

# Philosophy at Cambridge

Newsletter of the Faculty of Philosophy

Issue 2  
May 2005



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

## From the Chairman

The Newsletter again, and so soon. On behalf of all of us here thanks to those who sent us messages of encouragement after last year's, and to those who have contributed to the production of this one.

We have for some years been aware of gradually rising student numbers in the Cambridge Philosophy Tripos, fuelled by a steady rise in the number of applications. But recently the steady rise has become a flood, resulting in a statistic that some will find startling: there are more applications to Cambridge for Philosophy than for Computer Science. And when it comes to ratios of applications to admissions in the University Philosophy is very close to the top – only Architecture is significantly higher, Economics, Law and the Vet School, with their obvious vocational emphasis, are slightly higher, and no other Arts subject is near. This of course brings problems, and they remain problems even though we can take satisfaction in their very existence. It becomes particularly important to maintain staffing numbers in spite of the current tightening of the University's belt – for which our fundraising project has obvious relevance.

That project is now gaining momentum. And there is one clear piece of good news in the establishment by Trinity and Churchill Colleges of a joint College teaching post. So despite present financial restrictions we have every reason to be cheerful.

Well before the next Newsletter appears the Faculty will have a new chairman, Professor Jane Heal. So, wishing everyone all the best and hoping to see many of you at the Alumni Weekend in September, I sign off.

Edward Craig FBA  
Knightbridge Professor of Philosophy  
Chairman of the Philosophy Faculty  
Board

## “It’s the newspapers I can’t stand”

Onora O’Neill

One of Tom Stoppard’s characters explained to another: “I’m with you on the free press. It’s the newspapers I can’t stand.” It is a thought many of us have had. Are grisly newspapers an inevitable cost of press freedom? If so, why have British newspapers earned worse reputations than those in other countries where the press is free? Are arguments for press freedom beyond challenge? What exactly do the best of them show? Do any of them show that press freedom is unconditional?

Four arguments for press freedom are in common use. One is jurisprudential: it simply appeals to constitutional or other authorities that proclaim rights to a free press, such as the First Amendment to the US Constitution (“Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the press”) and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (clause 1; but note clause 2!). Unfortunately, arguments from authority don’t provide deep justifications.

Other arguments go deeper. Press freedom has been variously defended as necessary for discovering truth, as analogous to individual rights of self-expression, and as required for democracy. None of these lines of thought justifies *unconditional* press freedom.

Appeals to truth seeking won’t justify *unconditional* press freedom because, as Bernard Williams points out in *Truth and Truthfulness*, “in institutions dedicated to finding out the truth, such as universities, research institutes, and courts of law, speech is not at all unregulated.” Any search for truth needs structures and disciplines, and is undermined by casual disregard of accuracy or evidence. Unconditional freedom is not optimal for truth-seeking.

Appeals to rights to self-expression also won’t justify *unconditional* press freedom. John Stuart Mill argued that individual freedom of expression should be limited only by requirements not to harm others, and then claimed the same right for the press. The analogy is unconvincing. Individuals who are cavalier about accuracy may do little harm (even so, there are laws against libel, slander and inciting hatred). Powerful organisations – governments, businesses – that are cavalier about accuracy can do great harm. We don’t permit companies to invent their balance sheets, or public authorities their accounts and reports. If powerful media conglomerates have unconditional freedom of expression they will be free to be cavalier about accuracy, to harm others and to undermine democracy.

Appeals to democracy also won’t justify *unconditional* press freedom, since democracy needs a press that informs citizens accurately. However, if requirements for accurate reporting are too tightly drawn, the press will be intimidated. Nobody can be sure of getting everything right – even with zealous ‘fact checking’. So a press that serves rather than damages democracy needs to aim for accuracy: we can require truthfulness, but not truth. This standard can be met by providing evidence, by including caveats and qualifications, by prompt correction of error, by distinguishing reporting from commentary, rumour and gossip. These and other forms of epistemic responsibility allow readers to judge for themselves.

Ostensibly the British Press is committed to accuracy. It is the first demand in the *Press Complaints Commission’s* Code. But good reporting is a public good, not a

*continued on page 8*

# Cambridge Conferences

## The 2004 Annual Royal Institute of Philosophy Conference

In July 2004, the Royal Institute of Philosophy annual conference was held in Cambridge for the first time. I organised the conference, together with Ross Harrison, and the theme was 'Preference-Formation and Well-Being'. The idea was to bring together moral philosophers, political philosophers and philosophers of economics to address a number of questions concerning the formation of preferences and its relevance for theories of well-being. This was both a timely and under-explored topic. In various debates in moral and political philosophy, preferences are thought to have normative significance. For example, their satisfaction is said to contribute to individuals' well-being; and the choices that people make in line with their preferences – such as the choice to pursue a costly goal or ambition – are said to legitimately justify inequalities.

