

Critique

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Question Your Assumptions. 

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Editor's Note

The idea of a Philosophical Society journal has been around in many people's mind for a long time now, and I am pleased to now be able to introduce you to this, the first issue of Critique. Critique aims to provide a place for both undergraduates, and postgraduates to have their work published, wherever their philosophical interests lie, alongside an essay written by one of the Philosophy Department's staff. As such I am very pleased that this issue covers such a broad variety of topics - the mind, as a natural object, the nature of quantum mechanics within a philosophical framework, the (argued) failings of the ontological argument for God, and why we should study philosophy at all, are discussed within this issue. I hope that Critique will continue to allow Durham students to write on any issue irrespective of the divides that some see in philosophical debate (such as the supposed analytic-continental divide).

Lastly from me, I would like to thank all of the Exec who have helped to edit this issue and ensure that it has become a reality. I would also like to thank the department for the funding the printing of Critique, as without their help, the journal would have remained merely an idea, and of course I would like to thank everyone who submitted work for consideration. I hope that you enjoy the articles in this issue, and that you find them both interesting and informative on their subject matters, and invite you to contribute to the next issue.

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Generativity and the Mind: A Program for Naturalism in Philosophy

Professor Wolfram Hinzen

I would like to sketch a program for a new naturalism in philosophy. It regards mind as a natural object and makes the generative power of mind its central concern. This program sees philosophy as continuous with the natural sciences, adopting in this respect a methodological stance familiar from naturalism in analytic philosophy in the 20th century, while questioning a metaphysical/ontological premise usually associated with it (i.e., physicalism). It is a consequence of this approach that mentality is a primitive ingredient in nature that we have no reason to see as deriving from anything else and that we have every reason to believe is governed by natural law. Standard conceptions of mind and of naturalism in the analytic tradition may have to accommodate these findings.

Ever since the ‘Cambrian explosion’ of complex life forms on Earth around 500 million years ago, organisms have exhibited mental powers of some sort. Mental faculties allowing spatial orientation, for example, appear to be among the most basic requirements on which an organism’s foraging depends. Going far beyond sheer necessity, systems of spatial navigation in non-humans have taken highly sophisticated forms for millions of years. The honeybee, for example, when navigating to a food source outside of its perceptual range, communicates the spatial coordinates of a food source within a mental map of its territory (Tautz et al., 2004). Bees are animals with brains the size of the head of a needle. Insect navigation may also exploit sophisticated forms of memory and temporal reasoning. Thus, finding your way home without seeing or sensing it may depend on knowing in which directions you

have gone, how fast, and for how long. The advice one could give the traveller in this respect is: Always move in straight lines, and when making occasional sharp turns, always record the direction in which you are headed, the speed at which you travel, and the time that has elapsed since the last turn (or the point of origin). From recording all of this properly in memory, you can calculate the exact position at the end of each segment, and find out where you are. We know that desert ants compute the route back to their nest on precisely these grounds (Narendra et al., 2007). We also know from the behaviour of food-caching jays that they recover food they have hidden in thousands of places, depending on which food they have hidden, where they have hidden it, when they have done so, and how long it takes this food to rot (Clayton et al., 2006). As Gallistel (2009) observes, the memory structure underlying this behaviour does not make jay mental time travel or the organization of the jay remembered past look fundamentally different from human mentation as exhibited when we stand in front of a fridge, pondering which food item to open first.

As one of the very rationales for hiding food is that you don’t wish rivals to consume it before you, we would also quite expect that food is hidden depending on who is watching and when, and this is what we find (Dally et al., 2006). Indeed we expect that nature would have engineered some early ‘mentation’ for recognizing intent into organisms more broadly. Whereas until even a few years ago the evidence suggested that an ability to reason about what others want or believe only exists in humans and arises only after four years of

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age or when language is properly in place, it is now clear that basic forms of recognizing and reasoning about mental states in others is written deeply into the fabric of mind in nature, with evidence for such mentation in birds, chimpanzees, and other animals, and perhaps even in humans only a few months old (de Villiers, 2007, Meltzoff, 2007). The story has continued to the point where fundamental and abstract elements of human cognition such as representations of number are not confined to the human mind and shared with animals across wide ranges of animal phyla. Although no convincing evidence has been found that non-human animals can represent discrete, natural numbers consistent with the fact that the number line does not stop at any point (i.e., infinity), we do know that number representations emerging on the ontogenetic path of human infants emerge from a rich and biologically hardwired primitive arithmetic that is very far from humanly unique (Brannon et al., 2001; Dehaene, 1999).

