin McGinn's** arguments that we are born with some ideas.



The Language Animal by Charles Taylor

Charles Taylor, the well-known philosopher, is in many respects an oppositional writer – it is by seeing what he is *against* that we begin to see what he is *for*. In particular he is against scientism, against naturalism, and against reductionistic atomism. To be anti-scientistic is not to be anti-science: as organic bodies, human beings are of course susceptible to scientific analysis. However, as persons with intentions and values, we are not. This doesn't mean that we must give up on explanation at this point. Rather, the human sciences must make space for the way that human beings perceive themselves, which is an essential part of their identity. We must be aware that any account of ourselves is always liable to revision. Molluscs and aardvarks have no means of answering the scientist back. It is given only to human beings to contest the identities ascribed to them. Indeed, we change and grow by continually revising our own understanding of ourselves.

From this follows Taylor's anti-naturalism. Again, this is not to be construed as being against nature. He doesn't deny (although he can hardly be said to emphasize) that human beings are part of nature; but he does deny that they are *wholly* within it, or explicable in its terms.

Taylor's opposition to reductionistic atomism springs from his perception that society is not just a collection of individuals – rather, from the beginning we are *in* society; as human beings we are inherently social creatures. Moreover, language is not just an assembly of words – rather, from the beginning we are *in* language; we are language-saturated beings. The society in which we live and the language we speak are constitutive of the kinds of beings we are. Far from it being the case that (as a famous politician once averred) there is no such thing as society; for Taylor the very reverse is true: without society there can be no such thing as an individual. This leads Taylor to take a communitarian position in politics, opposing what he sees as the individualist bias of liberalism and social contract theory. It also leads him to take a holistic position in regard to language: a language is not merely the sum of its parts but is an all-embracing whole. To speak a language is to embrace what Wittgenstein calls 'a way of life'.

Taylor was born in Québec, where he found himself in a situation of competing linguistic (and nationalist) allegiances. He saw the proponents of English as viewing their language in utilitarian terms – to be preferred on the basis of its being more widely-recognised – whereas the native French speakers saw their language as part of their culture, part of the way they conducted their lives. His sympathies from the beginning were with the latter view, and in this his latest book he defends these early intuitions by pitting against each other two different traditions of thought. One he sees as springing from Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in the seventeenth century, and extending, at least partially, into contemporary Anglo-American analytical philosophy. The other originated with Johann Herder, a German Romantic thinker of the eighteenth century, and was developed by subsequent, predominantly German philosophers, still resonating in the later work of Martin Heidegger in the twentieth century.

Here I shall largely ignore these genealogies, and talk only of the two antithetical philosophies of language, which can be labelled for convenience as *instrumentalism* and *expressivism*.

Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism, as its name suggests, sees language as a tool, and its basic task as representing the world. Here there is a clear division between the world on the one hand and language on the other, and language is seen to perform its function when there is a fit between world and word such that the former is mirrored by the latter. The implicit model here is the scientific statement, which Taylor sees as a "late-achieved, regimented, designative use of language." The result is that with instrumentalism, the discussion of language is reduced to an analysis of propositions (basic assertions of facts) and whether or not they are meaningful or true. The doctrine of *logical positivism* then came along to say that propositions can only possess meaning and have truth-values if they are potentially scientifically verifiable. Where no such verification is possible – as with propositions ascribing beauty or goodness to things – positivism asserts that we are dealing only with 'pseudo-statements' which could have no anchorage in objective reality and are therefore no more than expressions of emotions.

There was a noticeable advance with 'speech-act theory', instituted by the British philosopher J.L. Austin and developed by

Speaking In Tongues © iStockphoto.com/minimil 2010

the American philosopher John Searle, among others. In his now classic work *Speech Acts* (1969), Searle protested against the preoccupation of analytical philosophy with assertions or statements, thereby obscuring other uses of language, such as promising, declaring, ordering, questioning, and so on. Indeed, the same propositional content (for example, marrying Miss X) can be the subject of innumerable kinds of speech acts: thus I can *promise* to marry Miss X; can *claim* to have married Miss X (perhaps secretly); can *wish* I was married to Miss X; can (in a fit of amnesia) *ask* whether I am married to Miss X, and so on. Searle sees his aim in the study of language as that of reducing "the maximum amount of data to the minimum number of principles." For Taylor, Searle like other analytical philosophers considers only a very limited range of linguistic data, being unable to move outside of the representationalist paradigm. There is also he says, an implicit bias in this tradition of thought. The model is invariably an individualistic one: there is an *I* who asserts, promises, declares, requests and so on, but there never seems to be a *you* who answers back. One would never guess from such analyses as Searle's that language is a conversational matter, that it is impossible without dialogue. True, Searle *et al* recognise that the intention behind an utterance is not necessarily at one with the utterance's literal meaning. The woman who tells you, "I have a spare ticket to the concert" is possibly not simply conveying a piece of information: the utterance may be also be an invitation. However, we have still not moved away from an instrumentalist view of language. Indeed, this example is nothing if not instrumental.

Expressivism

Given how little we know about the early evolution of language – not a major concern of Taylor's, given his religious commitments (he's a liberal Roman Catholic) – one should be wary of pronouncing on which of language's roles is basic or central. Yet Taylor is surely correct in holding that the 'regimented scientific zone' of assertions of facts to which analytical philosophers devote their attention is only one suburb of "the vast, sprawling city of language." As a corrective he emphasizes language's expressive role. The language of a mother to her baby, the language of lovers to each other, even the language we use on a casual basis to nodding acquaintances, often has little to do with conveying information. To say "Good morning" to one's neighbour is not (usually) to refer to the weather: it is more a matter of showing good will, of helping to establish or confirm a social relationship. Further, in communicating with one another we have a variety of sign systems at our disposal, especially gestures and facial expressions, whose origins no doubt pre-date spoken language, and are often used to reinforce verbal (strictly speaking, *semantic)* linguistic expression. It is remarkable how much can be expressed without semantic language at all: by a shrug, an expression of the face, or a certain look of the eyes. However, language proper clearly extends our emotional repertoire. As Taylor argues, a chimpanzee may feel anger, but only we as fully linguistic animals can also feel indignation.

Linguistic Jigsaw © iStockphoto.com/gyasemin

The analytical tradition in philosophy presupposes what Taylor calls "the primacy of the literal". And like many (though far from all) philosophers, both Hobbes and Locke aim for a language that is translucent and free of metaphor. The oddity is that their language is quite as metaphorical as that of any other writer. Indeed, the very title of Hobbes' most famous treatise, *Leviathan*, is itself a metaphor. It is impossible, except in some very restricted ranges of language, to manage without metaphors, although many we do not notice because they have become over-familiar. Indeed, the path of language is strewn with dead metaphors. (There are three of them in that very sentence.)

It is not only poets who concoct new figures of speech. Taylor tells us that they are demanded by new styles of life; indeed, they help to *bring about* new styles of life. No doubt there were 'cool' or 'chilled-out' people before those expressions gained currency; but once they had done so a style of living had come into existence and we had new ways of seeing and describing ourselves – and those who were cool were now to be contrasted with those who were 'uptight'. No doubt there were people like Hamlet before Shakespeare invented the character; but it became much easier for others to identify them and for Hamlets to identify themselves as such once he had done so. We think in metaphorical terms without realizing it, seeing life as a journey, time as a river, youth as springtime and old age as winter. As language animals we live *in*, and by means *of*, metaphors, and every language requires its own metaphorical range.

Linguistic Relativity

Every language also has its own especial way of categorizing and describing reality. For Herder each language has its own particular genius, so that the literatures of different nations had very different characteristics, each expressing its own special worldview. This leads to a position of 'linguistic relativity', such that, in some sense of the word 'world', to speak in a different language is to live in a different world. (Rather an uncomfortable position to be in if one is bilingual.)

Surprisingly, Taylor devotes a chapter of his book to the most-discussed expression of linguistic relativity, which is known as 'the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' – surprising, because one had thought that this hypothesis had been comprehensively demolished.

Benjamin Whorf drew lessons from languages such as that of the Hopi Indians, in which it is allegedly impossible to express simultaneity across space: for the Hopis, an event that happens in another place is seen as happening in a different time. Whorf therefore argued that the language you speak determines even such basic matters as how you think of space and time. He fails to make the case, however – not least because by the time he wrote, the Hopis all spoke English as well as their native language, and some (we may presume) wore wristwatches.

Languages are very various in how they divide up the colour spectrum, and some have many more colour terms than others. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis predicts that the colour discriminations you can make will be limited by the terms of your language. In fact – as one would expect – it has nothing to do with your language, and everything to do with the biology of your eyes. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus*, declared in his oracular fashion that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world." But this can only be true if we are unable to think outside or independent of language. This is improbable, given that much of our experience is extra-linguistic: such activities as listening to a piece of music, or following a football match, or playing a game of chess, or riding a bicycle, surely involve thinking

of a sort, but this is not essentially thinking that is, or can be, put into words.

Taylor's Language

Taylor espouses a sort of linguistic holism, yet it is not easy to see how far he can push this idea. If our language is a whole from which parts can't be detached without loss of meaning, and if meaning therefore resides ultimately in the language as a whole, it is hard to see not only how language gets going in the first place, but how translation is possible between one language and another.

From an instrumentalist perspective translation is obviously feasible: a horse is a *cheval*, is a *Pferd*, and so on. From the expressivist view things aren't so cosy. For example, the lyric poetry of one language is never translatable from one language into another, at least without losing a *lot*. And the same applies to much else: the basic informational content may be translatable, but not all the idioms, the connotations of the words, the cadences, the nuances – in short all those things that, as Taylor would say, make language constitutive of a way of life.

Yet although Taylor makes a spirited case for the expressivist view of language, this doesn't mean that the instrumentalist view is thereby demolished. It is not surprising that philosophy, insofar as it follows a scientific paradigm, stresses the representational function of language; but such a function is scarcely the specialized scientific matter that Taylor tries to make it. It is the language of courts of law, of medicine, of tax returns, and numerous aspects of ordinary practical life. Clearly it is true that some aspects of a language are peculiar to it alone, as the expressivists would have it. But other parts of language not only are, but have to be, unambiguously translatable. Instructions for taking medicines or for assembling furniture must convey the same information, and they cannot say one thing in Swedish and another in Italian. Whatever language they are framed in is, in this sense, a matter of indifference. One wonders if the same doesn't apply to philosophy. Charles Taylor wrote this book in English. He could have written it in French. In either case its ideas would surely have remained essentially the same.