In all these debates, it is assumed that the preferences individuals aim to satisfy, and make choices on the basis of, are 'authentic' preferences, formed under some but not other conditions (for example, that they are not preferences formed under hypnosis); or that they are not 'adaptive', in the sense that they should not be preferences formed in stifling circumstances under which people come to prefer what is readily available over what is not. In other words, these various debates assume some account of preference-formation. Nonetheless, despite the central importance of accounts of preference-formation, there is relatively little sustained and explicit discussion of them. The conference was intended to initiate such a discussion.

We were delighted to have, as our speakers, Richard Arneson (University of California, San Diego), Johan Brännmark (University of Lund, Sweden), Daniel Hausman (University of Wisconsin), Philip Pettit (Princeton University), Christian Piller (University of York), Mozaffar Qizilbash (University of East Anglia), Connie Rosati (University of California, Davis), and Alex Voorhoeve (LSE). The event was a successful one. Both during the formal conference sessions and outside them, participants discussed a number of questions that were being raised by the papers. These included questions on the relation between deliberation and preferences; on whether we should always prefer to do what is better; and on whether successful parenting should be taken as a model case of preference-formation. The success of the conference and liveliness of the debates that were set alight were in no small part due to Katherine Harloe's help with the organisation, the ideal setting of St. John's College, and the financial

support of the Faculty of Philosophy and the Analysis Trust.

A volume based on the conference, which will also include further contributions, will be published as a special issue of *Philosophy* and as a self-standing volume by Cambridge

University Press, under the auspices of the Royal Institute of Philosophy.

Serena Olsaretti, University Lecturer in Philosophy

## Postgraduate Conference

The 8th Annual National Postgraduate Analytic Philosophy Conference was held at Magdalene College, Cambridge, in July 2004. The Conference consisted of thirteen papers presented by graduates from across Britain and the US. Over eighty submissions were received and thirteen were selected as the very best in

graduate work in analytic philosophy today. Professor Onora O'Neill FBA, provided a keynote address to complete the three-day event. A large number of philosophy graduate students from all over the world met on this occasion making the event a great success.

## Mathematical Knowledge Conference

Goldbach's conjecture (every even number greater than two is the sum of two primes) has been confirmed for all numbers less than  $10^{16}$ . Should that count as evidence that it is likely to be true? What can the behaviour of adolescent monkeys tell us about the nature of mathematics? These were amongst many questions addressed at the conference on 'Mathematical Knowledge', held at Fitzwilliam College in the summer 2004. This interdisciplinary conference, organized by Dominic Gregory, Mary Leng, Alexander Paseau and Michael Potter, aimed at bringing together mathematicians, philosophers, and psychologists to present their perspectives on questions concerning mathematical knowledge.

Our invited speakers thus included two mathematicians (set theorist Akihiro Kanamori, from Boston University, and Fields medallist Timothy Gowers from Cambridge), who presented us with practitioners' views of the subject, as well as two psychologists (Susan Carey from Harvard, and Brian Butterworth from UCL), who discussed the mind's capacities to acquire arithmetical knowledge. Representing philosophy, Mary Leng, Alexander Paseau and Michael Potter were joined by Alan Baker (Swarthmore), Mark Colyvan (Queensland), Charles Parsons (Harvard), Gideon Rosen (Princeton) and Crispin Wright (St Andrews) to discuss philosophical issues about mathematical knowledge.

Having initially decided to hold a philosophy of mathematics event in Cambridge, we were led to the idea of organizing an interdisciplinary conference

in part as a result of the high level of interest in the philosophy of mathematics amongst Cambridge mathematicians. Since 2002, the Cambridge University Society for the Philosophy of Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences (CUSPOMMS) has been holding fortnightly seminars on the philosophy of mathematics in the Centre for Mathematical Sciences, organized by undergraduate mathematicians and philosophers. These seminars have regularly attracted large audiences of mathematicians and philosophers, and showed the potential for fruitful interactions between both groups, based on a shared fascination with the nature of mathematics.