The infinity of the natural numbers attests to the fact that a capacity to represent number in the full-blown human sense depends on a *generative principle* that applies *recursively*, i.e. to its own result. In the case of the natural numbers, this principle could for example be the operation '+1', which, when applied to any natural numbers and appropriately restricted by suitable axioms, yields the immediate successor of this number, and which can then be applied again, ad infinitum. The origin of recursive cognition is unknown and it is one of the deep mysteries around which a great deal of current research activity revolves. Yet, again, we know of at least one cognitive domain in which recursion may well be involved: the social domain, specifically kinship relations. For example, 'father of X' is a recursive function. Applied to X it yields

X's father, applied again it yields X's father father, and so on, forever (or until Adam); similarly, if there is a rank order of dominance in an animal community, then for some conspecific X, its dominant can have a dominant again, and so on. Are there non-human animals having forms of social cognition capable of recursive social cognition in this sense? It is hard to tell - even what would be a crucial experiment deciding this question one way or another. Yet, we do know that baboon societies are highly organized into both within-family dominance hierarchies and between-family hierarchies (Bergman et al., 2003). In this sense, baboon societies are *doubly hierarchical*: a class that unites a number of elements is itself a member of set uniting a number of similar such members. All recursion involves hierarchical relations, though not vice versa. Whether living in a baboon society involves truly recursive cognitive abilities, or which experiment would show this, we simply don't know yet, and again, unfortunately we don't quite know how to know.

Be that as it may, we may well conclude at this point that we have gone a long way from Descartes' contention that abstractions such as time, space, intentionality, and number are humanly unique and linked to the arrival of language on the evolutionary scene. Both of these claims (uniqueness and language-dependence) appear to be wrong, insofar as the above and similar evidence goes. Given Kant's claim that time and space are necessary foundations of human experience, we have to further conclude that these foundations, too, are not a unique feature of human experience and have laid the ground of animal experience for millions of years, perhaps since the earliest history of life and mentation on Earth. Recursivity, on the other hand, may well represent some kind of watershed that we need to cross before

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we reach anything resembling a human mind. Yet again, it does not seem impossible, or even unlikely, that we will find happening with recursion what we have found with so many other claims about what is allegedly humanly unique: we may well wait for the day where a new experiment provides evidence that recursion is much more primitive ingredient in animal mentation than we have hitherto allowed.

The above also not only suggests a way of studying the human mind as a natural object but also the necessity of studying it that way. Before we can approach the question of what it is to have a human mind, we have to study its empirical properties, structures, capacities and their inherent limits. This we can only do *comparatively*: we have to know what is not human in order to get a grip on what is. Once we know that, we can ask how these unique features arose and what they tell us about what creatures we are. In our as in other cases, it is the contingent assembly of different and partially domain-specific cognitive systems, some shared with other species, some not, and the way these interface with one another, which together makes the organism inhabit the kind of life world that is peculiar to it as a species.

II

Philosophical naturalism has always revolved around the question of mind. It has been centrally suggested from early on in the 20th century that the existence of mind would pose some kind of problem for a naturalistic worldview. Any assumption that there is some such thing as mind (mentation, mental properties, etc.) in some unreduced ('non-supervenient', primitive, fundamental, non-emergent, etc.) sense, or that such a thing has an intrinsic structure to it that can be empirically studied, is said to lead to a form of 'dualism', rated as a non-scientific anachronism. Yet,

if this was so, naturalism wouldn't make us expect, if not be inconsistent with, the methodology that we find the natural sciences to pursue. If biology is a natural science, it does study mentation, as we have seen, and it studies it as a natural object, without any presumption that there is something more basic about brain than there is about mind. If, say, a bird brain is dissected in order to uncover the neurological mechanism underlying the perception and organization of song, it is the avian mental capacity of perceiving song that is under study, and it will be typically the human mental capacity of music that we wish to ultimately elucidate in this fashion. So the subject matter of study, and the vocabulary for identifying it, is 'mental' and abstract - it is, say, the hierarchical or recursive organization of a song - and these mentalist descriptions motivate the physical experiments in question.

