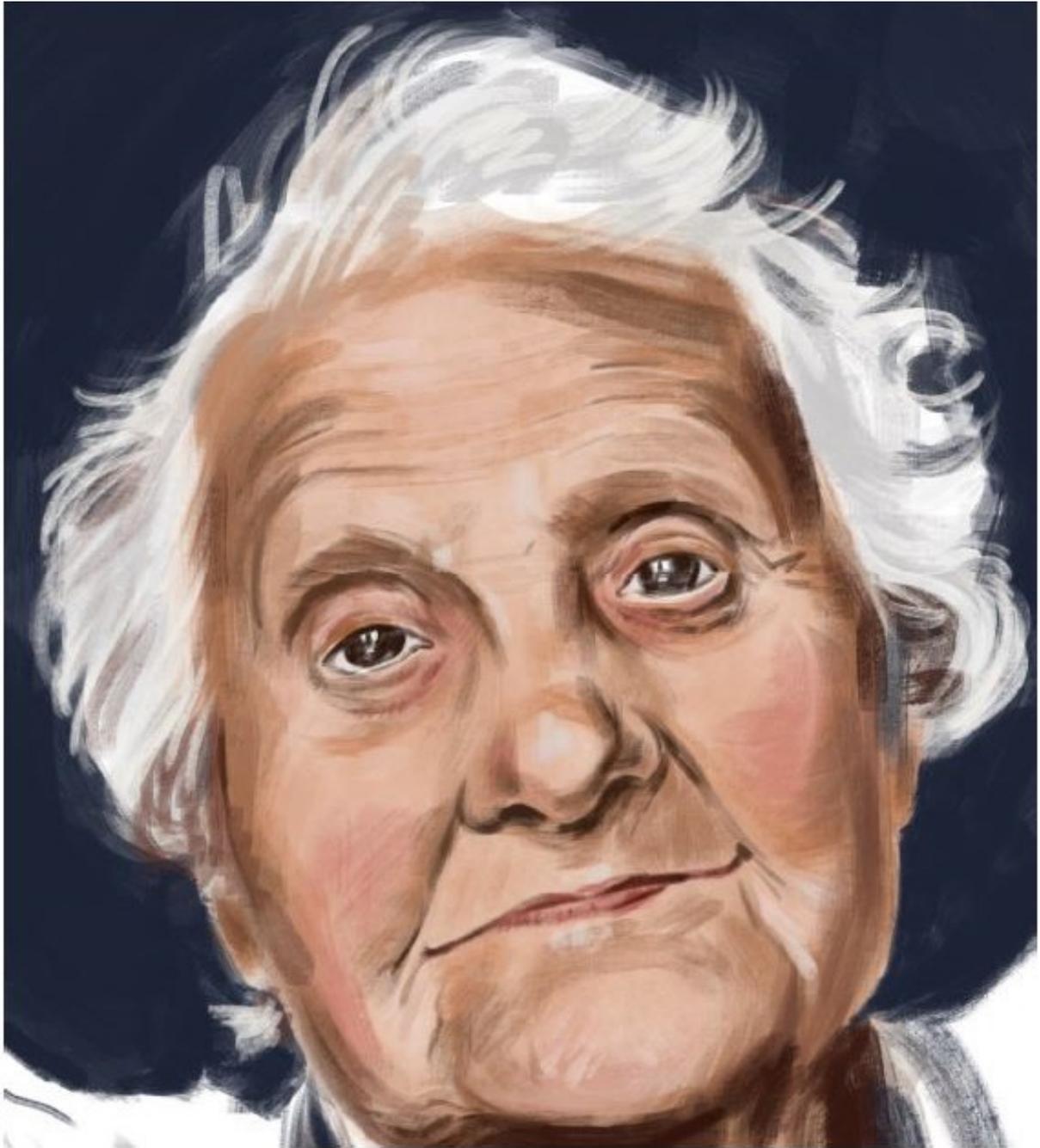


The Philosopher

Journal of the Philosophical Society

Spring 2016 Vol. CIV, No 1



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Editorial

We are delighted to be able to publish an article by Mary Midgley. The importance of her philosophical work has been recognised since she published *Beast and Man* in 1978. Recently she has received many honours, including a festschrift *Science and the Self* (eds. Ian James Kidd & Liz McKinnell, Routledge, 2016). After decades of active and sometimes controversial scholarly engagement, she still keeps a sharp eye on philosophical and cultural trends. Here she takes academic philosophy to task for neglecting its past: 'We need to grasp the story of our past intellectual evolution so as to understand where we are today'.

The other contributions in this edition can perhaps avoid at least that criticism. They all examine aspects of the philosophical tradition. David Rose discusses what he takes to be a 'universal error in moral philosophy' - 'the belief that a well-constructed moral problem can only have one possible solution in the same way that any theoretical question can only have one solution'. His discussion, which centres on Kant's ethical theories, raises issues which reach back to the philosophical reflections of the ancient Greeks, particularly to the Aristotelian problem about the 'scientific' status of moral philosophy. This is the topic of one of the three books on classical philosophy reviewed here.

At the last Council Meeting it was agreed that there is a need for a fundamental reassessment of the Society's activities and image. Though some elements of the Society's work are thriving, there are many reasons for concern. Membership has been falling. Participants in local groups value their local meetings, but very few take an active role in the Society. In recent years there have been successful national meetings. However, the good attendances were almost entirely due to the personal efforts of Brenda Almond who retired last year from the Presidency, a post she filled with energy and distinction for many years.

We cannot expect that a society which was founded over a hundred years ago can continue without radically reconsidering its objectives and activities. Please join the discussion. You will find a set of proposals prepared by the President and Secretary of the Society on page 24 which will be presented, along with comments and criticism, at the Council Meeting and AGM in November 2016.

Despite the challenges the Society faces, there are clear signs of widespread interest in philosophy. We must do what we can to enable the Society to continue to face the challenge that Mary Midgley lays at philosophy's door: to find 'new connections – new ways of thinking and living ... that will restructure the whole scope of our experience and allow us to

live differently. Their use is to extend our range. They can bring a landscape in sight that nobody even knew existed'.

Does Philosophy Get Out Of Date? - *Mary Midgley*

I started to wonder about this topic some time back when rumours reached me that, in some universities, no philosophy was being taught except what had been published in the last twenty years. These rumours were hard to check and clearly practice is very variable. It seems bumper-stickers have been seen on cars in the States bearing the message, 'Just Say No To History of Philosophy'. And Gilbert Harman at Princeton had a notice to that effect outside his office door. It also emerges that the term 'History of Philosophy' has changed its meaning. It is now being used to describe all study of older writers, not just study with a historical angle. So Harman's idea is that you shouldn't read them at all and should certainly not take them seriously. Friends at Cambridge say the situation there is less extreme, but still rather alarming. A student recently told one of them that he had spent his whole undergrad career without reading a word of Aristotle, Descartes or Kant. At this, (said my informant) 'my heart sank'.

Well, so does mine. But we need to ask just why our hearts sink, and ask too just what the people who make these changes are aiming at? Wondering about this, I remembered some things that happened in the Thatcher years, when cuts first began to threaten universities. Administrators, sternly told to economize, saw that the quickest way to do it was simply to close small departments. This would also enable them to harmonize with the mystique of 'centres of excellence' which was then in fashion. These centres were supposed to be big schools in which the study of a given subject would be so well covered that no other departments elsewhere would be needed at all. Thus, ideally, all the physics could be done at Manchester, all the economics at LSE, and all the philosophy (if any was still needed) at Oxford.

