

Philosophy at Cambridge

Newsletter of the Faculty of Philosophy

Issue No. 16 September 2020

ISSN 2046-9632

From the Chair

Rae Langton



Alexander Bird, Bertrand Russell Professor from 1 October 2020

This has been no ordinary year. As I write, we face profound uncertainties. We have seen political events that will alter our nation's future, in ways that are hard to fathom. We are in the grip of a global pandemic, whose long-term effects are unclear. We are learning new ways to teach and do philosophy together, while apart.

We are especially fortunate, at this time, to be able to welcome our new Bertrand Russell Professor, Alexander Bird, who takes up this role in October 2020.

This Professorship was established in 1896, and acquired its present name in 2010, after a successful fundraising appeal to endow the post. It has been held by Moore, Wittgenstein, von Wright, Wisdom, and Anscombe, and more recently by Hugh Mellor, Simon Blackburn, and Huw Price—who, I'm glad to say, will stay at Cambridge, as Director of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (see pp. 4–5).

Alexander works in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of medicine. He will be speaking at the Cambridge Alumni Festival 2020, on 'Romanticism, Creativity and the Replication Crisis' (see panel). Romanticism elevates the 'unfettered imagination', and deprecates the 'cold reason' of science, but he questions this perspective. Is the unfettered imagination a good thing? Is scientific judgment unimaginative? He responds from a surprising angle: 'Curiously, the replication crisis in biomedicine and psychology suggests otherwise.' We look forward to seeing many of our readers there.

Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* was my own introduction to philosophy, as a teenager, inspiring me to ask questions, and face uncertainties. It seems a good year to let Russell have the last word: 'To teach how to live

Faculty Events

30th Alumni Festival 2020

Tuesday 22 September, 12:30pm-1:30pm (online) 'Romanticism, Creativity and the Replication Crisis' with **Alexander Bird**

Friday 25 September, 6:30pm-7:30pm (online) 'Newnham Conversation: Democracy and Digital Technologies' with **Onora O'Neill** and **Rae Langton**

For further information and booking go to <https://www.alumni.cam.ac.uk/Festival>

Festival of Ideas 2020

For further information go to www.festivalofideas.cam.ac.uk

For information about future Faculty events go to <https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/events-phil>

without certainty, and yet without being paralysed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can still do for those who study it.'

Late news: we recently announced, with great sadness, the death of Hugh Mellor 1938–2020, 21 June <https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/news/mellor-announcement>. If readers wish to share a memory or a tribute, please write to the following address: remembering.hugh.mellor@gmail.com. With your permission, we may draw on your message for the next Newsletter, and for a commemoration event planned for 2021.

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The Birth of a Book

Michael Potter

I recently published a book, but it was not originally my idea to write it. What now seems a very long time ago (in 2012, in fact) Andy Beck at Routledge asked me to write a history of analytic philosophy. He had picked up on the fact that although an increasing number of philosophy departments offer courses on this subject, there are very few textbooks suitable for such courses. What Andy wanted, though, was a single textbook that covered the whole subject from Bolzano to the present day. I rejected this idea for two reasons: it was too ambitious, at least for me, requiring knowledge of authors of whom I have never made a detailed study; and it was so broad that its coverage of each author would inevitably be superficial. I was not really interested in writing what would be likely to be little more than a series of encyclopaedia articles.

But Andy persisted, we talked again, and I eventually agreed after some prevarication to write a much more narrowly focussed book with just four parts: on Frege, Russell, the early Wittgenstein and Ramsey. Each of these four parts would be long enough that I would have room to develop my own interpretation, and to go in some detail into their distinctive contribution to the subject.

The main doubt Andy raised at that point (guided by expert reviewers he consulted about my plan) was whether there should also be a part on Moore. There is no doubting that Moore was important historically in British philosophy in the first half of the 20th century (although part of the explanation for this importance must, I think, be that he possessed a sort of charisma that does not transfer well to the written page). In the end, though, I persuaded my publisher to let me omit him. This was partly because his voice would not be completely silent: he could be heard over Russell's shoulder, nudging him into many of the views he adopted between 1898 and about 1912 (the conception of propositions as containing parts of the world, the identity theory of truth, the sense-datum theory). But Moore's omission was also for the more selfish reason that I just do not enjoy reading him. I feared that as a result anything I wrote about him would lack the degree of sympathy that is required if one is to engage properly with a philosopher's thinking.

