

Conceptions of Philosophy

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Anthony O'Hear

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Visions of Philosophy

DAVID E. COOPER

I

Characterizations of philosophy abound. It is ‘the queen of the sciences’, a grand and sweeping metaphysical endeavour; or, less regally, it is a sort of deep anthropology or ‘descriptive metaphysics’, uncovering the general presuppositions or conceptual schemes that lurk beneath our words and thoughts. A different set of images portray philosophy as a type of therapy, or as a spiritual exercise, a way of life to be followed, or even as a special branch of poetry or politics. Then there is a group of characterizations that include philosophy as linguistic analysis, as phenomenological description, as conceptual geography, or as genealogy in the sense proposed by Nietzsche and later taken up by Foucault.

These characterizations and images – together with any number of others – could, of course, be taxonomized in different ways. For instance, someone might want to gather together the images of philosophy as deep anthropology, therapy and phenomenological description on the ground that philosophy, so pictured, focuses exclusively upon the *human* – on the presuppositions of human thought and talk, on mental health, and on human experiences. But the way I gathered together the various characterizations and images into three groups reflects, I suggest, a fundamental divide in attitudes towards philosophy.

For those who favour the first group of characterizations – philosophy as grand metaphysics, descriptive metaphysics, or deep anthropology – philosophy is an essentially *theoretical, speculative* enterprise. (‘Speculative’, in the honourable eighteenth-century sense employed, for instance, by Kant.) Its orientation is necessarily and primarily towards Truth – truths about reality or, failing that, about the conceptual schemes we employ for capturing what we take reality to be.¹ For those whose image of philosophy is that of a

¹ Peter Strawson compared the ‘analysis’ engaged in by the ‘descriptive metaphysician’ with the enquiries of the theoretical linguist into the ‘deep structures’ of languages. See his *Analysis and Metaphysics: An Introduction to Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

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therapy, a spiritual exercise, edifying poetry or politics, philosophy is, in essence, a *practical, vital* enterprise. Its orientation is towards the Good, towards Life as it should be. The Good in question might be that of the soul, of the mind, of society, maybe of the world as a whole. For all the differences among them, it is this practical, vital orientation that gathers together Wittgenstein's image of philosophy as a cure for 'mental cramps'; the Buddhist's idea of philosophy as wisdom in the service of the overcoming of suffering; the Stoic sage's commitment to philosophy as an exercise aimed at peace of mind; Heidegger's philosophical 'poetry' that will attune us to Being and release us to live authentically; and Marx's embrace of philosophy as an engine of change, not interpretation.²

Finally, for those who characterize philosophy as linguistic analysis, conceptual geography, genealogy and the like, the enterprise is essentially defined in terms of its *method* or *style* of enquiry. Philosophy, so considered, has no intrinsic orientation of its own: rather, it can be placed in service to Truth or to the Good, or both. Linguistic analysis, for instance, might be thought of as, in the first instance, an 'under-labourer of the sciences', preparing the ground on which science will unearth its truths. Or it might be seen as, primarily, a method employed in philosophical therapy, a means towards that conceptual clarity that enables us to clear up the confusions that depress us and distort our lives. In Ancient China, a major preoccupation was 'The Rectification of Names', something deemed necessary both in order to align our thought with reality, but also for the proper conduct of government. Nietzschean genealogy, likewise, might be engaged in either for the truths it discovers about our concepts, or for the way that – the *pudenda origo* of our moral systems now exposed – we are released from loyalty to those systems and are free to create 'new tables of values'.

Precisely because characterizations of philosophy in terms of method or style assign to philosophy no orientation of its own, they strike me as being secondary. For they feed upon some prior vision of philosophy's aim and orientation. Maybe philosophy does have, or should have, its distinctive methods and styles of enquiry: but that will be because these are the methods and styles especially appropriate for an enterprise – philosophy – that is already understood in terms of a purpose or orientation.

