

# Philosophy at Cambridge

Newsletter of the Faculty of Philosophy

Issue 1  
May 2004



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

## From the Chairman

Welcome to the first issue of the Philosophy Faculty's Newsletter. We plan to publish it annually.

The Faculty has now settled into its new premises at the top of the Raised Faculty Building, a move to which so many of you contributed so generously. And we are already looking to expand a little further. The English Faculty has a splendid (or do I just mean huge?) new building, which means that all the space occupied by their library in the RFB will shortly become vacant.

It isn't just architecturally that we are broadening out – we are also hammering at the walls between academic philosophy and the rest of the world. Professor Blackburn's introductory book *Think* has sold well over 100,000 copies and been translated into more than a dozen languages. And an exciting new venture, the *Forum for Philosophy in Business* (see p. 2) is gathering momentum.

With University funding even more uncertain than usual the Faculty is seeking greater financial independence. A project is afoot to find endowment-money for the Professorship previously held by Wittgenstein. Please wish us luck – and remember us when you win the National Lottery ...

We hope you enjoy the Newsletter. Our grateful thanks to those who have contributed to it.

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

## WRITING ABOUT SIN

Simon Blackburn

When, eighteen months ago, I was asked to give a public lecture on one of the Seven Deadly Sins, in a series jointly mounted by the New York Public Library and Oxford University Press, several sins had already been bagged. I was offered the choice of sloth, anger, or lust. Each was tempting, and each had a good philosophical pedigree. But I felt that only lust had star quality.

I had scarcely accepted when I became aware of my disqualifications as a middle-aged (at best), academic, male, heterosexual, English grandfather. Practically a paid-up member of the patriarchy, how could I move a step without outraging feminists, queer theorists, victims and campaigners for victims, of every hue? I saw myself driven from the stage for using the wrong pronoun. I saw armies of therapists offering me help. And then, what should I expect from the New York audience? There was the fate of my distinguished Cambridge predecessor, Bertrand Russell, who in 1941 was stripped of his appointment at the College of the city of New York, after a macabre witch-hunt, on the grounds that his works were 'lecherous, libidinous, lustful, venerous, erotomaniac, aphrodisiac, irreverent, narrow-minded, untruthful and bereft of moral fiber'.

My general thesis was to be that Lust should be shifted from the category of Sin to that of Virtue. David Hume defined a virtue as any quality of mind that is useful or agreeable to ourselves or others. Lust qualifies in spades. But my leading witness was the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who said that

The appetite which men call lust...is a sensual pleasure, but

not only that; there is in it also a delight of the mind: for it consisteth of two appetites together, to please, and to be pleased; and the delight men take in delighting, is not sensual, but a pleasure or joy of the mind consisting in the imagination of the power they have so much to please.

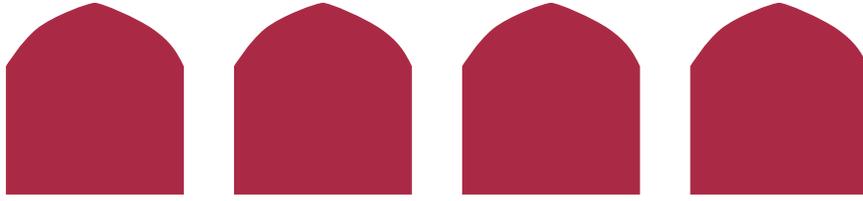
I also enjoyed contrasting the standard Platonic story of ascent, whereby lust for sex with an individual politely gives way to an abstract love of beauty, with the more earthy Shakespearean view in which erotic love is the domain of unreasonable dotings, fiction, madness, bubbles, and illusion. It is not so obvious why we ought to prefer the latter, which leaves it an option that we ought to take our lust neat.

Writing up the lecture for publication proved surprisingly difficult. Academic philosophy, let alone theology, is no friend to the light touch, and at times it seemed hard to bear the relentless disapproval of Augustine, Aquinas and Kant. I won't spoil the ending, but on the whole humanity does not come out too badly.

Simon Blackburn FBA  
Professor of Philosophy. His book *Lust* is part of the *The Seven Deadly Sins* series, and it is published by OUP, 2004.



Walter Crane (1845–1915), *Beauty and the Beast*



# The Forum

## *for philosophy in business*



addressing abstract problems can lead to practical results.

Intellectual property is a topical example. Lawyers and economists dominate the field. Yet at its heart lie conceptual distinctions that need philosophical attention. For example, there is increasing pressure to patent gene sequences: how else can businesses be persuaded to invest in R&D? Legally, only inventions, not discoveries, are patentable. So isolated sequences are now being treated as inventions. But the arguments for this move are specious. It is also surprising that

much of the argument about intellectual property rights simply assumes utilitarianism, a theory which Bernard Williams declared to be on its last legs in 1973. A premature verdict perhaps, but a good dose of scepticism about the theory would certainly enhance the debate.