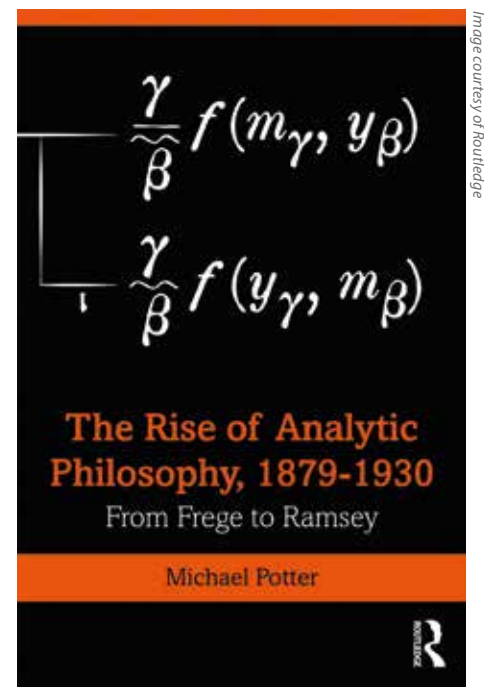
When I signed the contract in 2014, my plan was to dash the book off fairly quickly (quickly for me, anyway), so that it could come out in 2016. After all, I figured that I knew this stuff pretty well, having already written a book 20 years ago that discussed all four of my authors (although then with a slightly narrower focus on the philosophy of arithmetic). When I settled down to write, however, my original timetable soon fell apart. I discovered that almost every chapter threw up issues that I had not properly thought through before. And each time, there was a large secondary literature that I needed to look at, even if only to disagree with it.

The result was that I did not submit a final version until midway through 2019, over three years late. I probably would not have submitted it even then if it had not been for the Cambridge Faculty's decision to introduce a new paper on the history of analytic philosophy in Part IB of the Tripos in 2019-2020. It would have been embarrassing if the main textbook for the new course had not been available.

The project took much longer to write than I had originally planned, then, but it also ended up being a lot longer—200k rather than the 130k I had originally agreed. When I told Andy this, he quite reasonably demanded that I convince him the length really was necessary. But he then accepted it with good grace (and, I am pleased to say, priced the paperback edition of the book competitively).

The title we eventually agreed on for the book was *The Rise of Analytic Philosophy 1879-1930* (publishers like titles to be as explicit as possible, presumably to increase the chance that they will come up high in Google searches). The initial date of the period of study was easy to determine, of course. Anyone who read for the Philosophy Tripos will know that 1879 was the year Frege published *Begriffsschrift*, the book which inaugurated the modern era in formal logic. The appropriate end point was a little less determinate, but I chose the death of Ramsey in 1930. This allowed me to include Russell's post-war neutral monism (a position which, curiously, has become fashionable again quite recently, after being re-discovered by modern philosophers of mind).

What did I learn through writing the book? The biggest pay-off for me was



the sense I got of the development of the thinking of each of my authors. One of the most exciting things one can get from studying an author is the sense that one is understanding the problems they were working on from the inside, so that their next steps seem almost inevitable. It is remarkable how often a text that had previously seemed impenetrable begins to yield its meaning in this way.

The second thing I got was a conviction that my original choice of focus for the book had been the right one. Again and again I found resonances which gave the book a thematic unity belying its division into four distinct parts. Perhaps the most prominent of these unifying themes goes directly back to the famous paragraph from section 9 of *Begriffsschrift* in which Frege explained how the variables that occur in quantified expressions arise:

If, in an expression (whose content need not be assertible), a simple or a complex symbol occurs in one or more places and we imagine it as replaceable by another (but the same one each time) at all or some of these places, then we call the part of the expression that shows itself invariant a function and the replaceable part its argument.