The conference was well attended by 98 delegates from 16 countries, representing disciplines including philosophy, mathematics, psychology, mathematics education, and computer science. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our speakers and chairs, and our student helpers from the CUSPOMMS committee, for their contributions to a successful and stimulating conference. We are also grateful to the Analysis Trust, for providing funding for student bursaries, and especially to the Jesus College Science and Human Dimension Project, whose generous funding enabled us to put together this ambitious event. Look out for the book *Mathematical Knowledge*, containing articles based on talks presented at the conference, which should appear next year.

Mary Leng, Research Fellow, St. John's College

# Facts, Fables and Funds

Jane Heal

## Events in 2005

### Annual Heffer Lecture

Professor Frank Jackson of the Australian National University will deliver this year's Heffer Lecture – 'What we learn about reference from asking why we have proper names' – on 13 May 2005, at 5pm in the Lady Mitchell Hall, Sidgwick Site.

### Alumni Weekend

#### 'A Philosophical Evening at Trinity'

Friday 23 September 2005  
Winstanley Lecture Theatre,  
Blue Boar Court, Trinity College

For over one hundred years Cambridge has consistently produced many of the most influential thinkers and teachers in philosophy. But who do you think has made the most important impact? Come along and be convinced by current Cambridge philosophers who will champion the cases for Bertrand Russell, Frank Ramsey and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

There will be an opportunity for questions and the evening will end in a vote.

Cheese and wine will be served. For more information please contact Mrs Angela Elliott, Faculty of Philosophy – email: ae215@cam.ac.uk, phone: +44 1223 330525

#### 'A Philosophy Lecture'

Saturday 24 September 2005  
Sidgwick Site, Sidgwick Avenue.  
"Who owns your ideas?"

This presentation will be given by Alex Oliver and Dominic Scott, Co-Directors of the Forum for Philosophy in Business, in the Faculty of Philosophy, and Lionel Bently, Herchel Smith Professor of Intellectual Property Law, in the Faculty of Law. Intellectual property rights are fiercely contested, not least in this University. In what promises to be a lively and challenging session, we shall explore some of the ethical problems that lie at the heart of these debates.

The lecture will be followed by a reception in the Faculty of Philosophy. Light refreshments will be served.

For more information please contact Mrs Mariella Pellegrino  
Faculty of Philosophy  
email: mp10004@cam.ac.uk

How and when exactly did the University of Cambridge come into being? The question is debated. But at least we know that it was not founded in 287 AD by Athenian philosophers in the train of Cantaber, Spanish son-in-law of Gurguntius Brabtruc, King of Britain, nor yet in the 7th century by St Felix and Sigebert, King of the Angles. (These fine stories appeared in the 14th century as part of our historic rivalry with Oxford.) Rather it is clear that it came into being in the first decade of the 13th century. And so the University will shortly be gathering itself to celebrate its 800th anniversary.<sup>1</sup>

Another thing we are certain of is that Philosophy has always been an important part of the Cambridge curriculum. Aristotle's Logic, together with Grammar and Rhetoric, provided the foundation of the medieval *trivium*, while Moral, Natural and Metaphysical Philosophy were central in the later years of study. Philosophers were prominent in the far-sighted 19th century movement which reformed and reinvigorated the University. And the great Cambridge philosophers of the last century and a half have been immensely influential, not only in philosophy itself but in the world more broadly.

For all of us who have studied or practised Philosophy at Cambridge, the depth and richness of this tradition is something we relish and delight in. It is part of what makes us who we are and is something to be inspired by and added to, both for its own sake and as a legacy to our successors. But it is a legacy which cannot be taken for granted.

Doubtless you are already familiar with the rhetoric of fundraising – the 'new challenges', the 'building on traditions of excellence' and so forth. But what this rhetoric says is not less true for its familiarity. When we look at history, at the striking personalities and the great achievements of the past, we see that good things do not happen unless someone makes them happen.

So the question comes to us – what responsibility for the future will we take?

Our last appeal in 1997–8, drew a warm response from our alumni, whose generosity enabled our accommodation, library, computing and other facilities, especially for graduate students, to be greatly improved. As part of the University's 800th anniversary campaign, to be launched in the near future, we shall be appealing to you again. The constantly changing political and financial circumstances of higher education mean that the Faculty cannot rely on a steady level of support. Our aim is therefore to raise money to provide a permanent fund to endow the second Chair of Philosophy (founded in 1896 and hitherto neither named nor endowed), and to sustain the work of the Faculty more generally. If there is enough support among the donors we would like to name the chair for Wittgenstein, who occupied it from 1939–47. This project, which will greatly reinforce the Faculty's security and independence, has already attracted several generous offers of donations, and we have no doubt that a very substantial sum will be raised.

