



Letter from the Co-Editors

We are very pleased to start a new and promising 2018 with a fresh and ambitious project for the UCL Philosophy Department.

Many of us doing Philosophy in some form at UCL felt, at some point, that there was something missing from an otherwise interesting and challenging institution. Naturally, as philosophers-in-training, we thought that there should be a place where we can voice our thoughts and give our accounts on everything that's going on around us. On second thought, we'd say that there *must* be such a place.

Hence, *Bentham Digest* was born, and is today presented to all of you. Our assumed mission for this magazine is to *do* philosophy in a popular way that is accessible and inviting, and doesn't give the impression that some very strict academic guidelines have to be followed for one to do "good" philosophy. That's not to say, however, that we are not committed to a high standard of philosophy. On the contrary, we want to make sure that all our pieces are, first and foremost, examples of "good" philosophy.

We also wanted to do a lead-by-example step with *Bentham Digest*. That is why we decided to have an e-magazine, an online version, rather than a traditional hard copy. On the one hand, it is in the nature of UCL to be non-traditional. On the other hand, and we feel this is the most important aspect, environmental reasons led us to pick the online alternative. Accessibility will be also greatly enhanced as the e-magazine is easier to find and read, say, during the morning ride on the Tube.

We're committed to releasing at least two issues per academic year. With each issue, we hope to address problems of relevance for our rapidly changing times and, in doing so, we aim to show that philosophy is a handy tool to have when trying to shed some light on really messy topics.

In the long run, we hope that the entire UCL community will develop a close bond with this magazine, and we're confident that this very first issue is a promising start in establishing a tradition of popular philosophy within UCL and beyond it.

We have thoroughly enjoyed working with our staff supervisor for this issue, Simona Aimar, and look forward to working with our new supervisor, Han van Wietmarschen, for our next issue. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our devoted, hard-working editorial team, our contributors, and last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to all staff members who encouraged, helped and actively participated in the release of *Bentham Digest*.

Manuel-Iulian Cazac & Sailee Khurjekar
Co-Editors

Letter from the Staff Supervisor

Although Socrates thought philosophy shouldn't be written but discussed in person instead, he would applaud the start of *Bentham Digest*, the first UCL undergraduate journal in philosophy. Behind Socrates' scepticism for philosophical writing there was a sense of how philosophy remains alive, just if we keep doing it. UCL students have grasped this perfectly when they came up with the idea of beginning the journal.

Bentham Digest takes its name, of course, from UCL's (literal) icon, and is set to capture the liberal and accessible nature of UCL Philosophy. It includes pieces that are both funny and serious in nature, together with articles that are philosophically accurate and incisive. The first issue sets this dynamic tone by including different themes. From issue number two, it will focus on one awesome theme at a time. For issue two: feminism!

The work the editorial board has done for this first issue, together with the passion they put into it, calls for admiration and is full of promise. The *Bentham Digest* is merely one of the signs of how the UCL philosophical community is growing and thriving, to a great extent thanks to the students themselves. Together with the UCL Philosophy Society, this journal is bound to become a new pillar of the students' philosophical activity at UCL.

There is no question that *Bentham Digest* will trigger many challenging discussions on campus and provide students with a useful first venue for publishing one's own thoughts. Now is the time to enjoy all of this, while looking forward to seeing where their ideas will lead them next.

Simona Aimar
Staff Supervisor

Bentham Digest Team 2017-2018

Co-editors — Manuel Cazac and Sailee Khurjekar

Managing Editor — Matei Gheorghiu

Copy Editor — Ida Sjoberg

Creative Editor — Elaine Hong

Contributors — Grace Atkins, Joe Hawley, Eric Ho,
Daniel Simons, Liane Wergen

Cover Art — Mae Faugere

Cartoonist — Efrem Craig

Staff Supervisors — Simona Aimar and Han van Wietmarschen



BD



BD

Contents

Letter from the Co-Editors	2
Letter from the Staff Supervisor	3
Bentham Digest Team 2017-2018	4
Philosophy of Comedy: A Conversation with Alain de Botton and Jimmy Carr	6
The Black-Foot.....	8
Organ Donation and Deemed Consent	10
Cumberland Lodge (2017)	12
The Forgotten Rationalist: Spinoza's attempt to transform religion..	14
INTERVIEW with the Head of Department: José Zalabardo.....	17
A Little Extra... Terrestrial.....	19
A Philosopher's View: Stranger Things 2	22
Homosexuality: Pleasure over Prejudice	24
Happiness and the Good Life	26
Society Events	30

Philosophy of Comedy: A Conversation with Alain de Botton and Jimmy Carr



On a cold Monday night in mid-October last year, the *School of Life* hosted a talk on the philosophy of comedy. Ultimately, it is more accurate to describe it as a conversation between Alain de Botton trying to keep it philosophical and Jimmy Carr cracking jokes for two hours. Throughout the conversation, different ideas about what function comedy serves were discussed. The first one touched on by de Botton was about the purpose of comedy. He presented comedy as a helpful tool, remarking that it can ease despair. Carr agreed that the best comedy comes from the brink of despair: it is despair turned into laughter. He contended that comedy can be a way to look at the world—a will to laugh at things rather than be brought down by them.

Carr gave the example of his own approach to watching the news and contrasted it with that of someone like de Botton: for example, whilst watching a news clip about flood victims which featured a crying woman, Carr quipped, “well that’s not going to help” in reference to the irony of the woman’s tears in relation to her condition. De Botton linked this with a quote from Seneca: “[w]hat need is there to weep over parts of life? The whole of it calls for tears”. Life’s despair is itself on the edge of funny. Carr points out that whilst comedy may not be universal, laughter is. What people find funny can differ hugely, but it is a universal fact that everyone laughs.

In their discussion on what makes a joke appropriate, Carr referred to himself as an equal opportunities offender. He stipulated that if you need

to look around before telling a joke, it's not a joke worth telling and went on to describe the dichotomy between the subject of the jokes and the set of people offended by them: during a show at a cancer hospice, his jokes about the audience not being there for long went down well with those suffering from terminal cancer, but their families and the staff were offended on their behalf.

The entire conversation was punctuated by one-liners and teasing of the audience.

The real take away from the event was that comedy serves an important purpose in many people's lives, enabling them to laugh together and providing the basis for a sense of community in our otherwise individualistic society. The focus throughout was on the use of laughter in desperate times as a means to keep going without forgetting your situation as well as a means to connect with those around you.

Looking at the history of the philosophy of comedy, one understands why the conversation was also somewhat haphazard and shifting in tone. Only relatively recently has there been discussion on the philosophy of comedy or humour, which is interesting considering how highly most people rank humour or a sense of humour as a description of their personality. Until the late 20th century, much of the published work in the philosophy of comedy was concerned with mocking or cruel laughter as a negative personality trait which should be avoided. For example, Plato viewed laughter as a malicious action and an emotional action resulting from a loss of self-control. Similarly, in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes laughter as: "those

grimaces [...] caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleases them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves."

