It has been an eventful year for the Faculty. As we anticipated last year, we were given permission to name the Chair founded in 1896, the ‘Bertrand Russell Professorship of Philosophy’. The great generosity of past alumni made this possible, and we repeat last year’s gratitude for all the donations and support you have given. It was Russell’s combination of distinction as a logician and philosopher, work as a public intellectual, and visibility as a world-renowned symbol of the engagement of philosophy in public life that finally saw him edge ahead.

This year the Faculty again mounted a variety of public events. Fraser MacBride gave a fascinating and well-received talk entitled ‘The Dark Matter of Cambridge Philosophy’ at the Alumni Weekend. The ‘dark matter’ was made up of those more or less forgotten philosophers whose lights were partially eclipsed by the more memorable giants of the subject.

Cain Todd, a recent graduate student now working at Lancaster University and the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, talked at the Cambridge Festival of Ideas about the delightful and puzzling topic of our emotional responses to fictional events and characters. Also Tim Scanlon from Harvard, one of the world’s most distinguished moral philosophers, gave the annual Routledge Lecture entitled ‘Value in Morality and Politics’ to a large and appreciative audience.

An unusual event was a conference on philosophy and cloud computing, brilliantly organized by graduate student Tom Simpson, and supported by Microsoft. It was pleasing to find out how well engineers and philosophers could cooperate to think about things like trust, privacy, property, and exploitation in the virtual world. Finally, for three months this summer Professor Frank Jackson is a Leverhulme Trust Visiting Professor, having surmounted the formidable hurdles put in front of visiting academics by the immigration authorities, and will be giving four lectures.

Sadly I am rapidly approaching retirement in September, and this is the last Chairman’s letter that I will be privileged to write. My successor will be Professor Huw Price, currently the Challis Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. Huw has contributed hugely to many different areas of philosophy: an indication may be found at his website (http://homepage.mac.com/huw.price/publications.html). Amongst his many papers and books, the marvelous Time’s Arrow and Archimedes’ Point has reached the widest audience, even gaining applause from professional physicists, which is no easy thing to do. It is gratifying for me to know that the Bertrand Russell Chair will have such a distinguished occupant.

Last year I mentioned that the Faculty was prioritizing graduate support as the target of our fundraising ambitions. I am especially pleased to say that we are already able to offer partial support to some half-dozen graduate students, while one donor in particular has undertaken to offer full support to a PhD student for the foreseeable future. With the decline in public funding, this support is becoming ever more crucial for the future of graduate and undergraduate education.

Times are certainly turbulent in the university world. Nobody can know what the regime of increased fees and vanishing public support will imply for disciplines in the humanities. Nobody knows either, quite how the Government’s notorious ‘impact’ agenda will itself impact upon subjects whose value lies not in small measurable effects, but in the incalculably long and slow diffusion of ideas and modes of thinking. But as I hand over the reins to others, I am happy to reassure readers that the Faculty intends to meet future challenges with its intellectual ideals, its determination, and its morale, as high as ever.
Inaugural Lecture: What is Distinctive about Human Thought?

Nick Treanor

Very few know what it’s like to give an inaugural lecture. But for the audience, it is altogether different from other academic talks. The room is invariably large and unfamiliar and full of strangers. There is quiet excitement in the air, and nowhere to sit. And there is no reason to go — at least in the sense that it does not matter for Tripos, it is not likely to benefit the research of the academics who gather from scattered disciplines, and the turnout is usually so great that no one would notice you were missing. There are always free drinks it is true, but that is a reason to show up for the drinks, not for the talk beforehand.

And so it was on a cold night in December, in the last week of Michaelmas, when Tim Crane gave his inaugural lecture as the Knightbridge Professor of Philosophy. But as much as every inaugural lecture is the same, this one was different: for Professor Crane made intelligible, and interpreted as distinctly human, why we think a creature distinguish between the way the world is and the way others take it to be. We humans do not merely represent the world as thus and so, we also systematically represent the beliefs of others as being correct or incorrect. There is no evidence that animals can do this. Chimps, for instance, have beliefs about what other chimps know, but they do not have beliefs about what other chimps believe. The difference is that while chimps can believe that a certain relation holds between another chimp and her environment (knowing, seeing, wanting), they cannot isolate the mental state of that other chimp and think of it as being correct or incorrect.