Starting from the sentence 'Cato killed Cato', for instance, we can remove one occurrence of 'Cato' to obtain the function 'x killed Cato',

then remove the other to obtain 'x killed y', or we can remove both occurrences of 'Cato' at once to obtain 'x killed x'. Then, once we have obtained a function in this way, we can apply quantifiers in the now-familiar manner. Section 9 thus embodied an important insight, namely that the letters (*x*, *y*, *z*, etc.) that our notation for quantification employs are not variable names but a device for marking argument places. Frege's mistake, though, was to think he could base the whole of logic on this single insight. This led him to his mistaken assimilation of sentences to singular terms (criticised in the *Tractatus*), and to his mistaken view (criticised by Ramsey in

'Universals') that the structure of atomic sentences should be analysed on the model of section 9. It also, less obviously but more damagingly, underpinned Frege's paralysis in the face of the set-theoretic paradoxes when he learnt of them from Russell's famous letter of 1902.

Above all, though, I am pleased to report that writing the book left intact my respect for the philosophical abilities of the four authors I had chosen to focus on. The history of philosophy is not merely the history of ideas. We study authors not just because of the significance of their influence on subsequent developments, but also because we hope to learn from

them by engaging critically with their thoughts. We participate in arguments with the minor complication that one of the parties to the argument is now dead. For that to be worthwhile, we have to pick our subjects selectively. The mark of the truly first-rate philosopher is that even their mistakes are interesting. All four of my chosen subjects—Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein and Ramsey—made interesting mistakes.

Michael Potter is Professor of Philosophy in the Faculty.

People

Faculty and Staff News

Welcome to **Alexander Bird** who has been elected to the Bertrand Russell Professorship from 1 October 2020. He joined the Faculty earlier on 1 July 2020, as Director of Research, part-time (see p. 1).

Huw Price will be retiring at the end of September as Bertrand Russell Professor, but will continue in his role as Director of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (see pp. 1, 4–5).

Welcome also to:

Antara Haldar as Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow from September 2019

Maiya Jordan as British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow from November 2020

Jacopo Domenicucci, who has been appointed to a Junior Research Fellowship at Emmanuel College, Cambridge

Lucy McDonald, who has been appointed to a Junior Research Fellowship at St John's College, Cambridge

Matthew Simpson, who has been appointed to a Junior Research Fellowship at Robinson College, Cambridge

Dan Williams, who has been appointed to a Junior Research Fellowship at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge

Promotions, Honours and Awards

Congratulations to **Clare Chambers**, who has been appointed as a Member of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics.

Congratulations to **Rae Langton**, who was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Klagenfurt in January 2020 (see pp. 6–7).

Congratulations and farewell to:

Ori Beck who has been appointed to Postdoctoral Fellowship at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Anastasia Berg who has been appointed to a Lectureship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Matthew Leisinger who has been appointed as Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy, University of York

Maarten Steenhagen who has been appointed to a Research Fellowship at Uppsala University

Karina Vold who has been appointed as Assistant Professor at University of Toronto's Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology

Student News

Congratulations to **Senthuran Bhuvanendra**, who won the Emanuel Miller Prize in the Philosophy of Science for his paper 'Objectivity through Second-personal Intersubjectivity: Justifying Interpretation in the Behavioural Sciences'.

Congratulations to **Sahanika Ratnayake**, who received an honourable mention for the 2020 Jaspers Award by the Association for the Advancement of Philosophy and Psychiatry, for 'It's Been Utility All Along: An Alternate Understanding of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and The Depressive Realism Hypothesis'.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcome. Please send them to **Jo Harcus**, Editor, at: Faculty of Philosophy, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA. Email: jmh225@cam.ac.uk.

Two Projects from 2012 – a progress report

Huw Price

When Tim Crane interviewed me for the Faculty Newsletter in 2012, I mentioned a couple of projects I had in my head. One was a conference I was organising with our (then) Faculty colleague, Fraser MacBride. The other was a collaboration with Skype founder Jaan Tallinn, to try to establish a centre in Cambridge to study catastrophic risks of powerful new technologies, such as AI and synthetic biology.