Since philosophy departments were usually small, universities did indeed start to close them. Eight of them in Britain went in the end. As one after another vanished, it struck me that nobody was saying that this ought not to happen. Nobody was suggesting that the subject was important in itself – that universities needed to teach it, that, if they stopped doing so they

would become, in some sense, hardly universities at all. Fired by this thought I wrote to a number of the eminent philosophers of the time saying, in effect, 'do something! Write to The Times (which was what one did in those days). Let people know that this is important'. Nothing much came of this, but one of the replies that came back still strikes me as significant. I didn't keep it because it made me so cross, but I remember perfectly well what it said.

It came from that very distinguished Oxford philosopher Michael Dummett, and he told me flatly that it was wrong in principle to try to preserve all these provincial academic departments. Philosophy, he said, was a serious and highly technical subject which should only be studied at its own proper level. Any less professional approaches to it were useless and might even do harm. And what Dummett meant by the proper level is clear from a well-known passage in his writings where he said that 'the proper object of philosophy' had only been finally established with the rise of 'the modern logical and analytical style of philosophizing'. This object, he said, was... 'the analysis of the structure of thought, [for which] the only proper method is the analysis of language'. And, not surprisingly, he thought the business of linguistic analysis had now become a highly technical pursuit – something increasingly like nuclear physics - which could only be carried on by people specially trained in it.

Dummett raised the important question: What is the aim - the point, the proper object of philosophy? What are we actually trying to do? And it strikes me at once that, when Socrates talked about the great dangers that threaten human life, he didn't actually mention the danger of unexamined thought or unexamined language. What Socrates warned us against was an unexamined LIFE. And it is surely the attempt to examine life as a whole, to make sense of it, to locate its big confusions and resolve its big conflicts, that has been the prime business of traditional philosophy. Only quite lately has a different pattern of philosophizing caught on - a pattern that is modelled closely on the physical sciences and is reverently called Research.

In those sciences, progress can be seen as consisting in accumulating a string of facts, in moving on from one empirical discovery to another. This seems often to be imagined as a mining operation, a steady process of digging through the intervening strata to reach the truth - the precious metal that lies hidden far beneath. In this process, the obstacles that have been removed are, of course, only of passing concern. Once they have been conquered they are irrelevant to the enquiry. That is why, for many physicists, past physical discoveries have only a mild historical interest. Their eye is always on the next discovery. This accounts for their exclusive concentration on the latest journals, and also for the very revealing metaphor of the 'cutting edge' of research.

It is surely alarming that, at present, research is treated as the chief aim of academic life – outclassing teaching, which is seen as merely passing the fruit of previous research on to our successors. This is alarming because increasing specialization continually narrows what is expected of research-projects, shrinking some of the mines down to rabbit-holes. People occasionally ask me what topic I am researching, and I say that I don't do any research, because I'm certainly not running any fixed mining operation of this kind. I suppose that instead I try to follow the argument (as Plato said) wherever it runs, and I may finally catch it in a territory quite far from the one where it started.

Now of course this fashionable sort of linear progress does happen and it can go on usefully for a long time. But, even in physical science, it is never the whole story. It can only work so long as there is a given linear pattern, a preset journey which will go reliably from A to B and so on to the end of the alphabet in the expected direction. Even in the sciences, that pattern isn't always there. Often the next important discovery is going to crop up somewhere quite different – right off to the side of the expected route. Some awkward character such as Copernicus or Einstein or Faraday or Darwin mentions a new thought which calls for a quite new direction, a new way of envisaging the subject. Similarly, Peter Higgs has explained that the work by which he discovered his famous Boson was right off his official line of research, so that if his superiors had noticed that he was spending his time on it he might have been in trouble. The reason why original people can make their unexpected forays is that they themselves have been looking at things differently. They have found new standpoints from which unexpected things can be seen.

The difference this makes becomes plain if we look at a recent article on the topic, called 'Why Isn't There More Progress In Philosophy?', by David Chalmers (*Philosophy*, January 2015). To answer this question (says Chalmers) 'one needs to articulate a measure of progress and a benchmark. The measure of progress I will use is collective convergence to the truth. The benchmark I will use is comparison to the hard sciences'.

Several questions arise here– for instance, why should we compare philosophy with physics and chemistry rather than with (say) the study of history, or of medicine, or literature? And why does Chalmers flatly refuse to compare it with the cognitive and social sciences? Perhaps, however, the most striking difficulty he raises is about convergence. When original scientists, such as those just mentioned, make their startling suggestions they certainly are not increasing convergence. They are weakening it, and indeed are often blamed for doing so. It is only after their views have eventually been widely accepted that they can be counted as increasing 'convergence to the truth'. And at this point, as Chalmers points out, 'one may worry that, because most scientific theories eventually turn out to be false, most convergence in science will be convergence to the false'. He reckons that this drawback can be dealt with by 'formulating questions in terms of a small number of mutually exhaustive choices', so

that, 'false theory that is relatively close to the truth constitutes a kind of convergence to the truth'. This difficulty, however, is only one indication of how disastrous it is to treat scientific theories as a simple statement of fact rather than as a wide proposal for a new way of thinking.

How is this possible? Historians sometimes treat these achievements either as something inevitable or as a kind of miracle due to individual genius. (This is why some misguided people demand a further dissection of Einstein's brain, as if that would explain his discoveries.) But what is really happening is something both more obvious and more interesting. It is that these original thinkers have stood back from their local problem. They have placed it in its wider context and thought about how it connects with the surrounding scenery. They have been using telescopes rather than microscopes, so they can deal with a larger subject-matter. In short, they have been philosophizing.



This business of looking at life as a whole – finding wider contexts to give sense to our immediate problems – is philosophy's distinctive activity. It is what makes it a genuinely important occupation, in fact an occupation that matters to all of us.

Philosophy is not just one speciality among others, it's a kind of conceptual geography which looks at the relation between various ways of thinking and tries to map them. The reason why some philosophers become well-known is not that they have discovered new facts but that they have shifted the whole standpoint of thought. Philosophers have repeatedly brought absurdities to the attention of their age by displaying current customs against a new background and pointing out the strange assumptions that are distorting them. After this, new ways of thinking become possible.

For instance, when Rousseau started his book on the Social Contract by saying, 'Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains', he was lighting up some crashing discrepancies between theory and practice which had to be investigated if current problems were ever to be properly dealt with. Similarly, when this same Rousseau pointed out the strangely unnatural way in which babies were being reared – babies who were removed from their mothers, bandaged onto boards and handed over to carers who might well not care much about them – people started to notice anomalies in their whole idea of what nature is, and how it relates to our species. These anomalies had never struck them before. More immediately, they also started for the first time to pay some serious attention to small children, as they have gone on doing ever since.

It is interesting that our forefathers apparently could not see through these previous muddled ways of thinking until someone like Rousseau pointed them out. The assumptions that had produced these earlier customs simply persisted till some shock was delivered – till they were plainly stated in a form that could be grasped and made more workable. This shows how deeply our thought depends on a mass of unstated assumptions, very much in the way that our physical life rests on the hidden shifting masses of the earth beneath us. We don't notice these assumptions till things start to go wrong – until, so to speak, the smell coming up from below is so bad that we are forced to take up the floor-boards and do something about it. This is why I have often suggested that philosophy is best understood as a form of plumbing. It's the way in which we service the deep infrastructure of our life – the patterns in life that are taken for granted because they have never been noticed. This is something both deeper and more outward-looking than just examining the structure of our current thought and language, which seems to be what Dummett was calling for.