Another example is 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR). Corporate websites are awash with talk of responsibilities to society and the environment. But disagreement is also rife. While BP and Shell are CSR devotees, ExxonMobil's Chairman protests: 'we don't invest to make social statements at the expense of shareholder return'. Milton Friedman denounced CSR as 'pure and adulterated socialism', yet the left complains that it usurps the proper role of government. Behind these political quarrels are questions about the coherence of ascribing corporate responsibilities, and about the proper way to discharge them. There is also a problem of trust here. CSR talk is easily construed as cynical PR: looking good rather than being good. Call it the 'Cosmetics Business'. And why trust corporations which seek ethical reputations, when individuals doing the same would be deemed smug and opportunistic?

### III The Forum

These examples show that philosophy can and should do more to engage with practical problems. The Forum for Philosophy in Business was established last year by two Faculty members, Alex Oliver and Dominic

Scott, with inspiration from Maurice Biriotti, a Cambridge alumnus now running a consultancy (SHM). He continues to give advice and encouragement. The Forum's purpose is to bring together academic philosophers with practitioners in business, the professions and public life. It also aims to create new links with neighbouring academic disciplines.

### IV Activities

In November 2003, the Forum held a seminar on intellectual property with philosophers, lawyers, and business strategists. In January 2004, a workshop on corporate governance was jointly run by the Forum, Cambridge's Centre for Business Research and LSE's Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation. Among the participants were representatives from the Foundation for Independent Directors, Reuters, accountants BDO Stoy Hayward, and The Change Partnership.

Supported by a Faculty Award from IBM, the Forum is running a seminar series on trust throughout 2004. Participants include Sir Patrick Cormack MP, Dr David Halpern (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit), Dame Patricia Hodgson (Committee for Standards in Public Life), Sir David Omand (Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator), Professor Onora O'Neill (Principal of Newnham College), Mr Chris Swinson (Senior Partner, BDO Stoy Hayward), Lord Wilson (former Cabinet Secretary) and Sir Robin Young (Permanent Secretary, DTI).

### V Intellectual fundraising

The Forum aims to facilitate dialogue. Philosophy has a great deal of untapped resources to offer practitioners and, as we have learned, practitioners have as much to offer philosophers. Which is where you, the alumni, come in. Doubtless you have asked whether your philosophical education has made any difference to the way you do your job. You may also know of practical issues that philosophy should examine and make more of. Our aim is to create a dialogue with interested alumni on just these points.

Next year, we shall be organizing an alumni open day, with talks from alumni and academic philosophers, allowing opportunities for discussion and debate, as well as for catching up. If you are interested in participating – or in the Forum more generally – please write and tell us about yourself: when you studied philosophy, what you have done since and which philosophical topics you think the Forum should tackle.

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-](mailto:phil-forum@lists.cam.ac.uk)*  
*forum@lists.cam.ac.uk].*

### I Head in the clouds or feet on the ground?

Philosophy's reputation for ethereal contemplation is as old as the subject itself. Yet many philosophers have engaged directly in the practical world: Locke, Smith, Bentham, Mill and Russell are obvious examples. The truth is that, for all its abstractions, philosophy confronts issues underlying many decisions now facing professionals, business leaders and policy makers.

### II Examples

Trust in business, government and the media is sharply declining. Forms of managerial accountability are supposed to restore it. But the resulting 'audit explosion' has done more harm than good, and trust keeps declining. In her 2002 Reith Lectures, Onora O'Neill viewed the problem from a philosophical perspective. Autonomous individuals should place trust intelligently, not blindly. Intelligent trust requires evidence of trustworthiness, but this evidence is not automatically delivered by accountability, if that simply means demanding ever more information. Information must be intelligible and its authors properly interrogated, otherwise opacity, not transparency, will result. Before steps can be taken to restore trust, O'Neill shows the need to think through these concepts of trust, accountability and transparency. Her views are now resonating with practitioners.

There are many other cases where

## Events

### Annual Heffer Lecture

Professor Ronald Dworkin delivered the annual Heffer Lecture – *Truth, Morality and Interpretation* – on 22 April 2004.

### Conference on Mathematical Knowledge

Dr Michael Potter is organising a conference on Mathematical Knowledge together with Drs Alexander Paseau, Mary Leng and Dominic Gregory. The conference will be held at Fitzwilliam College from 30 June-2 July 2004

### 8th National Postgraduate Analytic Philosophy conference

The Annual Conference of the National Postgraduate Analytic Philosophy Association (NPAPA) will be at Magdalene College, from 2 July to 4 July 2004. The Keynote Speaker will be Professor Onora O'Neill.

### The Royal Institute of Philosophy Annual Conference 2004

The Royal Institute of Philosophy 2004 Conference is entitled 'Preference – Formation and well-being'. It is organised by Dr Serena Olsaretti and Dr Ross Harrison and will be held at St. John's College from 14 July to 16 July 2004.