However, more recent works have embraced the similarities between comedy and philosophy. Simon Critchley, the co-editor of *The Stone*, for example, has written: "[t]he philosopher asks you to be sceptical about all sorts of things you would ordinarily take for granted, like the reality of things in the world or whether the people around you are actually human or really robots. In this regard, the philosopher has, I think, a family resemblance with the comedian, who also asks us to look at the world askance, to imagine a topsy-turvy universe where horses and dogs talk and where lifeless objects become miraculously animated." (On Humour, 2002)

The link between comedy and philosophy may be closer than most people imagine. In philosophy, as in comedy, you are presented with an alternative worldview to your day-to-day and the difference between the two can be enlightening and amusing. If Carr and de Botton are correct in their contention that dealing with despair is a key function of comedy, philosophy arguably also helps provide answers to these problems in much the same way.

Finally, although laughter and thoughts are universal amongst humans, theories of comedy and philosophy are not: every persons and cultures have their own sense of humour as well as their own conception of how the world works and what their place is within it.

Ida Sjöberg

The Black-Foot



“Aujourd’hui, maman est morte.”—So begins one of the greatest short novels of the previous century. *L’Étranger* by Albert Camus has been translated into English on four separate occasions since its first, almost pitiful print-run in 1942. The best of these attempts—*The Outsider* (2012) translated by Sandra Smith—is also the most recent. Smith’s excellent and well-researched gloss of the first line as ‘My mother died today’ is the only one that captures both the warmth of the French word ‘maman’ and the overall passive tone of Meursault’s first remark. Previous translators have generally opted for the word ‘mother’, but, as Ryan

Bloom rightly points out in his New Yorker article (1946): “There is little warmth” in ‘mother’ and yet the next closest British equivalent, ‘mummy’ would simply sound too juvenile. It is a problem Smith overcame by adding the possessive pronoun ‘my’, which adds the requisite warmth, but is by no means childish: the main character, Meursault, is meant to be apathetic, not robotic.

Nevertheless, Smith’s translation of the first line fails at two critical points: in the original version, ‘today’, precedes the statement, consisting with the novel general portrayal of Meursault’s organized outlook. It fortifies the sense of order characteristic of Meursault and Smith’s use of the possessive pronoun arguably too strongly conveys a sense of kinship in violation of Meursault’s countenance.

Like his main character, Albert Camus too was a *Pied-Noir*. Born in Algeria on the 7th of November 1913, Camus had a front-row seat to the worst atrocities of the previous century. He was a communist, an anarchist, a revolutionary, and a strong supporter, along with George Orwell, of European federalism as a means to peace on the continent. His ability simultaneously to hold seemingly paradoxical and contradictory positions without difficulty emanated into all his books and essays which eventually won him the Noble Prize for Literature in 1957.

My favourite work of his is *L’Étranger*, but it is closely followed by an essay he published in the same year at the height of the Second World War: *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* or *The Myth of Sisyphus*. It is here that Camus acceptance of the contradiction in life is best expressed; it is here he introduces us to what he calls ‘the absurd’. The

absurd is not a logical contradiction, but refers to the paradoxical condition of our existence: the tendency of humans to seek value and meaning in life which at the same time shows itself to be entirely devoid of any. "The absurd", Camus summarises, "is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world." Taken as a piece of continental philosophy, *Le Mythe de Sisphye* is sorely neglected in the analytic tradition that has come to dominate the philosophical academia of today. Like *L'Étranger*, it begins with an enviably epic first line: "There is only one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide." Faced with the realisation that life is meaningless, what is one to do?

Camus considers three options: suicide, faith, and acceptance. The first of these was a position endorsed by Arthur Schopenhauer, but for Camus, "killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life too much for your or that you do not understand it." The irrationality of our existence and the suffering that fills it can be too much—but, Camus argues, suicide is an escape from the absurd, not a solution to it. Insofar as an individual escapes the paradox by the act of suicide, his action is unintelligible to those left behind. The problem remains and remains unanswered.

The second position, the leap of faith, was most prominently taken by Søren Kierkegaard. Belief in a God or transcendental existence that gives life meaning, but of which can have no certain knowledge, allows us to deal with the absurd. However, it is an unacceptable solution—swiftly, and astutely dealt with by Camus who describes it as 'philosophical suicide'. He notes that: "For the spectator, if he is conscious, that leap is still absurd. In so far as he thinks it solves the paradox, it reinstates it intact."

Camus held that the last position, acceptance, is the only way to deal with the absurd. Despite accepting the absurd, one continues to search for meaning and in doing so, one lives "without appeal". It is a conscious "revolt" against the demand of death through which one is at once free from the doctrinal prison of religious prescriptivism and, since one accepts the absurd and therefore rejects the possibility of finding meaning in life, each moment of one's existence must be fully experienced: "By the mere activity of consciousness", Camus writes, "I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death, and I refuse suicide".

Matei Gheorghiu

Organ Donation and Deemed Consent

At last year's Conservative Party Conference, obscured by other more newspaper friendly happenings, Theresa May pledged to alter the organ donation system in England. The proposal in question will change the terms of organ donation after your death from an opt-in to an opt-out system. This shift in policy has the consequences of changing the nature of consent for donation: formerly explicit consent (opt-in) was required, but now deemed (or presumed) consent is applied unless you explicitly withhold it. This change is directly aimed at increasing the number of organs donated. Ultimately, it is an attempt at saving, extending, and improving the lives of others. There is also evidence to show that it will have this desired effect. In Wales, in the first six months after adopting the deemed consent model, 50% of organ donations were from deemed consent.¹ Such straightforward utilitarian grounds for the policy seems to be enough to justify it, but a parallel from the history of political philosophy puts pressure on this idea.

Deemed consent in the new organ donation system resembles a kind of consent required by Locke² and Hobbes³ in their social contract theories. For Locke and Hobbes, we have obligations to the sovereign authority in our state and thus a social contract since from a state of nature we would consent to the creation of the state. Whether this is a historical occurrence or a hypothetical one, the fact we would set up such a system means we now must tacitly be consenting to the authority in place. However, a problem that probably instantly springs to your mind, and one that has plagued these views, is the nature and legitimacy of this consent. Tacit consent has struck many as no consent at all and a hypothetical contract as "no contract at all" (Dworkin, 1977, p. 151).⁴ Hume quipped that these views amounted to someone's consent to the authority of a captain on a ship even "though he was carried on board while asleep and must leap into the ocean and perish the moment he leaves her" (Hume, 1953, p. 51).⁵ To the extent that deemed consent to organ donation mirrors Locke and Hobbes tacit consent, these considerations should make us worry. It strikes us that deemed consent seems like a flimsy concept and therefore that an opt-out system is illegitimate and unjustified.

