



The Richmond Journal of **Philosophy**

Volume One Issue One Summer 2002

In this  
**issue** ■■■

**David Pugmire**  
on irrationality

**Roger Crisp**  
on Aristotle

**Brad Hooker**  
on Kant

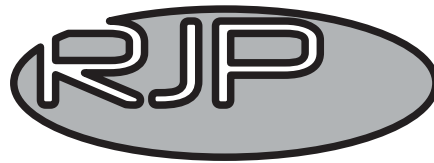
**Alan Thomas**  
on the mind/body problem

**Peter Goldie**  
on the emotions

**Aaron Ridley**  
on music and song



Richmond upon Thames College



# **The Richmond Journal of Philosophy**

**Issue one  
Summer 2002**

## **Editorial Board**

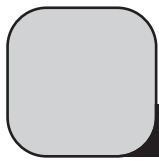
Stephen Grant

Paul Sheehy

Paul Sperring

Philosophy Department  
Richmond upon Thames College  
Egerton Road  
Twickenham  
Middlesex  
TW2 7SJ  
United Kingdom

[rjp@rutc.ac.uk](mailto:rjp@rutc.ac.uk)



## Contents

Editorial	p4
About the Editorial Board	p5
Are You Ever Irrational? <i>David Pugmire</i>	p6
Aristotle's Ethics: How Being Good Can Make You Happy <i>Roger Crisp</i>	p11
Kant's Normative Ethics <i>Brad Hooker</i>	p17
Is Your Mind Your Brain? <i>Alan Thomas</i>	p23
Can We Trust Our Emotions? <i>Peter Goldie</i>	p27
Song Got Wrong <i>Aaron Ridley</i>	p37
Notes on Contributors	p42
Notes for Contributors	p43
How to Subscribe	p45

# [Editorial]

Welcome to the first edition of the Richmond Journal of Philosophy or *RJP*. The motivation for and ambition of the journal is to provide serious philosophy for students who are at an early stage in their philosophical studies. The style and content of the papers will be accessible to students who have yet to become hardened to the more technical and specialised journals of professional philosophy.

What do we mean by 'serious' philosophy? First, the content of the journal is not constrained by a remit to appeal to or reach the interested general public. Whilst the papers must speak to the needs of students who are relatively inexperienced in philosophy, they presuppose that their audience is actively engaged in philosophy. Second, the content is serious in its focus on the central areas of philosophy.

The big or traditional questions of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics will provide the journal's centre of gravity. The third way in which the philosophy is serious is through the scope, variety and depth of analysis that can be achieved by the accumulation of papers over time. Moreover, each paper is not simply an introduction to one of the main topics on A-level, IB or degree courses. Such papers will indeed have a role in the journal, but they will not be the only kind. Our contributors will be offering original papers based on their own research. The journal will be a forum for the kind of critical engagement and debate that characterise the practice of philosophy. The fourth way in which the philosophy is serious is in the contributors themselves. The vast bulk of the papers will be written by professional philosophers engaged in both research and teaching.

Our aims thus stated we are now pleased to turn to the papers themselves. David Pugmire invites us into the heart of an epistemological concern by asking whether one can ever be irrational. Next Roger Crisp and Brad Hooker consider respectively the ethical theories of Aristotle and Kant. An enduring source of philosophical debate is introduced and some possible answers considered when Alan Thomas poses the question of whether your mind is your brain. Philosophy not only occasionally stirs the emotions, but is also deeply interested in their nature and role. Peter Goldie's paper tackles the issue of whether we can trust our emotions. Finally Aaron Ridley investigates the source of a song's value by looking at the relationship between music and words.

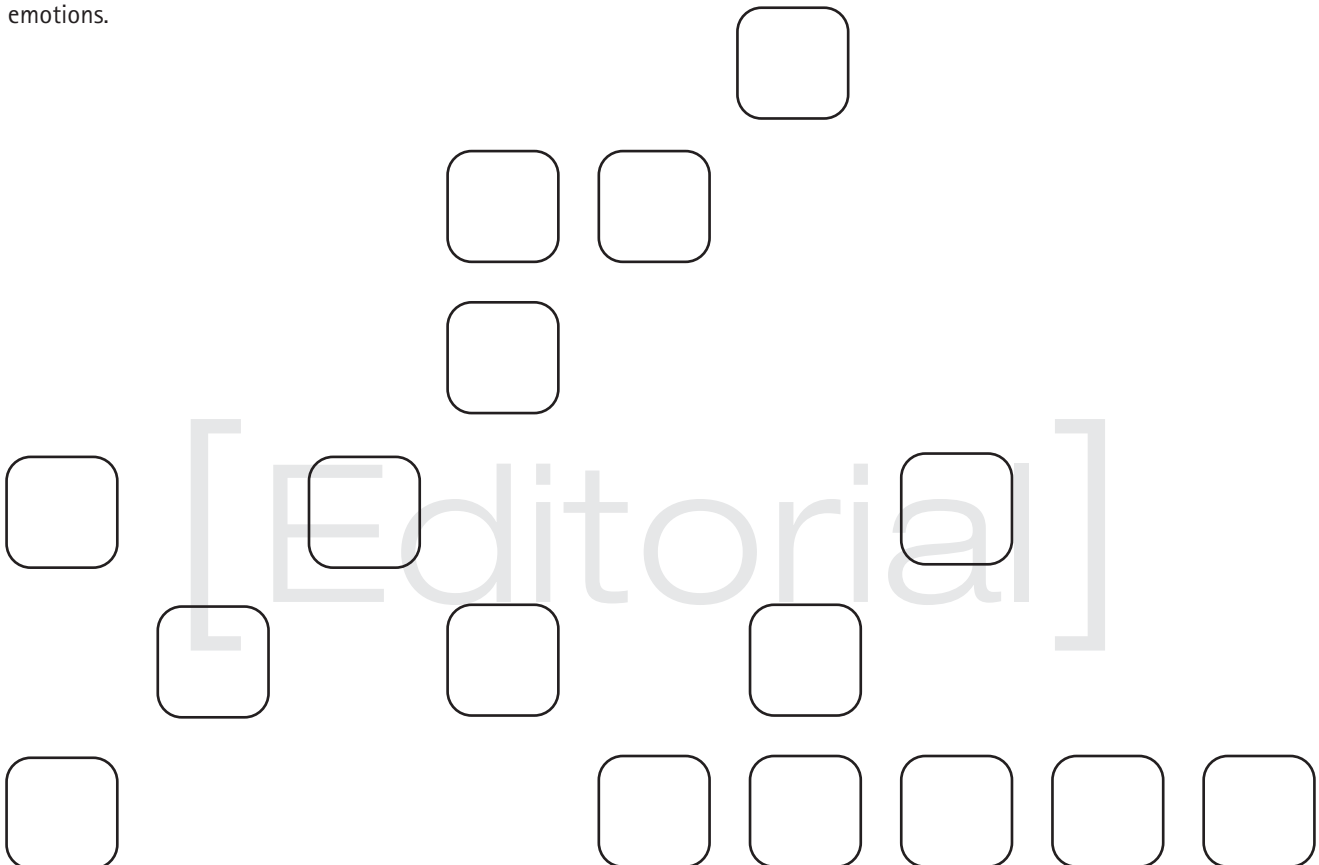
We would like to acknowledge those who have made it possible to bring the journal to this stage. We are delighted to be able to thank the contributors to this edition and the many other philosophers who have offered encouragement and support. Particular thanks are due to Richmond upon Thames College for its commitment to the journal from the very beginning.

# About the [Editorial] Board

Stephen Grant originally studied French and Politics, before moving into philosophy. He taught philosophy at a private university in the Czech Republic, before returning to England to pursue a doctorate at King's College London. He teaches at both Richmond upon Thames College and King's, specialising in ethics, political philosophy and the emotions. His doctorate focuses on the relationship between moral concepts and the emotions.

Dr Paul Sheehy teaches philosophy at Richmond upon Thames College and King's College London. His main areas of interest are in political and moral philosophy, metaphysics, and the philosophy of the social sciences. His doctoral thesis was on the ontological and moral status of social groups and he has published on social groups and voting.

Paul Sperring is head of the philosophy department at Richmond upon Thames College and an A-level examiner in philosophy. He completed his undergraduate and masters studies at Warwick University, studying both analytic and continental philosophy. His current research interests are in the philosophy of mind.



## David Pugmire

## [Are You Ever Irrational?]

*O Lord, make me chaste, but not yet.* – St Augustine

*At bottom I am afraid, but I haven't admitted it to myself.* – Wittgenstein

*I hold many firm beliefs, with some of which I disagree.* – George W. Bush

Aristotle famously defined human beings as 'rational animals', the emphasis being on the first of these two words. Later, Shakespeare has Hamlet characterise human beings as 'in conception how like a god'; and later still Kant made reason the basis of our freedom, our power to use our minds for the best, to preside over our responses to what the world throws at us. But for most of us there come moments when this all seems like whistling in the dark: often we seem to let ourselves down. Some of our attitudes and choices seem surprising and perplexing, even to us, let alone to others. And there are cynics who would never have rated us highly: 'the flesh is weak!' In Eden, tempted where we knew better, we threw away paradise. Very often the phrase, 'human nature' is used to connote fecklessness and incorrigibility.

What exactly lies behind all these potent but confusing assertions? Are we vulnerable to true irrationality? And what would that be? Rationality, so charmingly and vexingly absent in



young children, for example, applies primarily to thinking and acting; and accordingly, it is in these two areas that irrationality would be found.

As Descartes' *thinking things*, our beliefs are no longer directly and automatically triggered by our perceptions, as they may once have been in our prehuman ancestors. Our minds are not in the thrall of brute perceptual fact. We *form* our beliefs; and we do that by deliberating and reaching judgements, however carefully or carelessly. Now, belief aims at truth.

Arguably, one can't actually believe what does not at least appear true; and one cannot but believe what does appear true. ('That's right, but I doubt it' hardly makes sense, except to the American President.) Compelling reasons for something compel belief. (In Orwell's *1984*, Winston Smith maintains that no kind of suffering can make him *think* as opposed to *say* that  $2+2=5$ , that belief, at least, can't be politicised.)

Similarly, as *practical beings* we are unlike phototropic insects that have to seek light where they find it, even in a candle flame. We don't just react to stimuli but can consider and choose how to react. When we reason about what to do we are seeking to determine what, under the circumstances, would be for the best. (Whether this means for the best *morally* or not is part of what has to be decided here.) If beliefs aim at the true, actions aim at the good. The grounds for a choice lie in some worth that one finds in it. Thus, where there is no 'desirability characterisation' of an option, it is hard to see how there could be any motive for it, how it could be explained and therefore how it could happen. It is questionable, for instance – as Elizabeth Anscombe observed – whether anyone could be deemed to just want a saucer of mud. If so, it would seem to follow that

where a given choice is clearly seen as better than the alternatives there could be no adequate motivation for any other choice. Of course, I can choose something that *you* think the worst of, but how could I choose something that *I myself* really did, at bottom, view as the worst course?

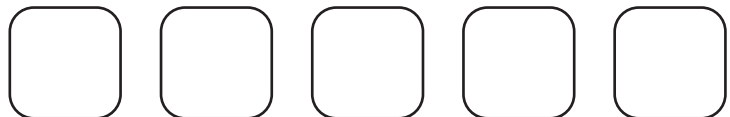
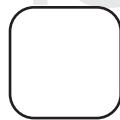
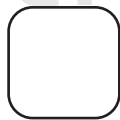
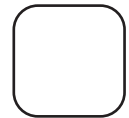
Perhaps, then, irrationality is impossible. It is hard to understand how I could believe where I see that matters remain inconclusive or how I could take the plunge where that strikes me as a mistake. Perhaps our perversities of thought and action – our blatant delusions and self-destructiveness – are not strictly irrational but more *nonrational*. The two are not to be confused. Thus, the failure properly to use our powers to deliberate and understand what really confronts us, before forming beliefs or taking action is very common. Indeed, care with these things does not come easily, and we are not always adequately educated and habituated to it. Also, mere omissions to make use of our rational faculties abound. People are often impulsive and just don't bother to think at all ('Oh, what the hell!' 'I just felt like it') or don't reflect with sufficient patience ('I guess I rushed the gun').

Again, despite best efforts people may be confused or unaware of important factors. Evidence can be vague and susceptible of interpretation, and one cannot prevaricate forever. Weaknesses and difficulties of such kinds might absorb all the cases we are tempted to regard as irrational.

Do they? What would downright irrationality be? It would surely involve, in the case of action, going ahead with something in the realisation that I am thereby letting myself down (rather than realizing only in retrospect that it wasn't for the best); and in the case of belief, clinging to or insisting on something but unsettled at the thinness of the case for it. My position would need to strike me as forlorn or desperate, unless I am just oblivious (and then I am just not rational). Are there any structures of thought and action that could manifest themselves in this way?

(At this point try for yourself to comb personal experience, literature, and history for examples and then to sift these for the principles they involve, always asking the question: Has reason lost its grip here, or has it just not laid hold?)

In *self deception* I seem to believe something in the teeth of what I know; I contrive to believe what I know better than to believe.



[Irrationality]

Here are two candidates in rather abstract form:

- (1) Belief in the innocence of someone whose guilt is obvious or proven.
- (2) Belief that a hopeless war is winnable.

The status of these cannot be decided without detailed examination of specific cases. Such examination could reveal some interesting possibilities in the shape of stratagems for sustaining belief or action against better judgement. Thus, a person might ignore adverse evidence in the belief that it *might* be overwhelming (note: he hasn't examined the evidence, so his belief isn't that it is overwhelming but that it might be, or probably is, and that is why he averts his eye from it). In the last days of World War II, the German armaments minister, Albrecht Speer, who was the only person Hitler would listen to, was deputised to get the fact of the German collapse through to Hitler. He prepared a document carefully setting out the realities and was careful to preface it with the conclusion: 'The war is irretrievably lost.' Hitler's reaction was to read this opening sentence, shut the report and lock it away in a safe, exclaiming, 'Don't depress me today!' Again, one might actually look the evidence in the face but bit by bit, without seeing, or thinking about what it adds up to; one sees the trees but not the forest. Finally, one might confront the evidence, and realise full well where it points and yet still hold out on the grounds that what looks decisive may not be, that evidence is seldom conclusive and there may be a saving explanation somewhere that has yet to emerge. Or, more stubbornly, that the conclusion just can't be true, therefore it isn't and so there *must* be

hidden faults in the evidence. In a more creative version of this, which could be termed *faith*, the 'evidence' could be reconstrued in light of one's unshakeable belief, so that, for instance, damning behaviour tending to confirm the worst is represented sympathetically as the defensive flailings of a victim. This could be done out of a genuine, not to say ingenuous, faith in the person ('It just can't be as it looks!'), but then we have a case of naivete and so of mere nonrationality. But if this insistence on putting the best face on things is peremptory and dogmatic and recognised as such by the person inventing the excuses, then we come closer to genuine irrationality. We still haven't arrived at that point, however, until this person actually has the thought that these excuses are mistaken. Yet that seems to remove the belief that made him self-deceived.

Two general candidates for irrationality of practice, or *weakness of will*, would be:

- (1) Smoking or eating unhealthy food, whilst believing that the risk from this is unacceptable.
- (2) Letting oneself watch television instead of preparing for a crucial exam the next day, which one recognises to be foolish.

In such cases of feckless letting go one seems knowingly and freely to choose



what one regards as the worst alternative at the time. This sort of thing is both very common and very puzzling. There seems just no room here for adequate motivation. Are these perverse lapses in self-discipline really what they seem?