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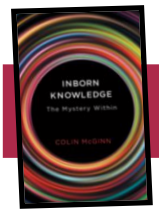
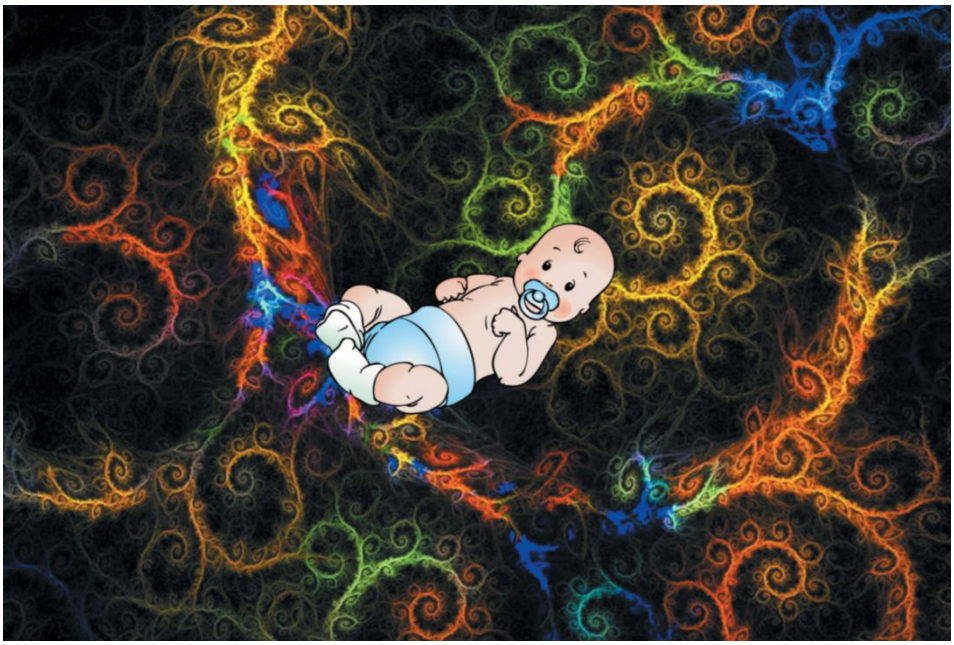
Roger Caldwell is a writer living in Essex. His latest collection of poetry, Setting Out for the Mad Islands, *is published by Shoestring Press.*

• The Language Animal – The True Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity, *by Charles Taylor, Bellknap Press /Harvard University Press, 2016, 368 pages, £25.95, ISBN: 978 067 4060205*



Inborn Knowledge by Colin McGinn

THE GREAT MAJORITY OF US can think of a very great many things: of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of houses and mountains, of pins and clouds and shadows, and so on. And the great majority of us know very many truths about the things we can think of: that unsupported bodies fall in air, that bread is nourishing, that fires produce ashes, that tables support teapots, and so on. About these twin capacities for thought and for knowledge we can raise the twin questions, 'Where did all these ideas come from?' and 'Where did our knowledge of these truths originate?'



BABY CLIP ART © ILA KHAHA 2017

The philosophy of *empiricism* provides a distinctive answer to both these questions. Most boldly enunciated by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), it claims that *all our ideas come from experience*, and so *all our knowledge also comes from experience*. Our senses give us ideas of external objects; and by internal experience we also come to have ideas of the operations of our own minds, such as doubting, willing, etc. Before Locke, Aristotle had accepted largely this picture, and subsequent philosophers in the empiricist tradition, such as Hume, have followed broadly the same line of thought on the origin of ideas.

One school of thought opposed to this tradition is *nativism* – the thesis that *at least some of our ideas and some of our knowledge are innate*. This is a claim most readily associated with Plato, but other adherents include Gottfried Leibniz and (on one reading of him) Immanuel Kant, and in our own day, thinkers such as Jerry Fodor and Noam Chomsky.

This might seem a simple enough contrast, but the point at issue can quickly become unclear. Once empiricists accept (as obviously they do) that the mind has innate *capacities*, and once nativists accept that the innate ideas they speak of may be only *implicit*, it can begin to be hard to see where exactly the point of difference lies.

McGinn's discussion of this contrast proceeds as if it's easy to see. A brief opening chapter outlines what he calls 'the traditional debate'. Twelve problems are then listed for empiricism. This is followed by further exposition of nativism; then some objections to it are considered and dismissed. A final chapter considers what would follow from the truth of nativism.

So how is the contrast to be understood? Clearly, what ideas a creature can receive (that is, what experiences it can have) depends on what senses it has. The fact that humans are sensitive to light of certain wavelengths and not to light of other wavelengths is part of the explanation of why we can acquire some external ideas (involving light from the visible spectrum) and not others (involving light from the infra red or ultra violet parts of the spectrum). To be interesting, nativism needs to say more than this.

Although many parts of McGinn's text read as if he thinks that he needs to show only that the mind has innate capacities, in places he does try, in a rather perfunctory manner, to go beyond this in offering a positive characterisation of implicit ideas.

(Revealingly, although the concept of implicitness must be absolutely central to the thesis of nativism, the word does not even appear in the Index.) McGinn suggests that we can understand ideas being only implicit by analogy with memory. If I remember, say, the last Olympic Games, I will have the ability to explicitly recall that event. But my memory is more than just that ability – it is also (to use McGinn's way of putting it) 'the ground' of my recollections and what 'gives rise' to them, so in these senses my memory can be implicit too. These implicit ideas are, he says, genuine mental states, albeit unconscious ones. In another metaphor, McGinn says that "we should picture the mind as a sheet with characters in invisible ink written on it. Once a suitable outside stimulus is brought to bear, the ink leaps into visibility… the potential was there all along" (p.107 fn.8). Elsewhere he gets carried away with his own rhetoric, when he says for example, "we could say that my knowledge is present well before I exist, in the genome of my ancestors" (p.52). This claim surely goes too far. There is a big gap between saying that one of the remote causes of some of my present knowledge was the genetic endowment of my ancestors and saying that my present knowledge exists in those ancestors' genes.

The Complexity of Simplicity

Although McGinn is largely hostile to the empiricist account, he does think that the empiricists were right to draw a distinction between simple and complex ideas. Locke says that all ideas come originally from experience; but he also wants to allow that we can form ideas of things which we have never experienced, such as unicorns or dragons. His solution is to say that all simple ideas come from experience, but that once we have obtained those simple ideas we can combine them to form complex ideas of wholly imaginary objects.

Unfortunately, this simple/complex ideas distinction has proven to be highly contentious, and nothing McGinn says makes it any less so. The two central problems it faces are 'What makes an idea "simple"?' and 'What is meant by "combining" ideas?' McGinn assumes along with Locke and other empiricists that the idea of red (meaning an experience of red rather than what you might think about red) is simple (although apparently not *all* colour ideas are). But can't that idea of red be said to 'contain' the ideas of hue, saturation, brightness, or intensity? If so aren't *those* better candidates for being simple? Or does, say, the idea of intensity include the idea of a scale, and a point on a scale; so perhaps is it those ideas which are simple? Or is the whole distinction bogus, so that instead there are ideas we experience, and ideas we imagine? And how exactly are we supposed to 'combine' simple ideas to form complex ones? McGinn prefers to speak of 'manufacturing' the complex from the simple, but this reassuringly mechanical-sounding procedure is just as unclear as anything the empiricists offer. Sometimes 'combining' the ideas of x and y apparently gives me the idea of something which is both x and y, as when I (presumably) combine the ideas of redness and squareness to get the idea of a red square. Sometimes the manufacturing process yields an idea of something neither x nor y, as when I combine the idea of a horse and a horn to get a unicorn. And sometimes I end up with an arbitrary collection of two unconnected ideas (for example the smell of a rose and the idea of drum beat). Lumping all these very different cases together under the label 'manufacture' (itself not further explained) is merely obscurantist.

Given that the book is defending the possibility of innate ideas and knowledge, a reader could also reasonably expect that it should specify which ideas and pieces of knowledge are innate. McGinn claims that idea of red and other like it are innate. But what does 'like it' mean here? For instance, he denies that *all* sensory ideas are innate (p.68). But if he thinks that we have an innate idea of red, why not of all other colour ideas, and ideas from other senses, for example, sliminess, or smoothness? In places, he says that all *simple* ideas are innate (for example, p.111). But we are given no definitive list of which ideas are simple, nor, more importantly, any criteria for finding out which ones are.

There is a similar lack of clarity over which knowledge is allegedly innate. A footnote tells us that "mathematical knowledge… is innate" (p.120), and to this McGinn adds knowledge of what redness is. But why is my knowledge of what redness is innate? Not because the idea is a simple one, since he also says that my idea of triangularity is innate, and that idea is presumably not simple, since a triangle is composed of lines. Again, no coherent case is presented.

Some reviewers have praised this short book, one of them (Gregory F. Tague) calling it "a valuable primer for philosophers who are interested in non-metaphysical theories about the mind." Primer it may be, but 'valuable' is too generous. The presentation of empiricism is poor, and the objections to it consequently often miss the mark. The book is unclear exactly what it is that nativism claims and how the theory avoids being either trivial or false; and it is frustratingly vague about which ideas and which knowledge is supposed to be innate. There are of course excellent grounds for saying that humans have innately a wide range of cognitive *abilities* and *dispositions*, and there is an interesting debate to be had about the details of this picture (for example, about which abilities, if any, are sex-linked). But *Inborn Knowledge* makes only a weak case for innate ideas, and an even poorer one for innate knowledge.

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Nick Everitt, now retired, was Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of East Anglia. He is the author of The Non-Existence of God *(Routledge).*

• Inborn Knowledge: The Mystery Within, *by Colin McGinn, MIT Press, 2015, 152 pp, £26.95, ISBN: 978-0262029391*

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Films

STAR WARS THE LAST JEDI

Jason Eberl & **Kevin Decker** philosophize among the stars.

WARNING: CONTAINS SPOILERS

As all observers of a particular galaxy far, far away know, there has recently been another awakening in the Force: *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*.

We reviewed *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* in Issue 115 of *Philosophy Now*. Our review of that film concentrated on the themes of disenchantment and 'doubles' – in particular, pointing out similarities with the original trilogy. We quoted Bryan Seitz of Babson College as saying, "Philosophy finds power and security in the double but from it simultaneously inherits countless forms of dependence and instability." *The Last Jedi* promises that the *Star Wars* franchise, and perhaps philosophy as well, is capable of transforming dependence and instability to yield something genuinely new.

The original *Star Wars* trilogy unfolded as a classic morality play of good versus evil, with a redemption story at its heart: in a crucial moment, Darth Vader turns from the Dark Side of the Force to save his son, Luke Skywalker. The prequel trilogy affirmed this dualist vision by depicting Anakin Skywalker in another crucial moment of decision: whether to save evil Chancellor Palpatine, who intimates that he holds the secret to saving Anakin's wife from certain death, or to stand with Jedi Master Mace Windu in preserving freedom and democracy from the tyrannous Sith. He chooses the former, so becoming Darth Vader.

Good Or Evil, Or Something Beyond?

The Last Jedi continues to use the language of the 'Light Side', the 'Dark Side', and 'turning' from one to the other. Early in the film, after finding him in "the most unfindable place in the galaxy", Rey tells Luke that the Resistance needs him to return because "Kylo Ren [Vader's grandson] is strong with the Dark Side of the Force." Daisy Ridley's deadpan delivery of this line is perfect insofar as she seems to be reciting from some gnostic textbook about the battle of good versus evil. Luke, however, has grown in wisdom beyond these simplistic categories to know that it is vanity to believe that the Force essentially belongs to the Jedi. He cynically but correctly points out that the Sith, and many others, are aware of, and capable of manipulating, the same Force. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Friedrich Nietzsche similarly argued that there is a fundamental 'will to power' which simultaneously undergirds and transcends the socially-constructed categories of 'good' and 'evil', and that the perpetuation of these moral categories serves to fuel the conflict between distinct social forces which are attempting to exert power over each other. In *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), Emperor Palpatine expressed this same idea by saying that *both* the Sith and the Jedi crave power and fear to lose it, indicating that this is the real root of their conflict (see Don Adams, 'Anakin and Achilles: The Scars of Nihilism' in *The Ultimate Star Wars and Philosophy*, eds. Eberl and Decker, 2015). Nietzsche's insight might have served the new trilogy well by providing a novel way of understanding the two moral categories. Alas, writer/director Rian Johnson pulled back, reducing Rey and Kylo Ren's troubled relationship to a mere tug of war: who's going to turn which way – towards the light, or towards the dark?