We are not at this moment asking you directly for support – but we give you frank warning that we shall do so. (And of course we would be more than delighted to hear from you if you have ideas for the campaign or would like to be involved.) Meanwhile we would be very pleased to see you at any of the various events listed in this Newsletter. And if you are in Cambridge, you are most welcome to call in at the Faculty, to find out more about what we are doing.

Jane Heal FBA  
Professor of Philosophy  
Secretary of the Endowment Fund  
Appeal; email: bjh1000@cam.ac.uk

<sup>1</sup> For more interesting details see *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge* by Elisabeth Leedham-Green (CUP 1996).

# Uses and Abuses of Probability

Hugh Mellor



In 1963 I anticipated later changes in the UK economy by leaving manufacturing for a service industry: in my case, by leaving chemical engineering at ICI to do a PhD on the philosophy of probability at Cambridge. I then discovered that this subject is a very good example of the intellectual service which Cambridge philosophy renders to many disciplines. Cambridge is a great place not only for the mathematical theory of probability and its scientific applications, but also for its philosophical foundations. From John Venn in the nineteenth century, through Maynard Keynes, Frank Ramsey and Richard Braithwaite in the twentieth, to expatriates like Ian Hacking and Donald Gillies now, nowhere has contributed more than Cambridge to our understanding of it.

Take Venn, the first great advocate of a frequency view of the chances – objective probabilities – postulated by physicists, geneticists, meteorologists, insurance companies and casinos: the view that a smoker's chance of getting cancer, for example, is just the fraction of smokers who *do* get cancer. Keynes, by contrast, originated a logical view of the so-called epistemic probabilities used to measure how far evidence supports conclusions drawn from it, such as the verdicts of law courts, the

results of clinical trials and the acceptance or rejection of scientific theories. And Ramsey was the first to make a subjective view of probability credible by showing how our decisions are affected by – and can be used to measure – the probabilities we attach to their possible consequences: as when people decide to stop smoking because they think they are less likely to get cancer if they stop than if they don't.

On the face of it, these three applications of probability are quite distinct. The chances of rain tomorrow, of offspring being male, of catching flu, or of winning a lottery, are features of the natural or social world that do not depend on what we know or think about them. Not so the

epistemic probabilities of a defendant's guilt, the safety of a new drug or the theory of evolution by natural selection: they only measure how far our evidence counts for or against these hypotheses. While subjective probabilities measure neither of the above, merely the actual strengths of our beliefs, which are what determine how we act when we are uncertain – as we often are – of what effects our actions will have.

Yet distinct though these three kinds of probability are, they are not wholly independent. They are not, for example, like light, sound and water waves, none of which implies anything about the other two, despite all being waves, i.e. all obeying similar mathematical equations. Our three kinds of probability, by contrast, are linked by more than a shared mathematics. Smokers' chances of getting cancer also tell us how far the evidence that they smoke supports the prediction that they *will* get cancer, and therefore how probable we and they should take that prospect to be. The greatest challenge for philosophical theories of probability is in fact to explain not just these three applications of it but why they are linked as they are. That remains an unsettled question, with rival theories still vying

for acceptance by practitioners and philosophers alike.

These controversies do not, however, prevent the exposure of many mistakes in the application of probability, some of considerable practical or theoretical importance. Most people know that the so-called 'gambler's fallacy' – the idea that, for example, landing heads ten times in a row makes a normal coin less likely to land heads next time – is just that: a fallacy. (If that sequence of heads tells us anything, it tells us that the coin is *more* likely to land heads than we thought.)

Other errors can be less easy to spot. Take the extreme probabilities invoked when a defendant in, say, a rape case is identified by DNA evidence. Suppose for simplicity that the probability of a false match – i.e. of DNA samples from two different people matching – is one in ten million, and that a sample from the scene of the crime matches the defendant's DNA. It may be tempting, given the enormous odds against a false match, to think that this evidence alone proves the defendant's guilt. But it does not. For suppose the only other evidence about the rapist is that he is an adult male in the UK, which contains well over ten million such males. Then all the DNA evidence tells us is that the rapist is likely to be one of at least two people, of whom the defendant is one. So on this evidence the epistemic probability that the defendant *is* the rapist, far from being over 99.99%, is less than  $\frac{1}{2}$ , which is too low to prove his guilt even on the 'balance of probabilities' needed to win a civil case, let alone 'beyond reasonable doubt', as required for a criminal conviction.