Even though it is physical variables that these experiments measure, there is no evidence in these experiments that the 'mental' properties we start out with are any less fundamental than the things that can be described in the vocabulary of physics. It would clearly be desirable to explain the forms of mentation we have described in terms of the movement of water molecules in the brain, say. Yet not even first steps in such explanations exist, and in fact it looks as if such a project has no way to even start out. This is mainly because we have as of now no way of translating the linguistic vocabulary in terms of which we describe linguistic cognition in humans, say (involving notions such as 'sentence', 'phrase', 'phoneme', 'semantics', or 'trace'), into the vocabulary of brain science ('oscillation', 'cell assembly', 'neuron', etc.) (Poeppel and Embick, 2005). So what happens is this: we start, say, from a pre-conceived and hypothesized abstract

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distinction between 'syntactic' vs. 'semantic' representations as underlying the processing of a linguistic input in the brain. And then we end up talking about changes in blood oxygenization, firing rates, or 'area 44/45' in the brain. The two kinds of things identified by these two kinds of vocabulary in many ways correlate (roughly), yet, even if so, none is more fundamental than the other. Whether we say that the brain is organized according to mental structuring principles, or the mind is organized according to structural principles organizing the activity of the brain, seems equally arbitrary at this point of naturalistic inquiry into the mind and brain. As noted, without the mental descriptions, experiments can barely even begin. Recordings of electrical potentials on the scalp, for example, as in Electroencephalography (EEG), depart from the identification of a mental event, such as perceiving a syntactic violation in a linguistic stimulus, which then distorts the wave that describes the electrical activity of the brain following the onset of this stimulus. Different mentally described aspects of the stimulus correlate with different such distortions, which we can record on a millisecond per millisecond basis. Is it something mental or something physical that we study here? Is it the brain, or the mind? The question appears to make no sense. A sentence, in linguistic terms, is a syntactic category that goes with a specific kind of semantic content; in electrophysiological terms, it is a wave. Is there anything more fundamental to a wave than to a syntactic category? Is there a sense in which a sentence is not a wave or a wave is not a sentence? Is the dependence of the one on the other in any way asymmetrical, so that we could distil some coherent sense in which one is more primitive than the other? I do not know how to distil this sense, or what it is in naturalistic inquiry

that motivates any such attempt.

One way of putting this conclusion is that the methodology of post-Newtonian natural science does not constrain science ontologically. It only constrains it methodologically. Naturalistic methodology is consistent with the existence of anything, as long as it falls into regular patterns for which we can state laws. Meaning in language is a prime example. We know there is meaning, and we have reasons to believe in it as an ingredient of language and linguistic processing in the brain, insofar as we can observe it obeying certain laws. For example, we know that meaning in language patterns propositionally and is organized compositionally: the meaning of a whole sentence is systematically determined on the basis of its parts. But we don't know what it is, ontologically, that obeys these organizational principles. Empirical inquiry into these patterns is not hampered by this failure.

III

If, then, we grant us the legitimacy of studying the human mind as a natural object in this fashion, how do we begin? If there is anything essential to the human mind, it is that it has generative power. While our minds are restricted to knowing or memorizing a *finite* set of words - the mental lexicon is large, yet restricted to about 60.000 words - we don't seem to be restricted to a finite number of thoughts that we can think or a finite number of sentences that we can produce on an occasion. Our minds freely generate thoughts and linguistic expressions that encode them, largely irrespective of external constraints. Combinatorial possibilities, once recursive, are infinite, and the ensuing generativity affects just about any cognitive domain: music, language, morality, religion. Just as there isn't any sense to the notion of the largest natural number, there isn't any