Anakin's own turn to the Dark Side and into Darth Vader could also be examined in terms of the theology of Saint Augustine, as an evil resulting from 'inordinate desire for temporal goods' (see Jason T. Eberl, '"Know the Dark Side": A Theodicy of the Force', in *The Ultimate Star Wars and Philosophy*). While it isn't intrinsically wrong, according to Augustine, for a man to love his wife, as Anakin loved Padmé, such love for an ultimately perishable person must be weighed against more eternal goods such as justice. In an Augustinian framework, Anakin's downfall is due to his privileging his attachment to a mortal human being over the more fundamental good of justice in the galaxy.

If Augustine was right that we are fundamentally motivated by what we perceive as good for us, then perhaps we should ask what good(s) Rey and Kylo Ren are pursuing as they turn this way and that. Rey – as Kylo points out – seeks *belonging*; she seeks relationship with those from whom she expects unconditional love: her parents or some suitable surrogate. However, her experience in the cave on Ahch-To reveals to her that she can only count on *herself* for self-affirmation. This echoes Ayn Rand's *objectivist* view that people will only progress if each individual pursues their own rationally-chosen self-interest;

Rey learns to rely on herself, as expressed through her light sabre

Rey © Lucasfilm Ltd. & TM. All Rights Reserved

or in other words, that each of us has the potential to flourish by our own devices (see for instance, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 1961). This thesis may be contrasted with the *communitarian* ethos exemplified by neo-Aristotelians such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum. Both of these thinkers contend that individual human flourishing – the actualization of each person's natural capabilities – can only be brought about within a supportive social environment, with institutions (such as the Jedi Order) enshrining practices (the training the Jedi receive) that yield goods internal to such practices (that is, Jedi virtues). So, despite her experience on Ahch-To, *The Last Jedi* ends with Rey on the Millennium Falcon with General Leia Organa and a severely downsized Resistance clinging to the hope that they "have all that they need" to defeat the First Order – namely, each other. By contrast, in his final shot, Kylo Ren is noticeably alone. The apparition of the last link to his father Han Solo – a pair of dice – disappears in his hand as he watches Rey close the door to the Falcon. He wanted to 'kill the past', and he got exactly what he wished for.

Interstellar Anti-Dogmatics

The three *Star Wars* trilogies have given us three seemingly competing, yet complementary, views of the Force. In the original trilogy, it was "an energy field created by all living things… that binds the galaxy together." The prequel trilogy introduced the concept of 'midi-chlorians' – ubiquitous tiny organisms mediating the Force – at which idea many fans balked, since it seemed to reduce the Force to matter; but it arguably rather served as a physical correlate of the mental Force just as neuronal firings arguably serve as a physical correlate to essentially immaterial mental states. *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi* affirm the *ubiquity* of the Force – as something accessible by non-Jedi such as Maz Kanata and Force-sensitive children such as the boy we see at the end of *The Last Jedi*.

The need to reconcile these views, reminds us of an ethical lesson: avoid dogmatism! In *Revenge of the Sith*, Palpatine counseled Anakin that "If one is to understand the great mystery, one must study all its aspects, not just the dogmatic, narrow view of the Jedi." Yoda, by the time of *The Last Jedi*, has also come to understand that the best students grow beyond what their masters have taught them. Yoda himself arrogantly thought that the Jedi held all the answers until he failed to defeat Darth Sidious; while Luke in *The Last Jedi* reaches the point of contending that "the Jedi must end."

Socio-Political Adventures On The Planet Of The Rich

The adventure of the 'rebel scum' Rose and Finn on the planet Canto Bight is an extension of *The Last Jedi*'s secondary plot. A 'master codebreaker' is reputed to be gambling there, and they believe they can hire him to disable the First Order's tracking system as it pursues the few remaining Resistance vessels through space. In the end, Rose and Finn retain the services of an 'alternative' codebreaker, portrayed by Benicio del Toro – unnamed, but referred to in promotional materials as 'DJ'. This development at first apparently reinforces Rian Johnson's overarching theme of 'anyone can be a hero'. Yet, as so often happens in *The Last Jedi*, what director Johnson giveth, Johnson also taketh away: Finn and Rose are betrayed by DJ aboard Snoke's massive ship, the *Supremacy*. Their plan to help the Resistance fleet comes to naught and, even worse, this results in the First Order learning the Resistance's plan to escape to an abandoned rebel base on Crait.

Canto Bight and DJ represents another 'doubling': DJ is Han Solo seen through a glass darkly, while Canto Bight, a casino city and playground for the ultra-rich, is a white-collar version of the Mos Eisley cantina or Maz Kanata's castle on Takodana. Rose and Finn are shocked to be shown that the wealth of

Rose and Finn on Canto Bight

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A galaxy of philosophy

Canto Bight © Lucasfilm Ltd. & TM. All Rights Reserved

Canto Bight has been gained through the sale of weapons to both sides. "It's all a machine, partner. Live free. Don't join," DJ tells Finn, implicitly predicting that he'll follow his own advice.

DJ and the mega-rich of Canto Bight represent the amoral galactic hegemony of the *Star Wars* universe; an irresistible economic force standing behind both the black hats and white hats. This war-based economy is built on cruelty, which the film illustrates through the brutality towards both the racing creatures called 'fathiers' and to orphaned children – thus calling into question neoliberal arguments about the broader benefits of economic productivity *per se*. In other words, it shows that a booming market does not necessarily ensure general improvements in living standards, autonomy, and emancipation, or greater equality. We are meant to infer from what DJ says about it rather that Canto Bight and places like it establish hegemony – that is, a dominance unrestricted to mere economics, but extending over society and culture too. Almost a hundred years ago, the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci highlighted such outcomes of capitalism, projecting that an 'elite' of entrepreneurs "must have the capacity to be an organizer of society in general… right up to the state organism, because of the need to create the conditions most favorable to the expansion of their own class" ('Prison Notebooks' in *An Anthology of Western Marxism*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, 1989, p.113.)

The galactic hegemony revealed on Canto Bight undermines the idea of *Star Wars* as a fundamental struggle between good and evil. Meanwhile, in the real world, the global hegemony of the market throws up difficult questions for collectivist and individualist political theories alike. For example, when corporate monopolies largely direct public taste and their political lobbyists fill the public square with ideological noise, it's difficult to know how to apply the idea from the communitarian ethicist Michael Sandel that the freedom of markets needs to be balanced by other values when deciding on the prioritization of public goods (See *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, 2012). Similarly, liberal theorists such as John Rawls might find it challenging to meaningfully assert that the choice of economic arrangements "must be made on moral and political as well as on economic grounds. Considerations of efficiency are but one basis of decision and often relatively minor at that" (*A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed., 1999, p.229). One can all too easily see today how popular insecurity over job outsourcing, plant closures, and the shrinking social safety-net might be exploited by authoritarian politicians – some of whom are going to be in big business, as Gramsci predicted. Indeed, in *Revenge of the Sith,* Emperor Palpatine was voted into power on a wave of insecurity about a military threat to the Republic.

Subversion & Repetition

In reviewing the most controversial episode yet in the *Star Wars* saga, it is perhaps no surprise that we have so often had cause to refer to philosophers – Augustine, Nietzsche, Gramsci – whose thought was subversive of the dominant culture of their times. Their examples show that philosophy is indeed capable of transforming dependence and instability into the promise of something genuinely new. However, this promise is not really redeemed in *The Last Jedi*. The dialectic between Kylo and Rey and, by extension, that between the Dark and Light Sides of the Force, is stressed, prodded, and presented for the audience's re-evaluation, yet without any substantial change really being made in the relationship of the protagonists. Kylo and Rey's brief alliance against Snoke can't be sustained, as Kylo reaffirms his villainous character and Luke proclaims that he will not be the last Jedi. The relative lack of development for the characters of the Canto Bight subplot – DJ, Rose, and Finn – leaves us with a pastiche of engaging with iinjustice on a galactic scale rather than really engaging with the problem of the hegemony of the super-rich. To these mega-wealthy masters of war, the titular 'star wars' are little more than a distraction from what's going on in their galactic banks and hedge fund accounts. Similarily, Luke Skywalker's last great act is to produce a powerful illusion that serves as a distraction to buy time. If we aren't meant to draw the conclusion at the end of *The Last Jedi* that there's a kind of nobility in deception, and entertainment value in defeating peoples' expectations, what message *was* Rian Johnson trying to send?

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Jason T. Eberl is Professor of Health Care Ethics at Saint Louis University. Kevin S. Decker is Professor of Philosophy at Eastern Washington University. They are the editors of The Ultimate Star Wars and Philosophy *(Wiley-Blackwell).*

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

Martin Jenkins looks at the life of a mathematician-philosopher apologist.

Blaise Pascal was a physicist, mathematician, geometer, calculating-machine designer, controversialist and Christian apologist – but was he a philosopher? He would probably have said no, bearing in mind the implications of the term in his own time. In the memorial of his conversion he writes, "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the savants." Yet Pascal is still read because he engaged creatively with the philosophical thought of his day, and still has something to say even to the thought of our time.

Early Life

Blaise Pascal was born on June 19th 1623 in Clermont in the Auvergne in central France. His older sister, Gilberte, was born in 1620; his younger sister, Jacqueline in 1625. His mother died the following year, and when he was eight the family moved to Paris. His father never remarried. At the age of twelve Pascal discovered for himself the thirty-second proposition of Euclid; afterwards he was admitted to the meetings of the intellectual circle led by the polymath Marin Mersenne.

In 1638 Pascal's father risked imprisonment in the Bastille in a rather obscure political affair, and had to go into hiding. However, after performing in a play before Cardinal Richelieu, the youngest daughter Jacqueline obtained his pardon. (She was then thirteen; precociousness appears to have been a Pascal family trait). He was then appointed as a tax commissioner in Normandy and the family moved to Rouen in 1640. At this time, aged 17, Blaise wrote an essay on conical sections. In 1641 his older sister Gilberte married Florin Périer. It is largely thanks to her and the Périer family that Pascal's writings have survived.

Between 1642 and 1645 Pascal was working on an arithmetical machine – thus anticipating Charles Babbage by two centuries. In 1646 his father suffered a fall and was cared for by the Deschamps brothers, who introduced Pascal to pious works from the abbey of Port-Royal, resulting in Pascal's 'first conversion'. At the end of the year and into 1647 Pascal was conducting experiments with pumps, investigating the nature of a vacuum. Later he got his brother-in-law Florin Périer to carry out experiments which demonstrated the differing effects of air pressure at different heights. In 1647 he also met Descartes.

Blaise's father died in 1651. He and his sister then installed themselves at Paris; thereafter he left the city only for brief periods. He continued to write on mathematics and physics. In the summer of 1654, in response to a letter from the Chevalier de Méré about the likely outcome of an uncompleted wager, he initiated a correspondence with Fermat which laid the foundations of probability theory.