Happily—and mainly due to hard work by other people—both projects thrived in ways I simply couldn't have imagined in 2012. I want to take this opportunity to thank some of those people, claim a little bit of inventor's credit for their success, and explain how the second project changed my life.

Both projects began in 2011, in the months before I arrived in Cambridge from Sydney. At that point, Tim and Heather alerted me to a new University strategic fund for research in the humanities. Fraser and I were both interested in Cambridge philosophy in the 1920s, and in what we saw a thread running through the work of many Cambridge philosophers since that time—as we put it, a kind of pragmatism. Pragmatists approach philosophical problems by enquiring about the practical role of disputed notions—truth, causation, value, or necessity, for example—in human life. Over the past century, many distinguished Cambridge philosophers have been pragmatists in one sense or another.

In a spirit of cheeky chauvinism, we called this 'Cambridge Pragmatism'. The name was cheeky on three counts. First, not all the Cambridge philosophers in our sights, by any means, thought of themselves as pragmatists. Second, the same thread could be found in other places, including *the Other Place*. And third, most egregiously, there's another Cambridge, where other philosophers had claimed the term Pragmatism, long before the ideas we had in mind—or their local authors, in many cases—had even been conceived.

So Fraser and I were risking egg on our cheek, especially trans-Atlantic egg—until a trans-Atlantic pragmatist turned up to save our bacon. Cheryl Misak gave us a remarkable paper on the then almost unknown influence of the great American Cambridge Pragmatist, Charles Pierce, on Frank Ramsey—the first and greatest of *our* Cambridge Pragmatists. Thanks to Cheryl, our cheeky term now had some intellectual teeth.

Happily, the conference in 2012 was only the beginning, from Cheryl's point of view.

With the bit firmly between *her* teeth, her paper became the seed of a brilliant book, itself called *Cambridge Pragmatism*, telling the full story of what Ramsey's philosophy owes to Pierce. And now, just released this Spring, Cheryl has completed her remarkable intellectual biography of Ramsey himself, *Frank Ramsey: A Sheer Excess of Powers*.

You'll see why I'm pleased to take some causal credit for this. (Has any Cambridge philosopher ever achieved so much, from so little initial effort?). More importantly, I'm delighted to have this opportunity to thank Cheryl for her remarkable contribution to the history of Cambridge philosophy.

The second project also began in the summer of 2011, when I got into a taxi in Copenhagen with a man I'd never met. I hadn't met him, but I knew who he was. We were attending the same conference, which had begun three days earlier, on a cruise ship in Norway. At the first session, as we sailed down the fjord, we'd all had two minutes to say who we were, where we came from and what we did. So I knew that he was called Jaan Tallinn, that he came from Tallinn in Estonia—he'd joked about his name being the same as his hometown—and that he was one of the founders of Skype.

I reminded Jaan who I was—the Australian philosopher taking a slow boat to Cambridge—and asked him the obvious question. What did he do these days (since inventing Skype, as it were)? He mentioned his day job as an angel investor, but said that he spent a lot of his time trying to get people to think about 'AI risk'. I asked him what he meant, and he talked about concerns that machine intelligence might far exceed human intelligence—perhaps soon, and perhaps rapidly, once machine intelligence becomes self-improving—and that that might be bad news for us.

I'd heard of these ideas before, but I hadn't met anyone who took them so seriously—especially someone with his feet so firmly on the ground in the computer industry. So I was intrigued, both by the ideas and by Jaan's evident commitment to getting other people to think about them.

As it happened, I had a couple of days in Jaan's hometown, just two weeks later. I was giving some lectures in Helsinki, and the best way to get from there to Cambridge was to fly from Tallinn to Stansted. So I suggested we continue our conversation there.

It had occurred to me that one of the people I already knew in Cambridge was also

worried about near-term risks to humanity from human technology. That person was Lord Martin Rees. Martin is one of the UK's most distinguished scientists. He's a former President of the Royal Society, and back in 2011 was still Master of Trinity College, where I was about to take up a Fellowship.