Reflecting on this, it seems deemed consent is in need of some justification. The most morally salient aspect of cases involving deemed consent is the fact that an action involving a person Y is done assuming they would, if given the chance, consent to that action. By their very nature, actions of this sort don't seem to be inherently immoral. We can imagine very concrete examples, everyday examples, where

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-36520627> (accessed 26th November 2017)

² Locke, John, 1986 [1689]. *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Ed, R. Ashcroft. London: Allen and Unwin

³ Hobbes, Thomas, 1985 [1651]. *Leviathan*. Ed, C.B Macpherson. London: Penguin Books

⁴ Dworkin, Ronald, 1977. *Taking Rights Seriously*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁵ Hume, David, 1953 [1752]. "Of the Original Contract," in David Hume's *Political Essays*, C. W. Hendel (ed.), Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co.

deemed consent *can* be useful and encouraged. You're invited to your friend Marianne's party at her house on Friday. When Friday comes, you bump into another old friend, Jane, whom you haven't seen for a while and with whom you therefore want to spend some time. You therefore decide to bring Jane to the Marianne's party. In this situation, the host's deemed consent would be justifiable if certain conditions obtain such as: you know that Jane is likely to fit in; it is a sufficiently big affair so Jane is not intruding; Marianne is an accommodating and understanding person, etc. However, deemed consent would be illegitimate if other, opposing conditions were in play: only intimate friends of Marianne's were invited; you know Marianne doesn't like meeting new people as it stresses her out; Jane is very likely to clash with many of the people at the party. What this suggests, and what I want to put forward as crucial for moral evaluation such matters, is that deemed consent is more justifiable the more you have seriously considered and taken account of the consenters point-of-view.

This captures some common intuitions we have about actions involving deemed consent. If we are looking to defend our actions we will give the person reasons why we assumed their consent. We are more likely to accept deemed consent from people who are close to us because they know us better and are more likely seriously to consider our point-of-view. We will also accept strangers doing actions to/for/involving us if the reasons are clear (someone stamps on your foot for you both to get £1000).

With this brief sketch of a general approach to the conditions under which an assumption of deemed consent is justified, we can look on the government's donation policy afresh, and ask whether the supposedly consenting individual's point-of-view has been sufficiently considered.

There are several compelling reasons to think this is the case and therefore that the policy is justified. Public opinion is on the side of an opt-out system, with two-thirds indicating they supported the policy.⁶ Also, in the case of organ donation, the action is done to you after death, so there's no actual harm done to you (unless you attach some spiritual significance to your body, in which case you can opt-out). On top of this, we have to remember that the consenters in these hypothetical cases include the very same people who hypothetically will benefit from the changes. An organ can just as well save you as come from you.

From considering the parallels to tacit consent approaches in social contract theory, I hope to have shown that similar issues should be considered for this new approach to organ donation. Alongside raising these issues, my ambition is to have shown that deemed consent is justifiable.

Daniel Simons

⁶ <https://www.bma.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/2017/february/two-thirds-of-people-support-an-optout-organ-donation-system> (accessed 27th November 2017)

Cumberland Lodge (2017)

In October, just under fifty members of UCL's Department of Philosophy journeyed to the historic grounds of Cumberland Lodge, a 17th-century Grade II listed country house in Windsor Great Park. What followed was a weekend of philosophy overdose organised by Amia Srinivasan, a member of the department's faculty.

The coach journey to Cumberland Lodge set a high bar for the trip: students and staff chatted amongst themselves whilst the driver belted out Elvis classics (or at least tried to do so). For many, this was the first of several bonding moments which occurred during our stay at the lodge.

On the first evening, after having eaten a sumptuous dinner in the ornate dining rooms, Timothy Williamson, the current holder of the Wykeham Professorship in Logic at the University of Oxford and the keynote speaker for the trip, gave a talk titled *Abductive Philosophy*. This was met with enthusiastic discussion and a range of questions from undergraduate, postgraduates, and faculty staff alike. After the talk, we retired to the Lodge's dedicated bar for further discussion and frivolity.

Overall, five talks were to be given by students: one third-year undergraduate, two MPhil students and two PhD candidates. The topics varied from the relationship between social egalitarianism and representative democracy to the significance of temporal structure in the relation of regret. It was inspiring to witness the passion of these students, all of whom had clearly spent a great deal of time researching their assorted interests.

Besides the philosophy overdose, there were plenty of opportunities to explore the local deer park and to visit the Chapel on Sunday morning with Her Majesty The Queen in attendance at the service. The grounds themselves were stunning and picturesque and the gentle deer made it all the more tranquil.

However, this could certainly not be said of the two most competitive aspects of the trip: the mini-Olympics and the games night. For both of these, we were sorted into the four

Harry Potter houses and completed a series of tasks in our teams. Thankfully, the mini-Olympics required only minimal sporting ability and included, for example, a wheelbarrow race and a sprint. One task also involved passing a balloon along the line without the use of hands—an excellent bonding moment as you might imagine.



The games night took place in the same teams and the rounds included a pub-quiz, a game of taboo, guessing the first line of a philosophical text, and a somewhat chaotic game of Pictionary. Having come last in the mini-Olympics earlier in the day, Slytherin dominated the games night and won a bottle of wine for their efforts.

Of course, I mustn't neglect to mention the philosophy party which took place in the basement on the final evening. Snooker, table tennis, and (somewhat awkward) dancing to cheesy music took place, as well as (no surprise here) several visits to the bar. I am told the party continued until five in the morning for some people! Our lecturers, no doubt.

Leaving the cool, crisp air at Cumberland Lodge was sad—it left us longing for more philosophy. Overall, the trip was a terrific event, during which we had the opportunity interact with members of the department from across the years, and it was an experience highly to be recommended for all!



Sailee Khurjekar

The Forgotten Rationalist: Spinoza's attempt to transform religion

The triumvirs of classical rationalism are often widely discussed in the philosophy community, especially Descartes and Leibniz. The last member of the three, Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), arguably receives less attention than he deserves. Spinoza ought to be remembered for his insistence in reconciling reason with religion and his espousal of a naturalistic perspective on God and the universe. His neglected effort of reinventing religion reminds us of the arduous challenges required to dismantle the spiritual beliefs of established religion.

Working as a lens grinder and a private tutor, Spinoza lived a quiet and solitary life. Perhaps it was his seclusion from society that led him astray from societal conventions and mainstream thought. Spinoza was an intransigent rationalist and left Amsterdam for Rijnsburg in order to pursue his interest in writing philosophy. His greatest work, *Ethics*, was published shortly after his death and remains one of the masterpieces of the Enlightenment era.

