

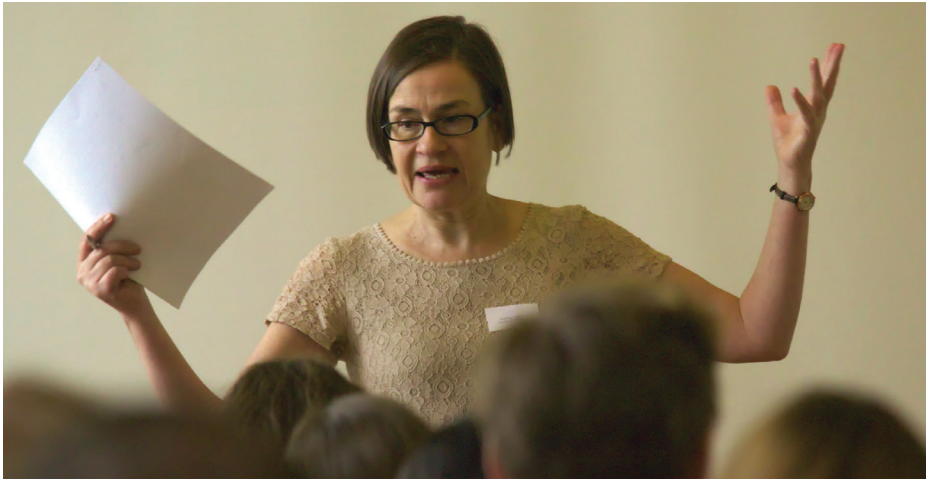


Philosophy at Cambridge

Newsletter of the Faculty of Philosophy

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Rae Langton giving a talk at the first Cambridge Sixth Form Philosophy conference.

Photo: S. Siriwardena

New Directions in the Philosophy of Mind

The philosophy of mind in the last few decades has been preoccupied with the question of physicalism: whether the mind is physical or material. But although many philosophers seem to accept some form of physicalism, there is little consensus on exactly which form of the view is true, on why it is true, and even on what it means for something to be physical.

Now with the assistance of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, whose aim is to support research on the 'Big Questions', Professor Tim Crane will be leading a major research initiative to investigate non-physicalist and non-reductionist views of the mind.

The project will be based in Cambridge from July 2015 to July 2017, and an international group of young philosophers of mind will join Professor Crane as the project's researchers: Craig French, currently a research fellow at Trinity Hall, Alex Grzankowski from Texas, Raamy Majeed from Sydney and Chris Meyns from UCL. The group will meet for a weekly seminar which will run for two whole academic years. There will be two invitations to submit research proposals, inviting philosophers, psychologists and neuroscientists from anywhere in the world to apply for smaller grants from the Cambridge New Directions Project, to support research activities related to the project's themes. The project will conclude with a major international and interdisciplinary conference in 2017, provisionally entitled 'The Human Mind Conference'. Watch future newsletters for more details as the project develops!

From the Chair

Richard Holton

Greetings from a new Chair, though a temporary one. Tim Crane has had a well-earned sabbatical this year, but the interregnum is brief. He will be back in position next year, whilst also directing a large Templeton project, 'New Directions in the Philosophy of Mind'. Huw Price has major Templeton funding as well for the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk. Together these two projects will bring in a number of new post-docs and lecturers. Add to this other new appointments, to replace staff who have secured research leave, and an unprecedented influx of Junior Research Fellows (seven at the last count), and the Faculty will be buzzing next year.