I knew Martin from philosophy of cosmology circles, and I knew that he'd been writing about risks of modern technology for many years. I was wondering whether I could act as a catalyst between Martin and Jaan. This seemed a fitting role for the new Bertrand Russell Professor—Russell himself spent the last twenty years of his life trying to reduce the risk of human extinction by nuclear war.

I discussed these thoughts with Jaan in Tallinn, and set out for Cambridge, gripped by the thought that Fate was offering me an unusual opportunity. She'd already lined me up with a wonderful new job. Now she seemed to be offering me a chance to use it to do something unexpected, and possibly important.

With Martin's encouragement, I brought Jaan to Cambridge for a public lecture. By the summer of 2012, we were working together to establish what we'd agreed to call the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, or CSER.

We decided to focus on catastrophic risks from new technologies. There are other extinction-level risks, such as asteroids, or mega-volcanoes. But those risks are low, constant, and pretty well understood. In contrast, potential technological risks might be both higher and rapidly changing, and were hardly studied at all. It seemed obvious where we should focus our efforts.

Under the leadership of two remarkable Executive Directors, first Dr Seán Ó hÉigeartaigh and now Dr Catherine Rhodes, CSER has now grown to a team of almost twenty researchers. It is highly interdisciplinary, with expertise ranging from philosophy and law to environmental science and biosecurity. It does many things, but most important of all, it's had a big impact on the conversation, helping existential risk to become a mainstream topic rather than a fringe topic.

My conversation with Jaan in that taxi was about the risks of AI. CSER isn't confined to AI risk, but it's the area that's seen the most remarkable change in public attitudes, over the past few years. When we first invited Jaan to speak in Cambridge, the organisers



Huw Price with Liana Tang, Director of the Centre for Strategic Futures in the Singapore Prime Minister's Office

worried whether the topic was serious enough for their Distinguished Lecture series. Some thought it was too flaky. No one would dream of raising that issue now—everyone now wants to discuss the future of AI.

CSER played a role in this. With the MIT Future of Life Institute, we co-organised an important conference in Puerto Rico in 2015. This helped to build a sense of community and common purpose—a sense that people were beginning to get on the same page, in thinking about the challenges of AI.

The week after that conference, the Leverhulme Trust announced a new competition for Major Research Centres. They wanted big ideas, ideas that had the potential to make a difference to the future of humanity.

It seemed perfect for us. With partners from Oxford, Imperial College, and Berkeley, we proposed a Centre to help to create the new interdisciplinary community we need to think about these issues. It was a long process, but the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (CFI) was officially launched in 2016, pushed off the slipway by two Cambridge giants, Stephen Hawking and Margaret Boden.

CFI is narrower than CSER in one sense, because it is just about AI. It's broader in another sense, in that it is not just about risks. Even if we assume that the risks can be

safely managed, AI will present us with many challenges, both short term and long term.

As Stephen Hawking put it at our launch, 'when human-level AI eventually does occur, it's likely to be either the best or worst thing ever to happen to humanity, so there's huge value in getting it right.' And that means thinking about the good side as well as the bad side—there's no reason to think that the best outcomes will magically fall into our laps, if we manage to avoid the worst ones.

CFI, too, has been thriving under the leadership of our Executive Director, Dr Stephen Cave (himself a Faculty of Philosophy alumnus). We have a good claim to be the world's first research centre in the new interdisciplinary field of 'AI Impacts', but similar institutes have since been emerging in many parts of the world. CFI now works to try to connect the best of these institutes, and to encourage cooperation and collaboration between them.

Much of my time now goes into these efforts, in countries such as Germany, Australia, Singapore, and especially China. (The slow boat got me there in the end!). The most life-changing aspect of this is not the travel—philosophy used to provide its share of that—but the fact that so much of my professional world, and so many of my new friends, are not in philosophy. This is very mixed news, of course. I've been sad to

be pulled away from the Faculty in recent years. But it's been a wholly unexpected privilege to have this new alternative.