The capacity to think of mental states as true or false is part of what gives us what Crane believes to be distinctive about human thought: the ability to desire the truth for its own sake. This Crane takes, not as the claim that we can desire the truth simpliciter, just because it is true, but that we can desire the truth on some subject matter, not for instrumental reasons, but for its own sake or value.

Once again the argument is partly empirical: Is there evidence that people sometimes, or at least can, desire knowledge for its own sake, and that animals do not or cannot? The answer is yes, at least prima facie. Humans, from a very early age, have a capacity for declarative pointing, which is pointing to draw attention to something, but not in the service of some immediate interest. Animals that seem to point or signal to others, in contrast, are at most communicating danger (“Watch out!” or food (“Pig out!”) or reproductive benefit (“Hey baby!”). What they cannot do, and what we can do, is point and mean something like “Check this out”. Not for safety or for food or for propagation, but to know it for its own sake.

Such was the thesis and thus ran the argument. Does it get to the truth on this matter? It may, and so http://bit.ly/craneinaugural (for the sake of knowledge itself).

Political Philosophy at Cambridge

Political Philosophy consolidated its position in the Faculty this year with two new research seminars. Both focus on contemporary political philosophy, an area in which the Faculty is particularly strong, but which was previously somewhat eclipsed at University level by historical approaches. The two new events are the Political Philosophy Workshop and the Seminar in Political Thought. Both events bring together Political Philosophers from around the University, including POLIS, Law, History, HPS, Classics and Philosophy, with a mailing list of around 60 specialists.

The Workshop is convened by Clare Chambers (Philosophy) and enables detailed, high-level discussion of work in progress by Cambridge scholars. Since papers are read in advance, the workshop consists of 90 minutes of focused engagement with the arguments, which is stimulating for all participants.

The Seminar is a visiting speaker seminar, convened jointly by Clare Chambers and Duncan Bell (POLIS). In Michaelmas Term the Seminar hosted four visitors. Andrea Sangiovanni (KCL) gave an excellent start to the Seminar with a paper titled “La verità effettuale della cosa”: On the Practice-Dependence of Political Values”. David Miller (Oxford) told the Seminar that his title, “The Idea of Global Citizenship”, was inspired by a poster display at a school celebrating ‘global citizenship’, an idea which is sadly nonsensical. Anne Phillips (LSE) argued against the commonly-used concept of property in the person, in “Do we own our Bodies? More Thoughts on Property in the Person and in the Body.” Finally, Zofia Stemplowska (Warwick) exhorted us to accept a duty of justice to take up the slack left when others fail to do their fair share, in “Responsibility for Refugees: A Duty to Do More Than One’s Fair Share?”

Cambridge contemporary political philosophers look forward to hosting more visitors and continuing to subject themselves to concentrated critique.

Philosophy at Cambridge page 2 May 2011
Aspects of Philosophy at Cambridge

Alexis Papazoglou

Philosophy at Cambridge doesn’t just take place in the Philosophy Faculty. Realising the extent of that truth, I decided to host an event, bringing together Cambridge academics who approach philosophy from different contexts, and ask them to talk about their conception of ‘philosophy’.

The result was a two-day conference with 12 speakers from 9 different faculties and departments, held at Hughes Hall as part of the College’s 125th anniversary. Part of the purpose of this event was to make explicit the plurality of perspectives on philosophy living in the University of Cambridge today.

It seemed to me that the trend in thought preoccupying many of the speakers was the question ‘What is bad philosophy?’ Tim Crane, Knightbridge Professor of Philosophy, inaugurated this theme. After convincingly denouncing a dichotomy between analytic and continental philosophy — falsely created by people who want to ignore certain texts — he exposed caricatures of analytic philosophy that locate its value in some alleged special relation with logic, language and the natural sciences. Crane located ‘the death of philosophy’ in what he called, borrowing Thomas Kuhn’s terminology, ‘normal philosophy’: philosophy that is preoccupied with increasingly esoteric questions against a background of controversial, yet unquestioned assumptions.

Tim Lewens (HPS) and David Runciman (POLIS) were concerned with two paradigms in their areas that they found problematic. Naturalism, for Lewens, seemed to be a philosophical assumption that sometimes — especially when it was interpreted as thinking of philosophical questions like causality with our eye on the sciences — muddies the waters instead of making things clearer, and is used as an ‘add-on’ to give an argument the authority of science. Runciman, on the other hand, criticised some attempts of offering a political philosophy by thinking of real politics, rather than providing ideal theories of justice.