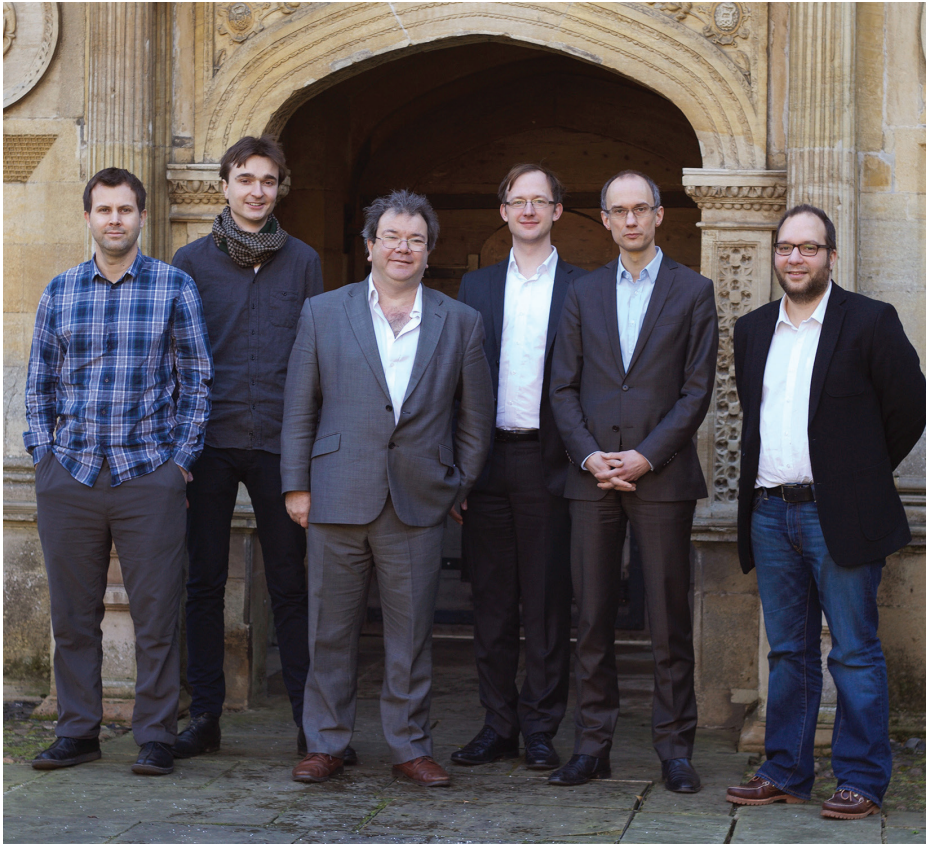
Before that though, we have a busy summer with many visitors. Heading the list, Judith Jarvis Thomson will be in Cambridge in May, not just to give the Routledge lecture, but also to receive an honorary doctorate. She will join the august company of W. V. O. Quine, Jurgen Habermas, Bernard Williams, Mary Hesse, and – more controversially! – Jacques Derrida. There has been no controversy

surrounding Thomson's degree. She is one of Cambridge's most distinguished philosophy graduates, having been at Newnham in the early 1950s, supervised by John Wisdom. Her last visit in 2013 was a tremendous success. The first-year undergraduates in one of their first ethics lectures were amazed to find themselves being addressed by Thomson, of trolley problem fame, in characteristically combative mood.

We saw a number of potential new undergraduates at our first sixth-form philosophy conference in March. One hundred very enthusiastic sixth-formers arrived to hear talks on free speech, free will and partial belief. Over lunch, their teachers attended a session to discuss what the Faculty can do to help with sixth-form philosophy teaching: web resources and seminars for teachers are in the works. Philosophy applications have not seen the decline that has hit many humanities subjects, but we should do what we can to ensure that the next generation realize the appeal of studying philosophy at Cambridge.

“Trust me, I’m a banker”

Fred Lewsey on a major project on trust in banks



The 'Trusting Banks' project team: L-R: Chris Thompson, Jens van't Klooster, Alex Oliver, Marco Meyer, Boudewijn de Bruin and Anthony Booth.

Photo: Craig French

“I’ll pay you, you know, 50,000 dollars, 100,000 dollars... whatever you want... I’m a man of my word.”

A UBS investment banker and ‘man of his word’ is caught trying to bribe a broker. Taken from an incriminating email uncovered after the Libor-fixing scandal – when traders illegally manipulated London interest rates – the sentence illustrates a climate that has a global sector reeling.

Even before news of the scandal broke, PR giant Edelman’s annual Trust Barometer was reporting that public trust in banks had fallen off a cliff, concluding that banking is the “most distrusted global industry.”

People need money. Once they have it, they need to know it’s safe. So people need to trust banks, and banks need people to trust them. If that trust ebbs, the system becomes dangerously unstable. For two philosophers, the current lack of trust sits like a time bomb at the heart of global capitalism.

“One should start by distinguishing trust from trustworthiness. Trust isn’t

always valuable, since it may be badly placed. It would be foolish and foolhardy to trust banks when they don’t merit it. Trustworthiness comes first,” said Alex Oliver, Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge. With Professor Boudewijn de Bruin Professor of Financial Ethics at the University of Groningen, he is co-leading a €1 million, five-year project on Trusting Banks, funded by the Dutch Research Council.