² On Heideggerian 'poetry' and Marx's 'politics' as expressions of conceptions of philosophy, see Richard Rorty, 'Philosophy as science, as metaphor, and as politics', in his *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

And if that is so, then the basis divide is between the two visions of philosophy as, respectively, theory or speculation orientated towards Truth, and vital practice orientated towards the Good, towards Life.

II

I have spoken of ‘visions’ and ‘images’ of philosophy, and this, I think, is an appropriate vocabulary, especially when it is made to resonate with Wittgenstein’s remarks, at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*,³ that distinguish *pictures* and *ideas*. There, the distinction is applied to views about language, and Wittgenstein contrasts particular ideas about language – such as that the meaning of a word is the object it names – from a larger picture of language, as a system of names. But the distinction is clearly intended to apply more widely. Ideas, he tells us, are ‘rooted’ in pictures, which means that pictures are more basic – so basic, indeed, that they cannot be decisively refuted, since they help to determine what counts as refutation. A Wittgensteinian picture, as one commentator explains, is given up by people only when they have been *converted* and experienced a ‘reorientation of interests’.⁴

Talk of ‘conversion’ and ‘reorientation’ does not mean that nothing can sensibly be said for or against a picture, so as reasonably to invite or to resist conversion or a change of interest. Indeed, Wittgenstein’s own point – when invoking the notions of meaning as use, language games, and the forms of life in which these games are placed – seems to have been to convert his readers away from what he saw as a distorting vision of philosophical enquiry. The vision in question is one of the two great rival visions I identified earlier – the picture of philosophy as theory, as speculation, with its orientation towards Truth. I am sympathetic to Wittgenstein’s desire to convert away from this vision, and this is a sympathy I shall be trying to justify in this essay.

Some care, however, is needed in order to see what is really at issue between the rival visions. Champions of philosophy as theory or speculative science will usually concede, or rather boast, that philosophy’s achievements can be exploited for bettering the human condition. At the most general level, their point will be that things go better for us when we know what is true, for by acting on the basis of beliefs that match up with how things are we are less liable to

³ Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (London: Macmillan, 1969), §1.

⁴ Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 36ff.

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live in friction with the world. At the same time, proponents of the rival vision of philosophy as a practical, vital enterprise will readily concede that achievement of its practical purposes requires understanding – that philosophers, even if they see themselves as therapists or poets, need to be ‘in the truth’. Philosophical therapy, after all, is not like administering a drug, and philosophical poetry is not fantasy.

But these polite concessions do not entail that there is no genuine rivalry. For one thing, the concessions being made are liable to be accused by rivals of not going far enough. For example, there will be those – Fichte, perhaps, or William James – who accuse the champions of philosophy as theory or speculation of failing to recognize that the Truth towards which philosophy is allegedly orientated is, ultimately, inseparable from the Good. In philosophy, at least, the true is what it is good to believe.

Aside from accusations of this kind, and the counter-accusations they are liable to invite, there is surely a genuine rivalry, between the two visions, over the *essence* or *soul*, as it were, of philosophy. Is philosophy essentially Truth-orientated and only accidentally, if at all, a contribution to the Good? Or is it, conversely, an essentially practical endeavour, with whatever concern it needs to have for Truth subordinated to, and shaped by, its pursuit of the Good? Later on, I shall revise this way of putting things. But locating the issue in this way is, I hope, sufficient to allow me to proceed to the business of conveying my sympathy for the practical vision – of defending a conversion away from the vision of philosophy as theory and a reorientation of interests in the direction of the Good. My claim is that the practical vision is more faithful to the origins and continuing impetus of philosophy. So I begin with some remarks on the infidelity of the rival vision to these origins and impetus.