Another useful piece of plumbing was done in the late seventeenth century, when John Locke discovered the concept of Tolerance. During most of that century people throughout Europe had assumed that they must not tolerate disagreement. If they couldn't agree on a single truth about religion, they must just go on fighting till they did, and meanwhile individual heretics must all be converted or punished. The idea that different opinions could perfectly well be allowed to exist side by side was seen as a culpable weakness, leading to anarchy. What eventually struck Locke, and what he managed to express in his writings, was that this system of competing dogmas can't work because the truth is simply too complex. Nobody ever has the whole truth, and people who grasp different bits of it can, in fact, perfectly well live peacefully together. Indeed, that may be the best way of putting the various partial truths together in the end.

This 'discovery' was not, of course, (as scientific discoveries sometimes are) simply a matter of finding a brand-new ready-made fact, such as that the earth goes round the sun. It was much more like inventing a new musical instrument and working out how to play it. Locke and the people who worked with him had to learn how to tolerate what had previously seemed intolerable, and how to do business with people they had previously thought were outside the pale. They had to learn, too, how to look at the outer borders of this toleration and decide what must still be regarded as intolerable.

In fact, toleration, like all big philosophical ideas, is a very complex instrument, as hard to play as the cello or bassoon, which is why we still have so much difficulty learning how to handle it properly and why we still need to go on thinking out the ideas behind it. And the other ideals round which we try to structure our lives, ideals such as equality, freedom,

compassion, fraternity or sisterhood, justice – are all as complicated as they are attractive. Yet they all have to be thought out and used together by the whole orchestra.

These ideals were, of course, central to the message of the Enlightenment, a message which we now assume is the obvious framework for any decent human life. But the Enlightenment story itself wasn't always obvious. It didn't drop ready-made out of a machine called History. It had to be invented, devised with a great deal of hard, grinding work by philosophers like Locke and Rousseau and it has had to be thought through with increasing labour up to the present day. In every age, more work of this kind is needed because the truth about the world is endlessly complicated.

Are we getting any clearer now about what is the real aim of philosophical enquiry? One thing that is already clear surely is that it can't be at all like the aim of any physical science. Physical sciences spiral inward and down onto particular bits of the truth, which sometimes are ready-made facts, while philosophy ranges indefinitely outward looking for new connections – new ways of thinking and living. So it is quite proper for nuclear physicists to know more and more about less and less. But philosophers are supposed to do almost the opposite – to find links that will restructure the whole scope of our experience and allow us to live differently. Their use is to extend our range. They can bring a landscape in sight that nobody even knew existed.

Of course the contrast between these two forms of thought is not complete because (as we have seen) physical scientists do sometimes have to widen their views in order to shift their focus, and philosophers too must sometimes deal with detailed technical questions. But in their general balance these two approaches really are opposed – not because they are at war, but because they serve quite different needs. Nuclear physicists are normally addressing a limited audience of specialists - people who already share much of their knowledge and want to know more about a particular aspect of it. But the philosophers' business is something that concerns everybody. Philosophy aims to bring together those aspects of life that have not yet been properly connected so as to make a more coherent, more workable world-picture. And that coherent world-picture is not a private luxury. It's something absolutely essential for human life,

World-pictures – perspectives, imaginative visions of how the whole world is - are the necessary background of all our lives. They are often much more important to us than our factual knowledge, as may be seen in the case of climate sceptics whose traditional views remain unchanged whatever new evidence appears that seems to disprove them. We all have these background pictures and we usually get them half-consciously from the people around us. We often don't ask where they came from. But, if we do ask we shall probably find that

they have been shaped by earlier philosophers who have influenced our tradition. For us, at present, that often means the prophets of the Enlightenment, people like Locke, Rousseau, Descartes, Hobbes, Hume, Mill, Marx and Nietzsche. This earlier philosophy doesn't get obsolete. Far from that, it's still vigorously alive. It has shaped the way we think. It has deep roots in the soil of our lives and it goes on developing there in its own characteristic way until somebody comes along and rethinks it. That is why people who refuse to think philosophically so often end up trapped in bits of earlier philosophy that they have unconsciously taken on from their predecessors..

The alternative to being enslaved by past thought in this way is to attend directly to what these earlier philosophers actually said and to see how it relates to our life today. If we do this, we shall often find that their message was far more subtle than the crude versions of it that are still working in the tradition. In fact, it is still throwing out shoots that can help us today...The reason why these philosophers caught the attention of their times was (as I have said) not just that they had solved particular problems but that they had lit up life from unexpected angles. They suggested, not just new thoughts but new concepts, distinctive approaches, whole new ways of thinking. Of course none of these new approaches solves all problems, but each of them gives us a fresh stance, fresh tools for the endless balancing act by which we try to understand our confusing world. We can see how influential these suggestions still are, not just because people today often still quote from (say) Marx or Nietzsche or Plato or Buddha for their illustrations, but because current thinking as a whole is still often visibly shaped by these people; coloured through in a way that the people using it now are no longer aware of.

So, how can it be plausible to think that they are out of date and we can now forget about them? How could it not be necessary for us to attend to these still influential factors in our lives? The point is not just that – as I've suggested – we need to check their details to protect ourselves against distorted versions of their message that are still working in our tradition. We need also to attend to these mighty trees themselves for their own sake. We need to understand them because they have shaped the whole way of life that we still live by. They are still active features of our present life, parts of the tangled forest through which we are still travelling. In fact, the reason why we need to learn about the history of philosophy is just the same as the reason why we need to learn about the rest of our history; namely that, without grasping the past, we can't hope to understand the present.

On the political scene this is obvious. We know that, if we haven't grasped the past history of the ravenous way in which Western nations competed to gobble up other countries during the nineteenth century, we can't hope to understand why so many people in those gobbled up countries still feel so bitterly resentful towards us. Historical epochs don't just succeed one another randomly like successive spinings of a roulette wheel. They are phases in a

continuum, organically connected, so that you often really cannot understand where you are now without grasping the background that tells you how you got there.

And if this background is necessary for understanding politics it is still more necessary for our moral and intellectual life. Without it, we can't really make sense of current conflicts. In particular, any student who is now expected to study the philosophy of the last twenty years without being told about the long sweep of history that produced it is surely doomed to frustration. And this student has all the more right to resent that frustration because (as we have seen) it affects not just his or her knowledge but their whole world-view, their imaginative understanding of life. We need to grasp the story of our past intellectual evolution so as to understand where we are today, just as badly as we need to know about our past biological evolution.

Philosophy, in fact, is not just one specialized subject like another, something which you need not take up unless you mean to lecture on it. Instead it is something we all do all the time, a continuous, background activity which is likely to go badly if we don't attend to it. In this way it is perhaps more like driving a car or using money than it is like nuclear physics. And perhaps it is more like music than it is like any of these other occupations. Anyway, like good music, good philosophy does not easily get out of date.