Notice that weakness of will may not be fully analogous to self deception. It is arguable that for me to realise that something *must* be (or cannot be) true, is for my belief to change accordingly. Between how I think the reasons stand and what I then believe there is no wiggle room. By contrast, there may be a narrow but fateful gap between appreciating where the practical reasons point and acting accordingly. The idea is that what I judge to be all in all the best may not be what I *desire* most strongly. The force of renegade desire may be enough to loosen the grip of better judgement without altering that judgement. In Homer's *Odyssey*, even great Ulysses knows that the prospect of certain death on the Sirens' rocks cannot be trusted to protect him from the beguilement of Sirens' songs and so as their deadly sweet island comes within earshot he has himself bound to the mast and orders his sailors to disregard any of his subsequent orders.

This allows two ways of understanding apparent lapses of choice. Sometimes one's judgment itself is swayed (and perhaps sometimes rightly swayed) by the proximity of temptation: 'My goodness! This *is* lovely!' One has just changed one's mind—a mistake maybe,

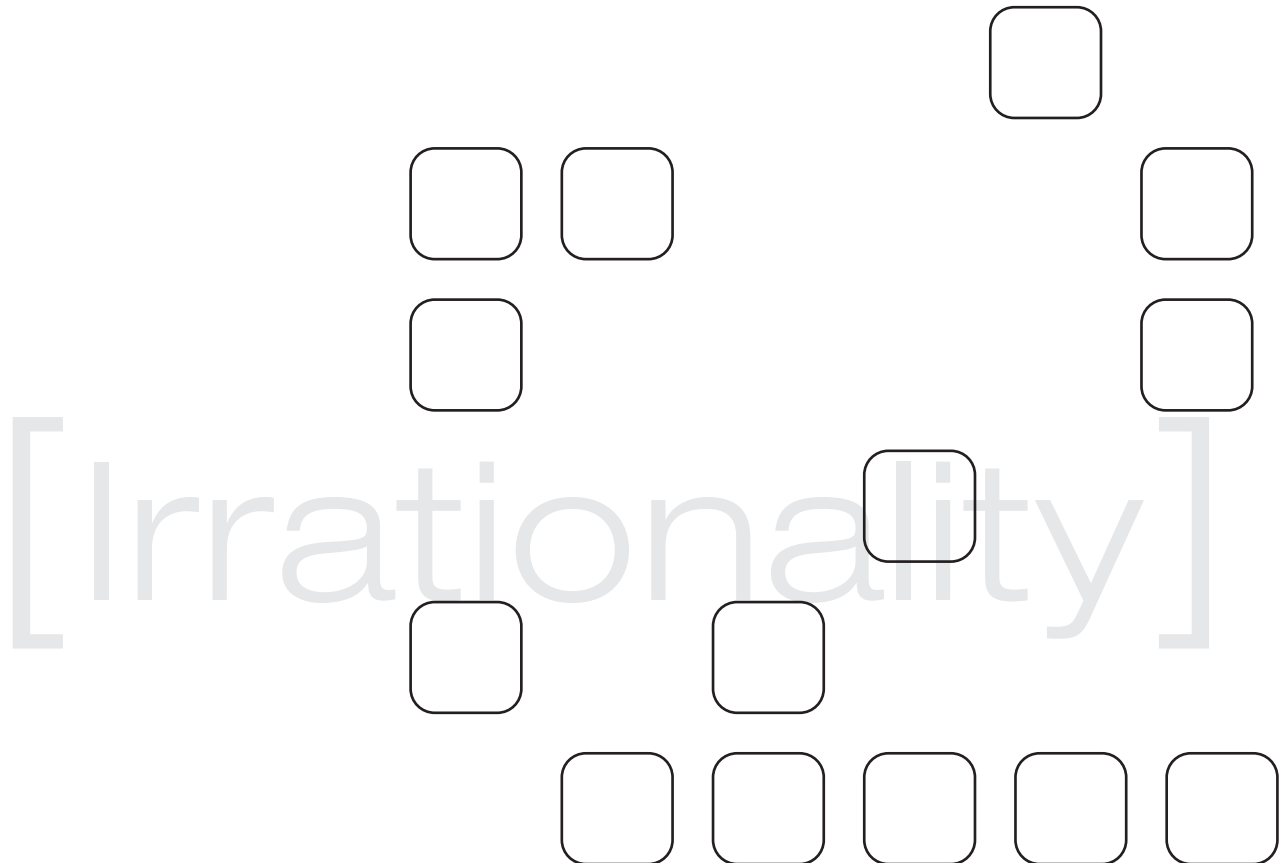


as one realises later, but not irrational. One forgets, temporarily, how important the interview is. Or one is under no illusion that, say, the risks from smoking are definitely not worth taking, but they are not incurred by this *particular* cigarette, nor by any other one cigarette, and each cigarette is, of course, just one. So, enjoy! In what look like harder cases ('What's wrong with me? How can I do this?'), the independence of desire from deliberated judgement can be invoked. This way out of irrationality would, however, be blocked if the source and force of *desires* has to be explained by the worth we see in the things we desire—judgements again.

Suppose there are really hard cases of self deceit and weakness of will that resist all attempts to make sense of them. Some philosophers claim that this would oblige us to postulate a split in the mind in which the reasoning that warns us against the inferior choice occurs and its conclusion grasped but is partitioned off from the rest of the mind in which the reasons favouring this choice are able to decide the day. Then all our reasonings are rational and our choice is also rational in light of the reasons that produced it, although it remains the worst choice, as we impotently and forlornly recognise.

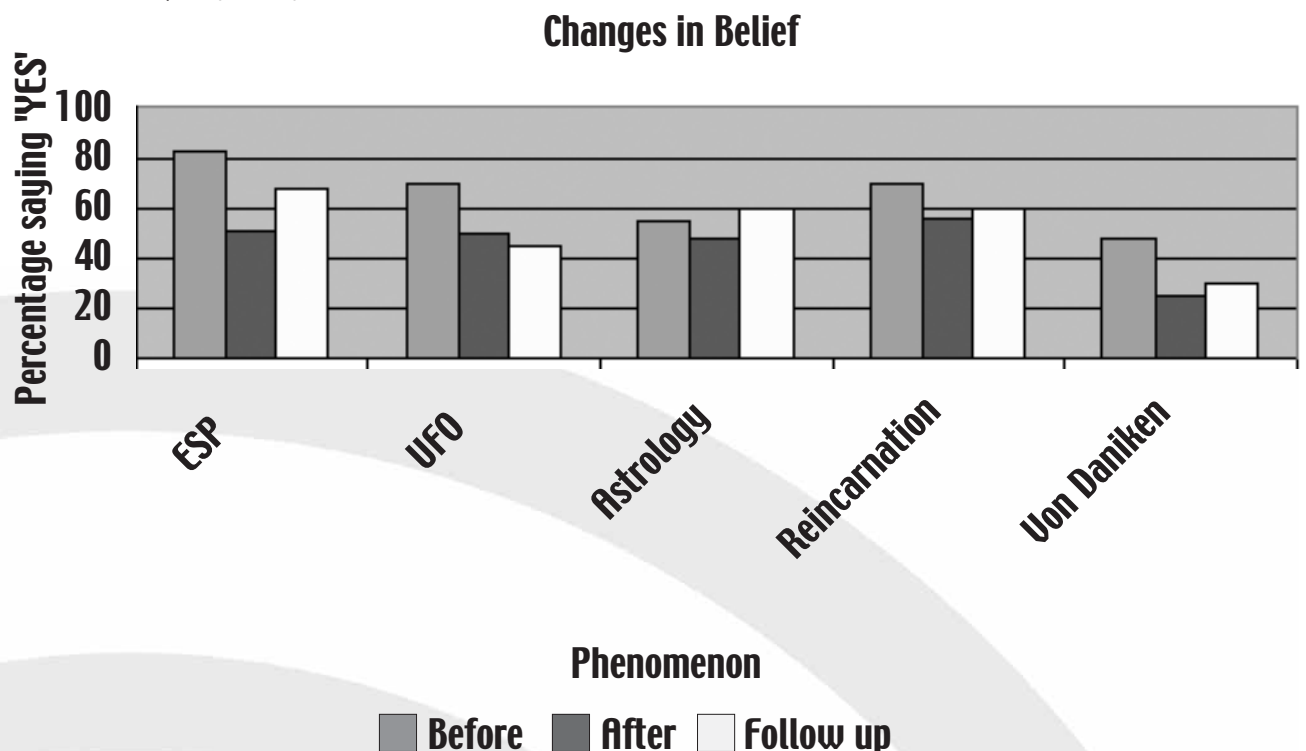
Maybe in the end we are never truly irrational, but at the very least we are a great deal more complicated than we imagine.

David Pugmire  
 Department of Philosophy  
 University of Southampton



## Addendum

The following chart suggests the power of believing as we fancy despite knowing better. It does not encourage optimism about education! - note that what is at issue here is not the *truth* of the beliefs but the sway over us of insight into the *evidence* for them: despite the patchiness of the evidence all the beliefs could be true, and for many this logical possibility is a welcome bolthole. (What is your favourite conspiracy theory?)



Changes in the percentage of students expressing belief as a result of university course specifically addressing the issue of belief in paranormal phenomena. The follow-up was conducted one year after the end of the course. 'Educational Experience and Belief in Paranormal Phenomena', Thomas Gray, p31, *Cult Archaeology and Creationism*, edited by Francis Harold and Raymond Eve (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995).

**Roger Crisp**

Ethics

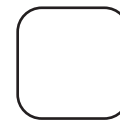
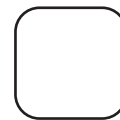
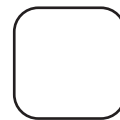
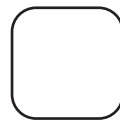
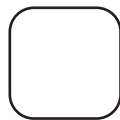
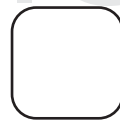
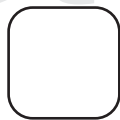
# [Aristotle's]

## How Being Good Can Make You Happy

Aristotle was among the very greatest thinkers ever, some would say the greatest. He was born in Stagira, in Macedonia (now in northern Greece) in 384 BCE. His father was a doctor, and he always had an interest in medical matters. In 367 Aristotle travelled to Athens, where he spent the next twenty years as a member of Plato's Academy. Plato died in 347, and Aristotle left Athens for thirteen years, during some of which he tutored (not particularly successfully, by all accounts) Alexander the Great. In 334, he founded his own philosophical school, the Lyceum, where he remained until just before his death in 322.

The range of Aristotle's thought is phenomenal. He could plausibly be said to be the founder of many disciplines, making advances in our understanding of logic, mathematics, biology, physiology, astronomy, time, theology, literature, rhetoric, the nature of happiness, and much else. Dante called him 'the master of those who know', and when Aristotle's works were rediscovered in the west early in the second millennium it was absolutely standard, when one was puzzled about almost anything, just to take the relevant Aristotelian volume off the shelf and find the answer. If we had all of his works, an English translation of them would run to something like 7 or 8 million words. In fact, only one fifth remains, but we do have the most significant.

When people talk of 'Aristotle's *Ethics*', they usually have in mind the work known as the '*Nicomachean Ethics*' (or '*NE*'). This consists in ten 'books', with several chapters in each. Each book tends to concentrate on a particular theme, or small number of themes. Exactly when Aristotle composed the work is not certain, but there is a tradition that he was revising it shortly before he died. Aristotle did not write books 'for publication'. Rather, he gave lectures to students in the Lyceum, his notes for which were then deposited in the library for consultation. As the years went by he would return to these notes and revise them, which explains how certain anomalies have entered the text we now have (the two separate, and potentially conflicting, accounts of pleasure, for example, in books 7 and 10). Its influence on humanity has been immense, both within and outside the Christian tradition, and it continues to play an important part in contemporary thinking about ethics.



It is important to remember that Aristotle was not an isolated thinker. Socrates had died in Athens in 399, only twenty-two years before Aristotle himself arrived there. A central Socratic tenet was that moral virtue consists in knowledge, so that one who acts wrongly acts from ignorance. The Socratic conception of happiness linked it closely with virtue and knowledge. Plato continued this tradition, identifying moral virtue with an ordering of the soul in which reason governs the emotions and appetites to the advantage of the virtuous person. Aristotle can be seen as following the same agenda, asking the same sorts of ethical questions, and using the same concepts.

In this brief essay, I shall be able to do little more than touch upon a couple of the main topics of discussion in Aristotle's *Ethics*: happiness and virtue. I shall have to pass over much of interest in Aristotle's accounts of responsibility, justice, practical wisdom, moral weakness, friendship, and pleasure. But if I can persuade you to read and think about this wonderful book for yourselves, I shall consider my task to have been more than worthwhile.



## Happiness

The starting point for Greek philosophical ethics was the question, 'What is the good life?'. That question was seen as close to, or even identical with, the question, 'What is the happy life?', and not so much, 'What is the right way to act?'. Though the Greek philosophers do have much to say about right action, their primary focus is neither on rightness nor on action. Rather, it is on happiness, and the happiness of a whole life.

Does that mean that, since he focuses on the happiness of the individual, Aristotle's ethics is egoistic? Not in the sense that he is advocating any kind of self-conscious, deliberate, self-seeking behaviour – looking out for number one. According to Aristotle, you should be concerned about particular other people *for their sake*, not for yours. But there is nothing in Aristotelian ethics inconsistent with the idea that, when the chips are down, your reasons for being concerned, for being a certain kind of person, for living a certain kind of life, or performing certain kinds of action, in the end rest only on the advancement of your own good. Strikingly, there is nowhere in Aristotle any recommendation of genuine self-sacrifice. Even the person who dies bravely on the battlefield 'assigns himself the greater good' – the good in question being 'nobility' (see book IX, chapter 8 (IX.8)).

There is a difference between the *concept* of happiness, and various *conceptions* of it. If you and I are talking about what human happiness consists in, we use the same concept. We attach the same sort of sense to the word 'happiness', and it is this that enables us to engage in discussion. But we may well have different

conceptions, that is, views about what happiness actually consists in. In his account, Aristotle moves between spelling out the implications of the concept, which he believes put constraints on any plausible conception, and offering arguments for his own conception of happiness itself. In an important chapter, I.7, Aristotle tells us that happiness is 'complete'. Since the beginning of the book, he has been constructing hierarchies of activities and specialisms. Bridle-making, because it is merely instrumental to horsemanship, is less complete than horsemanship. But horsemanship is instrumental to the end of military science, and so subordinate in turn to it. In general, Aristotle says, instrumental goods are inferior to goods which are both good in themselves and instrumental to some other good. The most complete (or most final, or most perfect) good is that which is not instrumental to any other good, and is good in itself. Such is happiness.

The same follows from the notion of 'self-sufficiency'. This notion was popular in philosophical discussions of Aristotle's time. According to Aristotle's use of it here, something is self-sufficient 'which on its own makes life worthy of choice and lacking in nothing'. Happiness does this. It is also unimprovable: it cannot be made more 'worthy of choice'. It is important to recognise here that Aristotle is not suggesting that a life can be happy only if it is itself unimprovable. That would be absurd, since any human life is always lacking something the addition of which would improve it. Rather, Aristotle's point is a *conceptual* constraint on any *conception* of happiness, that it not be improvable by the addition of

some good which it has omitted. Compare here the argument of Plato's mentioned approvingly by Aristotle in X.2: if you claim that happiness consists in pleasure, but accept that a life containing pleasure *and* wisdom is better than a life containing just the pleasure, your conception has been shown to be insufficient.

