

The Philosophers' Magazine

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*New Waves in Neuroethics
Hiking with Nietzsche
Science, Mind and Body
Rethinking Identity*

Existentialism



Issue 84

1st Quarter 2019

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The Philosophers' Magazine

Thought-provoking thoughts



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From the Editor

James Garvey

If someone new to philosophy asked you for a recommended reading, what would you suggest? I've asked a fair number of philosophers this over the years and found that there's more agreement in answers to this question than at least many philosophical questions. Ask about the nature of mind and the replies are all over the place. Ask for a good introductory book, and a lot of people point to Plato. "I dunno, *Republic*?" is a less than reassuring response you nevertheless hear often. If you're going to start somewhere, start at the beginning, I guess, and reading Plato is kind of wonderful anyway, at least when compared to something unspeakable written by Hegel or Kant. But do you really want to afflict a beginner with stuff like the divided line and the Myth of Er and the thought that justice in the city and in the soul has to be roughly the same sort of thing?

Maybe not, which is why many people suggest a contemporary book, written by someone deliberately setting out to introduce philosophy to the uninitiated. Simon Blackburn's *Think* and Thomas Nagel's *What Does it All Mean?* come up again and again. Blackburn's intro has been around for almost 20 years and Nagel's book for more than 30, and yet they're both still going strong -- top sellers on Amazon anyway. Those who would push on the novice something with more gravitas might suggest Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*,

also still killing it on best-seller lists despite being around since 1946.

But here's the thing, if you ask someone immersed in philosophy not what they recommend but what book they in fact read that got them hooked, you don't hear about Blackburn or Nagel or Russell -- sometimes Plato comes up, but more often it's something you'd never think to suggest to a newbie.

I've heard philosophers say it was a work of science or mathematics, nothing straightforwardly philosophical at all, which got them going. Dawkins' *Selfish Gene*, Hawking's *Brief History of Time*, something Carl Sagan wrote that they half recall hearing about or reading, a problem they encountered when working in another discipline entirely. Others were pushed in a philosophical direction by religious writing, maybe C S Lewis, or by some text from outside the Western tradition that got them wondering about their own beliefs. Still others found their way into philosophy through science fiction, or fiction more generally. What actually gets people into philosophy often isn't straightforward philosophy. It's questions, and here we are again with Plato's old point about wonder. Or, as Russell puts it for more modern ears, "Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves."

Winter News

Charlotte Knowles reports on the latest in “Grievance Studies”

As we all know, political correctness has gone mad. To quote the comedian Stuart Lee, “you can’t even write racial abuse in excrement on someone’s car without the politically correct brigade jumping down your throat”. This is, in effect, the sentiment shared by a group of “free thinkers” who have attempted to surgically remove the scales from the eyes of the academy and society at large, by going “undercover” within the field of what they term “grievance studies” (all the scare quotes, because really who calls it that?).

So what does this “hoax” actually tell us?

As James A. Lindsay, Peter Boghossian and Helen Pluckrose put it in an article published in *Areo* in late 2018, their concern was with “certain fields within the humanities” where they believe:

“Scholarship based less upon finding truth and more upon attending to social grievances has become firmly established, if not fully dominant, within these fields, and their scholars increasingly bully students, administrators, and other departments into adhering to their worldview. This worldview is not scientific, and it is not rigorous. For many,

this problem has been growing increasingly obvious, but strong evidence has been lacking. For this reason, the three of us just spent a year working inside the scholarship we see as an intrinsic part of this problem.”

So what “world view” are these people talking about? No, it’s not the hard-line error theorists or those insisting there’s no such thing as a table, just “particles arranged table-wise” (no disrespect meant to that passionate bunch), but rather “those that [for example] make whiteness and masculinity problematic”. Their targets were the feminists, the critical race theorists, the queer theorists: those engaged in “identity studies” and disciplines which seek to challenge and disrupt traditional power structures. And this seems fair, right? Because as we all know, it’s the gay, black, women who really hold all the power in our society, not only in higher education institutions, but across the board.

So, with their “Why doesn’t Jim Davidson have a Netflix Special” placards placed firmly out of sight, these absolute legends decided to take down the Judith Butlers and Kimberlé Crenshaws of this world by attempting to infiltrate the disciplines of which they were so suspicious. Like an increasingly crazed Tom Cruise lowering himself on a suspension wire made principally of limp spaghetti, they hatched their

plan to dangle themselves into the murky depths of “Grievance Studies” (still not a thing).

Over the course of a year, the three musketeers spent their time writing “hoax” papers and sending them to journals in cultural studies, gender studies, critical theory and the like. However, as they admit in the companion YouTube video to the *Aero* article, their first attempts to infiltrate the discipline and reveal it for the unscholarly, ridiculous work that it is, failed. In their own words, they were unable to penetrate their target journals with “poorly researched hoax papers ... we needed to change our ap-

proach, so we walked back from the hoaxing and began to engage with the existing scholarship in these fields more deeply”.

Let’s just take a minute and reflect on this statement. They weren’t able to get poorly researched hoax papers published, so they spent a significant amount of time researching in the fields of human geography, critical race theory, feminist theory, etc. Reading the relevant literature, exploring the arguments, immersing themselves in the theory, then writing papers on the topics they had researched.

As someone who has recently been appointed as an assistant professor of philos-



ophy at a research-intensive university (see below for where to send your congratulation cards), I know a bit about the workings of professional academic research. And, from what they've described, it doesn't sound so much like they've fooled everyone by pulling off an elaborate and devastating hoax, it just sounds like they've, well, written some research papers.

Moreover, their claims to "success" are rather overblown if we look at the actual results of their "experiment". Limited, as always, by considerations of time and space, I cannot go through all the laborious details here, so I strongly recommend you read the article by Daniel Engber "What the 'Grievance Studies' Hoax Actually Shows", published in *Slate*. Engber gives an excellent round up of the "success" (or lack thereof) of the various papers. He notes that of the 21 papers they penned for publication, two thirds were rejected outright. Of the seven remaining, one was a collection of poetry. As Engber observes, the fact that bad poetry gets published is hardly news-worthy and certainly not the academic bombshell they were looking for. He continues:

"Another three plants were scholarly essays. Two were boring and confusing; I think it's fair to call them dreck. That dreck got published in academic journals, is a fact worth noting to be sure. The third, a self-referential piece on the ethics of academic hoaxes, makes what strikes me as a somewhat plausible argument about the nature of satire. The fact that its authors secretly disagreed with the paper's central claim -- that they were parroting the sorts of arguments that had been made against them in the

past, and with which they've strongly disagreed -- doesn't make those arguments *a priori* ridiculous."

This, it seems, is precisely the right point to make. Firstly, boring and confusing things get published in all fields, not just in the humanities, and certainly not just in "grievance studies" (really, really not a thing). And just because you don't agree with what you've written, that doesn't automatically discredit it. If Kant came out now and said "LOL [he wants to be down with the modern lingo, having been resurrected and still not having left Königsberg] all that stuff about the categorical imperative? I didn't really *believe* it, you dweebs, it was meant as a joke! Lololololol #Konigsberg4Lyf". Would that discredit the whole of Kantian scholarship and deontological ethics? I think not.

*It doesn't sound like
they've fooled everyone
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and devastating hoax,
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So finally we are left with three papers, all of which were "presented as a product of empirical research, based on original data". As Engber goes on to argue, "[i]t's true that Pluckrose, Lindsay, and Boghosian tricked some journals into putting out

made-up data, but this says nothing whatsoever about the fields they chose to target. One could have run this sting on almost any empirical discipline and returned the same result.” Moreover, surely we cannot expect all reviewers (who work for free and review papers as part of their “contribution to the profession”, something they do on top of all their normal teaching, research and administrative duties), to attempt to go out and duplicate all the results cited in the papers they review to check the results are not fake or part of an “elaborate hoax”. That would be both ridiculous and impossible.

So what does this “hoax” actually tell us? My conclusion tends to be the same as Engber’s. The “hoax” doesn’t tell us anything about the state of academic scholarship in certain fields or in what no one calls “Grievance studies” (not least because it’s not a field of study. Still *still* not a thing). What it does show us, is that some people are so anti-feminist that they will do whatever they can – even spend a year writing “bogus” papers – to try and discredit the idea that maybe, *just maybe*, men are – and have historically been – privileged in society, often at the expense of women.

As Engber points out, although the hoaxers purportedly concerned themselves with a variety of “grievances” their main target was,

“clearly focused on the fields concerned with gender. Among the 21 academic journals named in the essay, almost half describe themselves on their websites as venues for ‘feminist’ research; three more refer to gender. (By contrast, just a handful say they’re dedicated to the study of ‘race,’ ‘sexuality,’ or ‘culture.’)

The sham papers, as written, show an even clearer version of this tilt: Going by their abstracts, almost all the fakes (18 of 21) make silly or parodic claims concerning gender; just eight mention race or sexuality.”

This hatred of feminism and feminists – and I’m going to go out on a limb here and say: women – is reiterated in the “real life” of these trail blazers. See for example Boghossian’s tweet of 2017: “Why is it that nearly every male who’s a 3rd wave intersectional feminist is physically feeble & has terrible body habitus?” and his subsequent article entitled “Why no one cares about feminist theory”.

So, to paraphrase that giant of conflict resolution and putting-the-toys-back-in-the-pram, Jerry Springer, what have we learned? Well, rather than wasting their time – and everyone else’s – trying to show that those bloody women with their ideas, and their equal rights, and their bloody academic papers *should just get back in the kitchen where they belong*; might I suggest that these three coins take a time-out and perhaps have a read of Kate Manne’s excellent book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, they might actually learn something.

Charlotte Knowles is a postdoctoral research fellow in philosophy at the University of Groningen, but will shortly be taking up a permanent position at the University as an assistant professor of ethics, social and political philosophy.

Duties and Ethical Giving

Paul Woodruff on the real demands of rescue

In a simple case, the duty of rescue is easy to recognise: As you are traveling on a path by a pond, you hear a woman scream and see a small child sink into the water. You run into the shallows (at no risk to yourself), save the child, and return it to its mother's arms, at the cost of a few minutes' time and the wetting of your shoes and socks. Obviously, that's what you should do in this case. If for some reason you are unable to do this -- you are confined to a wheelchair, for example -- you must at least *feel* like saving the child. Most people would feel that way, as Mencius famously pointed out, arguing that we all have a natural potential for goodness.

*A single pondside
emergency is one thing,
an unceasing worldwide
emergency that takes
many lives each day
seems like another*

It's not so easy to see what to do in every case, however. Suppose you are able to save this child, but only at the cost of letting five other children drown. Most of us would save the five, although we would feel that losing the other carries a moral cost. Or suppose you are caregiver for one child

and have promised to keep it safe. Then you have a specific duty to that child that may outweigh your duty to save strangers. Suppose, again, that the waters are deep and turbulent, and you would be taking a huge risk to your own life if you try to save the drowning child; if you dived in, you would have a one in five chance of surviving and a one in ten chance of saving the child. In such a case, you have a good excuse for not making the attempt, unless you have taken the responsibility of a lifeguard for this stretch of shoreline, in which case you have undertaken a more demanding duty of rescue than is incumbent on a mere passer-by.

If rescue entails saving a life, then rescue must often go beyond pulling a child from a pond. Rescue may entail a commitment for the long term. Suppose that, in the first case, the mother is alone and starving; in that case, pulling the child from the water is not enough to save its life. If you merely pull the child out and set it on the bank, it will die in the next few hours. Leaving it on the bank is little better than leaving it in the pond. Mother and child will need food and medical attention, and not just for today, but for the long run if the child is to survive. The duty of rescue may be demanding.

How far does your duty of rescue take you away from the journey that took you down that path in the first place? What sacrifices of time and wealth are incumbent on you in view of the real demands of rescue?

The recent case of the young soccer players who were towed out of a cave in Thailand illustrates the issue clearly. These boys were already living on the margin. Some of them, like their coach, were stateless refugees. They are only a few of the many stateless refugees in the world today, many of whom will die if sent back into the situation from which they fled. Sending them back would be like throwing the child from my first example back into the pond to drown. A genuine rescue cannot end until the child you rescue is in safe hands. But whose safe hands are they supposed to be? Yours? If that exceeds your capacity, then you are involved in what I call the *corporate duty of rescue*. Even a short-term rescue may exceed your private capacity; no one person acting alone could have pulled the boys in Thailand from the rising waters.

*The first world has a
duty to return wealth
to the third world*

When no one acting alone could effect a rescue, then, if indeed there is a duty of rescue, it must fall on some sort of corporate or social entity. What is your duty as a private individual in such a case? Does it matter whether you are a passer-by (as in the first case) or a neighbour? If it matters that you are a neighbour, what counts as a neighbour? That, after all, was the question addressed by the parable of the Good Samaritan. Could it be that every human being is your neighbour for this purpose? Then we face a further question: Of the many social

entities that might effect rescues, to which ones do you have an obligation under the duty of rescue? Do you have a duty to give time or money to any group or institution whatever that rescues children or looks after them after plucking them out of ponds or caves? These issues are murky, much murkier than the issue raised by the story with which we began.

A single pondside emergency is one thing, an unceasing worldwide emergency that takes many lives each day seems like another, and yet both kinds of emergency seem to trigger the same sort of duty: the duty to save whatever human lives we can save without undue risk to our own. On close analysis, however, we will find that there are at least three different kinds of duty involved in these cases. Some duties belong to us as a result of choices we have deliberately made, others arise as a matter of justice, and still others from the general values of philanthropy. My first case was simply philanthropic. Philanthropic duties are what Kant called wide or imperfect, as there may be many ways of carrying them out. Duties of choice and duties of justice, by contrast, are specific and leave less latitude.

We choose duties when we promise to do something. Often, we do this when joining organisations that require duties of their members. When you join the U. S. Marines, you undertake a duty, rooted in long tradition, to attempt to rescue your fellow Marines when they are in danger, even at great risk to your own life. As a passer-by you are not obliged to risk your life to save the child in the pond if the water is treacherous. But the case of the Marines is different; you cannot consider yourself a mere passer-by when



a fellow Marine is in danger. You have chosen otherwise. Firefighters, lifeguards, and policemen have all chosen to take on more demanding duties of rescue than fall upon passers-by; they have assumed a higher degree of risk in rescue operations. Some family obligations are duties of choice: you are choosing certain duties when you choose to have a family. In doing so, you may make yourself more philanthropic, coming to care more than you would otherwise for the children of others. U. S. Marines do not restrict themselves to their chosen duty; they have a record of bravery in saving non-marines, as in the flight from the Chosin Reservoir

in Korea. Duties of choice are more specific and more demanding than ones that are merely philanthropic, but practicing them may build your capacity to be more philanthropic in general.

Duties of justice fall into two groups with regard to rescue. First is your duty of justice to avoid freeloading. If you are a beneficiary of a practice of rescue, you have a duty to contribute your fair share to that practice. Sailors rescue other sailors when they find them in danger. Even if no one has ever rescued you at sea, you are safer because of this practice, and therefore you are among its beneficiaries. As such, you are obliged to do

your part. The same goes for any safety net, such as your local food bank, which rescues people from hunger and might rescue you some day. You may never draw on the food bank, but it is there for you if you need it. Such safety nets as food banks are especially important under governments that neglect to provide them at taxpayer expense. Safety nets are beneficial to you even if you never fall into them, just as fire insurance is worth money to you even if you never lose anything in a fire. Your fair share of the food bank is hard to calculate, but this at least is clear: If you benefit from its presence you must not be a freeloader. Give something.

Second is your duty of justice to return stolen property. If you find yourself in possession of stolen wealth, you have a duty to return it to its rightful owners. In doing so, if the owners are desperately poor, you will save them from drowning in hunger or ill health. Kant argued that great inequalities of wealth represent injustices that the wealthy have a duty to remedy, as a matter of justice. Great wealth is, in effect, stolen property and must be returned to those from whom it was extorted. Justice demands that stolen wealth be given not to those to whom it would do the most good, but to those who rightfully own it. To the extent that the wealth of the first world was extorted from the third, the first world has a duty to return wealth to the third world, and, in doing so, to rescue many people from desperate poverty and ill health. But some of the rightful owners of your wealth may live in the first world, in the very shadow of your wealth. You owe a return to them as well, even though you could rescue more people by applying the same amount to the third world. Third world rescues are less expen-

sive than first world rescues, but that is not relevant to the duty of justice.

Ethical giving requires attention to all three kinds of duty. Some effective altruists argue that we must always do the most good that we can in our charitable giving. That's good philanthropy, but it cannot exhaust our ethical duties. If we followed that rule, we would give only to the organisations that are most efficient in saving lives or health, and these operate almost exclusively in the third world. In restricting our giving in this way, we would neglect local obligations we have chosen, as well as our duties of justice, some of which are local. Ethical givers keep all of this in mind: global needs, our chosen duties, and the call of justice.

Paul Woodruff is a professor of philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin and the editor of The Ethics of Giving.

Philosophy, In a Sense: We Philosophers

Constantine Sandis on us, them, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein

Friedrich Nietzsche described his books *Human, All Too Human* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as “a book for free spirits” and “A Book for All and None”, respectively. What did he mean by this? A clue may be found in his uses of “we” to pick out – and where necessary *create* – the groups to which he belongs:

“we northerners” (*Beyond Good and Evil* § 48); “we free spirits” (BGE § 61); “we first born of the twentieth century” (BGE § 214); “We scholars” (BGE § 204); “We artists” (*The Gay Science* § 59); “we Europeans” (GS § 352); “we incomprehensible ones” (GS § 371); “we modern men” (GS § 375); “we new philosophers” (*Will to Power* § 988); “we philosophers of the present and the future” (WTP § 1034); and “we pagans in faith” (WTP § 1034).

Nietzsche’s uses of “we” are expressive not only of the time and place in which he is writing, but also of his intellectual pre-occupations and ambitions. As such, it is never entirely clear when he is inviting the sympathetic reader who identifies as free, modern, and new to join him in his quest, and when he is simply telling his readers about his

own kind (the twentieth-century European man). His writings are in principle for *all*, but in practice more likely for *none*, not least because Nietzsche is pessimistic about the likelihood of being understood by anyone in his lifetime. By the time of his last book, 1888’s autobiographical *Ecce Homo*, the first personal plural has given way to an “I” that bombastically proclaims to be incredibly wise, clever, and a destiny, though this is arguably a parody of Wagner’s autobiography *My Life* (completed eight years earlier).

Uses of “we” typically contrast with a “they” that is at the very least implied. Nietzsche’s “others” explicitly include the following sets of people:

“the Greeks” (GS 155, 356; BGE 260), “savage tribes” (GS 147), “these English [men]” (BGE 252), “the Celts” (BGE 48), “The Chinese” (BGE 267), “the Jesuits” (BGE 48), “the Brahmins (BGE 61)”, “the Jews” (BGE 61; 250), “the first Christians” (Daybreak 72), “German middle-class Protestants” (BGE 58), and, indeed, “the German(s)” (BGE 11,28, 246).

Nietzsche, who spent most of his life stateless (having given up his Prussian citi-

zenship at the age of 24 to work in Switzerland) knows full well that the names we give to others are as important as those we give ourselves:

“the names of peoples are usually terms of abuse. The Tartars, for example, are literally ‘the dogs’; that is what the Chinese called them. The ‘Germans’: this originally meant ‘heathen’; that is what the Goths after their conversion named the great mass of their unbaptized kindred tribes.” (GS § 146).

In grouping together his own imaginary “higher men” – who set themselves apart from “the herd” – Nietzsche puts into practice his view that “what things are called is unspeakably more important than what they are” since “it is enough to create new names and valuations and probabilities in order in the long run to create new “things”” (GS §58).

*Wittgenstein’s
philosophical therapy
begins with his own
continued bewitchment*

The heir of this “creationist” view of language’s relation to the world would come to be Ludwig Wittgenstein, though only after he’d written his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, in which in which he defends the “picture theory” of language as a means by which we represent the world.



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Like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein wrote with a handful of few specific individuals in mind, remaining pessimistic that even his closest friends could understand him. In his 1918 Preface to the *Tractatus*, he states that “[p]erhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has oneself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it – or at least similar thoughts”. Not much has changed by the time he writes 1945’s dark Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*:

“It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work ... to bring light into one brain or another – but, of course, it is not likely.”

Like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein sometimes writes as if it is he *alone* who is opposing the old guard, whilst simultaneously forming a new “we” via a problematic othering of groups such as “the Chinese” (*Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*), “mental defectives” (*Remarks On Colour*), “Englishwomen” (*Culture and Value*), and “the Jews” (CV). And yet the later Wittgenstein’s uses of “we” are more inclusive than Nietzsche’s, at times referring to anyone under the spell of philosophy. These include both his current self and the author of the *Tractatus*, that *other* within him whose views he is now fighting to break free from, despite a deep personal temptation to succumb to them:

“[W]hat confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them in speech, or see them written ... Especially when we are doing philosophy!” (PI §11); “Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our

understanding by the resources of our language” (PI § 109); “A picture held us captive ...for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably” (§115); “What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (PI §116); “The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to”(§133); “When we do philosophy, we are like savages ...”(PI §194)

In his *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes of the “sick” ascetic priest who tries to alleviate others of their suffering, though unable to cure himself of the very same existential pains. In stark contrast, Wittgenstein’s philosophical therapy begins with his own continued bewitchment, a confession regrettably lacking in many of his followers. We contemporary philosophers should take head.

Constantine Sandis is professor of philosophy at the University of Hertfordshire and fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. His book The Things We Do And Why We Do Them is now out in paperback.

The Skeptic: Trials and Errors

*Wendy M. Grossman considers the problem
of “outcome switching”*

Sometime last year I agreed that a research group could call me to participate in Alzheimer’s research. I’m not entirely sure what I was thinking: I’m not interested in trying experimental drugs. However: you never know, and so it was that I got a phone call a few months later asking me to come in for a buccal swab DNA test.

There is a lot they don’t know about Alzheimer’s, but one thing they *do* know is that there is a connection to the APOE gene, and there are three variants: E2 is protective, E3 is neutral, and E4 increases the risk of developing the disease. People have these in pairs -- one from each parent. Mostly, I wanted to know what my genetic makeup showed. No need for suspense: E3-E3. I couldn’t qualify for that particular trial, even if I had wanted to.

But the more interesting question about this occurred to me while listening to a talk delivered by Ben Goldacre, who summarised the work of the COMPare project to eliminate mistakes and fraud in medical papers. In this project, Goldacre and colleagues examined every trial as it was published in one of the handful of the most prestigious medical journals, and compared the stated findings with the statement of intentions written at the outset. When there

was a discrepancy, they sent a letter to the journal pointing it out.

The reason why this matters is known as “outcome switching”, a phenomenon familiar to skeptics from the history of research in parapsychology. As a simple example, say you’re studying whether a given subject can predict the symbol that will appear on the next Zener card you turn over. You do a bunch of trials, and it turns out that your subject does no better than chance at predicting Zener cards -- but in among those trials are a few where the subject did really well because randomness works that way. You publish the successful ones and drop the rest. Or, in the case of medicine, you discover that this drug you’re testing on a sample that’s representative of the general population doesn’t hold up on the whole sample, but looks good if you look only at teenagers and elderly women, and so you publish that result as if it were representative. Bad hoodoo!

So, it occurred to me to wonder: if you are a prospective participant, how do you determine that the trial you’re considering joining is going to be conducted with appropriate scientific rigour? It’s bad enough to take on the risk of swallowing an experimental drug every day -- in the trial I was



called for, every day for eight years -- but then to find out later that you were part of a trial that ultimately published false results and effectively defrauded the public?

*How do you determine
that the trial you're
considering joining
is going to be conducted
with appropriate
scientific rigour?*

I don't know what the answer is to this. The lab rat really isn't in a position to dictate terms because at the beginning everything looks fine. In the case of the trial I was called for, the initial stages included reading a bunch of stuff, then watching a video ("most people enjoy this", the research assistant told me when I started arguing with the video about the perkiness of the presenter), and then answering a bunch of questions to show you've understood what you've been told. (All right, the video did have one new fact: one copy of E4 increases your risk by about 25%; two copies increase it by about 55%.) The point of all this is to ensure that each patient is given the same set of instructions, verbatim, and also to ensure that each patient's consent really is informed.

The uncertain aspect I was focused on was the hypothesis that amyloid plaques, which are found damaging the brains of those with Alzheimer's, are a cause rather than an effect. The drug that's being tested is supposed to interfere with their forma-

tion. It could turn out that the drug interferes just fine with the formation of amyloid plaques but doesn't do anything to halt the progressive cognitive loss.

But the far bigger danger is that sometime much later, when tens, maybe hundreds, of millions of dollars have been spent, despite the hard work of the nice honourable principal investigator I met, someone along the line will cherry-pick the patients or switch the outcomes in order to wring profits out of this experimental drug. Goldacre suggested a fix: medical researchers should write and publish the computer code they're going to use to analyse the results. I suppose a patient entering a trial could ask: have you done this? And -- now -- we could search the internet for evidence of past mistakes.

Ultimately, trials depend on the willingness and trust of the participants. Random-controlled trials are still the gold standard of medical evidence, so they need us. I don't think it ever occurs to them when they commit statistical errors or perpetrate outright fraud that they're poisoning their own research pool.

Wendy M. Grossman (pelicanrossing.net) is founder and former editor (twice) of The Skeptic Magazine (skeptical.org.uk).



Thoughts

Would you take a pill that gives you a cognitive edge over others? It turns out you can, and many people do, take such things as Ritalin and Adderall to do better on college exams. It's easy to imagine moral arguments against this kind of thing -- it's unfair or causes unnecessary harm -- but also easy to imagine arguments in favour of it. Shouldn't a Kantian with a self-regarding duty to develop their talents down those pills with gusto?

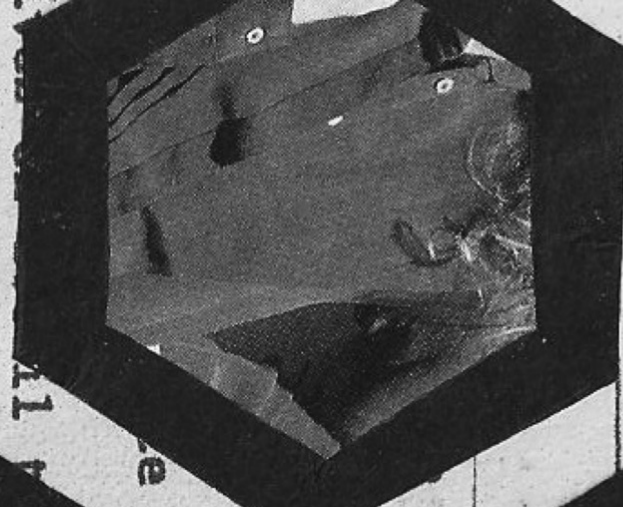
These and other questions of neuroethics are explored by Adina L. Roskies, and it's all part of a trend we notice in both philosophy generally and in the essays in this issue: there's a lot of philosophy to do around new waves in the brain and behavioural sciences. Laura Niemi explores the interesting philosophical territory opening up around scientific studies of fairness, and Friedel Weinert asks Susan Greenfield what neuroscience can tell us about the mind body problem.

But it's not all fMRIs and control groups in this issue. Anil Gomes takes up the compelling thoughts of P. F. Strawson, and Joan Forry muses on the everyday aesthetics of her dog standing on fire hydrants.



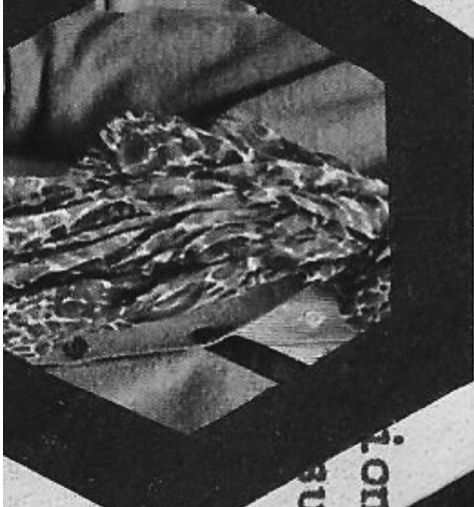
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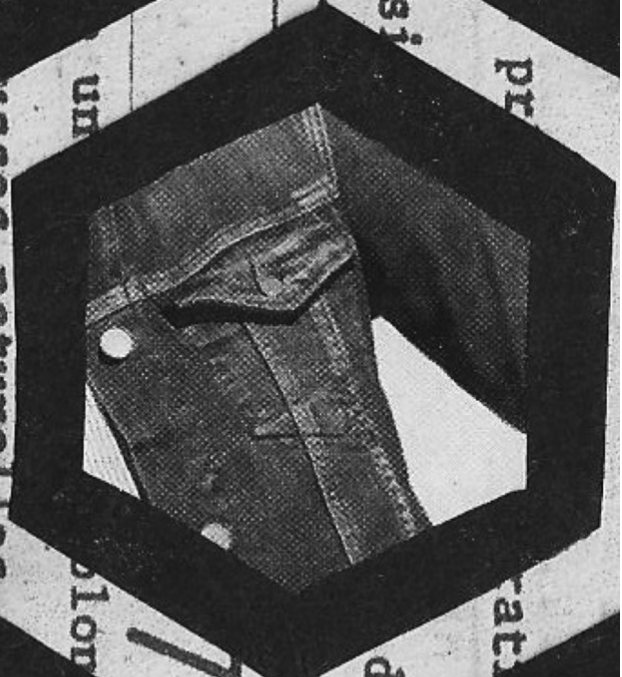


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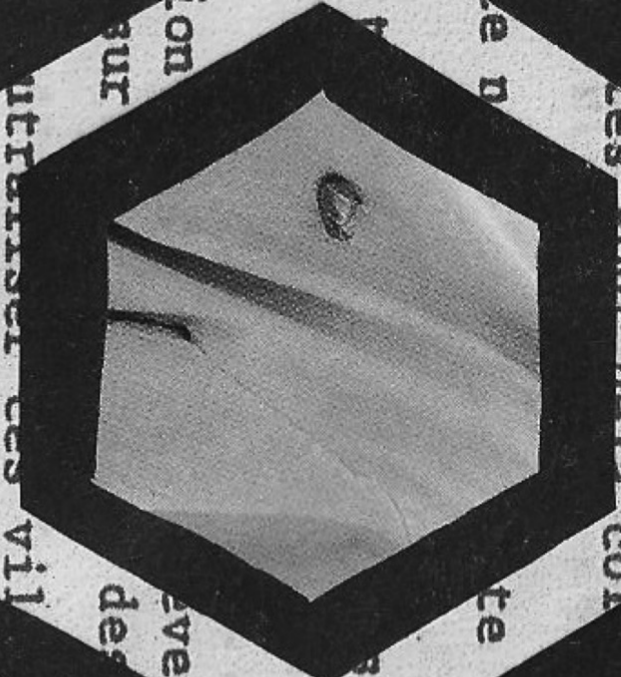


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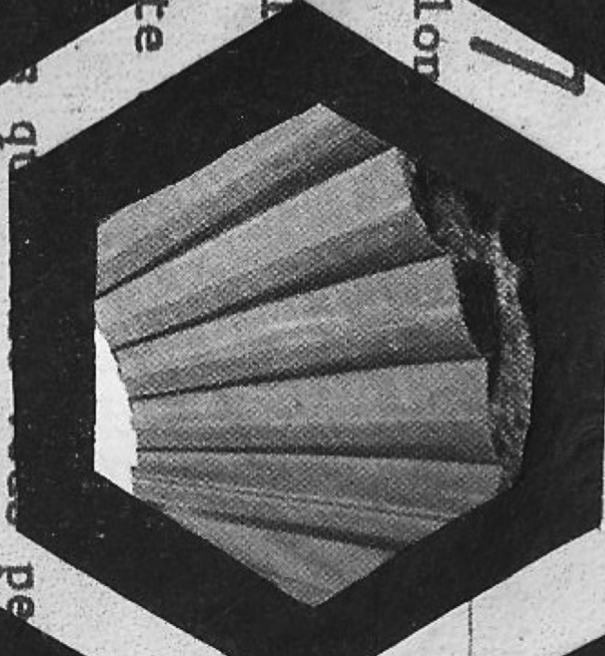


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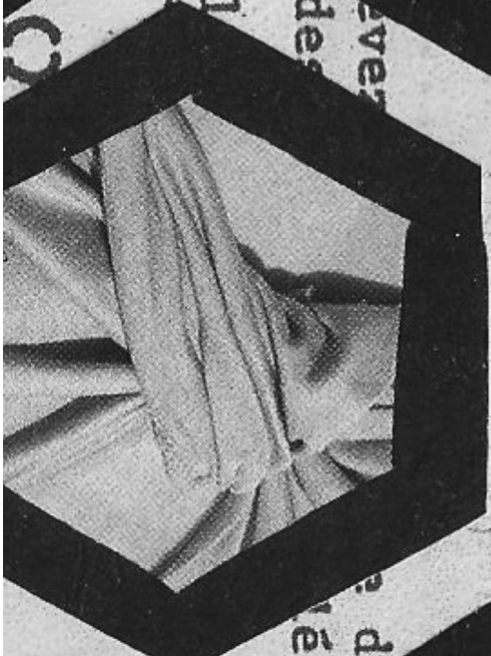
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THE SALTBRICK
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Neuroethics Fifteen Years On

*Adina L. Roskies explains how new discoveries are changing
the philosophical landscape*

In 2002 I wrote a piece entitled “Neuroethics for the New Millennium” that described a new research area, neuroethics, as comprising the ethics of neuroscience and the neuroscience of ethics. In the 15 years since, neuroscience has come a long way, and neuroethics, too, has evolved. There are courses in neuroethics at many institutions of higher learning, and national and international societies at whose meetings hundreds of researchers interested in neuroethics convene to discuss neuroethical issues. Here I highlight a few of the questions and issues that advances in neuroscience have raised for neuroethics. Although the questions themselves are not new, they are in a sense newly animated by advances in neuroscientific capabilities.