It is tempting to say that it is now that Pascal's life becomes interesting. On the night of November 23rd 1654 he had the experience usually known as his 'second conversion'. He recorded this in a document known as the memorial, which he kept sewn into his clothes until his death. It was so personal that when it was transferred between clothing, Pascal himself, rather than his servants, removed and replaced it.

Pascal began to frequent the Jansenist abbey of Port-Royal. His sister Jacqueline had already become a nun at the abbey. However, Jansenism was a suspect religious movement in seventeenth century France. It was founded on the posthumous book of Cornelius Jansen, *Augustinus*; the issues, around the theology of grace, seem incomprehensible today. Pascal often distanced himself from Jansenist ideas, yet he found himself drawn into the controversy.

There were a number of reasons for this. One may have been his loyalty to his sister and her abbey. However, he seems also to have been concerned by questions of authority and how far church authority properly extends. He was a good experimental scientist but accepted that the church had authority to determine theological truth. But he knew the difference. When the University of Paris condemned five propositions as heretical but further stated that they were to be found in Jansen's work, Pascal drew the distinction: the latter assertion was one of fact, in which the theologians had no more competence than any other educated person.

The result of his reflection on these issues was the *Provincial Letters*. The first of these appeared in January 1656, the eighteenth and last in March 1657. They were published anonymously – a fortunate choice, since they were placed on the papal Index of Forbidden Books in September 1657.

The first three letters addressed the University's condemnation of Arnauld's defence of Jansen. Pascal points out that the two factions united against Arnauld – the Jesuits and the Dominicans – actually disagree with each other on the theology of grace but have agreed to use the same terminology while meaning different things by it. He delights in having an anti-Jansenist explain that all men have access to 'sufficient grace', but that in the face of temptation they need to receive 'efficacious grace' from God because sufficient grace is insufficient. As a scientist he recognised the absurdity of that!

The remaining letters criticise Jesuit casuistry by citing extracts from the Jesuits' own writings. The Jesuits relied on contemporary authorities rather than the fathers and doctors of the church. Pascal believed in traditional authority in theology while rejecting it in science. Also, the Jesuits allowed for reliance on 'probable opinion'. This did not mean choosing what seemed the logically most correct view, while acknowledging that other views might nevertheless be right; it meant choosing the view that best suited the moral position one wanted to adopt. In practice this meant that the Jesuits could always find a way of excusing sins.

Although a polemical work, the *Letters* rests on a firm intellectual foundation. Pascal begins by condemning a lack of intellectual rigor and shows how it leads to a lack of moral rigor, and demands that we seek truth rather than what is convenient to believe.

God's Bookie

About this time Pascal began work on an apology, that is to say, an intellectual justification, for the Christian religion. It was never completed; but his notes and drafts were published in 1670, after his death, under the title *Pensées* (*Thoughts*), and this is the work for which he is best remembered.

Blaise Pascal
Portrait by Darren McAndrew 2018

Pascal's target audience was the circle in which he moved, that is, the educated nobility and bourgeoisie. These men (and an increasing number of educated women), under the influence of contemporary thought, tended to move away from traditional Christianity towards either deism or rationalism. Pascal intended to demonstrate the truth of Christianity in the context of seventeenth century philosophy. However, while engaging with the rational thought of his day, he also acknowledged the power of the non-rational. (His most famous phrase is probably "*Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point*" – "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know" – 'know' in the sense of 'to be acquainted with': a better translation is, 'Reason is a stranger to the reasons of the heart'.)

Traditional apologetics began with proofs of the existence of God. Pascal instead starts from the human condition as a question which demands an answer. He compares human life to a man in a prison cell who does not know his fate and has only an hour to find it out, yet the hour is enough to effect a change in his fate. It is contrary to nature that the man should spend the hour not discovering his fate but playing cards. Similarily, the one certainty in human life is the inevitability of death. Thus it is natural to seek the answer to the question of death. That question brings us to

Pascal's Wager

It goes like this. Each of us has to make a choice of whether or not to believe in Jesus Christ. Many of us have to make this choice without having proof that we consider decisive either way. Therefore effectively we have to make a wager. However, we can compare the possible outcomes to help us choose which way to bet. If we bet on believing in Christ and we are right, then our reward will be eternal bliss. If we bet on Christ, and we are wrong, then we have lost little – merely missed out, perhaps, on a few worldy pleasures. However if we bet against Christ – i.e., we decide not to believe in him – and we turn out to be wrong, then we have missed out on eternal life. So it is rational to put your faith in Christ, Pascal argues.

the most notorious idea in the *Pensées*: 'Pascal's wager'. (The text may well date from 1655, soon after Pascal had been working on the mathematics of gambling.) The man in the prison cell is invited to gamble after all: to bet on the Christian faith because the outcome of a successful bet is eternal bliss, which far outweighs any worldly loss caused by renunciation.

The obvious and often-made response to this argument is that the worldly loss would be real and demonstrable, whereas the gain hypothetical and uncertain. Pascal himself acknowledges this. He writes in a dialogue form (possibly between two aspects of himself), and the sceptic in his dialogue points out that the best option would be not to bet at all. The response to this is, "Yes, but it is necessary to bet." There is no choice except to bet one way or the other; if you do not bet on faith for the next world, you are betting on this world by default. In this Pascal reminds us that we cannot avoid existential choices, and that what we see as inaction is in fact an active choice of which we must accept the consequences. This aspect of Pascal's thought can be seen as a forerunner of French existentialism.

Pascal was an acute psychologist. He recognised that while the question of death needs to be confronted, many seek to avoid it. A frequent word in his writings is *divertissement* – distraction; he uses it as a heading to many of his notes. The man in the prison cell is playing cards, after all; but from what is he distracting himself? From death, or from his understanding of his place in the universe?

The Middle Man

The seventeenth century saw a dramatic change in how humanity viewed itself. Pascal's understanding of this was affected by two instruments: the microscope and the telescope. The microscope revealed the unsuspected world of the infinitely small; the telescope, the infinity of the universe. (It is worth noting in passing that the Pope's condemnation of Galileo in 1633 seems to have had no significant impact on either scientific or Christian thinking. Pascal accepts that the Ptolemaic system is no longer viable.)

What is the place of humanity in this new universe of thought? Clearly the self-importance which humans formerly gave themselves is no longer possible; but, Pascal argues, there are two factors which enable us to retain our dignity.

The first is that humanity represents a mid-point between the infinitely small and the infinity of the universe. "For in the end what is a man as regards nature? Nothing compared to the infinite, everything compared to nothingness, a medium between nothing and the all, infinitely distant from understanding the extremes." Humanity may not be able to reach to the furthest point of both infinities, but it has its dignity in comprehending much that lies between because of its central position.

Also, "Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but a thinking reed." The universe can crush him; but he will know that he is dying, whereas the universe knows nothing. "Our whole dignity therefore consists of thought" – or, we would probably say today, of consciousness. The rest of the universe is devoid of consciousness; only human beings enjoy the dignity which it confers.

Following the note which I have just quoted, Pascal has added a single sentence: "*Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie*" – "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me." Commentators have argued whether this represents Pascal's own thought or that of a hypothetical rationalist. The question is, to me, meaningless. Both would share the terror brought on by contemplating this new and infinite universe; Pascal would have found in his Christian faith a means of coping with the terror.

Cashing In His Chips

In 1658 Pascal organised his notes and drafts into bundles and delivered a talk explaining the plan of his apology. At the same time he was busy writing further polemics around the Jansenist controversy, as well as treatises on geometry. Yet early in 1659 he suffered a serious illness (still undiagnosed). From May to September 1660 he stayed with the Périer family at Clermont and his condition improved. In October 1661 his sister Jacqueline died, and his involvement in theological controversy ended; one wonders to what extent she had inspired it. In the first three months of 1662, Pascal organised *les carrosses à cinq sols* in Paris, a network of coaches, thus adding to his achievements the creation of the first urban public transport system. In June he became seriously ill. He died on August 19th 1662, two months after his thirty-ninth birthday.

The apology was never finished. After 1658 Pascal continued to make notes and drafts, but he never organised them again. It is a real question whether the work *could* ever have been finished. Pascal had made an acute analysis of the human condition as it appeared in the mid-seventeenth century, and he knew, as a result of his conversion, what his answer to the question was. But he seems never to have found a way from the question to the answer that would reconcile his intellectual commitment with his experience of conversion . He at first considered miracles (he was deeply influenced by the apparently miraculous cure of Marguerite Périer in 1656); then he looked to prophecies; but in the end, he could not solve this problem.

Perhaps, however, the incompleteness of Pascal's work makes it more useful than a finished apology would have been. In the *Pensées*, we encounter a great thinker wrestling with his own difficulties and those of his time. Pascal on miracles and prophecies is bogged down in his own era; Pascal on the human condition and the question of death still speaks to us today.

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Martin Jenkins is a retired community worker and Quaker in London.

A Note On Texts

Both the *Provincial Letters* and the *Pensées* are readily available in translations. However, Pascal is best read in the original French. As well as a great thinker, he was an outstanding prose stylist, even when writing notes and drafts.

Question of the Month

"Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?"

Each answer below receives a book. Apologies to the many entrants not included.

Although Heidegger described this as the fundamental question of metaphysics, the answer is quite straightforward at its base, if we are strictly examining a comparison between something and nothing. There is something because there is literally no such thing as nothing (at all), and there possibly never was. Spinoza and Einstein, among many other great thinkers, subscribed to this view that it is impossible for there to be nothing. Nothing is only ever the absence of something in particular, but it is never truly no-thing, since the very label 'nothing' implies 'something'.

What we think of as empty space in our universe is not actually nothing; it contains energy, radiation and particles that flit in and out of existence. It has properties: it can expand and contract, warp and bend. Even attempting to picture nothingness is impossible for the human mind. A Buddhist monk might claim to be able to clear his/her mind of thought during meditation, but even a blank slate is still *something*. Even a void still has some parameters around it to contain the 'nothing' within it.

Given the non-existence of nothing, a similar but more pertinent question might be 'Why does something – our universe – exist as it does, and how did it come about?' This is clearly difficult to answer with any certainty. As an agnostic, I can't agree with Leibniz *et al* that the universe exists because God made it so. Yet I also struggle with the scientific view that the Big Bang created the universe from nothing, as we have already established that there is no 'nothing'. Lawrence Krauss's more nuanced explanation of the origins of the universe imply that there was in fact something to begin with, namely gravity and the quantum 'vacuum', from which the universe was born. But of course we then wind up in circular reasoning *ad infinitum* with the question of where the pre-universe materials arose from... The theory that there may be multiverses that compete with each other for existence similar to natural selection, with the one(s) containing the best conditions for life to arise bringing themselves into existence for conscious beings, also doesn't address the issue of the origins of those multiverses in the first place.

Others claim that the universe is inexplicable and there will never be an answer to the question. But Bertrand Russell's assertion that "I should say that the universe is just there, and that's all" is ultimately an unsatisfying and disappointing response. How can we, as reasoning and self-aware beings, not question how our universe came to be and why it exists at all? It's a fascinating and mind-bending interplay between physics, theology, and philosophy, which undoubtedly the human race will long continue to ponder.