Ethical Pluralism and the Universal Error in Moral Enquiry - *David Rose*

1| Moral relativism versus moral universalism

The intention of this paper is to reveal what may well be a central error in moral enquiry; a widespread and subtle transposition of an assumption belonging to the realm of theoretical reason which influences, yet ultimately frustrates, moral reasoning. This assumption is the belief that a well-constructed moral problem can only have one possible solution in the same way that any theoretical question can only have one solution. If more than one solution is available, and it is impossible to decide between the merits of the answers, it is commonly supposed that the question is either badly framed or that it arises as the result of a conceptual error.

Not all practical judgements are universal: “what career ought one to pursue” cannot, for example, be answered definitively for all people, at all times and in all places. However, the universality of moral judgements is seemingly necessary to resolve conflicts of value: if I say human sacrifice is wrong and you say human sacrifice is right, either one of us is, or both of us are, mistaken in our answer or the question is conceptually confused. Conceptual bewilderment may have arisen from derivations from the more fundamental principle “killing is wrong.” Even that, in some societies, has exceptions: self-defence, war and, perhaps, euthanasia. In the first two exceptions, the moral stance of the agent is trumped by necessity, whereas in the final example a higher moral principle (“the good life”) comes into play. It is easy to see how human sacrifice may be necessary in some belief systems (“we must sacrifice, otherwise it won’t rain”), or even determined by a higher moral principle (“the victim will be rewarded in heaven”; “it is the will of the gods”). Once we have the proper conceptual description before us, then we can ask whether it was a cogent principle or not and whether one or both of us were mistaken in our response to the original question.

Yet, the search for universal principles in moral enquiry is beset by two problems: either they are just not available; or if they are available, they are vacuous and non-substantial. Take, for example, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhist idols in Afghanistan. The Taliban justified the destruction in terms of their faith: if one holds that all false idols are blasphemous, then these idols must be destroyed. Why should we not destroy these statues? The protestors did not have a universal principle with which to trump the relative principle of the Taliban. The answers ranged from: “because they are beautiful” to some substantial principle of restoration (the past should be preserved for educational purposes). In other words, the supposedly secular principles were themselves relative to a belief system which itself requires justification. The only point of agreement seemed to be the moral principle of respect, but again depending on which tradition or way of life one inhabits, this principle is open to a variety of interpretations and cannot resolve the conflict without substantial interpretation. And that interpretation, one would assume, largely depends on the meanings and values of the particular agent’s specific way of life.

Of course, the rejection of the claim that a moral question has but one solution overtly commits one to pluralism concerning moral values and motivations, or as it is more commonly known, 'relativism'. It is perhaps wise to say a few words about this thesis. Relativism, as a meta-ethical theory, recognises the intricate connections that exist between the possibility of making moral judgements and the moral agent’s way of life. It is most simply understood as the thesis that the agent’s moral beliefs, motivations and values are derived from and are dependent on the society he or she inhabits. It is not to be understood as the absurd claim that one has no right to pass judgement on the moral beliefs of others since this itself proposes the value of non-interference as a universal value and, therefore, as a

theory of relativism it is self-refuting.¹ One need only hold that moral values are derived from a way of life, which is to say, the ascription of the concepts of good and bad and right and wrong depends on the way of life of the moral agent. This says nothing about the revisability or rejection of these beliefs and it should not be assumed that the beliefs of one's birth remain unchanged.



The most attractive aspect of relativism is quite simply that it explains the variety of moral beliefs and values throughout the world and amongst different societies: there are many different and conflicting moral beliefs because they are derived from different societies and are not universally rational or objectively true. Moreover, value systems may exhibit certain features of a limited rationality, that is moral judgements may have logical connections, but only within a context defined by one's way of life. Herein, though, lies the weakness of relativism.

Even at its most robust, a theory of moral relativism can merely hold that the rationality of moral judgements is internal to a particular way of life and the attractions of relativism are undermined by one great disadvantage concerning conflicts of beliefs: surely a society with a moral belief, say, that human sacrifice is good should not be left alone to practise that which it believes just because values are relative? Other prime examples include female circumcision and the exploitation of children. This apparently makes conflicts of moral beliefs no better than conflicts of taste or dependent on some arbitrary rules of a game: if someone doesn't like cheese, it is only violence and power – not reason – that may force her to eat it. She could never be convinced to like it, in the same way that reason can convince a subject who is unaware that thirteen times thirteen are one hundred and sixty nine.

Relativism is rejected because it cannot resolve conflicts between ways of life, and for this reason alone moral universalism is a far more attractive theory. However, moral universalism is either both vacuous and insubstantial or it, too, leads to conflict; in other words, its supposed advantage is chimerical. If we examine the claim of universality at the heart of most ethical theories, it may be revealed that it is an ad hoc and, ultimately, frustrating addition to practical reason. We shall concentrate this examination solely on the claims of moral idealism using Kant's ethical theory as our guide.

¹ See Williams, B *An Introduction to Ethics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1991.

2/ Moral idealism and the assumption of universality

In proposing moral idealism, all I wish to offer is a minimal idealism, or the serious consideration of Kant's Copernican revolution.² In order for a subject to form judgements, certain concepts have to inhere in the subject. So, following Kant, a theoretical judgement is made possible by the subject's possession of prior and universal concepts belonging to the categories of modality, relation, quality and quantity. To put it simply, I would not be able to experience x as the cause of y, unless I already possessed the concept of causality and were able to bring it to bear on the content of my experience.

Universality is written into the Kantian epistemological position from the beginning because rational beings necessarily share the same constitutive concepts. If a subject is rational, which is to say if he is a possible knower or maker of judgements, then he must share Kant's twelve concepts and two pure intuitions. We shall not split hairs over the elements on this list, but leave it open whether it is an exhaustive and accurate table of the constitutive concepts. What is more significant for us is why it is that all rational beings combine the constitutive concepts in the same way as evidenced by the fact we can talk about and share our experiences.

The common sense answer is that the "real" object impinges on our senses and we translate it and filter the data through our concepts. This is not, however, consistent with Kantian idealism. Causality belongs to the concepts of the subject and not to reality, it is already a speculative step to posit "objects" in reality outside of experience. Intuitions are given to us as subjects and we form judgements on their basis.³ So, how do we all form the same judgements? A full response to this question would have to look closely at Kant's description of the schemata and the role of the imagination, but unfortunately we have no space or time to do this.⁴ An investigation of these would plausibly lead one from the constitutive concepts of experience to the regulative ideas of reason, and one in particular: the idea of the unity of all knowledge in one mind. The system of knowledge is ideally whole and harmonious.⁵ At the risk of oversimplifying Kant's position, I propose that what he has in mind is the assumption that since theoretical judgements aim at describing *what is*, then they ought to – and here one feels the force of the regulative norm – be the same for me and for you. Our

² Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Meiklejohn, J (revised by Politis, V) London: Everyman; 1993; Bxvi.

³ See the "Transcendental Doctrine of Elements" and the "Transcendental Logic" in *Critique of Pure Reason* 1993.

⁴ See "The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding" in *Critique of Pure Reason* 1993.

⁵ See chapter III of the "Transcendental Dialectic" in *Critique of Pure Reason* 1993.

judgements ought to converge. If they do not, we need to rid them of those contingencies (my particular angle to the table and my emotional response to its garish colour, for example) which are insignificant in the formulation of the judgement. Universality is a necessary norm for theoretical judgements since theoretical judgements ideally ought to converge.⁶

Whereas theoretical judgements are determined by modality, relation, quality and quantity, Kant informs us that all moral judgements are determined by the application of one single concept, viz. freedom.⁷ If the object of the judgement is not supposed to be free – that is, taken to be a moral agent – then, moral judgements are not applicable. The concept of responsibility cannot be applied to tables, chairs, animals, most children and the insane simply because they are not free. According to Kant, if the subject acts freely, then moral judgements can be made in line with the categorical imperative: if the agent is making an exception of himself, or if he uses others as means without their consent, then he is immoral.