*We can alter the
people we are via
neurotechnologies*

One of the central neuroethical questions concerns enhancement, our ability to improve upon our natural mental capacities. The medical sciences aim to treat disease and dysfunction, but often these treatments

can correct functionality beyond baseline, or can be used by those without a disorder to enhance normal function. What are the ethical issues surrounding the enhancement of our cognitive abilities? Neuroscience provides a number of avenues to enhance cognition or to augment other abilities. The most common is through pharmacology, with, for example, the common use of Ritalin or Adderall among college students without ADHD to improve performance on tests. However, enhancement is not confined to the administering of short-acting medications. Neural enhancement could potentially involve noninvasive or invasive brain stimulation, the implantation of neural prosthetics, or other more recherche methods such as targeted gene editing. Arguments about the ethics of enhancement are not new, and blanket arguments about the wrongness of enhancing our natural abilities seem doomed to fail – after all, we all want to educate ourselves and our children, yet education is just one method of cognitive enhancement.

To my mind no argument about the “unnaturalness” of neural enhancement holds water as a reason not to pursue it. The best arguments against neural or cognitive enhancement involve the harms that are likely

to accrue directly because of the interventions, or indirectly because of the larger effects such changes will have upon society. It is also unlikely that any arguments about the ethics of enhancement will fit all cases, since the details of each enhancement technique and its consequences will likely be different. What is certain is that more methods for and types of enhancement will be possible as our understanding of the brain improves, and our ways of manipulating it expand and become more targeted. Whether and for what purpose they should be employed or made available are questions that we will increasingly have to answer, as a society, as policy-makers, and as individuals.

*One of the central
neuroethical questions
concerns our ability
to improve upon
our natural mental
capacities*

The rise of neuroethics coincides with the rapid development and spread of neuroimaging technologies. Prior to the development of functional MRI, our ability to measure neural activity in behaving healthy humans was quite limited, restricted to measures of surface electrical activity on the scalp which provides poor spatial resolution, or somewhat invasive and restricted measures of blood flow with positron emission tomography, available to only a few well-endowed medical research centres. fMRI has changed all that, enabling researchers al-

most anywhere to noninvasively scan normal participants doing cognitive tasks.

As neuroimaging has developed, it has become a tool for correlating brain activity signals with neural function, and even content. Early worries about the prospect of mindreading with neuroimaging techniques seemed overblown, even quaint, to many working in the field, myself included. After all, the signal from fMRI is noisy and also has limited spatial and temporal resolution. It will never afford an understanding of the activity of individual neurons in an area of tissue, but only measures of aggregate activity of many millions of neurons.

However, as time has gone on, a number of developments make the prospect of mindreading more realistic. fMRI technology has improved, with stronger and more stable magnets allowing for higher resolution imaging than was previously possible. More importantly, however, a number of novel analytical approaches have altered the landscape for what kind of information can be extracted from fMRI data. The application of multivariate techniques allows for the classification of patterns of brain activation in ways that provide good predictive power for identifying complex mental and emotional states.

For example, recent work has shown that negative affect can be identified, as distinct from pain; that objects of perception can be reconstructed from brain data with reasonable resolution; and that imagination of objects belonging to certain kinds of semantic categories allows those categories to be identified well above chance. Other analytical techniques enable researchers to compensate for individual differences in brain size, shape and functional organisa-



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tion, allowing better pattern classification between people. The combination of these approaches has enabled researchers to make significant progress in classifying complex thoughts. As an example, a network trained to classify brain responses to sentences in two different languages was able to correctly classify the same sentences in a language it had not previously seen. This suggests that the brain represents semantic content independently of linguistic vehicle, and that this content is similarly represented across individuals and encoded in ways compatible with the limits of fMRI.

These recent advances have raised the prospects of mindreading with new urgency. While it is still not possible to “read” mental content from brain scans in the sense that one can unambiguously discern the contents of propositional thought, the prospects of gleaning sufficient information about thought content are no longer in the realm of science fiction. At least currently, however, this cannot be done without the knowledge and implicit consent of the subject.

On the philosophical side, the issue of mental privacy is surprisingly undertheorised, perhaps because realistic prospects for mindreading until recently have been nonexistent. In US law two constitutional amendments have been taken to be relevant to mindreading. The Fourth Amendment, which protects against unwarranted searches and seizures, could be taken to protect individuals against incursions into mental privacy by the state. The Fifth Amendment protects people from self-incrimination in criminal proceedings. This protection has been interpreted as extending to testimonial but not physical evidence. However, the

status of brain imaging data is unclear, for assuming that mental states just are a result of brain activity, there is no clear distinction between physical and testimonial evidence: evidence of mental content is both. And self-incrimination is a rather restricted context.

*Recent advances have
raised the prospects of
mindreading with
new urgency*

More importantly, such protections only extend to the relationship between individuals and the state, and not, for example, individuals and other individuals, or companies. The United States has lagged far behind Europe in protecting data privacy on the internet, and has thus far failed to clearly articulate the philosophical and legal basis for personal privacy in the information age. These lacunae will also pose a risk for mental privacy. Theorising about the value and scope of mental privacy should be part and parcel of protecting freedoms in the future.

Philosophers have long discussed the nature and importance of agency, of being an autonomous being acting in the world. Although we lack an analysis of agency, there are a variety of dimensions or capacities that we enjoy, perhaps in varying degrees, that intuitively have bearing on our agency. One aspect of agency is our personal identity, that which makes us the same person over time. There are a variety of philosophical theories about what it is that makes us the same person over time; many of them de-

pend on psychological factors, such as our memories, our personality, or our self-conception. There is another concept in this realm, which I will call self-identity, which is what a person self-identifies with (e.g. passions; religious or gender affiliations, etc.). Both may be valuable, but they are often conflated in the literature under the heading of personal identity.

Recent development in techniques involving brain interventions open up the possibility that we can alter the people we are (personal identity) or take ourselves to be (self-identity) via neurotechnologies. Fairly commonplace examples involve old neurotechnologies, such as pharmacological interventions, that in addition to their therapeutic value may, as a side effect, lead to changes in mood or personality that some have argued affect a patient's personal identity. Novel techniques are on the horizon that may more dramatically affect these sorts of factors.

For example, Deep Brain Stimulation is an approved treatment for Parkinson's Disease (PD) and an experimental technique for other disorders that involves implanting an electrode in subcortical structures and chronically stimulating neural tissue. Over 100,000 people currently undergo DBS as treatment for PD. DBS can be life-changing for those for whom other treatments are ineffective. It can reliably improve motor functioning for the vast majority of patients. However, some small proportion of patients report side effects of treatment that can include development of obsessive-compulsive behaviours, hypersexuality, change in mood or personality, gambling addictions, and psychosis. Although these effects are diverse, many of these behaviours can be

understood as playing some part in making up who a person is.

In one famous case study, a man with broad and eclectic musical tastes suddenly developed a strong and focused preferences for the music of Johnny Cash, foregoing all his previous musical interests. The strong desire for Cash's music abated when stimulation was interrupted, and returned again upon resumption of DBS. One might ask in what way this "desire" was one that could be attributed to the subject, or whether the treatment constituted an instance of "desire insertion", a preference not attributable to the agent himself.

*Understanding how
we think and act at
a neural level may
affect the way we
conceive of morality*

The ability to directly intervene on brain function, and in some cases to possibly alter aspects of who a person, is has alarmed some ethicists. Are these kinds of changes morally problematic in a special way? What sorts of things are constitutive of personal identity? Do some characteristics of people have a special status because of their role in constituting who someone is, or because of the way in which they play a role in someone's self-conception? Are there changes that are especially harmful, or perhaps absolutely prohibited? Does it matter whether they are desired effects or inadvertent side effects of a treatment? After all, some

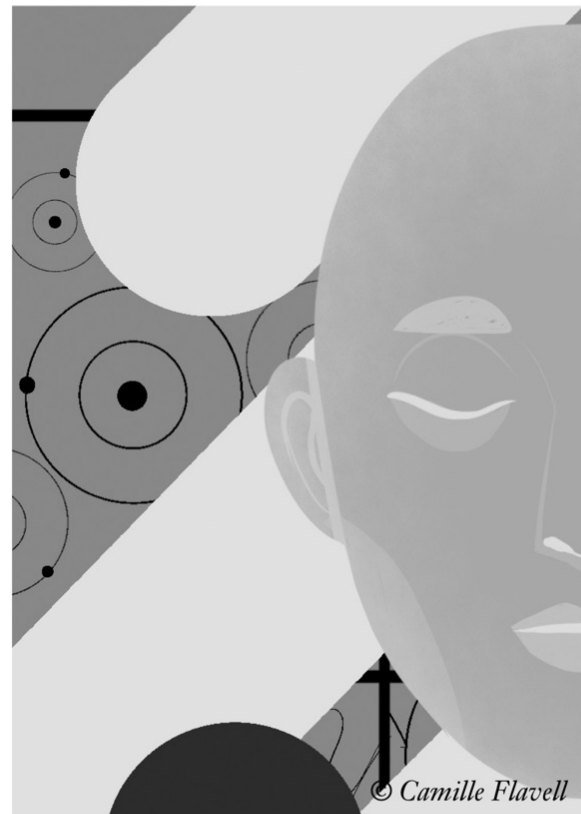
therapeutic treatments actually aim to alter things like a person's mood or desires. If changing oneself were itself morally prohibited, then many things we currently take to be valuable, such as certain types of self-improvement, would be morally wrong. The answers are unlikely to be so simple.

But even theoretically unproblematic questions such as *when are the benefits of a treatment outweighed by the harms?* are unlikely to be practically straightforward, or even objective. Consider, for example, a patient that was bedridden and hospitalised without DBS, but that with DBS regained his mobility but became psychotic and needed to be institutionalised. Should he undergo DBS? What if his views on the matter differ with and without stimulation? If personal identity really is altered, which person should decide? The more we are able to effect changes in a person's brain to core features of mood, cognition, and function, the more pressing it will be to answer these kinds of questions.

Severe brain damage can leave people in a persistent vegetative (PVS) or minimally conscious state (MCS). It is estimated that there are approximately 14,000-35,000 people in PVS in the US. PVS patients, even though they have periods of apparent sleep and wakefulness, show no evidence of awareness of internal or external stimuli. It has been argued on this basis, and the almost nonexistent prospects for recovery after a year or so of PVS, that there is no ethical obligation to keep such patients alive. However, about a decade ago scientists put a number of PVS patients in the functional MRI (fMRI) scanner, and asked them to imagine playing tennis or navigating through their house. Researchers had

already shown that different and highly distinguishable networks of brain regions are active in normal people engaged in these two tasks, allowing which task they were doing to be reliably identified from their brain scans. Asking this of PVS patients was an unprecedented, risky and expensive undertaking, since fMRI is enormously costly and these patients had been outwardly unresponsive to verbal and other stimuli for years. It was accepted that these patients had no mental life. Their results shocked the neuroscience community: A small percentage of PVS patients they tested showed distinguishable brain signatures to these two commands for mental imagery, in brain areas similar to those of normal people.

Further work showed that at least one of these patients was able to use these mental imagery tasks to indicate yes and no answers



to questions that they were posed. Although not everyone is convinced that these results indicate that the patients who produced the different brain signatures are conscious, the evidence weighs heavily in that direction. It seems that at least some people who outwardly appear to consistently lack any mental life at all are nonetheless conscious and sufficiently cognitively intact to understand instruction, execute a relatively demanding cognitive task, and stay on task for a significant amount of time.

These results raise a number of pressing ethical and neuroscientific issues: How can we more affordably and quickly screen PVS patients to determine whether they fall into the small minority of patients with evidence of preserved function? How should such patients be treated? At the very least it seems that we should determine whether they feel pain, and take steps to treat it if they do. More difficult will be determining the extent of their preserved capacities, and what those entail. Should they be able to take part in decision-making about their own futures – i.e. are they sufficiently competent to weigh in on matters of life and death? Can we develop imaging prosthetics that will improve their ability to communicate? And can we help the families of PVS patients understand that these capacities are rare in PVS patients, and for the vast majority, their unresponsiveness is indeed due to the absence of awareness? The case of PVS patients is one in which neuroscience has shown that an entire class of people has been mistakenly diagnosed by clinical practice relying on behavioural and not brain data, with ethically troubling results.

The previous examples have been examples of the ethics of neuroscience. One

thing that distinguishes neuroethics from general bioethics is that it encompasses the neuroscience of ethics. That is, it is concerned with understanding the neural basis of moral cognition, and the question of how such understanding will bear upon ethical thought. Although we still have a long way to go to really understand moral cognition, it is clear that emotional processing plays an important role in making some moral judgments. It has been argued that we ought to privilege rational over emotional processes in moral deliberation, that emotional processes are heuristics that are ill-adapted for use in today's complex world. Others have argued (I think erroneously) that neuroscience has shown that we lack free will, and they conclude that moral responsibility is thus an illusion. Although I disagree with both these claims, they are illustrations of how understanding how we think and act at a neural level may affect the way we conceive of morality. That is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of neuroethics, and the one perhaps most likely to change the way that we see ourselves.

Adina L. Roskies is the Helman Distinguished Professor of philosophy and chair of Cognitive Science at Dartmouth College.

The Flavours of Fairness

Laura Niemi explains how to understand the moral cognition behind our judgements

When it comes to fairness, there's something for everyone. Unfortunately, it's rarely the same thing. The concept of fairness is a shape-shifter. How do we understand "Un-fair!" when it is trumpeted by a politician to bemoan treatment during the investigation of massive, international white-collar crime, and also employed by exhausted students wishing to discretely use a restroom that matches their presenting gender? And are these sorts of unfairness the same as the unfairness protested at city halls around the nation when it is discovered that schools in some districts have been allowed to flounder underfunded, while others have been better endowed?

Philosophers and psychologists have long traced the many forms of fairness, and advances in the social sciences and neuroscience have enabled us to better understand the implications of these distinctions. One interesting feature that becomes vivid when observations across disciplines are taken together is that the principles guiding people's fairness judgements compete. In a series of studies aimed at understanding fairness controversies I conducted with psychologist Liane Young from Boston College, we explored three commonly observed fairness principles: reciprocity, charity, and impartiality.

Reciprocity reflects the belief that it's fair to allocate more to the person who allocated

to you. Charity, or needs-based allocation, is guided by a belief that it's fair to allocate to "level the playing field". *Impartiality* reflects the belief that allocations should be uninfluenced by people's unique circumstances. As such, impartiality is "person-blind". Reciprocity and charity, by contrast, are both "person-based", taking into account the unique deeds and needs of potential recipients.

Participants rated the impartiality vignettes as, by far, the most fair

In our studies, we considered group scenarios in which numerous people had an interest in a resource, and one person had the capacity to allocate that resource. We presented research participants with vignettes in which people in everyday roles (e.g., teachers, coaches, managers) allocated something that several people wanted (e.g., time with a favoured instrument, desired shifts at work). We varied the allocators' method according to the different fairness types: reciprocity, charity, impartiality, and unspecified (the control condition). We were interested in what people thought motivated these differing kinds of allocations, how fair and moral they considered them

to be, and whether individual dispositional differences in the participants contributed to differences in assessments. As reported in *Social Justice Research* in 2017, Young and I found that differing modes of allocation were linked to differences in perceived motivations, normative judgements, and participants' own dispositions.

For example, consider a factory manager tasked with allocating shifts. She might allocate based on impartiality, by allocating to whoever is next on the schedule. She might decide to allocate based on need (charity) by giving the desirable shifts to employees struggling to adjust to having newborns at home. She might allocate based on reciprocity by giving the desirable shifts to employees who recently helped her plan a training course. Considerations of reciprocity and charity are *personal* considerations, based on

individuals' past deeds and current needs, respectively. By contrast, to be impartial, one allocates consistently across individuals, typically by using a rule, such as a set of *impersonal* standardised criteria. (See Box A for a sample vignette and the four conditions.)

Our first, and most important, finding was that participants rated the impartiality vignettes as, by far, the most fair. If there is a go-to, prototypical fairness, it is impartiality – as Rawls would tell you, supported by the work of many other philosophers and psychologists. Intriguingly, Alex Shaw of The University of Chicago's Psychology Department and his colleagues recently showed that people disdain *creating* partiality so much, they throw excess resources they're tasked with distributing into the rubbish to maintain equality.

Individual differences also matter. Al-

BOX A: Sample Vignette. (Niemi, Wasserman, & Young, 2017)

Sasha is a manager at a large factory. She is in charge of scheduling shifts for all the managers to complete safety trainings. Today Sasha has to assign shifts, and she knows afternoon shifts are always preferred to morning shifts.

- a. *Impartiality*:** Sasha thinks about which managers had the morning shifts last week, since she trades off shifts week to week.
- b. *Charity*:** Sasha thinks about a couple managers who were struggling to adjust to having newborns at home.
- c. *Reciprocity*:** Sasha thinks about some managers who recently were a great help to her during the planning of the safety training curriculum.
- d. *Unspecified*:** Sasha thinks about the managers and the available shifts. She opens the scheduling document and selects some managers' names.

Sasha assigns those managers the better afternoon shifts.

though people broadly agreed about the fairness of impartiality, some people also folded other considerations into their idea of fairness. Participants' individual difference variables were linked to the likelihood that they perceived fairness to also include reciprocity or charity. On average, participants considered reciprocity to be the least fair, and the least morally praiseworthy allocation method. Yet people higher in Machiavellianism considered reciprocity to be significantly more fair than people lower in this variable. Machiavellianism, a well-studied individual difference variable, involves a desire for status and control, in which inequality is just fine: the world is a place where some people are superior to others, and Machiavellian people are committed to being in the superior class. Highly Machiavellian people engage in morally questionable means to pursue these personal goals, and deceptively build secret relational ties as an important way to get ahead. Reciprocity is the basis of many dyadic relationships; returning favours is polite and expected social behaviour. But outside of a friendship, where multiple people have rights to access or bid for a resource, reciprocity builds relational ties that push out some people to benefit a select few. Thus, reciprocal construals of fairness can be a tool that enables individuals high in Machiavellianism to further their goals by prioritising social relationships over impartiality.

While some see fairness in the impartial blindfold and others in eyes-on-the-prize tit-for-tat reciprocity, for others still, fairness follows the needy. On average, our participants considered charity less *fair* than impartiality. However, they did consider it equally *morally praiseworthy*. The potential

for conflict here is easily seen. As we know from debates around programs involving allocating to people in need, it's possible for charitable allocations to be viewed as good but not maximally fair. In these cases, a lack of impartiality is spotlighted and the fact that people in the most need are "targeted for special treatment" is presented as a procedural failing. Resulting skirmishes lead to resources being squandered as principles are put before persons.

Our participants considered charity less fair than impartiality

How to escape this conundrum? Some of our participants appeared to have the psychological equipment: those high in empathic concern. This dispositional feature, measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, reflects a tendency for concern for those who are worse off. People high in empathic concern were more likely to subsume charity, or allocating to the neediest, *within* their definition of fairness.

The participants who considered reciprocity and charity to be fair could not seem more different: the Machiavellians and the Empaths, respectively. Yet strikingly, when one examines the data on how participants perceived the allocators in the vignettes to be motivated, and the neural processing patterns when participants' morally judged the allocators, reciprocity and charity begin to look very alike.

The allocators in the reciprocity and charity vignettes were judged as significant-

ly more motivated by the unique states of individuals, whereas the allocators in the impartiality vignettes were judged as more motivated by the overall state of the group. Reciprocity and charity allocators were judged as significantly more motivated by their own emotion, and less by standard procedures, compared to impartial allocators.

*Reciprocity and charity
both robustly
recruited brain regions
for theory of mind*

In ratings of the difficulty of making a moral judgement (how hard participants thought it was to judge the allocator as “doing the right thing”), both reciprocity and charity were considered more difficult to judge as “doing the right thing”, compared to impartiality. Reciprocity stood apart from charity on only one dimension: it was considered significantly more motivated by the allocator’s personal goals. These ratings helped shed light on what features are important to most people’s sense of fairness – they tend to like their fairness group-oriented, unemotional, impersonal.

As we prepared for scanning, we wondered if, because people considered reciprocity and charity more motivated by the unique states of individuals and emotion, we might see enhanced neural activity in brain regions that support thinking about the contents of other people’s minds for both reciprocity and charity, relative to im-

partiality. On the other hand, what distinguished between reciprocity and charity was a difference in motivation by personal goals. Work in social neuroscience demonstrates that theory of mind brain regions code for mental states like goal planning. We might expect, therefore, to see reciprocity and charity diverge in theory of mind brain regions.

Aligning with the bulk of the behavioural results, as reported in *Social Neuroscience* in 2017 by Liane Young, Emily Wasserman and I, reciprocity and charity both robustly recruited brain regions for theory of mind (including precuneus, dorsal and ventral medial prefrontal cortex), relative to impartiality and the control condition. As might be expected, given how people considered reciprocity- and charity-based allocations to be more motivated by the circumstances of beneficiaries than impartial allocations, participants evaluating allocators in these conditions displayed significantly more brain activity indicative of processing of allocators’ mental states.

With a window into the neural processing involved in the moral evaluation of allocators we saw beyond pre-existing characterisations of forms of fairness and observed how they manifested in social cognitive processing regions in the brain. In this way, we were able to observe that the moral evaluation of two forms of fairness that appear very different on the surface – reciprocity and charity – both recruited robust theory of mind brain activity. Impartiality, by contrast, was rated optimally fair, just as morally praiseworthy as charity, and recruited far less theory of mind brain activity than both reciprocity and charity during moral evaluation.



What are the implications of these results for how we understand the moral cognition involved in judging these different kinds of fairness? Moral judgement has long been discussed as a process involving thinking about people's mental states and intentions, yet here we saw something interesting emerge in moral judgement of fairness: the fairest type of fairness was not recruiting much theory of mind at all. Greater activity in the theory of mind brain regions was a cue to people being in one of the conditions of lesser fairness, in which it was harder to judge whether the allocator was "doing the right thing": reciprocity or charity.

Fairness has a prototype: impartiality

Our investigation suggests that fairness has a prototype: impartiality. These descriptive results do not entail the normative conclusion that impartiality is morally right and good. It does let us infer that when we're being impartial, it's a mode of behaving that says a lot about us. Our motivations are revealed: we seem unemotional and grounded in standard procedures, and our judges might be able to morally evaluate us without too much social cognition. (Indeed, perhaps part of the appeal of impartiality is it's easy on our brains!)

Fairness will continue to mean different things to different people. Certainly, we'll continue to experience and periodically embody in ourselves discordant mixtures of self-interested Machiavellians, bleeding heart empaths, and coolly rational, impartial agents. Individual differences in Machi-

avellianism and empathic concern may be worth considering in one's organisational messaging because they represent potential sources of current controversy. However, impartiality – which does not trigger neural activity for social cognition and theory of mind to the extent that "person-based" allocations including reciprocity and charity do – is likely to strike most affected people as fair. It's rated as optimally fair, highly moral. Additionally, it is perceived as more motivated by the interests of the group, not unique individuals, and by standard procedures, not the allocator's emotions.

This doesn't mean that we must be uncharitable to people's needs. Fairness comes in more than one flavour. These flavours may be more or less appetising to people in different contexts, but some have wider appeal. For example, in a population of Empaths, needs-based allocation may be fairness-relevant in a way that just isn't so in a population of Machiavellians. Appeals to impartiality, rather than attempts to spur allocation to the needy by invoking empathy for their suffering, might have the potential to help alleviate disparities more broadly. There is new territory to be mapped that better traces the relationships between people, their interpretation of morally-relevant language, and the actual allocation of resources. The increased understanding that results may help us build something closer to a fairer world – in more people's eyes.

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The Last Mystery Standing

Friedel Weinert asks Susan Greenfield what neuroscience might tell us about the mind body problem

In 1996, the Australian philosopher David Chalmers gave a handy name to a phenomenon which had been known for centuries: the problem of how brain states can engender mind states. He dubbed it “the hard problem”. It describes a mystery with which we are all unwittingly aware.

When we win a prize most of us react with glee. When we come to harm, most of us react with sadness. A prize, like money or a trophy, is a physical thing, just as falling ill or being injured in an accident are physical in nature. Yet these physical happenings produce what looks like immaterial psychological states. It also works in the opposite direction. Most of us are happy about the idea of spending a sunny afternoon on the beach. And this expectation, this mental state, makes us get into the car, equipped with sun cream, towels and picnic, and drive to the beach. A mental event produces a physical event. How is it possible that a physical, bodily event can produce a mental, psychological event and *vice versa*?

Perhaps we could just ask a qualified brain surgeon to open a person’s skull and look inside. The surgeon will see the physical brain and its biochemical processes. Imagine we have a multilingual subject and ask them to read a passage from books written, say, in English, French and Spanish. The subject’s skull is exposed, and the surgeon can indeed see activity in the Broca

area of the brain. The Broca area is a region in the frontal lobe of the dominant hemisphere of the brain whose functions are linked to speech production. The surgeon observes a correlation between activity in the Broca area and linguistic function. But our imaginary brain surgeon is more ambitious and aims at a causal explanation: can the scientist tell from the activity in the Broca area *which* language the person is currently speaking or, more to the point, what the sounds mean?

How is it possible that a physical, bodily event can produce a mental, psychological event and vice versa?

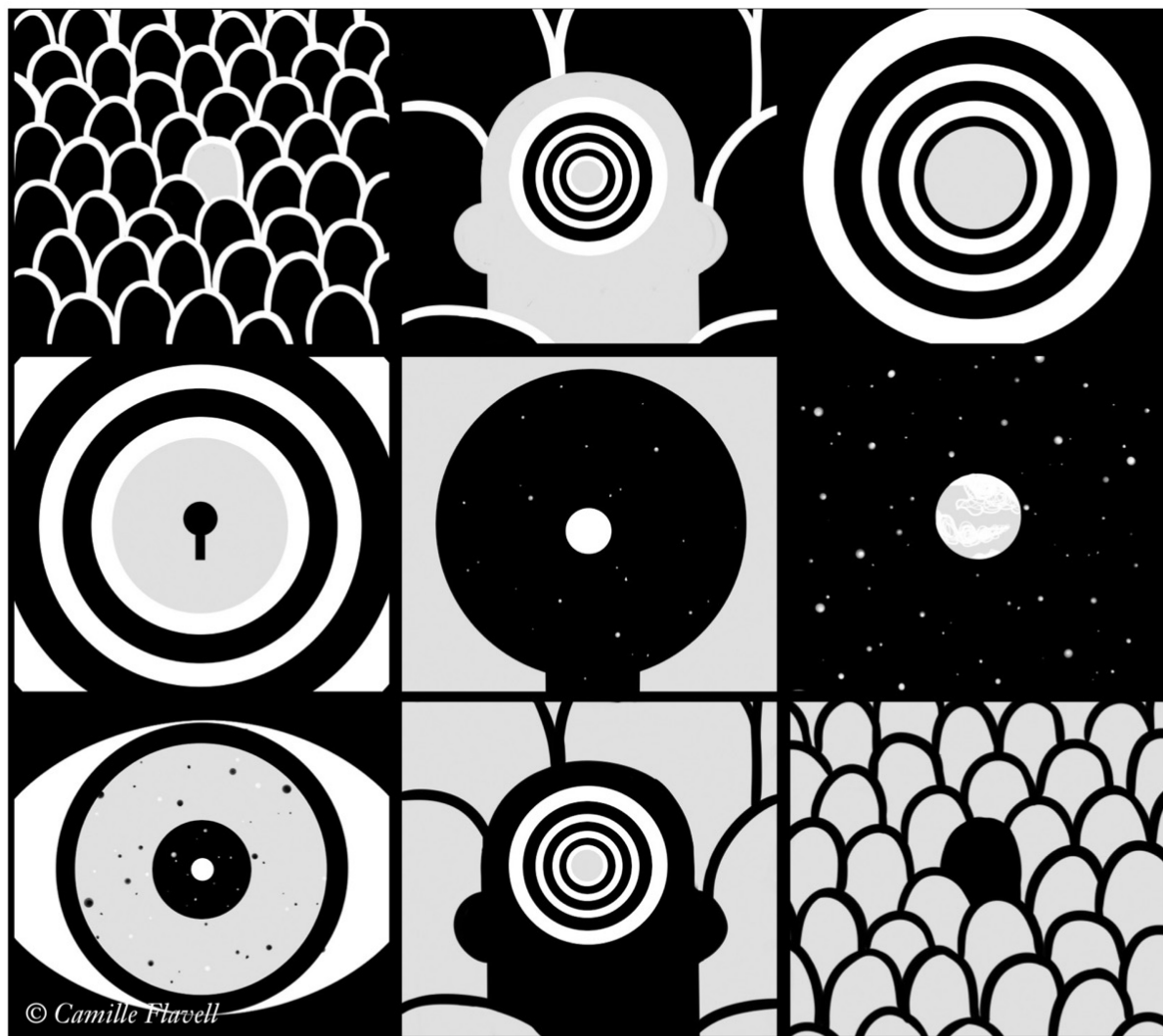
Neuroscientists, philosophers and psychologists all agree that the answer is “no”. There seems to be a correlation between a certain region of the brain and linguistic ability, but it does not amount to a causal connection. The processes in the Broca area do not answer the question why they make a speaker pronounce, say, meaningful French rather than Spanish sentences. There are correlations between brain states and men-

tal states just as there exists a correlation between day and night. The day does not “cause” the night, and the night does not “cause” the day.