Rose Dale, Floreat
Western Australia

Four musings and one solution. (1) The question posits 'nothing' as the default position. Suppose there *was* nothing. Would we then (*per impossible)* ask 'Why is there nothing?' This question doesn't have the same gravitas. 'Nothing' doesn't seem to require an explanation: 'There just is nothing' appears to be adequate. But if this is the case, why isn't 'There just is something' an adequate answer to our original question?

(2) Compare the Old Testament story of the burning bush, and Yahweh's answer to Moses' question of who He is: "I am what I am." This has been treated as a deep and meaningful response. Why don't we grant the same latitude to the universe and treat 'It is what it is' as an equally deep and meaningful response to the question of why there is something? Perhaps existence is a brute fact – the universe just is, and that's explanation enough.

(3) Indeed, what kind of explanation could there possibly be? To explain a thing's existence is to show what *other* thing or things cause it to be. But how can we explain the existence of the totality of things? By definition, there are no *further* things in terms of which the totality of things can be explained. To ask for an answer when none is possible seems futile.

(4) It is hard to avoid the suspicion that this is a trick question posed by theists who, when you get into trouble trying to answer it, attempt to trump you with the God card: "Ah ha!", they say, "You can't explain it, so the only plausible explanation for anything existing must be that God created it!"

A solution: my own route out of the fly bottle is on the wings of probability. Although there is only one possible 'nothing', there are an infinite number of possible 'somethings'. Thus the initial probability of there being nothing rather than something is one divided by infinity, which is next to nothing, a virtual zero. Conversely, the probability of there being something is as close to one as you can get. So why is there something rather than nothing? Because it always was an odds-on certainty. That's where the smart money is.

Ian Robinson
Cowes, Australia

This is arguably the most fundamental question in philosophy. I once heard a respected philosopher say it was the 'wrong question', without proffering a 'right question'. I thought this was a cop-out, not to mention a not-so-subtle evasion. But there are two major aspects to this question, and most attempted answers only address one.

We inhabit a universe we believe to be around fourteen billion years old. Proto-human consciousness only came into being about six million years ago, with *Homo sapiens* arriving on the

scene only very recently – roughly 200,000 years ago. But here's the thing: without a conscious entity to perceive the Universe, there might as well be nothing.

Einstein famously said, "The most incomprehensible thing about the Universe is that it's comprehensible." Many scientists, if not most, believe that the Universe and our status within it is a freak accident. Paul Davies in his erudite book *The Goldilocks Enigma* calls this interpretation 'the absurd universe'. Their standard current answer to this enigma is that there are many, perhaps an infinite number of universes. If this is the case, then there are an infinite number of you and me. The multiverse hypothesis says that all possibilities are equally valid, which doesn't explain anything, except to say that the freak accident of our existence can only be understood within an endless sea of all possible existences. A number of physicists and cosmologists have further pointed out that there are constants pertaining to fundamental physical laws whose size permits complex life-forms to evolve. Even small variances in these numbers, up or down, could have made the Universe lifeless. And as the cosmologist John Barrow has pointed out, the Universe also needs to be of the mind-boggling scale we observe to allow time for complex life – meaning us – to evolve. Brandon Carter coined and defined two anthropic principles on the basis of these ideas. The *weak anthropic principle* says that only a universe that contains observers can be observed (which is a tautology). The *strong anthropic principle* says that only a universe that permits observers to emerge can *exist*. To be self-realised, a universe requires consciousness, otherwise it's effectively non-existent; in the same way that a lost manuscript by Shakespeare would be non-existent.

Paul P. Mealing
Melbourne, Australia

As to why this something exists, we may consider the four types of causes identified by Aristotle: the material, formal, efficient, and final causes (in *The Great Philosophers*, Brian Magee suggested we could think of these as 'be-causes'). Hence there is something because of its *materials*. These can be given structure through a *formal cause* – which we can perhaps think of as a definition of what makes something that very thing – by means of an *efficient cause* – that is, through a *process* or *agent* – for some *purpose* – the last being Aristotle's *final cause*. The religiously persuaded have been inclined to seek the cause of *all* such causes – a '*first cause*', evoking a supernatural deity whose necessary existence and omnipotence can be seen to resolve the problem of there being something rather than nothing.

For us, 'why' primarily suggests purpose, intention and motive, which are distinctly subjective, human proclivities. In comparison, 'how' applies independently of these, objectively, to the material and efficient causes by which something exists. With the burgeoning of empirical science, such explanations of origins become emphasised, because evidence suggests that things naturally 'just are' rather than are consciously intended.

As to the role of 'nothing', at the extreme, according to *New Scientist* editor-in-chief Jeremy Webb, among others, space and time came into existence only after the Big Bang, and before this neither existed (*Nothing*, 2013, p.6). Asking what happened before the Big Bang's singularity is, says Stephen Hawking, like asking what is south of the South Pole. Furthermore, Brian Cox and Andrew Cohen (*Wonders of the Universe*, 2011, p.239) maintain that after 10^{100} years as regards this Universe, "nothing happens and it keeps not happening for ever." After this unimaginably long time, then, there *will* be nothing rather than something – an eternity of nothingness. However, in the interim, even if common sense tempts us to believe that matter cannot spontaneously arise from empty space, "when we allow for the dynamics of gravity and quantum mechanics… this is no longer true" (Lawrence Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing*, 2012, p.151).

Colin Brookes
Loughborough, UK

There seem to be three ways of answering this question posed by Gottfried Leibniz: 1) 'Something' – the universe – has always existed; 2) A necessary entity (something that could not *not* have existed) brought everything else into existence; 3) 'Something' – the universe – arose spontaneously.

Leibniz himself believed that "sufficient reason for the existence of the universe cannot be found in the series of contingent things" in the world, therefore "the ultimate root of the world must be something which exists of metaphysical necessity." He concludes, the "final reason for things is called God." This argument doesn't cut much ice with non-believers, since it prompts the question: Why is there a God rather than nothing?

In his brilliant book *A Universe from Nothing*, Lawrence Krauss develops the idea of self-creating universes. First, he challenges the question itself. He suggests that people who ask the question usually mean 'How is there something?' (a scientific question) rather than 'Why is there something?' (a metaphysical question). He then describes how a quantum theory of gravity permits universes to appear spontaneously from the quantum vacuum with their own time and space. These universes, although tiny, may contain matter and radiation, as long as their total energy (kinetic and mass energy minus gravity) is zero. These baby universes normally last an infinitesimally short time. However, inflation – the force that originally powered our own universe – can cause some to expand exponentially and turn them into universes, some possibly like our own, but some possibly with completely different particles and physical laws. Krauss goes on to argue that the creation of 'something' is inevitable because 'nothing' is unstable.

Does Krauss's argument offer a satisfactory explanation of why or how there is something? Can one not still wonder legitimately why there is quantum vacuum energy and inflation and not *nothing at all*? In any case, it seems that it's science that will find the answer, and philosophy can only stand by and double-check the arguments!

Michael Brake
Epsom, UK

Why is there something rather than nothing? One might answer, simply because there is. There are many convoluted paths to this point. If the universe had no beginning, therefore there always was something – its non-existence is therefore impossible. This idea is supported by a study that predicts that the universe had no beginning yet existed forever as a sort of quantum potential, before collapsing into the Big Bang. Another approach uses the idea of 'rainbow gravity' to back up the notion that the

universe had no beginning, and that time stretched out infinitely. Other views conclude that time did not exist before the Big Bang.

Hiowever, human nature and prior experience lead us to expect everything to have a cause – thus the need for belief in God. Yet a cause may not always be necessary, even for the formation of the universe, which is beyond our knowledge; if there indeed was a starting point of the universe at all. Of course, if we were to find a proven cause for the foundation of the universe, that cause itself would need a cause – we would be back to square one looking for that said new cause. This is true as any cause itself must have its own cause; there is no simple and confined cause for why the body works, if it is because of our organs, then our organs work because of our bodily tissues, the tissues because of the blood, and so on, until we eventually get to something we cannot explain. If there truly is a cause for the universe, the answer must be something that exists primarily without its own cause – so why can't the universe itself exist without a cause?

To answer the question of 'why', one must realise that the answer may lie within itself, that the world may be a 'necessary being', holding its own reason for existence within itself. An example of such could be provided by arithmetic, whose underlying laws exist as of themselves. So we come back to the simplistic reason that there is something rather than nothing just because there is.

Alanna Blackshaw
Morden, UK

The easiest way to show that there must be something rather than nothing is to try to define nothing. Nothing must have no properties: No size. No shape. No position. No mass-energy, forces, wave forms, or anything else you can think of. No time, no past, no present, no future. And finally, no existence. Therefore there must be something. And this is it.

Larry Curley
Sawtry, Huntingdon, UK

Why is there something rather than nothing? I vouch for 'play'. Bear with me. Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness* that a perfect nothingness would nihilate itself. It's as if there is something in nothingness that must become something. So imagine, if you will, a pre-Big-Bang cosmic boredom. Now imagine it, in some fundamental way, seeking to become something. This implies a kind of experimentation, or play, for the sake of seeing what happens. And how can there be any 'seeing' without consciousness, which is as removed from nothing as anything could be?

Everything seems to exist for the sake of being perceived. Consider, for instance, secondary qualities such as light and sound. While we can easily imagine a universe of form and extension – primary qualities – without consciousness (specifically, without being perceived), secondary qualities are different. If a tree falls in the forest and no one's around to hear it, it doesn't make *sound* as much as disturb the air. The same goes for light: neither color nor sound exist without being perceived.

So why all this rather than nothing? To see what happens? Experimentation, perhaps? *Play*? In this sense, all perceiving things can be thought of as the eyes and ears of God. This has two major implications. First, there are ethical implications concerning how we treat other perceiving things, the imperative to minimize suffering. This brings up an obvious objection: pain and suffering seem contrary to play. But experiments often go wrong. And to pose suffering and catastrophe against experimentation would be to mistake it for some purposiveness with a fixed positive outcome, guided perhaps by some higher consciousness. I'm after something more impersonal. Secondly, consciousness distances us from nothing. So we can assume that the more it evolves, the further it removes itself from that nothing. Therefore, the higher the forms of play we engage in (art, philosophy, science, etc.), the greater the distance. So what better thing could we do with our sliver of something than see what consciousness can do? And what could push us further from that cosmic boredom than play?

D.E. Tarkington
Bellevue, Nebraska, USA

That there is something rather than nothing I take as proven by the fact of a question having been posed. The *nature* of nothingness is more problematic. If by 'nothingness' we mean an everlasting void incapable of change, we have no evidence such a state could exist. Even a vacuum we now believe maintains a propensity to generate something via the laws of quantum mechan-

Cartoon © Jonny Hawkins 2018

ics. Those laws also apparently determined the nature of the fundamental constituents of matter and the energy fields that emerged 13.7 billion years ago in the Big Bang that initiated the 'something' of our Universe. These in turn exhibit propensities to interact in specific, definable and repeatable ways with each other, causing a dynamic of change of the something, from which increasing complexity can develop. One outcome of this increasing complexity, in at least one region of the Universe this process created, has been the development of self-replicating assemblies of matter, which, under the influence of competition for the fundamental materials with which to replicate, results in further complexity over time. The conclusion of this, over 300,000 years ago, was the emergence of a life form that approximately 2,500 years ago was capable of recording questions of the sort this response seeks to answer. Since then we have further developed the capacity to offer credible answers to such questions. Using a unique combination of toolmaking, observation and deductive and inductive reasoning skills, we have developed the remarkable understanding I just outlined. Unfortunately, many of our species will still challenge this understanding. They may concede that while this line of argument may address the 'how' of something rather than nothing, it fails to produce the reason, purpose or cause that the word 'why' in the original question implies. But I'm afraid that attributing a purpose to the laws of nature fails to appreciate the sort of thing those laws and the Universe that results are. The seeking of a purpose for all things, by the questioners we have become, reflects not something out there in what led to our creation, but something internal we use to organise our short lives within this magnificent creation.