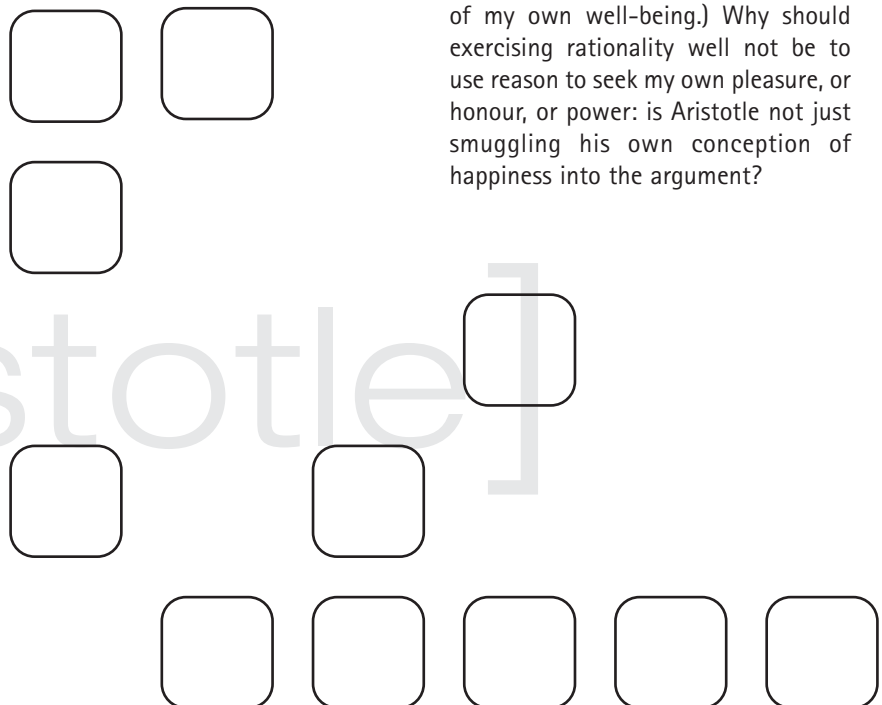
This interpretation of Aristotle on happiness has come to be known as 'inclusivist', for the obvious reason that it understands Aristotle to be claiming that any conception of happiness must include all goods. Against this, the 'dominant' interpretation has been offered, according to which Aristotle sees happiness as the primary or dominant good among several others. The force behind the dominant view lies mainly in the fact that in X.7, Aristotle appears to claim that happiness is to be identified with just one good, that of philosophical contemplation. Here, an inclusivist may suggest that Aristotle, having argued in I.7, that happiness consists in the exercise of the virtues, moves on in book X to consider which of these virtues is the most important.

At this point, we may wish to ask Aristotle which life one should go for, and whether it might be acceptable to commit vicious acts so as to further one's contemplation (to kill a rich aunt, for example, so as to spend one's inheritance on studying philosophy at Cambridge). Here we should remember Aristotle's frequent recommendation that we not seek greater precision in ethics than the subject-matter permits (see e.g. I.3), and his reminding us in X.8 that happiness can be found in exercising the moral virtues. There is nothing in Aristotle's text to suggest that he would advocate immorality in the pursuit of philosophy.

Having outlined this conceptual constraint, Aristotle then moves to consider the *ergon* – the characteristic activity – of human beings, in the hope that some light may be shed on the nature of human happiness. What makes a flautist a flautist? His characteristic activity – playing the flute.

The good – the 'acting well' – of a flautist is, of course, to perform that characteristic activity well. Now consider a human being. Its characteristic activity is the exercise of reason: that is what, Aristotle thinks, makes human beings what they are. The good of a human being, then, will be exercising that capacity well. But what is it to do that? The good is acting well, and acting well is acting in accordance with the virtues. So exercising rationality well will consist in exercising rationality in acting virtuously.

This famous argument of Aristotle's – usually called the 'function argument' – has been subjected to much criticism. Do human beings have a single characteristic activity? Is rationality not anyway characteristic of other beings – the gods? Why assume that the good for a human being is the same as performing well the characteristic activity of human beings? (In other words, perhaps the (morally) good human life is not the life that is in fact best for me, in terms of my own well-being.) Why should exercising rationality well not be to use reason to seek my own pleasure, or honour, or power: is Aristotle not just smuggling his own conception of happiness into the argument?



Some of these objections probably rest on uncharitable interpretations of the argument. And at least some of them can be avoided if we see Aristotle's conception of happiness as resting not only on the function argument itself, but on his accounts of the individual virtues in books II-V. Of course, it is too swift of him to expect us just to accept that exercising rationality well is exercising it in accordance with the virtues. But the detailed portrait Aristotle paints of the virtuous life – and vicious lives – in the later books can be seen as providing the main support for his account of happiness.

### Virtue and the Mean

It is important not to forget the conclusion of the *ergon* argument: human happiness consists in the exercise of the virtues. This has the radical implication that a vicious or immoral person literally has nothing to live for, and indeed might be best to commit suicide (since viciousness constitutes unhappiness). What, then, did Aristotle mean by 'virtue'?

Greek culture was one of excellence, in the sense that young men were encouraged to compete with one another in many spheres of life, including athletic, intellectual, and aesthetic activity. It is worth remembering that in Greek a horse that ran fast could be said to have a 'virtue' or excellence, in so far as it performed well its characteristic activity. Aristotle, however, is speaking not so much of physical excellences as virtues of character and of thought. Here, it is important that we have some understanding of the soul (I.13).

The soul can be seen as bipartite, with a rational and a non-rational part. The rational part is the source of the

intellectual virtues, the most important of which in connection with ethics is practical wisdom. Intellectual virtue is acquired primarily through teaching, while the virtues of character arise through habit. Someone might possess outstanding mathematical ability from a very young age, but developing virtue of character is more like learning a skill, such as carpentry – hence it is related to the non-rational part of the soul. Performing just actions, generous actions, and so on, will lead one to develop the corresponding character. And this character will lead to one's choosing virtuous actions for their own sake (II.4).



This provides a link between Aristotle's view and that of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). According to Kant, in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, moral worth attaches to an action only to the extent that it is motivated by respect for the moral law. Some have taken objection to this claim, suggesting not only that moral worth can lie in other motivations, such as love, but that pure respect for duty is itself sometimes out of place. Aristotle here tells us that a virtuous person will choose virtuous actions for

their own sake. Elsewhere, he says that he will choose them for the sake of 'the noble', and we can plausibly see choosing an action for its own sake as equivalent to choosing it for the sake of the noble. Again, as with Kant, there is no reference to love of others. But we should not forget Aristotle's account of friendship, which does allow for the concern one person may have for another.

Virtues, then, are dispositions engendered in us through practice or habituation. The notions of excess and deficiency, which play such an important part in Aristotle's account of the virtues, are first introduced in connection with the notion of habituation (II.2). In the case of healthy eating, for example, getting into the habit of eating too much or of eating too little will ruin one's health. Aristotle compares someone who is afraid of everything to someone who is afraid of nothing, and this kind of comparison has led some commentators to think he is offering us a quantitative account, according to which virtue is to be captured in, for example, being afraid of a middling number of things. But Aristotle's thinking is clearly prescriptive or normative: the brave person is the one who stands firm against terrifying situations, when he should, for the right reasons, and so on.

What, then, is Aristotle's 'doctrine of the mean'? In II.6, Aristotle says that we can feel fear, for example, either too much or too little, but that having fear at the right time, of the right things, and so on is 'the mean and best'. But how are we to understand feeling fear at the right time as in a mean? Again we have to remember the normative nature of the doctrine. No one should be fearless, since there

are some things one should fear. Likewise, there are things one should not fear. There are, then, two directions in which we may go wrong: feeling fear at the right time is in between not feeling fear at the right time, and feeling fear at the wrong time.

This analysis helps us to see how the doctrine of the mean works with actions. Generosity, for example, involves giving away money at the right time, and to the right people, and one may fail to live up to its requirements both by failing to give away money when one should (which is stinginess) and giving away money when one should not (which is wastefulness). We can also see how one's character may consist partly in two 'opposite' vices, and Aristotle explicitly says (IV.1) that some of the characteristics of wastefulness (such as spending money when one should not) are commonly found with certain characteristics of stinginess (such as taking money from the wrong sources). Aristotle's doctrine is therefore not one of moderation. Sometimes, for example, one will be required to be very angry, and sometimes to give away only a tiny amount of money. It depends on the circumstances, and moderation has nothing in itself to be said for it.

The doctrine of the mean works when we have a single morally neutral action or feeling that it is possible to do or feel at the right time, fail to do or feel at the right time, and do or feel at the wrong time. And it rests on an important insight: there are spheres of human action and feeling, and virtue consists in success within these spheres.

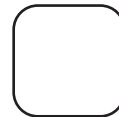
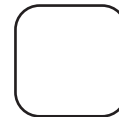
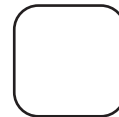
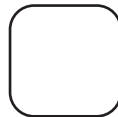
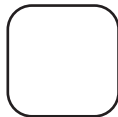
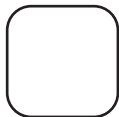
In recent years, there has been a revival of interest in the virtues, and in the ethics of virtue. The two main modern competitors to virtue ethics are utilitarianism and Kantianism. It is important to recognise that these three theories may largely converge in their practical conclusions. They may all, for instance, recommend that one be generous, or just. But the reasons that the theories offer differ greatly. According to utilitarianism, what makes actions right is their producing the largest amount of well-being overall. According to Kantianism, what makes actions right is their being in accordance with the law of reason. We might understand Aristotle, and a pure virtue ethics, as claiming that what makes actions right is their being virtuous.

There are differences between Aristotle and modern writers on the



virtues. The virtue of kindness or beneficence, for example, is almost entirely absent from Aristotle's account, though he does allow that human beings do feel some common bonds with one another on the basis of their shared humanity (VIII.1). And the crown of the virtues for Aristotle is a distinctly unmodern and pre-Christian disposition, greatness of soul (IV.3), which consists in thinking oneself worthy of great things and being concerned almost entirely with honour. The great-souled person is unlikely to stir himself to help the vulnerable.

[Aristotle]



Aristotle's discussions may be tabulated as follows:

Virtue	Sphere	Discussion in NE
Courage	Fear and confidence	III.6-9
Temperance	Bodily pleasure and pain	III.10-12
Generosity	Giving and retaining money	IV.1
Magnificence	Giving and retaining money on a large scale	IV.2
Magnanimity	Honour on a large scale	IV.3
[Nameless]	Honour on a small scale	IV.4
Even temper	Anger	IV.5
Friendliness	Social relations	IV.6
Truthfulness	Honesty about oneself	IV.7
Wit	Conversation	IV.8
Justice	Distribution	V
Friendship	Personal relations	VIII-IX

Aristotle also briefly discusses shame, which he says is not really a virtue, and appropriate indignation.

Another difference between Aristotle and modern theorists of the virtues is his objective notion of happiness. The idea that there is some universal account of well-being, especially one grounded in human nature, is denied by most important modern writers who otherwise see themselves as returning to Aristotle. Likewise, none of them goes as far as to identify happiness with the exercise of the virtues.

It is also important to remember the context in which Aristotle composed his lectures. He was writing two and a half millennia ago, for noblemen in a city-state of tens of thousands. He believed such a city to be the best form of human society, and might well have thought it absurd even to

attempt carrying across his conclusions about happiness in such a polity to what he would have seen as highly degenerate nation-states. It is not, in other words, a good idea to claim Aristotle as an ally in a modern debate the very assumptions of which he might have questioned. Rather, he should be read, carefully and sensitively, with an understanding of historical, social, and political context, as one of the best sources of insight into the human ethical condition available to us.

Roger Crisp  
Uehiro Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy  
St Anne's College, Oxford

## Further Reading

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. R. Crisp, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Crisp, R. and Slote, M. (ed.), *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Urmson, J., *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).



**Brad Hooker**

# [ Kant's Normative ] Ethics

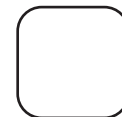
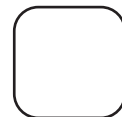
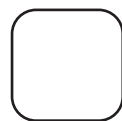
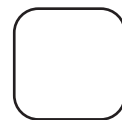
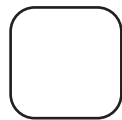
One central moral idea is that your doing some act is morally permissible only if others' doing that act would also be morally permissible. There are a number of different ways of developing this idea. One is the suggestion that, before deciding to do some act, you should ask yourself 'What if everyone did that?' Another central moral idea is that it is immoral to 'use' people.

Kant took himself to have identified a 'Categorical Imperative' that operates as the foundational principle of morality. He formulated his Categorical Imperative in different ways. One of his two main formulations of the Categorical Imperative develops the 'What if everyone did that?' question. The other main formulation of his Categorical Imperative develops the idea that morality does not permit you to use people.

Kant's ethics is grounded in the distinction between hypothetical imperatives and categorical ones.<sup>1</sup> By 'hypothetical imperatives', he means imperatives that tell you what you must do in order to get or do something you happen to desire: for example, 'if you want a good sleep, don't drink a gallon of caffeine at bedtime', or 'if you want to be trusted, always keep your word and tell the truth'.

'Categorical imperatives', on the other hand, tell us what to do regardless of our desires. I'm required to tell the truth even if I don't happen to want to. The same is true of my other moral duties.

But what could bring about intentional human action except desires, preferences, inclinations, and the like? Kant thought that unless there is something that can supply an answer, morality is a sham. He thought we aren't responsible for our desires and preferences. (We couldn't help the dispositions we were born with, nor the training we received in our formative years.) And if these desires, preferences, etc., completely determine our behaviour, then we can't really be held responsible for that behaviour either.



[ Kant ]

Kant thought that our desires and our beliefs about how to satisfy them are not the only things that could guide our intentional behaviour. We could act from duty. And what determines what duty requires? Kant's answer is: 'Since I have robbed the will of every inducement that might arise for it as a consequence of obeying any particular law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions to universal law as such, that this alone must serve the will as its principle.'<sup>2</sup>



Kant thinks this brings us to the first of his main two formulations of the Categorical Imperative: 'Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.'<sup>3</sup> A law of nature specifies an absolute regularity. For example, the law that pure water boils under normal atmospheric conditions at 100 degrees centigrade is a law of nature: pure water *always* boils under these conditions. So laws of nature would be laws (a) applying to *everyone* and (b) which everyone *always* follows. To imagine the maxim of my proposed action as a universal law of nature, I imagine that *everyone always* does the kind of act I propose doing when they are in the circumstances I am in.

Let us say that Kant's theory requires a three-step process. First, I formulate the maxim of my action. Second, I 'universalise' this maxim—that is, formulate the universal law of nature corresponding to the maxim of my action. Third, I consider whether I could *will* that the universal law of nature hold.

To see how this theory works, consider Kant's example of the lying promise.<sup>4</sup> The maxim of the agent's action is: *whenever I need money, I will get it by making a false promise to repay it.* As you can see, maxims state the agent's means and end—i.e., the means employed in the act and the purpose the act is supposed to achieve. The means here is making a false promise to repay money; the end is getting money. The universal law of nature corresponding to this maxim is, to paraphrase Kant: *Whenever anyone needs money, he or she will get it by making a false promise to repay it.*<sup>5</sup>

### The Contradiction in Conception test

Kant distinguishes between two questions.<sup>6</sup> The first is: Can I even *conceive* of my maxim becoming a universal law of nature? The second is: Assuming I could conceive of its becoming a universal law of nature, can I *will* that it become a universal law of nature?

There are some maxims that it is logically impossible should ever become universal laws of nature. A good example, which I learned from Derek Parfit, is the maxim: *I will give more to charity this year than is the average given in this year.* The corresponding universal law would be: *Everyone will give more to charity this year than is the average given in this*

*year.* This is an impossible state of affairs. So, according to Kant's contradiction in conception test, the maxim *I will give more to charity this year than is the average given in this year* is morally impermissible. But, intuitively, this maxim seems admirable rather than impermissible.

Let us move on to one of Kant's own examples. Kant thinks that the universal law of nature corresponding to the maxim of the lying promise is logically impossible. He writes,

I then become aware at once that I can indeed will to lie, but I can by no means will a universal law of lying; for by such a law there could properly be no promises at all, since it would be futile to profess a will for future action to others who would not believe my profession. ...<sup>7</sup>

Kant must be *assuming* that if everyone followed the principle of making false promises in order to get money, then everyone would *know* that everyone was doing this. Well, we can reasonably assume that, at least in most cases, if everyone is behaving in a certain way, then awareness that this behaviour is widespread will become widespread.