However, the analogy stops here. Underlying the correlation between day and night is the position of the Earth in the solar system and its daily rotation on its own axis. The latter is the cause of succession of day and night. But what particular brain state brings about a particular mental or psychological state? This question has proved to be intractable – that is why David Chalmers called it the “hard problem”. He’s given the

problem a convenient label. But it was René Descartes in the seventeenth century who proposed an influential “solution”.

Descartes held that the body was one substance and the mind was another; the former was material, the latter immaterial, but they were linked via the pineal gland. This so-called solution became known as Cartesian dualism. Unfortunately, it only pushed the problem a little bit further down the line: the pineal gland is a small endocrine gland, and it has a seat in the physical brain. Descartes may have thought that it was the “principal seat of the soul”, but



this invites the question, how can a physical organ be the seat of an immaterial soul? Descartes did not solve the “hard problem”.

There have of course been many “solutions” since Descartes’ valiant attempt, often made in conjunction with genuine progress in other areas of science. The rapid advances in physics, the establishment of the Darwinian paradigm, and the emergence of AI have all inspired proposals to solve the “hard problem”. So far without success. It is the last or at least one of the last mysteries still standing. What these proposed solutions share, with very few exceptions, is the admittance of consciousness into the physical realm. Very few people nowadays cling to the Cartesian belief that the mind is a separate immaterial entity. If they agree with Descartes, they agree that the mind is not identical with the brain. But this agreement leaves us with a need to explain how the mind “emerges” from the brain.

The Australian philosopher David Armstrong defended the identity view. As he put it,

“Suppose that the physico-chemical view of the working of the brain is correct It will be very natural to conclude that mental states are not simply *determined* by corresponding states of the brain, but that they are actually *identical* with the brain-states, brain-states that involve nothing but physical properties.”

Such statements are not made only by philosophers. Patrick Haggard, professor of cognitive neuroscience at University College London, writes, “The neuroscientific view focuses primarily on brain mechanisms: behaviour, decisions and individual consciousness are all consequences of these

mechanisms.” He goes on, “Neuroscience treats the ‘I’ as being synonymous with an individual’s brain.”

Haggard is not alone among neuroscientists. The German magazine *Gehirn und Geist* published a manifesto in 2004, signed by eleven neuroscientists, in which they expressed the view that mental processes – like imagination, feelings and decision making – could in principle be described in physico-chemical terms. What is left open or still debatable is whether these cognitive processes are merely correlated with brain processes or whether the stronger view holds, namely that the brain “causes” mental processes. At least one of the signatories of the manifesto, Wolf Singer, director emeritus at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research, Frankfurt, accepts the latter view. The American neuroscientist Gerald Edelman, author of many books on this question, also defends this stronger thesis. According to Edelman the brain “engenders” the mind: “Although conscious states (C) accompany states (C’), it is the neural correlate C’ that is causal of other neural events and certain bodily actions.”

Descartes did not solve the “hard problem”

What’s the right way to think about all this? I decided to ask someone working at the sharp end of brain science. Baroness Susan Greenfield, CBE, is a senior research fellow at Lincoln College, Oxford and the author of more than 200 peer-reviewed articles on neuro-chemicals and brain function. She is the author *A Day in the Life of the*

Brain, her latest book on what philosophers call the “mind-body” problem.

In this book Greenfield tackles the problem from an interdisciplinary perspective – a view which embraces neuroscience, psychology and philosophy. At the centre of her approach stand two notions which are familiar to philosophers of mind: emergence and the embodied mind. Mental processes arise from brain processes, and the mind is embedded in a physical and social environment. To readers familiar with philosophical discussions in the area of philosophy of mind, such an inclusive approach stands in stark contrast to other views, which also try to steer their way around the Cartesian rock. They either declare that the mind is actually identical with the brain or claim that the brain “determines” or “engenders” the mind.

*“Neuroscience treats
the ‘I’ as being
synonymous with
an individual’s brain”*

Edelman’s view is known as neural Darwinism, but according to Greenfield the invocation of Darwinism does not get to the core of the problem. The core of the problem is how the physical brain leads to subjective experiences. She clearly supports the embodied mind view, favouring correlations over as yet unfounded causal claims. She concludes her book by writing:

“Until we can formulate or articulate what kind of solution would satisfy us, then surely it will be almost impossible to deliver

even at the most abstracted mathematical level any kind of answer that goes beyond correlation to causality.”

So correlations “yes” but causality “no” or not yet. As she writes in *A Day in the Life of the Brain*,

“If we can establish accurate neural correlates, and it’s important to recognise that there will indeed be more than one, of moments of consciousness, than we can better understand how the phenomenological corresponds to the physiological – even though the causal connection still eludes us.”

I ask her about this distinction between correlations and causality, which, she says, bedevils neuroscience. It is drilled into philosophy students at an early stage. She says that “science is very good at correlations.” We can find correlations, but she won’t say how long it will take neuroscience to establish a causal mechanism which would demonstrate the link between brain states and mind states.

So what can neuroscience say about these neural correlations? There are two perspectives regarding this question, she says. On the *psychological* side Greenfield is not primarily interested in accounting for higher mental functions, like reasoning and decision-making. She wants to explain the raw subjective states – the first-person perspective – with which we are all familiar: the taste of chocolate melting slowly in your mouth, the sunshine on your face, the swishing roar of surf (in other words “qualia”). Her aim is to explain the first-person perspective from an objective third-person perspective, at which point *neuroscience*

enters the scene. She draws a distinction between the “mind” and “consciousness”: we can lose our minds in moments of high emotion without losing consciousness; but in sleep consciousness is switched off whilst the mind is busy producing dreams.

A tension exists, however, between these two perspectives, between what we feel subjectively and what neuroscience can explain objectively. Neuroscience must explain how the subjective mind works. So there must be in the brain a correlate to the subjective mind. For Greenfield and her team the correlate exists in neuronal assemblies, which she defines as “variable, highly transient (sub-second), macro-scale groups of brain cells (for example, about 10 million or more) that are not confined to, or defined by, anatomical brain regions or systems.”

*The emergence of
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and the mental*

The neuronal assemblies exist at a mesoscale, midway between the micro- and the macro-level. In this scheme the neuronal assemblies do all the work. But how do they do it? Recall that there is no claim that they causally explain how the qualia come about. Furthermore, this neuronal approach denies that there is a one-to-one mapping between particular brain states and mind states. The

brain does not have a “centre” which directs operations. Rather, brain regions contribute to the whole. In the language of neuroscientists, the brain is “holistic”, i.e. several regions of the brain are involved in mental activities. The brain is also adaptive and responsive to changes in the environment. Colour, for instance, is employed to influence consumer behaviour: red to sell luxury goods. It has also been linked with various mental perceptions. Blue is associated with creativity and imagination; while red is associated with warmth and cosiness. Open office spaces also encourage interaction between people since they suggest a greater sense of freedom.

In which way, then, do these neuronal assemblies contribute to the whole? Although she does not explicitly define the term, Greenfield repeatedly employs the notion of *emergence*. This notion, very familiar to philosophers, has the job of explaining how the third-person perspective could account for the first-person experience. Emergence is an interesting term, which has been used in philosophical discussions in a number of ways. Through an emergent process a new phenomenon arises out of a number of component factors, and the new phenomenon, once it has appeared, can no longer be reduced to its ingredients. It has become a separate phenomenon, which may obey its own laws. When you bake a cake, you mix the ingredients to prepare a dough; it goes into the oven and thanks to the exposure to heat it becomes a cake. The cake is no longer reducible to its ingredients. It is qualitatively different from its components. The cake emerges through this whole process. An analogy suggests itself: subjective psychological states emerge from underlying

objective brain processes, i.e. the neuronal assemblies.

Unfortunately every analogy is hampered by a disanalogy. A teacher may tell a student that the flow of electricity is like a water flow but water consists of water molecules whilst a current is made up of electrons. Electrons and water molecules are very different entities and obey different laws. So the problem with the notion of emergence, applied to neuroscience, is this: the emergence of the cake can be explained all the way from the mixture of the ingredients to the final emergence of the cake; and the glow of a light bulb can be explained in physical terms from the flow of electrons in a copper wire.

What can neuroscience say about neural correlations?

But the emergence of conscious states from neuronal activities must cross the Rubicon between the physical and the mental. It must explain, as Greenfield says, how to convert the water of the objective brain events into the wine of subjective consciousness. The age-old Cartesian problem even plagues the notion of emergence: for how can the neuronal assemblies, which are physical in nature, bring about the immaterial mental qualia? Hence even emergence does not deliver a causal explanation – it seems it is correlations all the way down.

I asked her about the progress which neuroscience has made, in her opinion, over philosophy. I reminded her of the many

“models” which philosophers have proposed to crack the “hard problem”. But she does not even accept the term “model” to characterise her neuro-scientific account. The use of the term “model” implies that the salient features of the model target – the system to be modelled – are known. You can model planetary motions once you know the order and the orbit of the planets around the sun from observations. But according to Greenfield, neuroscience does not even know the salient features necessary to model the emergence of subjective consciousness. In other words it does not know, at this stage, how to separate the essential from the accidental features.

So has there been any progress at all? Yes, she argues, for neuroscientists carry out experimental work, which has led to the discovery of many correlations between our psychological states and neuronal processes with which they co-occur. But she does not believe that neuroscience will replace, say philosophy, in our attempt to solve the “hard problem”. For her, it has to be an interdisciplinary approach. Once the “mechanics” of the brain are known, the big questions of who we are remain.

Friedel Weinert is professor emeritus of philosophy at Bradford University. He discusses free will and consciousness in his recent book The Demons of Science.

A Dog and His Art

Joan Forry on fire hydrants and the aesthetics of the everyday

I take a lot of photographs. The subjects of most of those photographs are my five dogs. But, I disproportionately take more photographs of one particular dog. His name is Miles.

My husband and I adopted Miles in 2013. Miles was rescued in Georgia, where lax leash laws and cultural attitudes against spay and neuter contribute to overcrowded shelters and high euthanasia rates. Miles got lucky and was transported up north to a Pennsylvania shelter to find a home. In a clever marketing effort, the shelter named him “Toto”, after Dorothy’s dog in *The Wizard of Oz*. Unlike Toto, Miles is reddish brown, but he has the same wiry coat, gravelly bark, and terrier spirit as the movie character. He found a home quickly, but he struggled with his new owner, and he was returned to the shelter after a month for growling and biting. When I met him at the shelter, he was wearing a faded purple bandana. He would barely look at me. I threw a tennis ball for him. He slowly trotted over to it and brought it partway back before dropping it in the dirt. “Are you aware of his past behaviour challenges?” asked the adoption agent. “Yes,” I said. “He’s perfect for us.”

I used to be a professional philosopher. Now, I’m a professional dog trainer. And, I’m a particular kind of dog trainer. I use the science of applied behaviour analysis to assess behaviour and modify behaviour in

dogs. I believe dog trainers have a strong ethical obligation to avoid using pain or fear to modify behaviour, and I put that view into practice when I’m teaching classes, training dogs, and coaching private clients. In the dog training culture wars, I’m what’s pretty accurately known as a “force-free positive reinforcement trainer” and what’s pejoratively known as a “cookie pusher” because I use food for training. (I actually rather like the pejorative characterisation, to be honest.)



Miles, in 2013, on the day of his adoption.

When we adopted Miles, he was afraid of a lot of things. On our walks, he'd scan the environment, looking for potential threats. And, Miles' view was that a good offense was the best defence, so he'd growl at everything that worried him. Even though I was more of a philosopher than a dog trainer at the time, I knew what to do to help Miles feel less afraid, help him feel safe, make scary stuff predict awesome stuff, and teach him things. I started reinforcing small behaviours with food in different environments. "Oh, you approached that strange trash can that wasn't here yesterday? What a brave dog, have some chicken." He began to feel better about going for walks, seeing new people, seeing other dogs, and encountering novel items in the world.

In 2014, I moved to Los Angeles for six months for what would be my last academic job. The things Miles had learned helped him feel comfortable in our new city. We also added some new skills into his repertoire. He could jump on a retaining wall, put his front paws on a flower pot, or touch his nose to my hand, all on cue. One day, I asked him to put his front paws on a fire hydrant at the intersection of Westerly Terrace and Berkeley Avenue. Instead, he jumped on top of it. He looked so pleasantly surprised to be up high, on top of this fire hydrant. I paid him in cheese and took a photo with my iPhone.

One mantra in the science of behaviour is this, "Reinforced behaviour is repeated behaviour." It's a paraphrase of Edward Thorndike's Law of Effect. And Miles demonstrated this on our next walk in our Los Angeles neighbourhood. He jumped on top of the first fire hydrant again, and then he jumped on the next one we encoun-

tered up the block. And then the next one. And the next one. He kept doing it, I kept reinforcing it, and I kept taking his photo. My little dog had found his favourite thing. I bought a better camera and *Miles on Hydrants* was born.

*I used to be a
professional philosopher
-- now, I'm a
professional dog trainer*

Miles on Hydrants is a photography project. For the past four years, Miles has jumped on a different fire hydrant for every single day of the year. I post them to @milesonhydrants on Facebook and Instagram. As of this writing, he's balanced on 1,570 fire hydrants in 21 states, in over 100 cities. There are a few rules to the project, and, as with most games, the rules are arbitrary. The only hydrant Miles repeats is the one in front of Providence Animal Shelter in Media, Pennsylvania, on the anniversary of his adoption. Otherwise, each hydrant is different. Another rule is that Miles has to jump up by himself; he's almost never picked up and placed on top. He sometimes vaults himself onto my leg for a boost, as we discovered that some fire hydrants are very tall. We do hydrants about once a week, and his record for hydrants summited in one outing is 29. He jumps up, he decides how to keep his balance and how he wants to pose, and then he holds very still for me to take his photo.

I've written elsewhere about our ethical obligations regarding animals in sports



Hydrant No. 1,536 in Bensalem, Pennsylvania. 4th of July, 2018. Miles demonstrates the pose where he puts his back feet on the hydrant's stem nut.

and games. I largely reject arguments that conclude that the presence of animals in sport is necessarily wrong or exploitative. Instead, I think we ought to consider the following question. Would an animal reasonably choose to engage in this activity? I argue that animals would not choose to engage in activities that involve force, fear, or pain, and we ought to consider our activities with the animal's preferences, agency, and wellbeing in mind. Lots of dog sports request various kinds of jumping and climbing from canine athletes. While jumping on fire hydrants is not a sport in itself, it's not uncommon to see it in a dog sport called Dog Parkour. According to the International Dog Parkour Association, "Dogs get introduced to the world of jumping, climbing, balancing over, crawling under, and going around different obstacles in their everyday world. Dog Parkour can be done anywhere and is limited only by one's imagination."

I've committed to keeping up this proj-

ect until Miles no longer likes doing it or is no longer physically able to participate in it. I've mentally prepared myself for the day that he loses interest. I've considered how I might modify the rules as he ages or if he is injured. However, I was not prepared for him to love this so much, and it still surprises me. I've posted several videos where I've simply said, "Hydrants?" and he starts screaming and bouncing with sheer delight.

After 1,500+ hydrants, Miles has developed clear preferences for certain fire hydrant models. I'd venture to say that his preferences are aesthetic in nature, as his appreciation for fire hydrants depends on his ability to jump up and stand on them with ease and comfort. He dislikes Mathews hydrants because they have a very tall bonnet and almost no lip around the rim. He has to grip with his toes and wrap his body around the bonnet. Mathews hydrants were produced from 1887 to 1963, and it's rumoured that the fluted domed bonnet design took its inspiration from the US Capitol Building. Miles is also not fond of the Waterous Pacer fire hydrant. This hydrant is modern and angular, and he frequently decides to put all of his feet on the stem nut, a physically challenging pose. His favourite hydrants are made by Mueller Co. and American Darling Valve. I don't know how he decides which is the best pose for each particular hydrant, but it's a performance in itself. For some, he stands with four feet on the bonnet rim. For others, he puts his back feet up on the stem nut.

Fire hydrants are integral to urban development. A pressurised municipal water supply, coupled with functioning fire hydrants, means that water is readily available to extinguish fires. These infrastructure efforts

Thoughts

to reduce risk caused by fire damage have enabled humans to live more safely in close proximity. Before there were fire hydrants, there were horse-drawn wagons of water and bucket brigades, teams of volunteers who would come on scene to pass buckets of water back and forth to put out fires. The first fire hydrant was invented by Frederick Graff, Sr., Chief Engineer at the Philadelphia Water Works, around 1801, though the patents were lost in a fire in the 1830s. The invention of the automobile changed the design of fire hydrants. A breakaway hydrant model was invented, so that if an automobile hit a fire hydrant, the hydrant breaks off without damaging the water line below. We've all seen cars hit fire hydrants in movies. The car crashes into a hydrant, and water shoots into the air and floods the

street. That's usually a misrepresentation, and only happens in warm climates where wet barrel hydrants are common.

The cast iron hydrants that decorate our communities today come in a variety of shapes and colours. The National Fire Protection Association issues recommendations for coding fire hydrants by colour, according to gallons per minute that a hydrant can pump. This helps firefighters know which hydrants to use in relation to the size of a fire. However, these markings are not universal or required, and some communities choose to paint their fire hydrants differently. For example, in Marysville, Ohio, the hydrants are painted blue and red, the school colours of the local high school. And the hydrants in Blue Ball, Pennsylvania, are – not surprisingly – blue.



*Hydrant No. 1,554 in Berwyn, Pennsylvania.
28th of July, 2018. Miles decided this hydrant needed four paws on the bonnet rim pose.*

As I took more photographs of Miles, I learned more about fire hydrants. I found myself enmeshed in a community of fire hydrant enthusiasts. There are entire Instagram accounts devoted to photographs of fire hydrants. There are folks who collect antique or out-of-use fire hydrants. Sean Crane has written a coffee table book entitled, *American Hydrant*. The largest working fire hydrant is located in Beaumont, Texas. Built in 1999, it is painted with Dalmatian spots as a tribute to the Disney animated film, *101 Dalmatians*, and is 29 feet tall. A few years later, Blue Sky (Warren Edward Johnson) unveiled his sculpture, *Busted Plug Plaza*, depicting a leaning silver fire hydrant almost 40 feet tall, in Columbia, South Carolina.

The idea that everyday objects have aesthetic value has been a mainstay throughout art history. From Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* and other readymade sculptures to Tracey Emin's *My Bed*, the use of everyday objects in artwork challenges us to appreciate objects apart from their function. To aesthetically appreciate everyday objects challenges our definitions of art, as well as the class-drawn distinctions in the art world that remain between museum- and gallery-worthy artworks and artworks that belong to the realm of kitsch or the street. When it comes to photography, the dog has become a compelling subject. William Wegman's iconic Weimaraners must be included in any list of photographers who take on dogs as their subjects, as well as Seth Casteel's photos of dogs underwater. Tim Flach's portraits of dogs are haunting and modern, and Sophie Gamand's photos of shelter Pit Bull Terriers in flower halos showcase the sweet and silly. Seeing a dog



*Hydrant No. 1,497 in Pittston, Pennsylvania.
This is the Great Gatsby hydrant.*

jump on top of a fire hydrant and pose there is a unique sight. Some of our followers have reported that now that they've seen Miles perched atop a fire hydrant, they can't stop noticing fire hydrants everywhere.

For hydrant No. 1000, Miles and I made a special trip to Vermont to visit a sculpture made out of fire hydrants by artist Chris Sharp. *Fire Hydrant Jack* is twelve bright red fire hydrants welded together in a dodecahedron. Sharp intended for the sculpture to be a tribute to 9/11 firefighters and their courage. Sharp wrote to David K. Leff in 2016 that the sculpture is "also about the playful representation of an overlooked and under-appreciated everyday object". The hydrant sculpture is located on Route 7 in Shelburne, Vermont, across from the Shelburne Fire Department. It was raining on the 21st of January, 2017, when Miles balanced on the sculpture. Would Miles recognise these as fire hydrants? Should I count them even though none of them were in use? (I decided to count the entire sculpture



Hydrant No. 1,000 in Shelburne, Vermont. Perched on Chris Sharp's Fire Hydrant Jack sculpture.

as one hydrant.)

Similarly, when Miles was approaching hydrant No. 1,500, we searched for a special hydrant to mark the occasion. We discovered that Pittston, Pennsylvania, had a community art campaign called Arts on Fire. This public art campaign enabled local businesses to sponsor an artist to create artwork on a fire hydrant. The campaign produced magnificent results, with fire hydrants painted in memoriam of people who had passed, a *Legend of Zelda*-themed fire hydrant, and all manner of colourfully themed hydrants that gestured to local businesses and the proclivities of Pittston citizens. For hydrant No. 1,497, Miles balanced on a hydrant that was painted after F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby*. The hydrant features the cover artwork by Spanish artist Francis Cugat, and the last

line of the novel is painted on the back, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." For heaven's sakes, someone also put a pink scarf around that hydrant. For his 1,500th hydrant, Miles balanced on a hydrant outside the local fire department, which was appropriately painted in red and orange flames, and a blue wash to represent water. I am grateful to the Pittston Arts Council which helped me identify the artists and themes of the 18 artistic hydrants Miles jumped on that day.

The *Gatsby*-themed hydrant raised so many aesthetic questions for me that I couldn't stop laughing as I posted that photo to social media. Which was the artwork? Representing Cugat's cover painting on a fire hydrant? Was the fact that Cugat's painting had become utterly synonymous with *The Great Gatsby*? What happened

when Miles jumped on top and I took his photo? Was that an artwork itself? Was it derivative or appropriative? And what about that pink scarf? This particular hydrant brought all these lurking questions to the forefront. And what about the aesthetic significance of the fact that this is a streak? Streaks in sports are a sublime thing to behold. The streak has motivated and supported me in deep ways. Through the professional and personal upheaval of changing careers, through wondering who I am if I am not an academic, this little project with my dog has been there as a constant.

*I found myself enmeshed
in a community of fire
hydrant enthusiasts*

Philosophers talk about virtues such as bravery and courage, and this has been an ongoing theme for us. Not only is Miles an odd little dog with a quirky obsession, but he also had a lot of fears to conquer. One of the messages I try to convey in the project is that it's okay to be different, and that you have to be brave to be different. It might sound saccharin, but that's okay with me. I created a hashtag, as folks on social media sometimes do: #bekindbeweirdbebrave. I think that if dogs had mottos, that would be Miles'. It so resonated with one of our connections on social media that she had it tattooed on her arm.

We invite dogs into our lives for many reasons, sometimes out of necessity and sometimes out of frivolity. But we usually invite dogs into our lives because we long

for connection. And it's the ultimate paradox. These are animals with sharp teeth, after all, but we continue to attempt to connect with them in profound and transformative ways. Those of us who live with animals have an ethical obligation to seek out activities to enjoy together. I take my dog out to jump on fire hydrants because it matters to him, and it makes his life more interesting. It's enriched and transformed my life in unexpected ways, but that was never the point. This was the dog's idea, and it's his artistic practice. This activity has an aesthetic component for Miles, as it's enabled him to appreciate his environment in a more meaningful way. Anais Nin wrote, "Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage." This project has not only expanded both of our lives (and our courage), it has also enabled me to appreciate my dog for all his richness and sharpness. Through this project, we cultivate a shared experience through a whimsical practice that calls attention to the everyday. Most importantly, we get to do this together. I hope he wants to keep this up for a while.

Joan Forry, Ph.D., is an independent scholar in philosophy as well as a dog training instructor at The Dog Training Center of Chester County in Exton, Pennsylvania, where she teaches Basic Manners and Puppy Kindergarten classes. Here, she talks about the aesthetic significance of photographing her dog, Miles, on Hydrants. All photos are taken by the author.

Snapshot: P. F. Strawson

by Anil Gomes

P.F. Strawson (1919-2006) was one of the most significant philosophers of the twentieth-century. His career centred around Oxford – first as Tutor and Fellow at University College, then as Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Magdalen College. His careful, thoughtful, and characteristically elegant written work was influential in moving Oxford philosophy from the anti-metaphysical leanings of A.J. Ayer and J.L. Austin to a renewed and rejuvenated era of traditional philosophy theorising, albeit domesticated in a distinctively Strawsonian fashion. His influence on British philosophy persists through a generation of students who were brought up on his writings.

*Philosophy, he found,
“congenial and
absorbing” from
the start*

Peter Frederick Strawson was born in London on November 23, 1919. He arrived in Oxford in 1937 on scholarship to study English at St. John’s College, Oxford, but decided to change to Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE), in part because of the international political climate. Philosophy, he found, “congenial and absorbing”

from the start. His main philosophy tutor was J.D. Mabbott, a respected political philosopher and later head of the college. And he also had one term’s tuition with H. P. Grice, whom Strawson later described as “one of the cleverest and most ingenious thinkers of our time”.

St John’s were initially reluctant to allow Strawson to change to PPE on the grounds that he would not get a first-class mark. This prediction was proved correct, but rumour had it that Strawson’s second-class mark was a result, in part, of the younger of his two examiners leaving Strawson’s exam scripts in the back of a taxi, and thus not being able to argue the case for a higher mark against the view of the older, more conservative, examiner. He was called up to military service, attaining the rank of captain, and when he left the military in 1946, took up a post in philosophy at the University College of North Wales, Bangor.

It was his award of the prestigious John Locke prize – awarded on the basis of a written examination to philosophy graduates in Oxford – which enabled his return to Oxford, his answers sufficiently impressing Gilbert Ryle that he recommended Strawson to University College, Oxford, where he was appointed first as a lecturer, and then as a Fellow in 1948. He had thus achieved what, at the age of 21 was his ambition: to be a Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy in Oxford.

Strawson's name was made almost immediately through two articles published in 1950: "On Referring", published in *MIND*, and a debate with J.L. Austin about truth, published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. In both cases, Strawson was up against a big-name philosopher: Bertrand Russell, in the case of his paper in *MIND*, and J.L. Austin, the current dominant figure in Oxford philosophy, in the debate about truth. In both cases Strawson was judged by many to have won the battle. The debate with Austin was particularly important, since it was unheard of for someone to take Austin on at his own game: with a careful, almost forensic, analysis of the ordinary ways in which we talk.

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J.L. Austin about truth*

"On Referring" is, in part, a criticism of Russell's famous article "On Denoting". The topic of both papers is reference – and, in particular, the ways in which we refer to things by use of the definite description "the". (It is a mark of philosophy that so much can turn on so little a word.) Consider the statement "The Prime Minister

is tired". And contrast it with the statement "A Prime Minister is tired". How does the former differ from the latter? According to Russell, the latter statement tells you that there exists a Prime Minister, and it (she) is tired. The former statement, the one which uses a definite description, works exactly the same way except that it also adds that there are no other Prime Ministers. That is, "The Prime Minister is tired" says "There is one and only one Prime Minister and it is tired". Perhaps this sounds strange – and Strawson's insight in his reply is based in part on the observation that it *should* sound strange – but Russell's theory had achieved orthodoxy by the time of Strawson's writing, and was thought to be a philosophically illuminating account of one small but important aspect of ordinary language.

Strawson raised a range of objections to Russell's proposal. One of his points is that Russell's view implies that statements of the form "The F is G" are *false* when there is no F in question. For Russell, this was a merit of the view. If I say to you "The King of France is bald", my statement is false, precisely because there is no King of France. But Strawson pointed out that we do not always treat such statements as false. In some cases, perhaps in many cases, we would not say that the statement is false, but that it does not make sense – that it is not even false. For Strawson, sentences can be neither true nor false, and some of Russell's cases fall into that category. This showed, he thought, that Russell's analysis cannot be the whole story about reference.

If it was these early papers which made Strawson's name, it was his books *Individuals* (1959) and *The Bounds of Sense* (1966) which cemented his reputation and helped

move British philosophy in a new direction. In the first half of the twentieth-century, British philosophy was going through one of its regular periods of metaphysical hostility. For the logical positivists, such as A.J. Ayer, and for the careful, language-focused philosophers, such as J.L. Austin, metaphysics was a domain of wild speculation, where philosophical claims went beyond the limits of sense and significance. Strawson's writings allowed a return to metaphysical theorising, albeit theorising which was constrained by a lingering respect for the anti-metaphysical arguments of his predecessors.

The return to a form of metaphysics is announced in the subtitle to *Individuals*: "An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics". The contrast, as Strawson outlines it in his Introduction, is with "revisionary metaphysics". "Descriptive metaphysics", he tells us, "is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure". Descriptive metaphysics takes there to be ways of thinking about the world which are common across time and space, and the role of the descriptive metaphysician is to outline these universal forms of thought. Revisionary metaphysics, in contrast, wants to emend or reject these ways of thinking. This contrast has entered the philosophical lexicon, and many philosophers have used it as part of their self-image. But one way to see the perhaps problematic nature of the contrast is to consider the five philosophers whom Strawson classes within his schema: Descartes, Leibniz, Berkeley, Aristotle, and Kant. Without looking, could one predict which category each is said to belong to? (Strawson gives the first three as examples of revisionary metaphysicians, and

the latter two as descriptive.)

The aim of *Individuals* is to outline the concepts used in thinking about particular things in the world. One of the most discussed chapters – and one which most readily illustrates the way in which the rarefied world of philosophical analysis can interact with the wildest science-fiction – is the second chapter in which Strawson attempts to determine how important our idea of space is for our thinking about an objective world. Strawson imagines in this chapter a sound world – one in which a person has only auditory experience – in order to see how much sense can be made of the idea of objectivity without the idea of space. The chapter is intellectually fascinating, and showcases a certain sort of British temperament and style which can be found in many writings from the period.

*Strawson attempts
to determine how
important our idea of
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about an objective world*

Strawson wrote primarily on a range of issues in the philosophy of language, metaphysics, and epistemology, but his work on all of these topics was informed by a close engagement with people and ideas from the history of philosophy. Prime amongst these was Immanuel Kant. Strawson's introduction to Kant arose out of the historical peculiarities of the PPE degree. This was structured, in Strawson's day, such that



there were two special subjects which those who wished to specialise in philosophy were obliged to take: Logic and Kant. The latter was to be studied through the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and when studying the first *Critique*, Strawson tells us, he found “a depth, a range, a boldness, and a power unlike anything I had previously encountered”.

The influence of Strawson’s engage-

ment with Kant can be seen in *Individuals*. But it was his ground-breaking and influential commentary on the *Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Bounds of Sense* (1966), which demonstrated the importance of Kantian ideas for contemporary philosophical discussions and, in the words of one philosopher, “opened the way to a reception of Kant’s philosophy by analytic philosophers”. Strawson’s aim was to detach and defend

what he saw as valuable in the first *Critique* from that which was dodgy and downright dubious, what Strawson called the “imaginary subject of transcendental psychology”. The result was a fascinating and insightful account, not perhaps of what Kant said, but of what Kant ought to have said, had he had the good fortune to have read some recent Oxford philosophy.

*Strawson often said
that had he been able to
choose his gifts, he would
have chosen to be a poet*

I have mentioned Strawson’s work in language, mind, and metaphysics. And he always joked that he would turn to moral philosophy only when his powers were waning. Nevertheless, his most famous article, and the one which may persist the longest, is perhaps “Freedom and Resentment”, a small and suggestive paper which aims to dissolve the problem of determinism and responsibility. In this paper Strawson draws attention to our “reactive attitudes”: attitudes such as gratitude, anger, sympathy and resentment. These attitudes are part of our human life, we cannot imagine what it would be like to be human without them. They thus are not subject to justification or entitlement from grand metaphysical theses. The conflict, then, between determinism and responsibility is largely illusory.

This paper captures one of the central themes of Strawson’s work: a relaxed sympathy for our ordinary ways of thinking about

ourselves and our role in the world. In his discussion with Russell, Strawson brought us back to the way in which we use definite descriptions, in our conversations with each other, in our talk about the world. In *Individuals*, it is our ways of thinking which are under consideration, not the ways of thinking of some purified, logical creatures which might be related to us, and which we might become. And in “Freedom and Resentment”, it is the ways in which we react to each other and hold each other to account which are the focus, ways which are insulated from philosophical theorising about grand metaphysics. Across these philosophical debates, Strawson never loses sight of our humanity.