Mike Addison
Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK

This is one of those questions which, as the Buddha says in a sermon attributed to him, "tends not toward edification", if by edification we mean achieving a final answer. Perhaps one is possible, but attempts to answer the question by appeal to the principle of sufficient reason devolve quickly into infinite regress: God created everything, but who created God? Appealing to multiverse cosmology, we might say that we happen to live in a universe finely tuned for existence of certain particles and, especially, stars. Other universes may be an absence of things. But what created the *multiverse*?

Perhaps then the question tends not toward edification, toward a final answer; but the *asking* of it can nevertheless be edifying because beneath the query there seems to be an attitude of awe that there are things and here they are and here we are as things too, among the others. Would we be right in saying that awareness of and immersion in this 'thisness' (or *haecceity*) – not among the things themselves as struggled-toward essences or concepts, but among the things as we live with them, with all their particularities in all this dizzying scope and precision – is the foundation of Freud's 'oceanic feeling'? This is the kinship selves feel for what is real and bigger than they are. The poets have been particularly good at describing this, haven't they?

So in asking the metaphysical question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?', perhaps we can forego the apparently impossible answer in favor of how the questioning itself is inherently ethical. Knowing the 'I-thou' relationship begins here.

So I'm not interested in trying to justify an answer to a seemingly unanswerable question. I'm saying that the motives for asking it mean we are enraptured by the material world – a world which too many philosophers, beginning with Plato, have denigrated, much to the detriment of reason, understanding, compassion, reverence and equity.

Christopher Cokinos
University of Arizona, USA

My baby daughter is starting to babble. Soon she will mouth her first word, and then… Well, then come the questions. She will be asking why this and why that, so the powers of my knowledge and patience will be stretched to new limits. I have tried to prepare myself for that most puzzling question of all: Why is there something rather than nothing? She will, no doubt, phrase it differently, but I will know what she means. I close my eyes and begin to imagine what the wise men would say…

Professor Broot says, "There just is"; and Professor Endelez that "The universe was caused by a Big Bang, and before that was a Big Bang, and so on." My daughter still presses her whys, even though the former dismissed the question and the latter dodged it by swapping nothing with infinity. That does not sit well with myself or my daughter. So my daughter swamps the pair with a stream of whys, and then I notice Professor Broot beginning to twizzle and tug at his moustache, and I know it is time for us to go. We move on to Professor Gottluv, who tells us that "Everything in the universe has a cause and the ultimate cause must, by necessity of avoiding an absurd regress, be uncaused, and we call this thing God." Yet my daughter continues to ask why, and so do I. It sounds like our concept of nothing was now swapped for a kind of infinity called God. Meantime, rumours have been going around about our endeavour. A host of Professors are swarming around us now, and we are overwhelmed by ever more exotic definitions of nothingness and time, and pedantry about the question's wording.

Enough! We go somewhere quiet, sit down and break bread. Here we munch over the problem that has been bothering us the entire time. There never seems to be a way to satisfactorily end the whys. All answers, discounting the cop outs, somehow end up either becoming circular, turtles all the way down, or dogmatically cut short at an arbitrary point. I ask my daughter, "What do you think about all this?" With bits of cheese on her chin she says, "Dish shammich ish sho good!" So it is, my love, so it is… a good ploughman's for common folk with common sense. Amen!

Eneree Gundalai
Hannover, Germany

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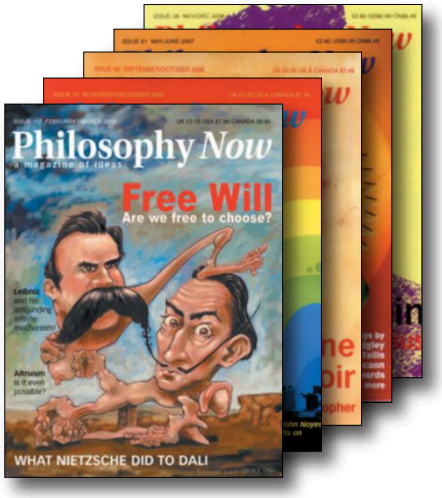

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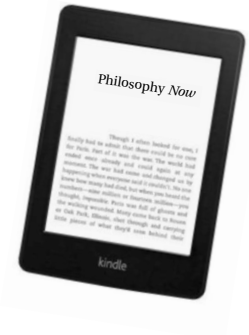

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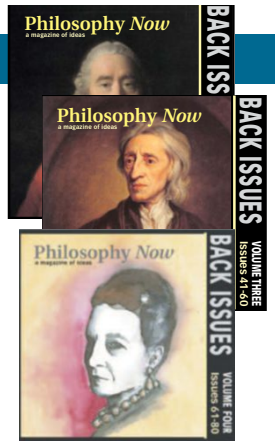

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Tallis in Wonderland

Problems & Mysteries

Raymond Tallis says mystery is the heart of philosophy.

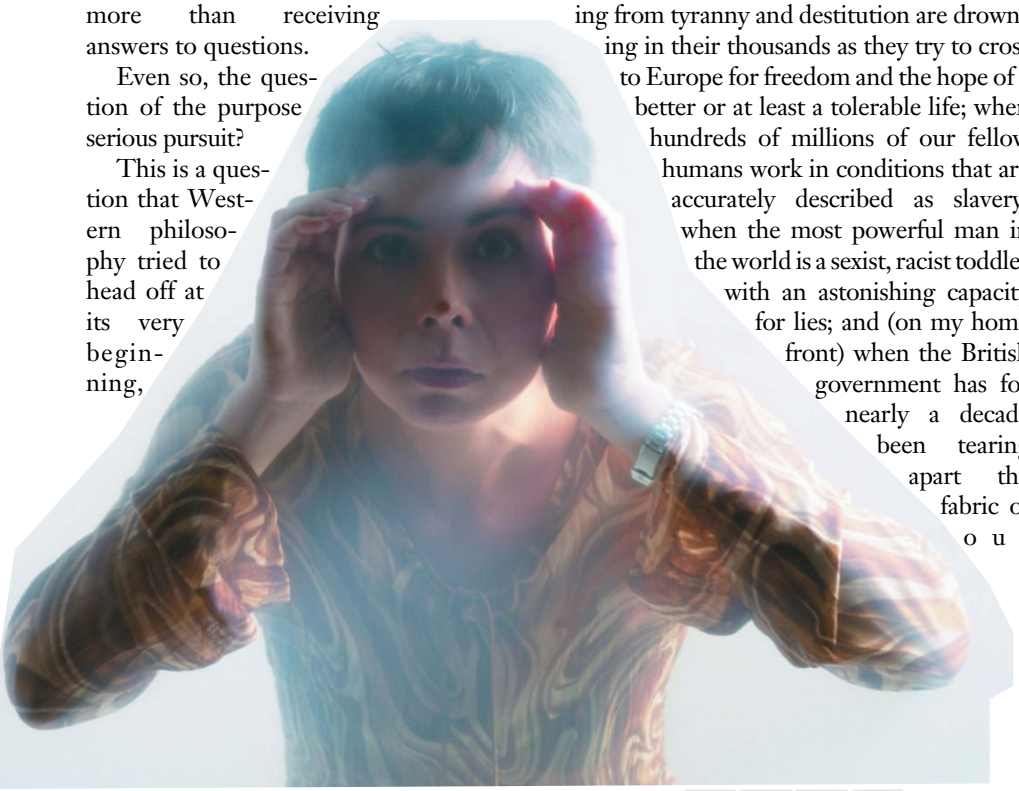
A couple of years ago I addressed the delicate question of whether or not philosophy makes progress ('The "P" Word', *Philosophy Now* 113, 2016). The question is more complicated than could justify a straight 'Yes' or a straight 'No' answer.

It might at first seem that progress in philosophy should be like progress in any other theoretical discipline, namely reaching agreed-upon solutions to problems. By that criterion, there are few branches of philosophy which can be regarded as a success. But of course, things are not that simple. There are other markers of progress. One is the capacity of philosophy to transform its problems into something possibly more complex, definitely more interesting, and most importantly, less in the grip of the presuppositions of everyday life. Philosophy is at least as much about creating problems as solving them. If, ultimately, philosophy is about waking up to, and even out of, our ordinary wakefulness, it cannot be just a matter of solving problems. Waking up is more than receiving answers to questions.

Even so, the question of the purpose serious pursuit?

This is a question that Western philosophy tried to head off at its very beginning, when Plato asserted through the mouth of Socrates that "the unexamined life is not worth living". And the version of the examined life he had in mind was that of a life like his own – one preoccupied by fundamental questions about the ultimate nature of things, many or most of these questions without obvious practical value or answers we would regard as useful. Of course, some philosophy has endeavoured to be a guide to life – political philosophy, ethics and meta-ethics included – but much of it has not. This is a constant critique of the Platonic defence of philosophy. In my four decades as a doctor, few (if any) of the tens of thousands of patients I met – many of whom were entirely admirable people living truly worthwhile lives – had the slightest interest in the kinds of philosophical problems I have wrestled with since I was a teenager.

The question of the seriousness of philosophy bears down on us more heavily as we become ever more aware of the remediable suffering in the world. When migrants fleeing from tyranny and destitution are drowning in their thousands as they try to cross to Europe for freedom and the hope of a better or at least a tolerable life; when hundreds of millions of our fellow humans work in conditions that are accurately described as slavery; when the most powerful man in the world is a sexist, racist toddler with an astonishing capacity for lies; and (on my home front) when the British government has for nearly a decade been tearing apart the fabric of our welfare state and the public services that mark our collective decency – arguing about the reality of objects in the outside world may seem frivolous. Philosophical questions start to look like questions you stop asking when things get serious. "Quick! Call a metaphysician!" rarely, if ever, seems an appropriate response to a crisis.



Philosophy Past & Present

It would of course be entirely unjust to philosophy to deny its important influence over the conversation humanity has had with itself about matters of the utmost practical significance. There are instances of direct influence. John Locke on the US Constitution, and the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century on the Enlightenment that led to personal liberation and inspired the principles of liberal democracy, are two particularly obvious examples, but there are many others. The interactions between intellectual history and the wider history of humanity are often complex, and other influences may be indirect. The broadening of the Golden Rule – 'Do unto others as you would wish others to do unto you' – to the Kantian Categorical Imperative – the universalization of any moral law to something that applies equally and unconditionally to all rational beings – was itself an indirect product of Immanuel Kant's seemingly purely theoretical inquiries into the relationship between mind, world, freedom, and our moral nature. René Descartes' division between a non-physical mind and a machine-like body was an important contribution to the framework for future biological sciences and the understanding of our organic body that underpins so much of medicine. And – to go back to the beginning of Western philosophy – the habit of questioning one's ideas and subjecting one's life to Socratic examination has been the motor of much human thought, and of the challenge to received ideas that has been central to human intellectual and perhaps moral progress. Kant's characterization of the Enlightenment as humanity's

Tallis in Wonderland

> The question of the seriousness of philosophy bears down on us more heavily as we become ever more aware of the remediable suffering in the world.