But it is possible that everyone could be *acting* in a certain way without everyone's *being aware* that everyone was acting in this way. Here are some examples. When I started as an undergraduate at an American university, all the students I met told me that they were studying virtually every minute of sixteen hours a day. I was overwhelmed until, about six months later, I realised everyone was hugely exaggerating. Another example is that when I came to the UK to do a further degree, I attended a university where the fashion was exactly the opposite: all students hugely

understated how hard they were working. By this point, I was not quite so stupid. So this time it took me only about three months to figure out that everyone was misrepresenting the truth. One more example: I grew up in a culture in which pretty much every male overstated certain things, but I didn't realise that at the time.

So we do need to distinguish between *everyone's acting* in a certain way and *everyone's knowing* everyone acts in that way. It is possible for these to part company. And this distinction is important in our discussion of Kant because what would make it impossible to get money through false promises of repayment would *not (necessarily)* be *everyone's making these false promises*. What would make it impossible to get money through false promises of repayment would instead be *everyone's knowing* that everyone makes these false promises.

Many modern philosophers have said explicitly that there are two distinct requirements which principles must pass if they are to qualify as moral principles. The first is that moral principles must be capable of being *universally followed*.<sup>8</sup> The second is that they must be such that they can be *universally known* to be universally followed.<sup>9</sup> This second requirement is often called the *publicity principle*.

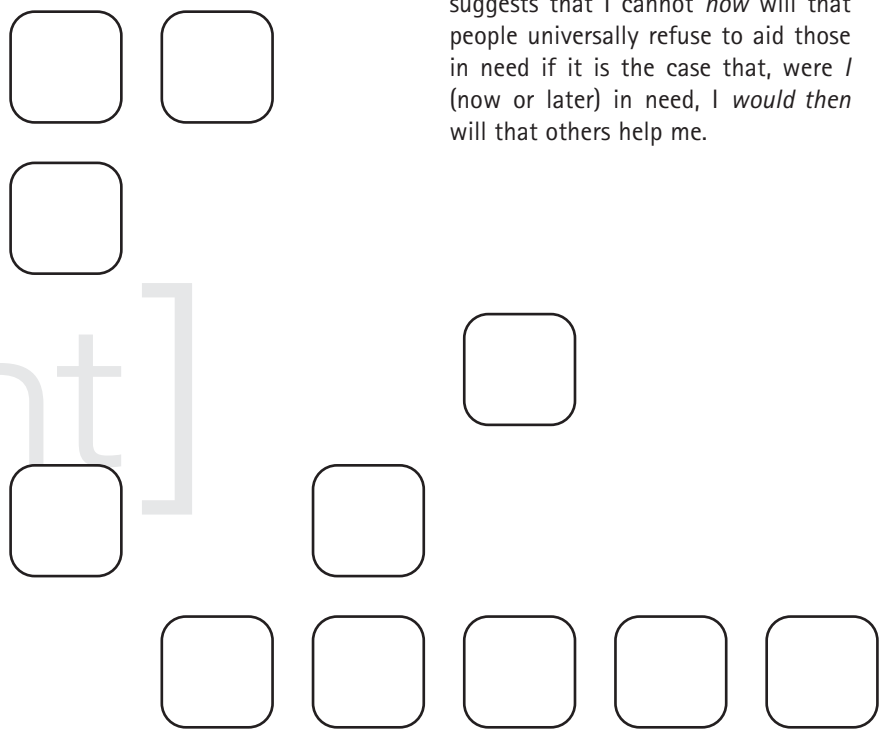
### The Contradiction in the Will test

In the question 'Can I *will* that my maxim be a universal law of nature?' what does Kant mean by 'will'? Our first guess might be 'choose' or 'endorse'. But what determines what I choose? The answer that first springs to mind is: my all-things-considered wants or desires. Yet we should be far from confident that this answer is correct—for this answer creates severe problems in interpreting other claims of Kant's, such as the claim that moral duty in no way depends on contingent human desires. On the other hand, what besides 'all-things-considered desire' could 'will' really be? So let us suppose 'will' means 'all-things-considered desire'.

Then, Kant's question 'Can I will that my maxim be a universal law of nature?' would seem to amount to 'All things considered, do I really desire my maxim to become a universal law of nature?' But when Kant tries to illustrate how his question works, what he gives us is the question 'Could I, in every situation, accept this maxim as law?'

Kant asks us to think about the case of a well-off person considering not coming to the aid of others in distress.<sup>10</sup> Kant asks whether this well-off person could will it to be the case that everyone ignores the cries of others in need. Kant says the answer is No, and the reason he gives is that on other occasions the previously well-off person may herself be in dire need of help from others. In giving this reason Kant suggests that one cannot will that some way of acting (such as denying aid to those in need) becomes universal practice if one might under certain conditions will that someone not act in this way. His remark suggests that I cannot *now* will that people universally refuse to aid those in need if it is the case that, were I (now or later) in need, I *would then* will that others help me.

[Kant]



But that suggestion seems inadequate, because it rules out too much. Just as I would if I were stuck in a ditch want others to come to my aid, I would if I were convicted want the judge not to punish me. If the former desire's existence in the hypothetical case rules out the maxim allowing everyone to ignore cries for help, the latter desire's existence in the hypothetical case rules out the maxim enjoining judges to punish convicts. How can Kant claim that it matters what I would will when I need help but it doesn't matter what I would will when I am facing the judge?

Let me put this argument against Kant in a slightly different way. Kant is advancing the following principle:

- (1) If I would, were I in another person's predicament, not want a certain maxim followed, that maxim is not morally sound.

But just as it is an empirical fact that if I were stuck in the ditch I would not want others to act on the maxim allowing everyone to ignore cries for help, it is an empirical fact that

- (2) If I were in the convict's predicament, I would not want to be followed the maxim enjoining judges to sentence convicts to punishment.

So, on Kant's principle,

- (3) The maxim enjoining judges to sentence convicts to punishment is not morally sound.

But surely the maxim enjoining judges to sentence convicts to punishment is morally sound. Indeed, Kant himself would say that judges should punish convicts even though this conflicts with the desires of the convicts.<sup>11</sup> The reasoning leading to (3) is logically valid. So, since (3) is clearly mistaken,

an assumption must be false. And the false assumption appears to be (1).

By rejecting (1), we are rejecting the idea that it is a *necessary* condition of a principle's being morally sound that there be no circumstances in which agents might find themselves where they would not want that principle followed. Now let us turn to the idea that it is a *sufficient* condition of a principle's being morally sound that there be no circumstances in which agents might find themselves where they would not want that principle followed.

This idea is often attacked with the following counter-example. Die-hard Nazis propose to kill Jews in order to 'purify the human species'. Critics of Kant's first formulation of the Categorical Imperative say the Categorical Imperative on this formulation will not be able to show (at least some kinds of) Nazis that killing the Jews in order to 'purify the species' is wrong, since die-hard Nazis would will it to be a universal law that the Jews be killed. That is, there is no occasion on which die-hard Nazis would not will that the Jews be killed. Were these Nazis to find out they themselves were Jewish, *even then* would they will that the Jews (themselves included) be killed. Such killing is nevertheless clearly morally wrong. Therefore, the case of the die-hard Nazis seems to constitute a powerful counter-example to the idea that the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative gives us a sufficient criterion of right and wrong.

I should mention one other standard criticism of Kant. He insisted on considering only very general maxims (rules), and confused a rule's being categorical in the sense of not making exceptions to satisfy the agent's

wishes, with its being categorical in the sense that it neither makes exceptions nor gets outweighed by other moral considerations. The rule requiring me to tell the truth does not make an exception for cases in which I don't feel like telling the truth. But it might make exceptions for cases in which my telling the truth would endanger the lives of innocent people.

Turn now to the other of Kant's two main formulations of the categorical imperative—the injunction never to treat rational agents merely as means but rather always to treat them as ends in themselves.



The most inviting way of interpreting this injunction is that it requires us to treat people in a way they can consent to. We might think that the focus on consent rules out deception. The thought is that, on careful reflection, you can't actually consent to my deceiving you. For if you're agreeing to let me lie to you, then I'm not really deceiving you, since you know not to trust what I say. Likewise, you can't really consent to my coercing you. For if you consent to what I do to you, I'm not really *coercing* you. We might even make this claim about assault. To do so, we'd have to define 'assault' as intentionally physically harming

someone *without that person's rational consent*. If you rationally consent to my physically harming you, what I do isn't assault.

There is a question about whether the focus here should be on what you *really do* consent to, or merely on what you *could* consent to. Suppose you want me to repay the loan I borrowed from you. You *could* rationally consent to my not repaying the loan to you. If the focus is on what you *could* consent to (whether or not you actually do), then is my not paying the loan permitted? If so, then the categorical imperative seems to be going wrong.

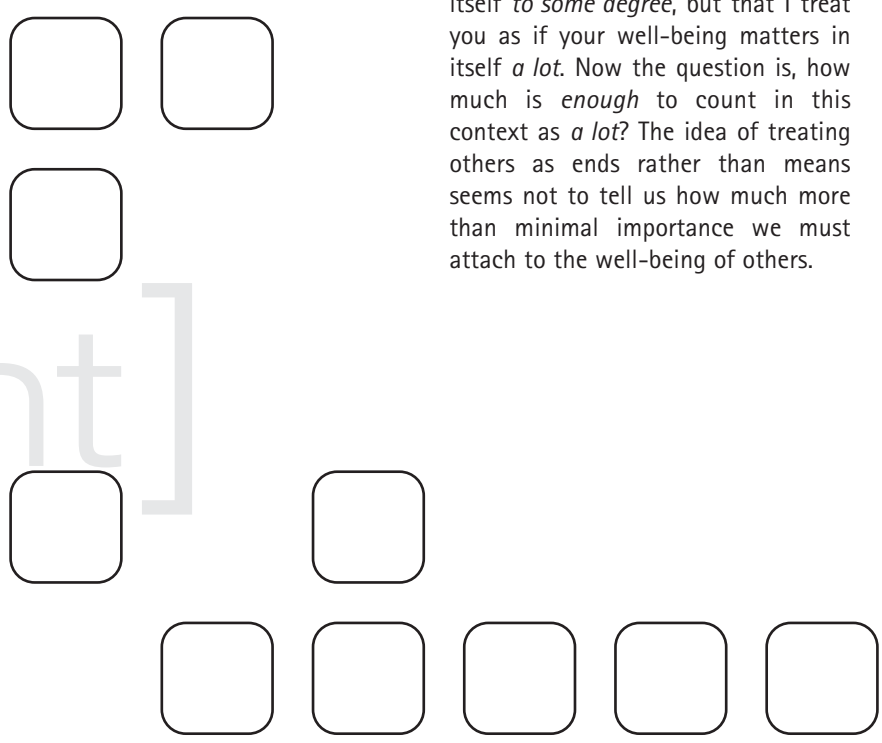
A far more natural reading of 'treat people always as ends in themselves and never merely as means' is as requiring us to treat people in ways that they actually do consent to, or would consent to under appropriate conditions. This idea is developed within what has become known as contractarian, or contractualist, ethics.<sup>12</sup> Contractualism is in many ways the successor theory to Kant's.

Robert Audi, however, attempts a different interpretation of Kant's principle about treating others as ends.<sup>13</sup> Audi takes the idea of treating someone as a means as pointing to 'the idea of using something merely as an instrument: it matters only in getting the job done; *it may be damaged in the process and trashed thereafter*.'<sup>14</sup> And Audi writes, 'from our understanding of instrumental relations, we have a sense of what it is to treat someone merely as a means. We regularly use tools and far too often similarly use other people. Here, *what happens to the tool is of no concern* - unless we may need it for another job or happen to like it for its own sake.'<sup>15</sup>

So Audi's suggestion is that treating someone as a means consists in treating that person *as if his or her well-being doesn't in itself matter at all*. There is nothing in this suggestion about *lack of consent*. Audi's interpretation thus contrasts sharply with the usual interpretation of Kant's prohibition on treating rational agents as means.

The suggestion that morality requires us to treat people as if their well-being matters in itself is fairly empty until some indication is given of how much weight we must attach to a person's well-being. After all, I might treat you appallingly though I attach some minimal weight to your well-being. Suppose that, though I treat you as if your well-being matters in itself, the minimal weight I attach to your well-being is .000001 of the weight I attach to anyone else's well-being. Clearly, if I treated you that way, I wouldn't be treating you rightly. What is needed is *not* just that I treat you as if your well-being matters in itself *to some degree*, but that I treat you as if your well-being matters in itself *a lot*. Now the question is, how much is *enough* to count in this context as *a lot*? The idea of treating others as ends rather than means seems not to tell us how much more than minimal importance we must attach to the well-being of others.

[Kant]



Whatever the implications of Kant's moral theory, what is the right answer to the question of how much weight to attach to the well-being of others? Intuitively, some degree of partiality is morally required. In your day-to-day decision making, you to be somewhat more concerned about the well-being of your family and friends than you are about the well-being of others.

But the requirement to be partial might itself be impartially justifiable. Indeed, we might expect that every defensible moral requirement is impartially justifiable. What is this impartial justification? The most natural answer is that, when we impartially assess any possible set of moral requirements, we should accord the same importance to benefits or harms to any one person as we do to the same size benefits or harms to anyone else. This line of thought, however, is not Kantian; it is rule-utilitarian.

Brad Hooker

Professor of Philosophy  
University of Reading

#### Notes

- 1 Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* was translated by H. J. Paton and published as *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson, 1948). My references to Kant will be to the 1969 reprint of Paton's translation. For the distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives, see pp. 78–80.
- 2 Kant, p. 67.
- 3 Kant, p. 84.
- 4 Kant, pp. 67–8.
- 5 The easy way to get from the maxim of the action to the corresponding universal law of nature is to substitute indefinite pronouns ('everyone', 'anyone') for the first of the first person pronouns in the maxim and then to substitute 'he or she', or 'him or her', for the later first person pronouns, and then alter the verbs so that they agree with the new subjects. For example, in the text above I substituted 'anyone' for the first 'I' and 'he or she' for the second 'I'.
- 6 Kant, pp. 86–7.
- 7 Kant, p. 68.
- 8 This first requirement would rule out the principle that one ought to give more to charity than is the average this year.
- 9 This second requirement would rule out the principle that one ought to get money by making false promises to repay it.
- 10 Kant, p. 86.
- 11 Kant, p. 92 fn.
- 12 For an overview, see Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's 'Contractarianism', in H. LaFollette (ed.) *Blackwell's Guide to Ethical Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) pp. 247–67. A contractualist theory can be found in T. M. Scanlon's *What We Owe Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). I briefly discuss contractualism in my *Ideal Code, Real World: A Rule-consequentialist Theory of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 6–8, 66–70.
- 13 Audi, 'A Kantian Intuitionism', *Mind* 110, pp. 601–35.
- 14 Audi, p. 612, italics added.
- 15 Audi, p. 623, italics added.

**Alan Thomas**

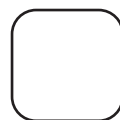
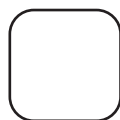
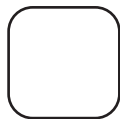
Is Your Mind

# [Your Brain?]

When you arrived at the location where you are now perusing this paper, your action was preceded by a prior decision to make the journey: a mental event. Perhaps you did not make the trip alone; you arranged to come with a friend, to meet them beforehand, and to travel with them to where you currently are. That involved prediction on your part of how your friend would behave. That prediction was not a matter of physical comings and goings involving slide rules, the laws of physics and your friend's mass and velocity. It involved your appeal to their mental events and states. You believed that they would meet you because they believed that it was what they ought to do, in the light of what they wanted, given that they are rational human beings.