Strawson’s commitment to our ordinary ways of thinking comes out in a certain sort of relaxed realism which became characteristic of a strand of Oxford philosophy. This relaxed realism – Strawson sometimes called it a liberal naturalism – stands in opposition to two pulls in philosophy. The first is that of scepticism or *eliminativism* which cannot find a way to make sense of some aspect of our ordinary life – say, the colours of objects, or moral values, or our capacity to make free decisions. The sceptic cannot find room for these items in the natural world, and thus recommends that we *eliminate* them from our ways of thinking. Objects are not *really* coloured, there are *really* no moral values, we are not *really* free. The sceptic is a revisionary metaphysician who charges our ordinary ways of thinking with confusion and error.

The second pull is that of *reductionism*. The reductionist disagrees with the sceptic as to the existence of these ordinary items. But she agrees that if these things are to ex-

ist, it must be because space can be found for them in the natural world. She concludes, then, that these ordinary things can be *reduced* to something whose status as naturalistically respectable is not in doubt. Objects really are coloured – but that is because colours are nothing more than the micro-physical reflectance properties of surfaces. There really are moral values – but that is because moral values are nothing more, say, than that which is beneficial to us. And we are really free – but that is because freedom requires nothing more than that we act in accordance with our desires, however those desires were formed.

Strawson's writings allowed a return to metaphysical theorising

Strawson's instinctive tendencies lie opposed to each of these extremes, and one can see his work, in different ways across a wide variety of debates, as showing how ordinary thought can be defended against both of these tendencies. The mistake each makes is the mistake of thinking that justification for our ordinary ways of thinking can only be found by making those ways of thinking accord with some etiolated scientific conception of how things are. The sceptic cannot see a way of making an accord, and thus finds our ordinary ways of thinking to be wanting. The reductionist defends our ordinary ways of thinking, but only by reducing them to something more scientifically respectable. Strawson's relaxed realism has no truck with the idea that our natural meta-

physics is beholden to the physical sciences for its legitimacy, and thus finds no need to eliminate or reduce.

Indeed, not only is there no conflict between our ordinary ways of thinking and a scientific story about how the world works, Strawson argued that the former must itself take precedence. We are *humans* before we are scientists and philosophers, and it is to our human ways of thinking that our scientific and metaphysical stories must ultimately defer. Scientific ways of thinking are important to our lives, but they are only one way in which we can think about the world, and they neither show the falsity of nor take precedence over our ordinary forms of thought.

Strawson often said that had he been able to choose his gifts, he would have chosen to be a poet. And there is something of the poet's careful attention to the ordinary and the words with which to express it in Strawson's measured prose. His original and important contributions shaped British philosophy in the twentieth-century, and continue to repay careful study.

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The Forum

Existentialism

“Existentialism? I don’t know what that is.” Thus, apparently, Sartre, and so begging off giving a definition of the focus of this issue’s forum seems an entirely reasonable thing to do. Whatever it is, existentialism is one of the few philosophical cross-overs, a movement with concepts and heroes and ideas as famous inside philosophy departments as outside.

But let us insist, *what is existentialism?*

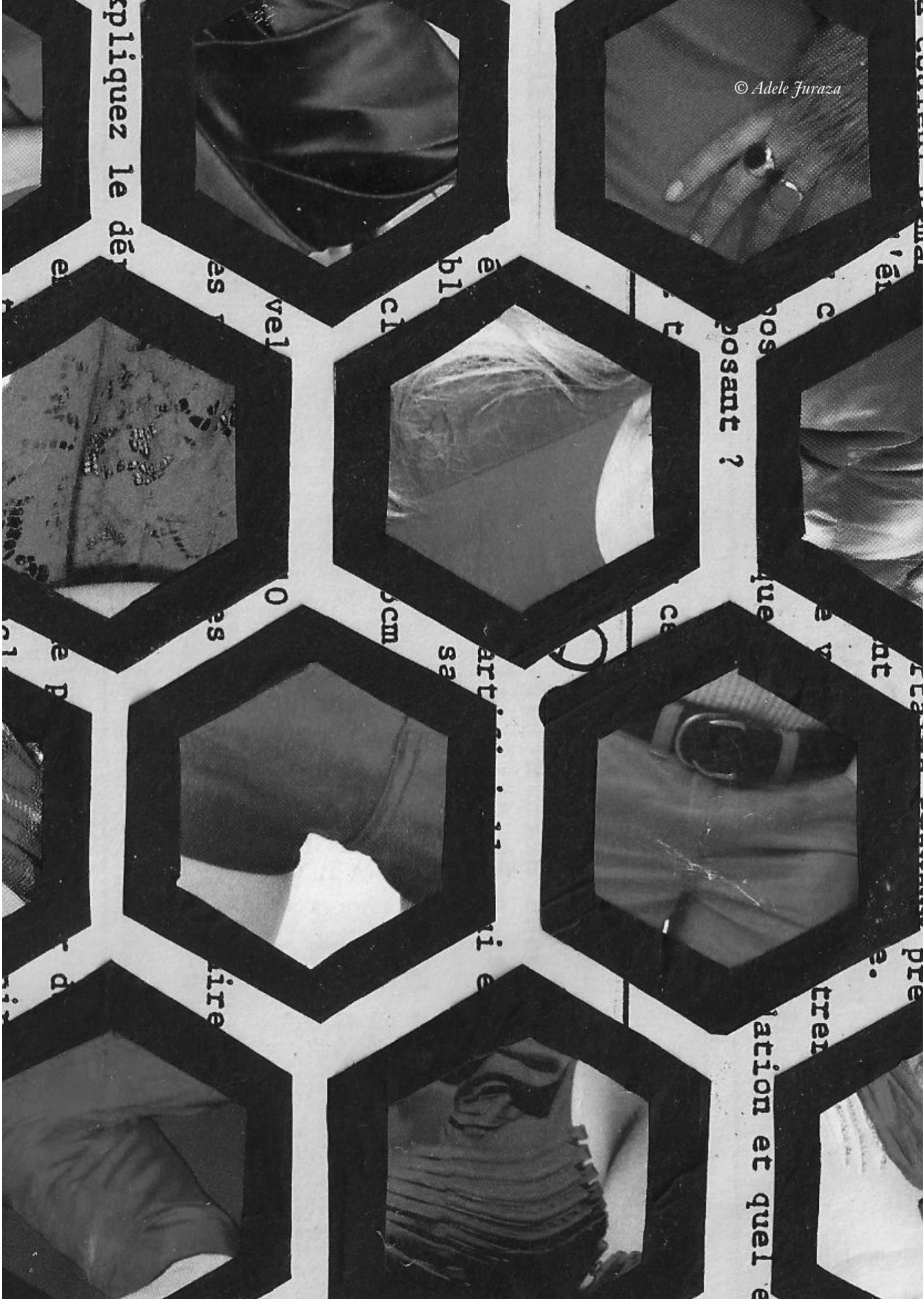
Stephen Priest braves these troubled waters in our opening essay, fixing our minds on the main problems, questions, concepts and thinkers in this remarkable part of the history of philosophy. Shannon M. Mussett considers the work of Simone de Beauvoir and wonders how her depiction of the “sub-man” might find itself quite rightly at the very forefront of thoughts about contemporary politics. Gordon Marino reflects on Kierkegaard’s philosophy and focusses our attention on what it means to know that we will die. Rebecca Bamford takes on the philosophy-sceptic, giving us a fine-grained feel for the relevance of existentialism today. Carlos Alberto Sánchez explores the thinking of Emilio Uranga and the remarkable meaning of Mexican existentialism. Finally, Gary Cox gets emotional with reflection on existentialism, psychology and our emotional lives.

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What is Existentialism?

*Stephen Priest scouts two hundred years of reflection
on questions concerning human existence*

Although there is no single doctrine common to all and only existentialists, existentialism is a philosophical movement in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe loosely held together by addressing fundamental questions about human existence. For example: *Am I free? Am I responsible for my actions? Is life meaningful, or absurd? Are ethical and aesthetic values discovered or invented? Is an authentic life possible? What sort of political, religious, or sexual commitment should there be? What is existence? How should I face death?* Accepting the label “existentialist” is neither necessary nor sufficient for being an existentialist.

*A “leap of faith”,
according to
Kierkegaard, is the only
viable way out*

To understand the claims of the Danish Lutheran philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846); “subjectivity is truth” and “truth is subjectivity” it is necessary to be brought up sharp by the reality of one’s own existence. Each of us divides existence into two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive portions: that part one is, and the

remainder, which one is not. “Subjectivity” (*subjektivitet*) is Kierkegaard’s name for the lived reality of one’s own being. Facing death, that inevitable death that really will be my own, I experience a gnawing underlying anxiety or dread (*angst*) and intermittent despair (*fortvivelse*). It is profoundly mysterious and productive of angst that some existence is your own. The “objective” truths of science and history, although truths, are by comparison abstractions. Responses to this condition pass through an aesthetic, an ethical, and a final religious stage which entails a “leap of faith”; according to Kierkegaard, the only viable way out. The scepticism about Christianity caused by the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment of the eighteenth has increased human alienation. I feel myself a stranger in the world.

The German essayist and aphorist Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) explores ways of living given that “God is dead”, that is, either there is no God or people have stopped believing in God, or both. The “advent of nihilism” is the absence of any God-given source of value and meaning. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) the early Nietzsche advocates affirming life through art. But, disillusioned with the metaphysics and aesthetics of Schopenhauer and Wagner, Nietzsche urges a shedding of conditioning through self-definition, and in *Thus Spoke Zarathus-*

tra (1883) a transfiguration of values by the over-man (*Übermensch*). Because people will risk their lives for power, the will to power (*Wille zur Macht*) is more fundamental than the will to live.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) Nietzsche grounds morality in power relations, distinguishing master from slave morality; the courage and strength valued by those with power, from the piety and compassion valued by those without power. There therefore exists a valuing of values, in which power is primordial. “The eternal recurrence of the same” is Nietzsche’s thesis that one should have the will to live one’s life as though one were doomed to repeat it an infinite number of times. Nietzsche’s own life ends in madness. *The Nachlass, The Will to Power* (1900), entails a process ontology rather than an ontology of Being.

In *I and Thou* (1923) the Austrian-Israeli Jewish theologian, Martin Buber (1878-1965) argues that human existing alternates between the relational modes “I-thou” (*Ich-du*) and “I-it” (*Ich-es*). In the *I-thou* relation, the subject treats the other as another subject; a centre of free consciousness, like oneself. In the *I-it* relation, the other is treated as a mere object, anonymously. Buber diagnoses much of the terror and oppression of the twentieth century in misconstruing people as objects on the *I-it* model, instead of respecting them as fellow subjects on the *I-thou* model. Materialist philosophy is a bogus legitimization of the same de-humanisation. The ultimate *I-thou* relation, between one’s own existence and God’s, is temporarily masked by the empty consumerism and materialism of modernity.

Although ordinary ontology is the branch of philosophy which addresses *What*

is there? the “Fundamental Ontology” of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is a systematic attempt to answer the question *What is it to be?* The two questions are distinct, because being is not being something. Being, rather than not being, is not the same as being something or other. However, the massive and brilliant 1927 work *Being and Time* is unfinished, and essentially concerned with *Dasein*, that manner of being entailed by being a human being, rather than with Being itself (*Sein*). For this reason, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) categorises Heidegger as an existentialist in his October 1945 lecture to Paris’ Club Maintenant (The Now Club); “Existentialism is a Humanism”.

*Nietzsche’s thesis is that
one should have the
will to live one’s life as
though one were doomed
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number of times*

Heidegger resists the label in his essay “Letter on Humanism” (1949) but Jacques Derrida (1930 - 2004), the French pioneer of post-structuralism, suggests in “The Ends of Man” (1967) that Sartre has understood Heidegger better than Heidegger has understood himself, and that Heidegger is indeed an existentialist. Derrida is right because Heidegger’s authenticity or “ownness” (*Eigentlichkeit*), concern (*Sorge*), temporality, and thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) are

existential structures of *Dasein* (human being). Heidegger describes *being-in-the-world* (*in-der-Welt-sein*) and leaves the question of being (*Seinsfrage*) unanswered.

Sartre defines “Existentialism” as the thesis that, in the case of human beings, existence precedes essence. Anything’s essence is *what* it is. Anything’s existence is the fact *that* it is. Existence is being. Essence is being something or other. (Medieval philosophers used to ask two questions: “Is it?” (*an est?*) and “What is it?” (*quid est?*) and distinguish something’s existing (*esse*) from its being what it is (*id quod est*). In “existence precedes essence” “precedes” does not necessarily mean “earlier in time than” but “is a necessary condition for”. So Sartre means that a human being may be what they are, only if they exist.

Conversely, essence precedes existence in the case of artefacts; paradigmatically, planned objects produced by the manipulation of matter. An artefact may only exist, therefore, if there is something that it is. Its blueprint makes it possible. In the case of naturally occurring objects (trees, stones) existence and essence “coincide”: their being, and their being what they are, are mutually dependent (and, it follows, mutually sufficient). Sartre thinks it the mistake of the theist to assume humanity is like an artefact: If humanity were created by God, the essence of humanity in the mind of God would determine human existence. But, both at the level of the individual, and humanity as a whole, human beings are self-defining. We are the beings that make ourselves what we are.

Because, in the 1945 lecture, Sartre says “we are free”, “we are freedom”, “there is no determinism”, he is often misunderstood

as having an exaggerated view of human freedom. He caused offence after the Second World War by suggesting that no one had been more free than the French *resistants* being tortured by the Nazis. Although the source of all value, freedom is not something comfortable for Sartre. The *resistants* agonisingly face the choice between betraying their comrades or remaining silent for moments longer. Freedom entails terrible responsibility.

*Life should not be
refused, by suicide,
but affirmed by
perpetual revolt*

In the chapter on freedom in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) Sartre draws a crucial but often overlooked distinction between freedom (*la liberté*) and power (*le pouvoir*). I might have very little power, for example be tied up and under torture. But I retain the capacity to choose. Sartre thinks there is no situation in which we do not have a choice, some choice or other. We are inherently choosers, choosing beings. The only respect in which we are not free is that we are not free not to be free. By comparison, scientific (or pseudo-scientific) doctrines of determinism are abstract, and expressive of that denial of one’s own freedom Sartre calls “bad faith” (*la mauvaise foi*).

In 1949, with Jean Cocteau and Pablo Picasso, Sartre successfully petitioned the French government for the release of the playwright and novelist Jean Genet (1910-86) imprisoned for theft and homosexu-



al offences. The depiction of the criminal underworld or political radicals in Genet's plays, for example *The Balcony* (1957) and *The Blacks* (1959), and in the quasi-autobiographical *Thief's Journal* (1949) questions conventional "bourgeois" morality in ways endorsed by Sartre in his *Saint Genet: Comedian and Martyr* (1952) as the choosing of values, as the expression of authentic freedom.

Sartre and the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1913-1960) fuse existentialism with phenomenology into Existential Phenomenology. Phenomenology is the description of what appears to consciousness, with the aim of answering the Kantian question *How is knowledge possible?* and grounding knowledge in the first person singular, in a rather Cartesian way (while eschewing both Cartesian mind-body dualism and the unknowable Kantian *thing-in-itself* or *thing-as-such* (*Ding-an-sich*)). Following

Heidegger, both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty argue that, because being is inextricably *being-in the world* (*être-au-monde*), the Austro-Moravian "father" of phenomenology Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was mistaken in attempting to reduce the world to its appearance, through the methodological device of *epoché*, or suspension of belief (notably in his 1913 book, *Ideas*).

"We are freedom"

Sartre fuses existentialism with Marxism in the massive and ambitious *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). Existentialism emphasises the free choice of the conscious individual in the present, but classical Marxism is a determinist, materialist, theory of history as class-struggle. The synthesis of the two philosophies therefore requires solv-

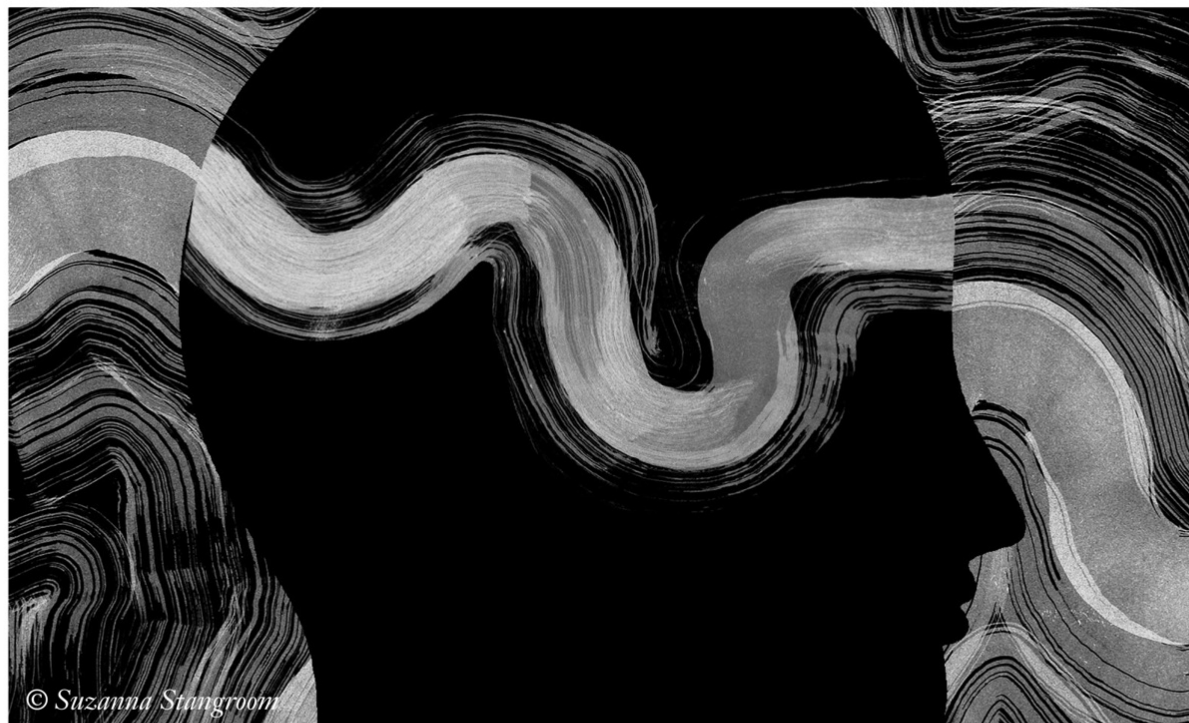
ing some central problems of philosophy: freedom and determinism, the mind-body problem, the existence of past, present, and future. Sartre argues that human reality is both individual and social, subjective and objective, bodily and conscious, historical, future directed, and present.

Sartre deploys dialectical reason; that method of problem solving derived (in modern philosophy) from the German idealist G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) which exhibits solutions to philosophical problems as entailing mutual dependencies between *prima facie* opposed concepts. In "Hegel's Existentialism" in *Sense and Non-Sense* (1948) Merleau-Ponty argues that Hegel himself anticipates existentialist themes, especially in the "overcoming" of epistemology in the synthesis of being and knowing in "Absolute Knowledge" (*das Absolute Wissen*) at the end of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).

The French Catholic convert Gabriel

Marcel (1889-1973) argues that although any individual has an ineradicable capacity to choose, addiction to the commodities of consumerism, or identifying oneself with a profession or social role, are obstacles to that increase in freedom that comes through realising one's own possibilities through meeting the real needs of others. Self-realisation is therefore through the other. Fulfilment, or true being, is not by consuming but by "creative fidelity". "Communion" with others entails their reciprocal presence. In *The Mystery of Being* (1951) and in over thirty plays, Marcel may be understood as offering Christian solutions to problems posed by atheistic existentialism. Marcel argued frequently, publically and acrimoniously with Sartre.

The Myth of Sisyphus (1942) by the French-Algerian writer Albert Camus (1913-1960) opens with the claim that there is only one truly serious philosophical prob-



lem: suicide; whether life is worth the bother of living or not. Camus' sustained answer is that life should not be refused, by suicide, but affirmed by perpetual revolt. The struggle for meaning is the meaning. Camus does not believe in God but says in his *Notebooks* (1951-9) "I am not an atheist". The two positions are mutually consistent, because not believing does not entail disbelieving.

Camus' literary work is held together by the question of how to live life in the certainty of one's own death. Camus thinks religion provides no viable answer. In the short influential novel *The Stranger* (1942) Camus's Mersault seems indifferent to the deaths of his own mother, the Arab he murders on the beach, and his own juridical execution for that crime. The novel ends with Mersault's openness to the world's "tender indifference" to him. In *The Plague* (1947) the lives, lifestyles, and ideologies of the inhabitants of Oran are tested by the terrible confrontation with suffering and death. For example: a journalist, a doctor, a smuggler, a magistrate, a priest, are depicted before, during, and (if they survive) after the plague. In the novel *The Fall* (1956) Amsterdam's concentric system of canals is disturbingly reminiscent of Dante Alighieri's Circles of Hell in his *Inferno*.

Martin Esslin seems to have coined the expression "The Theatre of the Absurd" in his 1960 essay and 1962 book of that name. The themes are markedly existentialist. In the play *Waiting for Godot* (1954), first published in French as *En Attendant Godot* (1952), by the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett (1906-89) the tramps Vladimir and Estragon await the arrival of the unexplained, and perhaps inexplicable, Godot. Is Godot God? Is Godot meaning? Is Godot some

perpetually postponed future? The play made little impact in early performances, and audiences were nonplussed, but it was received rapturously in St. Quentin Prison in California in 1957 by inmates who clearly understood it. The French Romanian playwright Eugene Ionesco (1931-1994) breaks with conventional understandings of the real, for example by absurdly introducing rhinoceri on stage.

*De Beauvoir argues
that the thesis that
existence precedes essence
does not apply to women*

In the chapter "Existential Psychoanalysis" in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre rejects the existence of the unconscious on the ground that "unconscious mind" is contradictory. In a rather Cartesian way, Sartre insists that minds are essentially conscious or, more accurately, are consciousnesses. That which psychoanalysts have assumed to be the unconscious is, in fact, the subject's past. Any past is someone's past. Human beings make themselves what they are by their free present choices. Because anyone can always change, it is only at death that we may say: He was a coward, etc. In *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1939) Sartre resists the assumption that emotions well over us deterministically. We choose our emotions as social strategies in refusing to face up to our very real choices. Existential psychiatry is advocated by Karl Jaspers (1883 - 1969), Viktor Frankl (1905-97) and R. D. Laing (1927-89).

The feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) argues that the existentialist thesis that existence precedes essence does not apply to women. In *The Second Sex* (1949) she describes how the essence of woman is prescriptively and oppressively imposed by man. In patriarchal society, a woman is essentially wife, mistress, sex object. de Beauvoir's ethical claim is that human beings are worthy of respect as human beings, irrespective of their sex.

The American philosopher Hazel Barnes (1918-2008), the translator of *Being and Nothingness*, is the author of *The Literature of Possibility: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism* (1959) and *An Existentialist Ethics* (1967). Her *The Story I tell Myself is subtitled A Venture in Existentialist Autobiography* (1997).

In *Crime and Punishment*, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) has Raskalnikov undergo an existential transformation through murdering his landlady.

The Anglo-Irish novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) authored a study of Sartre and over two dozen novels, many with overtly existentialist themes; the grounds for ethical, sexual, and political choice; the question of how to live.

In *The Trial* (1925) by the German-speaking Czech writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924) Joseph K.'s prosecution for an unknown crime by an unknown legal authority may be understood as an allegory for the human condition, construed in existentialist ways: We exist but did not choose to be. We face death but do not know why we are here.

In *The Courage to Be* (1952), and more technical works, the German Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) offers

an existentialist theology. Anxiety in the face of non-being may be overcome by affirming one's own existence through courage ultimately derived from "the God beyond God" that is, God as more or less ineffable ultimate reality and the object of faith, rather than God as conceptualised by philosophers and theologians. In *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (1955) Tillich argues that the fundamental questions of philosophy concern being, especially one's own being.

There is existentialism outside modern European philosophy and literature. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates interrogates his interlocutors on questions of how to live. St. Augustine has that heightened sense of one's own being necessary for existentialist thought. The New York philosopher Thomas Nagel (1938-) also raises recognisably existentialist questions, perhaps most poignantly in his essays on death in *Mortal Questions* (1979) and in the chapter "Being Someone" in his *The View From Nowhere* (1986).

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Simone de Beauvoir's Ethics

Shannon M. Mussett on the relevance of her thinking today

"Behold, I show you the *last man*.
'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?' thus asks the last man, and he blinks."

-- Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

After fourteen years, Friedrich Nietzsche returned to his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) with an excoriating verdict. In his notorious "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" he wrote: "today I find it an impossible book: I consider it badly written, ponderous, embarrassing, image-mad and image-confused". While his harsh criticism may be warranted in some respects, this text remains a profound keystone in aesthetics and Nietzschean philosophy as a whole. Simone de Beauvoir published *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in 1947 and, like Nietzsche, years later penned her own attempt at self-criticism. In her autobiography, *The Force of Circumstance* (1963) she writes: "Of all my books it is the one that irritates me the most today". Yet, this work remains one of the best -- and quite possibly, the best -- theories of atheist existentialist ethics written in the twentieth century. Perhaps both existentialist philosophers were embarrassed by the expression of the youthful exuberance and unapologetic frankness evident in their early texts. However, despite their theatrical self-effacement, insights in both works remained central to their later writings.

Twentieth-century existentialism faced a difficult terrain when it came to the question of ethics. Most representatives of the tradition placed the question of God and religion either as antithetical to existentialism (Sartre and Beauvoir), peripheral to existentialist concerns (Merleau-Ponty and Camus) or central to but not determinative of ethics (Tillich, Marcel, and Frankl). Beauvoir claims, again in her autobiography, that her reason for writing the Ethics was to defend against attacks on Existentialism for being pessimistic, frivolous, despairing, and nihilistic. Most of these attacks issued from the philosophical rejection of God and the resultant fear this rejection produced in those who think that without divine law, humans would quickly descend into immorality.

*Beauvoir begins, as so
few philosophers do,
with childhood*

Beauvoir's name usually appears (somewhat ironically) in the vacillating obsession with her romantic relationship to Sartre or her ground-breaking feminist work, *The Second Sex*. But despite her own gestures to distance herself from it, *The Ethics* continues to captivate those of us who find ethics to be inherently ambiguous and historically

situated. The cause of Beauvoir's irritation with this book was in her depictions of various modes of human existing that she later found too abstract, removed from reality, and devoid of social context. Yet, these portraits of human beings living in what Sartre would call "bad faith" remain the most important and oft discussed aspect of the work. Accessible and illuminating, these portrayals pop up in unlikely places (even appearing in such bubble-gum pieces as, "The Nine People You'll Date According to Simone de Beauvoir" in *The Huffington Post*). The issues raised in *The Second Sex* about how women are made to be the corollary of masculine subjectivity and systematically denied autonomy (acutely relevant with the current global rise of bombastic patriarchal masculinity) remain pressing. However, as of late, I have been drawn more and more to her analyses of the various attitudes of inauthenticity outlined in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. These sketches are profound in their simplicity and provide a short-hand for naming a panoply of disingenuous and often dangerous ways of acting in a fraught and ambiguous world.

Yet, there is nothing simplistic about *The Ethics*. It was published in 1947, three years after the four-year Nazi occupation of Paris ended. The work is thus saturated by the experiences of a philosopher struggling to come to terms not only with recent global carnage and genocide but with the uncertainties of how to live in the world knowing that no God can expiate humankind and no absolute moral laws can ground it.

To try to begin to tackle such an abyssal problem, Beauvoir begins, as so few philosophers do, with childhood. Although aware that childhood is not an ideal Edenic sit-

uation, it is remarkable insofar as 1) it is a shared, therefore universal human state and 2) it is marked by the experience of finding ourselves in a world where the values, institutions, practices, and truths are in place before our arrival on the scene. As a result, the world appears fixed, with values as given and immutable and people as possessing static roles and identities. To the child, her teacher is not a person who engages in teacherly activities, but rather is *essentially* a teacher. Just ask any child about the experience of running into a teacher outside of school. It is disorienting because to children, adults have a kind of substantial nature that is not separable from their ascribed identity. That humans are not essentially what they do is a realisation that (hopefully) comes with maturity.

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This faith in the givenness of the world is the driving force behind the most widespread unethical attitude discussed in the *Ethics*: the attitude of seriousness. Like the child, the serious man (*sic*) maintains truth as absolute, values as indisputable, and people as possessing invariable natures. Because we all lived in the serious world as children,



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this approach to life is by far the most common (we slip into it quite often). Every time we find ourselves denying the fluidity of our choices because we are *something* (a nurse, a father, a wife, a communist, etc.) we are in the serious attitude. Although common, this alignment is not morally neutral. Unlike the child, the serious person has passed through the crisis of adolescence and should have thereby challenged the authority of the adult world. Thus, the appearance of seriousness reveals something deeply duplicitous. While seductive, the attitude of seriousness is a manifestation of a deeply problematic desire to fix being in oneself and the world. It is the voracious yearning to be something -- a Christian, an American, a lawyer, a conservative, a good person,

etc. -- as a way to avoid the anxiety of having to choose at each moment *and* take responsibility for those choices. It is far easier to hide behind labels than to admit that these labels only have meaning because I continue to choose them and give them meaning. Yet, however much I may wish otherwise, I cannot *be* anything. In fact, the harder I try to fix my identity, the more anxiety I feel when it is threatened and the more energy I put into preventing any challenges to it from within and without. Inevitably, the ruse reveals itself in more or less destructive ways.

For Beauvoir, one can only do what children do, which is to *play* at being. The ethical attitude is, in part, recognising that we are constantly becoming through actions and choices based upon the intricate and

complex web of our individual, social, and historical situation. We will never reach the plateau of being anything at all. As Sartre also points out, this realisation of the nothingness at the heart of being fills us with anxiety and dread as it induces an existential feeling of groundlessness. To combat this uneasiness, the serious person seeks refuge in identities in order to flee this terrifying feeling. In truth, “the thing that matters to the serious man is not so much the nature of the object which he prefers to himself, but rather the fact of being able to lose himself in it”. However sad it is to see people refusing to question the fixity of their lives, seeing their choices as made for them, and acting as grown-up children who do things because they *have* to, the danger is not simply that of living an inauthentic and unfulfilled life. Rather, the attitude of seriousness is exceedingly dangerous because those who adhere to it completely put nothing in question and will set up idols to which all is sacrificed: wealth for the capitalist, power for the politician, war for the general... As such, the serious person slides all-too-easily into the position of the tyrant, demanding not only his own subjective sacrifice to his idols, but the sacrifice of others to them as well. “Dishonestly ignoring the subjectivity of his choice, [the serious man] pretends that the unconditioned value of the object is being asserted through him; and by the same token he also ignores the value of the subjectivity and the freedom of others, to such an extent that, sacrificing them to the thing, he persuades himself that what he sacrifices is nothing”. Such willingness to sacrifice all freedom, choice, and responsibility to an identity or cause leads to fanaticism and this fanaticism infringes on an-

other key component of ethics for Beauvoir -- the recognition and respect of the freedom of others. To illustrate this dangerous tendency, Beauvoir lists examples of fanaticism in the European Inquisitors, Southern American Vigilantes, and French Colonial Administrators, all of whom are willing to kill hundreds or even millions in the service of an unattainable and inhuman Idol. When one's identity or goal becomes fixed and absolute, no sacrifice is too great to sustain it.