### Faculty of Philosophy Alumni Open Day

An exhibition, refreshments and informal discussions with members of the Faculty. Full details can be found on the Faculty website (click on Alumni) or contact Mrs Angela Elliott – email: ae215@cam.ac.uk, tel: 01223 330525 or Mrs Mariella Pellegrino – email: mp10004@cam.ac.uk, tel: 01223 331889.

## 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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A downloadable version of the Newsletter is available from the Faculty website:  
<http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/>

# Cambridge Centenary Conferences

**Frank Ramsey Centenary Conference**  
Monday 30 June - Wednesday 2 July 2003  
Newnham College, Cambridge

An international conference celebrating the work of Frank Ramsey in the centenary year of his birth.

**Speakers**

Simon Blackburn (Cambridge)	Frank Jackson (ANU)
Partha Dasgupta (Cambridge)	Fraser MacBride (St Andrews)
Dorothy Edgington (Birkbeck)	Hugh Mellor (Cambridge)
Hartry Field (NYU)	Michael Potter (Cambridge)
John Forrester (Cambridge)	Peter Sullivan (Stirling)
Dan Isaacson (Oxford)	Wlodek Rabinowicz (Lund)

**Competition for Submitted Papers**

There will be a competition for submitted papers, of which one will be awarded a fully funded place at the conference. The deadline for submission of papers is 31 December 2002.

For further details about the competition and also about conference registration, please consult the conference website at [www.phil.cam.ac.uk/events/ramsey.html](http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/events/ramsey.html). A number of subsidised places for graduate students will be available. To apply, follow the instructions on the online registration form.

**Organisers**

Professor D. H. Mellor and Dr Hallvard Lillehammer

The Ramsey Centenary Conference is generously supported by The Analysis Trust, the Mind Association, the Aristotelian Society, the British Society for the Philosophy of Science, the Cambridge University Faculty of Philosophy, and the Cambridge University Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

During 2003 the Faculty celebrated two major philosophical centenaries, both of which were marked by an international conference.

From 30 June to 2 July, the Ramsey Centenary Conference took place in Newnham College to mark the centenary of Frank Ramsey's birth. Ramsey died in 1930 at the early age of 26, by which time he had done groundbreaking work in philosophy, mathematics, and economics, and also been (the 14 years older) Wittgenstein's graduate supervisor. The papers at the conference covered a broad range of Ramsey's work across these three disciplines, as well as his personal interest in psychoanalysis. The conference attracted speakers from the UK, France, Sweden, USA, and Australia, including Simon Blackburn, John Forrester, Hugh Mellor, Michael Potter and Partha Dasgupta (Cambridge), Dorothy Edgington and Daniel Isaacson (Oxford), Fraser Macbride (St Andrews), Peter Sullivan (Stirling), Jerome Dokic and Pascal Engel (Paris), Wlodek Rabinowicz (Lund), Pierre Cruse (Louvain), Hartry Field (New York), and Frank Jackson (Australian National University). The Cambridge

conference was followed by similar events in Paris and Vienna later in the year. A volume of essays based on the Cambridge conference is currently in preparation under the title *Ramsey's Legacy*, and will be edited by Hugh Mellor and Hallvard Lillehammer.

On 15 November 2003, the *Principia Ethica* Centenary Conference took place in King's College to mark the publication of G. E. Moore's most influential book. It is famous not only for the notorious argument against the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy', but also for its theory of value and its influence on the Bloomsbury group, one member of which (Keynes) described the book as 'better than Plato'. *Principia Ethica* stands as a watershed in the history of ethics, and was arguably the most influential work in English speaking moral philosophy in the 20th Century. While its centenary was marked by more than one conference in the USA, the Cambridge event was the only one of its kind in the UK. The speakers at the event were Tom Baldwin (York), Jonathan Dancy (Reading), and Stephen Darwall (Michigan). Darwall, who was visiting Cambridge from the USA especially for this conference at the invitation of the King's College Research Centre, rounded off his stay by presenting work for his forthcoming book on ethics both to the Philosophy Faculty Graduate Seminar and to the Moral Sciences Club.

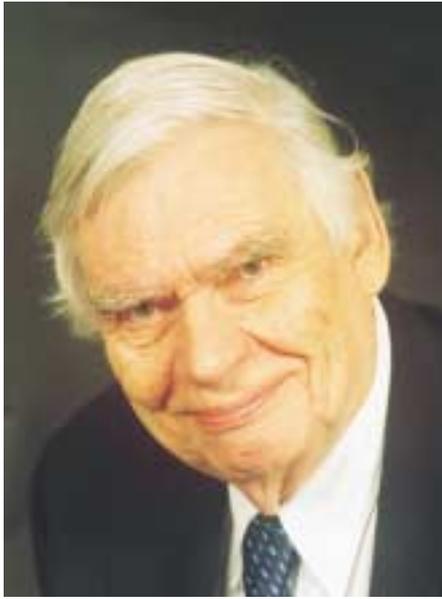
Hallvard Lillehammer  
University Lecturer in Philosophy



Tom Baldwin (left) and Hallvard Lillehammer at the Principia Ethica Centenary Conference.