The mid-1980s deregulations were based on the idea that banks have a strong, self-interested reason to behave scrupulously. If they do not, so the reasoning goes, they will be found out, their reputations will suffer and trust will be lost, leading to competitive disadvantage. But this market-based deterrent mechanism has comprehensively failed: witness Bernie Madoff’s Ponzi investment scheme – described as the largest financial fraud in US history – the manipulation of markets, money laundering, mis-selling of payment protection insurance and interest rate swaps, flawed credit ratings and the subprime mortgage crisis. Where will it end?

As those at the top of the sector continue to walk away from financial meltdown with personal fortunes intact, public anger at perceived injustice has mounted. Whether or not banks and their staff deserve this reputation, in the post-crash economic winter there are few, if any, professions and institutions as universally reviled.

For Oliver and De Bruin, this poses a very serious problem. If citizens and businesses distrust banks, they say, a chilling effect will spread as economies slow, unemployment rises and companies and countries go bust. It’s already happening.

“If you talk to bankers, many will blame the public for not trusting them, either for a lack of financial understanding, or for an unwarranted cynicism encouraged by hostile portrayals in the media,” said De Bruin, “but this is a defensive ‘blame the consumer’ strategy – a form of denial. The decline in public trust tracks a decline in trustworthiness of the financial sector. Trustworthiness needs to be restored first. Trust will follow.”

In developing a theory of trustworthiness for banks, Oliver and De Bruin will navigate the various conflicting interests inherent in financial relationships – between depositors and borrowers, between bankers and shareholders, and so on – and will chart the complex kinds of interactions needed for successful and trustworthy financial services. To be trustworthy, one must be both able and willing to perform the relevant actions. That is why the research will address key questions of competence and motivation, both of individuals and of organisations.

As well as drawing on the expertise of colleagues in their departments, Oliver and De Bruin are working with a team of postdoctoral researchers and PhD students. The first to join was Dr Tom Simpson, who wrote his Cambridge PhD thesis on trust on the internet. He soon progressed to Oxford’s Blavatnik School of Government, where he is now Associate Professor of Philosophy and Public Policy.

The current post-docs are Dr Anthony Booth, who works at Sussex University and has published widely on epistemology and the ethics of belief, and Dr Chris Thompson, who brings to his research in political philosophy several years experience in policy roles for the UK and New Zealand governments. The two PhD students are

both trained in philosophy and economics. Marco Meyer came to Cambridge via Bayreuth and Oxford, while Jens van't Klooster has degrees from Amsterdam and Berlin.

Using initial results, they designed a 'Philosophy in Business' course for the MBA programmes at Cambridge's Judge Business School, and they have run tailor-made workshops with bankers, from trainees through to boards.

Banks are massively diverse corporate agents. Fine-grained distinctions can be made between retail and investment banking, for example, which are easily conflated in the public mind. Not everyone who works for a bank is a 'bankster' driven by a 'greed is good' mentality, just as not every university staff member is an ivory tower academic.

"Many bank branch employees are trying to serve communities, and are deeply disturbed by 'bad apple' bankers. But their customers tend to tar them with the same broad brush. It's a good question why rogue doctors don't have the same effect. Doctors always top the trust polls, while bankers are now in the gutter with tabloid journalists and politicians," said Oliver.

Virtues, and how an organisation can embody them, are a cornerstone of the project. Connecting with cutting-edge research on corporate entities and corporate decision-making in philosophy and social science, the project will examine how institutional structures can foster the virtues needed for trustworthiness, such as intellectual honesty and humility, open-mindedness, curiosity and truthfulness.

"The solution can sometimes be as simple as putting the right people in the right place, but typically it is not that simple," said De Bruin, "Organisational change may well be needed, such as rotational policies, in which employees are shifted around to maintain objectivity in their client relationships."

Oliver and De Bruin are keen to emphasise that their work is not a simple one-way transfer of knowledge from academia to the 'real world'. 'Philosophers and economists have increased our understanding of 'virtue management', but there are still many open questions. Answering them requires collaboration not only with other disciplines, but also with the banking world itself. Sharing ideas with bankers often leads to reciprocal illumination, which benefits all parties."

One of the project's outcomes will be a 'financial citizenship' initiative. Rather than try to teach people about complex financial products, this will focus on empowering citizens through identifying virtues that help them cope with conflicting financial information. A web-based interactive module will enable prospective clients to test whether they are critical and sober-minded enough to see through the marketing tricks used to sell financial products.

"Where it once stood for cautious financial advice and a firm handshake, the word 'banker' has become slang for a 'greed merchant' who gambles other people's money in rigged games so they alone get rich," said Oliver. "Trust me, I'm a banker!' is now a well-worn joke. We want to investigate how it can be made good advice."