*Beauvoir's depiction
of the sub-man has been
at the forefront of my
mind in recent global
political developments*

But who is it who does the work of the serious person? Certainly, other serious-minded individuals who buy into various ideologies are key players in great fanatical movements. However, there is another attitude in Beauvoir's ethics required for seriousness to grow beyond itself and to effect real social and political destruction: this is the attitude known as the “sub-man”.

Beauvoir's depiction of the sub-man has been at the forefront of my mind in recent global political developments (and more pointedly, in my home of the United States). The fanaticism of the serious person often burns itself out without much damage if it doesn't have henchmen to do its dirty work. And the sub-man is the character who is the go-to for such work. When President

Trump (in many ways a serious man) blares confidently: "If you see somebody getting ready to throw a tomato, knock the crap out of them, would you? Seriously, OK? Just knock the hell ... I promise you I will pay for the legal fees. I promise, I promise" to whom is he speaking? When he directly claims or alludes to immigrants as "rapists", "criminals", and "animals", who is going to take him at his word and prepare to act if called upon to do so? When he leads thousands in the anti-Clinton chant, "Lock her up! Lock her up!" who is it who is carried away by the call to contain political threats by any means necessary? Who *are* the people who so readily endorse what is clearly hateful and violent language, many of whom are actually prepared to act on it? This is clearly an overly-simplistic question as we are not talking about a uniform mass of humanity.

*These corpses were not
historical accidents, but
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serious and sub-man*

But certainly, for Beauvoir, the primary army who carries out the will of the serious man is composed of sub-men -- those who await commands in order to be the willing tools of a leader shrewd, charismatic, and serious enough to use them. If there is a hierarchy of human beings, Beauvoir tells us, the sub-man would be "on the lowest rung of the ladder".

Nietzsche's speaks throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, of the hardest truth for his protagonist to swallow: the existence of the "last man". The last men -- those who blink in the face of the impossible marvel of existence -- are ineradicable; like flea beetles, they cover the earth and cannot be overcome. Beauvoir's sub-man is an expression of these existence blinkers. As she explains: "They have eyes and ears, but from their childhood on they make themselves blind and deaf, without love and without desire". The serious person feels the quaking, vibrating pulse of existence and submerges all of her energy into trying to freeze it, to provide unshakable foundations to an inherently precarious condition. The sub-man, however, denies the very movement of life itself. Through a pathological fear of tension and risk, her orientation toward existence is one of denial, rejection, and detachment. I understand the sub-man as the couch-potato of life, viewing the world as paradoxically terrifying yet also hopelessly boring. Feeling both indifferent and suspicious, the sub-man tries to avoid choice and responsibility, not as the serious man does by attempting to lose himself in identities and fixed ends, but by trying as much as possible to make himself into a thing. As Beauvoir puts it,

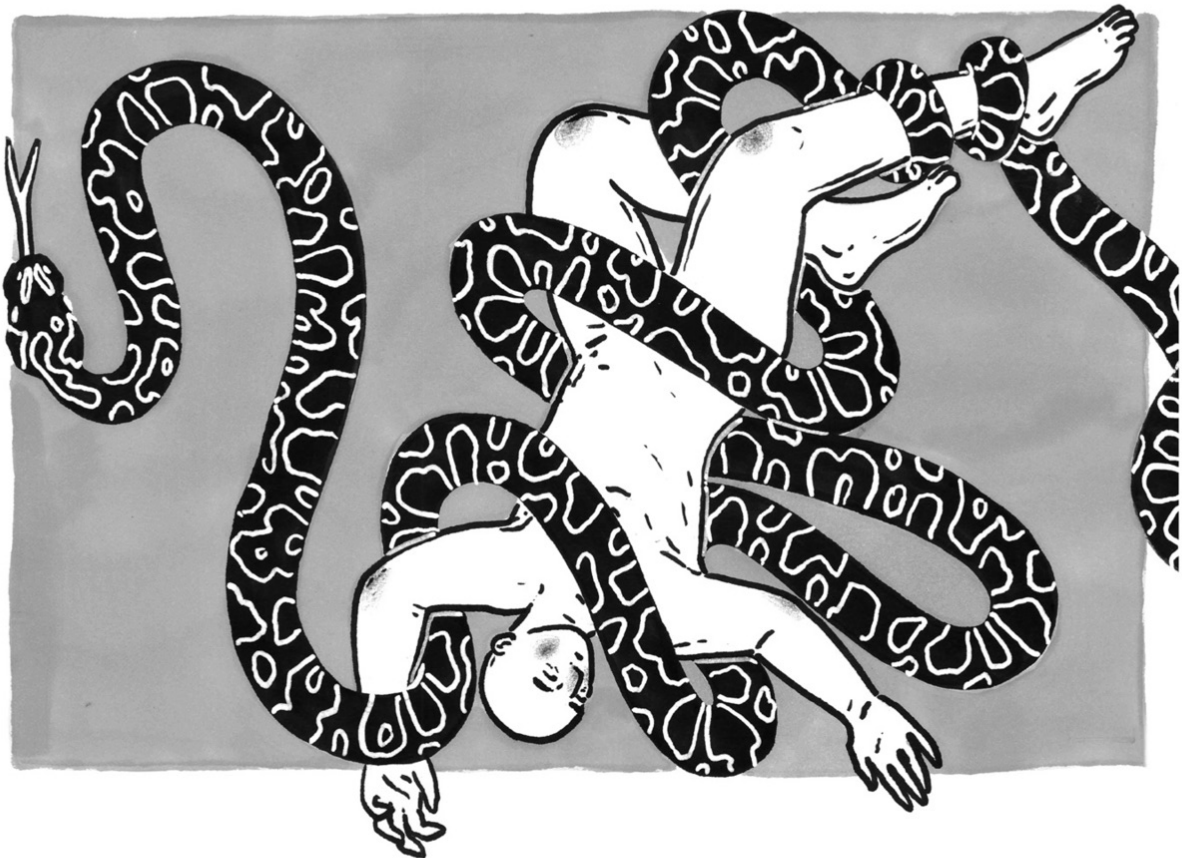
"He is afraid of engaging himself in a project as he is afraid of being disengaged and thereby of being in a state of danger before the future, in the midst of its possibilities. He is thereby led to take refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world. He will proclaim certain opinions; he will take shelter behind a label; and to hide his indifference he will readily abandon himself to verbal out-

bursts or even physical violence.”

Returning to my earlier questions -- to whom is Trump (or Duterte, Bolsonaro, Le Pen, Johnson, etc.) speaking? Beauvoir provides us an answer with the sub-man. This character changes with power, “One day a monarchist, the next day, an anarchist, he is more readily anti-semitic, anti-clerical, or anti-republican”. He is, in short, defined not by positive choices, but by being against whatever bogeymen the savvy crafters of seriousness tell him to be. And if those bogeymen change day to day or even moment to moment, all the better for the figures of

power who manipulate the sub-men to their purposes. Beauvoir writes,

“Weighted down by present events, [the sub-man] is bewildered before the darkness of the future which is haunted by frightful spectres, war, sickness, revolution, fascism, bolshevism. The more indistinct these dangers are, the more fearful they become. The sub-man is not very clear about what he has to lose, since he has nothing, but this very uncertainty re-enforces his terror. Indeed, what he fears is that the shock of the un-



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foreseen may remind him of the agonizing consciousness of himself.”

One need only to tinker with the above list to hear it resonate powerfully today ... haunted by frightful spectres of immigration, socialism, taxation, unemployment ... to see how easy it can be and is to mobilise the sub-men for wicked deeds. Beauvoir was right to show how dangerous people are who adopted the fanaticism of seriousness and who were willingly swept along by the currents of sub-humanity during World War II, and so should we too be on guard of their reappearance in the historical present.

Perhaps Beauvoir was right to criticise her depictions of the attitudes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* as being overly abstract. Certainly, one cannot simply group large swaths of any collective as being one type of person. A better way to read these attitudes (and there are so many more than the two discussed in this piece) is that they can and often do come to be expressed by all of us at certain times and in different ways. This is why ethics is such a slippery domain for Beauvoir -- how do we make rules for social and political action given the constantly, maddeningly shifting terrain for choice and action? Regardless of the oversimplification, Beauvoir saw the sub-men with her own eyes as her fellow citizens helped Nazis cart off French Jews to concentration camps. That much was not abstract.

But does the call to avoid unethical attitudes carry any weight in the modern condition? Haven't we moved past this idiosyncratic way of talking about ethics based in notions of freedom and responsibility? Science often purports to have done away with

these approaches that so occupied thinkers like Beauvoir (see, for example, a discussion on Neuroexistentialism recently published in the last issue of *The Philosopher's Magazine*). Hard determinism seems to have edged out existentialism's focus on individual lived experience, choice, and authenticity. To someone like Beauvoir, however, the confidence that any theory or system has answered the mysteries of human experience is itself an expression of the serious attitude -- a continuation of the European belief that we can expose being -- get the *truth* of the world through numbers and experiments. While science (like art, technology, and mathematics) is a vital component in disclosing the world, it is not the only way to do so. To believe that it is *right*, is to adopt the attitude of seriousness. And taken to an extreme, it can become just as fanatical as certain political or religious movements.

For Beauvoir, there is an ethical demand to not accept the serious and sub-minded as inevitably recurring attitudes but rather to stand up to them

While the realities of being material beings in a material world were not lost on Beauvoir (the notion of situation and facticity loomed large in her studies well beyond the concerns of the *Ethics*) the reduction of the human to scientifically objectified

matter is objectionable on aesthetic and more importantly, moral grounds. In fact, Beauvoir's analysis of oppression is that it strives to reduce humans to things, merely maintaining existence through mechanical gestures. This is precisely the mechanism of oppression: to reduce human beings to pure facticity, congealed in immanence, cut off from the future, and therefore manipulatable and morally nugatory. Reduced to an object, a person "no longer appears as anything more than a thing among things which can be subtracted from the collectivity of other things without its leaving upon the earth any trace of its absence". Beauvoir reminds us of the material, animal flesh of the decomposing corpses of Buchenwald and Dachau, that express "the stupid tranquillity of trees and stones". And these corpses were not historical accidents, but the direct product of the unethical attitudes of the serious and sub-man working in tandem to horrifically destructive ends.

At the very least, given the limited nature of human consciousness and perspective, even if we did stumble onto the answer to life, the universe, and everything, we wouldn't have a god's mind to understand what it means. As the Presocratic epistemic sceptic Xenophanes knew millennia ago, no one has ever seen the truth of the world and "even if he should completely succeed in describing things as they come to pass, nonetheless he himself does not know: opinion is wrought over all". More pointedly, our lived experience is certainly one wherein we feel like we make choices and are compelled to take responsibility for those choices. And we certainly live in a world where the ethically minded judge those who harm, oppress, torture, and kill and believe that they

should be held accountable for those actions. Tyrants, fascists, megalomaniacal officials, and corporate tycoons are not bits of matter in the abyss to those who suffer under their violence, but rather, human beings in a human world who must take responsibility for the creation of that world. This is why, for Beauvoir, there is an ethical demand to not accept the serious and sub-minded as inevitably recurring attitudes (even if, like Nietzsche's last men, they are) but rather to stand up to them, call them out, and, if necessary, fight against them. And this requires vigilance in monitoring not just those who we think may be guilty, but perhaps more importantly, ourselves. Because no one is immune to the seductiveness of fleeing the agony of choice and responsibility.

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The Self is a Relation That Relates Itself to Itself

Gordon Marino unpacks Kierkegaard on what it means to die

Kierkegaard had nothing but sneers for academic philosophers. In fact, much more often than not, he refers to himself as a poet in the broad German Romantic sense of the term and very rarely as a philosopher. However, ironically enough, if you want to study Kierkegaard, the master of irony, your best bet is to go the philosophy department and look for Kierkegaard in a course on existentialism. While I am not one for keeping intellectual box scores on such issues, Kierkegaard is almost universally regarded as the progenitor of the philosophical movement that is existentialism.

*While everyone else
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quill to make life harder*

The existentialists are a motley crew, so motley that there is little consensus amongst scholars as to who should be included on the roster. Nevertheless, Soren Aabye Kierkegaard is a consensus pick. The existentialists are united by common themes rather than common views. A short list of these themes might consist of choice, freedom, the indi-

vidual, the absurd, authenticity, the limits of reason, the meaning of life, etc. As a group, they also pay closer attention than their cooler-headed philosophical colleagues to moods, such as anxiety and depression, or as I prefer to parse it, to the obstacles that we are up against in ourselves. Kierkegaard struck all of these chords in his massive oeuvre, but more than that he adopted an inside out, first-person perspective that was anathema to the Socrates guild both then and now. It was from this personal vantage point that meaning of life questions bubbled up, questions that are the earmark of existential reflection.

Born in 1813 in Copenhagen, Kierkegaard wrote his classic works pseudonymously. For decades, there has existed an academic cottage industry of researchers attempting to interpret Kierkegaard's use of noms de plume. One of the most compelling explanations has it that the various pseudonyms represent different life perspectives. For a sampler, Vigilius Haufniensis, the author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, embodies the purely psychological perspective. The dogmatist Anti-Climacus, who gave us the lapidary *Sickness unto Death*, represents a rigorous religious perspective. Johannes Climacus is Kierkegaard's philosophical personae and the author of both the *The Philosophi-*

cal Fragments and *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*.

In the *Postscript*, which was published in 1846 and is about four times longer than the *Fragments*, it is easy to detect the fingerprints of the inside out, existential perspective. First, Kierkegaard, aka Johannes Climacus, confesses that while everyone else is writing to make life easier, he will wield his quill to make life harder for his readers. Climacus begins with notion that while everyone believes it is easy to be subjective, he will reveal that subjectivity is in fact difficult to accomplish. In his opening gambit, he endeavours to “show how the simplest issue is changed ... into the most difficult.... For example *what it means to die*.” After all, everyone imagines they know that they will perish. But is this a knowledge of something in general, something that is not yet subjective and fails to address the issue of what death means to me? At this juncture, our hero allots a full page registering the objective facts about death. He begins:

“On that topic (death) I know what people ordinarily know: that is, I swallow a dose of sulfuric acid I will die, likewise by drowning myself or sleeping in coal gas etc. I know that Napoleon always carried poison with him, that Shakespeare’s Juliet took it, that the Stoics regarded suicide as a courageous act and other regard it as cowardice....”

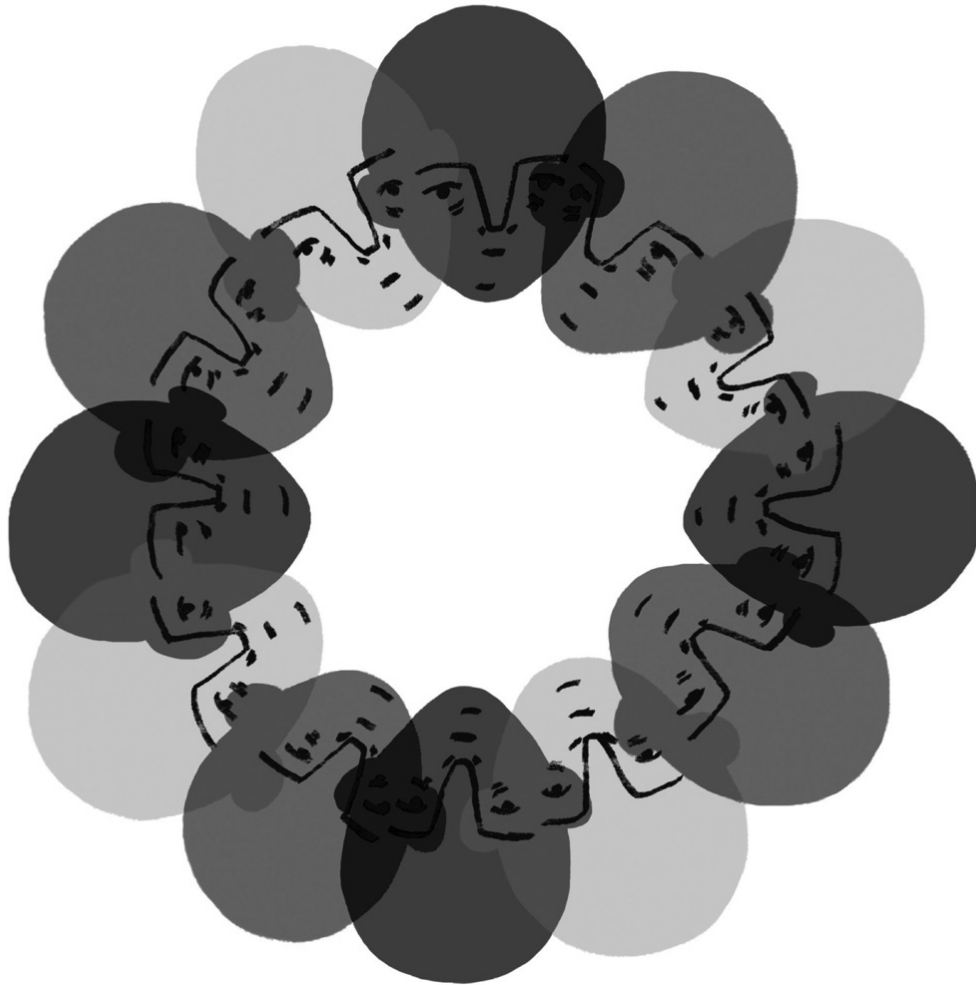
The laundry list of facts continues until the author throws up his hands and proclaims, “despite this almost extraordinary knowledge or proficiency of knowledge, I am by no means able to regard death as something I have understood.” Why not?

In part because in order to understand the meaning of my demise on a personal level, I need to grasp that death is a certain uncertainty. The subjective challenge then becomes, how do I think this most unsettling uncertainty into my daily life?

*I need to grasp
that death is a certain
uncertainty*

Tolstoy drives home the same point in his immortal *Death Of Ivan Ilyich*, namely, that it is one thing to understand the syllogism: All humans are mortal; Socrates is human; ergo, Socrates is mortal. It is something else again to for me to *feelingly* fathom what it means that *my* days are numbered. Thinking myself dead is just one example of becoming subjective, but with resonances of the authenticity motif, Kierkegaard is endlessly prodding his readers to reflect on our personal relation to the ideas swimming around in our skulls. Do I really believe what I espouse or are they just talking points which I more than less mechanically recite?

In one of his most famous and infamously opaque sentences, the author behind the author of *The Sickness unto Death* wrote, “The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation.” In more ways than ten, Kierkegaard insists that humans are self-relating creatures. According to *The Sickness onto Death*, we have both infinite and finite aspects, we are endowed with possibility and anchored to necessity, and we have a tem-



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poral and an eternal dimension. This can sound like existential yak yak or the “jargon of authenticity”, but becoming a self is involves integrating these contradictory poles of our existence -- and not on a merely intellectual or theoretical level. We are also relational creatures in that we are caught up in an ongoing dynamic relation with our thoughts and feelings. In his early twenties, before his authorship began, Kierkegaard wrote in his journal that he was searching for an idea that he could live or die for. That is, he was striving for subjectivity.

Like Nietzsche but with a different set of categories up his sleeves, Kierkegaard delivered a critique of the objective stance in life. For him, becoming objective did not necessarily entail a lack of passion. Kierkegaard understood objectivity to be a state in which the individual suppresses his or her self-concern, i.e., concern about what kind of individual I am or am becoming. While Kierkegaard affirmed that there are subject matters, e.g., math and science, for which the objective stance is entirely appropriate, he was adamant that subjectivity is the de-

sideratum with regard to ethico-religious matters.

True to his pietistic upbringing, subjectivity, inwardness, and earnestness were god-terms for Kierkegaard. On his reckoning, the erudite expend too much effort speculating on and accruing objective knowledge, but scant energy pondering the question of how to appropriate or bring that knowledge inward and mould their lives to their beliefs. One can only imagine how Kierkegaard would bury his head in his hands watching those of us who might sit by the fire enjoying a Netflix movie while “Liking” some social justice posting on Facebook. Ah! And he thought his age was suffering from an inwardness deficit!

In the introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*, the pseudonymous author bemoans the fact philosophers, and especially the Hegelians, are guilty of category mistakes. More to his point, he chides his philosophical and theological brethren for treating a concept such as sin in psychological terms, as though it were something that we could and should cogitate about with objective indifference. Kierkegaard/Haufniensis writes:

“When sin is treated in a place other than its own, it is altered by being subject to a nonessential refraction of reflection. The concept is altered, and thereby the mood that properly corresponds to the correct concept is also disturbed.”

Kierkegaard insists that there is a mood proper to every concept. When there is something awry with the mood, there is something awry with the idea. Thus, *The Sickness unto Death* informs us, “When the issue of sin is dealt with, one can observe by

the very mood whether the concept is the correct one.” *Pace* Kierkegaard, a researcher on the Holocaust who pores over death camp documents in the mood of someone trying to chalk up publications would, for all his or her knowledge, have in some profound way misunderstood the Holocaust. In a footnote, Kierkegaard/Haufniensis pens this epiphanic observation:

“That science, just as much as poetry and art, presuppose a mood in the creator as well as in the observer, and that an error in the modulation is just as disturbing as an error in the development of thought, have been entirely forgotten in our time, when inwardness has been completely forgotten, and also the category of appropriation....”

We live in relation to our moods

Part of the “modulation” of a thought process is the mood accompanying that thought process. When we reflect on sin or, for that matter, love, in an objective mood we distort the concepts. The mood proper to thinking about ethics might be the firm resolve to overcome impediments to the moral life and become a good, kind, and righteous human being. No matter: as though ethics were chess or a crossword puzzle, contemporary philosophers lucubrate over ethics dilemmas as though they were problems sets in physics. That is the wrong mood and from at least one existentialist point of view; it belies a misunder-

standing of ethics itself.

From the first to the last page of his authorship, Kierkegaard stresses appropriation and by that he means that when it comes to the essentials in life, we need what Philip Rieff called a “feeling intellect”. But true to the existential tradition, appropriation requires more than emotional fervour -- it demands action, it requires that we walk our talk. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard/Anti-Climacus daubs a character who expresses feelings enough about self-sacrifice but fails to translate his ardent beliefs into action. He writes:

“It is exceedingly comic that a man, stirred to tears so that not only sweat but also tears pour down his face, can sit or read or hear an exposition on self-denial, on the nobility of sacrificing his life for the truth--and then in the next moment ... almost with tears still in his eyes, be in full swing, in the sweat of his brow and to the best of his modest ability, helping untruth to be victorious.”

True to his favourite Bible text, the Letter of James and in harmony with the gospel of Sartre circa 1946, Kierkegaard writes, “Truth exists only as the individual produces it in action.”

For Kierkegaard there is no more serious goal in life than to become *alvorlig* -- that is, serious or earnest. To become earnest is in effect to understand and strive to become (and yes I know that these terms will drive some to distraction) your true self. Despair (*fortivelse*) is a passive or actively produced state in which you are ignorant of and in-souciant about becoming the self that you were intended to be. Clearly, Kierkegaard

would have rejected the Sartrean shibboleth of existentialism-- “*existence precedes essence*”.

In *The Sickness unto Death* the author tenders the idea that there are three selves: the concrete self, the ideal self, and your true self. For an individual mad with the aspiration to become say a doctor, the ideal self will wear a white coat and have a stethoscope slung over her shoulder. However, if medical school slams the door on this person’s face and becoming a physician becomes impossible, then her concrete self becomes a terrible burden since she does not want to be who she is unless “M.D.” can be affixed after her surname. In sum, it is a case of depression but also of despair because being swallowed up in this black and blue mood, she becomes oblivious to the task of becoming her true self, which for Kierkegaard is, among other things, an individual “who rests transparently in the power that established it”.

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There are more spiritual perils ahead as Kierkegaard/Anti-Climacus warns that the individual who succeeds in merging their

concrete and ideal selves, i.e., a person who fulfils her wildest ambition, is more likely than not, also in despair. After all, the self-satisfied and roundly admired find it all too easy to be blinkered by their success. On this point our virtuoso of suspicion and faith warns “for despair the most cherished and desirable place to live is in the heart of happiness”. Yes, you may have realised some ideal vision of yourself, but that by no means implies that you have become the spiritual being that you were intended to be.

What does it mean that I will die?

Here there is an important distinction, one that is collapsed in our own age, between depression (a psychological malady) and despair (a spiritual illness). Happiness and depression are incompatible but not happiness and despair. For Kierkegaard, who was himself a card carrying melancholic but did not consider himself a case of despair, depression is a mood whereas despair is an activity of refusing to become who you are. To listen to this doctor of the soul and contrary to the common view, despair cannot be identified with any particular mood or feeling.

In contrast to despair, earnestness maintains awareness of the danger of forgetting your core task in life. However, earnestness is not a mood. Indeed, the earnest individual takes care how she reads and relates to her moods. In the discourse “At a Grave-side” that was the seed for Heidegger’s concept of being-towards-death, Kierkegaard, now writing under his own name, conjures

the image of a depressed fellow suffering through hard times and inclined to pull the blanket over his head and convince himself that life is meaningless, and spiritual and ethical aspirations just grandiose delusions. Again, the self is a relation that relates itself to itself which is, to repeat, we live in relation to our moods. We can take them one way or the other. The downcast individual who is free of despair, will relate himself to his funk, will grab himself by the collar and as Kierkegaard imagines it, he could well say to himself, “My soul is in a mood, and if it continues this way, then there is in it a hostility toward me that can gain domination.” A line later, Kierkegaard suggests that the poor soul trudging beneath the black sun will “summon the earnest thought of death” will summon not his objective knowledge of death, but his answer to the question, what does it *mean* that I will die? It means in part that your days are numbered, that you should be concerned, (subjective) and take care about what kind of person you are becoming.

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The Relevance of Existentialism

Rebecca Bamford takes on the sceptic

There is a tendency to think that the history of philosophy is no longer relevant to us today -- assuming it ever has been relevant -- because it can't help us with solving problems that we face in the contemporary world. This view is becoming ever more common and problematic, as increasing numbers of universities explore swapping philosophy programs, amongst other humanities programs, for new offerings in STEM and technical, career-focused fields that seem obviously relevant to us today, such as cybersecurity and game design. Someone who takes this view of the history of philosophy -- we can call this person the philosophy-sceptic -- might propose the following argument in support of their view. Philosophers of the past didn't know about current scientific, ethical, or political issues such as climate change, designer babies, fake news, or Brexit. Therefore, the history of philosophy can't offer us all that much by way of conceptual resources to help us to solve these problems. Hence, by extension, the history of philosophy isn't relevant to us today.

The history of existentialism may be better placed than the history of philosophy as a whole to provide a more satisfying response to the philosophy-sceptic. Existentialist philosophers including Kierkegaard and Ni-

etzsche, as well as Sartre and Beauvoir, have consistently framed existentialist philosophy as a way of seeking meaning in life, and also as a way of examining and responding effectively to problems or concerns that arise for us in and through our lived experiences. Existential philosophers in the European intellectual tradition therefore tend to be strongly concerned with the question of authenticity: how we stand in relation to ourselves as fundamentally responsible for our projects and our values, individually, and in our relations with other people. If we do not find a satisfying way of answering this question of authenticity, then we end up living inauthentically. For existentialist philosophers, an inauthentic way of living is not simply a conceptual failure: it is detrimental to us in practical ways.

Philosophy
“always comes too late”

Nietzsche was particularly concerned with the negative health effects of inauthentic living, on an individual and on a cultural level. He is one of the few existentialist philosophers who received at least some formal training in healthcare; he served briefly as

a member of the Prussian medical corps in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, providing emergency care to wounded soldiers. While his experience was not extensive, it did nonetheless mark his philosophical development. He pursues answers to questions about the relationship between illness, health, and human development in his work on the free spirit, in which he attempts to counter the health-limiting effects of a form of morality that he describes as customary morality.

*Nietzsche's thinking
can be applied to specific
issues in contemporary
bioethics*

Nietzsche's active campaign against customary morality commences in his book *Dawn*. In this book, he criticises how a form of morality that is based on obedience to custom gets in the way of key aspects of human flourishing and development. The most moral person, from the perspective of customary morality, is the person who makes the largest sacrifice to custom. In so doing, the person overcomes themselves, not because of any particular benefit from the sacrifice, but rather so that custom or tradition can triumph over individuals. While self-overcoming could have a more life-affirming and positive goal, under the rule of customary morality it is life-abnegating. Those who fail to heed the demand for sacrifice may become liable to compensate their community, or for their community to exact some form of revenge upon them,

because of their individual transgressive actions. Instead of this, Nietzsche proposes that those individuals who are able should to take responsibility for their own health, by making themselves into the sources of their own values, rather than relying upon received social authorities, such as priests, or doctors, or teachers, to tell them what they ought to value. His concern for the negative health effects of inauthentic life prompt him to experiment with setting up new customs or traditions, which he actively encourages his readers to try for themselves.

The philosophy-sceptic might worry that Nietzsche's experimentation with values in order to avoid the unhealthy limitations of inauthentic life sounds vague and impractical, especially with regard to the concerns of contemporary medicine and healthcare. However, it is certainly the case that Nietzsche's thinking can be applied to specific issues in contemporary bioethics; this is unsurprising given that value identification and creation is both a core characteristic of Nietzsche's thought as well as an essential feature of contemporary healthcare. Just as one example, Nietzsche's account of free death facilitates a valuable contribution to the debate surrounding our moral uncertainty concerning physician-assisted dying. In *Dawn*, and in his later book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche distinguishes between the *end* of a life -- the death of a person -- and the *goal* of a life -- the particular spirit and quality that characterise that person's life. As he writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,

“Free for death and free in death, a sacred Nay-sayer when it is no longer time for Yea: thus is his understanding of

death and life.

That your dying be no blasphemy against humans and earth, my friends: that is what I ask from the honey of your souls.”

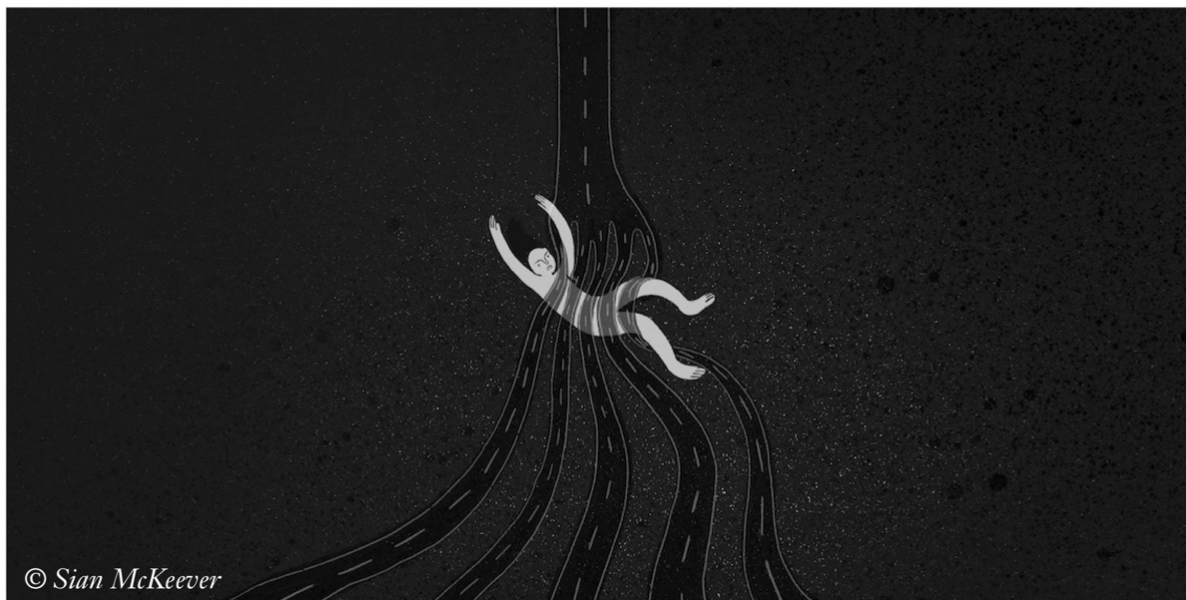
Instead of seeing death as the end of a person’s life, the text prompts us to imagine death as a consummation of life. This, Nietzsche indicates, would enable us to liberate ourselves from imposed value assessments concerning death and dying, and would help us to pursue our own values, and thereby to live more authentically. Death on Nietzsche’s account need not necessarily be life-negating, but may instead be understood as life-affirming, in the sense of constituting a consummation of the values to which a person has committed themselves during their life. This helps us to appreciate why someone with a terminal illness may wish to seek physician aid in dying: not in opposition to life, but as a fulfilment of their life’s goals. Not everyone will seek such an option, but Nietzsche’s emphasis on living authentically as a matter of taking responsibility for one’s own values may help us to better appreciate why for some people, seeking physician aid in dying could count as a positive, life-affirmatory, decision. This is not a simple, top-down application of a theory, as one sometimes sees in bioethics, but rather, is a means of opening up a fresh perspective on the issue as well as facilitating a more existentially authentic way of living (and indeed, dying).