III

Richard Rorty (see note 2) uses the name ‘scientism’ for the vision of philosophy as theory or speculative science. This is liable to mislead, for ‘scientism’ is more familiarly applied to a particular, modern version of that wider vision. I am thinking, for example, of the version articulated by W.V.O. Quine, when he writes that ‘philosophy is continuous with [natural] science’, and differs from the individual natural sciences only in the breadth of the claims it makes. Since ‘whatever can be known can be known by means of science’,⁵ the

⁵ ‘Philosophical progress in language theory’, *Metaphilosophy* 1, 1970, 1.

continuity of philosophy with natural science is just as well. Here we have a good example of a particular ‘idea’ rooted in the larger ‘picture’ of philosophy as theory.

Rorty’s paradigmatic example of an advocate of ‘scientism’ is a philosopher who is certainly no Quinean – Edmund Husserl. This is because, Rorty tells us, for Husserl philosophy is founded on the conviction that it can emulate and indeed surpass the natural sciences in establishing genuinely ‘*universal knowledge*’. And that is a pretty good way of characterizing the vision of philosophy as theory or speculative science. In this vision, philosophy is essentially driven by the desire to know, and therefore owes its origins and development to, above all, the challenge of *scepticism*.

Why might this vision be less than compelling? To begin with, it will only be as compelling as the picture it assumes of the special sciences, such as physics, as repositories of objective knowledge of reality. Philosophy, after all, deserves the labels of ‘theory’, ‘speculative science’, and ‘a quest for universal knowledge’ because it is reckoned to emulate and surpass the special sciences. Now ironically, it was Husserl – following the lead of Nietzsche and Bergson, and in turn followed by his student, Heidegger – who helped to render suspect the image, the self-image indeed, of the sciences as mirrors of nature, unclouded or uncontaminated by ‘all-too-human’ interests, perspectives, prejudices and purposes. If, in the light of the powerful criticisms advanced by these philosophers, this (self) image of the sciences has lost its power to compel, then the comparison of philosophy with the sciences – the invitation to see philosophy as the viable pursuit of ‘universal knowledge’ – will have back-fired. Like the sciences themselves, philosophy will have been rendered a particular perspective on the world, a particular way of organizing or regimenting human experience. This is not, in itself, to deprecate the philosophical endeavour, but it is to surrender the vision of philosophy as essentially orientated towards Truth.

Another reason for finding the vision unconvincing concerns the assumption that philosophy must be primarily a response to the challenge of scepticism. Here, too, there is a danger of the strategy back-firing. For, even if this assumption is true – which is hardly evident – it is not clear that it helps to secure the vision of philosophy as ‘universal knowledge’. And this is because, historically, sceptical challenges were intended more often than not, less as invitations or demands to people that they secure their shaky claims to knowledge, than as challenges to ways of living, to misguided pursuits of the Good. Consider, for example, Pyrrhonism, in both its Hellenistic and early modern forms. The last thing that was wanted by Pyrrho

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and his heirs, like Montaigne, was to goad people into trying to establish their claims to knowledge. On the contrary, their point was to *deter* people from wasting time and energy on a febrile, frustrating and futile search for certainty. A similar observation applies to scepticism in the context of Indian thought. In defending the *pramanas* ('means to knowledge') against critics, the philosophers of the Nyāya ('Logic') school were not primarily concerned to establish the possibility of certainty, but to defend the exercise of certain capacities – such as perception and testimony – deemed to contribute to 'felicity' and 'release from the wheel of life'. And what some of those sceptical critics, like the Buddhist thinker Nāgārjuna, were interested in arguing was not that we do not really know what we claim to know, but that we should reject the whole conceptual scheme within which calls for evidence, and distinctions between the veridical and the illusory, assume excessive importance. And that is because it is a scheme which puts human beings 'out of joint' with 'the harmonious whole' of the universe.⁶