A version of this article first appeared in *Research Horizons Issue 25 (2014)* and is available online at:

www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/trust-me-im-a-banker.

Philosophy from Oxford



Biological Foundations of Bioethics
Tim Lewens
Much recent work on the ethics of new biomedical technologies is committed to hidden, contestable views about the nature of biological reality. This selection of essays by Tim Lewens explores and scrutinises these biological foundations, and includes work on human enhancement, synthetic biology, and justice in healthcare decision-making.
240 pages | January 2015 | Hardback | 978-0-19-871265-7 | £30.00



Tetralogue
I'm Right You're Wrong
Timothy Williamson
Four people with radically different views meet on a train and talk about what they believe. Each starts off convinced that he or she is right; then doubts creep in. Timothy Williamson uses a fictional conversation to explore the philosophical debate over whether one point of view can be right and the other wrong. He invites the reader to decide.
160 pages | February 2015 | Hardback | 978-0-19-872888-7 | £10.99



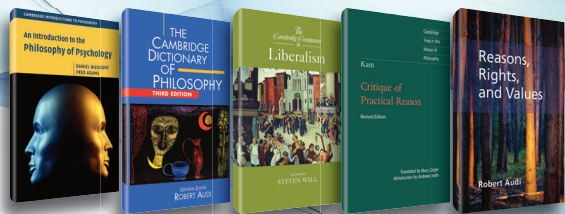
The Limits of Realism
Tim Button
Tim Button explores the relationship between minds, words, and world. He argues that the two main strands of scepticism are deeply related and can be overcome, but that there is a limit to how much we can show. We must position ourselves somewhere between internal realism and external realism, and we cannot hope to say exactly where.
280 pages | June 2015 | New in Paperback | 978-0-19-874412-2 | £19.99

The Robust Demands of the Good
Ethics with Attachment Virtue and Respect
Phillip Pettit
Phillip Pettit offers a new insight into moral psychology. He shows that attachments such as love, and certain virtues such as honesty, require their characteristic behaviours not only as things actually are, but also in cases where things are different from how they actually are. He explores the implications of this idea for key moral issues.
304 pages | May 2015 | Hardback | 978-0-19-873260-0 | £25.00

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Religious Belief

Arif Ahmed



Christ Rises Triumphant by Fr Lawrence Lew CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

www.flickr.com/photos/paullew

In early 2014 Dr Daniel Weiss (Divinity Faculty) and I received a grant to run an Interdisciplinary Mellon Seminar on religious belief. The aim, at any rate my aim, was to learn from people of diverse religious and academic backgrounds just what role belief, for instance in divine revelation, miracles etc. plays in modern religion. You would have thought it was central: how could any Christian say with a straight face that the resurrection was a conjuring trick with bones, or any Muslim allow that Mohammed was deluded? And yet many sophisticated followers of religion think or say that religion centrally involves only 'practices' – what Wittgenstein called 'forms of life' – to which full-blown belief is incidental. But what *are* these practices? And what, to anyone who doesn't believe, could possibly be their point?

These enquiries led us to a range of classic and little-known works from anthropology, apologetics, history and philosophy. The discussions, which were always lively, often started out by attempting to isolate what

their writers had got right and what wrong; but frequently this was the occasion for members of the group to describe their own forms of religious life. So I learnt as much from the seminarians as from the texts. Although nothing altered my views concerning the value or truth of religion, I ended with a greater appreciation of the variety of attitudes to it that fall short of full-blown rejection.

In fact, the question we addressed in the first two seminars was not whether religious belief is necessary to religion, but what would justify such belief in the first place. This arose in the context of a famous exchange between W. K. Clifford and William James. In 'The Ethics of Belief', Clifford had argued that *the* proper determinant of belief is *evidence*: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

This principle can look tautological, and yet it certainly is true that many people evaluate not only the expression of a belief,

but also the holding of it, on grounds that have nothing to do with evidence. Consider the proposition that there is a causal connection between immigration and crime, or the proposition that one race is innately superior to another in some measurable respect. Many well-intentioned people find these thoughts distasteful and are for this reason reluctant to adopt them, or even to keep an open mind. But they are empirical propositions, and Clifford's principle applies here if anywhere: we should not deny them unless the evidence supports doing so. Therefore Clifford's principle cannot really be that obvious.

But what *is* obvious once we do appreciate it, is that it bites quite hard on religion. Most irreligious thinkers (most notably David Hume) and many religious ones (e.g. Kant, Kierkegaard and William James) agree that the evidence does not support any religious belief – at least, none that have anything like the content of those associated with the major religions.