Errors with fewer practical implications but perhaps more theoretical interest are made by some cosmologists and theologians who are over-impressed by the apparent improbability of those features of our universe needed to produce more or less intelligent life. This so-called 'fine-tuning' of our universe's laws, constants and initial conditions has seemed to many to call for some natural or supernatural explanation. The latter may be that our universe was *made* to support intelligent life; the former that we live in a 'multiverse' containing many universes, with many different features, which makes it not only probable but inevitable that

intelligent life will arise only in the few universes that can support it.

Where is the error in this? Not in the platitudinous conclusion that life can only arise in a universe that can support it. The error lies in assuming that such a universe is improbable in any sense that makes its existence call for explanation, an error rooted in a failure to distinguish chances from epistemic probabilities. Of course our evidence gives the relevant features of our universe a high *epistemic* probability, since all this means is that it tells us what those features are. It does not follow from this that there is any such thing as the *chance* of a universe having these features, let alone that only something like a design or multiverse theory can make that chance high enough to make our existence unsurprising. Nor does this follow from the fact that our universe could have been different in many ways, most of which would not have allowed it to support life. The most that follows from this is that the epistemic

probability of our kind of universe, relative to no evidence at all, would have been very low, which again is just to say that it's only the evidence – including the evidence of our own existence – which tells us what our universe is like.

None of this shows that design or multiverse theories are false, merely that some bad but common reasons for thinking or wanting them to be true are based on too indiscriminating a view of probability. A more discriminating view helps us to adopt the attitude expressed in Thomas Carlyle's alleged comment on one Margaret Fuller's reported remark that she accepted the universe: 'Gad,' said Carlyle, 'she had better.' And so, I think, had we.

D. H. Mellor FBA  
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy  
His book *Probability: A Philosophical Introduction* (Routledge, 2005) is available in hardback and paperback.

## We want to hear from you!

The Editor welcomes all comments and suggestions or material for future editions of the Newsletter. Please contact:

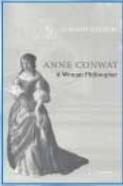
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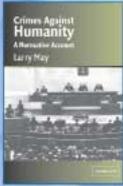
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# Recollections

## Nobody Knows Anything: Philosophy, Film and Me

Amanda Boyle (St. John's)

I was slightly surprised to be asked to write about philosophy at Cambridge because I wasn't exactly a stellar student. My first two years of Tripos were tricky for many reasons. Boys, alcohol and the ten plays I just had to act in didn't really help. After year one I tried to change to English but that Faculty cleverly dodged my eagerness suggesting my essays were just too 'philosophically minded'. Despite their claims, I knew I wasn't adept at philosophy – the disciplined structures of logical arguments were alien to my kaleidoscopic, scatter-gun way of thinking. I wanted to understand, I was fascinated, but it was as if everyone else involved in philosophy was following a script I hadn't been issued.

Things started to make more sense in my third year. This was partly due to the addition of aesthetics. Finally there was a subject I had an affinity for, which I was able to combine with another new passion, film. These two curiosities led to two extended essays, one on Arthur Danto and the other on the glamour of horror films. I left with an acceptable degree but I was most proud of those essays.

I'm now a film director and producer. After Cambridge I worked briefly as a runner for a company that made lifestyle cookery programmes for cable television. Not feeling entirely satisfied, I wrote hundreds of letters trying to get a job in film. One of the people I targeted was a producer who had made his name in horror films. He had read my CV and one day called saying he wanted to talk to me about my Cambridge essays. Why did people enjoy being scared out of their wits by horror films? Why had he spent his life making them? I refused to enlighten him until he gave me a job.

A week later I was working as his assistant. A month later he was sacked off the film, but by luck I kept my job and although the film was a critical flop of extraordinary proportions, I finally had my foot in the door. Sadly I never had time to divulge the secrets of my essay to the producer before he packed his bags for LA, but without it who knows Nanette Newman and I might still be working together.

Since then I have set up the low budget division of Working Title Films and was closely involved in the making of *Billy Elliot* and the horror flick *My Little Eye*. I'm now producing an IMAX film

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on the rebuilding of the World Trade Center and last year wrote and directed my first film *Hotel Infinity* which is doing the international festival circuit. This short is about a man who understood his unusual hotel by rigorous mathematical calculations.