The picture shows me in Singapore (obviously) in 2019. I was there for their biennial Foresight Conference, and the tenth anniversary of the remarkable Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF), in the Singapore Prime Minister's Office, who have been friends of CSER and CFI for several years. The person to whom I seem to be mansplaining Singapore is Liana Tang, Deputy Head of CSF. I'm actually pointing out a small Chinese hotel—remarkably still in existence—in which I stayed in 1976, on my way to Cambridge as a graduate student. For me, by tying together these two visits to Singapore, this picture ties together two landmarks in my long association with Cambridge Philosophy—two milestones, more than forty years apart, in one of the most fortunate journeys of my life.

Huw Price (Darwin 1977-81) joined the Faculty as Bertrand Russell Professor in October 2011, and retires from that role in September 2020. He continues in his role as the Director of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence.

The Enlightening of Maria von Herbert, Klagenfurt, 1770–1803

Rae Langton

Image used with the kind permission of Bernhard Ritter.



Maria von Herbert

On 21 January 2020 I was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, partly in recognition of my work on the life and letters of Maria von Herbert, a young woman who lived in Klagenfurt from 1770-1803, and corresponded with Immanuel Kant. I was amazed to receive this honour, but delighted to share in the renewed attention to this little-known philosopher from Klagenfurt's history, and to meet philosophers and scholars now at Klagenfurt, including Ursula Renz, Oliver Vitouch, and Bernhard Ritter, who has significant new findings on Maria and her enlightenment circle.

Immanuel Kant said that enlightenment, *Aufklärung*, or *enlightening*, is about growing up, and thinking for ourselves ('What is Enlightenment?' 1784). It is the emergence of human beings from self-imposed infancy or immaturity, the inability to use our own understanding without guidance. This is self-imposed when it is lazy or cowardly, hence the Enlightenment motto, *sapere aude*, 'dare to know!' But it can be imposed by others, who make independence 'seem hard and dangerous to most people', indeed 'the entire fair sex', said Kant: we are made into stupid cattle, prevented from taking a single step without leading-strings, and shown dangers that would threaten, if we should try to walk by ourselves.

Kant's remark about 'the entire fair sex' was not quite right. Sadly, he missed the brilliance and independent judgement of Maria von Herbert, who, in 1791, wrote him an impassioned letter from her small outpost of the enlightenment:

*"Great Kant,
As a believer calls to his God, I call to you for help, for comfort, or for counsel to prepare me for death. Your writings prove that there is a future life. But as for this life, I have found nothing, nothing at all that could replace the good I have lost, for I loved someone who, in my eyes, encompassed within himself all that is worthwhile, so that I lived only for him, everything else was in comparison just rubbish, cheap trinkets. Well, I have offended this person, because of a long drawn out lie, which I have now disclosed to him, though there was nothing unfavourable to my character in it, I had no vice in my*

life that needed hiding. The lie was enough though, and his love vanished. As an honourable man, he doesn't refuse me friendship. But that inner feeling that once, unbidden, led us to each other, is no more—oh my heart splinters into a thousand pieces! If I hadn't read so much of your work I would certainly have put an end to my life. But the conclusion I had to draw from your theory stops me—it is wrong for me to die because my life is tormented, instead I'm supposed to live because of my being. Now put yourself in my place, and either damn me or comfort me. I've read the metaphysic of morals, and the categorical imperative, and it doesn't help a bit. My reason abandons me just when I need it. Answer me, I implore you—or you won't be acting in accordance with your own imperative."