You do not predict everything that happens in the world in such a way. When you are calculating which way the avalanche will fall, or the boulder roll, during a hazardous mountain hike, you do rely on the slide rule and the laws of physics, at least in their everyday 'folk' variant. If you say that the avalanche has a mind of its own, and that is why it blocked the path, you are speaking metaphorically.

So in our dealings with the world we treat some parts of it differently from other parts, and the grounds we give for this difference is that parts of the world have minds and other parts don't. Philosophers have always been puzzled as to what this difference amounts to and this puzzlement has survived scientific progress in the understanding of the physical basis of behaviour. This progress is made up not only of the emergence of an autonomous science of psychology, originally a discipline that was part of philosophy, but also the emergence and spectacular development of the brain sciences, centrally neurophysiology. How can this be? Haven't we understood all that there is to understand about the mind when we know that the mind is the brain?



[Mind]

Philosophy being philosophy, philosophers are worried about the word 'is' in the sentence, 'the mind is the brain'. It has to be understood in the sense of strict and literal identity at a time. In that sense, when we say that the table is the table, we do not mean that it is very similar to some other table, that in another sense of the word 'identity' means, 'is very similar to'. Identical twins are identical in that sense of 'very similar to', but philosophers are interested (typically) in identity strictly conceived. One thing that has seemed, to many philosophers, to follow from the claim that one thing is identical to another is that they would have to share all their properties or features. (It does not follow that if two things share all their features or properties that they are the same.) So if we really believe that the mind is the brain, then the mind and the brain should share all their features. But many philosophers have believed that the mind and the brain do not share all of their features and therein lies the problem.

This claim needs to be unpacked considerably. What is it about the mind that we do not believe that a brain can also possess? Candidates for such features are: representation (directedness), rationality, consciousness and, generally, the belief that there is a 'what it is like' to be a mental subject. The philosophers' worry is that we do not find these features in a brain.

Each of you is, I take it, neither a cyborg nor a zombie. If I knock off your head I won't find the white oozing goo that emerges from the heads of the automata in the *Aliens* series of movies. Nor are you a zombie in the sense that you are a physical replica of a human being that does not have experiences. The philosophical zombie

is not a flesh-eating instance of the undead, but an imagined human subject that is physiologically a replica of you but has no mental life. You, by contrast, do have a conscious mental life. As you sit reading this, you have a distinctive range of experiences, unlike the zombie or the cyborg that has none. This seems to suggest that your mental life has features that a brain does not have. Suppose that I rigged up a means for you to view your brain processes as you were reading this paper. Suppose in a mirror you saw the output from this device, a cerebroscope. How would you reconcile the pale grey mushy stuff you see in the mirror with the complexity of your mental experience? Doesn't your mental life have features that are just missing from the life of a cyborg or a zombie, even if they have functioning brains? What is missing?



Expanding on this line of thought, philosophers have argued that minds can represent, whereas brains cannot. You can think of things, whereas brain states simply are. You can think of the non-existent, such as an imagined mountain made entirely of gold. Your mind represents the world as so and so, whereas nature gives evidence not

of complex representation but merely of signs, such as the rings of a tree that indicate its age. The kind of representing that minds do is more complex because, paradoxically, there is a richer sense in which it can go wrong. The tree's rings signal states of affairs without the same capacity for error, but your thoughts can be wrong in a thousand ways (alas).

Second, and related to your capacity to represent, you are a thinker. Your thoughts can be tied together by relations that are rational. If you are thirsty, and you believe that your thirst will be relieved by putting 50p in the Coke machine, and you have 50p, then you ought (other things being equal) to put the money in the machine for the drink to slake your thirst. These mental states of yours did not just happen in sequence. They were a sequence, a rational chain of argument. This sequence depended on other mental states of yours. I said you should put the money in the machine if all other things were equal. But suppose that they were not. Suppose that 50p was your only coin for your call home for your parents to come and pick you up and if you drank the Coke you would be stuck overnight at a deserted railway station with a collection of mass murderers. You ought not to buy the Coke but you ought to make the call. So it seems these rational sequences call on a range of mental states that you have and they are all implicated in some kind of network of states. What, in the brain, corresponds to that? What is that at the level of neurons? We know that, in fact, the brain does operate in a network like way. But where is the sensitivity to rationality in such networks? Your thoughts must make sense, whereas your brain events merely are.



Third, you are a conscious subject. There is a difference between being conscious and being non-conscious. For a whole person, that is the difference between being awake and responsive, and being unconscious or asleep. But we also think that this distinction applies to individual states you can be in. You can be conscious of a thought, or a sensation like a pain, or you can be not conscious of those things. The difference seems to be a matter of awareness. How, looking at a brain and its states and events, could we explain the difference between those of its own states of which it is aware and those of which it is not aware? Is it a matter of having an internal scanner? If so, then brains could be conscious, but so will handheld and laptop computers and many other devices of comparable (and higher) complexity. Are they conscious too?

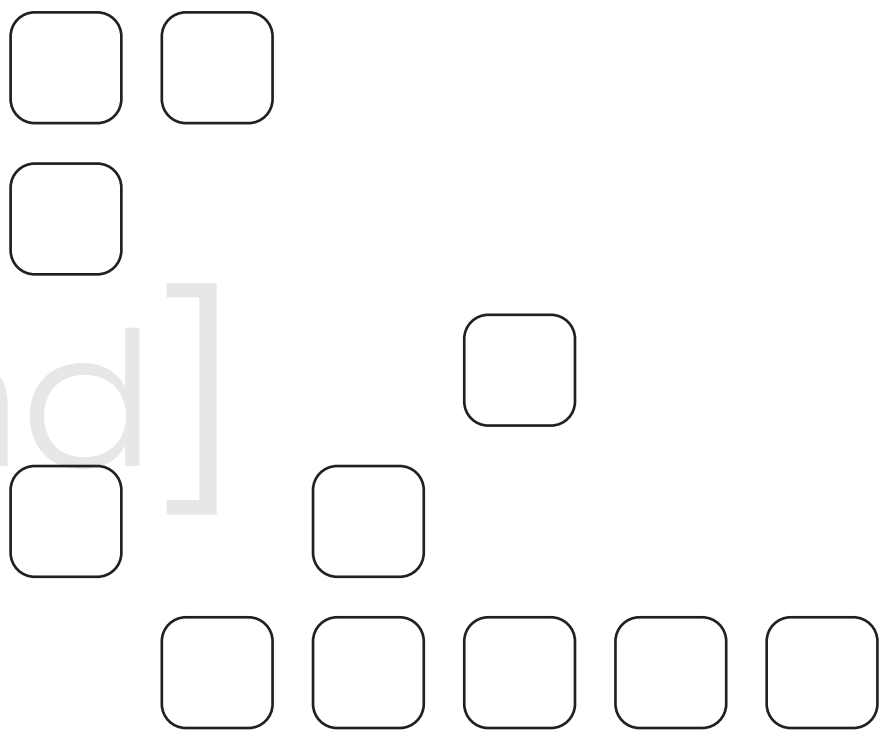
One way to sum up these worries is that there is a 'what it is like' to be a mental subject. There is a 'what it is like' to be you. I don't mean by this that you are alienated, or hopeful about the future and such like. I mean simply that at the level of being a conscious mental subject, there is what it is like to be such a thing. This is a very difficult thing to describe or to do anything other than point to

(and a metaphorical pointing at that; philosophers who believe in such a thing spend a lot of time hitting themselves on the head). It is a bit like Dizzy Gillespie's response to the woman who asked him to explain rhythm in jazz: his answer, paraphrased, was that if he needed to tell her she was not ever going to know.

At this point, a certain amount of exasperation may set in. How can it be denied that the mind is the brain? We have the spectacular successes of psychology and neurophysiology as proof that it is. Science, by this stage in our collective history, stands on its own two feet and it does not postulate the operations of mind to explain anything. In particular, the most fundamental science, physics, describes everything that happens.

It does not do so in terms that are always useful or helpful. If you want to know the causes of an economic recession, you need an explanation in economic terms using the typical concepts and procedures of economics. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which those very same features of the world that the economist describes in her successful explanation of a recession are those features that a physicist could describe if she chose to do so. It would be a long, boring, and shapeless list in lieu of a 'description', but it would be true. True statements can have many other defects, but remain true. So physics gives a true and complete description of everything that there is, even if not always a helpful or salient description. Less abstractly, we know that behaviour has a physical basis. Drugs affect our brains and our behaviour, brain damage impairs mental function, mental illness can be cured by anti-depressants. How can these facts be denied? These facts show that the mind is the brain.

[Mind]



These facts are undeniable, and if they are undeniable we had better find a way, if we want to sustain our conclusion of claiming that the mind is not identical to the brain, of dealing with them. An initial response is to say that of course the brain is very important for the functioning of the mind, but then a steering wheel is very important for the functioning of a car. But steering wheels do not drive cars, drivers do. Similarly, the brain is a very important conduit for mental functioning, but it is not a mind. Damage to the conduit damages the operations of mind the way that damaging the steering damages the functioning of a car. But mind and brain are not identical.

The serious challenge comes from the argument that says that everything in the world has a true physical description. So if the mind is distinct from the physical brain, we seem to be suggesting that its doings and happenings are not physical doings and happenings which is ruled out by this argument. What can we say here?

There are three routes. One is to say that we just need to build in to physics, at a fundamental level, laws that correlate physical events with mental properties. This expands the repertory of what we count as physics. The problem here is that everything that happens, we believe, happens because it has physical causes. So now we have two competing causes for events, a brain event cause and a mental event cause. We know that the first of those, being physical, completely explains what it causes. So we have accepted that there are parts of the world that are mental, mental events that are not brain events, at the cost of making them idle spectators of the passing show. They are caused, but

do not cause. This seems a very heavy price to pay. The second option is to deny our principle. The world is not, as it seems to be, physically closed and complete. That seems desperate.

The third option says: let's make a new distinction. That is the distinction between two particular things being identical at a time, and types or classes of things being identical. In the former sense, perhaps we have been shown that mental events are brain events. But describing them in that way makes a difference. There are many sciences, if we look beyond physics, where mental sayings and doings make a difference to what we can and cannot explain. Mental talk makes a difference, but not the kind of difference we accommodate by making it a magical exception to the claims of physics or a special unusual part of physics. On this relaxed view, mind talk and brain talk are two ways of talking. They do not introduce new classes of thing into the world. They are different vocabularies with different commitments but none the worse for that.

This view may have problems of its own. It looks, for example, as though one and the same event in the world can have both a true physical description and a true mental description. But how could that be if that event does not have different properties? And if it does have different properties, don't we re-state our initial worry? It is the event described as a brain event that completely explains what happens, not the fact that this event is also your decision to read a philosophy paper.

The answers to these concerns go deeply into central questions about how language relates to the world and whether it is basically made up of

events, or of substances instantiating properties. Our initial problems were about the distinctive features of the mental; those aspects of our mental life that suggest that the events of our mental life cannot be identical, as a type, with the type of events in our brains. But further examination of that view has taken us a long way from the initial starting point to consideration of issues about descriptions and properties. But then this reflects the holistic character of philosophy, where nearly all problems overlap. Perhaps this was only to be expected in the mind's investigation of itself and its place in the natural world.

Alan Thomas  
University of Kent at Canterbury  
a.p.thomas@ukc.ac.uk  
<http://www.logical-operator.com>

**Peter Goldie**

# [Can We Trust Our Emotions?]

I think that our commonsense intuitions tend to draw us in two apparently opposing directions about this question. On the one hand, we are inclined to say that we can certainly trust our emotions. Indeed, our emotions can sometimes tell us things about the world that reason alone will miss, as all the recent books about 'emotional intelligence' attest. In this respect, our emotions serve us very well; that, one might think, is why we evolved as creatures with emotions. Yet, on the other hand, we are inclined to say that our emotions can and do profoundly distort our view of things: in anger or jealousy, for example, when the red mist comes down over the eyes, and we can feel the blood pulsing in the temples, things look other than the way they are, and, accordingly, our emotions can mislead us profoundly; literature is replete with examples.

A cheap resolution of these competing intuitions would be to say that there are cases and cases: sometimes our emotions help us to gain knowledge of the world around us, and sometimes they hinder us. No doubt this is true so far as it goes, but I think there is more to be said than just that. So what I want to do here is to say what lies *behind* these competing intuitions, and the sense in which both are right (without simply appealing to the idea that there are cases and cases). But in doing this I want to raise what

I see as two quite deep epistemological worries about the emotions as a source of empirical knowledge—that is to say, they are worries about whether the emotions can help us to know certain things—empirical facts—about the world around us. I think that there is something especially troubling about the emotions here.



[Emotions]

		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## The value of emotions: instrumental and non-instrumental

To the extent that the emotions do serve the purpose of being a source of knowledge about the world, then they are of *instrumental* value. (A knife, for example, is of instrumental value in so far as it is useful for cutting things, and if it ceases to be able to do that, then it is no longer of instrumental value in that respect.) Although my focus here will be only on the potential instrumental value of emotions—on their value in enabling us to see things as they really are—I also think that they can be valuable *non-instrumentally*; that is to say, they can be valuable even if they serve no further purpose or create no other sort of valuable thing.

This is in contrast to a popular view in ethics, which I think should be resisted, which goes only part of the way in accepting the value of emotions. This is done by, first, accepting that emotions matter, and then, secondly, going on to insist that they only matter *because* of the way that they can affect other things—their effect on how you act, for example. In other words, emotions are *only* valuable instrumentally.

I will not argue the point here, partly because it is not the central topic of the paper, and partly because I find it very difficult to think of an argument that can *persuade* someone who disagrees. So, rather than putting up an unpersuasive argument (one that will only persuade the already-converted, and what is the use of that?), I will give an example; examples can sometimes persuade where arguments cannot. It comes from a wonderful novel, *Disgrace*, by

the South African writer, J. M. Coetzee. The central character, David Lurie, is a university lecturer who is forced to resign in disgrace from his post for having an affair with a student, which involves him treating her very badly. He tries to make a life of sorts with his daughter, who has a hopeless smallholding deep in the country. He starts, as part of his new life, to help a friend of his daughter, Bev Shaw, at the animal welfare clinic that she runs. Many sorry animals come in, and many have to be put down, either because they are sick, or because no one wants them. David asks Bev, when he first visits the clinic, whether she minds putting down the animals. She replies 'I do mind. I mind deeply. I wouldn't want someone doing it for me who didn't mind!' Much later, right at the end of the novel (after some awful things have happened to David and his daughter), there is a wonderful redemptive moment, almost unbearably poignant. One by one dogs and cats are brought in to be put down, now by David as well as Bev. Coetzee writes: 'One by one Bev touches them, speaks to them, comforts them, and puts them away, then stands back and watches while he seals up the remains in a black plastic shroud. He and Bev do not speak. He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love!' At last, in this final scene of the novel, David has the right emotion; and, I want to add, it matters *non-instrumentally* that he should have the right emotion (and that he should be able to name it). Even if his treatment of the soon-to-be-dead animals were no different because of his emotion, and even if David's feelings of love

were to have no other consequences elsewhere (even for him), it still *matters* that he was able to give love to the dying animals.

But now I must get down to the task at hand: Can we trust our emotions to give us knowledge of the empirical world?

## Having an emotion

I will first consider what it is to have an emotion, and then go on to consider what it is to have an emotion that reveals things as they really are—that is, as I will put it, to have the *right* emotion. Let me begin with an example. You are trying to cross a field during your afternoon walk, and you see a bull in the field. You feel afraid of it. Your fear, being an emotion, is what is called *intentional*, in the sense that it is directed in thought and feelings towards an object, in this case the bull.' You think that your fear is justified (although in your fear you might hardly dwell on the point): you think it is justified not only because the bull seems to you to be dangerous, but also because you think it really is dangerous (because it might harm you, with its long horns and menacing look in your direction). In your fear you are frozen to the spot, and feel adrenaline coursing through your veins. Then suddenly you run! Only when you get over the stile into the next field do you feel safe; your heart is still racing, but the fear is now nearly over.