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sense to the notion of the longest natural language sentence. In each of these cognitive domains we find a restricted number of primitive elements and a number of combinatorial principles that generate complexity of the compositional, part-whole sort: the meaning of the whole depends systematically on the meaning of the parts. Given this inherent creativity, we need not fear the last musical piece ever produced, the last religious system ever developed, the last moral judgement made. The mind's productivity is constrained *internally*, by the rules operative in the domains in question, yet not *externally*, by the structure of the external environment. Although the cultural environment is woven into the fabric of human language, which always is a bio-cultural hybrid, and is indeed a condition for language to develop normally, it doesn't causally restrict our ability to freely decide on what to say or think next. We can refer to anything using language, link words to any concept we can conceive, talk about worlds that don't exist with just the ease with which we describe the actual one. Fictions, the reference to non-existent, the thinking about possibilities, are not anomalies: they are the hallmarks of human nature. Generativity is the reason they exist.

Generativity in turn depends on generative principles, but these in turn are not caused by any features of the external physical world, insofar as we know. They appear to be intrinsic aspect of minds. That said, we find them in several realms of nature, both organic and unorganic. Recursive rules give rise to structures which are self-similar in that they have parts that are again wholes containing parts of the same sort, and so on. Just that kind of pattern we find in growth patterns of plants and shells, in crystals, or in the shape of coastlines. It is a solution that nature has hit

upon many times. Occurring in both the physical and the living world, it occurs in language too, as we would expect, when studying language as a natural object. Is recursive cognition therefore something 'mental', or does it derive from deeper and more abstract principles of nature, cross-cutting the mental-physical divide?

IV

If we were to take the latter idea seriously, the problem of how mind fits into nature appears in a new light: similar or perhaps the same abstract principles may be operative in both 'realms'. Starting from generativity, that is, there is hope that we will be able to stop setting the mental *against* the physical, strangely isolating it from the rest of nature. Mind, perhaps, will come not be thought of any more as sticking out from nature like a sore thumb: we may feel 'at home' in this physical universe (Kauffman, 1996). The program is to find the precise elements and principles of the generativity involved, at different levels of description and abstraction, in an effort to unify domains.

This program does not fit comfortably with the standard positions in the philosophy of mind in the 20th century (Kim, 2005), and thus may have something new to offer. Thus it flies in the face of the position of eliminative materialism, according to which there is no mind. It is also inconsistent with the tradition of functionalism in the philosophy of mind, which involves the essentialist claim that the mind is function which as such is something abstract that is independent of its physical instantiations in particular organisms. But the generativity I have talked about is deeply 'embodied' and develops in species-specific forms. Studying mind 'in general', irrespective of issues of embodiment, is like studying 'life in general', irrespective of which physical laws happen to characterize the

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world in which the relevant life forms evolve. This is hardly a topic for naturalistic inquiry. Moreover, on the above account, mind is not function: it is structure, a precondition for function, too. Minds have an inherent architecture that can be studied empirically. Observations about which functions minds perform are data that the study of those minds' structure needs to explain.

Dualism is also not an option on the above account, given that this account questions the intelligibility of the question of whether mental or physical things are being studied, and denies that science is ontologically constrained or is bound to vindicate pre-theoretical conceptual dichotomies (but see Hinzen, ed., 2006). Anomalous monism, finally, will also not appear attractive: adopting an ontology of physicalism, which the above account rejects, it involves a dualism of scientific methods in studying the 'mental' and the 'physical', which allows us to make little sense of what was claimed above: that, factually, the mind is being studied in naturalistic terms (see further Hinzen, 2006).

The hunt is on, then, for the generator. The search for what generates both the complexity of a single individual's language and the observed variation among past and present human languages, in particular, is a naturalistic research program that investigates a given phenomenon of nature. The notion of a 'Universal Grammar' (Jackendoff, 2002), which depicts the study of the principles underlying human language design, is in a relative crisis today, as the study of the seemingly unbounded variation we find among the world's languages has belied virtually any claim about what's universally present in all human languages (Evans and Levinson, to appear). At the same time, language is a species-property that develops uniformly across the species and is remarkably inde-

pendent of and isolated from cultural differences. It also cuts across individual differences in education, upbringing, sensory capabilities, or ways in which they are communicated (manually, as in a sign language, or vocally, as in spoken languages). In these regards, all human languages are the same. Hence we might as well look out for the generators of the variation that we find, in an effort to understand it. If the alternative is to let variation be accidental and to engage in historical narrative of whatever historical variants we find, there is little else that it seems we can do.