Maria was asking for advice, which Kant noticed, and he kindly wrote back to her with a 'sermon' about lies and friendship. Maria was also thinking for herself, which Kant did not notice. In this and subsequent letters, we find a critique of Kant's philosophy bursting with insight, and an audacity that makes you laugh out loud. She writes of honesty, deceit, suicide, and the limits of Kantian ethics. She has read Kant's work, 'and it doesn't help a bit'. She finds a life lived by Kantian ethics to be an 'empty and vegetating' life. Kant did not notice this either. And when Kant was told of the scandal behind her 'lie', he did not make up his own mind. It seems she had failed to tell her 'friend' about a previous lover. So Kant gave up on Maria, describing her to others as a *kleine Schwärmerin*, an ecstatic little dreamer, whose letters had value, not as philosophy, but as a 'warning of the perils' of sexual love. He sent her letters, thus advertised, to another young woman, since that after all is what young women need—warning and protection, not philosophy. He told the recipient to ignore the philosophy in the letters: Maria, he said, had 'a curious mental derangement', and 'a number of expressions refer to writings of mine that she read, and are difficult to understand without an interpreter'. Kant did his small part to prevent the enlightenment fully reaching Maria, and to deny himself, and others, the opportunity of learning from her own share of that light. He did not censor her, but he silenced her, and disempowered her. This teaches us something about freedom, and silence, and its conditions. Maria's story is remarkable, and ultimately tragic. I can't tell it here, but I will say that when I discovered her letters, I was bowled over, and they drew me into moral philosophy.

Klagenfurt is still a centre or outpost of the Enlightenment, I found. The University 'stands in the great European tradition of the Enlightenment', according to their unabashed mission statement. Klagenfurt has taken a leading role in the building of 'Universities for Enlightenment', a band of Central European universities who have joined together to promote their shared commitments, and combat new and different threats. They issued 'The Vienna Statement' in December 2018, a stinging condemnation of the Hungarian government's attack on the Central European University. As many readers will know, the CEU has been effectively closed down and evicted, forced to move from Budapest, though it is finding a new camp in Vienna. Many readers will know that Philosophy at CEU has strong associations with Cambridge. Gabòr Betegh has come from CEU to be Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy. Katalin Farkas, who has served as Provost and Pro-Rector of CEU, was recently a



Professor Rae Langton with Professor Dr. Oliver Vitouch, Rector, at the award ceremony

research visitor in the Faculty and at Newnham College. Tim Crane, my predecessor as Knightbridge Professor, now leads the CEU Philosophy Department.

This brings us to larger questions about the role of a University, and what, if anything, 'enlightenment' could possibly mean for us now. Is a University a 'post-truth' institution? Should we raise our hands in the air? Should we foster sophisticated scepticism? Let us hope we can do better than that. Now, more than ever, we face challenges that call on us, with new urgency, to

remember our shared commitments, that span far across times, and far across borders.

*Note. The quoted letter is slightly abridged. Parts of this article draw on Rae Langton's Hulsean Sermon, given at Great St. Mary's on 23 February (coincidentally the first Hulsean Sermon after Brexit, and the last before the coronavirus outbreak). For more on Maria von Herbert's letters and story see 'Duty and Desolation' *Philosophy* 67 available at <https://cambridge.academia.edu/RaeLangton>.*

Philosophy and the Cambridge-LMU Partnership

Cambridge and the Ludwig Maximilian University launched a major Strategic Partnership in 2019, building on strong prior collaborations. 'No single institution can provide, on its own, the answers to the great challenges of these turbulent times,' said our Vice-Chancellor, Stephen Toope, announcing the initiative. 'Collaboration and openness to the world are essential to achieving our academic and civic missions. Our partnership with LMU, one of Europe's finest universities, creates exciting opportunities to work together to address tough issues and provide our students with a richer education.' Such partnerships have special significance in a post-Brexit landscape, underlining and strengthening our teaching and research relationships with our peer institutions.

The Philosophy Faculty welcomed this venture with open arms, proposing four projects, all of which won support. Richard Holton (with Nora Heinzelmann, LMU) proposed the Cambridge-LMU

Moral Psychology Group, investigating such topics as empathy, addiction, and self-control, with participants from Philosophy (Rae Langton, Paulina Sliwa), Psychology, Psychiatry, and Neuroscience. We are about to join forces with Classics, led by Gabòr Betegh (with Christof Rapp at LMU), looking next at the moral psychology of persuasion. Huw Price (with Stephan Hartmann, LMU) proposed a project on 'Decision Theory and the Future of Artificial Intelligence', drawing together researchers from CFI and LMU. Angela Breitenbach (with Axel Hutter, LMU) proposed a network that brings together Kant and Philosophy of Science, with a focus on originality and creativity in the sciences. And Jeremy Butterfield (with Erik Curiel, LMU) proposed a project in philosophy of physics, which is going to solve 'Foundational Problems in Black Hole Thermodynamics and Semi-Classical Gravity'. We look forward to the next chapters of these collaborations.