As this example brings out, an emotion (in this case your fear) is complex, episodic, dynamic, and structured. It is complex in that it involves many different elements: thoughts and feelings directed towards the object of the emotion (the bull), bodily changes (increased adrenaline), and so forth. It

is episodic and dynamic in that, over time, these elements wax and wane (your fear ceases after you have got into the next field). And it is structured in that the emotion constitutes part of a larger unfolding sequence of actions and events (you still feel nervous many hours later).<sup>2</sup>



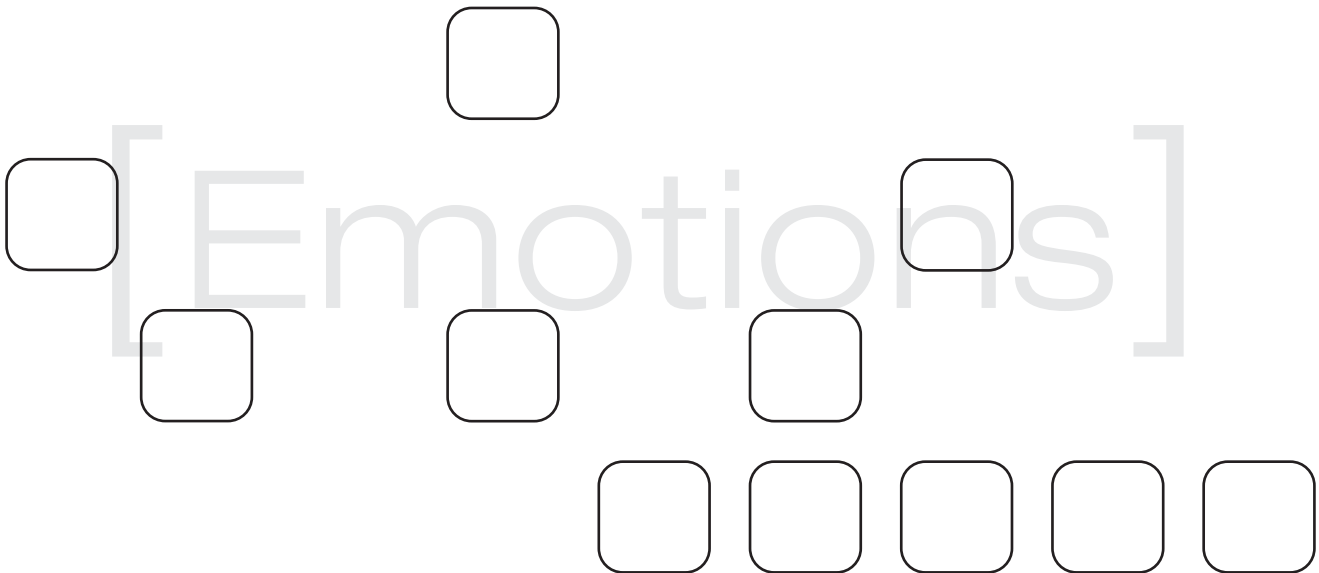
### Having the right emotion

Now, what is it to have the *right* emotion? Well, staying with this example, it would not be the right emotion if it were not really a bull, but one of those Milton Keynes stone cows that we see through the window of the train, and you had mistaken this for a real live bull. Also, it would not be the right emotion if it was really a bull, but the bull was not really dangerous because it was very firmly tethered. In both these cases, it would not be right to feel fear because the object of your emotion is not really a source of danger; and thus the fear would not be justified. But even if it was really a bull and it really was dangerous, so it is right to feel fear, you could still feel fear in the wrong way: perhaps being too afraid

(all it wants to do is follow you out of curiosity and it would only be dangerous if you made it panic); or perhaps being afraid for too long (even after you are safely in the next field).

The idea, then, is that the right emotion is the one that is not only appropriate to its object, but is also proportionate and of the right duration. In short, the right emotion is the emotion that is *reasonable* or *justified*.

In the bull example, and the example is typical of emotional experience in this respect (there are other non-typical cases that I will turn to next), the emotional response involves the experience of the emotion as being reasonable or justified. In other words you fear the bull, and at the same time think that the bull that seems to you to be dangerous really is dangerous, and that it really is dangerous because of its having other features (long horns that might harm you, a menacing look etc.), and that its having these other features justifies your fear.



In the non-typical case, one does not see one's emotion as reasonable or justified in this way. For example, you are afraid of the mouse in the corner of the room, and yet at the same time you know that the mouse is not really dangerous. So, in these circumstances, you would not try to justify your fear by appealing to the mouse's features which you think make it dangerous; rather, you might give an explanation of your fear which does not seek at the same time to *justify* it: you might, for example, say 'I have always been afraid of mice ever since I woke up and found one in my bed when I was six; but I know they are perfectly harmless.' Nevertheless, even in these non-typical cases, the experience is still of the mouse as *seeming* to be dangerous. There is, thus, the possibility of acknowledging, in one's own case, and at the same time as the emotional experience takes place, that things are not really as they seem: the mouse seems to you to be dangerous; but you know that it is not. And this is why you give an explaining reason why you are afraid (your childhood experience), without holding that this *explaining* reason for your fear also justifies it.<sup>3</sup>

So far, then, we have the following picture. Having the right emotion is having the emotion that can be justified by features of the object of the emotion. In the bull example, you are right that your fear is reasonable or justified, and that things really are as they seem: the bull seems to be dangerous and it really is. You think you are having the right emotion and you are. Where the bull is firmly tethered but you have not seen the tether, you think the bull really is dangerous, but it is not, and so you are wrong that your fear is justified or reasonable. You think you are having

the right emotion and you are not. In the mouse example, you think the mouse is not really dangerous (even though it seems to be), and it is not, and so you are right that your fear is not reasonable or justified. You think you are not having the right emotion and you are not. (To fill in the rest of the picture, try to think of an example where you think that you are not having the right emotion but you are.)

It seems true to say that we want to have the right emotions: this would mean, so far as fear is concerned, being the sort of person who is afraid when and only when fear is reasonable or justified. This sort of person, Aristotle would say, has the virtue of courage, as to have this virtue just is to be disposed to be afraid when and only when it is reasonable or justified. We want our emotional dispositions, so to speak, to *attune* us to the world around us, enabling us to see things as they really are and to respond as we should—in short, enabling us to *get it right*.

### Emotion and virtue

In Book II of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the virtues, of which courage is, of course, an example. Courage is also (and not all the virtues are like this; justice is not) an example of an emotional mean-disposition: to be courageous is to have the virtue of courage, and to have this virtue just is to be disposed to feel fear when and only when fear is justified—that is, disposed to get it right (in thought, feeling and action) so far as fear is concerned. (Thus, to be a *just* person is to have a virtue that is not also an emotional mean-disposition (although it is a mean-disposition), because being a just person does not involve being disposed

to feel any particular sort of *emotion*; rather, it involves being disposed to have just thoughts, to decide on what is truly just, and to act justly.)

Sometimes Aristotle is read as if he is saying (and there are things that he says that encourage this reading) that to be virtuous in some respect, courageous for example, is to be somewhere in between two extremes: moderation in one's fear at all times, so to speak. But this is not what I think he is really getting at; it would be an absurd view if it were. So when I call it an emotional *mean*-disposition, I do not intend to suggest that I endorse the so-called doctrine of the mean; for I reject it.<sup>4</sup> Rather, as I think Aristotle makes clear, the virtuous person will feel (that is, have emotions) and act 'at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, and in the right way; ... this is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1106b20). And, with courage specifically in mind, he says, 'Hence whoever stands firm against the right things, and fears the right things, for the right end, in the right way, at the right time ... is the brave person; for the brave person's actions and feelings reflect what something is worth and what reason prescribes' (1115b17).<sup>5</sup> Not moderation in all things, then, but just *getting it right*. In each case, on each occasion, there will be one way of getting it right, and many ways of getting it wrong; it is, as Aristotle says, like hitting a target (1106b16).

Having the emotional mean-disposition, the deployment of which will enable one to get things right, is a profoundly *normative* notion, governed by the norms of reason, and not by what is merely typical or normal. It would be absurd to suggest that one can check to see whether or

not one is getting it right by comparing one's emotional responses with those of other humans or with those of others within one's community, and concluding that if they match up with what is typical or normal, then they are fine, and if not, then they are 'wrong'. For example, it is in an important sense *normal* for humans to feel envy and sexual jealousy, but in both cases it is at least questionable whether envy and sexual jealousy are ever justified.

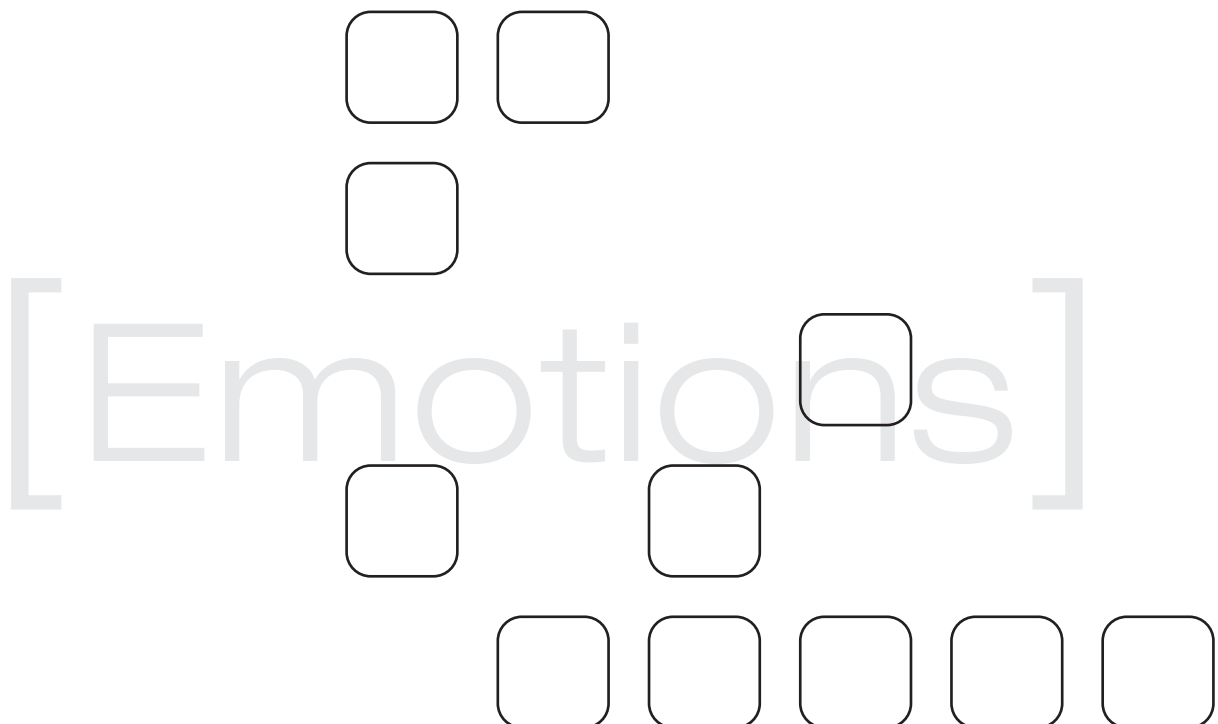
Moreover, in respect of an emotion towards a particular object or type of object, an entire community (or near enough entire) can be wrong, as for example, were English people at the beginning of the First World War, who almost universally felt profound anger and disgust at all things German: Dachshunds, Wagner, and so on. We now see that as silly (or worse), and surely it is we who are right.

And it was certainly 'normal' to experience what was called an 'outpouring of grief' at the death of Princess Diana, but this too has been argued to be wrong;<sup>6</sup> and here again the contrary view is not wrong simply in virtue of not being normal. And, so far as fear is concerned, it might be normal not to fear the microwaves from mobile 'phones, and those who feel no fear may think that fear is not justified, for they think that there are no good reasons to consider them dangerous.

But perhaps we will find out at some future date that most of us are wrong about this: we *should* be afraid of mobile 'phones. In this respect, our emotional dispositions are different from our perceptual mechanisms. We need only check that our perceptual mechanisms (sight, hearing, smell etc.) are *normal*, and the idea of 'normal' here is not a normative idea.

### Getting it right and getting it wrong

If we are not properly attuned to the world around us, then we will be disposed to get it wrong. If, for example, you are, by disposition, a timorous person, then you will not have the emotional mean-disposition for fear, and accordingly you will respond with fear to all sorts of things (such as mice) that are not really dangerous—or at least to things that are not as dangerous as you take them to be. And if you are disposed to be unduly indifferent to fear, then again



you will not have the emotional mean-disposition for fear, and here you will fail to fear things when you ought to. It is, of course, an over-simplification (one to which Aristotle was perhaps prone) to think in terms of us having (or lacking) a *single* emotional mean-disposition for fear of *all sorts of thing*. Matters are less simple than that: some people are brave about one sort of thing and timid or overly fearful about others. A particular person could, for example, be both unduly indifferent in respect of the risk of being attacked by bulls in fields, and unduly timorous in respect of the risk of being attacked by muggers in dark alleyways. There may be explanations of these dispositions that will appeal to his past experiences: perhaps he was brought up in the company of an unusually friendly bull, and was also brought up by parents who were terrified of street crime, so that their timorousness in this respect rubbed off on him.

To have the emotional mean-disposition is not, however, *sufficient* for getting it right. Other temporary factors can also unduly interfere with one's emotional response on an occasion, leading one to fail to get things right. I will mention two notable ones. First, one's *mood* can affect one's emotional response: for example, if one is in a jittery mood (perhaps through drinking too much coffee), then one is more likely to be frightened by a strange noise as you walk through an alleyway. Secondly, a recent emotional experience in relation to one thing can resonate across to some other, unrelated thing: for example, if one has just had the terrifying experience of being mugged in the alleyway, then one may be especially likely to be jumpy every time the doorbell rings; your

emotional disposition gets temporarily put 'out of tune'.

So let us see where we have got to so far. If one is of the right disposition, that is, if one has the emotional mean-disposition, and if there are no other undue influences on one's thinking, then one will see things as they really are, and one will respond emotionally in the right way, in thought feeling and action. But if one is not properly disposed, or if there is some temporary undue interference on one's emotional response, then there is a significant risk of getting things wrong; one's emotions can *distort* how things are, and one will fail to respond emotionally in the right way, or as one ought.



### The first epistemological worry: Reason-skewing

This is just where my epistemological worries being to arise. As I have already said, it is typical of emotional experience to consider one's emotion to be justified—that is, to see the object of one's emotion as having the features that justify your feeling. So far so good. But what if, without one's knowing it, one's emotional response is wrong or unjustified, and the object

of your emotion does not have the features that it seems to have? (Perhaps you think you have the emotional mean-disposition but you do not; or perhaps there are other temporary undue influences on your thinking that you are not aware of.) In such cases (and here is the worry), one's emotional responses tend to *skew* one's reasons to make them cohere with the emotional experience. To be clear, I am not here concerned with those non-typical occasions, like the mouse example, when one knows at the time that one's emotional response is not justified, but the emotion remains, for on those occasions one's reasons stand *opposed* to one's emotional response, and one recognizes that it is one's emotional response that is in error. I am, rather, concerned with those more typical cases where, in the here and now of emotional experience, one does not know that one has reason to doubt one's own emotional response, so one sees no reason to question one's experience of the object of the emotion as having the features that it seems to have. In such cases, I think we tend to *look for and find* 'reasons' where there are none—'reasons' which are supposed to justify what is really an unjustified emotional response. The emotion becomes a sort of *idée fixe* to which other thoughts have to conform. This is the first epistemological worry; let us call it the *worry about reason-skewing*.