# A Student's View of Cambridge Phi

Richard



I came up to Cambridge just after the Second World War, in 1947, to read Moral Sciences. For Part I this was Philosophy, Logic, Ethics, Psychology. For Part II I read Psychology, under Professor Sir Frederic Bartlett FRS. I was fortunate to stay in Cambridge for twenty years: first research in the MRC Applied Psychology Unit, then a University Lectureship in Experimental Psychology, which set the course of my life's career mixing experiments with some attempts in philosophy. Now 80, I remain active in Bristol with a Senior Research Fellowship allowing me to continue experimenting and writing, though without formal teaching. This is a great way to go.

Because of the war that had just ended, most of us were several years older than normal for students, and the contrast from the Services to Cambridge was intoxicating beyond description. I couldn't believe my luck when Downing College accepted me. My father and both grandfathers had been to Cambridge, but during the nearly six years of my mute inglorious time in the RAF, it seemed impossible I would follow suit. Actually, by a strange chance I was not entirely mute, as I was posted by the Air Ministry to explain war-time technologies of communication to the public in an ambitious Air Force exhibition, in the John Lewis bomb site in Oxford Street in 1945. This perhaps led to an interest in presenting science to the public, founding the Exploratory hands-on Science Centre forty years later. But nothing made up for the failing to be a

fighter pilot, due to an ear operation while at school, though of course this might have been life saving twice-over.

What Cambridge philosophy was like at that time, is brilliantly described in *Wittgenstein's Poker* by David Edmonds and John Eidinow. Here are the wonderful characters I knew – all except Wittgenstein who had just left, ill, for Ireland. He returned to Cambridge, but as a recluse in Dr Bevan's house, and never seen at any rate by us, even though we knew Dr Bevan's consulting room with its Blue oar on the wall. We lived in the turbulent stern-wave of Wittgenstein. He was a haunting presence, materialised by John Wisdom in his remarkable lectures. Wittgenstein's ideas were a voice in our minds, though his writings had not yet appeared in print. A tattered, typed version of the Blue Book (or the Brown Book?) was circulated but closely guarded by John Wisdom's students. I got no more than a surreptitious glance.

Our teachers were extraordinarily varied personalities; devoted to issues philosophical, and commendably willing to show and share with us their mental treasures. Supervisions, when our essays were dissected in depth and detail, could be exciting excursions into their adventures of understanding, as well as grounding on our shoals of ignorance. My main Supervisor was Dr Alfred Ewing, who though the least exciting, I owe a lasting debt, as he enforced discipline by demanding essays on uncongenial topics, showing one how to dig out or create interest as one went along. Richard Braithwaite (later Professor) supervised me for one term, inspiring a lasting interest in the philosophy of science. John Wisdom was the most remarkable character and truly histrionic lecturer. I still don't know how seriously to take him, as he was more therapist than teacher, but he was a strong influence. He would conjure and live for weeks or months with an image, such as: Other Minds are, and are not, like a fire on the horizon. He would tell us the mind is not a *thing*, and – usefully – go on to examine what an acceptable *thing* might be. He loved creating and resolving puzzles, his somewhat hidden attachment to psychoanalysis being integral to his thinking and teaching. Professor C D Broad was utterly different, impressive almost to the

point of intimidation. It is true that he read his lectures word-for-word twice over for our dictation; but I can't swear that he read the jokes three times to make it clear they were jokes.

Meetings of the Moral Sciences Club, held in Richard Braithwaite's rooms in Kings (No 3 on H staircase) were serious occasions, most often with detailed points on recondite topics which would be hard to appreciate; but they were enjoyable and occasionally there would be drama. In the famous poker incident, the year before (actually 25 October 1946), Wittgenstein, who was chairing the meeting, picked up and brandished the possibly red hot poker, on some accounts waving it around for emphasis but on others threatening the visiting speaker, Sir Karl Popper. This was a clash of basically different ideas of what philosophy is about; each held with passion by the proponents and their supporters. Wittgenstein urged (though perhaps never quite proved) that philosophy cannot solve problems, though may resolve linguistic confusions producing puzzles. Evidently he would become extremely annoyed with people claiming to make significant remarks on what for him could not be said. This was Popper's sin. Popper was an outsider, battling in this charmed arena where the chosen few took turns for attention, with commanding gestures, but pretty well ignored the surrounding world. There were, however, some exceptions such as the distinguished American logicians. Having been present at a few meetings, one learned to anticipate from the preliminary gestures which line of argument was about to emerge. The primary division was between Wittgensteinians and the Broadians. Wittgenstein's gesture of holding his forehead in his hands, apparently looking inwards with a long period of enforced silence, was embodied by John Wisdom and no doubt remains immortal in his successors. Professor Broad and his acolytes would throw back the head with the arms upraised, as though looking for external revelation.