There is something further that makes questionable the thought that, even if philosophy has often been a response to a sceptical challenge, it must therefore be pictured as, primarily, a theoretical exercise, as the attempt to establish 'universal knowledge'. Sceptical challenges only have the power to disturb if the kind of knowledge whose possibility is challenged is a kind that *matters* to people. Few people would devote a career to trying to secure beliefs that, as Descartes put it, 'no sane man has ever seriously doubted'. But, in that case, attention will shift to the question of why it is that philosophers attempt to secure the possibility of this or that kind of knowledge, of why it is that this kind matters. (For Descartes, it was the potential of scepticism to question the existence of God and the after-life which made confrontation with it an urgent issue, and that is because scepticism is thereby threatening 'the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life'.⁷) And it will then be tempting to characterize philosophy, not as a theoretical endeavour to establish 'universal knowledge', but in terms of vital goals that are too important to be left as matters of opinion or taste – in terms, therefore, of an orientation towards the Good.

⁶ See the selections from the Nyāya-Sutras and Nāgārjuna in David E. Cooper and Peter S. Fosb (eds.), *Philosophy: The Classic Readings*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

⁷ *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 98.

IV

If it is not *per se* worries about the possibility of knowledge to which philosophy should be seen as a response, what is it that gives to philosophy its impetus and continuing breath? In a couple of books, I have suggested answers that invoke, respectively, the notions of *alienation* and *answerability*.⁸ The answers gestured at by those terms are not, I think, at odds with one another: on the contrary, they complement one another. In this section, I shall rehearse those suggested answers, and in the following section indicate what seems to me to be some of their combined merits.

There is nothing original, of course, in the suggestion that philosophy owes its origin and subsequent development to human beings' sense of alienation from the rest of reality. For Hegel, famously, the history of philosophy just is the story of the struggle by Spirit – and by its main 'vehicles', human beings – to overcome alienation. Philosophy's work will be done only when Spirit recognizes that there is, after all, no 'out and out other' to itself. After millennia during which human consciousness has been dominated by alienating dichotomies like mind and nature, or freedom and necessity, philosophy will eventually succeed in enabling us to 'find ourselves in nature' once more and to appreciate that our freedom presupposes rational necessity.⁹

Hegel's story of philosophy is but one attempt – albeit a particularly stirring one – to construe our intellectual history as that of creatures trying to resolve the matter of their status in a universe most of which indeed can strike them as 'out and out other'. And there is no need to subscribe to Hegel's particular story in order to appreciate the element of truth in the wider vision. Once human beings emerged from what Hegel called their 'sunkeness in nature', it must indeed have struck many of them how radically different they seemed to be from just about everything that surrounded them. Only they, it seemed, possessed, *inter alia*, a moral sense, a capacity for freedom, a feeling for beauty, and a tendency to worry about their relationship to the wider world.

The central issue posed for philosophy – the issue which, on this picture, drives the whole enterprise – is how, without cavalier

⁸ *World Philosophies: An Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 2003; *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

⁹ See Hegel's *Encyclopedia of Logic*, §194, and *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §12 and §195.

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dismissal of the uniqueness of human beings, they can nevertheless be perceived, and perceive themselves, to be integrated with the rest of reality. How, without rendering them aliens, freaks or danglers – set against and apart from what is ‘out and out other’ to them – may all that is distinctive of human existence be understood?

One thing, surely, that would soon have taxed our ancestors as they emerged from their ‘sunkenness in nature’ – from their innocence, as it were – must have been the question of whether what they thought, felt and did *measured up* to or was properly *answerable* to anything beyond itself. To be sure, there is a sophisticated modern, or postmodern, conceit that, as Rorty puts it, the only fidelity we require is ‘obedience to our own conventions’.¹⁰ But that is a view – in so stark a form, at least – which few people entertained until recent times. It is a *late* view, and one which, arguably, no one really subscribes to even today. At any rate a case can be made for saying that such a conceit is *unliveable*. Whether or not that is so, it is surely true that, for a very long time, the search has been on for something to which our words, thoughts, feelings, purposes and deeds might be answerable – for what Kierkegaard called a *Maalestock*, a ‘measure’, a ‘qualitative criterion’.¹¹