“God is the unique, infinite, self-caused substance of the universe.” Spinoza perceived God to be the substance of the universe that contains all possibilities and realities. He conceived of God as that which encompasses all rules and principles of existence and that God is understood as identical with nature itself. Many may find his philosophy baffling and incomprehensibly abstract, perhaps this because we are accustomed to a more conventional conception of God. For Spinoza, God is not thought of as the fatherly figure, who also happens to be omnipotent among other qualities. In fact, Spinoza regarded this to be as “foolish anthropomorphism” and argued that this is a

wholly irrational portrait of God. Spinoza's God is contained within nature as every individual thing is fundamentally determined and necessitated by God. Unlike the God we are accustomed to, Spinoza's God cannot defy or interrupt the laws of nature to create miracles. God's providence is not exhibited by divine interventions against the laws of nature; rather, Spinoza's God is revealed through nature and the discovery of laws that govern the Universe.

The Abrahamic God is an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient being. This God is involved with human affairs and is willing to redeem mankind from the world of sin through salvation and redemption. This is a God that contains human psychological and moral attributes, such as will, intelligence, morality and emotions. Spinoza repudiated this God resolutely, as he believes that this God is purely based on superstition, human passions, and imagination. Spinoza's God is not some entity that judges how well someone conforms to his purposes, but rather, he is Nature and determines the laws of the Universe.

"He, who loves God, cannot endeavour that God should love him in return."⁷ Spinoza asserted the importance of accepting one's destiny, a perspective that contradicts the message of change and hope present in many religions. Spinoza's God was not one that would bend the rules of existence to fulfil the happiness of any particular individual. He insisted that wisdom lies in comprehending the rules and principles that govern the world.

⁷ Spinoza's Ethics, Part 5, 19

Spinoza reinvigorated philosophical thought by suggesting that religion should not be defined by reverence towards superstition and endless desires to amend reality. A truly rational religion should teach us the wisdom of acceptance and understanding and that God could be construed in a much more logical manner. Regardless of whether you agree with his philosophy or not, Spinoza ought to be commended for being able to explain religion in a radically different fashion. Compared to his contemporaries, Spinoza was exceptionally progressive. Despite the fact that he failed to convince the masses with his philosophy, Spinoza's efforts should be celebrated and acknowledged.

Eric Ho



INTERVIEW with the Head of Department: José Zalabardo

Firstly, I was just wondering what you are working on at the moment?

Well, I am working on truth and meaning. I am working on the idea that to explain those concepts we must look at the rules that we follow when we ascribe truth or meaning. That means specifically to look at the rules that will follow when we interpret one another. Not so much linguistic interpretation, as when I ascribe mental states to others, I decide what you believe and what you desire. So, what are the procedures that we assume for doing that? Now there's a lot of empirical work on that in psychology and the psychology of infants, which I wasn't very familiar with until recently, so I've been teaching myself that sort of stuff.

Has that been challenging?

Yeah. But, very rewarding because I've looked at psychology in the past and I've been disappointed that I didn't really learn anything. And now, I'm learning important things from psychologists.

What's the piece of work you've done that you're most proud of, or were most interested in writing? I think quite a lot of people would assume your first published paper may be what you're most interested in as that was what you focussed on initially – is that the case?

Yeah, maybe. I'm not very proud of my first few papers but they are on the topic that I'm now sort of coming back to. In terms of how interesting [the topics are], those [first papers] are the ones I would mention. I moved on from those topics basically because I wasn't making any progress. I moved to other things I thought were more accessible and I spent years working on those other things, and I enjoyed them. But I want to now go back and have another go at those topics.

Can you recommend a paper, book or piece of philosophy you've read recently that you thought was interesting, even if you strongly disagreed with it?

There's a book by Jonathan Bennett called Linguistic Behaviour. I think some of the things he had to say were actually very good.

What's your most treasured piece of philosophy in general?

Wittgenstein's work. I think the *Tractatus* is a unique, intellectual product. The same goes for the *Philosophical Investigations*. I feel that if I understood that, I would understand many things that I'm stuck with.

Is that what sparked your interest in philosophy? Have you always been interested in the philosophy of language?

No, my Undergraduate degree was largely continental philosophy – Heidegger inspired stuff. I found it very interesting, in fact I found it more interesting than the analytic stuff I was exposed to at the time. I just couldn't see me doing it myself. That kind of prose does not go with my character. Although I enjoyed reading it, I couldn't see myself contributing.

Could you see the department at UCL becoming more interested in continental philosophy?

We are widely perceived as one of the leading continental philosophy departments. It's all relative of course, but if you are a talented person who wants to do a PhD in continental philosophy, UCL would be one of the first places you would think of. One virtue of UCL that other continental departments lack is that we work off each other. In other places you've got analytics and the continental people and they don't mix, whereas here we all see what we do as part of the same enterprise. People like Tom Stern and Sebastian Gardner, the stuff they write I recognise as the kind of stuff that I admire and vice versa. We may well hire more continental philosophers, we don't have a policy of not hiring them. We hire good people essentially.

Befriend, acquaint, avoid: Wittgenstein, Kant and Nietzsche.

Befriend them all, of course. The problem with Kant is befriending him would take so much work. I've enjoyed reading Nietzsche, but I think that a lot of the things that I admire in Nietzsche are not insights into the kind of enterprise that I see myself as involved in.

What's the strangest thing you've heard in a lecture or seminar?

If you ask me the strangest thing I've heard, it is a defence of Panpsychism. These people think the whole universe is mental – there's no matter. So, atoms are consciousness. There are famous philosophers who defend this. I once went to a talk by one of the leading panpsychists and I could not believe that an intelligent person could actually be saying these things. Bizarre.

Interview conducted by Grace Atkins

A Little Extra... Terrestrial

They are under attack. Aliens are charging towards them from all sides.

He is kicking and shooting at them the best he can.

There's simply too many to be destroyed by two people. All seems lost. But at the right instance, the coward of the story suddenly unearths a surprising quality: he has an idea. Together with a small assembled team he interrupts the situation with a battle-cry. People die. Aliens die. There is a big explosion - and then, victory!

Now, what?

We have all experienced the feeling. When leaving a film theatre, reality seems less realistic - you want to talk about it, but the words don't come.

A few esteemed directors even make it their purpose to confuse us. In some of the films they create, they use philosophical concepts as bases for the plots; e.g., in *The Matrix*, *Inception*, and even in the series *The Walking Dead*. Yet it is not only these more-or-less earth-bound plots that stimulate our philosophical thought. Films about extra-terrestrial life can compel us to wonder in much the same way and even more so. However, in this article I argue that a number of these kinds of films also lack a certain scope of imagination regarding the unknown.

Consider a blockbuster miracle like *Avatar*. The inhabitants of the planet Pandora are very similar to human beings apart from size, colour and an additional limb. They have a compositional language as well as appetitive desires that need nourishing - they also tame and use animals to their own benefit. What's more, their entire culture and the plot of the film itself is easily viewed as an analogy to the genocide of Native Americans by European intruders. In part, this excuses the depiction of familiar natural laws and cultural references, because in some ways, the film is just a futuristic retelling of the past.