Those years at Cambridge have had a deep impact on me. I'm glad I didn't change subject and sometimes think about studying aesthetics again. Trying to understand a foreign way of thinking was good for me and there are many moments and ideas from that time I often ponder. From the superb lecture about Beauty which discussed the voices of Maria Callas and Billie Holiday; to the hilarious political philosopher whose mantle piece was littered with crude sketches of tomb stones under which 'Past Cambridge Students' was written. In my report he wrote 'she deserves not to do well but I have a feeling she is an over-achiever'. That line will appear in a film, mark my words.

Equally unforgettable were the supervisions I had with my Director of Studies. She had an amazing skill at turning my head upside-down. In the first five minutes I would be made to see things from a position I had never considered. My essays in the first year weren't researched well. But in the last two years I was working hard and she still had the ability to make me see afresh. I would like to create films that do the same thing – that show another possible vision of the world, tell tales from another angle.

The similarities to my work today and my forays in philosophy don't end there and indeed it may not be a coincidence that one of the directors I admire, Terrence Malik, is also a philosopher. Now, just as then, I struggle with

structure. I'm interested in thoughts and emotions but I still have to fight to make a good story without letting it strangle my ideas. What film and philosophy ultimately have in common is that they

both deal with the known, unknown and the unknowable. Don't even get me started on the complexities of trying to make an original and successful film. As William Goldman famously put it "Nobody knows anything". Well I certainly wouldn't argue with that.

Amanda Boyle is a film producer and director



Jamie Whyte

## Seven Years at Cambridge

Jamie Whyte

(Darwin, St. John's, Corpus)

In 1985 I was an undergraduate at Auckland University studying philosophy. A travelling salesman had pinned up an advertisement for the LSE masters degree. I was seriously considering it.

At the same time, the department was visited by Hugh Mellor. When I mentioned the LSE, he suggested that I was aiming 50 miles too low. I should apply to do the MPhil in the History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge (the Philosophy MPhil did not then exist).

That's what I did. I will be glad if I make an equally good decision in the second half of my life.

In my seven years at Cambridge, the university's various institutions provided me with two degrees, a job (I was a research fellow at Corpus), two fiancées and one wife.

It may seem strange to say that Cambridge provided me with fiancées and a wife. But it reflects the fact that Cambridge takes over not just your education but your life. This is especially true for foreign students. With no old friends or family within striking distance, a square mile of colleges, libraries, lecture halls, common rooms and pubs becomes your whole world. And, as far as you are inclined to notice, it is populated by no one but other students and fellows, in which your arcane enquiries are the burning issues of the day.

Apart from All Blacks matches, I watched no TV. Politics, in which I had been actively engaged, faded in my consciousness, until it seemed to concern another planet. Great cultural movements, such as the emergence of 'Brit art', failed to draw my attention.

This temporary loss of the external world was beneficial. It allowed me to concentrate on philosophy with an intensity that I do not think I would have managed in a city university, or even

perhaps in Oxford. I finished my PhD in slightly under three years. My speed was assisted by a rapidly growing overdraft and by not joining the University Library. Libraries, like churches, have always given me the creeps: all that hushed reverence. This saved me from wasting hours every day flirting and gossiping in the UL coffee shop.

My research concerned truth and mental representation. Several philosophers at Cambridge – David Papineau, Tom Baldwin and Hugh Mellor, among others – were then working on the same or closely related topics. Most of what I have learnt in philosophy, I got from these people and the way they approached the subject.

Philosophy can easily descend into a point-scoring game where victory is to be had, not by answering philosophical questions, but by refuting others' answers. That was not the culture I encountered at Cambridge. I usually felt that discussions were collaborative efforts aimed at getting to the truth.

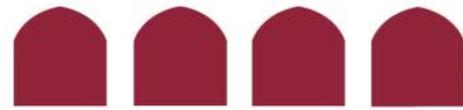
It helped that influential figures in the Faculty – especially Hugh Mellor – disagreed with Wittgenstein and believed that philosophical problems were both real and solvable. When that is what you believe, debate will often be robust, but not petty or pointless.

Cambridge philosophy then had a reputation for treating speakers harshly. I think it was exaggerated. Some speakers got roughed up; Cambridge philosophy never has been, and hopefully never will be, a touchy-feely love-fest. More often, however, seminars turned into 'working sessions' where contributions from the audience aimed at developing the speaker's ideas or suggesting solutions to problems.