The ‘measure’ intended here is one of our lives as a whole, and certainly not simply, or mainly, of the accuracy of our beliefs. While it may be impossible finally to isolate the components of belief, feeling, purpose and action in our lives, the initial focus in the search for measure is liable to be upon purpose and action. For the ‘metaphysical horror’, as Leszek Kolakowski calls it,¹² that impels the quest for something to which our lives our answerable is the dark thought that it just doesn’t matter what we do and aim at, that nothing we seek and achieve is worth more than anything else we might have sought or achieved had life gone differently.

The upshot of these reflections on philosophy as grounded in concerns with alienation and answerability is that philosophy is indeed orientated towards the Good. For if this vision is cogent then, to put the matter in a somewhat Daoist idiom, philosophy’s enterprise is the dual one of a search for a sense of our integration with the way of things and a quest to find, within the way of things, a measure of our lives. Differently expressed, it is the endeavour to

¹⁰ See the Preface to Rorty’s *Consequences of Pragmatism*, (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

¹¹ *The Sickness Unto Death*, in H. and E. Hong (eds.), *The Essential Kierkegaard*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 363.

¹² *Metaphysical Horror*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

overcome alienation and to become liberated from the 'horrible' thought that lives are answerable to nothing beyond themselves.

V

But how faithful is the vision articulated in the previous section to the genesis of philosophy and, more importantly, does it capture the continuing impetus of philosophy?

It speaks in favour of this vision, in my judgement, that it places the original enterprise of philosophy in close proximity to religion. The two are close since what philosophy endeavours to establish – the integration of human life with the rest of reality and a measure for the conduct of life – is promised by just about every religion to those men and women who adopt its dispensation. It is no accident, surely, that 'the axial age' in which the great religions emerged is the one in which philosophy is first pursued in a disciplined, critical form. Indeed, for many centuries, making a cut between works of religion and works of philosophy would have been an arbitrary procedure. Were the *Upanishads*, for instance, exercises in religion or in philosophy? A pointless question.

That philosophy emerged in the same climate of concerns as religion does not mean, of course, that every philosophy must be religiously committed. But it does suggest that the philosophies which belong to the main historical current of philosophy have shared the aspirations of religion – integration and measure – even when these aspirations have been pursued godlessly and naturalistically.

The best defence of the vision, however, is that it renders salient, and helps to ground, the discernible rhythms that run through and give form to what I just called 'the main historical current' of philosophy. One does not have to subscribe to a grand History of Philosophy, replete with Laws, Goals and Progress, in order to accept that a relatively small number of theses and antitheses – and the rhythm of their oscillation – gives structure and pattern to philosophy's history.

Fichte may not have been too far wrong when maintaining, at the start of his *Wissenschaftslehre*,¹³ that the only real dispute in philosophy has always been between *Idealism* and *Realism* (or *Dogmatism*, as he pejoratively called it). This is the dispute, in all its many shapes, between those schemes (like Fichte's own) which

¹³ *Science of Knowledge*, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), 9ff.

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would make the world more mind-like than we usually imagine it to be, and those which (like physicalism) would render the mind more world-like than we might imagine it to be.

It is hard, in my view, to understand the centrality of this dispute between Idealism and Realism – and the constant oscillation between them over the millennia – except as a conflict between two opposed strategies for addressing the issue of alienation. The world can be shown not to be ‘out and out other’, and hence alien, to human beings *either* by demonstrating that it is much more like us than we thought, *or* by proving that we are much more like it than we thought. To the first strategy belong the attempts, for example, to depict the world as purposive, or as ‘constituted’ by thought, or as a collection of divine ideas. To the second strategy belong the attempts to establish that, for example, we are purely material beings, or that human freedom and the moral sense are, if not illusions, then reducible to the same nature possessed by everything else that we live alongside. (Dualists, incidentally, do not stand outside the dialectic of alienation. For while they may try to be even-handed in recognizing the irreducible existence of both mind and matter, they are usually anxious to mitigate the alienating effect of the opposition they maintain. They will argue, for instance, that there is divinely established harmony between the two or, as in the case of some Indian schools, that an oppositional engagement with the material world is a precondition for an eventual purification and liberation of the mind.)