At the same time, in other films, humankind receives unpleasant, but not hopeless visits by vicious aliens to exploit our earth and resources (e.g., *Oblivion*). In these cases, it is the aliens who are the 'bad guys' with a similar capacity to 'evil' as we humans.

Both types of film certainly have their allures. Firstly, it is obvious that they are created in a way which will maximise box-office revenues. The viewership definitely seems to enjoy a particular sense of violence which they exploit. Secondly, the films provide a source of excitement for the viewers – a sort of addictive feeling towards visual forms of adventures. And thirdly, they cause humans to ponder upon their own qualities. Courage, heroism, love, unity and conflict are all subjects we are attracted to precisely because they personally concern us outside of the cinema. These types of film manage to concentrate or focus on the good and the bad in humanity and allows us to identify ourselves with specific roles. Outer space becomes slightly more palpable

and understandable to our capacities as it looks similar to the conditions and laws we live under.

But films often lack the unpredictability, the unfamiliarity and the arbitrariness of the unknown. They lack the sense of awe at what is out of our reach and only induces potential fear or wonder for *specific* details. Ideally a film about outer space and the unknown would *not only* compel you to reflect on life on earth and your own role in it, but more importantly on things that are bigger than us and supersede our understanding.

Many films depict aliens as vicious, dangerous, and a form of pure evil. In fact, the concept of evil is an endless source of creative inspiration. Vilifying the unknown is easy. "It is the unknown we fear when we look upon death and darkness, nothing more", as Professor Dumbledore so eloquently quips. As soon as we are uncertain about things, we begin fearing them and that fear turns into a certainty of that something bad resides in the dark. We only favour that which is familiarity, because we are habitual beings adapted to a specific way of nature.



The other extreme is the similarity some conceived of aliens bear to things we adore. *E.T.* and *Avatar* belong to a kind of film that makes our hearts burst. Such films also offer examples of human errors and others can be seen as commenting on our obsession with knowledge and materialism.

However, there are only few films which manage to explore a concept independent from our fascination with the notion of good and bad. The depiction of alternative intelligence is often quite narrow-minded. I believe that an alien intelligence might entail an indifference or independence from human concepts such as evil and good, since these are both anthropologically made can vary in accordance with different cultures. Why should a non-human intelligence have the same quality and the same binding affliction with justice? On reflection, we may realise the probability that would is very low. Extraterrestrials could have knowledge and notions of an entirely different area in which we lack experience.

A positive example of 'extraterrestrial representation in the media' is the modern film *Arrival* featuring Amy Adams and Jeremy Renner. (If you have seen it – fantastic! If not, I would highly recommend it). What struck me particularly about the film was that it seemed to contain features common to other alien films. The aliens arrived, a state of emergency was declared, and the area expecting the worst was evacuated. The aliens initiate communication, but some people's fear grows irrational and drives them to violence. An alien dies and at this point the viewer, sympathetic with her human counterparts in the film, fears a retaliation of the most destructive sort.

In the film, the aliens communicate their desire to offer or give a thing to the people of earth. For lack of vocabulary, the linguists translate their message as an offer of a

'weapon', which triggers the attack by humans, but in reality, they mean the word 'gift'. The plot is resolved when the main character receives this gift: the gift of time. By learning to understand their language, her perception of time changes: "But now I'm not so sure I believe in beginnings and endings" and as soon as she succeeds in this, the aliens leave.

This is a good example of deconstructing concepts that people rarely question, since they cannot understand them in any other definitions. Furthermore, the assumptions which we make about extraterrestrial intelligence is too direct and straightforward. *Arrival* provides an example of our natural expectations and reactions to foreign intelligence.

We expect aliens to pursue revenge and greed, like we would do in their place. Mark Twain for example noted that "Of all the animals, man is the only one that is cruel. He is the only one that inflicts pain for the pleasure of doing it". On one hand we are alienating (pun intended) them and making them out to be a great evil (another pun); on the other hand, since we ascribe to them only the worst characteristics of humankind, we make them appear similar to ourselves.

I think there are three types of responses or reactions to different films about the extraterrestrial.

Type 1: (example: E.T.) makes you contemplate humanity

Type 2: (example: Avatar) makes you contemplate outer space

Type 3: (example: Arrival) makes you contemplate the unknown in its abstraction

The first two are mainly based on the film experience itself. And they may contain each other in differing proportions. *What would one do*, if one found oneself in *that situation*? What would one be capable of? What would life on *this particular* planet be like? Imagine if...

Both have certain allures and advantages, whilst the third builds up on the stimulation of types 1 and 2, bringing up many questions such as:

What do I know? What can I know? What are the boundaries of human understanding and knowledge? If our physical senses are already proven to be limited, what about our understanding of time, feelings like love and knowledge?

These are independent thoughts indirectly stimulated by the films' depiction of the universe. I believe that in the aforementioned slumbers a lot of potential. There could and therefore should be more films attempting unusual interpretations of life and possibilities. As the media attract attention like no other source, they can induce philosophical thought in a wide audience and broaden the horizon or at least spark regular employment of all our imagination.

"Reason is intelligence taking exercise. Imagination is intelligence with an erection." - Victor Hugo

Liane Wergen

A Philosopher's View: Stranger Things 2



Stranger Things 2 is attracting huge audiences right now and for good reasons. It boasts nostalgic and retro 80s references, loveable characters, and an awesome mix of horror and sci-fi. However, when you delve a bit deeper, the show also raises some interesting philosophical questions, mainly revolving around the relationship between Will Byers and the Mindflayer...

Let us consider the issue of identity. When Will gets inhabited by the Mindflayer and begins to lose his memories, who do we call Will? Is the Mindflayer part of Will, or is there a clear dichotomy between the two? If Will kept losing his memory, would he cease to be the same person? First, let us look at the role of memory in identity. It is a commonly held opinion that memories make up a big part of our identity and this view is vocalised in *Stranger Things 2* by Joyce when she asks: "What will happen when my boy's gone?" in reference to Will's rapid memory loss. If our memories were erased every night when we went to sleep, we could not form long-term, meaningful relationships and we could not live out a coherent life plan; we would lack a consistent identity.

However, maybe this is an oversimplification. If someone experiences significant memory loss, we don't usually say that the person suffering is now literally a different person. Similarly, we might be reluctant to say that Will is literally a different person with his deficient memory. But then, what role *does* memory play in forming our identity? It is clear that we don't have to have a complete memory of everything we've done—maybe then all we need is a 'chain' of memories. On this view, one would be the same person if, for every experience, they can remember a time where they remembered that experience. If I have an experience at t_1 , remember the experience at t_2 , forget the t_1 experience at t_3 but still remember t_2 , then I am the same person at each point. The chain can have more complex links than this too—it may be that I remember a time when I remembered a time when I remembered a certain experience, and so forth. The difference between t_n and t_{n+1} may be miniscule, but it will do. This seems to be a simple way of affirming the view that Will is still the same person when he starts losing his memories to the Mindflayer. Unfortunately, this idea doesn't work.