Mind is, and has been since the time of Descartes, a subject matter of naturalistic inquiry. We should continue this study so as to decode the sources of the generativity that is the essence of mind. For all that we now know, these principles are natural principles, and the mental is as 'natural' or fundamental as anything else.

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Constant Conjunction Revisited: Quantum

Mechanics Against the Event Theorist

Micheal Corcoran

This paper will maintain that fundamentally causes cannot relate events. Drawing on insights from quantum mechanics it will be shown that events ultimately reduce to states and that states cannot be connected in causal relations, but only annexed by Humean constant conjunction. Thus causation will be removed from the notion of events, and continuing in a Humean vein, it will be proposed that causal relations are creations of the mind, removing many of the difficulties pitting against alternatives to event theories in the past.

To begin we must first defining an event. In 'Physical Causation,' Phil Dowe proposes the following:

An event is a change in a property of an object at a time, e.g. a quantitative change, or a related simultaneous change in more than one property of more than one object at a time, and so on.¹

Events *must* involve change: if there were no change then seemingly there would be no event, but rather a state.² As E.J Lowe expresses it, "an event is a change, a state is a 'un-change'".³

Causes do relate events in our everyday language. Take the statement, 'Throwing the brick caused with window to smash.' Throwing the brick and the window smashing are events, annexed by some causal relation.

However, this does not give us grounds to conclude that causes fundamentally relate

events, for the events which causation is supposed to relate cannot be understood without further appeal to causation. As Kenneth Sayre explains:

The causal process, continuous though it may be, is made up of individual events related to others in a causal nexus . . . It is by virtue of the relations among members of the causal series that we are enabled to make inferences by which causal processes are characterised.⁴

Consider the event of throwing the brick. This event is actually composed of many events; picking up the brick; swinging your arm toward the window; releasing the brick from your grip and so on. Each of these can be divided still further and each is the cause of its successor. Thus macro-events such as throwing the brick contain causal relations between the composite events of which they are composed.

To determine what causes relate requires that causal relata are defined without further appeal to causation. If the relation is between events, then it seems such a definition is impossible.

Some see this as the end of the story. For Carroll, "with regard to our total conceptual apparatus, causation is at the centre of the centre."⁵ Causation can never be extrapolated from the events it relates, it is simply too fundamental.

We needn't draw this conclusion if events are reducible to something more basic, definable without the notion of causation. As we shall see, this more basic component of an event is an unchanging state.

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Here we can turn to support from quantum mechanics. If events are basic, then it seems that they will be eternally divisible, with it being possible to produce smaller and smaller events, involving smaller and smaller changes (A continuous spectrum). However if events reduce to states, then ultimately we will reach a level where events can be split no further, a level where it is not possible to a smaller to change to occur (A discrete spectrum).

To illustrate this point consider the following hypothetical event: A spherical globe heated from 0 to 100 degrees. To keep matters simple, consider the globe to exist in space occupied only by a radiating field, acting as the source of heat. The event of heating from 0-100 degrees can be divided into the event of heating from 0-10, from 10-20 and so on. Each event can be divided further, and each event is the cause of the next.

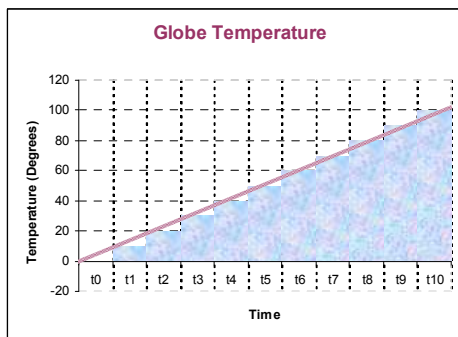


Figure 1: The blue bars represent a discrete spectrum, the purple line a continuous one.