Again, here, I would like to avoid specific problems arising from the Kantian account of moral judgements, but it is worthwhile saying something about the possibility of transgression. It is often assumed that, on Kant's account, one is either good or irrational, and that the agent can never freely commit wrong. However, Kant does reveal two ways in which a man can be bad: using others as means without their consent and making oneself an exception to the law of reason. I believe that the latter is merely derived from the former and they both derive from the constitutive concept of freedom: I rely on you to obey conventions such as promising which I pretend to do in order to profit from you. This is immoral because I do not give your freedom and your rationality the respect it deserves and I actually contradict the value of freedom.

For Kant, other lesser moral constitutive concepts are all derived from the idea of the free-will (imperatives, autonomy, persons, rational ends) and moral judgements are universal because they are synthetic a priori: they are true for all rational beings. Yet it is not clear that such judgements will not conflict. Kant assumes that they will not, due to the fact that there can be one and only one solution to moral problems, but such universality is built into his system due to his assertion that moral judgements are synthetic a priori and therefore identical to epistemological judgements. However, epistemological judgements are ruled by a regulative concept that there can be one and only one possible true description of objects of experience (unity). Is there any reason to assume that the same norm governs moral judgements?

⁶ Kant, I *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* trans. Gregor, M Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1998, Preface and *Critique of Practical Reason* trans. Gregor, M Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1997, I, 1.

⁷ Kant, I *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 1998, p. 10.

In fact, Kant offers a different normative ideal for practical reason when he states: "... the true vocation of reason must be to produce a will that is good, not perhaps *as a means* to other purposes, but *good in itself*, for which reason was absolutely necessary."⁸ Freedom is the concept which constitutes moral judgements, but if I am free I can form any judgement which is not contradictory to freedom. The good will regulates moral judgements, but on two levels. First, that the reason for action be good in-itself. On this level, to be a moral agent one needs to act on a reason which is good and can be recognised as such by others. What is rational is good for me, but I can recognise the rationality of the other's intention without endorsing its goodness. Kant goes further, though. He pushes this subjective goodness over into objectivity. Second, then, the good will recognises that good in-itself is binding because it is rational, or the right precedes and determines the good. This, however, is a step too far. A good reason is intelligible to both me and you - it is one which makes sense. A good moral reason is one which makes sense and is also freely motivated by reason and not desire. Yet, there is nothing in this description which justifies the move from rightness to goodness as Kant supposes.

Kant moves from a reason which is recognised as valid by all agents to a reason which must be endorsed by all rational agents: what is right is good. There is no justification for this transposition except the assumption of theoretical wisdom: what is true for me ought to be true for you, but there is no reason why this norm ought to govern the moral realm. For example, I can understand that a Hindu does not eat beef and that it would be wrong to eat beef if I were a Hindu, but I am not and though I can recognise the validity of the reason, that does not make it a universally binding reason. It is possible, given the normative element of the good will, to offer a weaker form of universality which is, if an agent is free, his reason for action is valid so long as it does not use others as ends without their consent or, which is just another way to say the same thing, makes an exception of the agent himself.

However, Kant assumes a strong universality: if a reason is determined in line with the categorical imperative, then it is a moral duty for all subjects, at all times and in all situations. This leads either to the narrowing of moral duties to abstract universals (respect others, treat others as ends) which are insubstantial and cannot direct action or more substantial duties (do not break promises, do not commit suicide) which may lead to conflicts.⁹ The two major

⁸ Kant, I *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 1998, p. 10.

⁹ The first problem motivates Hegel's attack on the empty formalism of the Kantian position. The clearest exposition is to be found in section II of *On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, on its Place in Moral Philosophy, and its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Right* trans. Nisbet, H in *Political Writings* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1999.

problems with Kant's moral system arise because he chooses to endorse a strong rather than a weak universality.

Kant's motivation for so doing is twofold. On the one hand it is because he is a man of the Enlightenment and he wants to avoid the relativism of superstitions and irrational beliefs. On the other, it is due to the transposition of the norm of unity from the theoretical realm to the practical realm: we must all form the same judgements. However, in the theoretical realm this norm was due to the assumption that theoretical judgements describe *what is*, but moral judgements describe *what ought to be* and there is no coherentist justification why there should be but one answer to *what ought to be*. And *what ought to be* is determined by the agent's concept of good, not right, so the substantial account of good supplied by a way of life adds the necessary flesh to the abstract bones of Kant's ethical theory.¹⁰

However, weak universalism may commit us to a different norm governing moral judgements, viz. the simple recognition of the validity of other agents' motivations or reasons for action even if we do not admit them as binding on ourselves. This means we have pluralism of moral principles and this will lead to conflict. However, this conflict will not be seen as resolvable or as the reflection of an error in our method. It will be recognised as somehow inevitable. Instead of resolution we may seek to minimise conflict under the governance of some norm of harmony rather than convergence, but that is outside the scope of this paper to decide. All I want to demonstrate here is that the unjustified assumption of universality in idealist moral theory is unwarranted and harmful to moral discourse. The main disadvantage of relativism, that it is impossible to decide between competing ways of life, is, therefore, revealed to be a pseudo-problem. If one cannot decide between them it may be due to pluralism of values and that has to be accepted. Alternatively, it may be that, even given a certain way of life, the reason for action is still invalid (and here one thinks once more about female circumcision or human sacrifice) since it either uses an agent without his or her consent or makes an exception of the subject. This, of course, relies on the Kantian view and that still has to be supported.

3/ Conclusion

This paper attempts to show that moral discourse is governed by a norm which is transposed from theoretical discourse without justification: the assumption that there can be but one answer to a problem or but one description of reality. Logically it would be a poor inference

¹⁰ This point seems to fuel Hegel's examination of Kant's examples such as promising and its reliance on a way of life with moral practices inspired by the institution of private property. See *On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law* 1999, pp. 124-128.

to move from the claim that it has not been justified to the claim that it cannot be justified, especially without considering alternatives to ethical idealism. In theoretical reason such an assumption is justified whether one be a realist, coherentist or pragmatist, but there is no reason to suppose it is applicable to moral judgements. In fact, the assumption leads to two undesirable consequences: one, insubstantial moral principles that are vacuous, empty and formal; and two, substantial duties which lead to a conflict that the moral system itself finds contradictory. If one embraces the weaker form of universality and its subsequent normative basis, these two problems are avoided. First, moral principles are substantial because the abstract universal principles generated by the moral will are fleshed out by a particular way of life and its conception of the good. Second, conflicts of duty still occur but they are no longer seen as symptomatic of an error in one's moral reasoning. They are just an inevitable consequence of the recognition of the pluralism of moral values.