The prestige of a PhD from Cambridge is valuable. It has helped me get jobs inside and outside academia. But what has helped me to do those jobs, and now to write professionally about politics and logic, is what I learnt at Cambridge. It was not a body of information; philosophy isn't that kind of subject. It was the values of intellectual honesty and rigour.

When faced with difficult decisions, many American Christians ask themselves: 'what would Jesus do?' I don't. But sometimes when I am writing something for public consumption about which I am not quite sure, I ask myself, 'how would this go down at the Moral Sciences Club?' The real benefit of my seven years at Cambridge is that I can answer that question.

Jamie Whyte is an author and freelance journalist



## The Forum for philosophy in business

Since its launch in 2002, the Forum for Philosophy in Business has been dedicated to strengthening the link between academic philosophy and practitioners in business and public life. No one high up in a large organisation can avoid grappling with abstract problems. The Forum provides a space to think, enabling them to articulate and address such concerns. As Aristotle said: 'It is impossible to untie a knot that one does not understand.' Philosophy is able to isolate the different strands in the knot and help point the way forward.

When we started, the idea of bringing together philosophers and practitioners in this way was very much an experiment – a chemical experiment, if one thinks of the potential for explosive reactions. But to judge from the range and calibre of interested practitioners over the last year, this experiment is proving extremely successful.

Throughout 2004, we engaged in research on trust funded by a Faculty Award from IBM. We looked at trust in different contexts – in the civil service, the professions and the media. Participants at one seminar included Sir David Omand (Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator, Cabinet Office), Anthony Williams (former HM Inspector of Constabulary) and Lord Wilson (former Cabinet Secretary), as well as senior figures from the medical, actuarial and accounting professions. At the seminar on trust in the media participants included Philip Graf (Press Complaints Commission), Dame Patricia Hodgson (former Chief Executive of the Independent Television Commission), John Lloyd (Editor, *FT Magazine*), Graham Mather (President, European Policy Forum). On the philosophical side we are greatly indebted to Simon Blackburn, Ross Harrison and Onora O'Neill for their contributions and support.

The Forum operates in a number of ways:

- With sponsorship from outside organisations, we organise seminars and conferences (normally in Cambridge), bringing together participants with very different backgrounds. We are grateful to IBM and the consultants SHM for their support in this area.
- We also take on projects sponsored by

specific organisations, private or public sector. For instance, we are working with Acevo (The Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations) on a project examining public trust in charities. Nick Aldridge, Acevo's Head of Policy and Communications, is a recent Cambridge Philosophy alumnus. Our industrial links include BT and Pfizer.

- Our research feeds directly into the Tripos. We are currently running a seminar series investigating whether corporations are in any sense persons or morally responsible agents. We have also conducted a philosophical audit of company corporate social responsibility statements and 'business principles' – from BAT to the Body Shop. We are pleased to report that the undergraduates are as sharp as ever, and left no target standing.



We would like to thank the many alumni who wrote in to express their support for the Forum and to suggest possible avenues for research. Please keep up the dialogue and please come to the forthcoming 2005 Alumni weekend (see 'Events'), when we will be discussing the ethics of intellectual property with Prof Lionel Bently of the Cambridge Law Faculty.



from left, Professor Ross Harrison, Mr Graham Mather and Mr Philip Graf

Alex Oliver and Dominic Scott  
For information about the Forum, see [www.phil.cam.ac.uk](http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk)  
The Forum can be contacted at the Faculty's address or via email ([phil-forum@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:phil-forum@lists.cam.ac.uk))

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consumer product, and complaints procedures for individuals can't secure public goods. This doesn't show that a self-regulating free press can't achieve adequate standards. It shows that the weak self-regulation that we currently have in the UK is inadequate. If we think statutory regulation of the press too risky, we need more serious self-regulation.

Professor Onora O'Neill FBA is Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge

## Faculty News

This year again many members of the Faculty have had their achievements recognised by promotions, awards, elections and invitations to give lectures around the globe.

It would be impossible to list them all but here are a few highlights:

**Simon Blackburn** gave the Jack Smart lecture at the Australian National University and the Lindley lecture at Kansas. **Ross Harrison** was promoted to a Personal Chair; from September 2005 he will be the Quain Professor in Jurisprudence, University College, London. **Onora O'Neill** will be the next President of the British Academy, from July 2005. **Michael Potter** was promoted to a Readership.