"emancipation from self-imposed immaturity" and the associated commitment to thinking for oneself could be applied to much of philosophy.

Even so, the deliberations of contemporary professional philosophers seem to play a relatively small part in our intellectual and civic life, whether it is challenging received ideas in the natural sciences, defending universal human rights, and/or mending the torn fabric of civilization. The more sophisticated the inquiry, the less impact it seems to have. Derek Parfit's monumental 1,400 page defence of a particular form of utilitarian ethics does not seem to have been required reading for those responsible for the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar and is unlikely to have influenced the disgraced British businessman Sir Philip Green when he weighed the relative priority of owning a second yacht versus treating with minimal decency the members of his failing company's pension scheme. John Rawls' classic work *A Theory of Justice* (1971) was most lauded in academe precisely while his notion of distributive justice and his brilliant arguments concerning the role of the state in mitigating the lottery of life were being trashed by the irresistible rise of neo-liberal politics and the unashamed worship of greed that would benefit few and damage many.

Questions Ask Philosophers

While we must not entirely dismiss the beneficial influence of philosophy in the practical sphere, we need to look elsewhere for the significance and indeed importance of much of what professional philosophers get up to. To guide our search, we must acknowledge that philosophical inquiry arises out of and returns to something that is not reducible to problems amenable to solution. That something is Mystery – in particular the mystery of Being and of the place of our human being in the order of things. The problems that exercise philosophers are ways of gaining a hand-hold on the smooth surface of these mysteries.

The difference between problems and mysteries has been well expressed by the French Catholic existentialist Gabriel Marcel:

> "A problem is something which I meet which I find completely before me, but which I can lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity." (*Being and Having*, 1949).

Problems are localized and 'out there', whereas mysteries enclose us.

There are many ways of capturing this. Anthony Morgan and the interviewees in his brilliant book *The Kantian Catastrophe?* (2017) explore the double nature of humanity as being "a world-constituting subjectivity" and yet discovering itself as something in that world.

In the light of this double nature, addressing the most fundamental philosophical problems seems an endeavour to transcend ourselves that would make Baron Munchhausen's famous feat of lifting himself and his carriage by his own hair look unimpressive. When we investigate Being we are a minute part of that Being; our philosophical inquiries into time take time (nearly a decade in my case); and thoughts about thought take the form of thought. As always with ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology (the studies of the nature of being, reality, and knowledge respectively, and for me the most interesting areas of philosophy), we are attempting to engage with something that engulfs every part of ourselves. We are soluble fish endeavouring to grasp the sea. It is not in the least surprising therefore that we do not 'solve' the mysteries of which we are ourselves a (very small) part, and that while the philosophical questions may undergo transformation, they do not go away; that they continue to ask us.

To say this is not defeatism, or expressing a patience that is excessive in view of the shortness of our lives. Living without the expectation of ending our inquiries is not a reason for not starting them. The endeavour to 'unknow' the apparently secure knowledge that enables one to glide through life without touching the sides for the sake of greater wakefulness, is not something that has a natural conclusion; nor would one want it to arrive at such. As the great Czech thinker and political dissident Tomasz Halik has pointed out, "there are questions so important that it is a pity to spoil them with answers." Halik has also asserted "God is mystery – that should be the first and last sentence of any theology" (*Patience with God*, 2009). If we replace 'God' with 'human life', then the same applies to philosophy.

The Purposes Of Philosophy

The appropriate defence of philosophy is that, like art, like love, or like wakefulness, it is an end in itself. Even so, when so many lack the wherewithal for survival, activities that belong to the Kingdom of Ultimate Ends always sit uneasily next to those that belong to the Kingdom of Means. A lyric poet agonizing over her choice of words in a poem about childhood looks indefensible in a world where children are starving, beaten, and worked to death. "To speak of trees" Berthold Brecht famously said, "is to pass over many crimes in silence." And the same applies to speaking of, say, qualia. Even so, pursuing the nature of consciousness down endless arguments and counter-arguments and a million footnotes is no more vulnerable to criticism than is aiming at perfection in art or music.

Also, notwithstanding my earlier somewhat pessimistic observations on the practical consequences of philosophy, there are more powerful defences of its unique contribution to the million-stranded dialogue humanity has had with itself. It is entirely plausible to ascribe to philosophy beneficial effects in the Kingdom of Means. For instance, Parmenides' mad vision of a homogeneous, unchanging, unified world prompted the atomism of Leucippus and Democritus that has become the most profound and fruitful of all scientific ideas. And, at a more homely level, the standards of rigour and transparency that are expected in philosophical arguments may have had an even wider positive impact on the human conversation.

You may suspect that you have been eavesdropping on a long-running not yet settled argument I have had with myself. Your suspicions are well-founded.

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Raymond Tallis' Of Time and Lamentation: Reflections on Transience *is out now. His* Logos: The Mystery of How We Make Sense of the World *will be out soon.*

The Sheep & The Dogs

Anushka Bhaskar (17) and **Zachary Cerniglia** (18) take inspiration from Diogenes the Dog.

Anushka: Being a teenager is definitely hard work. Teens are stressed-out people trying desperately to improve themselves and the world they live in. Or perhaps that's just me. In any case, teenagers have their own busy loads to attend to. Many adolescents across the world have workloads that rival those of professionals in the corporate world.

Zac: So where does philosophy fit into our busy lives? Well, Anushka and I, in the moments of relaxation that interrupt our workloads, use philosophy to make sense of the crazy adult world that so many of us often feel unequipped to enter.

Anushka: We want to start by discussing something we find particularly pertinent in the life of many teens, including ourselves.

Zac: The world around us is constantly trying to mold us – whether by way of the advertisements we're shown, the social media tailored to us, the way our friends act, and so on.

Anushka: Social media is a means by which people of all backgrounds are meant to share their unique ideas, but often it's a platform where unique personalities begin to mesh into something more homogenous.

Zac: So the question is this. In a world that constantly markets the appeal of 'fitting in', how can the modern teenager keep his or her individualism?

Anushka: Human beings are social creatures. But how social is too social? How can we resist our culture stunting the growth of our unique characters?

Zac: The point here is not necessarily to make fun of people who want to keep up with the trends. I believe the problem lies in the fact that some teens – and others – think keeping up with the latest trends and ideas will guarantee them some status among the herd. But as much as I'd like to, Anushka and I have elected not to give an inspirational talk regarding the importance of 'being yourself" and will, instead, shed light on the philosophy of Diogenes.

Anushka: Diogenes the Cynic was a Greek philosopher of the fourth century BC who advocated for the importance of radical individualism.

Zac: He argued for the disregarding of social norms, and suggested we should enjoy nature, seek happiness in the present moment, and ignore social pressure. For this reason, people called him a 'Cynic', from the Greek for 'dog'.

Anushka: The Buddha talked about the exact same thing: keep the company of dogs, he said, because they will teach you how to live your happiest life, by rejecting the need for social conformity and 'normal' behaviour. Evidently, great philosophical minds from all parts of the world think alike. But what do dogs have to do with the importance of individualism? Well, let's consider the other option: living like a sheep.

Zac: We're not trying to create a generation of contrarians, but we do feel it's important to recognize sheepy behavior in oneself, which many of us participate in, likely without even realizing it. Living like a sheep means conformity, and it lacks the carefree happiness characteristic of a dog's life. While someone who lives like a dog is constantly exploring their passions and the world around them, the sheep are bogged down by the pressures of society, and struggle to fit into a mold that will add nothing to their quality of life and long-term happiness.

Diogenes in his barrel home

Anushka: It's not a good balance working to fit in and keep up with the lifestyles of those around us. It leads to a Sisyphean struggle to constantly seek out possessions and superficial luxuries. Upon obtaining these coveted things, happiness is artificially stimulated temporarily; but when that feeling leaves, the person is left feeling empty and wanting more. Commonly, people use this argument when speaking against materialism and greed. But in our view, it's not greed for greed's sake that drives this constant cycle of want – it's the desire to fit in with the rest of the herd. *Baaaad*.

Zac: Diogenes, the ultimate autonomous man, lived a life devoid of non-essentials. He resolved to live without worldly possessions, and instead enjoy nature's gifts. His philosophy was to avoid the pain induced by the frustration, exhaustion and jealousy that came from living the life of a sheep, thus putting oneself through deliberate suffering. He claimed that refusing to give in to social norms would lead to constant satisfaction through a lifestyle of simplicity. We're not trying to tell you to abandon your Instagram or never update your iPhone, but hear us out. Diogenes recalled that once his mind was stripped of social constructions, the simple prospects of life, such as a calm rest after a long day, brought him total satisfaction. People generally give in to social norms so as to be accepted by others. Diogenes believed that once one realizes the irrelevance of these social norms, one will also realize the irrelevance of public acceptance.

Anushka: We see Diogenes' philosophy as empowering and inspiring. Buddhist philosophy preaches many of the same things, and it's interesting to recognize the similarity between East and West. In our own lives as teenagers, public acceptance and conformity seem to make a lot of sense. After all, who doesn't want to feel accepted in the eyes of their friends, family and peers? Yet perhaps the best way to achieve happiness is to renounce acceptance all together. When you renounce public acceptance, you can then focus on more important things, like the content of your personality, your values, and enjoying your passions and interests without fear. Let acceptance come as it may, and in the meantime, focus on being your best self. Don't worry about buying the latest branded clothing, start your own clothing line! Or if branded clothing is your thing, do it because fashion makes you *happy*, not because those around you all have the same brand. Social norms shouldn't be on the list of things that gets you down. Don't be sheepish. ;)

© ANUSHKA BHASKAR & ZAC CERNIGLIA 2018

Anushka Bhaskar and Zac Cerniglia are high school students in Orange County, CA.

Mink and Brace's Accidental Conference On The Design Argument

Mark Piper designs an argument questioning the design argument.

Last winter Sylvia Mink and Edgar Brace arrived in St Louis, Missouri, and took cabs to St Louis University. They had come to attend a conference on the design argument for the existence of God, but there had been unavoidable delays, and they were both running late. They arrived at the same time and ran to the library, looking forward to the warmth and refreshments inside. Instead they found the library locked. Bewildered, they hastily introduced themselves to each other and double-checked the conference details – where, to their shock and embarrassment, they discovered that the conference was actually taking place at St Lawrence University. In Minnesota.

Most people would have made their way to the nearest hotel bar in disbelief. But Mink and Brace weren't so hasty. Instead, they made themselves comfortable upon a bench and thought about how best to proceed. No chance to make the conference now; a wasted opportunity. But did it have to be wasted time? After all, philosophers hadn't always needed modern amenities to hold their conferences: they had had time and their ideas, and that had sufficed. Why couldn't it now? Ah, what the hell.

And so, despite the cold and the snow and the dark descending outside, Mink and Brace decided that they would forge ahead. Brace had a candle amongst his things, which he lit. Mink shared her flask, and produced some bread and cheese. What follows is an only slightly abridged transcript of their utterly unlikely little conference.