Plato's Anti-Hedonism & the Protagoras - J. Clerk Shaw
Cambridge University Press, 2015

ISBN-13: 978-1107046658

232 pages, £65

Review by William Strigel

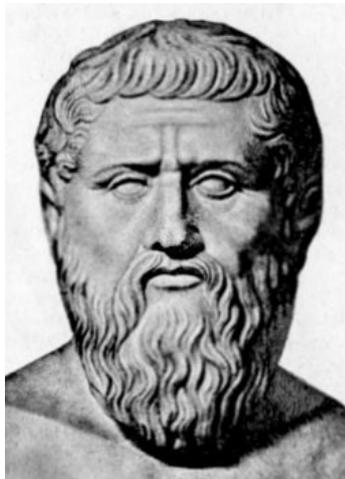
At *Protagoras* 351b-57e, Socrates appears to argue that a life of pleasure—including the pleasures of power over others and wealth (354b)—really is the good and flourishing life. Is Socrates serious? This is a long-debated problem: if Socrates maintains this position, it appears to contradict the majority of Plato's work in which he argues vehemently against identifying pleasure with the good. If Socrates is not serious in his argument here, it is not clear why Socrates introduces it in a frank and un-ironical manner, and what role it plays in the larger arguments of the dialogue.

In *Plato's Anti-Hedonism and the Protagoras*, Shaw contends that the hedonism of the dialogue is fundamentally inconsistent with the rest of Plato's ethical thought, particularly the *Apology* and *Crito*—for it is a bodily hedonism, or the claim that virtue should be pursued solely for the sake of bodily pleasures and pains. Socrates therefore must have an ulterior motive for introducing it. That motive is to covertly examine Protagoras' beliefs about virtue and the good, under the cover of examining the views of 'the many.' Protagoras believes, with the many, that bodily pleasure is the good, wisdom is weak, and that injustice can be prudent—but he is 'ashamed' to admit it out of fear of social retribution and commercial detriment. All at once, then, Socrates exposes Protagoras' inner beliefs while at the same time critiquing the great complex of Greek popular morality which is predicated on pure bodily hedonism.

This book is rich with new insights and suggestions, and a paradigmatic study of how a dialogue's dramatic form can reflect and inform its content. It is, however, far too ambitious for a single line of argument and falls into an awkward coherence, and so each chapter or section should be consulted and analysed independently. For that reason, I will address the virtues and vices of each chapter.

Chapter one, which I will discuss below, argues that the hedonism of 351b-57e ranges strictly over bodily goods, and so maintains that virtue is desirable only for the sake of bodily goods. This is “not only practically but also axiologically” (25) inconsistent with Socrates' commitments at *Apology* 29d7-30a2 and 30a7-b4 (22): that we should “seek virtue rather than bodily and reputational goods” (23).

Chapter 2 persuasively argues that Protagoras thinks wisdom can be ruled by fear at 349d-51b, and so is weak, but doesn't explicitly say so. Chapter 3 argues that when pressed, Protagoras verbally denies that wisdom is weak and injustice is prudent out of ‘shame,’ or fear of social retribution and ridicule, for his profession (‘wisdom’) is predicated on its strength and traditional morality. Here the book falters. While Protagoras really may be aware of his immoralism and reluctance to discuss it (333d2; Shaw 87), the claim that he is aware that he believes his art is powerless is wildly implausible in light of textual, historical and dramatic evidence (Shaw only briefly touches this possibility at 74). Protagoras repeatedly asserts that his ‘wisdom’ is the most powerful thing in the world, which secures reputation, wealth and political power (esp. 335a). He was the infamous author of Truth - parts of which are debated in this dialogue - and placed his own wisdom above the oldest teachers of Greece; Homer and Hesiod, Thales and Solon (316d4ff; 333aff). The sophists professed a ‘god-like intellect’ (e.g. *Theaetetus* 161c, *Alcidamas Against the Sophists* 9). Given the strength of Chapter 2, it seems more plausible that Protagoras simply does not know what he believes, nor what it is to be a *sophistēs* (lit. ‘technician of wisdom’).



The shame Socrates instills in Protagoras is popping the bubble of arrogance, not exposing an extreme case of bad faith. Despite parallel structures of debate in the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* - explored wonderfully and systematically in Chapter 4 - the two dialogues have different purposes. *Gorgias* has long been noted to be ‘dark’ and terse, whereas *Protagoras* may be a revision of an old comedy by Eupolis - one seeks explicitly to shame the interlocutors through dramatic form, the other to expose bombast, or *alazōneia*.

Shaw's fifth Chapter is a much needed and certainly new addition to the literature on Plato's understanding of sophistry and Greek *paideia* and I recommend it highly, stating that the Sophists are pressured by the

public to believe, through shame, in unfettered bodily hedonism and so ‘internalize’ the complex ethical apparatus that results from it. Chapters 6-8, which develop that complex, are as crucial for contemporary scholars of ethics as for historians and scholars of Plato and the Sophists.

Recall that Chapter 1 argues that the bodily hedonism of 351b-57e is fundamentally inconsistent with *Apology* 29d7-30a2 and 30a7-b4. Despite the impressive list of counterexamples that may show how it is not inconsistent (27-40), Shaw does not consider the following reading: Protagoras serves to harmonize that very passage with bodily hedonism, but of a certain kind. Socrates exhorts Hippocrates (of a noble house) to care for his soul before he cares for wealth, reputation and honour (312e8-13a-c5; cf. *Ap.* 29d7-30a2). He does so precisely because those things lack moral value if his soul is in a poor condition (313a7-10 - cf. 30a7-b4). In other words, the health of the soul/virtue should be pursued not rather than, but for the sake of, doing anything well, even if it includes pursuing wealth and power. [The instrumentality of the soul is brought out explicitly in the Greek: The soul is that “upon which your all (πάντ) is dependent - or whether you act badly or well - in proportion to its becoming properly useful or good-for-nothing (χρηστοῦ ἢ πονηροῦ)...” (313a7-9)] He thereby encourages Hippocrates to find or become a ‘physician of the soul,’ who knows ‘the nature of the good and bad’ (313e4) and the appropriate art of measurement to make any action good (313d-14b), like the Hippocratic art (313a-14a). It is the physician of the soul/ignorance who knows the nature of pleasure and pain who is qualified to do this (356d8-9-356e1-3; 357b6-10, e2-4)—and, like the Hippocratic art, is able achieve a state of bodily balance, avoiding excesses and deficiencies in any pursuit (cf. 357a-c to *The Art* 3.2; *The Nature of Man* 4.2). If we are to take the Hippocratic analogy seriously, it seems unlikely that Socrates endorses unbridled hedonism—rather, a body in order with respect to wisdom/virtue, on a typically Platonic as well as Hippocratic model, is a *kosmos* (*The Nature of Man* 7.8).

This book is a welcome and essential text for any serious scholar of the *Protagoras*, the Sophists and popular moral philosophy. Despite its uneven and awkward main line of argument, it is a work that non-academics can very well enjoy (though with reservations about the second chapter, which is at times far too difficult to follow even for experts).

Bridging the Gap between Aristotle's Science and Ethics - Devin Henry and Karen Margrethe Nielsen (eds.) Cambridge University Press, 2015

ISBN-13: 978-1107010369

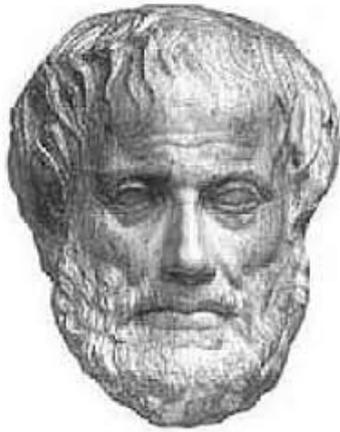
316 pages, £70

Review by Matthew Duncombe

During the night of 6th of August 1974, Philippe Petit and a gang of accomplices broke into the World Trade Centre in New York City. Working through the night, the gang rigged a wire-walking cable 400m above the ground, between the two buildings. Shortly after 7 am, to the astonishment of crowds and consternation of authorities, Petit stepped onto the wire and walked between the two.