What quantum mechanics proves is that temperature, along with any physical entity, can only change in finite jumps, that

is, nature produces discrete spectra. If we continue to divide temperature increase events, we reach a level where it can be divided no further. This turns out to be to the order of a million-billion-billion-billion-billionth of a degree: tiny, but finite none the less.⁶

Events are not eternally divisible as physical entities are quantised, existing in discrete, indivisible packets, quanta. The quantum world is one in which there is one unchanging state, then an instantaneous 'quantum leap' to the next. There is the state of being one temperature, then an instantaneous leap to the state of being in a new temperature, with nothing in between.

Our example is conveniently simple, but the principle applies to every physical event. We can think of the world like a flip book: Despite how it may feel, we do not move in continuous way, but in tiny quantum leaps from one state to the next.

Unlike events, states rely on no further appeal to causation. Yet it also seems that no cause could possibly act between two states. There can be nothing in a state to bring about an effect, for a state is unchanging. Remember that the world is like a flip book, with no process between one page and the next. It seems quantum mechanics resigns us to a reality of one unchanging state followed by another, where some uniformity of nature ensures that certain states are always followed by certain others. This is an expression of the Humean concept of constant conjunction.⁷ Constant conjunction, Hume explains is not a rational necessity but discovered aposteriori:

Knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance attained by reasoning a priori, but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are

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constantly conjoined with any other.⁸

From observation of constantly conjoined states, we induce that such states will be constantly conjoined in the future, and form laws which describe this regularity, the laws of physics, which guarantee the uniformity of nature.⁹ The regularity of constant conjunction does not require causation, but only obedience in accordance with the laws of physics, which are not concerned with the question of 'why?' They do not offer an explanation of how one state follows another, but only describe nature with increasing degrees of precision. As Bertrand Russell explained, physical laws can be expressed without a sniff of causal language:

In the motions of mutually gravitating bodies, there is nothing that can be called a cause, and nothing that can be called an effect: there is merely a formula.¹⁰

It remains to be seen then, why we need the notion at all. Russell claimed that we must force ourselves to let go:

The law of causality is a relic of a bygone age, surviving like the monarchy, only because it is erroneously believed to do no harm.¹¹

We must conclude that causation does not relate states, that states are related by constant conjunction and nothing more. Does that mean that causation relates nothing, as it simply does not exist?

We need not, and should not, make such a drastic claim.

That causation does not relate states does

not entail that it does not exist. Rather, causation exists as an object of the mind, a psychological association between states and events we observe in constant conjunction.

In the Enquiry, Hume explains that when we state that A causes B, "We mean only that they have acquired a connexion in our thought."¹² This psychological connection is most plausibly an evolutionary disposition to find causation where only constant conjunction is observed. This disposition is of evolutionary necessity, for as the idea of freedom is required to act freely, the idea of causation is required to act causally. Without the idea of causation, our motivation to act so as to bring about effects would be removed.

Causes therefore, are creations of the mind. They can neither relate events, nor states, but they do relate the facts which we abstract from these events and states, allowing us to act in a causal way.

A great problem in denying that causes relate events, as posed by Bennett has been that causation cannot relate facts, for facts by their nature, cannot 'cause' anything.

However we have argued that nothing is 'caused,' causation is merely the way in which we understand constant conjunction. These facts then do not need to cause anything, only to let us operate within the world of causeless constant conjunction which quantum mechanics has revealed to be a reality.

Footnotes:

1. Dowe, P (2000:169)
2. Note here those who maintain that there can be events without change: Persistence. For example, moving through space at a

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constant velocity can be construed as an event without change. Armstrong explains persistence as a change from one time-slice to the next, with causal processes acting between them. Here we do not consider such examples as genuine examples of events, and furthermore, due to the quantisation of time Armstrong's argument seemingly falls victim to the same fate as the events we do consider. For more see Dowe, P (2000:53-55)

3. Lowe, E.J (1998:235)

4. Sayre, K (1997:206)

5. Carroll, J.W (1994:118)

6. This factor is determined by 'h', the Plank constant.

7. Hume analysis of causation was given in terms of events, yet is perfectly applicable to our reduction of events to states. Without the revolution of quantum mechanics, this reduction was beyond Hume's understanding and inconsequential to his conclusions regardless.