Hume argues most persuasively in this direction in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and in the last two chapters of the first *Enquiry*, chapter X of which is the famous essay on miracles. He argues that the testimony that constitutes our evidence of, say, the resurrection of Jesus was most probably misleading. For it must be agreed on all hands that resurrections are at best vanishingly rare.

And it must similarly be agreed that deceitful or deluded testimony, particularly on matters of religion, is widespread – after all, Christians must agree that over 99% of world religions are founded by what C. S. Lewis called ‘lunatics or liars’. Therefore, we should be much more confident that the Gospel testimonies to miracles are false than that they are true. Clifford’s principle then tells us that we should all drop – if we ever held – the distinctive beliefs of the Christian religion, and similar points hold against all others. (Clifford himself applies an interesting variant on Hume’s argument against Mohammed’s testimony that he met an angel.)

This raises two questions: first, is evidence really necessary for religious belief? And second, is religious belief really necessary for religion? The first question brings us to William James, who argues in ‘The Will to Believe’ that on religious questions we *should* go beyond the evidence. Whether to believe or not is in James’s term a decision that is both forced and momentous, meaning that you must do one or the other, and it matters which. James now addresses Clifford: “If religion be true and the evidence for it still insufficient, I do not wish... to forfeit my sole chance in life of getting upon the winning side.” You might wonder why this doesn’t equally support *any* religion, and so strongly supports none. James might reply that Zoroastrianism, the Roman and Hellenic cults, Branch Dravidianism and the rest are for us *dead* options – that is, not really available for us to believe in the first place. Clifford responds that what killed them is what should kill modern Christianity and Islam too; and on the whole, despite James’s grave chiding, the proverbial schoolboy got things more right when he said “Faith is when you believe something that you know ain’t true.”

The second question was whether religious belief itself was necessary for any practice recognizable as religion. I was surprised to meet people who professed to be Christian but didn’t believe in the miraculous events surrounding the birth, life and death of Jesus. Some of the texts we examined helped to give an independent fix on whether this approach was historically or geographically widespread and whether it had philosophical support.

Amongst the historical texts that we considered were discussions of ‘belief’, or rather expressions that are now so rendered in medieval sources. Here it became apparent that ‘belief in God’ meant more than mere intellectual assent to an existential proposition. Instead it signified an emotional engagement that was manifest in all aspects of medieval life.

In a way that is hardly surprising: one would not after all have expected the Spanish Inquisition or the St Bartholomew’s day massacre from men whose religion was entirely dispassionate. But the lack of emphasis on intellectual assent seemed to me to illustrate not its *absence* from earlier forms of Christianity but rather its having been *taken for granted* in those earlier times, the entire Middle Ages having laboured under the great disadvantage of pre-dating the Enlightenment.

Anthropological work on the Nuer people of South Sudan has highlighted the difficulties involved in the cross-cultural transposition of the notion of belief; for the attitude *they* take to religion is not incontestably of the same type as what we call ‘belief’. There is verbal adherence to a creed; there is the transmission of tribal myths; there is a feeling of reverence: but there is no unitary ‘inner’ state. That at least was the claim of Rodney Needham’s famous work *Belief, Language and Experience*. Indeed, Needham sought to expunge the very notion of belief from ethnography and comparative epistemology, because the more closely we examine it “the harder it is to concede it any discrete character or any empirical value as an index to the inner life of men.” The seminar was divided over the plausibility of Needham’s very radical

critique of a category that has after all had enormous value in everyday life; also over quite what conclusions to draw from the disparity between his description of the Nuer and their descriptions of themselves, now handily available at nueronline.com.

The penultimate week covered a modern figure who figured largely in Needham’s work and in almost every other seminar: Wittgenstein. We read his conversations on religious belief alongside work by Kai Nielsen and D. Z. Philips. The broad outlines of Wittgenstein’s approach are well known. Religion functions as an autonomous ‘language game’ or ‘form of life’. Judging its claims by standards of empirical enquiry is a sort of category mistake, like criticizing tennis because it violates the rules of cricket. Therefore, religious discourse is not subject to external standards – either you go in for it or you don’t.

Nielsen objects that things must be more complicated because religious discourse uses words that occur elsewhere in our lives. And it presumably *must* be like that if religion is to comfort ordinary practitioners in the ways that they seek. Unless ‘the life of the world to come’ really *means* the life of the world to come in the ordinary sense of those words, how could the promise of it reconcile anyone to death? But these grounds for thinking Wittgenstein wrong are grounds for wishing he were right: if religion *had* been the world-historical game of *Mornington Crescent* that he seems to envisage, it would have done a lot less harm, as well as a lot less good, than it actually has.