Perceptual Confidence Workshop

Jessie Munton

Is your perceptual experience of the world all or nothing, or does it come in degrees? It's (fairly) uncontroversial that the beliefs we form on the basis of our perceptual experience can be more or less confident, but what about the perceptual experience itself? How much *uncertainty* is there in it? What form does that uncertainty take?

These were some of the questions explored at a workshop held at St John's College, Cambridge from the 5 to 7 August 2019, that brought together philosophers and neuroscientists from nine different universities to try to make some headway on the nature of our perceptual experience. In the past, John Morrison (Barnard College, Columbia University) and I have separately argued in favour of the view that perceptual experience itself can present its content with more or less *confidence*, whilst most other parties had written critically of that view.

The workshop kicked off with a talk from John Morrison, presenting some new work arguing in support of perceptual confidence on the basis of neuroscientific evidence. His talk was followed by two talks from neuroscientists. Chris Fetsch, from John Hopkins University, presented a range of relevant experimental work, whilst Rachel Denison from NYU delved more deeply into the relationship between theoretical models of visual perception and our visual phenomenology: can we read off what our visual experience is like from our theoretical models of how it is generated? 'Probably not' was her cautious conclusion. We then took a turn up the tower of St John's chapel to admire the view: Ely Cathedral was just visible in the distance, its spire and the distant fields presented with a lower degree of perceptual confidence than the clearly visible roofs of the nearby colleges.

Refuelled by dinner at the Punter, (funded by York University), we reconvened the next day for two talks that explored the different kinds of indeterminacy and uncertainty we find in perceptual experience, from Jonna Vance (Northern Arizona University), and from Steven Gross (Johns Hopkins). In the last talk of the day, Susanna Siegel struck a more critical note, putting pressure on the claim that the view is well motivated

from within perceptual epistemology in particular. Li Li Tan (Cambridge) and Tom McClelland (also Cambridge) then led a round-table discussion to round out the day. The final day of talks continued to focus on perceptual epistemology, with Jake Beck (York University, Toronto) and Alex Byrne (MIT) offering some incisive criticisms, before I decisively refuted them all in a final talk arguing in favour of perceptual confidence. E. J. Green (MIT) then led a final roundtable, bringing together some of the different strands of discussion and critique that had arisen over the previous three days. Some of the participants then tried their hand at punting, with varying degrees of success. A final dinner at Stem and Glory was funded by Barnard College. The conference was a family-friendly affair, with some participants and attendees bringing children and partners, including to some of the sessions and the evening dinners. We were very grateful to St John's College, who provided us with a beautiful setting, and further financial support. One lasting regret is that one of our scheduled speakers, Anya Farennikova (CUNY), was unable to come due to difficulties securing a visa.

I'd love to be able to say that the participants felt they had made tangible progress on the issue or reached any kind of greater consensus, but I'm restricted here by the general

agreement that there is some kind of truth norm of assertion. For the most part, everyone ended the workshop more certain of their existing views than they had been before. One point of agreement that did emerge was the difficulty of deciding questions concerning the nature of perceptual phenomenology: empirical work on its own, without a theoretical framework within which to interpret it, isn't able to offer a clear answer, and simple reflection on our own perceptual phenomenology is also surprisingly inconclusive. That's an odd feature of the discussion: questions that bear on the nature of your perceptual experience ought to be *easy* to settle: just a bit of introspection should be all that's needed to find out if your perceptual experience comes in degrees! But even after days of careful discussion and reflection, deep disagreements remained between the participants. But perhaps you can help us, dear reader! As you hold this page further towards the periphery of your visual field, what changes occur in your visual experience? What kind of theoretical framework do you think we need in order to capture that?

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PHILOSOPHY SMACKDOWN
DOUGLAS EDWARDS
May 2020 / PB 978-1-5095-3766-2 / £12.99
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