A number of our graduate students and Research Fellows have secured jobs in philosophy academia, among them are: **Carrie Jenkins** at St. Andrews, **Fiona Macpherson** at Bristol, **Alex Paseau** at Wadham College, Oxford.

## Justify Yourself – Tim Button

The Amoral Sciences Club, undergraduate foil to the Moral Sciences Club, last year organised a series of talks entitled 'Justify Yourself'. Five Cambridge stalwarts – Simon Blackburn, Hugh Mellor, Jane Heal, Peter Lipton and Raymond Geuss – and one visiting scholar – Bob Hanna – bravely justified themselves and their subject.

Mellor started the series by distinguishing two senses in which philosophy might require justification: either as a *professional* practice or *in itself*. To attempt to justify philosophy itself would mistakenly treat philosophy as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself. Accordingly, he said little about philosophy *per se*.

Mellor claimed that the professional practice of philosophy is for a society, not an individual, to justify. Society sets aside funding for professional philosophers, and we may rightly ask what the appropriate level of funding should be. However, since society makes *some* money available to philosophers, there's no reason why he shouldn't take advantage of that and make a living out of what he loved.

Jane Heal asked us to imagine a society in which professional philosophy was not supported. She conjectured that such a society would be largely uniform, with an enforced, dictatorial orthodoxy, or it would be comprised of turnips, incapable of reflection.

The distinction between professional and pure philosophy was invoked by Hanna in a different context. He feared that the pursuit of tenure can obliterate the love of the subject. For him 'getting "interested" in philosophy was precisely like falling in love: hot & cold flushes, shivers, complete absorption in it to the neglect of everything else, alternating manic intellectual excitement & abysmal depression.' Geuss supplemented his

description of his love of philosophy with the paradox that he is drawn to it in alternating waves of optimism and pessimism about the possibility of societal change.

What *is* philosophy for these philosophers? Mellor argued that it is not a spectator sport: only those who can philosophise can really criticise or enjoy the subject. But Lipton noted that the boundaries of philosophy are vague. Much of philosophy is 'philosophy of X', where X is some other subject (e.g. science), and the philosophy of X is usually also found within the X-subject itself. But while many other subjects need to justify themselves in terms of the practical value of what they do, 'studying philosophy is self-justifying.'

Philosophy captures something of the scale of cosmology, Heal argued, but in the study of people. With the subject so loosely defined, it could only be a question of examining your life. All sorts of question arise during this enterprise, only some of which will interest you. Little wonder then that what is called 'philosophy' varies so much across cultures and times.

With the human condition at its core, Hanna claimed that philosophy aims 'to get a priori insight into this subject matter, whether cognitively or non-cognitively.' The first is 'conceptual analysis'; the second is Aristotle's 'wonder' or Wittgenstein's 'mystical'. Philosophy is a synthesis between the two. This found resonance in Mellor's argument that philosophy cannot be *purely* analytic, since analysis provides too little metaphysics and an analytic argument (e.g. a mathematical one) is won by knockout, but philosophical arguments are won on points.

What does the future of philosophy hold? Blackburn enthused about recent progress in logic and philosophy of

science, and noted optimistically that philosophers are taking an increased interest in genealogy. Heal was more cautious. She was happy that so many intelligent people are philosophers, but expressed concern that the volume of philosophical literature is becoming so large that it is escaping from philosophers. Philosophy should allow its participants to sit back and think for fifteen or twenty years.

Here we saw alienation between philosophy and philosophers, foreshadowing some of the tensions highlighted by Geuss. Although we can see the flaws in our own creation, it is unclear how to change it for the better. Geuss also noted that only two 'schools' of philosophers – the positivists and the Hegelians (both left and right) – were immune to the attractions of National Socialism, and thus cast doubt on the ability of philosophy and philosophers to do more than justify extant systems.

Amidst such weighty material, we were also treated to light-hearted insights and hilarious anecdotes, most memorably the stunning impressions, by Blackburn and Heal, of the 'Wittgenstein-slump': body posture *de rigueur* of post-Wittgenstein Cambridge. The sheer intellectual and emotional variety displayed during the series reveals that the philosopher's life – the examined life – is self-evidently worth living and worth examining, and that sometimes these cannot be properly distinguished.

*In 2005, the ASC is holding a series of 'Confrontations', reenacting famous incendiary disputes from the history of philosophy.*

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/societies/asc/>

Tim Button is an MPhil student