The idea of relying on memory to define identity is circular. If Will has a memory of seeing the Mindflayer, having this memory doesn't make the memory his since he only has this memory because it is his in the first place. In other words, identity precedes memory. Furthermore, this idea of a chain is built around constant change and development and doesn't seem to account for the underlying consistency that we usually associate with one's identity. How does this explain Joyce's intuition that the

person she identifies as Will will die with his memories? I'll leave that question for you to ponder!

For now, we will leave memory to one side and consider what other issues the Mindflayer poses for Will's identity. *Stranger Things 2* quite clearly portrays the Mindflayer and Will as separate beings when the two are entangled: the ability of the two to spy on each other exemplifies this dichotomy.

However, the Mindflayer seems to pervade Will's mind in a deeply ingrained way. Will and the Mindflayer share feelings, thoughts, and memories. Physiologically the two are connected through the brain, as shown by medical scans when Will is tested in Hawkins Lab. If the Mindflayer permeates Will's mind, then surely the Mindflayer becomes part of Will's identity? When one's brain is altered in a significant way, hasn't their identity changed? For example, in real life, when some people suffer significant brain damage, we are apt to see massive personality changes. However, we usually claim that the individual is still the same person. In the same way then, does the Mindflayer become part of Will's identity without making him a different person? The Mindflayer's presence affects the hardware of Will's brain and so seems to be part of his identity. However, there is a key difference between the Mindflayer and brain damage when it comes to one's identity. The Mindflayer has its own aims and motives which are distinct from Will's, but this is not the case in instances of the latter kind.



Imagine someone with the power of mind control. If the mind controller made someone else act against their will, the mind controller does not become part of the victim's identity, because the will of the mind controller does not become identical with the will of the victim. It merely overrides the victim's will. In the same way, the Mindflayer doesn't become part of what it means to be Will Byers, but merely overrides Will's identity and agency.

So where does all this leave Will's identity? We haven't tried to explain what it means to be Will Byers, but have instead shown why our intuition is correct when it holds that the Mindflayer and Will remain separated despite their deep entanglement. However, our intuition about the role of memory in Will's identity is less reliable. The fact that Will forgets important people in his life seems to change his identity, but if memory doesn't define our identity, can we be right in claiming that a loss of memory is a loss of identity? This seems inconsistent. This leads on to a question of huge importance that I'll leave you to consider. What makes you the same person from one day to the next? That is: what makes you be *you*?

Joe Hawley

Homosexuality: Pleasure over Prejudice

In a time of religious conservatism "sex whether between a man and woman or a man and man are both natural" says Bentham.

With some 25 countries allowing gay marriage⁸ and an overwhelming 61.6% of the Australian public in support of it in a non-binding postal vote in November 2017, the world – especially the West – appears to be finally moving towards a general acceptance of homosexuality. However, 200 years ago, Jeremy Bentham was well ahead of his time.

The central principle of Bentham's utilitarianism is contained by two expressions 'the greatest good for the greatest number' and 'pleasure over pain'. In 'Offences Against One's Self: Paederasty', written in 1785 but unpublished in his lifetime due to anxieties he had about how its content would reflect on him, Bentham discusses homosexuality, necrophilia, sodomy, bestiality, and masturbation. His argument for the decriminalisation of homosexuality forgoes prejudice in favour of reason, arguing that it "produces no pain in anyone. On the contrary it produces pleasure".⁹

Today, this is a standard argument of proponents for gay rights: sex is pleasurable and, when it is consensual, there is nothing wrong with it. So why should sex be the preserve of relations amongst men and a women?

During Henry VIII's reign and the separation of the Church of England from Rome, the Buggery Act of 1533 was passed making sodomy (and bestiality) a capital offence until 1861 when the sentence was lessened to penal servitude. While questions may be raised in legal courts today on pederasty, defined as sexual relations between a man and a boy not of age, Bentham's impartiality shows in his reasoning.

In such relationships, one can be the 'passive' partner or the 'active partner'. Whilst the former of these was thought by the ancients to be similar to being female (and therefore, for them, degrading), while the latter was considered manly since it consisted in "making another man one's property".¹⁰ Montesquieu argues that such relations weaken men, but Bentham proposes it is not the act itself, but the habit of the act which does so. History does not show pederasty to have any "enervating effects",¹¹ despite its prevalence in the Ancient world. The practice has no more a tendency to distract or weaken men than an excess love of women, wine, or drugs.

⁸ <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/08/08/gay-marriage-around-the-world-2013/>

⁹ Bentham, Jeremy and Crompton, Louis (eds). 'Offences Against One's Self: Paederasty'. Journal of Homosexuality, 1978, p2

(http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/exhibitions/sw25/bentham/bentham_offences_1785.pdf)

¹⁰ Ibid. p5

¹¹ Ibid. p5

If such practice were widely adopted, the effects it would have on the population and the marriage prospects of women would not be considerable. Firstly, any suffering or affront it'd cause women – in terms of finding husbands, as seems to have been Bentham's central concern – is less than the pleasure it would bring to men.



Secondly, Bentham appears to suppose that "All the documents we have from the [ancients] relative to this matter, and we have a great abundance, agree in this, that it is only for a very few years of his life that a male continues an object of desire even to those in whom the infection of this taste is at the strongest."¹² There seems to be connotation of bisexuality in this: the men engaged in pederasty would eventually settle down and have families. However, this result seems not to bear well for the gay marriage argument. Bentham even argues that there are good reasons to think that a man's infidelity towards his wife would be

more hurtful with a woman than with a man since an attachment to a man "could not be lasting".¹³ A further matter is that Bentham does not address homosexuality directly by these remarks, but indirectly through his discussion on pederasty.

Bentham, however, does discuss religious arguments by Voltaire that homosexuality is unnatural because homosexuals cannot procreate. However, if homosexuality is an affront to God because it is not about procreation, then what about the monks, God's faithful servants, who do not procreate?

Bentham argues sex, whether between a man and woman or a man and man are both natural. "All the difference would be that the one was both natural and necessary [for procreation] whereas the other was natural but not necessary. If the mere circumstance of its not being necessary were sufficient to warrant the terming it unnatural it might as well be said that the taste a man has for music is unnatural."¹⁴

If one cannot find argument for gay marriage within Bentham, one should at least find that punishment for homosexuality should not be greater than the offence.¹⁵ While Bentham does not address homosexuality as it is defined today, but merely in the capacity he of the notion in the Ancient world as pederasty, and only very briefly mentions relations between women, Bentham was a man ahead of his time. Although an atheist, he lived in a religious, conservative society and despite not condoning homosexuality, if he could find reasons for it not to be considered unnatural, why is there still difficulty over 200 years later?