Arif Ahmed is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty.

Joint sessions in Cambridge

In July 2014, Cambridge hosted the largest annual philosophy gatherings in the UK academic calendar: the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association; and the annual conferences for the British Society for the Philosophy of Science, and the British Society for Ethical Theory.

Over 400 philosophers from across the world converged on Fitzwilliam College for seven days of conferences, during which more than 200 talks took place, on topics ranging from *truth and meaning* to *moral testimony*, from *Kant and the paradox of knowability* to *reasons of love*. For the first time, the inaugural addresses were recorded and are available here: <http://sms.csx.cam.ac.uk/collection/1780470>

Open access to Wittgenstein’s Nachlass

A project to produce a new high resolution facsimile of Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass* using the most up-to-date technology has been made possible through a partnership between the Wren Library at Trinity College, Cambridge, the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen and the Stanhill Foundation.

The *Nachlass* consists of hundreds of separate manuscripts, typescripts, notebooks and other written material, totalling some 20,000 pages. The new facsimile will give free online access to Wittgenstein’s work as he wrote it, and without editing or intermediation and will be of immense benefit to Wittgenstein scholars. It is available from: www.wittgensteinsource.org.

People

Staff news

Emeritus Professor **Onora O'Neill** was the winner of the Sir Isaiah Berlin Award for Lifetime Contribution to Political Studies. She also gave the 2014 Isaiah Berlin lecture at Oxford University.

Prof Alex Oliver was awarded a LittD for his work in logic and metaphysics.

Prof Rae Langton was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. She won the Mind Senior Research Fellowship for 2014/15, and will give the prestigious John Locke lectures at Oxford University this Summer. More information is available from: www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/lectures/john_locke_lectures.

Prof John Marenbon won a British Academy grant to promote ties between the Cambridge Faculty of Philosophy and the Philosophy Department at Peking University in China. It will involve exchange visits for philosophers to attend a workshop at both institutions during 2015.

Prof Huw Price and **Dr Seán Ó hÉigeartaigh** (Executive Director, CSER) have contributed a case study to a report of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Mark Walport on the risks of geoengineering: www.gov.uk/government/publications/innovation-managing-risk-not-avoiding-it

Dr Tim Button was awarded a £100,000 Philip Leverhulme Prize for outstanding scholarship. This will fund a 2-year research project, during which he will write a book on the way in which attitudes towards

the self have influenced English speaking philosophy, during the 20th century.

Dr Louise Hanson's paper 'The Reality of (Non-Aesthetic) Artistic Value' *Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (2013), available at: <http://philpapers.org/rec/HANTRO-14> was recently chosen by AFB as one of the top five papers in aesthetics to be published in 2013.

Dr Arif Ahmed took part in a special debate on "Does evidence undermine religion?" on BBC One's "The Big Questions" on 18 January 2015.

Dr Angela Breitenbach has been awarded the first CRASSH Pro Futura Scientia Fellowship, to be held at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, and the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study from 2015 to 2018.

Dr Paulina Sliwa was awarded an early career fellowship for Lent 2016 to work on a project about praise, blame, and intentional action.

Dr Clare Chambers and **Prof Rae Langton** participated in the first Cambridge WOW (Women of the World) Festival which celebrated the achievements of women and girls worldwide.

Dr Tom Dougherty (University of Sydney) was appointed to a University Lectureship.

Dr Michael Gabbay joined the Faculty as a Research Fellow, funded by the International Federation of Computational Logic.

Dr Will MacAskill was appointed as a Junior Research Fellow at Emmanuel College.

Appointments

We are delighted that a number of our recent graduates have been appointed to academic posts. **Owen Griffiths** has been appointed as a temporary Teaching Associate at Cambridge. **Chris Cowie** has a 3-year Junior Research Fellowship at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. **Sebastian Nye** has been appointed to a one-year Lecturer post at Keble College, Oxford. **Neal Carrier** has been appointed to teach Philosophy and Religious Studies at Hampton School, London.

Student Prizes

Luke Cash (St Edmund's) was awarded the Matthew Buncombe prize for best overall achievement in the MPhil. The Craig Taylor prize for best performance in the Tripos went to **Matthew van der Merwe** (Gonville and Caius) for Part IB, and **Michael Thorne** (Peterhouse) for Part II.