Finally, Jane Heal (Philosophy) was also concerned with the pitfalls of philosophy. For Heal the dangers lie in pure philosophy — philosophy divorced from other disciplines. Part of the success of much of early 20th century Cambridge philosophy, she argued, was down to the institutional structure of the Philosophy Faculty, then the Moral Sciences Faculty, which included history, psychology, economics, linguistics etc.

Podcasts of some of the talks are available from the Philosophy Faculty website.

Principia at 100

Peter Smith

In A Mathematician’s Apology (CUP, 1940), G. H. Hardy recalls Bertrand Russell telling him of a horrible dream:

G. H. Hardy recalls Bertrand Russell telling Peter Smith at 100

Principia at 100

Peter Smith

Well, a hundred years after the publication of the first volume of the triple-decker he wrote with Whitehead, the book is certainly still held in enough regard for its centennial to have been marked by a number of conferences. True, I doubt that many who attended them (or indeed many of the speakers) had actually read more than half the first volume of Principia. And almost no-one now believes that the logicist project that the work tries to pull off can succeed, or at least not as its authors conceived it. But the influence the book has had can hardly be exaggerated.

Cambridge’s contribution to the celebrations was a two-day symposium held in Trinity in November 2010. The driving force behind this was Nik Sultana, a graduate student in computer science, and indeed a number of the speakers were computer scientists (this gave the Cambridge meeting an interestingly different flavour to other centennial celebrations). The theoretical computer scientists’ interest in Principia is, of course, as a key source for the ‘theory of types’ and the development of a typed language. Though it is a nice question — one addressed by Randall Holmes — whether Russell and Whitehead’s ramified type theory can be precisified to the point where Principia proofs could pass muster with a computer proof-checker.

The symposium was an enjoyable success: for abstracts and some of the papers, do go to: www.srcf.ucam.org/principia. And Russell’s shade can relax and look forward to the next centenary...
People

We’re fortunate to have many highly motivated and able students in Philosophy. But their talents are not just limited to the academic arena — many of them excel in their non-academic activities too. Our current students are a particularly talented bunch, with impressive achievements in comedy, fiction, business, and political activism among other things. Here are some success stories.

Christiana Spens

Before Cambridge my first novel, The Wrecking Ball, was published. After that exciting but overwhelming experience, it was a relief to set my mind to something so disciplined as Philosophy. I wasn’t exactly a natural with Logic, but nevertheless enjoyed the course (Aesthetics especially), and it seeped into extra-curricular activities here: I curated an art exhibition, Companions in Guilt, with two other philosophers (Emma Whittall and Matthew Drage) — and this term, I’m writing a faux ‘lecture series’ for Varsity on ‘The Philosophy of Gossip Girl’, interpreting the popular series’ for and this term, I’m writing a faux ‘lecture series’ for Varsity on ‘The Philosophy (Emma Whittall and Matthew Drage) — and this term, I’m writing a faux ‘lecture series’ for Varsity on ‘The Philosophy of Gossip Girl’, interpreting the popular series’ for

Joe Pitt-Rashid

I started out as a photographer at student paper Varsity, then features editor, before being appointed full editor for the Michaelmas term. I also played Varsity Rugby League in my first-year and have worked with the Cambridge Union and Beyond Profit, a student run organization educating people about socially responsible business. At the moment, I am working on a short film and trying to dedicate more time to my degree. I worked for the Ministry of Defence last summer and will soon be starting a Dual-Degree in International Affairs at Science-Po in Paris and Columbia University in New York, if I can find the funding.

Hugo Hickson

I co-founded Beyond Profit (www.beyondprofit.org.uk) in May 2010. We are a student society promoting social enterprise and sustainable business, consisting of over 700 student members and 11 professionals in an advisory role. Each term we put on workshops, discussions and networking events aiming at dispelling the myth that earning money and making a positive difference are at odds with each other. We hope to aid, inform and inspire the next generation of business leaders and social entrepreneurs.

James Angel

As a King’s third year philosopher, I find myself tired of the obscure metaphysical questions that initially got me hooked on philosophy. Instead, after three years of climate and social justice activism, which have encompassed everything from negotiating meetings to breaking the law, I am interested in whether philosophy can be of use in affecting the radical social change that I believe is necessary. I plan, after Cambridge, to continue my activism; this is motivated by moral and political concerns raised by philosophy.

Mark Fiddaman

Mark is President of the legendary Cambridge Footlights and regularly performs in a mixture of sketches and stand-up, as well as plays.