8. Solomon, R.C (2001:233)

9. Many of the problems pitted against Hume diminish when we think of regularity as compliance with the laws of physics. Mackie for example, argues that Hume's analysis cannot deal with unique events, for having observed an event only once, we would have no grounds to determine that cause and effect were in constant conjunction. However, so long as the event is understandable in virtue of physical laws, which have been derived from observation of constant conjunction, then Hume's argument stands firm. Similarly, ideas such as backwards causation and action at a dis-

tance are no permitted by Hume's definition, for he claims that the causal connection requires priority and contiguity. However if such phenomena are observed, then the notion of causation, which is a purely empirical one, may be updated accordingly.

10. Slater, J. G and Frohmann, B (1992:202)

11. Slater, J. G and Frohmann, B (1992:193)

12. Mackie, J.L (1974:20)

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Why Philosophy?

Ian Kidd

Why philosophy?

Philosophers are allegedly highly reflective creatures, alert and attentive for prejudices and presumptions in their own arguments and beliefs, and those of others. As any undergraduate philosophy student knows, clarity, rigour, and ruthless critical acumen are the prize virtues of the modern philosopher. However, despite this praise of critical reflexivity, it's surely peculiar that philosophers don't place more of an emphasis upon identifying why it is that we *do* philosophy.

There is a standard repertoire of answers of course, such as 'love of wisdom', training in intellectual discipline, or the Delphic Oracle's injunction to 'know thyself', as well as the transferable 'key skills' of modern philosophy syllabi, such as rapid analysis of complex materials, or the ability to construct potent arguments, and which are reportedly prized by typical big city graduate recruiters. However, it is arguably only rarely that such answers are directly raised in typical philosophy courses. 'Why are you studying philosophy?' This may be a question asked by a tutor upon meeting the new fresher philosophers, and of course it's familiar to anyone who's recently filled in a UCAS application. But once one 'gets going' in a philosophy degree - an hour of Descartes each Wednesday, two hours of logic on a Monday, weekly trips to the library, and so on - the question seems to fade from both the mind and the syllabus. As soon as one begins getting to grips with the problem of other minds, or Aristotelian virtue ethics, or the perils of formal logic, the question of why one is studying philosophy in the first place recedes, rapidly subdued by tutorial schedules, essay deadlines, and the comfortable routine of university life.

This isn't to say that one stops asking

the question - especially when burning the midnight oil to learn Kant's categorical imperative before the nine am tutorial the next day - but it is surely strange that the question isn't asked, implicitly or not, by the degree course itself. Perhaps it's considered that the question of why a student is studying philosophy is a very private one, something for them to ruminate on in their own time. Others might suggest that it doesn't really matter, as long as the module quota is filled or as long as they turn up for the tutorials and hand in an essay. Others of a more cynical persuasion might quietly advise that the question is perhaps not better left unasked.

Common and understandable as these responses may be, it does seem strange, to myself at least, that the question 'Why philosophy?' isn't a more constantly present motif in undergraduate philosophy courses. Of course, Kant's ethics are important, and Hume's account of causation intriguing, and yes, philosophy of mind can tell us a lot about ourselves as the unique cognitive beings we are: but, at the end of the day, what of it? Even if one is intrigued by the various ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical issues addressed by 'Knowledge and Reality' or 'Moral Theory' or 'Philosophy of the Sciences', these are specialised areas of inquiry, and perhaps do not aspire to this sort of perhaps more comprehensive 'why question'. There is, for some at least, a more general sort of inquiry called 'philosophy', whose content consists in, but is not exhausted by, the various sub-disciplinary areas reflected in a modular syllabus. This is the more general sense of philosophy which is, in Pierre Hadot's term, a 'way of life', a sort of ongoing exploration of how to comport oneself within the world, living the sort of 'eudaimonistic' life praised by the ancient

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Greeks, and perhaps enjoying the sense of 'homeliness' in the world gestured to more recently by Martin Heidegger.