To perform his high-wire walk, Petit literally 'bridged the gap' between two structurally similar items. Henry and Nielsen's edited volume aims to pull off a similar stunt, perhaps not as risky, but certainly as difficult: bridging the gap between Aristotle's science and his ethics. This of course is a metaphor: Aristotle's theory of science and ethical theory are not buildings and cannot be bridged by a wire. We will see below that cashing out this metaphor is important to see whether this volume succeeds in its aims.

Aristotle has views about what it is to be a (demonstrative) science, described primarily in his *Posterior Analytics*; he also makes various methodological remarks in the *Nicomachean Ethics* about what ethical theory is and how to do it. The *Posterior Analytics* gives, so to speak, a theory of theories: any scientific theory has a small number of true, primitive, immediate and more familiar first principles (*A. Po.* 72a20-b4). From these, we deduce theorems by a special kind of syllogism, one whose middle term picks out the cause or explanation of the conclusion (*A.Po.* I.13-2.1-2). These theorems connect universals. These conditions are each necessary and together sufficient for a science. Axiomatic geometry is a prime example of such a science: in deducing the Pythagorean theorem I show, from self-evident first principles, not only that the theorem holds, and holds between universals, but also why the theorem holds.



Aristotle gives us some methodological remarks on ethical theory: in particular, that we should not demand from an ethical inquiry more precision than is appropriate to the subject matter (*NE* I.3; *NE* I.7). That subject matter is good action and good things (*NE* I.3). Both good action and good things do not remain good in all circumstances. Hence, when given a theory with such subject matter, our premises and conclusions can only indicate the truth ‘in outline’ and hold ‘only for the most part’ (*NE* I.3). But here arises a gap: an ethical theory cannot be a scientific theory, since, unlike a scientific theory, the conclusions of ethical theory do not hold universally, nor are they true ‘full stop’, but only true ‘in outline’. This edited volume, rather like Petit’s stunt, shows this gap, although real, is not as scary as we have thought.

One way to bridge the gap, as argued by Nielsen in chapter 1, is to argue that there is a full-blooded science of ethics. Indeed, as Nielsen puts it at one point ‘Aristotle conceives of theoretical ethics as a science’ (p. 47). Aristotle holds that universal ethical principles, the hallmark of a demonstrative science, have a role to play in ethics. There are principles of ethics of the form, ‘the highest good is thus-and-so’. But doesn’t this just move the gap to a different place? How can knowledge of universal principles help us with practical decision-making? This is where the ‘inexactness’ claim enters: a universal claim, like ‘good is thus and so’ does not tell us how to act in a good way, except ‘in outline’ or ‘only for the most part’. Part of our moral education is to learn how to apply such general principles correctly. But it seems to me that ethical theory and practical ethics can still come apart: I can be happy without knowing happiness is the highest good. Equally, I can know that happiness is the highest good and still be miserable. Maybe the answer is that theoretical ethics helps ‘for the most part’: if I know what happiness is, I’m more likely, but not certain, to get it.

A second, slightly different, way to bridge the gap would be to show that, despite his apparent reservations, Aristotle does use a scientific methodology in his ethical investigations. It is usually held that Aristotle builds ethical theory ‘dialectically’ (as described in *NE* 7.1). That is, builds a theory by gathering widely held and/or expert opinions on a matter, such as what happiness is, and attempts to resolve any ‘puzzles’ (*aporiai*) that arise. The resulting consistent set of opinions is the theory. However, chapters by Karbowski, Devereux, Natali and Henry, in Part II, argue that the actual method followed in the *Ethics* is more like a scientific inquiry. In particular, at various points in the *Ethics*, Aristotle stresses that his theory is answerable to ‘the facts’ rather than opinion (*NE* I.8). But he seems to follow this approach too: *NE* I 4-6 where accounts of happiness are rejected as false; *NE* I 7, where one is endorsed as true; *NE* 5 where an account of justice is accepted as true. And yet: these papers convinced me that the method is not straightforwardly dialectical; but it does not follow that just because the inquiry is not dialectical, it is scientific in the full-blooded sense. Some claims of ethical theory are true, granted, but this does not mean that they are explanatory, or primary or deductively related to other claims.

The final ‘bridge’ sought in this volume comes in the third part of the paper. Rather than bridge the gap between Aristotle’s ethical theory and theory of science (as with the first two bridges), Lennox, Leunissen, Shields, Johnson and Wiit, in Part III, try to say that some part of Aristotle’s ethical theory depends on some part of his scientific theory, for example his biology or psychology. Debate has focused on Aristotle’s function argument of *NE* I 7. The orthodox view is that the argument does not rely, in any profound way, on Aristotle’s biological theory. The function argument posits that happiness (*eudaimonia*) is the ultimate good. But what does this good consist in, for humans? Aristotle claims that this good will be (a) performing the distinctive function of humans and (b) performing (a) well. An analogy: good for a flautist is performing their distinctive function, flute-playing, well.

But while it seems analytic that the distinctive function of a flute-player is playing the flute, it is an empirical question what the distinctive function of humans is. This is where Aristotle’s biological and psychological theory is needed for his ethical theory: having a rational soul distinguishes humans, so the human function must be performing rational activity well. This ‘bridge’ seems the most secure: I’m convinced that Aristotle’s ethical theory depends on his scientific theory; but it still does not show that Aristotle’s ethical theory conforms to his theory of science.

But in the end, demanding that Aristotle’s ethical theory conforms at every point to his theory of science may be unfair. After all, Aristotle himself admits that the subject matter of ethics makes this impossible. What this volume does achieve, however, is to articulate the three main approaches to bridging the gap and to show, like Petit, that walking between the edifices is at least possible.

Philosophical Life in Cicero’s Letters - Sean McConnell Cambridge University Press, 2014

ISBN 978-1-107-04081-6

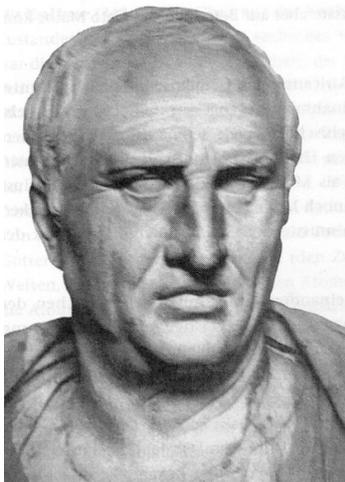
268 pages, £60

Reviewed by Lauren Emslie

McConnell’s ambition, to explore Cicero’s letters with his attention squarely focussed on the letters themselves, is music to the ears. As McConnell notes, Cicero’s letters have received regular attention from scholars, but, more frequently than not, the letters are not the sole focus of the research; rather, they are used as a source of evidence for other matters of historical context, political detail, and so on. With regard to Cicero’s philosophical work—not just that contained in the letters (which are, of course, McConnell’s focus, but his

philosophical works in general—this problem is far more pronounced, since they are often being used to fill in missing details of Hellenistic philosophy. McConnell wishes to demonstrate that the letters are far more than a ‘repository of useful facts’ (220), that ‘some of his letters are pieces of philosophical literature that stand alongside his recognised philosophical works as genuine components of his philosophical legacy and oeuvre’(4): in this he is successful. It is not a wholly new project, but the problem it focuses on most certainly requires greater scrutiny.