The philosophy-sceptic might, however, raise another concern. Philosophers are products of their time, and the biases and gaps in understanding inherent to their time are more than likely to be reflected in their

work. Perpetuating or glossing over past injustices by using historically-situated conceptual tools is not defensible. Neither is the perpetuation of problematic biases and gaps in understanding through applications of the history of philosophy in solving contemporary problems. Existentialist philosophy is certainly not immune to this concern, but its resources can help sketch out a response to the philosophy-sceptic.

*Philosophers of the
past didn’t know about
current scientific,
ethical, or political
issues -- so the history of
philosophy can’t help us
solve our problems*

Black existentialism also grapples with the central existentialist question of authenticity. Black existentialism is, importantly, an activist philosophical project with respect to this question. Grounded in black people’s experiences of oppression, black existentialism seeks authenticity, justice, and liberation in a world that is (still) overfull of anti-black racism, colonialism, sexism and misogyny, as well as stereotyping and microaggressions. Health and medicine constitutes an important point of connection between black existentialism and existential philosophers of the nineteenth century such as Nietzsche, as well as providing an opportunity to highlight the innovation of black



existentialist thought.

Fanon's expertise in medicine, as well as his critical engagement with the negative effects of issues of race and colonialism, far exceeds that of Nietzsche. A veteran, qualified psychiatrist and chief of psychiatry at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria, Fanon is perhaps the most perfectly placed philosopher to speak of health from both a medical and an existentialist perspective at the same time. For Fanon, authenticity as an existential question is bound up with health. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon discusses the consequences of colonisation for psychological health, pointing out the way in which colonialism systematically disables the capacity to humanise of all those it touches, including medical professionals as well as patients. Fanon shows how racism and colonialism in the history of medicine and psychiatry has been insufficiently acknowledged and challenged, and how they continue to shape the profession of medicine, particularly through delegitimation of patients' testimony -- what phi-

losophers would today identify as a form of epistemic injustice.

As Fanon points out in *Black Skin, White Masks*, nobody is immune to the effects of racist colonialism, even including himself. Within the colonised hospital, his efforts to speak with an elderly female patient in pursuit of a diagnosis end up being characterised by instances of his talking down to her and by his condescending attitude towards her; as he puts it, he slips into these behaviours are "the stigmata of a dereliction in my relations with other people". In response, Fanon identifies that he must take responsibility for interrogating himself with regard to how he can perform his roles of psychiatrist, citizen, and self without these stigmata, in order to live authentically. He acknowledges to himself that people will ask with respect to such a task, is he an idealist? "Not at all -- it is just that the others are scum," he replies. In recognising the need for interrogation of one's own behaviour in relation to others, Fanon pursues authenticity in human relationships with others,

both as doctor and as philosopher. For him, the existentialist philosopher's question of authenticity is not one that needs to be made relevant to a specific medical context, or to be stripped of its philosophical depth in order to be rendered acceptable to biomedicine, as the philosophy-sceptic might perhaps expect. Instead, Fanon shows that the existentialist philosopher's question of authenticity arises quite naturally for medical professionals in their interactions with patients, with one another, and also within Fanon's own historical situation -- a contested, highly complex, colonial context. By extension, this question naturally arises for contemporary health professionals within their particular historical and social contexts.

The philosophy-sceptic might raise a third concern, namely that the history of existentialism, like the wider history of philosophy, is limited in terms of its relevance by virtue of its historical nature. This isn't an unusual view: several philosophers have espoused such a view of philosophy as historical, and thus as limited with respect to contemporary and future problem-solving. For instance, Hegel suggests in his Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that philosophy seems to come too late to shape the future, "to teach the world what it ought to be" -- philosophy, he says, "always comes too late". In a world in which speed, digestion of information, and constant movement are increasingly normalised through information technology, social media, and accessible travel around the world, the historian of existential philosophy might appear only to plod, to regurgitate, and to retread the same old ground, rather than to offer anything much that is new. Existential ques-

tions might not therefore appear particularly valuable from the perspective of the philosophy-sceptic, other than as a form of intellectual indulgence, however engaging.

Yet here, the philosophy-sceptic relies on the unsafe assumption that philosophical thought cannot be active. In thinking, writing, and talking about ways of living that are more authentic, responsible, and free, existentialist philosophers also at the same time act on us. Like Nietzsche, black existentialist philosophers such as Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, and Audre Lorde, didn't merely think or reflect in the abstract on problems of injustice and on ways of exploring authenticity: they aimed to provoke us, as part of the wider project of pursuing more authentic ways of living, and of making these ways of living more accessible to others. Considered as a form of active provocation, existential philosophy is a stimulus to our critical understanding of our own and society's values and to our consciousness of problems of injustice and specific forms of oppression, as well as to our social and physical situation in relation to these problems. Existential philosophy is not simply reactive, because it is not simply a reflection on the past -- it is also a stimulus to action in direct response to contemporary problems. As such, it has an important capacity to shape the future.

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(M)Existentialism

*Carlos Alberto Sánchez views the habitat of
Emilio Uranga's thinking*

A controversial figure in the history of twentieth-century Mexican philosophy (a controversy the details of which I cannot get into here), Emilio Uranga (1921-1988) articulates what we could call Existentialism “*a la Mexicana*”, Mexican existentialism, or (M)existentialism. Uranga’s (M)existentialism, like its French or German varieties, is rooted in the notion that human existence is a never-ending project of precarious and uncertain becoming and overcoming. Also like its European counterparts, (M)existentialism forms itself around certain metaphysical oppositions like identity and difference, universality and particularity, and, crucially, essence and existence.

Existentialism legitimizes the philosophical concern for Mexico's uniqueness

The socio-cultural entity recognised historically and politically as “Mexico” lends a non-negotiable material ground to (M)existentialism. In fact, Uranga’s philosophising emerges from the suspicion that philosophical universality and generality are themselves historical constructs serving the interests of European colonial power. Thus, he

says in his *Análisis del ser del mexicano* (1952), “we are not certain of the existence of man in general ...[or of] what passes itself off as man in general, namely, generalized European humanity.” The movement away from this doubtful “man in general” requires a return to origins, that is, to Uranga’s own, particular, *lived circumstance*, where the generalisations of European philosophy will not always fit.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty visited Mexico City in the spring of 1947 at the invitation of Mexico City’s burgeoning existentialist community. In the aftermath of that occasion, Uranga published a reflection on a conversation with Merleau-Ponty in a Mexico City newspaper of the day. In that column, “Dialogo con Merleau-Ponty,” Uranga writes:

“Definitively, what decides the value of existentialism is its capacity to lend ground to a systematic description of human existence, but not of human existence in the abstract, but of a situated human existence, in a situation, of a human existence located in a determinate geographic *habitat*, in a social and cultural space also determined and with a precise historical legacy.”

In this brief articulation of the “value of existentialism” we find the *reasons* as to *why*

and *how* existentialism appealed to Mexican philosophers, and specifically to Uranga himself. Regarding the “why”, it was the European philosophical position that held the most promise for a proper philosophical encounter with the Mexican circumstance, or what Uranga calls, the “determinate geographic habitat”. That he refers to the circumstance as a “habitat” seeks to suggest the complexity of Mexico as both a national-geographic space and as an idea (for writers, artists, politics, philosophy, etc.). “Habitat”, from Latin, *habitare*, “to dwell”, or to *inhabit*, refers to the dwelling-place or habitation of individuals and communities. It is the place where one thinks, builds, lives, and dies. But more than dwelling *in* or *inhabiting* the habitat, the habitat itself also *inhabits* persons through social and cultural sanctions, histories, habits, and the internalisations of experiential modes of being belonging to the determinate habitation. For Uranga, existentialism presents itself as the “capacity” to engage the habitat, in which one dwells and which dwells in one, so as to reveal those modes of being.

With this focus on a determine habitat, or circumstance, the value of existentialism for Mexican philosophers is thus its promise to legitimate the philosophical concern for Mexico’s *uniqueness* (reflected primarily in its history and customs). This is, indeed, what Mexican existentialists like Uranga heard in the existentialist mantra that says “essence precedes existence”, namely, that *that which is particularly Mexican* takes priority over *that which is generally human*, or, said differently, they heard a justification for the privileging of the concrete over the abstract, the particular over the universal, and the contingent over the permanent.

The truths that existential analysis promised to legitimate would not be those that reason or rational processes would legitimate; these would be truths legitimated in immediately *lived experiences*, a source of epistemic and philosophical justification Uranga calls “corazonadas”.

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Corazonada literally translates to “intuition”, or “a feeling”, or “a presentiment”. However, the word comes from “Corazon”, Spanish for “heart”. Thus, a *corazonada* is something relating to the heart. More than intuition understood in the philosophical sense, it means a *feeling* rooted in heartfelt certainty. Unlike in the Western tradition, especially as we find it in Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, the intuition that “corazonada” mirrors is less mental and more bodily, more emotive, reminding one of Pascal’s oft quoted truth that “the heart has its reasons”. A “corazonada” is thus *a reason of the heart*, a “heartfelt intimation” or, even, an “emotive intuition”.

Corazonadas grant access to the mysteries of Mexican being; they are heartfelt intimations that reveal the secrets of existence. Its echoes to Pascal are not addressed

by Uranga or by other Mexican existentialists who gestured to it, but they are certainly clear. The upside of using *corazonadas* as sources of truth, moreover, is that the emotional *habitat* or circumstance is as significant as the material habitat or circumstance, so that those *modes of being a Mexican* are given immediately to anyone who can invest, or inhabit, or dwell, in the Mexican circumstance. Uranga calls his *corazonada*-influenced methodology “auscultation”, a term that in other contexts refers to the act of carefully listening to the human body so as to reveal its internal processes. In (M) existentialism, auscultation is the method whereby the depths of Mexican being are explored with heartfelt feelings and emotive intuitions.

What existential auscultation reveals is that Mexican being is (1) accidental and (2) insufficient, constituted by (3) *nepantla* and (4) *zozobra*.

(1) Accidentality

With “accidentality” or “*accidentalidad*”, Uranga refers to the way that a being which is not fully substantial manifests itself in the world, namely, as *dependence* or *attachment* to something else, something greater than it, or presumed greater than it. Mexican being is accidental in its apparent dependence to Spanish and Indigenous being, in an inability to attach itself to either, and in its shipwreckedness, an intimate floundering in its own world without a steady ground onto which to stand. Mexicans, in their being, thus exist as accidents of European conquest, colonisation, and philosophy; existence shows itself as having been intrinsically and historically determined by a contrast to a European self-conception and worl-

dvew that thinks of itself as fully formed, permanent, and substantial. That is, before the Spaniard, who presents himself as stability, permanence, and universality itself, the Mexican is a chance attachment, an incidental part of a greater whole, an *accident*.

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Ultimately, Uranga will conclude that “accidentality” defines all human beings in their being; he concludes that we are all floundering, trying to hold on to something that’s more permanent than we are, trying to find an anchor, seeking to attach ourselves to what deems itself greater than ourselves. Accidentality, it turns out, is an aspect of the human condition. That it shows itself more noticeable in the Mexican is merely a result of Uranga’s subject position and his method, namely, an auscultatory analysis sourced by the most immediate.

(2) Insufficiency

Being aware of one’s accidentality frees one from the false delusion of one’s importance, permanence, or what Uranga calls “substantiality”. The revelation of our accidentality also points to our insubstantiality, to our “insufficiency”. For Uranga, this means that at the root of their being, Mexicans are not *sufficient* in their being, they are not *sub-*

stantial. The Spaniard, he argues, historically presented himself as permanence itself, as historically sufficient and ontologically substantial -- as lacking nothing. This was a false and misleading self-understanding to be sure, but one rooted in the historical confrontation between colonisers and their subjects. That the Mexican, as indigenous or mestizo, has historically been thought only as a subject of or in relation to a colonising other makes the Mexican an (historical) accidental property of that other. Thus, what is of interest to the Mexican existentialist perspective is not that the Mexican is thrown into a world that he did play a role in creating and for which he must now be responsible; what is of interest is that he is thrown into this world *as accident* and insufficiency, a situation from which he must then confront the world he did not play a role in creating and to which he must now be responsibly committed.

(3) Nepantla

“Nepantla” refers to an existence that is lived in between two worlds -- between two modes of existence that stand at extremes to one another. Uranga adopts the term from the writings of the sixteenth-century Dominican friar, Diego Durán. The key passage is found as an epigraph to Uranga’s *Análisis del ser del mexicano*. The epigraph quotes Durán, who records a conversation with an Indigenous man who has squandered all of his hard-earned money on a large, lavish, *boda* (or wedding) to which he has invited the entire town. Durán, perhaps while taking the man’s confession, reprimands the man for the carelessness of his spending, which could have, perhaps, better served the interests of the church or the

poor. The indigenous man replies to Durán as follows: “Father, don’t be alarmed ... we are still *nepantla*.” Durán goes on to explain that *nepantla* translates to “middle”, and that the Indigenous man meant to say that, unlike Durán, they (the Indigenous people) existed in the “middle” of two different cultures, or two “laws”, the Christian and the Pre-Hispanic Indigenous, which meant that they were not (by the middle sixteenth century at least) fully committed to either, that they were “neutral”, and could thus live out actions that would seem *alarming* to the Western mind, such as squander their resources on a celebration of community (the “*boda*”) rather than doing with those resources what would be most “reasonable”, namely, dedicating their resources to a more acceptable utilitarian purpose.

*Mexican being is
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attach itself to either*

Uranga accepts Durán’s translation and interprets *nepantla* as that middle non-ground in which the modern Mexican exists as constituted by *both* European and Indigenous forms of life yet uncommitted to *neither*, a phenomenon that explains a fundamental neutrality to or flight from ideals essential to European life (for instance, essentialism or universalism in philosophy)



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or those that define Indigenous life and history (for instance, pre-Hispanic theology or metaphysics). *Nepantla* as the middle, the in-between, or the uncentring centre is the point over which Mexican being hovers as it swings to and fro the different laws and extremes that frame its possibilities. This makes Mexican being and identity dynamic rather than static, defined by a perpetual movement and migration from extremes to center and from center to peripheries, never settled in “one at the expense of the other”. *Nepantla* thus designates the unsettledness of Mexican being, their in-betweenness regarding two distinct possibilities of existence. *Nepantla* is a state of being in which one is denied the purity of extremes, the state of being abandoned in the contaminated space of two overlapping modes of existence; *nepantla* is *to be* perpetually in the middle.

The movement of a being in who is “still *nepantla*”, is “*zozobra*”, a term that Uranga borrows from that the Mexican poet Ramón López Velarde.

(4) *Zozobra*

Zozobra is closely related to what European existentialist have called “anxiety”. It is the name for the *feeling* of being groundless, in the no-where between this and that history, this and that culture, or this and that identity -- a being in *nepantla*. *Zozobra* names the anxiety of not knowing where one stands at any one time. Uranga defines *zozobra* as follows: “a not knowing on which [extreme] to depend on, or what is the same, a dependence on the two extremes [of our identity] ... a grasping at both ends of the chain.”

Zozobra constitutes the interiority of Mexican existence. But, it is also an exis-

tential characteristic that defines the human being *in general* as accident. Because Mexicans are in a more familiar and thus proximal position to *zozobra* (and to accidental-ty and *nepantla*), Uranga makes the further point that the being that defines the being of the Mexican is also the being that defines the human, so that the human *should* model itself (in attitudes and existential comportment) to the Mexican, an affirmation meant to suggest that Mexican existence should be attended to by all.

*Zozobra is closely
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The concept of *zozobra*, along with *nepantla*, is not foreign to philosophy in the Anglophone world. They are operative concepts in contemporary Latina feminism (cf. Gloria Anzaldua) and thematic in Aztec philosophy (see, James Maffie). Although *zozobra* describes what in European existential phenomenology is referred to as “anxiety” or “angst” (see Heidegger) or “nausea” (Sartre), its untranslatability has to do with the fact that in Uranga and Velarde, *zozobra* is thought to be more than anxiety or nausea; it is a complex feeling that includes in itself a consciousness of accident, insufficiency, groundlessness and loss; and more than that, it is also the condition for the possibility of these feelings and, as such, it is an aspect of the human condition (he calls it a “bare skeleton” that can be filled with his-

torically or culturally-specific sentiments).

That the Mexican person is accidental and insufficient or that nepantla and zozobra define the Mexican's manner of being, does not mean that life is meaningless. It is not a *reason* to forgo the call of existence itself and sink into the hopelessness and despair of those famed existentialist anti-heroes one finds in Camus' *The Stranger* or in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It does not mean that because she is accident the Mexican should forgo all commitment and responsibility. On the contrary, insufficiency and accident, by pointing to the fragility and finitude of human existence, call on us to live fuller, more loving, and more generous lives; that is, consciousness of this insufficiency and accident calls on us to take responsibility for the other by articulating, on her behalf, the urgency to pursue a genuine and authentic existence and the necessity to forgo the impossible assimilation of purity and perfection. Thus, Uranga suggests that Mexicans, in living lives that, in their performance, affirm insufficiency and accidentality as existential truths, are closer than other human beings to authenticity and truth.

Uranga's (M)existentialism is a project that describes the finitude, fragility, and groundlessness of existence (accident, insufficiency, and napantla), as well as the manner in which this existential condition is navigated and confronted (zozobra). However, it is also meant to bring about a consciousness of generosity that includes within itself, what we could call, a moral orientation. In other words, the move that follows recognition of the Mexican existential condition is a move outward, as he puts it, "the getting out of insular consciousness so as to arrive at

community consciousness".

It does not escape Mexican philosophers that a thinking of totality, a thinking that transcends contingency and place, has been the hallmark of philosophy since it's naming by the Greeks. But (M)existentialists, among them Uranga, have come to understand that a thinking that thinks totality is ultimately alienated from the specificity of its emergence. In the process of grasping at the universal -- what they are told philosophy has to be -- they've discovered that their thoughts are incapable of letting go of their situated existence, an incapacity (call it loyalty) that forces a return of thinking to its place, to the *determinate geographic habitat*.

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Getting Emotional

Gary Cox on existentialism, psychology and the emotions

Existentialists recognise that much of a person's emotional life is Other related, an aspect of what they call our *being-for-others*. They recognise that many if not most of a person's emotions are different ways in which he encounters other people and realises himself as a being for the Other.

How much of an emotional life does a solitary person actually have or need? Perhaps the so-called emotion of elation that people feel when enjoying solitude well away from other people is not so much an emotion as a sense of freedom from emotion; a transcendence of cloying, irksome Other related feelings like self-consciousness, shame, embarrassment, anger, repulsion and disappointment.

It will be objected that not all these are necessarily Other related emotions. Disappointment, for example, is not necessarily an Other related emotion in the sense that a person can be disappointed by non-personal things like the weather. But surely, most of the disappointment people experience in their lives is due to others, just as most of the anger and irritation they experience is due to others, or more specifically, their *reaction* to others. Other people disappoint and anger us so readily precisely because we have so many practical and emotional requirements with regard to them, requirements they seldom want to fully satisfy. Other people are nothing to us if not frustrating.

As for the emotion of loneliness that the

solitary person may feel, what is this emotion but a hankering after engagement with the Other? A person often feels loneliest when he has recently been in contact with the Other, especially if that contact ended before he had his fill of it. He feels the Other's lack and so misses the Other. When a person has been alone for some time, however, the lack of the Other tends to diminish as he chooses new paths of transcendence -- ways of exercising freedom and overcoming the world -- that are not dependent on the Other.

*Most of the
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is due to others*

Returning to an empty house after a night out with friends, John always feels isolated and lonely for half an hour or so. Yet, spending a whole busy week alone in the same house he never feels isolated or lonely and doesn't miss other people at all. The once empty house is now full of him, as he is full of himself.

We often get very emotional when angry, disappointed or frustrated with ourselves. But arguably, to be angry with ourselves is always to be angry with ourselves as Oth-

er. I am performing some task and become angry with myself when I make a mess of it. The present me is angry with the me I was a moment ago for messing up and causing the present me precious time and effort to put things right.

In cursing my stupidity I curse my former self for impeding the anticipated transcendence of my present self, for causing me to suddenly find this situation, which I was smoothly transcending towards larger and more important future goals, an oppressive nuisance. Is there any need or room for what we call “emotion” when we are thoroughly absorbed in a task and our transcendence is smooth? Shortly, we will look at the view that emotion occurs when a situation, a task, at least temporarily, becomes too difficult for a person to cope with.

Interestingly, existentialists argue that emotions are not actually states of being that we possess or that possess us. Rather, we must always aim at a particular emotion without ever being able to be at one with it. As essentially ambiguous and indeterminate beings, it is never possible for us to become anything in the mode of being it. We can only ever aim at what we are, play at what we are and so on. It is therefore impossible for a person to achieve an emotional state such that they become unified with that emotional state.

The sad person, for example, strives to be in himself what in actual fact he must make himself be. Initially, the claim that a sad person is not sad in the mode of *being* sad is likely to meet with greater resistance than the claim that we are not identical with what we do. The fact that a banker so evidently plays at being a banker is sufficient to reveal that he is not really a banker in the mode of

being one. Surely though, if a person is sad then he is sad in the mode of being what he is; surely he is to be identified with his emotional state. To hold the view that a person is identical with his emotional state, however, is to fail to grasp that consciousness is always other than itself and never self-identical. The nature of consciousness implies that there is no such *thing* as an emotional state.

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In everyday life it is not misleading to speak of a person being in a certain emotional state. When, in an everyday situation, a person behaving hysterically is described as being “in an hysterical state”, the intention is simply to convey an image of a distraught person who is screaming, crying and tearing at his hair. Many psychologists, however, are misled by such talk. Believing that mental and emotional phenomena have a certain objective existence, they take the expression literally and go in search of the state of hysteria in itself; its psychological and physiological essence. But hysteria has no essence; hysteria *is* hysterical behaviour.

What is true of temporary emotional states like hysteria is also true of enduring mental conditions like schizophrenia. Criticising traditional psychology, R. D. Laing points out that having a mental condition like schizophrenia is not like having a cold.



“No one *has* schizophrenia, like having a cold. The patient has not ‘got’ schizophrenia. He is schizophrenic”.

Psychologists will object that many emotional states do have at least a physiological essence. Tourette’s syndrome, for example, which is characterised by sudden, repetitive movements and utterances, is the result of certain neurochemical irregularities in the brain. However, that a person is subject by virtue of the facticity of his biology to involuntary spasms of aggressive behaviour, to a failure of aggression inhibition, does not mean that within his biology there exists the substantial being-in-itself of aggression.

Although the Tourette’s sufferer behaves aggressively due to physiological causes beyond his control, and is not, therefore, responsible for his actions, his aggression can no more be separated from his behaviour than a university can be separated from the buildings and functions that comprise it.

There is no such *thing* as sadness. The sad person is not a sad thing in the way that a crow is a black thing. Sadness is rather the transcendent meaning of a certain set of gestures; the meaning of a certain slumped, listless demeanour. As sadness is nothing but the meaning of postures that a person must re-adopt moment by moment, he can-

not take possession of his sadness. He can no more take possession of his sadness and be united with it than he can be united with himself.

Sadness is not a being but a conduct; the conduct of a person who makes himself sad. The requirement of having to be perpetually at a distance from himself in order to make himself sad means that he can never be sad in the manner of being what he is. As Sartre says, "If I make myself sad, it is because I am not sad -- the being of the sadness escapes me by and in the very act by which I affect myself with it".

The sad person is not a sad thing in the way that a crow is a black thing -- sadness is the transcendent meaning of a certain set of gestures

A person cannot give sadness to himself as he can give a gift to another. Precisely because he exists as that which always *strives* to be fixed and substantial, he cannot *be* fixed and substantial. In so far as his being is to be what he is not, he is sad only in so far as he makes himself sad and reflects upon himself as sad. His sadness is not an object in consciousness reflected on; it exists entirely in and through an act of self-reflection.

The sadness of another, especially when portrayed in art, theatre or film, appears to a person to have more substance than his own. As his sadness consists only in an ir-resolute commitment to be sad he may envy

the sadness of others in so far as their sadness appears to him to be sadness in itself. He too would like to be the personification of sadness: a weeping, dejected angel of melancholia pictured by an artist. Far from wanting to snap-out of his sadness, he will want, for example, to honour a lost lover with a sadness that is the epitome of despair. Or, in bad faith, he will strive to become his sadness and despair in order to escape his freedom to hope that his lover will return; a hope that tortures him with apprehension as it repeatedly raises him up only to cast him down. However, because sadness is only the conduct of a person who makes himself sad, he can never, so to speak, be sad enough.

This view of sadness reveals the full extent to which, according to Sartre, "Man is a useless passion". Each person is such a useless passion that he must despair even of becoming, as a last desperate means of escaping his free transcendence, a being in despair in the mode of being what he is.

Sartre's position echoes that of Kierkegaard. In *The Sickness unto Death* Kierkegaard considers a girl who despairs over the loss of her lover: "Just try now, just try saying to such a girl, 'You are consuming yourself,' and you will hear her answer, 'O, but the torment is simply that I cannot do that'". The girl has to be herself as despairing, rather than escape herself by having herself consumed by despair. She despairs of being at one with her despair as a means of escaping her consciousness of despair.

In 1939 Sartre published a book called *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*. Although very short, this book contains many powerful insights into the nature of emotion that are well worth exploring.

Sartre advocates a philosophical meth-

od of investigating emotion as opposed to a psychological one. The phenomenon of emotion, he argues, can only be properly understood by subjecting it to a *phenomenological reduction* that thoroughly analyses it and grasps its true essence.

*Classic theories of
emotion are inadequate
because they fail to
recognise the role that
consciousness plays*

The problem with psychology, as opposed to phenomenology, is that it fails to grasp the essential features of phenomena and instead simply lists facts about phenomena that appear as accidental. Psychologists can only say that there is emotion, that it involves certain behaviours in certain situations. They cannot explain why there is emotion, what it signifies or why it is an essential aspect of human consciousness and a necessary feature of human reality.

Psychologists investigate people in situation, but phenomenology investigates what it is for people to be situated. Emotion is an inalienable feature of human situatedness and human reality, it belongs essentially to our way of being in the world and is not the accidental addition to human reality that psychology makes it appear.

Sartre offers psychology the insights of phenomenology in the hope that psychology will derive a method from phenomenology that will enable it to do more than simply accumulate observational data that

it hopes to interpret in future through the accumulation of yet more data. Pure psychology underpinned by phenomenological psychology would be able to comprehend the essential significance of psychological phenomena by identifying them as aspects of a coherent whole. Pure psychology, that great, barren, reductionist, pseudo-science that enthralled the masses by pretending to have the power to help people understand each other *as people*, has, as yet, largely failed to take up Sartre's generous offer.

In moving towards an account of his own phenomenological theory of emotions, Sartre begins by critically examining the classic theories of emotion put forward by William James, Pierre Janet and Tamara Dembo respectively.

James endorses the *peripheric* theory of emotions, arguing that emotion is consciousness of physiological manifestations. A person feels sad, for example, because he weeps, rather than vice versa. If emotion was simply awareness of physiological manifestations, however, then different emotions could not be associated with the same physiological manifestations in the way that they are. Weeping accompanies relief as well as sadness and the fact that the physiological manifestations of joy and anger differ only in intensity does not mean that anger is a greater intensity of joy. The central weakness of the peripheric theory is that it overlooks the fact that an emotion is first and foremost consciousness of feeling that emotion and not simply consciousness of weeping or laughing; it has *meaning*, it is a certain way or relating to the world.

Janet's theory is an improvement on James' as it recognises that emotion is not simply an awareness of physiological distur-



bance but a *behaviour*. Janet views emotion as a behaviour of defeat that serves to reduce tension. For example, a girl breaks down in tears rather than discuss her case with her doctor.

Sartre agrees with Janet that emotion is a behaviour of defeat, but criticises him for not appreciating that defeated behaviour can only be such if consciousness has conferred that meaning upon it through its awareness of the possibility of an alternative, superior, undefeated behaviour. For Janet, the girl simply begins to cry as an automatic reaction to the situation in which she finds herself. For Sartre, the girl's action is and must be deliberate. She cries in order to avoid talking to the doctor, although in bad faith she refuses to recognise that this is her motive or indeed that she has any motive.

Dembo, whose theory is closest to Sartre's own, holds that emotion is an inferior response to a situation that may occur when a superior response has failed. For example, a person becomes angry and kicks the machine he has failed to fix. Sartre agrees with Dembo that emotion is an inferior response to a situation that occurs when a superior response has failed, but argues that Dembo fails to acknowledge the significance of the role played by consciousness in the change of response. One form of behaviour cannot replace another unless consciousness presents the new behaviour to itself as a possible, if inferior, alternative to the present behaviour.

To summarise: All three classic theories of emotion are inadequate because they fail to recognise or sufficiently acknowledge the essential role that consciousness and intention play in the emotions.

Sartre moves on to critically examine the

psychoanalytic theory of emotion put forward by Freud and his followers. Arguing for a position that has become central to the theory and practice of *existential psychoanalysis*, Sartre contends that the traditional psychoanalytic distinction between consciousness and the unconscious, the domain of primitive drives and desires, is nonsensical in various ways.

Emotions are a way of apprehending the world

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre argues that the ego would actually have to be conscious of the memories and desires it was imprisoning in the subconscious, the memories and desires it was *repressing*, in order to act as a discerning censor. "In a word, how could the censor discern the impulses needing to be repressed without being conscious of discerning them?". In *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* he questions the very possibility of a relationship between consciousness and an unconscious.

Freudian psychoanalysis claims that emotion is a phenomenon of consciousness, but as Sartre points out, in Freudian psychoanalysis emotion is *essentially* "the symbolic realization of a desire repressed by the censor". The desire, being repressed, plays no part in its symbolic realization as an emotion. The emotion, then, despite the claims of Freudian psychoanalysis, is only what it appears to consciousness to be, anger, fear and so on. Freudian psychoanalysis considers emotion to be a signifier of whatever lurks in the unconscious, but as Sartre points out, the signifier is entirely cut off

from what is signified.

Freudian psychoanalysis, argues Sartre, treats consciousness as a passive phenomenon, receiving and being the signification of meanings from outside without even knowing what they mean. But consciousness is not a passive phenomenon. It is entirely active, it makes itself, it is nothing but consciousness of being conscious of the world. As such, whatever meanings consciousness signifies are its own meanings, meanings *for* consciousness, not meanings that are received from “behind” or “beneath” consciousness that have no meaning for consciousness.