If Fichte exaggerates in judging philosophy to be no more than the prolonged battle between Idealism and Realism, this is because he ignores another, though not unrelated, struggle that has gone on for millennia. Here the pattern is one of recoils back and forth between three stances on the issue of whether there is a way reality is independently of how it is conceived of and described. According to one of these stances, which we might label ‘humanism’, there is no such way. The world is necessarily a ‘human world’, and no sense can finally attach to the idea that there is a way the world is that transcends our perspectives and ‘takes’ on it. As Sartre put it, it is only through human being that ‘it happens that *there is a world*’.¹⁴ According to the other two stances, there is a way reality absolutely is, irrespective of our ‘takes’ on it – but a crucial difference separates these two stances. For the first, absolute reality can, in principle at least, be conceptualized and articulated: we can, with enough

¹⁴ *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes, (London: Methuen, 1957), 552.

effort and luck, know what it is like. For the second, however, it cannot be conceptualized and articulated: reality must be an ineffable mystery to us. In honour of Kant, we might label these two stances 'dogmatic' and 'transcendental' absolutism respectively. The former is represented by all those metaphysical systems – from Spinozan monism to Logical Atomism, from Berkeleyan idealism to contemporary physicalism – which purport to tell us just how reality fundamentally is. The latter is represented by the many philosophies that invoke a notion – the Dao, Brahman, the Godhead, Being, or whatever – that is deemed to be radically mysterious and 'beyond' whatever can be articulated.

It is difficult, in my judgement, to understand why so many people have devoted so much time, energy and passion to defending or refuting the positions just adumbrated except by reference to a preoccupation with the 'vital' issue of answerability or measure. In relation to this issue, the position of the 'dogmatic' absolutist has its obvious appeal: not only is there a way that reality absolutely is, but we can know how it is and therefore hope to identify how our lives must go if they are properly to accord with fundamental features of reality – with, say, the divine will or with Nature's teleological ends. For both the 'humanist' and the 'transcendentalist', however, this is a pipe-dream, for it fails to appreciate that whatever we can conceptualize and articulate belongs, not to an absolute order, but to a perspectival world, one that is the way it is only in relation to human purposes and interests. For the 'transcendentalist', this cannot, however, mean abandoning the idea of absolute reality, for then our lives would be without anything to answer to beyond themselves. What has to be accepted, though, is that this reality is radically mysterious, and that while we can have intimations of the Dao, Being or whatever – intimations sufficient to provide some measure for our lives – this does not approximate to the crisp, theoretical, propositional knowledge aspired to by the 'dogmatist'.

For the 'humanists', meanwhile, measure and answerability must be, as it were, internal to human existence: for while they reject the appeal to mystery as much as the appeal to an absolute that may be articulated, they are usually unwilling entirely to give up on the quest for measure. The measure or 'criterion' of our beliefs, values and purposes, it might be suggested, is the strength and authenticity of the commitment we have to them. Or the proposal might be that we answer to all that there is to be answerable to when we adopt beliefs, values and purposes without the intrusion of comforting and self-serving illusions – of the kind, it will be added, to which absolutists are prone.

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So, to conclude this section, the history of philosophy – its rhythms, patterns of recoils, its alliances and disalliances – falls better into place when it is envisioned as the story of a long enterprise engaged in by human beings who struggle to resolve the ‘vital’ issues of alienation and answerability. The story manifests the endeavour to live well, to lead lives that are integrated with, and measure up to, the way of things. Thus envisioned, philosophy has been an essentially practical or vital undertaking, orientated towards the Good.