Kuganiga Kuganeswaran

¹² Ibid. p9

¹³ Ibid. p11

¹⁴ Ibid. p10

¹⁵ Ibid. p13

Happiness and the Good Life

Well-being has been, is, and will continue to be one of the most important topics in philosophy. Since the first philosophers in Ancient Greece, numerous definitions and conceptions of well-being have been put forward, and today we lack a certain answer. Here, I will attempt to add to this debate. The most common component across all definitions of well-being, and perhaps the most obvious, is happiness. Therefore, it seems that happiness plays a crucial role in creating a theory of well-being, and thus in order to define well-being, I will begin by examining theories of well-being with contrasting conceptions of the role of happiness; hedonism and objective list theory. I will then attempt to devise a theory that resolves any problems that surface over the course of that examination.

The first theory of well-being to consider is hedonism. Hedonism defines a good life as that which contains the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness, where happiness and unhappiness are respectively defined as pleasure and pain. In this theory, happiness is both necessary and sufficient for human well-being.

When considering what makes up human well-being, hedonism is something of a common-sense view. It appears to be obvious that a pleasurable life is better than that which is painful, and human behaviour supports this. We covet lives that are pleasurable, and we pity those in pain. We seek to emulate the pleasurable lives of the rich and famous, not those of the impoverished and insignificant. This suggests that pleasure and pain are indeed significant, and that happiness is necessary for well-being.

Additionally, one might consider the case of a depressed scientist. This scientist is making ground-breaking discoveries that are beneficial to humanity, and such contributions are what many objective list theorists argue should contribute to well-being. However, she is not happy with her life, and suffers from depression. Despite the contributions to science that she has made, her life is not one which we would covet, and if we would not envy this life, it surely cannot be a good life. This suggests that happiness is important for well-being, while knowledge, or making contributions to humanity, are not, or at least not to the same extent as happiness. This can be repeated with anything else that one might consider to be important for well-being. Consider the cases of two people; A and B. A has no friends but is very happy with her life despite this, while B has many friends but is depressed. Even if you believe friendship to be important for well-being, it is surely A who lives the better, more enviable life. While it may not be a particularly good life, it is certainly at least tolerable, and better than the alternative. No matter what else you try to force into a theory of well-being, a happy life without it will always be better than an unhappy life with it.

Despite these strengths, there are some convincing arguments against hedonism. These arguments tend to attack the proposal that happiness is sufficient for well-being, rather than the proposal that it is necessary. Such an argument is Roger Crisp's 'Haydn and the Oyster' thought experiment, in which you are offered the chance to live either the life of famous composer Joseph Haydn, which is an example of what

could be considered by many as a good human life, or that of an oyster. The oyster is capable of experiencing some low-level pleasure, which Crisp equates to the pleasure felt by drunk humans in a warm bath, but its life can be as long as you want it to be. Thus, according to hedonism, the oyster's life can be preferable to the human one, given a long enough lifespan.¹⁶ It seems ridiculous to claim that a millennium of life containing only pleasure equal to an inebriated bath would be more desirable than 77 years spent as the Michael Jackson of the 18th Century, and thus it seems that mere happiness doesn't suffice for well-being.

A similar thought experiment can be found in John Rawls' 1971 work, *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls describes a man who makes a living by solving mathematical problems, and 'whose only pleasure is to count blades of grass in various geometrically shaped areas...' ¹⁷ Assuming the man is perfectly happy with this life, we would have to call this a good life, according to hedonism. Once again, this seems preposterous, and suggests that there is some other component to well-being.

One alternative to hedonism is objective list theory. Human well-being, according to this theory, consists of a list of multiple elements, rather than simply happiness, which according to this theory is neither sufficient nor axiomatically necessary for well-being. There is no consensus over what goes on an objective list, but there have been many suggestions. One such suggestion is found in John Finnis' *Natural Law and Natural Rights*. Finnis suggests that well-being consists of 'life', knowledge, 'play', aesthetic experience, friendship, 'practical reasonableness' and 'religion' ¹⁸.

It must first be pointed out that objective list theory avoids the problems of hedonism outlined above. The issues raised by the 'Haydn and the Oyster' and grass-counter thought experiments can be avoided by including something else in well-being. As the oyster is only capable of experiencing low-level pleasure, if anything else was necessary for well-being, the oyster's life would not be preferable to Haydn's life.

Another advantage to objective list theory is that its allowance for things other than happiness to make up well-being provides us with perhaps a more complete, less simplistic definition of well-being. I am sure that many would be inclined to say that other things such as knowledge or friendship are necessary for well-being as well as happiness, and would choose the life of a happy person with friends over that of a happier loner, or that of a happy and knowledgeable person over that of a happier idiot. A hedonist may argue that the happier life will always be better, but I do not doubt that most people would rather choose the less happy, but more 'complete', life if offered the above choices, and that the hedonist is mistaken.

Objective list theory is not without problems, however. The first is that, according to objective list theory, it is near impossible for some people to live a good life. For example, it is often suggested that knowledge is necessary for well-being. If this is true, those who cannot pursue knowledge, such as those who live far from any places of education, or as children are not sent to school by their families, or have mental

¹⁶ (Crisp 2006, p. 112)

¹⁷ (Rawls 1971, p. 379)

¹⁸ (Finnis 1980, pp. 86-90)

disabilities that render learning extremely difficult, will have a significantly harder time pursuing a good life. I, for one, and I'm sure many reading this will agree, am not comfortable claiming that if a person is not born into the right circumstances, they cannot live a good life, and thus we are faced with a significant problem.

An additional complication of objective list theory is that we have no agreed criteria to choose what goes on the list. If I propose that some property x should go on the list, and somebody disagrees, we have no way of saying whether x should go on the list or not. This means that objective list theory offers no guidance on what human well-being consists of, and makes it impossible to work out what a good life is. A possible solution to this is to propose an objective list made up of whatever is commonly agreed to be part of well-being. Again, many of the lists that have been put forward propose that knowledge and friendship are constituents of well-being, and as there appears to be some consensus about this, we could place knowledge and friendship into our objective list. This offers something closer to guidance, but there will still be good reasons why things on the list should not be and why things not on the list should be, and such a list ignores those.