Mink: It's safe to assume that we're both familiar with the basics of the argument?

Brace: Yes, but perhaps we could still say a few words about it at the outset? My apologies for the request. I'm a bit of a dork. I like beginnings before my middles and ends.

Mink: Nothing wrong with that. Dorks are some of the finest people around, as far as I'm concerned. Would you do the honors?

Brace: Happy to! So – we have come together to judge the cogency of the design argument for the existence of God. Before turning to the analysis, we must set out the argument itself, making sure to enumerate its component parts.

Mink: Oh my, we *are* dorks.

Brace: Too stuffy? Sorry about that. I blame professional deformation.

Mink: No, I love it. Please go on. Cheers!

Brace: Ah, thank you. Cheers! So – the universe as a whole, the conditions for its existence and maintenance, and all of the things of which it is composed and which it contains, including its natural laws, and us, of course, are of such an intricate and precise organization, with each part seeming to play its role so perfectly in the operation of the whole, that we are compelled to conclude that there must be a Cosmic Intelligence of some sort responsible for its design and conservation. In just the same way that we would not suppose a particle collider to form itself except through the efforts of *human* intelligent design, we must conclude that the intricate interconnected workings of the universe and its innumerable component parts could not have been formed except through the efforts of an Intelligence possessing the knowledge and power sufficient to conceive and fashion it. Further, recent data from a tremendous variety of sources, from cosmology to particle physics, indicates that the values of several physical constants – both presently, and at the critical moments directly after the Big Bang – needs to have been of such an utterly precise calibration for life to be possible, that we are even more compelled to say that there must be some Cosmic Intelligence responsible. And this Cosmic Intelligence, this Universal Designer, is what we mean by God. Hence we can conclude that God exists, or at least that God's existence is very probable, insofar as this is the best explanation of the innumerable kinds of intricate order we find in the world.

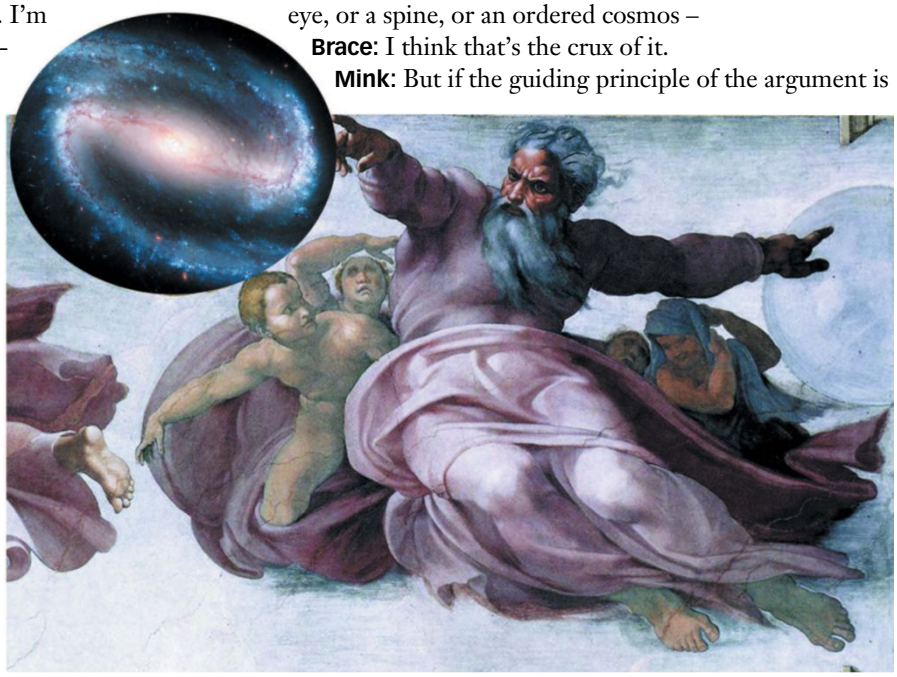
Mink: Well said. *Prost*!

Brace: *Prost*! So, your thoughts?

Mink: I think the evidence of intricacy and order is undeniable; but I also think the argument is particularly vulnerable to one specific line of criticism. The guiding principle behind the argument is that where one finds objects – used in the broadest sense of the term – of highly intricate order, one should infer the existence of an intelligent designer as the best explanation for how those objects came about. Just as with a computer, so with an eye, or a spine, or an ordered cosmos –

Brace: I think that's the crux of it.

Mink: But if the guiding principle of the argument is



that we should explain intricate order by postulating intelligent design, then mustn't we conclude by that very logic that God Itself requires a designer? Wouldn't God be an instance – perhaps the very *highest* instance – of intricate order and purpose?

Brace: It would be odd to think that a designing intelligence could be less intricate than what it designs, at the very least in the matter of intelligence.

Mink: And if this is the case, then the very reasoning employed in the argument leads us by necessity to judge that God, *above all else*, stands in need of a designer! And God's designer, being still *more* intricate and ordered than God Itself – again by the logic of the argument's driving principle – is even more in need of an intelligent designer; and on and on… And thus the very logic of the argument leads inevitably into a never-ending regress of ever more intricate and powerful designers, with the result that a designer can't serve as an explanation for the thing we're trying to explain in the first place: the ubiquitous examples of intricate order in the world.

Brace: What if one were to protest that the utterly intricate God who designed the universe can exist in and of itself without being designed by something further?

Mink: Well, once we accept that entities of highly ordered intricacy can exist without having been designed by some intelligent being, can't the atheist employ this idea to the detriment of the design argument by retorting that, for all we know, the utterly intricate universe can exist in and of itself without having been designed?

Brace: I don't see why not. But what if it is said, as it sometimes is, that God is a purely simple substance, and thus isn't a being of ordered intricacy whose existence requires an intelligent designer?

Mink: I think that leads to a dilemma. Either that purely simple substance supports a transcendently intricate and powerful mind, in which case the infinite regress problem still exists at one remove, or God is purely simple through and through, in which case it is admitted to be possible to have complex effects explained by simple causes – which is again grist for the atheist's mill.

Brace: Could you pass back the flask?

Mink: Gladly. So it seems to me, based on reasons of this sort, that the design argument fails, since it either leads into a neverending regress of ever more Godly designers whose existence is itself ultimately unexplained – in which case the task of explaining all this intricate order is never really fulfilled at all – or it leads to the acceptance of reasoning that can be employed just as easily in the service of atheism.

Brace: So how do we explain the astonishing intricacy and order of the universe?

Mink: Well, it isn't *always* so nicely ordered – but we can shelve that concern for now… How do we explain it? For all we know, I suppose it's possible that the universe was created by God, or a god, or gods; but, for the reasons I've covered, the design argument alone can't show that. At the same time it's also possible that the universe is only a vast collection of mindless laws and energy which, among the various combinations they take throughout time, produce ordered systems that allow for organic evolution, at least sometimes, all the while being at bottom 'designed' by nothing more than a mass of mindless patterns, regularities, and energies blindly working out algorithms. And of course Darwin's work gives us a compelling naturalistic explanation of natural 'design' – one that doesn't lead to an infinite regress. But anyhow, I'm getting off the theme a bit. Does the design argument show that God exists? No. God may exist, but the design argument doesn't establish it. God may even be the explanation of the existence of the universe, but the design argument doesn't show that, either.

Brace: That sounds very reasonable.

Mink: Well now, that's a rarity!

Brace: What is?

Mink: A philosopher who doesn't mind agreeing with another philosopher! In my experience, most philosophers seem to think that they're not doing their job if they don't find holes in other peoples' arguments.

Brace: Ah, you're committing a hasty generalization there. *Sláinte*!

Mink: *Touché* and *sláinte*! Brace, the floor is yours. What do you think?

Brace: Honestly, I'm not sure I have any further thoughts. Well, that's not entirely true. I suppose I could sift through the history of the argument a bit, and point out people who made important contributions – in which case I'd talk a lot about Hume's argument that the nature of the universe doesn't necessarily support the idea that anything that might have designed it would be particularly benevolent or wise; or I could spend some time analyzing the meaning of the terms used in the argument, and the like… But why bother? I think you've done the trick. We might as well consider the matter resolved, and move on to something else.

Mink:: But we don't have anything else to move on to. The conference concerns the design argument, and I think we've shown that it's a bust.

Brace: Begging your pardon, Mink, but that rubs against the modesty I've been cultivating for the past few decades.

Mink: Well, in any case, we certainly don't deserve the credit. Give it rather to Hume, as you suggested. But perhaps we've done a service by echoing his conclusions.

Brace: Not that it will affect the wider public. The design argument will live on, of course.

Mink: No disagreement there – it's one of the Greatest Hits of philosophy. But its enduring popularity should, if anything, give us further motivation to show up its flaws. An old professor of mine once said that there's no virtue in recycling arguments. I think he was mistaken, at least concerning arguing against people who keep making the same mistakes. Anyway, it looks like the flask is empty and the snow and cold aren't particularly concerned about our discomfort. I'd say it's time to engineer a better situation for ourselves, yes?

Brace: *Quod erat demonstr-*

Mink: Brace, please. If you're going to lapse into Latin, at least give me a chance to refill my flask!

Thus ended the unforeseen and unheralded conference of Mink and Brace on the design argument for God's existence. Although unoriginal, it remains one of the most productive conferences in the history of philosophy.

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Mark Piper is Associate Professor of Philosophy at James Madison University, VA.

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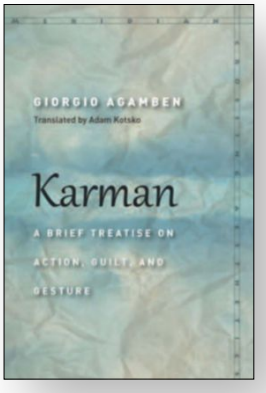

Karman

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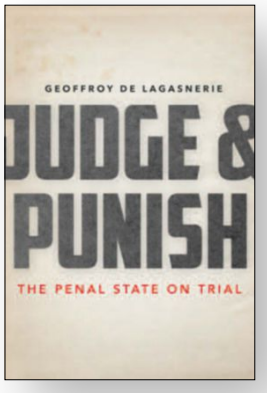

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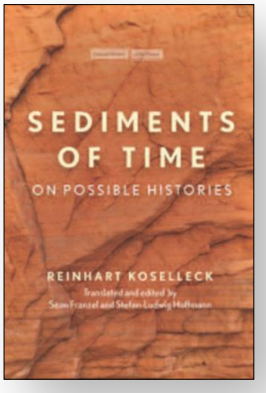

Sediments of Time

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Reinhart Koselleck
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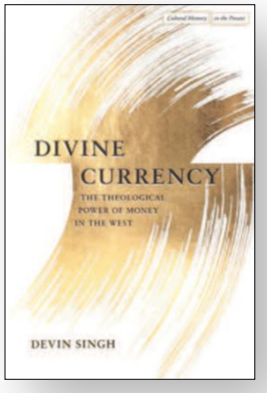

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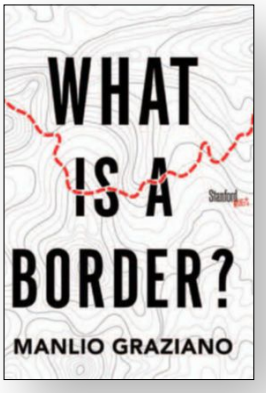

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