VI

In this final section, I want to consider a predictable objection to the vision I have been recommending. The objection is not, I think, fatal, and it provides a welcome opportunity to guard against a misconstrual of the position I have advanced.

A sympathetic critic might concede that philosophy is thoroughly implicated in the endeavour to live well and with a sense, therefore, of integration with a way of things to which human life is answerable. But this critic will insist that philosophy itself is best characterized as a particular *means* towards the success of this endeavour – a specifically theoretical, speculative, ‘scientific’ means. Philosophy, then, is a search for truths, albeit ones that may then be practically and vitally exploited for a wider enterprise directed towards the Good.

Well, it was cheerfully conceded in section II that philosophy’s way of securing integration and answerability – its angle of approach to the Good, as it were – is that of *understanding*. In that sense, yes, philosophy is orientated towards Truth. But this is not to concede that the understanding philosophy seeks is simply, or at all, a *means* to the resolution of vital issues. And this is because the understanding sought is not finally separable – as a means is from its end – from the Good towards which it is orientated. It is the idea of an *opposition* between orientations towards the True and the Good – one that my earlier remarks might have encouraged – which now needs to be revised in the light of the critic’s objection.

The revision will invoke something like the Ancients’ equation of knowledge with virtue. This equation was most often employed to stress that a virtuous person must have knowledge. A bad man, as the Stoics urged, cannot be wise. But the equation can be, and has been, employed to emphasize that a person is not possessed of the relevant kind of knowledge – philosophical understanding, in effect – unless he or she is attuned to the Good. For the understanding in question has not been acquired or fully absorbed unless it brings

with it precisely that transformation of vision and comportment towards the world which was the purpose in seeking it.

Stoicism furnishes a good example of connection. In Book 3 §2 of his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius writes that the Stoic philosopher or sage, who has achieved 'deeper insight into the processes of the universe', will therefore find 'hardly any phenomenon' that does not give him pleasure and invite his respect and admiration. For as he explains later (Bk 10 §21), this 'insight' embraces the appreciation that 'the universe loves to produce all that [is] produced', an appreciation that requires the sage in turn to 'love' the world as a whole. Failure so to 'love' the world – to feel integrated with it, and to find the measure of one's life in it – entails that one is not, after all, a sage, a Stoic philosopher, for one cannot as yet have achieved that authentic 'cosmic consciousness' which is the criterion of sagehood.¹⁵

Many other examples from the history of philosophy could be given of this insistence that philosophical understanding is lacking or incomplete unless manifested in virtues that are in turn manifested in an appropriate comportment towards the world. For the Buddha, for instance, unless enlightenment or understanding cuts a person free from the 'unwholesome roots' of greed, aversion, and delusion, then it is not enlightenment or full understanding. For properly to understand, and not simply to mouth, such doctrines as that of 'not self' is in crucial part to be transformed in the way one sees, and feels and acts towards other people. But there is no need to pile up more examples in order to appreciate the central point being made. The understanding that philosophy seeks is not 'mere' propositional knowledge that may or may not then be exploited for some practical purpose, and that may or may not be employed as a means to the resolution of some 'vital' issue. Rather, it is an understanding that is already invested with an orientation towards the Good, already 'on the way' towards resolution of the 'vital' issues that give philosophy its impetus.

The understanding in question, to give it an old name, is wisdom or *sophia*. So my conclusion, my proposal, could be expressed by saying that philosophy is indeed philosophy, the love and pursuit of wisdom. The journey towards that conclusion has been, I hope, a little less boring than the conclusion itself.

¹⁵ On Marcus Aurelius, see the illuminating discussion in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. M. Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 190ff and 250ff.