Emerald Paston

I started performing comedy songs, along with some stand up, in my first year here. Since then I’ve performed in numerous smokers and balls around Cambridge and at the Edinburgh Festival. I also managed to get through to the final of the Chortle Student Comedian of the Year Award last summer.

Luke Hawksbee

I got involved in setting up the National Campaign Against Fees & Cuts by being on the steering committee of Education Not for Sale (since dissolved into NCAFC). I’ve been politically active in other ways too: speaking at conferences and day-schools, holding meetings and organising protests, running local campaigns and fundraising etc. I’m currently focusing on educating myself and others — I’m arranging seminars on left-wing theory/history for local sixth formers. My goal is to help make the world more equal and democratic, and the first step is to defend public services.

Odin Mühlenbein

I co-founded clicks4charity (www.clicks4charity.net), a student-run social business in 2007. We provide online fundraising tools for non-profit organizations, including major German NGOs like SOS Children’s Villages and Greenpeace, and we co-operate with over 400 online shops. Clicks4charity has been profiled in major German newspapers and on television, and we’ve received two awards. My current goal is to put other projects aside in order to make some progress with my PhD, which isn’t easy, because I already have new business ideas!
The Faculty

Awards, Honours and Promotions
John Marenbon has been conferred the title ‘Honorary Professor of Medieval Philosophy’ at Cambridge.
Affiliated lecturer, Derek Matravers has been made a Professor by the Open University.
Clare Chambers was promoted to University Senior Lecturer.
Tim Lewens has been awarded the first Crausaz Wordsworth Fellowship in Philosophy.

Clare 1972–75) was named W. Mellon Foundation.
Professor Jonathan Lear (Clare 1970–73) received a Race on the Agenda, and Chief Executive Officer for the and Women’s Issues. Carlene is Senior Policy Officer for Girls’
Ms Carlene Firmin (Fitzwilliam 2002–05) has been awarded an MBE in the New Year’s Honours list for services to Girls’ and Women’s Issues. Carlene is Senior Policy Officer for Race on the Agenda, and Chief Executive Officer for the Gag Project.
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Mr Jonathan Brown (Pembroke 1974–78) has had a large painting of a storm in Nice, accepted by the International Museum of Naive Art Anatole Jakowsky, for its permanent collection.

Arrivals
This year Maike Albertzart was appointed as temporary lecturer in October 2010 while Dr Olsaretti was on leave.

Richard Child was appointed as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Social Justice and Criminal Justice for two years.

Steinvør Árnadóttir joined the Faculty on a 2-year Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship with matching funding from the Isaac Newton Trust.

Special Lectures
Members of the Faculty are often invited to give lectures around the globe. Onora O’Neill visited New Zealand to give the inaugural Royal Society Arouni Lecture Series on “Two Cultures Fifty Years On” in September 2010. She also gave the Woodbridge Lectures at Columbia University in April 2011. Simon Blackburn gave the inaugural ‘Philosophy in the World’ Lecture at Leiden University College in March 2011.

Onora O’Neil and Simon Blackburn will also speak at the popular Cambridge Series at the Hay Literary Festival, May 27th to June 5th 2011.

Student Prizes
The Matthew Buncombe prize for best overall performance in the MPhil degree was awarded to Owen Griffiths (St John’s).

The Craig Taylor prize for best performance in Part IB went to James Angel (Kings). The Part II prize was shared between Zoe Johnson King ( Fitzwilliam); Felicity Loudon (Corpus Christi) and William Ratoff (Robinson).

Appointments
Hallvard Lillemoer was appointed to a Senior Research Fellowship at Churchill College.

Niklas Möller has been awarded a 2-year, full-time funded project on the philosophy of risk at Stockholm University after his EC Marie-Cutie Fellowship here in the Faculty finishes in June 2011.

Florian Steinberger joined the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich as Assistant Professor in Logic and Philosophy of Language.

Four new Research Fellows have been appointed at Cambridge from Michaelmas 2011: Lorna Finlayson (Cambridge) and Jessica Leech (Geneva) at King’s, Will Davies (Oxford) at Churchill, and Thomas Land (Chicago) at Corpus Christi.

Of our graduate students, Adam Caulton has a 2-year Jacobsen Fellowship at LSE, and Cristian Constantinescu was appointed to a lectureship at Birbeck.

Alumni News
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Philosophy at Cambridge page 5 May 2011
If I were to say that a degree in philosophy — or in my case moral sciences — was a very good preparation for a career in healthcare management you might assume that I was referring to the many day to day dilemmas inherent in providing services for worried, sick and dying people and their relatives.