Future Events

Routledge Lecture in Philosophy
15 June 2015

Sidgwick Hall, Newnham College

Prof Judith Jarvis Thompson (MIT) will give the 9th Routledge Lecture entitled 'Partiality'.

Alumni Festival 2015
25 September 2015

Dr Hermann Hauser, Dr Lucy Cheke and **Dr Demis Hassabis** will have 'A Conversation on the Future of Intelligence' chaired by **Prof Huw Price**. Further details will be available from: www.alumni.cam.ac.uk.

Cambridge Festival of Ideas 2015
20 October–2 November 2015

The University of Cambridge and the Arts and Humanities Research Council present a debate on 'Religion and Education: an Uneasy Partnership'. This debate is a part of the AHRC Anniversary Debates on 'The Way We Live Now'. Please see the Festival website: www.cam.ac.uk/festival-of-ideas for further details.

Information about other forthcoming events is available from the Faculty website: www.phil.cam.ac.uk.



Tech Sgt. Jason Harlan (left) presenting Chris Cowie with a clock

Dr Chris Cowie gave a talk on why philosophy matters to the Philosophical Society at RAF Lakenheath – home of the US Air Force 48th Fighter Wing. The Society, founded by Tech Sgt. Jason Harlan aims to develop the critical thinking skills of its airmen to enable them to better themselves, both in their jobs and in their day-to-day lives. He commented that: "Philosophy is far from being a futile endeavor or something that has no real bearing on the world. It has real applicability in everyone's life".

Effective Altruism

William MacAskill

Philosophical ethics often focuses on the negative, on 'thou shalt not'. It focuses on issues like abortion, euthanasia, or killing in war, in an attempt to mark the demarcation between the permissible and the impermissible. More rarely does it focus on the positive aspects of living a good life: on how individuals can use their time and money to make the world a better place; on issues like how one should spend one's money, or which career one should choose. I think that's a mistake. Of the students I've had the privilege to speak with at Cambridge and other universities, the most pressing ethical question they have is often not "How can I avoid acting impermissibly?" but instead, "How can I leave the world a better place than I found it?"

The philosophical approach I've helped to develop is called *effective altruism*: the theory of how one can use one's time and money to do the most good. Through my research I've discovered that many well-intentioned social programs achieve very little, but the most effective give each of us an extraordinary ability to make a difference. I've written up the ideas behind effective altruism into a book called *Doing Good Better*, which will be published this August.

Sometimes my research has led me to unexpected conclusions. I've concluded, for example, that altruistic graduates can often do more good by working in a lucrative career and donating a large proportion of their earnings (an approach I call *earning to give*), than by working directly for a charity. By earning to give, a graduate can often pay for the salaries of *several* charity workers; moreover, they can ensure that their donations only fund the very most cost-effective charities. Given how greatly charities vary in their effectiveness, this is a big deal.

Effective altruism is a practical movement as well as a philosophical one. In 2009 with Oxford philosopher Toby Ord I cofounded Giving What We Can (givingwhatwecan.org), which encourages people to donate at least 10% of their earnings to the most cost-effective charities, and provides recommendations about which development charities do the most good with every pound or dollar they receive. In 2011, with philosophy and physics graduate Ben Todd, I cofounded 80,000 Hours (80000hours.org), which advises young people on how they can have the biggest social impact with their careers. (The name refers to the number of hours you'll typically work in life.) In the late 2000s, two hedge fund analysts quit their jobs to found GiveWell, based in San Francisco, which undertakes in-depth charity evaluation based on effective altruist principles, and advises the foundation Good Ventures.

We've seen a remarkable uptake in these ideas. Giving What We Can now has almost 1,000 members, raising \$14 million in donations for the most cost-effective charities, with a further \$380 million in lifetime pledges. 80,000 Hours has advised hundreds of people round the world who are now pursuing careers with the aim of maximizing their social impact, in areas as diverse as research, politics, finance and entrepreneurship. New effective altruism aligned organisations are being set up every year. And there is now a vibrant community, with people who identify with effective altruism supporting each other and helping each other be more successful in making the world a better place.

William MacAskill (Jesus 2008) is a Junior Research Fellow at Emmanuel College.

The 14 Students Giving Away £3 Million

Matthew van der Merwe

14 current and former Cambridge Philosophy students have signed the Giving What We Can pledge to donate 10% of their lifetime income to the charities they believe will do the most good. Conservatively, this amounts to an estimated £3 million in donations pledged by the Faculty's undergraduates. Giving What We Can encourages people to donate 10% of their income through their pledge, and performs research into which charities achieve the most good for a given donation.