This may sound preposterously ambitious in our 'postmodern' age, when 'grand theories' of 'life, the universe, and everything' are dismissed as intellectual fantasies indulged in by overzealous philosophers ignorant of Jean-Francois Lyotard's urge for us to exercise 'suspicion of metanarratives'. However, the aim of philosophy, in the sense that I intend, isn't any sort of comprehensive cosmology or 'worldview', but the far more modest, yet no less important, project of developing a sense of oneself and one's place within the world; to arrive at a 'sense of things' that can lend purpose, meaning, and direction to our lives. This seems to me neither overly ambitious, since anyone can do it with a little investment of time and effort, nor wholly dispensable, because there is so much at stake, namely one's happiness, in the broadest sense of that term. Studying epistemology or aesthetics or environmental philosophy can all play a part in this, and there is much to learn from the history of philosophy, too; but the enormous resources afforded by these diverse disciplines and traditions is arguably best managed by directing them to a definite aim: namely, developing this sort of 'compartment', or 'sense of self', or whatever one wishes to call it, rather than simply fulfilling assessment criteria, getting a good two-one, or ticking the right boxes on a CV.

Philosophy, then, as I've described it, offers a very complex and diverse range of ideas, arguments, and opportunities for developing a sense of our 'place' in the world, contributing to an understanding, however inarticulate it might be, of who we are and where we stand in the world. If this sounds like existentialism, it needn't, since

it might equally be simply described as 'ethics' in the broadest sense, the inquiry into how to live and behave - not just in the sense of avoiding moral pitfalls, but in cultivating and enjoying the sort of 'homely', flourishing life that is, as Aristotle rightly remarked, the proper end of all human thought and action.

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Solving God (Or the ‘Notological’ Argument)

Max Popiolek

Philosophy is a very grave form of wordplay. Perhaps the most popular example of the power of words is the Ontological Argument, put forward most famously by St Anselm and Descartes on different occasions. The argument claims to necessitate God's existence by use of only the basic content of the idea of God - specifically, that God is the greatest, most perfect being conceivable. Here is presented a conclusion to the exact opposite effect (that it is necessary for God not to exist) using only that very same content.

The property of existence can be primarily considered from either a materialist's or dualist's perspective. No matter which perspective is taken, existence in - and interaction with - either the material or mental realms of substance is inevitably dependent on the existence of the substances considered. These substances are often said to be dependent in turn upon the existence of God, but I would like to turn the tables on this viewpoint.

God, in the sense taken by St Anselm and Descartes, is the greatest or most perfect being conceivable. So by this very definition the material (and mental, if considered) realm of substance and its contents must always be less perfect than God.

It is clear that God's existence in and interaction with either of these

substances is dependent on the existence of the substance considered. The more God is to exist in, and interact with, these imperfect substances, the more dependent he will be on imperfections and hence the less perfect he will be.

It is therefore necessary of God, the most perfect conceivable being, that he not exist in these substances. So of necessity God can only ever exist in some other, supernatural realm (that necessarily does not interact with our realms of substance at all, lest it be lessened in perfection), and “in the understanding,” as St Anselm would have put it.

What it means to be perfect independent of all mental and material measures we have is unclear; it is perhaps just as meaningless as the idea of imperfection being mulled over by a perfect God. I would however suggest that it is reckless to apply human standards and values - especially for concepts as abstracted as perfection - to an uncaring universe and what's more, an uncaring God.

*William of Ockham, Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, Richard
Horn, Daniel Dennett, Aristotle, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Da
Timers, René Descartes, St Thomas Aquinas, Alain Badiou
my Bentham, Bishop George Berkeley, Simone de Beauvo
Noam Chomsky, Epicurus, Gottlob Frege, Georg Wilhelm
iedrich Hegel, John Locke, **Philippa** Foot, Thomas Hobbes,
David Hume, John Searle, **Socrates**, Gottfried Wilhelm von
nitz, Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, John Stuart Mil
iedrich Nietzsche, Blaise Pascal, Plato, Willard van Orman
ine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul
Sartre, Karl Marx, Baruch Spinoza...*

Question your assumptions.

Durham University Philosophical Society.