The great error of Freudian psychoanalysis is that it interrogates consciousness from the outside, treating it as a passive collection of signs, indicators and traces that have their meaning and significance elsewhere. In fundamentally misrepresenting the nature of consciousness psychoanalysis overlooks the fact that the significance of emotion lies within consciousness, that consciousness is itself “the *signification* and what is *signified*”. Phenomenology, unlike Freudian psychoanalysis, undertakes to interrogate consciousness itself -- as a relation to the world and to itself -- for the meaning of emotion.

In outlining his own view of emotion, Sartre argues that although people can always consciously reflect on their emotions, emotion is not originally or primarily a phenomenon of reflection, a state of mind. Emotional consciousness, argues Sartre, is first and foremost consciousness *of* the world. Emotions are intentional, they are a way of apprehending the world. For every emotion there is the object of that emotion, every emotion is directedness towards its

object and exists as a relationship with its object. The emotional person and the object of his emotion are wholly bound together. To be frightened is to be afraid *of* something, to be angry is to be angry *with* something, to be joyful is to be joyful *about* something and so on.

Sartre considers the kind of relationship to the world that emotion is and what is common to all the diverse occasions when emotion occurs. The world presents itself as a system of instrumentality that people utilize to achieve their goals. There is always a degree of difficulty involved in utilizing any system, always the possibility of obstacles and pitfalls arising that hinder progress. Difficulty manifests itself as a quality of the world itself. Sartre describes objects as *exigent*, they are exacting and demanding, their potentialities can only be realised by overcoming certain difficulties. Emotion occurs when the world becomes too difficult for a person to cope with.

*In Sartre's view,
all emotions are
functional*

Finding all ways of acting in the instrumental world barred by difficulty, a person spontaneously and non-reflectively wills the transformation of the world from a world governed by causal processes to a world governed by *magic* where causal processes no longer apply. Emotion is a spontaneous attitude to a situation that aims to magically transform that situation in such a way that it suddenly no longer presents an insurmount-

able difficulty or threat to the consciousness of the person concerned.

A person faced with great danger, for example, may faint as a means of removing that danger from his conscious grasp, even though fainting does not normally serve to remove a danger in any real, practical sense. Similarly, a person may angrily curse, hit or throw a tool that is proving difficult or impossible to utilise, as though the world had magically become a place where the difficulty presented by a tool could be removed by these “means”.

In Sartre’s view, all emotions are functional. Anger is evidently functional but, on the face of it, joy does not seem to fit this description. Unlike an angry or frightened person, surely a joyful person does not need to magically transform his situation; surely he wants his situation to be as it is with its object or source of joy secured? Sartre distinguishes emotional joy from the joyful feeling that results from adapting to the world and achieving temporary equilibrium with it.

Emotional joy occurs precisely because the object or source of joy is not yet secured and if it is secured will only be obtained by degrees and never as an instantaneous totality. Sartre considers a man who is told that he has won a large sum of money. The man is restless with joy in anticipation of something the pleasure of which will only come to him over time through countless details. “He cannot keep still, makes innumerable plans, begins to do things which he immediately abandons etc. For in fact this joy has been called up by an apparition of the object of his desires”. His joy expresses *impatience* for the object of his desires, rather than satisfied possession of that object.

Sartre also considers a man who dances with joy because a woman has said she loves him. In dancing, the man turns his mind away from the woman herself and from the difficulties of actually possessing and sustaining her love. He takes a rest from difficulty and uncertainty and in dancing mimes his magically achieved total possession of her. “Joy is magical behaviour which tries, by incantation, to realise the possession of the desired object as an instantaneous totality”. Joy, no less than sadness, anger, fear or any other emotion, is a magical behaviour that functions to miraculously transform a situation when that situation becomes too difficult for a person to deal with in a practical, unemotional way.

Gary Cox is an honorary research fellow of Birmingham University and the author of The Sartre Dictionary, How to Be an Existentialist and The Existentialist’s Guide.

The Reviews

Death. In one way or another, much of philosophy is about it, and so are several of the books and movies reviewed in this issue of *The Philosophers' Magazine*. Should children be able to make medical decisions that will likely end their lives? Margaret Betz reviews *The Children Act*, a movie that explores the question. When we die, should we be able to pass on our wealth to our children, even if the result is increasing inequality? Jason Brennan reviews Daniel Halliday's new book about inheritance.

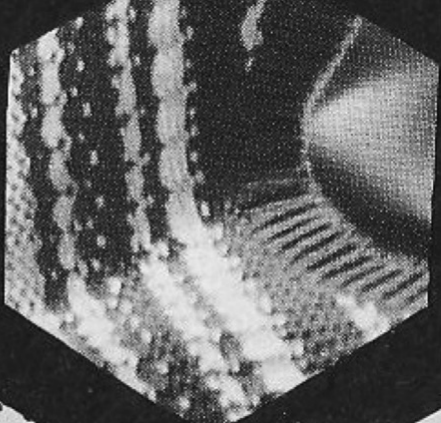
Could there be something good about putting oneself close to death's door? Jean Kazez discusses the movie *Free Solo*, about climbers who dispense with anchors and ropes, so that their skills make the difference between life and death. And speaking of mountains, Daniel Conway reviews John Kaag's new book *Hiking with Nietzsche*. He really does mean hiking in the mountains, not dangling off cliffs without ropes, but Nietzsche had a few things to say about death.

OK, philosophy is not entirely about death. Who are we, when we are alive? Georgia Warnke reviews *The Lies that Bind*, a new book about identity by Kwame Anthony Appiah. And what on earth are we really doing, when we do philosophy? Probably not preparing for death, as Socrates claimed. *Doing Philosophy*, Timothy Williamson's short introduction to the topic, is warmly reviewed by Justin Fisher.

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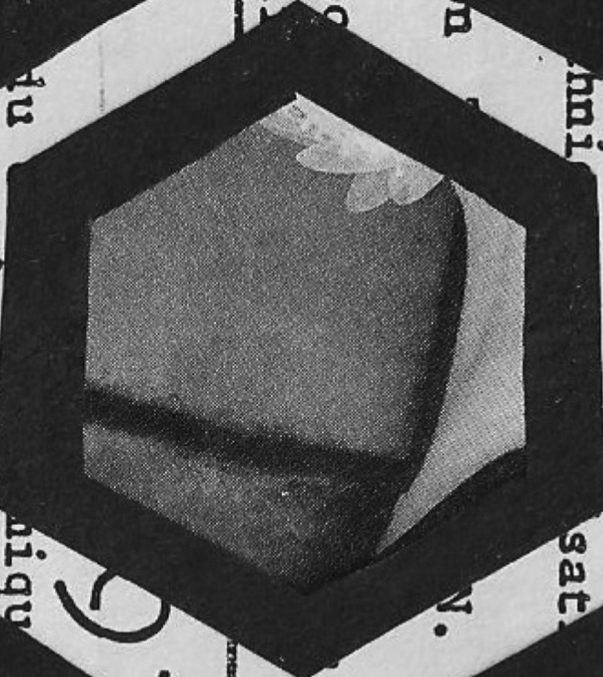


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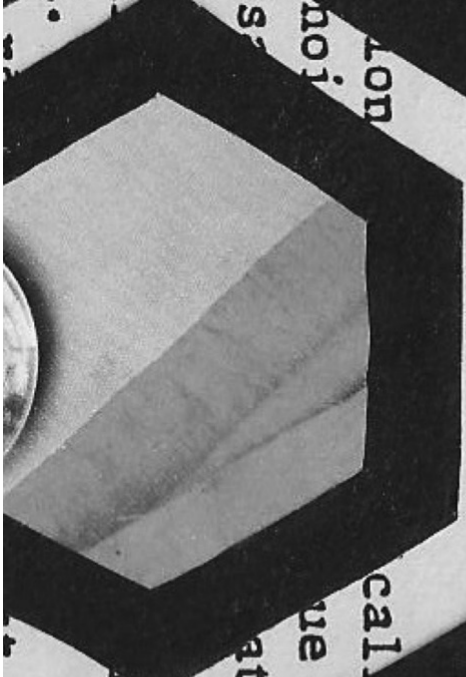


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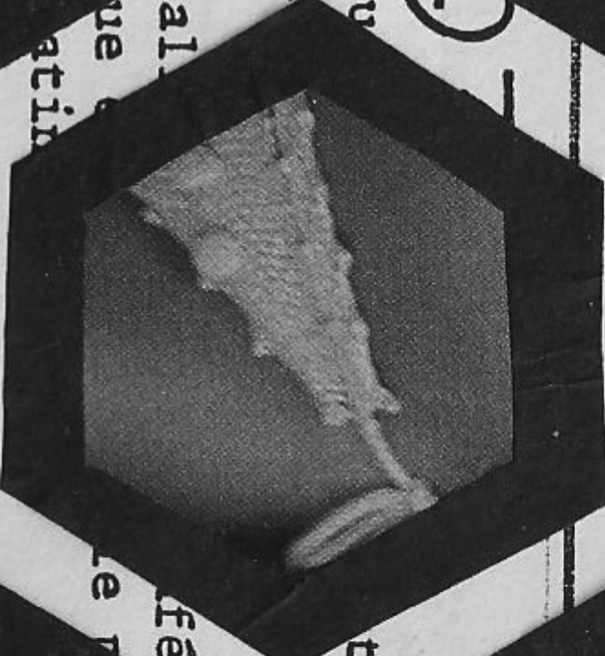
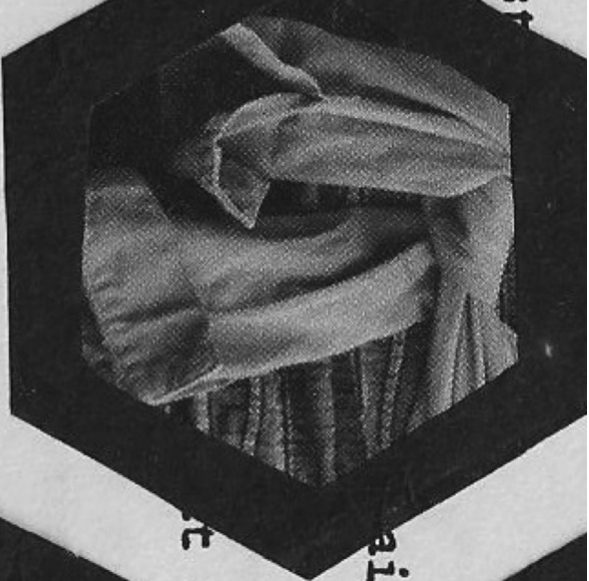


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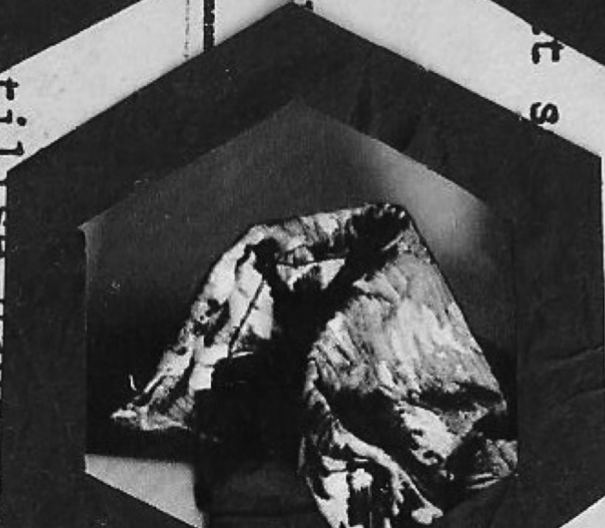


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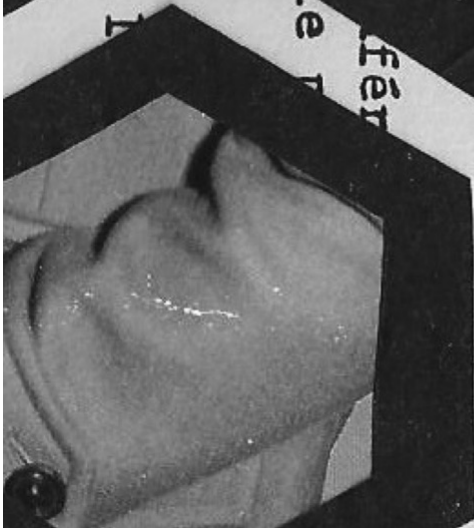
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Free Solo

Jean Kazez on a film that might make you climb the walls

Philosophers disagree about whether death is in some sense good for us. Bernard Williams famously argued that immortality isn't especially desirable. It wouldn't be particularly good for me to be able to keep baking bread for a million years, even though it's one of my favourite things to do now. The desire to bake, like all my current desires, will eventually be exhausted and extinguished. Eventually I'll be left with the kinds of desires that don't give me a reason to go on living (the desire to have a glass of water, if thirsty) or with desires so weird and un-me that I couldn't reasonably want to live long enough to fulfil them. Would I be wanting to spend my time torturing cats if I lived another million years?

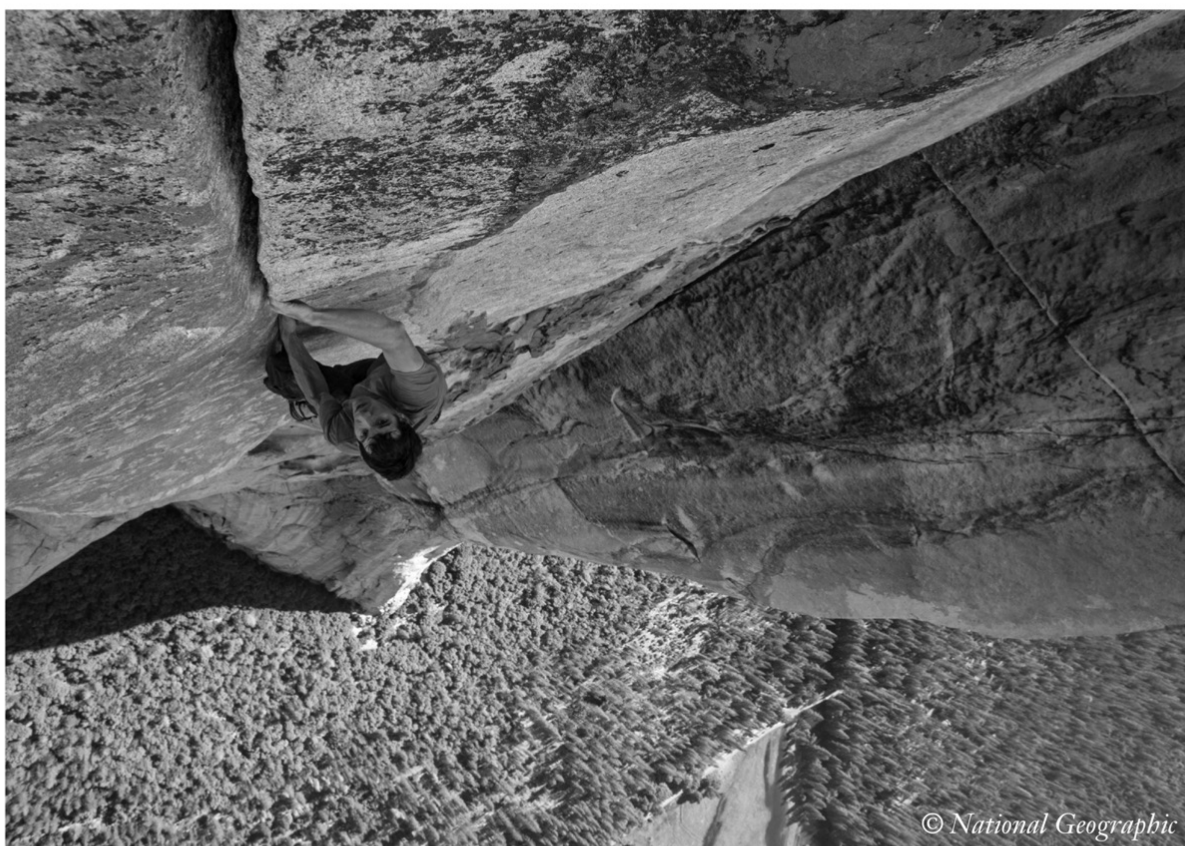
*The prospect of
eventual death provides
us with a deadline
we need to have*

Some go further, saying death is downright positive, the prospect of eventual death providing us with a deadline we need to have, to get on with our projects. There are even those who think that imminent death has its value, giving the about-to-be-deceased access to valuable feelings and insights. But that's about as far as death-affirmation usually goes.

Nobody thinks hovering at death's door is something to be pursued, let alone pursued for itself. Sure, people do choose to do dangerous things, knowing they risk dying, but it isn't typically the proximity to death that they're after. They're after getting to the top of Everest, or fighting for a worthy a cause, or trying to save someone else's life.

But then there are free-climbers, like Alex Honnold. Free-climbers climb the sheer rock faces of tall mountains without anchors and ropes. They deliberately put themselves in a position such that one tiny mistake could make them fall to their deaths. Honnold is the star of the new documentary *Free Solo*, which follows his effort to free-climb El Capitan, the massive granite rock formation in Yosemite National Park. The movie-makers -- Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin, himself a climber -- focus on both the "how?" and on the "why?" And flirting with death does seem like a part of Honnold's motivation. He seems to value experiencing his consummate skill on "Cap" as making the difference between living and dying. In fact, dozens of his climbing friends have already lost their lives.

Could it just be an autonomous, self-sufficient ascent that Honnold is after? In fact, that's not really what free soloing is. He's not like a spider who could climb up the sheer rock face independently the very first time. He's capable of self-sufficiency only after



he's been massively assisted by both gear and other people. The film shows him practicing the route with anchors and ropes and many climbing friends. Nor does it seem as if the self-sufficiency of the final ascent is exactly what he's after -- it really is a matter of his wanting to feel as if tiny differences in performance make the difference between life and death.

Then again, the experience of having death-defying skills is not all that Honnold is after. It doesn't seem as if he would want to free-climb the Empire State Building or traverse a tightrope between skyscrapers. It doesn't seem like he's going to turn into a race-car driver as his second act. These other modes of skilful death defiance don't have the element of natural grandeur and beauty -- captured so stunningly in the movie. Nor

can I imagine Honnold becoming a mercenary soldier, though at his most reflective, he likes to call himself a "warrior". He also doesn't (apparently) want to experience his skilfulness as making a life and death difference to someone else -- as a surgeon might.

Honnold seems to see himself as pathologically focused on performance and cut off from feeling as a result of his family background, but to find fault with himself is not to cease to be himself. Performance is everything, even if he seems to worry that it shouldn't be. An ebullient girlfriend enters his life at the beginning of the movie and comes to be central to the drama because she warms him up, making him more capable of feeling. Is that why Honnold suffers two falls and abandons his first attempt to solo-climb the mountain? Will he be able

to combine a happy home life with risking it all on the rock? We don't know the answer until the movie is over.

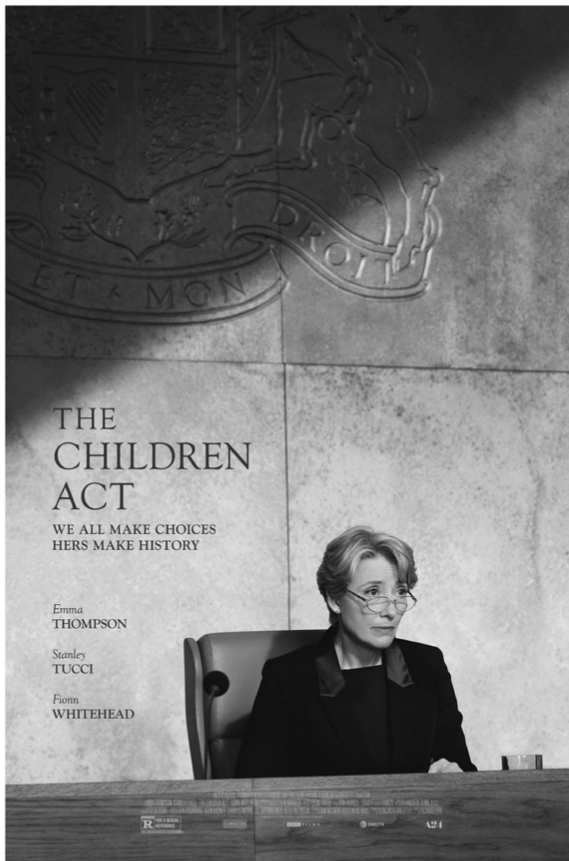
The directors are honest about their own potential role in causing Honnold to fall to his death. Being filmed could make him take more risks than he should. So they're immensely relieved that he does call off the climb the first time he attempts it. That seems to show that he answers to himself alone. Nevertheless, they decide to back off, keeping the film crew that surrounds Honnold on the rock further away from

the climber. They also decide to leave one of the most arduous parts of the climb un-filmed, so Honnold can fall off the rock in privacy -- if he was going to fall.

Watching the final climb is excruciating, even for the movie viewer who strongly suspects the movie wouldn't be in theatres if Honnold were no longer with us. It was much more painful for the camera crew. One cinematographer is repeatedly shown with his camera running but his back to the mountain. Honnold is both a spectacular climber and almost unwatchable.



© National Geographic



The Children Act is directed by Richard Eyre and stars Emma Thompson, Stanley Tucci, and Fionn Whitehead. Based on the novel by Ian McEwan.

Review by Margaret Betz

An early scene in *The Children Act* involving a philosophy lecture contextualises what is to come in the film. Philosophy professor Jack Maye (played by Stanley Tucci) cites Flaubert on the wisdom of the Roman poet Lucretius. “With the gods gone and Christ not yet come,” Jack explains, “there was a unique moment from Cicero to Marcus Aurelius when man stood alone.” Jack adds, “Before Christianity began to close the Western mind, what was briefly possi-

ble then was the fixity of the pensive gaze.” Lucretius’ wisdom and his advancement of Epicureanism are the lenses through which we are able to understand *The Children Act*’s two main characters – Fiona Maye and Adam Henry. Fiona embodies Epicureanism and Adam experiences his own brief period “between two gods”.

McEwan invites us to consider Epicurus’ advice to strive for “freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind”

The Children Act is based on the novel by Ian McEwan, who also wrote the screenplay for the film. Emma Thompson plays Fiona Maye, a high court judge in London who is Jack’s wife. Long married, they have drifted apart partly because of Fiona’s all-consuming career. She is forced to make life and death decisions for children, often with excruciating no-win outcomes. When delivering a decision regarding the separation of conjoined twins, allowing the weaker one to die, Fiona cites “logic” as her guiding principle, stating that the application of the law, and not “morals”, is the aim of the court.

Because Lucretius was a proponent of Epicureanism, McEwan invites us to consider Epicurus’ advice to strive for “freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind”. Extolling the importance of a “contented mind”, Lucretius labels prudence the “greatest good”, which will bring



a soul “free from disturbance”. To be most effective at her job, Fiona must maintain this Epicurean equanimity at all times. In order to endure the weight of her decisions, she has become practiced at approaching things with a “sober”, unemotional eye.

Fiona’s sober disposition helps her avoid becoming overwhelmed by the *gravitas* of her work, yet it predictably poses problems in her personal life. Early in the film, Jack tells Fiona that, despite loving her and wanting to stay married, he is nonetheless unhappy with their lack of intimacy and wants to pursue an affair. Jack pleads with Fiona to address the problems in their re-

lationship, but is continually met with her silence. Even in this crucial moment of her marriage, Fiona is unwilling (or unable) to let anything penetrate the wall she has built around herself.

Epicurus also famously advised against becoming paralysed with fear about the gods’ punishment, for, in truth, the gods have no real interest in us. It is against this backdrop that we’re introduced to Fiona’s next case: Adam, a 17-yearold Jehovah’s Witness in need of a blood transfusion to treat his leukaemia. Both Adam and his parents have chosen that he refuse treatment due to their belief, based on Bible passages,

that mixing blood is a “contamination”. If Adam dies, he will be rewarded with a place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Because Adam is so close in age to legally being able to make the decision himself, Fiona visits him bedside to determine if he fully understands what is at stake. He responds with steadfast commitment to his faith, but what unexpectedly emerges during their short meeting is a comfortable and warm dynamic between Fiona and Adam. Cracks appear in her prudent disposition as she spontaneously sings the lyrics to a song he plays on his guitar and as she bursts out with laughter at his response to one of her questions. Warning: spoilers below.

*She must “protect him
from his religion
and himself”*

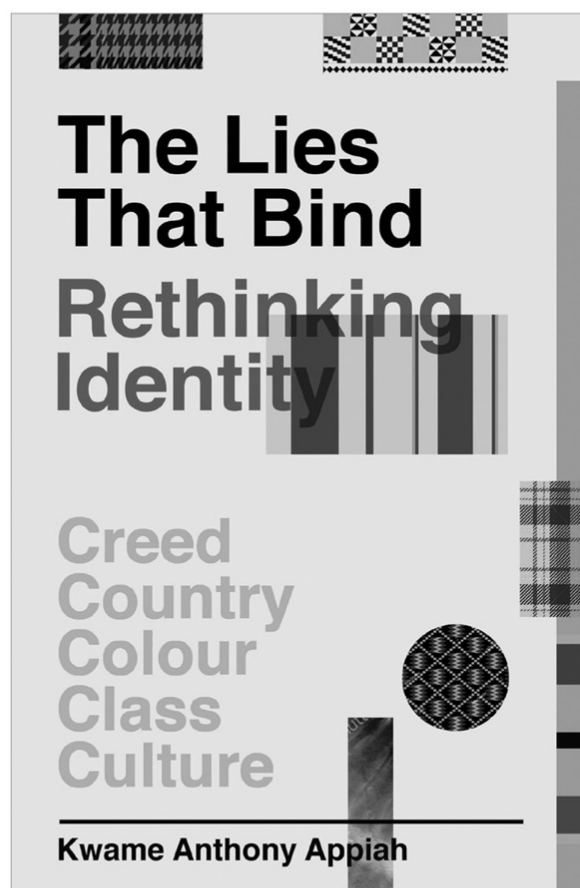
Citing the Children’s Act, which stipulates a child’s welfare is the court’s responsibility, Fiona orders that Adam undergo the blood transfusion. Just as Epicurus might, Fiona announces she must “protect him from his religion and himself”. So begins Adam’s period “between gods”, his opportunity for pursuing a “pensive gaze”. His life post-treatment is fitful and uneasy. Adam begins to question his faith and his parents’ (godlike) willingness to sacrifice their only son. To Fiona’s surprise, Adam seeks her out, requesting conversation and guidance. It is as though their brief meeting opened a door for him just a crack, and Adam wants to swing it wide open. True to form, Fiona meets Adam’s pleading mostly with silence

and her unshakeable demeanour. We realise, however, that just as their first meeting opened a door for Adam, it opened a door for her as well.

Adam’s brief period of “standing alone,” of considering deep philosophical questions that do not rely on his faith to answer, comes to an end when he slips back into illness. It is as though the floodgates have been opened for Fiona, allowing her to experience a full spectrum of emotions as tears and love pour out from her, towards both Adam and her husband. Her unruffled demeanour, her self-imposed wall, is gone.

Fiona Maye represents a stark reminder of the perils of Epicurean equanimity if it amounts to little more than a defence mechanism and a refusal to engage. Through Fiona, McEwan reminds us that Epicurean tranquillity should not come at the expense of being authentically human but, instead, to approach life’s messiness with a thoughtfully deliberate and positive attitude.

Margaret Betz teaches philosophy in the Philadelphia area. She is the author of The Hidden Philosophy of Hannah Arendt.



The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity, by Kwame Anthony Appiah (Liveright/Profile), £14.99/\$27.95

Review by Georgia Warnke

Focusing on creed, country, colour, class and culture, in *The Lies that Bind* Kwame Anthony Appiah examines the mistakes we make about identity. Our religious, national, race, class and cultural identities can matter to us and motivate us to do things together in solidarity with other members of our group. At the same time, they can set us against those with different religious, national, race, class and cultural identities and do enormous damage. How might we walk this fine line

between granting the importance of identities and mitigating their dangers? This is the question Appiah sets himself to answer – not definitively but as a contribution to a conversation.

*How might we
walk this fine line
between granting the
importance of identities
and mitigating their
dangers?*

Gender and sexual identities are not among the beginning-with-“c” identities that Appiah examines, but perplexities they involve provide him with an orientation. Identities possess three general features: they are labels we apply to ourselves and others; they form our ways of acting and behaving as well as our ideas about how we should act and behave and they affect the ways others treat us. But take questions feminists have raised about who should receive the label of a woman, questions that have recently erupted into hostile debates over whether trans women are women. If women or female human beings are those with two X chromosomes, what about not only trans women but those with one X and one Y chromosome who have androgen insensitivity syndrome and have stereotypically female features or those with two X chromosomes where maternal androgens give them stereotypically male ones? If we turn to gender characteristics and if women are meant to be more gentle than men, what

about women warriors? And what about the way one's religious, national, race, class and cultural identity shape one's female identity? What is meant to connect, say, Sudanese Muslim women with white, middle-class American women? What do female CEO's share with their worst paid female employees? Feminists have proposed different ways of conceiving of what women share: for example, overlapping and crisscrossing characteristics between women (Ann Garry); subordination along some dimension due to "observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction" (Sally Haslanger) or expectations or realities that include pregnancy or nursing (Linda Martín Alcoff).

Appiah thinks we might as well dispense with such proposals. The tendency they illustrate is to think that once a set of people acquires a certain label there is something about those people, some essence they share, that explains their similarities and justifies the label. But if we look at creed, country, colour, class and culture, what this essence is meant to be in each case remains unclear. We often think that what binds adherents of a certain religion together is their beliefs. Yet, since one can be Jewish, for example, without believing in God and since accepting all of Maimonides' thirteen principles does not make one Jewish, beliefs are clearly not the point. We often equate our nationality with an ancestry, language and set of traditions we hold in common with others of our nationality. But the attempt to align nation states with this sort of "peoplehood" is both overly exclusive, leaving off people with whom we share a nation but nothing else, and overly inclusive – take the Celts of Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland,

Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Man who share an ancestry but are not a nation. If we turn to colour, the problems with the idea of race or racial essences are well known: for one, even if some of our traits are part of our genetic heritage, we do not inherit our genes as parts of racial packages. And what is class? Appiah calls it the "four-color-map" problem of the social sciences. Marx's division of capitalists and proletarians obviously leaves out a number of people but the more variables such as wealth, status and proximity to power that one tries to account for, the more elusive the composition of class becomes – even though the goal of equality remains similarly elusive. As for culture, at least Western culture, perhaps the less said the better given what it owes to the many cultures from which it historically has tried to distinguish itself and the different tasks to which it has been set.