This skewing process can be continuous whilst the emotional response is in place, operating on new information as it comes in. One's emotions and emotionally-held judgements *ought* to be open to be shown to be wrong by new evidence, but when new evidence does emerge, one tends not only to be insensitive to



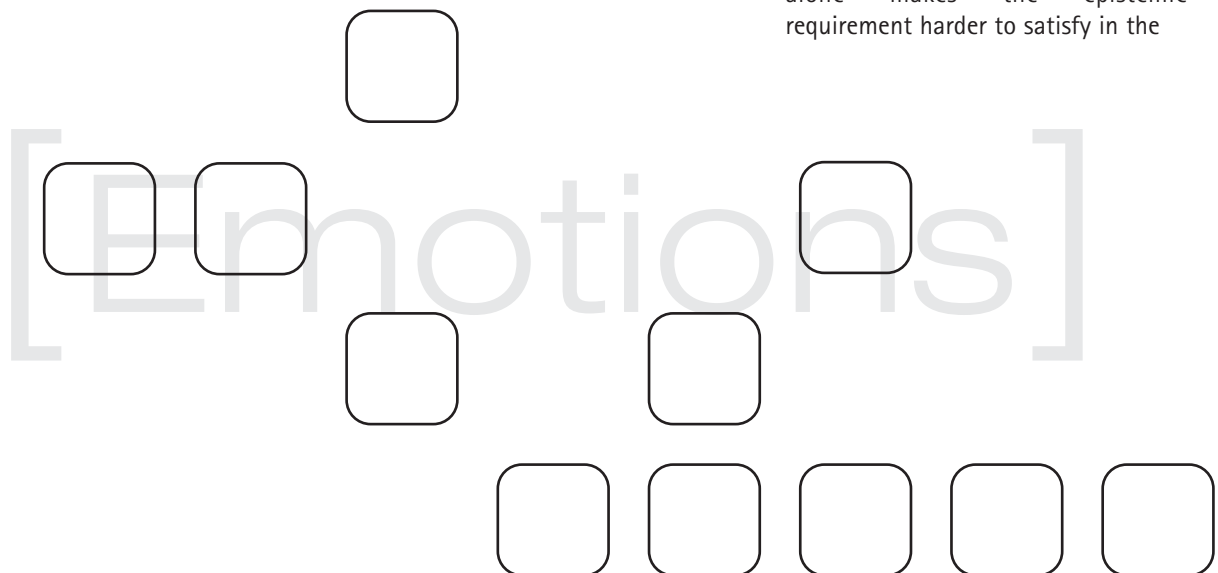
that evidence, but also, for the sake of internal coherence, to doubt the reliability of the source of that new evidence. An extreme case is Leontes in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*. Once he becomes convinced that he has been cuckolded by his boyhood friend Polixenes, he refuses to listen to what previously trustworthy Camillo tells him to the contrary; he even refuses to accept the words of the oracle of Apollo. Anyone with a contrary view to his own *must* be either mistaken or an enemy, acting on ulterior motives. Only when Leontes' child and wife die at the hand of Apollo does he recognize that he has 'too much believ'd his own suspicion'.

**So what's special about the emotions here?**

A possible objection to my position is that there is nothing special about the emotional case: people are generally subject to all sorts of well-documented cognitive deficiencies,<sup>7</sup> and the emotional case is just an instance of this.

One response to this objection, which I find independently attractive but will not pursue here (although it is not unrelated to the second worry), is that perhaps more of these cognitive deficiencies can be traced back to the emotions than might at first be thought. The other response, which I will put forward here, is that there is something special about the emotional case: emotionally-held judgements, about things as having emotion-proper properties, are *more intransigent* than are their non-emotional counterparts, and thus the skewing (for the sake of internal coherence) tends to be towards the preservation of the emotionally-held *idée fixe* at the cost of the unemotional beliefs.

Now, it is surely a reasonable epistemic requirement that one be willing and able to 'stand back' to reflect on, criticize, and if necessary change our way of thinking of things. And this requirement surely rightly extends to critical reflection on the way that one's emotions can have this skewing effect. This is *obviously* the case when one knows that one's emotional dispositions are not as they should be (as in the mouse example). But it is also the case when one has no particular reason to doubt one's emotional dispositions: even then one should try to be especially watchful and reflect dispassionately on the evidential support for one's emotionally-held judgements. The contrast is stark here between the epistemic requirement to check up on our perceptual mechanisms and the epistemic requirement to check up on our emotional dispositions. The contrast lies not only in the fact, which I have already discussed, that we need only be sure that our perceptual mechanisms are *normal* (within a certain tolerance), whereas we need to be sure that our emotional dispositions enable us to get it right, which is a *normative* notion. This alone makes the epistemic requirement harder to satisfy in the



emotional case (comparing one's emotional reaction with that of others may not be the *right* check). But it is more problematic than that. The contrast with ordinary perception lies also in the fact that we can readily observe that our perceptual mechanisms have fallen away from what they should be: car number-plates become illegible; you now cannot hear a noise which others can hear; and so on. Whereas we typically *cannot* observe that our emotional dispositions have fallen away from the norm: as Simon Blackburn puts it, there is no 'loss of immediately felt phenomenal quality ... when we become, say, corrupt'<sup>8</sup>



The problem is a very familiar one to everyday experience: how one is to satisfy this epistemic requirement when one is in the swim of emotional experience. Consider this example. You are in despair about your job. The job seems hopeless, and it seems to be hopeless for all sorts of reasons which seem to *justify* your despair: there are no decent prospects for promotion; most of your colleagues are people with whom you really have very little

in common; you do not seem to be able to get the work done properly; the journey to and from home is a nightmare; and so on. Your friends, not in the here and now of this emotional experience, assure you that things only seem this black *because* you are feeling so despairing (you used not to be like this; perhaps some Prozac might help?). You try to stand back and see things as others do (maybe things will look a bit brighter in the morning). And you might succeed in doing this to some extent. But you could still think that it is your friends who are wrong: they believe these things because they do not see that things really *are* hopeless and how *right* you are to be in despair (Prozac might lift the despair, but the job will still be hopeless).

### The second epistemological worry: water lilies

This leads me directly to the second, deeper epistemological worry. Emotions continue to resonate in one's mind long after they are, as it seems, 'over'. It is a fundamental error to think of emotions as being just about mental turbulence, of the sort that one can immediately recognize from introspection, so that one cannot be in error as to whether or not one is being emotional at any given time. Rather, we can be emotional without knowing it: for example, one may think that one has 'got over' some emotional experience or other, and that its potentially distorting effects are no longer at work, whilst the emotion still, at a deeper level, continues to resonate in the psyche. One can therefore be inclined to think that one is being 'dispassionate' when one is not, and thus one has no way of

knowing that special watchfulness is required. On such an occasion, then, one might ask oneself 'Am I emotionally involved here? Because if I am, I should be especially watchful!' Yet the answer comes back 'No, I am not emotionally involved here'; moreover, one might sense a certain puzzlement as to what *sort* of emotion might be relevant here.

I call this the water lilies worry after this marvellous passage from Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*: 'We ... imagine that the world is unambiguous, whatever the relationship between the things out there and the inner processes may be; and what we call an emotion is a personal matter that is added to our own pleasure or uneasiness but does not otherwise change anything in the world. Not just the way we see red when we get angry – that too, moreover; it is only erroneously that one considers it something that is an occasional exception, without suspecting what deep and general law one has touched upon! – but rather like this: things swim in emotions the way water lilies consist not only of leaves and flowers and white and green but also of "gently lying there"'<sup>9</sup>

If Musil is right, then, that we are always in the swim of emotion ('no emotion ... ever comes to an entirely specifiable end'<sup>10</sup>), and that we will often not know what emotions are at work in our minds at any given time, then we could be in this worrying position. Our reasons continue to be skewed as they are in emotional experience (the reason-skewing worry), and yet we have no way of knowing in what way they are being skewed, because we do not know what emotion is at work (the water lilies worry).

Let me give an example. A long time ago you were very angry with a colleague at work because he failed to turn up to a meeting that you were chairing where his presence was essential. And he *promised* to be there. You thought your anger to be thoroughly justified—how *could* he not have told you in advance! The following day, though, he gave you a full explanation, and was extremely apologetic. You put your anger behind you, as you should do, realising that he really had a good reason not to be there, and a good reason why he could not give you advance warning. Later still—*much* later—you are asked to give your colleague a reference.

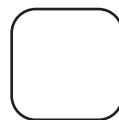
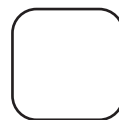
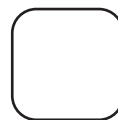
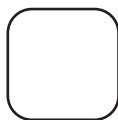
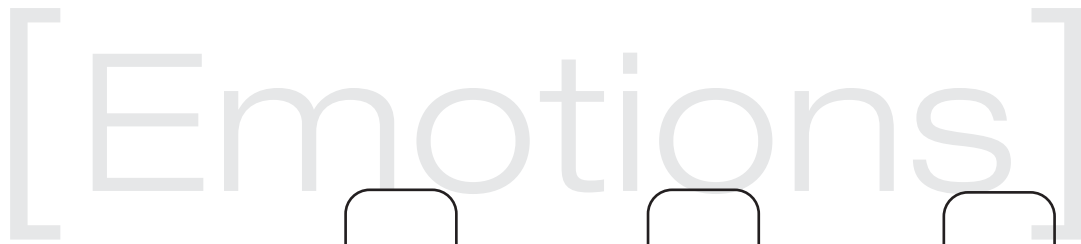
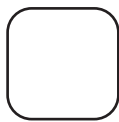
Without your realising it, what you say is influenced by your emotional experience, which still has its residue deep in the recesses of your mind: you do not say that he is unreliable (for the long-past incident is no longer in the forefront of your mind), but your reference is not as favourable as it would have been if the incident had never taken place. You are, in a subtle way, and without knowing that you are doing it, *getting your revenge*."

**So where does this leave us?**

The two epistemological worries, then, are as follows. First, whilst one is in the swim of life, emotionally engaged with what is going on, one's reasons are liable to be skewed by one's emotions, which become sort of *idées fixes*. This is the reason-skewing worry. To avoid this as much as possible, one should see oneself as subject to the epistemic requirement to reflect on one's reasons, and to correct them where necessary, and to be aware that one should be especially watchful when one is emotionally engaged.

The second water lilies worry is that one can be emotionally engaged without knowing it, so one has no way of knowing which of one's reasons are being skewed, and in what ways. Even if one were to embrace Musil's thought (or my interpretation of it) that we are always in the swim of emotion, and thus to accept that a special watchfulness is *always* required, one will still be no wiser as to *how* to apply this epistemic requirement at any particular moment. This seems to me to be especially troubling. But then perhaps I am just being unduly emotional.

Peter Goldie  
King's College London



## Notes

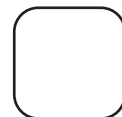
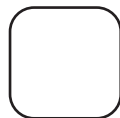
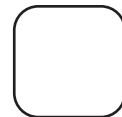
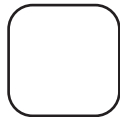
- 1 Intentionality is a notion that I cannot hope adequately to explain here. It is sometimes explained as the property of *aboutness* that is one aspect of the mental; for example, if you think about your kitchen at home, it is your kitchen at home that your thought is about. There is a very good, but not easy, paper by Tim Crane, 'Intentionality as the mark of the mental', in A. O'Hear ed., *Current Issues in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp229–51, where Crane argues that intentionality is better understood as directedness towards an object. This is the view I adopt here.
- 2 I argue for this in *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).
- 3 Jonathan Dancy discusses the distinction between explaining and justifying reasons in his *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 4 Aristotle discusses these ideas in Chapters 6 and 7 of Book II of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. There is an excellent discussion of the doctrine of the mean (and a rejection of it as false), in a recent and very readable book by Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; I strongly recommend this book to anyone beginning to find his or her way into Aristotle's ethics. Also, for anyone thinking of buying a copy of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the edition that I recommend is translated by Terence Irwin, Indianapolis: Hackett. It has especially useful notes and a glossary.
- 5 See also, with courage in mind, 1115b35 and 1116a4.
- 6 See Anthony O'Hear's 'Diana, queen of hearts: sentimentality personified and canonised' in D. Anderson and P. Mullen (eds.), *Faking It: The Sentimentalisation of Modern Society* (Social Affairs Unit, 1998), pp181–190.
- 7 For a fascinating survey of these deficiencies, see R. E. Nisbett and L. Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgement* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980).
- 8 See his 'Errors and the Phenomenology of Value', in his *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp149–65, at page 160.
- 9 *The Man Without Qualities*, tr. S. Wilkins and B. Pike (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), page 1561.
- 10 *Ibid.* page 1307.
- 11 This example is very loosely based on some empirical research, which seems to lend some support to my case here. See Dolf Zillman and Joanne Cantor, 'Effect of timing of information about mitigating circumstances on emotional responses to provocation and retaliatory behaviour', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 12, 1976, pp38–55.

**Aaron Ridley**

Song Got  
[Wrong]

One of the commonest ways of going wrong in philosophy is to assume that the consequences of a statement that is obviously true must themselves be obvious. So, for instance, from the obviously true statement that the mind is not the same as the body, it can seem to follow directly that the mind and the body must be distinct kinds of *thing*. But that conclusion, although it may look like an obvious consequence of the obvious truth that minds and bodies are different, is almost certainly false. Or, to take another example, from the obviously true statement that human beings tend to prefer pleasurable experiences to painful ones, it can seem to follow directly that all issues of value must be reducible to questions about the pleasurable or painfulness of experiences.

But again, and however obvious-looking it may seem, the inference is bad and the conclusion is false. These two mistakes – known respectively, of course, as dualism and utilitarianism – show how powerful the seductions of expecting obvious consequences from obviously true statements can be. The examples I have given are well known ones from the philosophy of mind and ethics. But the same sort of error crops up throughout philosophy, not least, as I hope to show, in aesthetics.



[Song]

## I

Here's an obviously true statement: songs are a combination of music and words. Franz Schubert's song *Erlkönig*, for instance, is clearly a combination of Schubert's music and the words of the poem by Goethe that Schubert sets. So far, so obvious. But it can seem to follow from this, and to follow obviously, that the text of Schubert's song must be Goethe's poem. And it can seem to follow obviously from *that* that an appreciation of Schubert's song must, at the very least, involve an appreciation of Schubert's music, an appreciation of Goethe's poem, and an appreciation of the relation between the two. Certainly these are the conclusions that contemporary philosophers of music have drawn, and have thought to follow obviously from the obvious truth that songs are a combination of words and music.<sup>1</sup> But both conclusions are false, however intuitively compelling they might appear. And both have seriously impeded the attempt to say anything philosophically sensible about song – one of the most important kinds of music there is.



## II

To see what's wrong with the first of these seemingly obvious inferences, we need to think for a moment about poems. Consider rhyme, alliteration, intonation and metre. All of these are sound-effects, factors which make a poem sound one way rather than another. They are, in an altogether unmetaphorical sense, *musical* qualities. They are also, of course, part of what makes a poem mean what it does, or have the expressive effect that it does. The difference in meaning between Coleridge's line 'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure-dome decree' and a perfectly good paraphrase of it – for example, 'Kubla Khan ordered that a pleasure-dome of elegant but substantial proportions be erected or built in Xanadu' – is due, at least in part, to the fact that the paraphrase entirely lacks the musical qualities of the original. A poem is to be appreciated as the poem it is, in other words, at least partly in virtue of its musical qualities. I don't think that this is controversial. But as soon as a poem is set to music, it is precisely its musical qualities that change, and more or less inevitably so. The metre of the resultant song is likely to be altogether different from that of the original poem; rhyme and alliteration may be softened, highlighted, eliminated or even created in the setting; and the music may impart to the words an entirely new style of intonation. The musical qualities of the *words of the song*, that is, may be completely different from the musical qualities of the words of that song when read *as a poem*. And since its musical qualities are part of what makes a poem the poem that it is, this means that the text of a song is *not* the poem that it sets. The poem may

have one set of qualities, the text of the song another. The text of a song is therefore the words of the poem it sets *as sung* in that song; and, as such, the text of a song cannot be fully specified without reference to the song itself, which is to say, without reference to the *music* of the song. The first apparently obvious consequence of the obvious truth that songs are a combination of music and words is therefore false. It is not the case that the text of, say, Schubert's *Erlkönig* is Goethe's poem of the same name, which Schubert has set. Rather, the song's text consists of the same words in the same order as Goethe's poem, but of those words as *sung* to Schubert's music.