Since 2011, Giving What We Can has had a presence in Cambridge. This has grown substantially, mirroring that of the organization as a whole. Remarkably, 80 students have so far signed the pledge. More remarkable still, is the fact that despite representing only 1 in 100 Cambridge undergraduates, philosophy students represent 1 in 6 Cambridge pledgers.

This is explained to some extent by social factors, since many of the early organizers of the Cambridge student group were philosophers. However, I think that further explanation lies in the fact that philosophy students are broadly more open to hearing new arguments, and more concerned with acting consistently with their beliefs than those in other subjects. Consequently, these students are both more likely to be persuaded by the arguments in favour of making this sort of commitment, and more likely to make it having decided it is the right thing to do.

This phenomenon should be a source of pride for Philosophy at Cambridge. For a discipline often criticized for its focus on problems far removed from the practical, it is producing an impressive number of young people intent on leading impactful lives.

GIVING
what we can

965 members in 17 countries

\$388 million pledged

\$7 million donated

85k amount that a typical person in the UK could donate in their lifetime

Richard Baron on Giving Back to Philosophy

Shyane Siriwardena



Richard Baron

Photo: S. Siriwardena

Richard Baron has a passion for philosophy. He is an independent researcher; he is a former teacher and a current public speaker on the subject. But more than this, he is also a patron of the discipline. He has donated to the Faculty in support of the Bertrand Russell Chair. And recently, he decided to leave a gift to the Faculty in the form of a legacy.

Richard's interests are many and varied. An accountant by training, he had a 30-year career in tax accountancy and policy, but now devotes his time to matters philosophical (and occasionally, poetical). He has written on mind, values, and epistemology. He has also taught in adult education on topics ranging from the *Nicomachean Ethics* to Gödel's incompleteness theorems.

It's certainly not your average career path. But Richard seems to delight in his philosophical activities. "I have a kind of fascination with problem solving— with puzzles," he professes, one that he's harboured for most of his life.

His first run-in with philosophy was at the tender age of twelve when he chanced upon Bertrand Russell's obituary in *The Times*. The article mentioned Russell's account of definite descriptions, and it was this most technical puzzle that piqued the young Richard's interest. "There was just some little light bulb that went on inside; I thought 'This matters.'"

Philosophical puzzles have a deep relevance to us, he explains. They help us to better understand ourselves. And while it's true that they are puzzles anyone can ponder, he feels it is important that they continue to be studied by the world-class academics at Cambridge. "These are puzzles that matter. Therefore it matters that we have steady input into solving them. And it matters that we have high quality input into solving them."

Richard's respect for and commitment to the integrity of the field is never far from the surface. Indeed it is even apparent in the way he recounts his undergraduate experience. As a student at Selwyn, he read philosophy and history. He recalls his time here with obvious fondness, and tells of the thrill that came with learning from those at the top of their field. Today, some 30 years later, his sense of excitement remains. He remarks: "This stuff [contemporary academic philosophy] is the real McCoy; it gives those of us working outside universities something to think about, and sets a standard which we jolly well ought to meet."

This commitment to preserving philosophy's place in universities is part and parcel of his sense of philosophy's importance more generally. Richard devotes much of his time to public speaking engagements. He describes

how rewarding it is to discuss philosophical matters with people from different academic and professional backgrounds. "The groups are comprised of intelligent people with a wide range of skills," he explains, "In the question and answer sessions, they can make you think quite hard."

But, even in light of such a level of dedication to philosophy, why support Cambridge philosophy by way of a *legacy* in particular? "Legacies have the great advantage that you're not going to need the money yourself," he jokes. He notes some of the tax-related practicalities – there is no inheritance tax on legacies, he explains.

But most important to him is the desire to preserve and support a discipline that he loves:

"Philosophy opened up new horizons for those of us who had the chance to study at Cambridge, and it influenced our way of looking at the world and society, in ways that we may or may not have noticed. It is worth doing our bit to make sure that the discipline does not merely survive, but flourishes, for the sake of current and future students."

Richard Baron (Selwyn 1977) is an independent researcher in philosophy. He has given a number of public lectures and seminars on philosophy, and is an organiser of Philosophy For All. His personal website is available at: www.rbphilo.com. Richard was interviewed by Shyane Siriwardena, a PhD student in the Faculty.

Your comments and contributions are always welcome. Please send them to the Editor at:

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