There was plenty of underlying mythology. It was known to us that Professor Broad, who had Newton's old rooms in Trinity, would call up Newton's spirit in nightly ceremonies. It was also known that John Wisdom would tempt fate at the Newmarket

# Philosophy Post-Wittgenstein, 1947-9

Gregory

ances. Richard and his wife Margaret Braithwaite (Richard came nearest to being a saint than anyone I have ever met) practiced occult ceremonies, with mystic signs on the floor in a local windmill. They were all vivid personalities and were most generous to their students, socially and intellectually. Ewing stood somewhat alone, living in a tiny house with his mother and apparently with no social life. He was an 'old fashioned' Idealist, a Kantian scholar, and deep believer in objective standards of ethics. He disputed Ayer-type Logical Positivism (that for a proposition to be meaningful, it must be testable for truth or falsity) with a delightful argument on *Is there Life After Death?* – which made him twinkle: "After my death I would be able to confirm continuing consciousness, but not its *absence*. As only the 'yes there is life after death' alternative is verifiable – yet the proposition is clearly meaningful – the Verification Principle must be false". This amused his peers and students but they seemed not to take it seriously. Topics of conversation with Dr Ewing were limited to two: Table Tennis and the Lake District. Yet he was an excellent supervisor, especially for those of us who lacked academic discipline and skills, through leaving school early. (I missed the sixth form, filling sand bags to protect buildings, farm-boying, and teaching old ladies how to deal with incendiary bombs with a stirrup pump). Though physically a little man, Dr Ewing wore enormous boots. Listening to one's weekly essay in front of the gas fire in his little, far too hot sitting room, the boots would rise up in the air, as he looked for interesting propositions in the ill-written sentences. The huge black boots would rise highest with challenges to objective ethics. He confessed to responsibility for starting the first war. As he told me, in 1914 he gave a lecture at St. Anne's, near Blackpool, and the war started a day or so later. He didn't visit St Anne's again until 1939 – the second war immediately started. So induction suggested he caused the second war, and he looked guilty. We unfairly called Dr Ewing 'a sheep in sheep's clothing'. He defended his ground with a quiet dignity I at least found impressive.

Bertrand Russell, who was then 76, came to Cambridge each Thursday. He

gave two very well attended lectures during the day, one on non-demonstrative logic and the other on ethics, which he said were the hardest to write. He also saw six of us for an hour or so, in his Trinity room over the gateway in Whewell's Court, overlooking the elms just re-planted after 400 years. We sat on sofas, the great man on his own, with two pipes alternately smoking and cooling for re-filling. At that time he was involved not so much with philosophy and logic, as the future of Europe and especially which of the great powers would move in and control Berlin. This was rather disappointing for us, for we were not interested in war or politics; we were seeking Absolute Truth, and here we were, sharing sofas with the immortal Master who had sorted out the basis of logic and mathematics. But he would warm to comments and questions on Wittgenstein. We got the feeling that he did not really want Wittgenstein to be accepted by us as the Philosopher of the Twentieth century. Lord Russell was well aware of his own eminence and wished to preserve it for the future, and why not?

On one occasion which I remember particularly, a pile of his newly-written *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* stood on the floor. For once I raised a worthwhile question: how to justify the prior probability of 0.5 to get the Keynes method of induction going. The great man picked up the volume on top of the pile, signed it, and gave it to me with a smile. I treasure the book to this day. The last of his philosophical works, it is I think an important account of the basis of scientific knowledge from inductive inference, though it never really took off.

We were not expected to read much of classical philosophy – the emphasis being on thinking, and formulating our questions and tentative answers – but I was attracted by Berkeley's *Dialogues* to issues of perception, and especially how perceptions are related to what seems to be perceived in the external world of objects. But I

felt there was lack of appreciation of the many rich and interesting phenomena of perception. So moving into psychology was not a turning away from philosophy, but rather trying to develop and test philosophical ideas with experiments. The old term Experimental Philosophy which is still used in Scotland is very appropriate. This is not the place to recount what happened in the more than fifty years between reading Moral Sciences (as it was then called) and now; but briefly, I rejected Idealism, and the Direct relation of 'naïve' Realism; coming up with the notion that perceptions are predictive hypotheses of what is out there, actively created by the brain, from general rules and knowledge of kinds of events and objects. I put this notion, that perceptions are hypotheses somewhat like hypotheses of science, to a major philosophical meeting in 1971, but it fell like a lead balloon without leaving a discernible mark in the world of philosophy. To me the

*continued on page 8*



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**From Sir Michael Scholar KCB** (St. John's, 1960) President, St. John's College, Oxford

I recall attending (in the early 1960s) a lecture by Dr Ewing on time, in which he discussed the logical impossibility of time going backwards. The lecture took place in a lecture room in the then very new Sidgwick site. As he came to his conclusion the clock on the wall stopped, then began to go backwards, at increasing speed.