McConnell’s monograph is well structured and accessible. When quoting from the letters he offers the original Latin (and Greek) along with a translation. He also provides the reader with useful background and contextual information, which is imperative for a proper study of any Ciceronian writing, given the socio-political backdrop against which Cicero was writing. McConnell has found a balance between not slipping into extended narrative nor making it tedious for an informed reader, and has provided a succinct but full picture of the circumstances in which those letters were written for a reader perhaps more interested in the philosophical aspects of the texts.



McConnell is careful to stress that his study is not exhaustive, owing to the huge body of surviving letters; stating in his conclusion that one purpose of this monograph is to stimulate further enquiry into Cicero’s letters as literary and philosophical works (220). Consequently, McConnell identifies a number of clearly defined themes relating to a small collection of letters which are analysed in detail. These are separated into specific chapters, the aims and purposes of which McConnell sets out with remarkable clarity. Equally, he draws conclusions at the end of each individual chapter. As a reader, this is most welcome. Almost against McConnell’s own protestations, these multi-focused chapters, however demarcated and distinct, work together towards the overarching theme of demonstrating the extensive array of Cicero’s philosophical engagement and the importance of philosophy to Cicero for ‘life’. It is precisely because of the detailed close readings of particular letters in each chapter that McConnell’s monograph makes for a pleasing read.

In Chapter 1, 'Exploring the relationship between philosophy and politics', McConnell's aim is to demonstrate that Cicero engages with a positive conception of the place and role of philosophy in Roman political culture in his letters long before he embarked on project of writing his philosophical treatises.

McConnell highlights a Platonic influence in Cicero's changed perception of philosophy's place in politics. Chapter 2, 'Cicero and Plato's *Seventh Epistle*', aims to elaborate on Cicero's construction of a philosophical narrative of his actions in the civil war and argue that this forms a sort of 'apology' for his choice. Chapter 3 explores Cicero's engagement with the philosophy of a key Peripatetic figure, Dicaearchus. Firstly, McConnell outlines Dicaearchus' highly complex ideas and, in a slight departure from his initial aim precisely not to use the letters for the purpose of things such as 'filling in the gaps' of our knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy, he does just that. Following this groundwork, though, the chapter moves on to discuss the ways in which Dicaearchus figures into Cicero's political and ethical deliberations and to argue the fundamental impact of this exchange on Cicero's conceptions.

As a classicist and a philosopher, for me, the most compelling and insightful aspects of this volume are the advances made in chapters 4 and 5, 'A Stoic lecture: *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22' and 'Dealing with Caesar: the συμβουλευτικόν' respectively, concerning Cicero's use of philosophy as a method of dealing with, talking about, and engaging with the dramatic socio-political circumstances surrounding the rise and domination of Caesar, and civil war in the late Roman republic.

In particular, it seems to me that McConnell's study will be of great interest to those doing research more widely into both the Ciceronian persona during this time, and the relationship between Cicero and Caesar. In the final chapter, McConnell's task is to reconstruct the lost συμβουλευτικόν (advisory letter) from Cicero to Caesar in 46 BC. This is a somewhat risky project and perhaps remains purely speculative even after McConnell's investigation, owing to the amount of guesswork involved in the reconstruction task. As the author himself

concedes, his analysis is by no means conclusive (219). It does seem pertinent, however, to accept that Cicero would have ensured that this letter, like his others, was also intended for more eyes than Caesar's: consequently, it should be considered, as it was most likely intended, as a serious piece of philosophy on *magnitudo animi*, *gloria*, and 'the good rule'. By approaching the relationship between the two great ancient figures of the late Republic from a philosophical angle, and using Cicero's application of philosophy to politics and leadership, McConnell makes some headway.

With his chosen book title, *Philosophical Life*, McConnell makes an important distinction; that, for Cicero, — and this reviewer agrees with McConnell on this matter — philosophy is intertwined with life in a particularly practical sense, that philosophy has an enriching role to play in both politics and in one's own personal life.



Letter to the Editor

Reply to John Griffiths

Dear Editor

In *The Philosopher*, Autumn 2015, John Griffiths commented on my article in the Spring 2015 edition which attempted a refutation of theologian William Lane Craig's eight reasons for God. John Griffiths chose three of Craig's reasons for comment -- may I clarify my position in the light of Griffiths's remarks?

Craig Reason 1: *God is the best explanation why anything at all exists.*

Craig, a master at polemics, merely asserts that “Anything which *begins* to exist needs an explanation.” This subtlety, known as the Kalam argument, allows Craig to evade the impossible task of inventing a cause for God’s existence by averring that as God is eternal, having no beginning, ‘He’ escapes the need for a cause, but that as the universe *did* have a beginning (the Big Bang), *it* does need an explanation for its existence, which is – wait for it – God.

Griffiths says that quantum indeterminacy applies to small entities but not to the complete universe. However the Big Bang was supposed to begin as a tiny point (albeit of infinite density), so the quantum laws did apply to it and these do permit spontaneous, uncaused events -- the universe itself could be one such event. Griffiths also contemplates events *before* the Big Bang (eg a previous contraction) which, if they repeatedly occurred, would undercut Craig’s reliance on the cosmologists’ alleged belief in a *beginning* of time.

Craig Reason 4: *God is the best explanation for the fine tuning of the universe for intelligent life.* Currently, cosmologists work on alternative theories to the simple Big Bang, e.g. Roger Penrose has ‘aeons’ preceding it, and the multiverse has other universes ‘elsewhere’ at this time. I believe Griffiths makes incorrect statements about the multiverse as being necessarily unscientific because untestable. However, if a multiverse theory should *also* offer the best account of *this* universe’s physics, we’ll have good reason to accept it. Griffiths is surely wrong to claim that “Whatever is true in our universe is untrue in the others, including the theory that they exist.” There’s no reason why a core physics can’t be common throughout the infinitude of ‘bubble universes’ with some parameters (c, G, h) differing in each bubble from their values here. Our bubble universe supports life, others don’t – so ‘tuning’ is not required, nor therefore is the Tuner.

However, Griffiths then asks “If we allow Bacrac the Multiverse, why not open the door a bit wider and allow Craig God?” Because we now know, in principle, how complex life can have evolved in four billion years from very simple non-conscious elements, but we have no idea *how* a Mind, able to call matter into existence, could arise *ex nihilo* nor *why* such an omniscient Mind should be so perverse as to create even the *possibility* of so much pain in its creatures. Griffiths’ wider opening lets in a host of unanswerable questions!

Extra Reason : *Free Will.* Whereas Kalam assumes universal causality, Craig insists that although every physical event has a cause, humans have been granted ‘libertarian free will’ by God so their choices, exceptionally, are independent of their past - they are originated in the moment but never necessitated; ‘bad’ choices, not God, are responsible for the ‘evil’ in

the world. This fiction of libertarian free will then paves the way for the doctrine of divine judgment and retribution.

However, I suggest the term ‘free will’ is commonly used just to indicate a voluntary choice, one made without any *external* coercion, but quite compatible with there always being adequate causes for one’s choice. This *de facto* determinism means that no *past event* or *past action* could have been different from what it was, given *all* the circumstances that then applied, so retribution is not justified.

Norman Bacrac