As a hospital Chief Executive I was certainly faced with decisions about how we should handle “advance directives” and “do not resuscitate policies”. More problematically, I recall being drawn into the deliberations — and occasional tensions between relatives, carers and clinicians — about when to carry on treatment in intensive care or when to support a dignified death. (I hired a clinical ethicist, but that’s another story). As NHS Chief Executive I also played a part in priority setting in a context where everything is a priority for somebody and where decision making on uncertain evidence was sometimes better than no decision at all.

This is all true, but only part of my point. More cynically, you might think that some philosophical training was useful in a world where more nonsense appears to be talked than in any other. A random sample makes the point well.

“Because costs are rising so fast, we must start charging for healthcare”. (But costs are generally higher in countries where they charge and there are alternative approaches). “Cancer patients in the UK have poorer survival rates than in Bulgaria”. (We don’t know: in the UK we follow patients up better and know how long they live). “What about “demand for healthcare is infinite”? (No it’s not; most men avoid the doctor like the plague).

Statements like these are full of false assumptions, inaccurate inferences and misleading arguments but also for the most part contain a grain of truth or draw attention to an important point. If you are running a health service it is important to be able to make the arguments well and spot the flaws — or to put it crudely, spot bullshit at 25 paces.

There is a third level, however, where the ability to think, to go beyond current assumptions and beliefs and imagine a different future is all important. Healthcare is an enveloping, all encompassing environment for its professionals. It socialises them from an early age with its language, norms, habits, rituals and patterns of thought.

More insidiously, we the public also find ourselves affected by the thinking, preceding control of our health to the practitioners. The result is the doctor, disease and hospital centric health systems which exist in every wealthy country — even though we know that we must focus on prevention and can see that such systems don’t work well for the elderly people with multiple needs and pathologies who are the main users of the service and its greatest expense.

New ideas won’t come from within a service burdened by its own history and hobbled by vested interests. Insight and inspiration can, however, come from poorer countries — in Africa and Asia — which without our resources and baggage are innovating, adapting and creating. Examples abound of newer cheaper technology, community leadership — often from women — and shorter more focussed training of health workers. They may need our science and resources but we need to turn the world of our assumptions upside down and learn from their wisdom and their experience.

My brief exposure to philosophical thinking has been helpful in this context by giving me the humility to understand that there can be different realities and the intellectual insight and curiosity to explore them.

Lord Nigel Crisp (St John’s 1970–73) is an independent Cross Bench member of the House of Lords. He was Chief Executive of the NHS and Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health from 2000 to 2006. His latest book is Turning the World Upside Down: the search for global health in the 21st century (RSM Press, 2010).
Aestheticians have spilled a lot of ink trying to resolve what has become known as the ‘paradox of fiction’, namely, the problem that we seem to have emotional responses to characters, events and situations that we know to be merely fictional. We feel sad at the death of Anna Karenina or afraid of the Blair Witch. Why? The puzzle is sharpened by considering that our ordinary, everyday emotional responses in non-fictional contexts appear to possess two essential features that preclude their being directed at fiction. First, they seem dependent in some way on existential beliefs about the relevant objects and their properties. For example, my fear of the approaching lion will disappear if I discover that it is just a convincing hologram, or that it lacks teeth and claws. Second, emotions seem to be very closely tied to physiological symptoms and action tendencies. To be in a state of genuine fear, for instance, requires that I tremble, sweat, and that I be inclined to flee or cower. Our emotional responses to fiction seem to lack these features, at least to a significant degree.

Solutions to the ‘paradox’ range from the downright counterintuitive — such as denying that our fiction-directed responses are genuine emotions — to the deeply unsatisfying — such as regarding our responses as simply irrational and inexplicable. The general tendency, however, has been to deny, on the one hand, that genuine emotions must be responses to beliefs, and to show that they can be responsive to merely imaginary scenarios. On the other hand, philosophers have also come to acknowledge that even fiction-directed responses are not entirely shorn of the relevant connections to physiology and behaviour. The most important and interesting recent impetus here has come from philosophical and psychological (including neuroscientific) work on the nature of imagination and emotion.