Furthermore, there may be disagreements between the different components of well-being. Suppose we have an objective list containing both knowledge and friendship, as posited above, and we are offered the chance to perform ground-breaking and fascinating scientific research. The only catch is that this will require you to live and work alone someplace very remote for the duration of your research. Here, you will wish to accept because this opportunity will allow you to gather knowledge, which makes you better off, but the extended lack of contact with anybody would harm your relations with them, which, because friendship is necessary for well-being in this scenario, would make you worse off. Additionally, such conflicts can cause ethical dilemmas. Say an objective list states that to live a good life, you need to be happy and be a good person. There may be times when being a good person will make you less happy, and thus a conflict arises. For example, suppose I pass a man begging in the street. It would only be right for me to give him the £20 I found behind the sofa earlier, but I know that it will mean I cannot spend it on something that would personally make me happier. Such conflicts cause further problems for a theory already suffering from the problem of unclear guidance.

It is clear to see, from the arguments above, that the two accounts of well-being I have considered are, despite their numerous strengths, too flawed to be accepted as the definitive account of human well-being. The Grass Counter and Haydn and the Oyster all show that happiness cannot be sufficient for well-being, as that leads to lives being categorised as good lives when we would say that in fact are not. Meanwhile, if some are unable to live a good life, this can cause conflicts between components of well-being, and being unable to define the perfect composition of well-being, objective list theory is also problematic.

As both of the above theories are unsatisfactory, we must look elsewhere to properly define well-being. I believe that the best theory of well-being is something intermediate of an objective list and a hedonist account, where well-being is made up of multiple things, and happiness is necessary, but not sufficient, for human well-being. To

illustrate this point, I refer to one sentence I wrote when explaining the strengths of hedonism: "No matter what else you try to force into a theory of well-being, a happy life without it will always be better than an unhappy life with it." A happy life is always at least agreeable, even in the absence of anything else to make it better, but a truly good life is that which also contains other things, potentially such as knowledge and friendship, while maintaining happiness. This gets around the issues raised above. In accepting this theory, we are not committed to accepting that the life of the oyster or the grass-cutter are good lives, only that they are not bad lives. People can live a good life despite being unable to fulfil any or all the other components of the objective list, so long as they are happy. Conflicts will still occur, but if one always acts to be happy, one will always be better off. Finally, while there may be no objective criteria as to what else goes on the list, it doesn't impede people's abilities to lead decent lives, so while the guidance this theory gives is not ideal, it is at least a significant improvement over traditional objective list theories. As Mill said, "It is better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied"¹⁹. I say it is better to live a simple life satisfied, than to live it a full life dissatisfied.

Tom Brown



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Crisp, R. (2006) *Reasons and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Finnis, J. (1980) *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Mill, J.S. (1863) 'Utilitarianism' in Williams, G. (ed.) *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government, Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy* (London: Everyman, 1996)
- Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

¹⁹ (Mill 1863, p. 10)

Society Events

Philosophy Society has returned this academic year with creativity, energy, and passion, with the new team paving the way for further philosophical reflection within the walls of the Department. Already, we have had the opportunity to attend four excellent events, with many more to look forward to in the upcoming months.

Nakul Krishna – a lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Cambridge – kicked off a series of talks which have been organised, ranging from Artificial Intelligence to the importance of free speech in the 21st Century. Krishna's talk was on *Coercion and Dialectic*, with a focus on the Socratic dialogues. He was investigating whether or not Socrates can be viewed as a bully within these ancient texts, and to what extent it is problematic to partake in coercive practice. The discussion which took place afterwards was particularly interesting, allowing first years – many of whom are getting to grips with Plato at the moment – to immerse themselves in Western Philosophy. The informal 'pizza and drinks' after the talk was a particular highlight, allowing for the opportunity to socialise with students from different years.

It was lovely to build on the social aspects of the Society at the Mid-Term Philosophy Party, which took place shortly before Reading Week. It was created to celebrate the end of the first half of the first term. Free wine galore, crisps, and biscuits were provided. Everyone in the Department was invited – graduate students, professors, and so on – which shows just how inclusive the Department is. We discussed all things philosophical, and played a competitive game of Beer Pong – not quite related to Philosophy, but equally fun. The party happily continued beyond the confines of the Department, and those of us who ended up at the Institute of Education bar certainly had a wholesome and enjoyable evening with our peers.

The talks are not limited to Philosophy students – David Sedley's talk on *Plato's Final Proof of the Soul's Immortality*, for instance, interested a range of Classicists. Sedley, himself being an acclaimed historian of Philosophy, was able to engage us using the *Phaedo*, providing us with a detailed analysis of the text. Sitting around the table with Sedley in the centre mimicked a seminar room, with the discursive aspects adding to this idea. Clarification was needed at numerous points – as a contemporary audience reading Plato in present-day, it is often challenging to state what his intention was – but Sedley charismatically and patiently went through his thoughts with us. It was a wonderful experience being able to discuss what Sedley's opinions are about Socrates' final words – a topic which is surrounded by much debate to this day.

So far, the talks have had an Ancient Greek vein running through them, although Mike Otsuka's talk *Should a University Education be Free?* provided variation. Otsuka is a political philosopher who lectured at UCL for over a decade, before moving to LSE. Returning to the Department, he felt, was surreal – the photographs in the seminar

room, for example, have not changed since he was here. His topic of choice was particularly relevant, given the National DEMO which occurred the day before, demanding that we should tax the rich to provide free education for all students. Otsuka's views were in keeping with this notion, and within his talk he discussed the distinctions between the German educational system and those of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Chatting with the philosophers in question – in this case Otsuka – after their talks is an excellent way to explore a range of philosophical ideas.

This is a philosophical snapshot of the admirable efforts of the Society. In the space of three months, the entire Department – those who are joining or returning, as well as those who are at the end of their time at UCL – have had a plethora of events to get involved with. There is even more to come, including – but not limited to:

Date	Speaker	Topic	Location
Monday, February 19 th	Graham Priest	Objects that are not Objects	Drayton House B03 Ricardo LT
Thursday, February 22 nd	Sir Roger Scruton	Free speech and why it matters	Drayton House B20 Jevons LT
Friday, March 2 nd	Tom Pink	Free will and practical reason - the problem of power in moral philosophy	Philosophy Department Seminar Room
Thursday, March 8 th	Jonathan Wolff	Topic TBD	Room TBC
Wednesday, March 14 th	Simon Blackburn	Topic TBD	Chandler House 118
Thursday, March 22 nd	Sophie Grace Chappell	Topic TBD	Philosophy Department Seminar Room
Friday, May 11 th	Lea Ypi	Topic TBD	Philosophy Department Seminar Room
Monday, May 21 st	Kit Fine	Topic TBD	Philosophy Department Seminar Room

Hopefully there is something that takes your fancy.

Sailee Khurjekar



BD

Where would you eat food if you want to follow the categorical imperative?

The KANT-EEN.

[Heard in knowledge and reality module]

Student A: I'm so glad we're finally learning about race.

Student B: Yes, I couldn't be 'appier!

BD



Where do German idealists go to sort out matters of international justice?

The HAGUE-EL.

Efrem Craig

COMING SOON....

Bentham DIGEST

issue
no. 2

on

FEMINISM



BENTHAM
DIGEST