*Given how strident
and split our social,
political and even
cultural worlds
have become, is good
sense enough?*

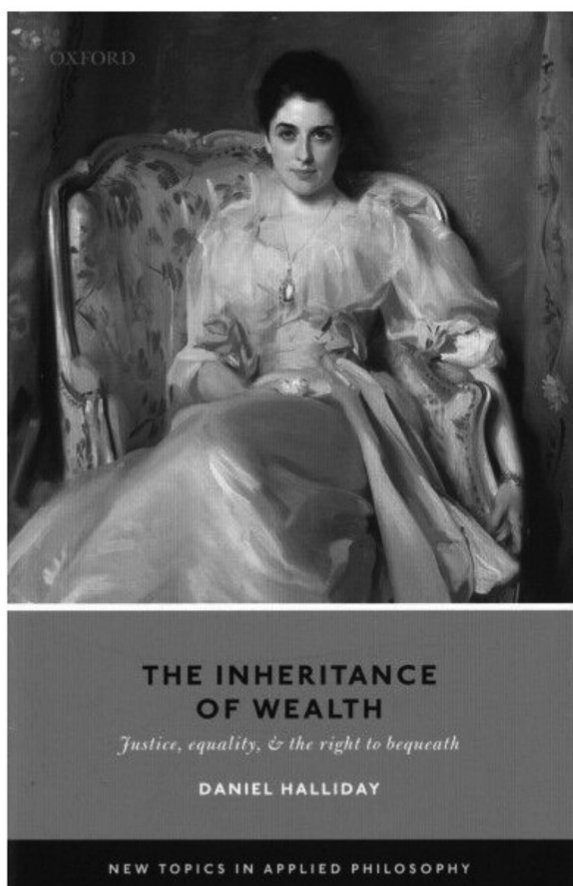
If, as Appiah argues, the thought that there is an essence or "golden nugget" to any of these identities is a nineteenth-century invention, how should we think of them and what can they still do for us? In the United States, we live in an environment of tribalism and polarisation in which our religious, gender and racial identities in-

creasingly align with our political and ideological ones, in which both social media and our segmented real world interactions cement these alignments and in which we find it more and more difficult even to fathom the views and attitudes of those outside our tribe. Indeed, when it comes to others' experiences we are cautioned against even trying to understand them: white poets such as Anders Carlson-Wee are not to try to speak in the voice of homeless African American men; white gay filmmakers such as David France ought not make films about black transgender activists. Does this identity alignment, voluntary segregation and mutual mistrust not suggest the excesses of our devotion to our identities? Might we not try to wean ourselves from our current preoccupation with them? Appiah argues that we do not need to. Instead, we can simply recognise that our identities have been and can be lived in different ways and that their meanings are open and contestable. Why set creed against creed when religious identity is not about doctrine but about practice and ritual? Why worry about cultural appropriation (as opposed to cultural respect) when cultures are always already the result of intercultural borrowing and reciprocal education? Why not acknowledge that the identities with which we align ourselves are heterogeneous and changing and why not try to live them, then, in ways that promote human flourishing rather than division?

These are good questions. Appiah's book is written with relaxed elegance and his characteristic good sense. It is filled with histories and stories – not only stories about himself and his multi-national, multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-class family but also tales about a wealth of other

intriguing people and histories of nations such as Singapore. These stories add ballast to Appiah's arguments, complicating any ideas we might have that identities are easy or straightforward. And yet the question remains: given how strident and split our social, political and even cultural worlds have become, is good sense enough? We need to understand the complexities of our identities, as Appiah advises, and to live them in more generous ways. But we might also try to discover new solidarities that can help us with the formidable global and environmental challenges we face.

Georgia Warnke teaches at the University of California, Riverside. She is the author of After Identity: Rethinking Race, Sex and Gender as well as four other books on interpretation, political philosophy and feminism.



The Inheritance of Wealth: Justice, Equality, and the Right to Bequeath, by Daniel Halliday (Oxford University Press), £30.00/\$40.95

Review by Jason Brennan

Around the world, children born to rich parents -- such as Donald Trump -- tend to be rich adults. *Why?* Is this unfair and unjust? What, if anything, should be done about it?

Dan Halliday worries that inheritance allows some to have unfair advantages. He worries not so much about, say, the small bequests my working-class nana made last year, but about very wealthy families which are able to transmit significant amounts of

wealth through multiple generations. Halliday worries that multigenerational inheritance leads to “economic segregation”, to a genuine class-segregated society.

This book begins with luck egalitarian premises and ends with luck egalitarian conclusions. Luck egalitarians hold that differences in life outcomes should result from people’s autonomous choices, not from factors outside their control.

Halliday takes pains to argue his position is not inherently anti-market. Indeed, even certain libertarian heroes, such as Nobel Laureate economist James Buchanan, favoured high inheritance taxes for largely the same reasons as Halliday. Further, in what is perhaps the strongest chapter of the book, Halliday shows that many libertarian-ish and commonsense defences of unlimited inheritance are inadequate. For instance, Halliday accepts that family ties are valuable, even though families create inequality. To express and reinforce that parental bond, parents should have some prerogative to provide some gifts to their children. But, he says, showing that parents may buy birthday presents for their kids -- equality be damned -- doesn’t mean parents should be able to bequeath \$50 million at death.

What should we do? Halliday suggests we follow the Italian philosopher Eugenio Rignano, who argued that inheritance taxes should be increasingly progressive through each subsequent generation. For instance, when Donald leaves \$100 million for Donald, Jr., we might tax that at 25%. If Donald, Jr., then lives off the interest and tries to bequeath \$75 million to Donald III, we might tax that at 50%. And so on. Exactly what the percentages should be and how quickly they should rise is up for debate.

To know whether we should accept any of Halliday's proposals, we need to answer many difficult *economic* questions: How much inheritance is there? How much does inheritance explain various forms of inequality? How much is explained by other factors? Do bequests possibly reduce inequality? Would introducing and successfully enforcing high inheritance taxes cause people to accumulate less capital? (Keep in mind that it is uncontroversial in economics that capital accumulation is one of the key proximate factors explaining why some societies have high standards of living and others do not. See Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*.) Might high inheritance taxes induce the elderly rich to waste their wealth on frivolous consumption? Do inheritance taxes actually succeed in reducing inequality? Even if inheritance taxes do reduce inequality, might there be economic downsides to removing wealth from bank accounts-- where it would fund mortgages, business loans, and so on-- and instead consuming it as current government spending? After all, what are the economic trade-offs between capital accumulation and government spending? What kind of tax avoidance strategies will the rich use to avoid the Rignano taxes?

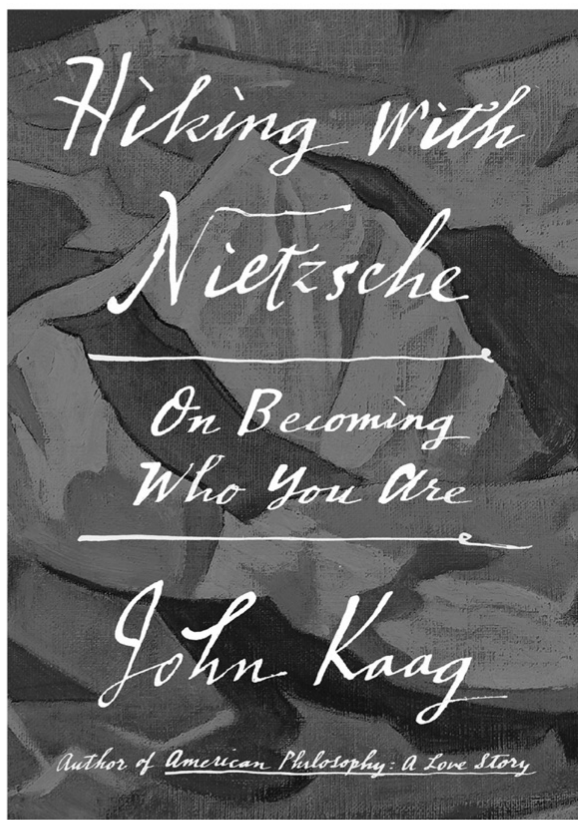
Without a careful economic analysis of these complicated issues, we cannot even begin to know whether we should accept Halliday's thesis. Unfortunately, the careful analysis never appears. He cites Thomas Piketty's argument about the downsides of wealth concentration, but Piketty isn't analysing inheritance per se.

To my surprise, on Google Scholar, I found -- among the top hits -- a significant number of recent papers in top economics

journals arguing that the overall effect of inheritance -- for a variety of complicated reasons -- is to *reduce* income inequality. Halliday admits he does not know how much inequality results from inheritance versus other factors. But there is a large literature on this question as well. Many papers argue that genetic factors and the transmission of social and human capital do far more to explain why successful families tend to remain successful over subsequent generations (for example, Bowles and Gintis in a 2002 paper). Every question I listed above has a large and lively debate among social scientists. But Halliday's book largely ignores this empirical debate -- he simply assumes at the outset that inheritance must exacerbate inequality, though he is not sure how much.

As a result, Halliday leaves us with a conditional thesis: *If* a strong version of luck egalitarianism is true and *if* inheritance tends to increase inequality and *if* taxation of a sort would reduce that and *if* the downsides from doing so (including strategic attempts to get around the tax) do not outweigh the benefits, then maybe some sort of to-be-determined Rignano taxation scheme would be good. I recommend Halliday's book in large part for its ability to raise good questions, but I cannot quite say it offers an argument for its conclusions.

Jason Brennan is the Flanagan Family Professor at Georgetown University. He is the author of many books, including When All Else Fails: The Ethics of Resistance to State Injustice and Against Democracy.



Hiking With Nietzsche: On Becoming Who You Are, by John Kaag (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 18.99/\$26.00

Review by Daniel Conway

The German-born philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche took great pride in his efforts to renew the tradition and practice of peripatetic philosophy. Disdaining the monkish life of the cloistered scholar, Nietzsche claimed to accomplish his best and most original thinking while rambling across the surrounding countryside. *Where* he walked was a matter he could hardly afford to leave to chance. Beset by chronic illnesses, he was always on the lookout for propitious climatic and atmospheric conditions. As a result, he spent most of his final decade of sanity

shuttling between the Upper Engadine region in Switzerland and various picturesque locales in northern Italy. It was on one such walk, in the vicinity of Genoa, that he was gifted with the germ of what would become his masterpiece, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It was on another such walk, along the shores of Lake Silvaplana, that he was overtaken by his weightiest idea -- that of the eternal recurrence. The scene of this latter bolt of inspiration, marked by a plaque affixed to the "Nietzsche-Stone", is still a popular destination for intrepid pilgrims in search of adventure, insight, renewal, and, perhaps, redemption.

Nietzsche claimed to accomplish his best and most original thinking while rambling

One such pilgrim has recently taken Nietzsche very seriously, not only as a philosopher but also as a peripatetic. Seeking to match Nietzsche stride for stride, this determined pilgrim set out to hike with Nietzsche, hoping thereby to root the philosopher's most famous insights in the somatic context of his perambulations. Dispatching himself (and his family!) to the Upper Engadine, this philosophical traveller resolved to reprise in person the philosopher's most beloved exertions. And why not? At stake was not simply a clearer understanding of Nietzsche's modernity-bending ideas, but also an opportunity to secure that most elusive of human treasures: the experience of genuine, bone-marrow *authenticity*. Taking Ni-

etzsche at his Pindarian word, our pilgrim endeavoured “to become who he is”, in brazen defiance of the clutter, chatter, cheap entertainments, and myriad distractions of late modernity. He would do so, moreover, precisely as the master had prescribed: by walking his way into an experience of secure self-possession.

The pilgrim in question is none other than John Kaag, the (justly) celebrated author of *American Philosophy: A Love Story*. (Full disclosure: I had the great good fortune of teaching him at Penn State, where he received his BA and MA degrees in philosophy.) In this sequel of sorts to *American Philosophy*, Kaag opens a window onto

his second act as a public intellectual. The love story documented in his earlier book has produced a new domestic partnership, a precocious child, and a series of all-too-familiar challenges attendant to the routines of family life. Before the reader can ask why Kaag, of all people, would want or need to “become who he is”, much less retrace the lonely footsteps of the perpetually unhappy Nietzsche, Kaag explains himself. With marital bliss come freedom-curtailling responsibilities; with middle-aged adulthood come mounting expectations; and with fatherhood come occasional frustrations and disappointments. Mortality beckons; insignificance looms. The prospect dawns of a



final reckoning, which is likely to render, at best, a passing grade. To make sense of his second act, Kaag returns to Nietzsche (a figure beloved by juvenile males!), with the express purpose of reclaiming the philosopher's teachings for those adults among his readers who are similarly anxious about their place in an increasingly indifferent cosmos. Haunted by the ghost of a forgotten philosopher whose abandoned library he rescued in *American Philosophy*, Kaag confronts the gnawing question of his own legacy. *Hiking with Nietzsche* is meant (and, by this reader, received) as a vade mecum for anyone who is curious about, or terrified of, what comes next, *after* the curtain falls on a love story as richly satisfying as Kaag's.

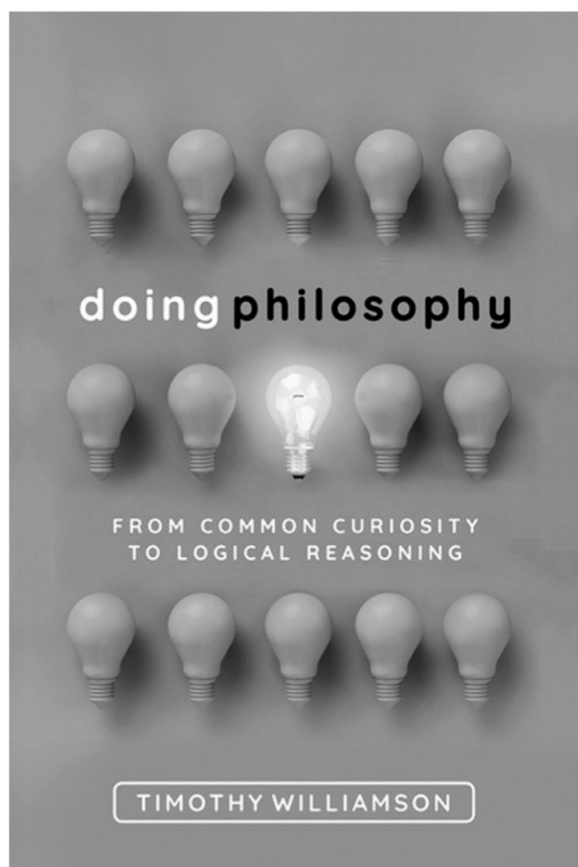
*Taking Nietzsche at his
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As he recounts this journey of self-renewal, Kaag expertly displays his grasp of the Nietzschean teachings that have motivated his pilgrimage. His interpretations of these teachings are to be welcomed not only for the clarity of their teacherly exposition, but also for Kaag's attention to the intimate details of their situation and context. A bout of insomnia triggers a splendid riff on Nietzsche's observations on friendship. An unplanned detour stages a gleeful rumination on the pleasures of solitude. An unwanted memory of his neglectful father summons a wry reflection on Nietzsche's decision to

view the rise and fall of morality through the lens of genealogy. Most poignantly, an unscheduled (but entirely predictable) tumble down a mountainside prompts Kaag's appreciation of the need, attested to by Nietzsche in both word and deed, to open oneself to those hardships and reversals that are most likely to re-ignite a reckless love of the mortal, finite, hopelessly incomplete existence that awaits all featherless bipeds.

Above all, *Hiking With Nietzsche* reminds its readers that every love story requires periodic refreshment and renewal. The best antidote, as Kaag learned from Nietzsche, is to "become who one is", i.e., to take those bold, rash steps that compel one to fall head over heels all over again. To earn a second act worthy of its predecessor, Kaag realized, he needed to seek out -- and, in Nietzsche's preferred formulation, to *affirm* -- those obstacles and impediments that would elicit his next, best self. As Kaag picks himself up after enduring the nasty fall referenced above, we can easily imagine him channeling his inner Zarathustra: "Was that life? Well then! Once more!" Upon finishing *Hiking with Nietzsche*, Kaag's readers are likely to respond with a similarly buoyant expression of affirmation.

Daniel Conway is professor of philosophy and humanities and affiliate professor of film studies and religious studies at Texas A&M University.



Doing Philosophy: From Common Curiosity to Logical Reasoning, by Timothy Williamson (Oxford University Press), £12.99/\$18.85

Review by Justin Fisher

If I could assign readings to anyone, I would assign Timothy Williamson's new book *Doing Philosophy* to pop-scientists who have made ill-informed blanket dismissals of philosophy, like the late Stephen Hawking, who recently pronounced "Philosophy is dead", or Richard Dawkins, Lawrence Krauss or Neil DeGrasse Tyson. *Doing Philosophy* would open their eyes to a productive research program in analytic philosophy that works in concert with advances in science and mathematics.

Williamson is as much a "superstar" as any living analytic philosopher, meaning he's familiar to most professional philosophers, but sadly to few others. In addition to having "done" a great deal of philosophy, especially in metaphysics and epistemology, Williamson also works in "meta-philosophy" or "*The Philosophy of Philosophy*" (the title of his earlier book on the topic). *Doing Philosophy* provides a short introduction to Williamson's philosophy of philosophy, now easily accessible to the uninitiated.

I imagine this book as involving a park bench with three kids on it. At one end is a young Stephen Hawking, representing the clique Williamson wants to join: science and mathematics. At the opposite end is a young Michel Foucault, representing humanities, the arts, and "continental" philosophy (philosophy in the tradition of French and German speakers of continental Europe). Williamson is the awkward kid in the middle, representing "analytic" philosophy (philosophy in the tradition of English-speaking countries). The book is Williamson's attempt to ingratiate himself to Hawking in three ways: by approaching Hawking, by pulling Hawking towards him, and by distancing them both from Hawking's nemesis Foucault. (Like a gentleman, Williamson rarely names names, a vexing trend in books meant to be widely accessible, so we can't be sure if he has Hawking or Foucault specifically in mind.)

Williamson sidles up to Hawking by likening philosophy to science. "Philosophy, like all science, starts with ways of knowing and thinking all normal humans have, and applies them a bit more carefully, a bit more systematically, a bit more critically, iterating that process over and over again". To draw

attention to similarities between philosophy and science, Williamson has chapters discussing philosophical uses of deductive logic, inference to the best explanation (chap. 6), precision and clarity in defining terms (chap. 4), and model-building (chap. 10). He also dedicates a chapter (chap. 9) to explicit connections between philosophy and various sciences.

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Williamson pulls Hawking toward him by arguing science is more akin to philosophy than some might think. Philosophers hold it against views when they violate common sense, but so too do scientists when theories violate “common-sense ways of knowing through the senses”. Like philosophers, scientists often stubbornly defend lost causes, and progress occurs when the next generation chooses whose research programs to follow. Philosophers typically don’t do real-world experiments, but neither do mathematicians, computer scientists, nor highly theoretical scientists. Philosophers

often use “thought experiments”, but so do some scientists. Philosophers place great weight upon intuitions, but if you define ‘intuition’ as the complement to conscious inference, then everyone relies upon intuition, if only to provide starting premises for conscious inferences. Frustratingly, Williamson doesn’t address the concern that philosophers might employ *less reliable* intuitions than scientists, a concern that becomes especially salient when you consider “far out” philosophical intuition pumps like John Searle’s Chinese Room, Keith Lehrer’s TrueTemp, or Donald Davidson’s Swampman. I, for one, would place more trust in a physicist’s intuition that her calculator is working than I would any philosopher’s intuitions about these fanciful cases!

Williamson distances himself from nameless philosophers (like perhaps Foucault) whom he thinks have given philosophy a bad name. “Admittedly, many contemporary philosophers are anything but scientific in their approach. This book is about doing philosophy *well*, not doing it badly”. Williamson admits that philosophers often study our field’s history more than scientists do theirs, but he argues this isn’t essential to good philosophy and can sometimes be a useful source for ideas (chap. 9). Then there’s this deliciously shade-filled passage, in which Williamson postures himself close to Karl Popper-minded scientists, and apart from a common analytic caricature of continental philosophy:

“Precision-loving philosophers [like me] are sometimes criticized for excessive caution, even for intellectual cowardice. The idea is that the truly bold philosophers are those ready to plunge into the depths of obscurity, risking all in murky

darkness, while the precision-lovers play trivial games in the clear shallows. It's a nice picture, the vagueness-lovers' safe dream of danger. Wild and woolly prose may sound radical, but it's really the easy, comfortable option, because its unclarity makes it unrefutable. The risky option is saying something clear and specific enough to be refuted."

Williamson also distances philosophy from *other* non-sciences. He rejects the relativist view, common in other humanities, that all belief systems are equally correct, because this view doesn't allow the real possibility that our own beliefs may turn out to be wrong. His chapter connecting philosophy to other fields runs the gamut of sciences, but the only "softer" field that merits



even a brief section is history, as a potential reality check for political philosophy (chap. 9). Williamson's vision of philosophy apparently has little use for religion, literature, sociology or the arts.

The current zeitgeist has many in the humanities calling for increased diversity and greater representation for women, non-western, and other under-represented voices. Williamson resists this at various points. Williamson defends stereotypically masculine "gladiatorial combat" aspects of philosophical discussion: "But to discourage sharp-edged questions only exacerbates matters by making it easier for high-prestige speakers to bluff, and get away with bad arguments." Similarly, he dismisses the stereotypically feminine "feel-good slogan" that "discussion should be constructive", which he likens to instructing city-planners to "always build houses and never knock them down". Williamson dismisses gender and ethnic differences in philosophical intuition uncovered by experimental philosophy as resulting from flaws in experimental design, and he optimistically views philosophical intuitions as having "far more to do with cognitive capacities we all share, irrespective of our ethnicity and gender". Williamson also discourages philosophers' weighing in on whether we should use the word "woman" for trans-women in a passage that suggests he might have learned the lesson of George Orwell's *1984* a little too well: "In practice, a trend towards redefining terms may favour more sinister causes ... Politically, people habituated to going along with linguistic reforms are easier to manipulate." The net effect of these scattered passages is that philosophy may as well continue to be predominately white, privileged, masculine,

and politically disengaged. It's probably not coincidental that this echoes common perceptions of science.

Despite its title, *Doing Philosophy* contains less actual doing of (traditional) philosophy than most introductory courses would want. Also, its most sustained exploration of standard intro-philosophy fare (the mind-body problem in chap. 6), is unfortunately quite idiosyncratic, e.g., in depicting the view that many philosophers would call "Functionalism" as a form of "Identity-theory" – an interesting way of carving logical space, but not one I would use in an introductory course.

This book could perhaps be used in an upper-level course on meta-philosophy, though it would be somewhat challenging to use, as it does not engage at a high level with many named opponents. Williamson's earlier *The Philosophy of Philosophy* would probably be a better choice.

Instead I would most recommend this book as an excellent option for independent readers who want to learn more about analytic philosophy and its relations to sciences and mathematics. Does anybody have Neil DeGrasse Tyson's number?

Justin Fisher is an associate professor of philosophy at Southern Methodist University. He works in multiple areas of philosophy, including philosophy of mind and meta-philosophy.

The Partially Examined Life

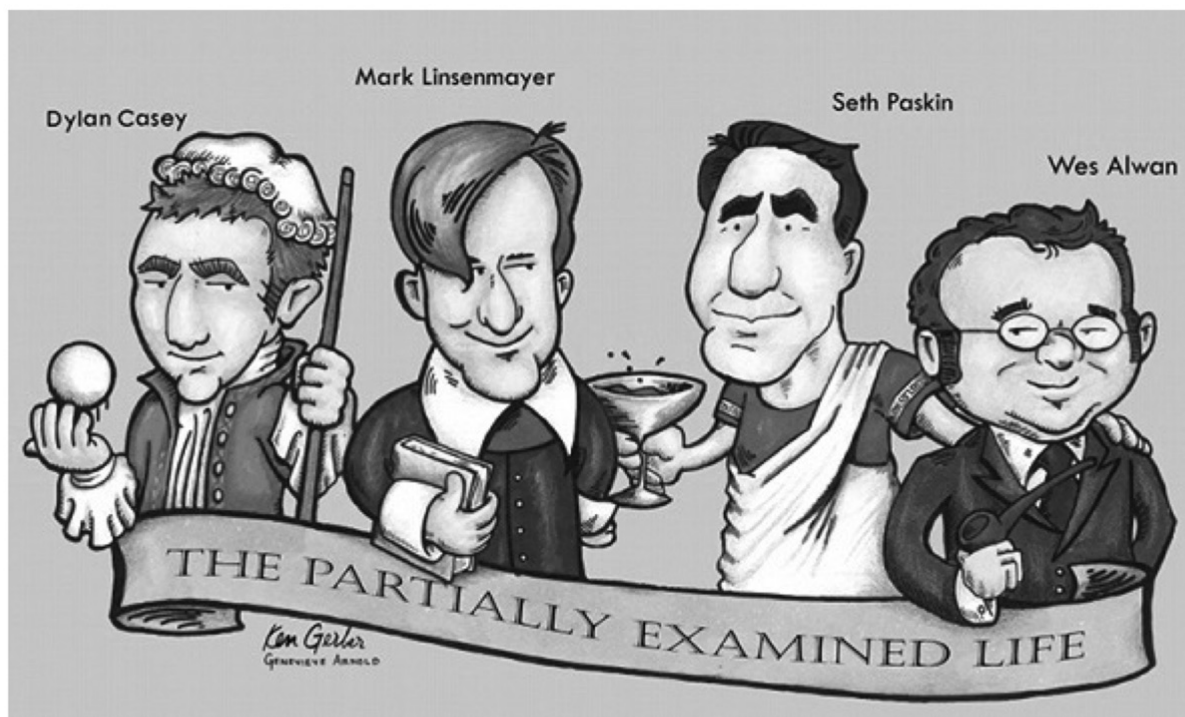
Q&A with Mark Linsenmayer

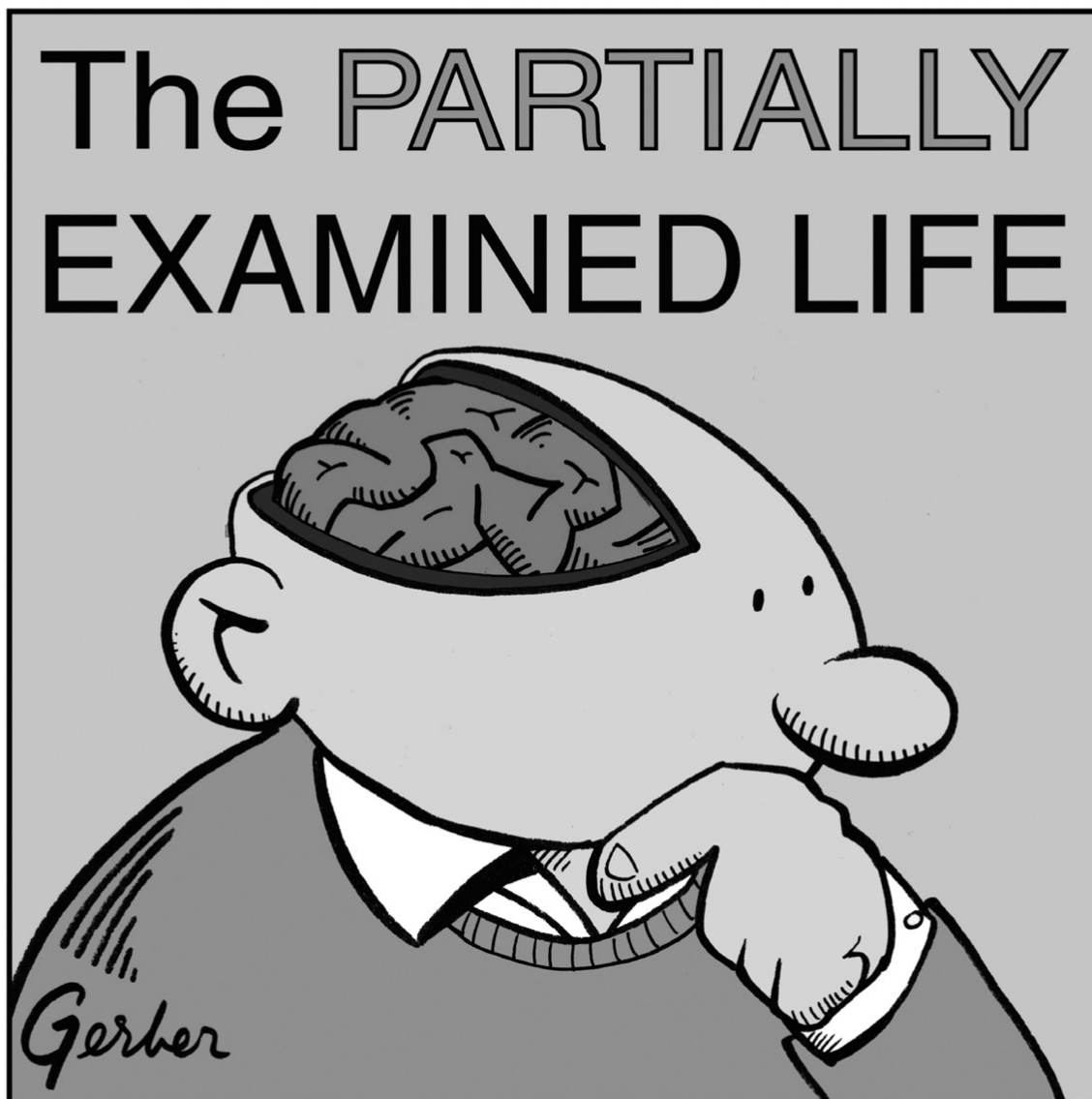
Tell us about your podcast.

The Partially Examined Life (est. 2009) is a philosophy podcast that attempts to merge the experience of a graduate seminar with the experience of going out to the pub after the seminar. Three or four ex-grad students—sometimes with a guest—pick a text to read and hold an informal roundtable discussion about it, both teaching it to the audience and trying to relate it to “real life”. We’ve covered philosophers from all eras, focusing on the Western canon, but also delving into non-Western and contemporary sources, as well as philosophy-adjacent figures like Darwin, Tocqueville, Freud, Durkheim, and James Baldwin.

Why did you start doing a podcast?

As former graduate students now working non-academic jobs—Mark Linsenmayer, Wes Alwan and Seth Paskin all attended The University of Texas at Austin in the 90s; Dylan Casey, who joined later, has a physics Ph.D. and taught at St. John’s in Annapolis—we missed the experience of regularly reading and discussing philosophy. We thought that this kind of seminar format where texts are really explored in detail and not just boiled down and summarized is something that should be shared much more widely, that this more-or-less direct access to texts forms an essential part of liberal education.





What are the best three episodes you've aired so far, in your opinion?

A great introduction to the podcast is this one we put on live, covering Plato's Symposium (one of ten Platonic dialogues we've covered so far), where each host takes primary responsibility for presenting one of the characters' theory of love: <https://bit.ly/2TUJ8uQ>. The episode includes video and music and an opening comic mono-

logue about the "Apology" by guest Philosophy Bro.

We have done five episodes on Nietzsche. Episode 84 (<https://bit.ly/2RV63sO>) covers our favorite book by him: *The Gay Science*. We discuss his updated take on the Socratic project of challenging your most deeply held beliefs. What lurks behind this "will to truth" that we as philosophers exhibit? Nietzsche's insight into our ignorance of our-

selves provided a primary influence in calling our lives “partially examined”.

We have been pleased to feature as guests some of the world’s foremost philosophers: John Searle, David Chalmers, Peter Singer, Pat Churchland, Martha Nussbaum, Simon Blackburn, Elizabeth Anderson, and Michael Sandel. Due to our connections with St. John’s College, we have also featured current president Pano Kanelos to discuss liberal education (and the kind of conversation that our podcast and St. John’s seminars involve), Stuart Umphrey on natural kinds, and two appearances by Eva Brann, which are what we’d like to call your attention to here.

Episode120 (<https://bit.ly/2Dg0ixv>) explored Eva’s book *Un-Willing: An Inquiry into the Rise of Will’s Power and an Attempt to Undo It*. We discussed views on will by Socrates, Augustine, Aquinas, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Sartre, current neurologists, and others. Eva not only exemplifies a truly interactive way for an author-philosopher to discuss her work, but provides a model for a

now all-too-rare kind of conservatism rooted not in dogmatism or reactionary thinking, but in habits for living a good life rooted in ancient Greece.

Can you recommend one other philosophical podcast and tell us about one good episode?

Elucidations out of the University of Chicago (<https://bit.ly/2tUmUQa>) provides a great forum for current academics to talk about their work. For instance, Matt Teichman’s 2017 interview with Steven Nadler on Spinoza: <https://bit.ly/2x7ZojN>

Beside straight up philosophy podcasts, could you recommend another podcast?

We have found Econtalk by Russ Roberts (<https://bit.ly/1TXhre4>) to be a continually challenging and enlightening experience (and have had Russ on as a PEL guest to discuss Adam Smith). We especially enjoy his many one-on-one discussions with Mike Munger, such as this early episode on price gouging: <https://bit.ly/2Hg0W20>

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