## III

What of the second apparently obvious consequence – that an appreciation of Schubert's song must involve an appreciation of Schubert's music, of Goethe's poem and of the relation between them? Well, we can already see that this can't quite be right. Goethe's poem is not, after all, the text of Schubert's song, so there is no longer any reason to think that an independent appreciation of that poem must be part of what an appreciation of Schubert's song involves. One must appreciate the text, to be sure: but the text and the poem are not, as we have seen, the same thing. Nor, for reasons that shadow the ones given above, are there any grounds to think that an appreciation of Schubert's song must involve an *independent* appreciation of its 'music' – that is, of its music considered in isolation from its words. For the music of Schubert's song is no more to be divorced from its words than those words are to be divorced from its music. The sound of a voice is

shaped by the words that it sings: the timbre of a high note sung to the word 'chalk', for instance, is entirely different to that of one sung to the word 'cheese', as a moment's experimentation (at home) will confirm. And since the sound or timbre of a piece of music is a musically important quality of it, and since the timbre of a song's leading instrument, the voice, is decisively affected by the words that it sings, the music of a song cannot, in the end, be specified independently of its text. The appreciation of Schubert's *Erkönig*, that is, cannot involve an appreciation of its 'music' in isolation from its text, since its text is partly what makes its music the music that it is. Songs may indeed be a combination of music and words. But that doesn't mean that the music and the text that it sets can be got at separately; and it therefore certainly doesn't mean that an appreciation of a song must involve appreciating its 'components' in isolation from one another, and then appreciating the 'relation' between them. The second obvious-seeming consequence is therefore also false.

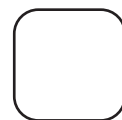
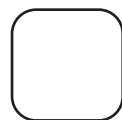
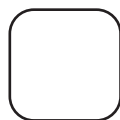
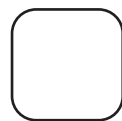
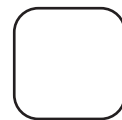
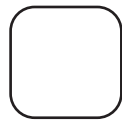
**10**

Once one sees that the obvious truth that songs are a combination of music and words doesn't entail that any given song is to be regarded as a *hybrid* of a piece of music and a poem, both specifiable independently of the song itself, some other things become clearer, or at least acquire a clearer context.<sup>2</sup> Here I have space to highlight just one of these.

There is a near-ubiquitous thought that the quality of a song is a function, primarily, of the quality of its 'music' – that is, of its music considered independently of its words, as a piece of purely instrumental music (that just so happens, as it were, to be sung).



Partly, I suspect, the motivation for this thought lies in the fact that most of the people writing about musical aesthetics are native English-speakers, while most of the songs that they admire are in German, French or Italian. One can see why, from this perspective, it would be nice if the words didn't matter too much. But there is another, more principled-seeming, reason to think that the music must be in the driving seat; and this lies in the observation, often



[Song]

made, that great songs sometimes have rotten words, an observation customarily rounded out or off with a reference to Schubert (who frequently set poets of infinitely lesser stature than Goethe). Now this point is made often enough to be worth pausing over. What – exactly – is it meant to show? One can see how it fits with the hybrid picture of song. Spelled out, the fit comes to this: viewed purely as a poem – i.e. as a poem in its own right – the words to such and such a song are no good. The song itself, however, is felt to be first rate. Therefore the quality of the song must derive solely from its music (specified independently of its words), that is, from its music conceived as purely instrumental. Thus the observation both exploits the strictly bipartite picture encouraged by the hybrid model *and* offers a reason to suppose that the real point and value of a song – any song – must reside in its qualities as an autonomous musical artefact. To point out that Schubert's songs sometimes have rotten words, then, is, in this context, simultaneously to presuppose and to reinforce the idea that what is properly to be thought of as essential to song is the music without the words. It is no surprise, in light of this,



that philosophers of music never point out the equally true and equally misleading fact that great songs often have lousy music. Here Schubert makes way for, e.g., Bob Dylan: lousy music, badly sung, but great songs. What do 'lousy music' and 'badly sung' mean in this case? They mean 'would be lousy and bad if the music were to be judged by the standards appropriate to a piece of purely instrumental music.' The conclusion? By parity of reasoning, that the quality of a Dylan song must derive solely from its words (as specified independently of its music), that is, from its words conceived as purely poetic, so that we now have an observation that both exploits the strictly bipartite character of the hybrid model *and* offers a reason to suppose that the real point and value of a song – any song – must reside in its qualities as an autonomous piece of poetry. And this, in effect, is simultaneously to presuppose and to reinforce the idea that what is properly to be thought of as essential to song is the words without the music.

Silly. But the Dylan and Schubert cases are mirror-images of one another, and both flow directly from the (mis)understanding of song as a hybrid art form, and of songs as a more or less unequal combination of independently specifiable pieces of poetry and independently specifiable pieces of music. So the greatness of Schubert and Dylan songs needs to be understood in a different way. Specifically, the greatness of those songs needs to be understood in a way that recognises the transformative effect that words and music can have on one another. Thus, while Schubert transforms and galvanises his words in setting them, and produces great

songs in virtue of that, we should want to say, Dylan transforms and galvanises his music through the words that he sets – points that the hybrid model not only fails to capture, but is bound to misrepresent.

## U

Much more needs to be said, of course.<sup>3</sup> But it should be clear that the error that I have been trying to expose – the error of thinking that the consequences of the obvious truth that songs are a combination of music and words must themselves be obvious – is a serious one. It pushes those who perpetrate it into an entirely false dichotomy – here, Schubert *or* Dylan: Schubert if you think that the greatness of his songs, in light of the weakness of the poems that he sets, must be due to the fact that the (allegedly independently specifiable) 'music' of a song is the chief source of its value; Dylan if you think that the greatness of *his* songs, in light of their weakness when construed as pieces of purely instrumental music, must derive from their (allegedly independently specifiable) 'texts'. Neither alternative, for the reasons that I have given, is correct, and neither captures the value of the kind of song that it sets out to champion. That is already a major failing. But there are knock-on effects, too, at least one of which is actively pernicious. This is that, with song got wrong in the way that I have described, the appearance can be generated of a theoretically respectable reason for dismissing so-called popular music out of hand. For if, as most philosophers of music have rightly thought, Schubert's songs are indeed and undeniably great; and if, in the grip of the hybrid model, it is concluded that their greatness must derive from their purely 'musical'



qualities, since the poems they set are often so bad; and if, as a result of that, it is concluded that the value of any song must be a function of its 'music' construed as purely instrumental; then, since more or less no popular music can survive being so construed, it follows, to this way of thinking, that popular songs are simply, and pretty well by definition, *worse* than classical ones. If one takes a composer such as Schubert as one's paradigm, that is, and as most philosophers of music have, and if one mistakenly endorses the hybrid model of song, then what is, essentially, a piece of silly snobbery can find itself elevated to the status of a philosophical finding.<sup>4</sup> And this, while not perhaps as calamitous as the misunderstandings engendered by either dualism or utilitarianism, is nevertheless regrettable, and certainly constitutes something of a black mark against recent musical aesthetics. Song has deserved better from its attendant philosophers than this.

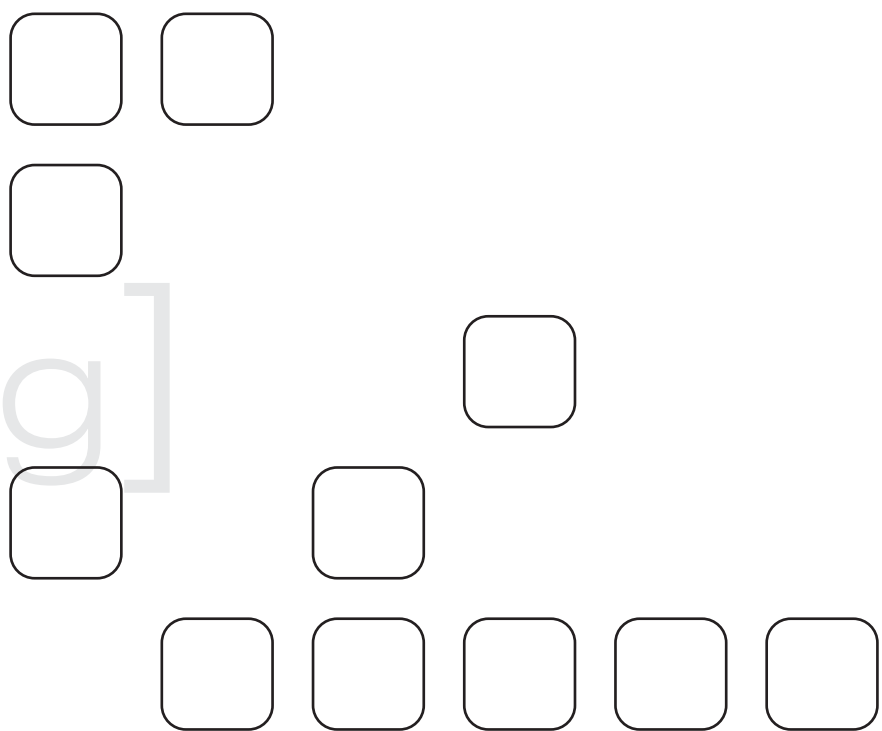
Aaron Ridley  
 Department of Philosophy  
 University of Southampton

Notes

- 1 Examples of distinguished contemporary philosophers of music drawing precisely these conclusions are to be found in, e.g., Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), chapter 10, and Jerrold Levinson, 'Song and Music Drama', in his *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp.42-59.
- 2 I take the term 'hybrid' from Jerrold Levinson's essay, 'Hybrid Art Forms', in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.26-36. Levinson regards song as a 'hybrid' art form in precisely the sense that I have rejected.

- 3 I try to say some of it in my forthcoming book, *The Philosophy of Music: Theme and Variations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), chapter 3.
- 4 For a particularly uncompromising example, see Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapter 15.

[Song]



# [Contributors]

Notes On

## Roger Crisp

is a fellow and tutor in philosophy at St Anne's College, Oxford. His main interests lie in ancient philosophy, ethics, and political philosophy. He has published widely including *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) and he has recently completed a new translation of *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

## Peter Goldie

is a lecturer in philosophy at King's College London. His main areas of interest are ethics, philosophy of mind, the emotions, and aesthetics. He recently published *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and he has edited a collection of essays on the emotions entitled *Understanding Emotion: Mind and Morals* (London: Ashgate, 2001).

## Brad Hooker

is a professor of philosophy at the University of Reading. His main area of interest is ethics. Recent publications include *Ideal Code, Real World: a Rule Consequentialist Theory of Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) and *Truth in Ethics and Moral Particularism*, ed. with Margaret Olivia Little (Oxford: Clarendon 2000)

## David Pugmire

is a philosopher from the University of Southampton where his main interests are philosophical psychology, ethics, philosophical anthropology, and Kant. His book, *Rediscovering Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) came out in 1998, and he is the author of numerous articles.

## Aaron Ridley

teaches at the University of Southampton, where he specialises in aesthetics, philosophy of music, and Nietzsche. His books include *Music, Value and the Passions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1995) and *R G Collingwood: a Philosophy of Art* (London: Orion 1998) and he has published many articles in leading journals.

## Alan Thomas

is a lecturer at the University of Kent at Canterbury, where he focuses on moral, political and social philosophy, Wittgenstein, and Kant's philosophy of mind. He is the author of *Value and Context: the Nature of Moral and Political Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and *Thomas Nagel: a Study of his Philosophy* (London/Princeton: Acumen/Princeton University Press, 2002). He is also the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Bernard Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

# [Contributors] Notes For

## Content

We welcome articles on any area in philosophy. Papers may be broad or narrow in their focus (for instance a discussion of the mind/body problem, or an analysis of Hume's treatment of causation in the *Enquiry*). We would particularly encourage contributions which reflect original research on the following philosophical themes: epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of religion, ethics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, political philosophy, religious ethics; and texts, such as: *The Republic*, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, *The Meditations*, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On Liberty*, *Existentialism and Humanism*, *The Problems of Philosophy*, *Language Truth and Logic*.

The articles should be around 3000-4000 words.

## Style

The language used in the articles should be as non-technical as possible whilst preserving the richness of the arguments. Where technical terms are unavoidable they should be explained and examples offered.

Notes should be presented as endnotes.

## Presentation

Articles should be written in *Word* (any version).

## Contributions

Articles for this journal are currently written by a panel of philosophers from a variety of universities in Britain, Australia and the United States, whose work is edited by the journal's editorial board. We invite unsolicited contributions from philosophers working in any field. The contributions should be submitted via email attachment to [rjp@rutc.ac.uk](mailto:rjp@rutc.ac.uk)

## Copyright

The RJP retains the option of reprinting published articles in later RJP publications. Authors may republish articles with the journal's permission provided that they acknowledge that those articles were first printed in the RJP. Papers should only be submitted if the author is willing and able to be bound by the conditions set out in this paragraph.

# [Contributors]

# Richmond upon Thames College

is a large further education college located in  
Twickenham, West London  
offering 16-19 students one of the widest  
curriculum choices in the country.

Last year, we came top of all  
London further education colleges  
in the Times league tables  
and we are proud of our reputation  
for achieving excellent results year after year.

We are well known nationally for  
our high quality staff, excellent student support systems  
and the inclusive education we offer to all our students.

If you would like to find out more about us -  
please contact our Course Information Unit on

**020 8607 8305 / 8314**

or visit our website on

**[www.rutc.ac.uk](http://www.rutc.ac.uk)**



**Richmond upon Thames College**

# [Subscribing]

to the **RJP**

The RJP comes out in October, February and May. To subscribe you need to select the appropriate price from the table and complete the mailing information at the bottom of the form. All prices include post and packaging. The bottom half of the form should then be detached and sent with a cheque made payable to Richmond upon Thames College to the address below:

RJP Subscriptions  
 Philosophy Department  
 Richmond upon Thames College  
 Egerton Road  
 Twickenham  
 London TW2 7SJ  
 United Kingdom

Please allow one week for delivery in the UK, and two weeks for the rest of the world.

 **Annual Subscription up to May 2003**

Institutional Subscriber in the UK	£33.00
Individual Subscriber in the UK	£18.00
Institutional Subscriber from the rest of the EU	63.00 Euros
Individual Subscriber from the rest of the EU	40.50 Euros
Institutional Subscriber outside the EU	\$67.50 US
Individual Subscriber outside the EU	\$45.00 US

Your name: ..... Your organisation's name (if appropriate) .....

Address .....

..... Post code/Zip code.....

Telephone number (including full international dialling code) .....

Email address .....

I enclose a cheque for the amount of .....to purchase an annual subscription

Signed ..... Date .....



[Philosophy]



The Richmond Journal of **Philosophy**

Are You Ever Irrational? **David Pugmire**

6

Aristotle's Ethics **Roger Crisp**

11

Kant's Normative Ethics **Brad Hooker**

17

Is Your Mind Your Brain? **Alan Thomas**

23

Can We Trust Our Emotions? **Peter Goldie**

27

Song Got Wrong **Aaron Ridley**

37

Richmond Journal of Philosophy  
Philosophy Department  
Richmond upon Thames College  
Egerton Road  
Twickenham  
Middlesex  
TW2 7SJ  
United Kingdom

Tel: 020 8607 8000  
Fax: 020 8744 9738  
Email: [rjp@rutc.ac.uk](mailto:rjp@rutc.ac.uk)



Richmond upon Thames College

ISSN: 1477-6480