Professor Wisdom's occasional appearances in the lecture theatre dressed in hunting pink (the colour itself being used as a philosophical example), were not regarded as particularly newsworthy at the time. His Socratic (or Cambridge Moral Sciences?) method of lecturing could sometimes be disconcerting to unsuspecting students. I remember him addressing the question "Is it possible to feel what another feels?" to us all – no reply – question repeated – again no reply – then he moved towards the front row and put his face, held in his hands, very close in front of a terrified undergraduate, repeating the question and adding "That is not a rhetorical question".

**From Mr Richard Fries** (King's, 1959) Former Chief Charity Commissioner, now Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics

When I came to Cambridge in 1959 the Moral Sciences faculty (as it was then called) was still under the shadow of Wittgenstein. Its professors were Richard Braithwaite and John Wisdom, the latter in particular Wittgenstein's living representative in Cambridge (and the embodiment of the agonised questioning philosopher of popular imagination). The faculty was small – perhaps a total of 50 undergraduates – but remarkably diverse, from AC Ewing to Casimir Lewy (whose uncompromising introductory lectures quickly sorted out those fit for logic) and even CD Broad occasionally emerging from a retirement said to be devoted to the paranormal. For me the course Jonathan Bennett gave on Kant's Analytic, vivid and engaging like the book which came out of it, made a lasting impression.

Oxford dominated British philosophy then and visits from Elizabeth Anscombe and Bernard Williams, perhaps testing the climate, enlivened the proceedings of the Moral Sciences Club. But at that time much of our syllabus – like our required text on ethics (PH Nowell Smith) – seemed, as Iris Murdoch memorably expressed it, 'dry', avoiding the 'thickness' of moral life – look there in vain for philosophical engagement with lust, or even trust!

I had the good fortune, however, to be supervised by Michael Tanner, not yet a lecturer, opening up wider visions of philosophy while keeping me (more or less!) to the syllabus. And sharing accommodation with Myles Burnyeat in my last year was a close encounter with commitment to philosophical rigour.

*Philosophy at Cambridge page 6 May 2004*

# Recollections

Certainly formative years for me – and ones which I like to think had an application in the Civil Service, at least while policy analysis outweighed spin.

**From Professor Ian Hacking** (Trinity, 1956) Professor of Philosophy at The Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, University of Toronto, also Professor in Philosophy and the History of Scientific Concepts at the Collège de France, Paris

I should like to tell an anecdote only I can tell. It is about the old Moral Sciences Library, as it was still called in 1956. It is also about the arrival of Imre Lakatos in Cambridge. Lakatos got out of Hungary at the age of 34, was picked up by the Rockefeller foundation in Vienna, and supported doing a doctorate in Cambridge, with Richard Braithwaite. Lots of people came to hate Imre, or found him dangerously difficult to get on with; others have found discreditable things in his Hungarian past. There are plenty of people in Budapest today, to whom it is not wise to mention the name of Lakatos. I am not going to discuss such weighty issues. Personally we got on fine, and I do know that *Proofs and Refutations* is one of the great philosophical dialogues of all time.

Here was my first vision of Lakatos. I too arrived in Cambridge in 1956, a gauche colonial at Trinity, starting two years as an affiliated student for what was still called the Moral Sciences Tripos. In those days the Moral Sciences Library was housed in a dingy room, an antiquated and dusty collection that no one had troubled to keep up. A few years later Jonathan Bennett had most of the books thrown out, and later we had the Sidgwick Avenue site, and the more simply named Philosophy Faculty.

One day in the autumn of 1956 I was writing a weekly essay alone in the library, too shy to be anywhere else. Then an amazing apparition entered the room. A short scowling man wearing a suit, shiny with years of wear. Greenish, I think, but maybe just green with age. I had probably

never before seen an escapee from Stalinism. The books in the library were shelved by the first letter of the author's name, starting at 'A' in let us say the North-East upper corner, reachable only with an antique ladder, and continuing to 'Z' in some dingy lowest other corner. The strange man took it all in instantly, grasped the ladder, mounted to the first 'A', opened the first book, scanned it for a couple of minutes, slapped it shut, and went on to the next. And so a morning passed, my first introduction to one of the more remarkable thinkers I have had the occasion to meet.

**From Lord Cobbold** (Trinity, 1957) Chairman and Managing Director, Lytton Enterprises Ltd.

Casimir Lewy was a very special person. I was fortunate to have him as my tutor and my study of philosophy from 1957 to 1960 would have been a lot less interesting without his support and encouragement.