Antonio Damasio’s famous research on certain brain-damaged patients, for example, appears to demonstrate that our practical reasoning, involving imagined scenarios concerning our own future decisions and actions, is successful only insofar as it essentially involves somatically encoded emotional responses. The ability to respond emotionally to the merely imaginary, seems to be a fundamental feature of our cognitive apparatus. Moreover, a plausible evolutionary — psychological story can be told about the nature and value of appreciating fiction in engaging the imagination and emotions in just this way. For our appreciation of fiction depends upon the exercise of cognitive resources that play a fundamental role in human behaviour and well-being, and the engagement with fiction thus offers an important way of exercising and developing these capacities.

Recent work on the emotions has also pointed in a similar direction, with psychologists demonstrating that certain emotional responses can be activated in response to mental imagery, and also via sub-cognitive processing i.e. without involving anything like the formation of beliefs. Some prominent philosophical theories of the emotions take up this ‘non-cognitive’ view of emotions and employ it directly as a solution to the paradox of fiction. They hold that our belief in the unreality of what we are responding to need not inhibit emotional responses.

These connections between fiction, imagination and emotion offer a nice demonstration of the productive interaction of philosophy with the kind of empirical inquiry provided by psychology and other disciplines. Nonetheless, despite the impressive progress made on this problem, there remains an insufficiently explained issue at the very heart of the paradox. Just how can one have an emotional response of, say, fear, towards something that is known, currently with the emotional state, to be merely imaginary?

I think that an answer to this question needs to explore the nature and role of attention in our appreciation of fiction. Our ability to ‘bracket’ off the awareness of fictionality — thereby becoming ‘lost’ in the fictional world — whilst simultaneously appreciating something as a fiction, is a phenomenon we still need to account for if we wish to have a better understanding of the nature of appreciation.
Philosophy, St. John’s, Cambridge, 1986

Fraser MacBride

Our Director of Studies was Renford Bambrough. He was a disciple of John Wisdom — a Cambridge professor of the 1950s and 60s whose work was inspired by the later Wittgenstein’s emphasis on ordinary language and by G.E. Moore’s common sense approach. For Bambrough and Wisdom, philosophy as it should be practiced shared more in common with literary criticism and psychoanalysis than mathematics or the natural sciences. Renford’s task in supervisions was to inoculate us against the diseases of the intellect with which traditional philosophy threatened to infect us, especially metaphysics. This impression of what philosophy should be was confirmed the following year when Richard Rorty came to deliver the Tanner lectures at Trinity (later published as Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (CUP, 1989), lectures that included inter alia a sweeping deconstruction of the very idea of ‘Truth’ and the notion that ‘Reality’ had its own independent structure. The wider academic community outside philosophy departments took note: the announcement that metaphysics was dead echoed about. But unlike the Soviet Union or the apartheid system that were soon to collapse, metaphysics wasn’t on its last legs; in fact it was about to stride forth invigorated, renewed with a second youth.

Many factors contributed to its resurgence, but one important event through which the Zeitgeist channeled its energies was the publication of a work by the Princeton philosopher David Lewis: On the Plurality of Worlds (OUP, 1986). Lewis argued that when we ordinarily talk about how our lives could have turned out differently we are talking about other people whose lives really did turn out that way — only people who inhabit regions of space and time that can’t be reached from our neck of the woods. He raised plenty of eyebrows saying this; it was really a breathtaking achievement on Lewis’ part to still convince so many philosophers that his theory of possible worlds exhibited the theoretical benefits or virtues of the metaphysical schemes they proposed, virtues broadly speaking shared with respectable scientific theories.

The maelstrom of metaphysical speculation that subsequently engulfed the discipline during the 90s and the 00s has now begun to wash back out to sea. Metaphysicians are beginning to become more circumspect, ‘meta-metaphysics’ has accordingly become a respectable subject of enquiry. Looking back over the years it seems to me that whilst Renford was far from being right, he wasn’t entirely wrong either. The ordinary language and therapeutic approach to philosophy that he and Wisdom advanced arose as a response to the excesses of the logical atomism that preceded it. Metaphysics of the style I have described — an ‘ism’ for it still needs to be invented — blew away the cobwebs and liberated us from the essentially conservative way of thinking associated with ordinary language philosophy. But it took us too far in the other direction, made philosophy too much like a crude caricature of the natural sciences, and what we must do now is find our way back.

Fraser MacBride completed his B.A. in 1989. He returned to Cambridge twenty years later to become a University Lecturer in Philosophy and a Fellow of Trinity Hall. He was previously a Reader in Philosophy at the University of St. Andrews and Birkbeck College, London.

The Faculty gratefully acknowledges support for the newsletter from Polity Press and Cambridge University Press