His weekly lecture on Thursdays was a must. He was a passionate and flamboyant lecturer. He would stride up and down the lecture theatre waving his arms to stress a point and swirling his gown. His favourite subject was entailment.

In weekly private supervision at his home in de Freville Avenue he was always interested and positive in his comment on the weekly undergraduate essay.

His association with Cambridge happened almost by chance in the years before the Second World War. A combination of the deteriorating international situation and the inspiration of Broad, Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein prompted him to abandon his homeland and take the BA degree in Cambridge with first class honours in 1939.

For us students it was particularly exciting to discuss the problems of philosophy with someone who had studied under those great Cambridge names.

I remember asking one of the senior Trinity fellows why Casimir was not a fellow and happily the situation was rectified soon after. All Casimir's pupils and admirers are pleased and proud that the Faculty of Philosophy Library bears his name.

A nice cartoon appeared on the board in the common room:



which prompted the question:



and got the reply:



*Cartoon by Jana Diemberger*



Sir Karl Popper  
(1902–1994)

Ludwig Wittgenstein  
(1889–1951)



# Popper and the poker

## Timothy Smiley

At the Moral Sciences Club in October 1946 the speaker was Karl Popper, the chairman Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Bertrand Russell was in the audience. In 1969 Popper wrote this account:

‘I went on to say that if I thought there were no genuine philosophical problems, I would certainly not be a philosopher; and that the fact that many people, or perhaps all people, thoughtlessly adopt untenable solutions to many, or perhaps all, philosophical problems provided the only justification for being a philosopher. Wittgenstein jumped up again, interrupting me, and spoke at length about puzzles and the nonexistence of philosophical problems. At a moment which appeared to be appropriate, I interrupted him, giving a list I had prepared of philosophical problems, such as: Do we know things through our senses?, Do we obtain our knowledge by induction? These Wittgenstein dismissed as being logical rather than philosophical. I then referred to the problem whether potential or perhaps even actual infinities exist, a problem he dismissed as mathematical. (This dismissal got into the minutes.) I then mentioned moral problems and the problem of the validity of moral rules. At that point Wittgenstein, who was sitting near the fire and had been nervously playing with the poker, which he sometimes used like a conductor’s baton to emphasize his assertions, challenged me: “Give an example of a moral rule!” I replied: “Not to threaten visiting lecturers with pokers”. Whereupon Wittgenstein, in a rage, threw the poker down and stormed out of the room, banging the door behind him. I really was very sorry. I admit that I went to Cambridge hoping to provoke Wittgenstein into defending the view that there are no genuine philosophical problems, and to fight him on this issue. But I had never intended to make him angry; and it was a surprise to find him unable to see a joke.’

There matters rested until 1998, when a memoir of Popper by John Watkins triggered a heated correspondence in the TLS. Peter Geach criticised him for repeating ‘an old story of Karl Popper’s about how Wittgenstein threatened (*sic*) Popper

with a poker’. Two other eye-witnesses joined in. Sir John Vinelott endorsed Popper’s account, including the famous exchange, but it is not mentioned in Peter Munz’s letter. He has an over-excited Wittgenstein, bad-tempered at being contradicted, waving a ‘red-hot poker’ in front of Popper’s face, whereupon Russell ‘took his pipe out of his mouth and said in his high-pitched, scratchy voice: “Wittgenstein, put down that poker at once!” Wittgenstein obeyed and, after a short time, got up and stormed out of the room’. The divergence between eye-witness recollections is a commonplace. Less often remarked is their compelling quality – how people cannot believe that anyone could honestly have seen things differently. ‘Popper is a liar’ whose story is ‘false from beginning to end’ said Geach, while Munz said ‘Geach saw and heard all this as clearly as I did, and it is incomprehensible that, out of mistaken loyalty to Wittgenstein, he should now deny that the incident happened’.

Two journalists, David Edmonds and John Eidinow, like the Cold Case Team of detectives on television, set out to discover what really happened fifty years earlier, and published the result in their book *Wittgenstein’s Poker*. Their verdict is that Popper’s account is a fabrication. They prepare the ground in two ways. They go back as far as the Vienna of the 20s and 30s to build up a picture of a resentful, academically marginalised Popper socially and intellectually obsessed (their word) by an aristocratic, successful Wittgenstein. They are brilliant story-tellers but their picture is a caricature, designed to supply what Norman Malcolm called ‘plausible reasons why it was so important for Popper to have laid claim to victory in this brief encounter’. They also impugn Popper’s credibility by a series of unsupported assertions and innuendos. For example, they quote him as noticing a girl next day reading a review of *The Open Society*. Failing after a brief search to find a review fitting the date, they ask pointedly ‘Could this “memory” of Popper’s also be false?’. But he did not mention a review; he said ‘an attack’. They were looking for the wrong thing.

As to the central incident, they judge it likely that anything so dramatic would have got into the minutes (as if the poor secretary would pillory his own PhD supervisor!). Then they argue that in Popper’s version Wittgenstein’s demand for an example of a moral rule ‘comes out of nowhere, quite at odds with the run of the dialogue’. On the contrary, if Popper was following his previous offerings of specific problems with a more general one, what could be more natural than for his interlocutor to ask for an example? And if Wittgenstein did not put the question, who did? They opt for Richard Braithwaite, some time after Wittgenstein’s departure; but they do not realise the implications. Braithwaite’s question cannot have come out of nowhere. So either Popper has just said something like ‘Here’s a problem I forgot to mention earlier’, or he had indeed presented the problem to Wittgenstein, but Wittgenstein, who had challenged every one of his previous offerings, simply ignored it.

This is too much much to swallow. Edmonds and Eidinow have gone too far in trying to provide a satisfying twist. Who wants a detective story in which the prime suspect’s confession turns out to be true after all? If I were looking for a twist I would ask who in the room was most likely to produce in a flash the quip about the poker; the answer being, of course, Russell. Alas, the facts don’t allow it. But several witnesses do report an exchange between Russell and Wittgenstein, and Watkins’ memoir finds a plausible place for it. After Popper’s retort ‘there was laughter, and Wittgenstein stormed out, angrily declaring as he went that Popper was confusing the issues; whereupon Russell called out, “Wittgenstein, you’re the one who’s causing the confusion”’. Popper doesn’t mention it, but why should he? I do not pretend to have cleared up all the confusion surrounding the meeting, but I see no reason to doubt the truth of his account.

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Philosophy

continued from page 5

notion links brain processes of perception to methods of science in an interesting way. Is it best judged by scientists or philosophers? I would look to the skills of philosophy for assessing internal coherence of ideas; to science for coherence to the way things are.

Has reading philosophy at Cambridge been useful? It was a wonderful experience to live in the centre of the known – and especially the unknown – Universe, especially at the time of Lord Adrian in physiology and the discovery of DNA, when Francis Crick with his atom-smashing laugh was very much in evidence. But was it directly useful? It gave one the courage (and on good days the skill) to challenge accepted ideas and attempt to clear confusions, which psychology being so difficult and so little understood were (and in spite of my humble efforts, are!) plentiful. The issue I looked at first, was localisation of brain functions. How could functions be localised when we didn't know how the brain works, and so what the functions are? Rather more subtle: from changing or removing part of an interacting system, how is it possible to see from changes of performance what that part was doing? Unfortunately some of my friends engaged in these experiments saw this

as an attack on what they were doing: it was intended as a help for interpreting what they found. These arguments have often been quoted since – and perhaps more often ignored!

But I have been more concerned with getting evidence, for or against, philosophical positions; most dramatically the study of a case of adult recovery from infant blindness, almost certainly from birth – following Molyneux's Question raised by John Locke, which I read as a student: 'Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a cube and sphere ... and the blind man made to see ... query whether by his sight ... could he distinguish and tell which was the globe and which the cube?'

We found some surprising instant vision, with something not anticipated by philosophers: he could immediately use his knowledge from touch, to read capital letters, and tell the time. Transfer from touch introduces another dimension to the issue of what these rare cases can tell us of the basis and status of perception. Didn't Wittgenstein say that all new knowledge comes from science? This does not make philosophy useless – if only because it is as important to see the conceptual significance of data, as it is to establish statistical significance for believing them.

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## Faculty News

Many members of the Faculty have had their achievements recognized by awards, elections and invitations to give major lecture series, as well as symposia being held on aspects of their work. These include: **Simon Blackburn** is Gifford Lecturer 2004 at the University of Glasgow. The Political Science Association held a symposium on **Raymond Geuss'** work in political philosophy at its conference in Lincoln in April 2004. **Ross Harrison** is Invited Academic Visitor at the Department of Government, London School of Economics. **Derek Matravers** has been elected Affiliated Lecturer to the Faculty.

**Hugh Mellor** has been elected Honorary Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. **Alex Oliver** was awarded a Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship. **Onora O'Neill** has been made an Honorary Professor of the University. She has also recently been elected Foreign Member of the Royal Irish Academy and Foreign Corresponding Member of the Austrian Academy of Science.

**Michael Potter** is at the moment AHRB Senior Research Fellow at the University of Stirling and recently a Philosophy of Mathematics Conference in St Andrews devoted a symposium to his book *Reason's Nearest Kin*. **Dominic Scott** has just completed his British Academy Research Readership and was a recent winner of the University Pilkington teaching prize. **Jan Westerhoff**, who has recently completed his PhD, has won the first prize in the competition for research in ontology and metaphysics of the Gesellschaft für Analytische Philosophie.

*Philosophy at Cambridge page 8 May 2004*

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