Listening to Clifford's Ghost

PETER VAN INWAGEN

The Clifford of my title is W. K. Clifford, who is perhaps best known as the exponent of a certain ethic of belief – an ethic of belief that he was probably the first to formulate explicitly and which no one has defended with greater eloquence or moral fervor. In the lecture called, appropriately enough, 'The Ethics of Belief,'¹ Clifford summarized his ethic in a single, memorable sentence: 'It is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence'. It will be convenient for us to have a name for this ethical thesis. I will call it 'ethical evidentialism' – 'evidentialism' for short.

Everyone I know of who has written on 'The Ethics of Belief' has taken it for granted that Clifford propounded evidentialism with a certain target in mind, and that that target was religious belief. In the last twenty years or so, however, philosophers have come to realize that a strong case can be made for the thesis that believing things without sufficient evidence is a pervasive feature of human life, a pervasive feature of the way we hold and acquire beliefs in the ordinary business of life, in politics, in matters pertaining to literature and the arts, and in science. And they have noted that failures to observe the dictates of evidentialism in these areas are not in the main 'near misses,' cases in which these dictates might easily have been observed if only people had been a little more careful about what they believed, if only they had taken a little more trouble to collect and examine evidence relevant to their beliefs. It seems, rather, that vast numbers of people believe things (things in no way related to religion or the supernatural) for which it is impossible for them to have sufficient evidence – if not impossible in principle, impossible for those people in the circumstances in which they in fact hold those beliefs.

My concern in this essay is not with religious beliefs or political beliefs or scientific beliefs or the beliefs on the basis of which we conduct the everyday business of our lives. It is with philosophical beliefs. I shall be concerned with the question whether any important philosophical belief is, or ever could be, held by anyone (philosopher

¹ *Lectures and Essays, Vol II* (London: Macmillan, 1879). Variousy reprinted.

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or not) otherwise than upon insufficient evidence. And I shall be concerned only with philosophical beliefs that satisfy the following two conditions.

- (1) They are positive, not negative. What it means to say that a belief (proposition, thesis, conjecture, theory, hypothesis ...) is positive or negative is hard to explain in any philosophically satisfactory way, and I will not attempt to do so. I shall have to be content to give a few examples of philosophical beliefs or propositions that are paradigmatically *not* positive: 'Formalism is not the correct philosophy of mathematics'; 'Utilitarianism is not an acceptable ethical theory'; 'Knowledge is not simply justified true belief.' And, by the same token, 'Knowledge *is* justified true belief,' although it is no doubt a false thesis, is a positive thesis, and to assent to it is to have a positive philosophical belief. Formalism and utilitarianism – assuming that these terms have been sufficiently well defined that they denote particular propositions – are positive theses, and anyone who accepts formalism or accepts utilitarianism thereby has a positive belief.
- (2) They are not held by almost all human beings. I shall not be concerned with philosophical theses that have been accepted by all sane non-philosophers and have been denied only by a few philosophers – generally practitioners of 'revisionary metaphysics.' I assume that there are such philosophical beliefs because I assume that the denial of a philosophical belief is itself a philosophical belief, and many philosophers have believed things (in, as it were, their professional capacity) that almost everyone – even most philosophers – would deny. Or so it seems at least plausible to maintain. Plausible examples of things that fall into this category would be: 'Change and motion are not real features of the world'; 'One has no reason to suppose that there are minds other than one's own'; 'There are no material objects.'² (All these

² I say *plausible* examples, because questions concerning what is uncontroversial on the Clapham omnibus can be extremely controversial in the philosophical lecture-room. Berkeley notoriously maintained that no one but a few philosophers had ever believed in the existence of matter, and my former colleague José Benardete insists that Zeno believed nothing about change and motion that contradicted the beliefs of any of the passengers on the Clapham omnibus. I'll say this: I mean to consider only those philosophical beliefs that are, so to put it, uncontroversially controversial. It will be only these beliefs that will fall within the scope of the question

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theses, or my statements of them, contain some sort of negative construction. Nonetheless, all of them are what I would call 'positive' theses. As I said, 'positive' is a very hard term to explain.³) Thus, philosophical beliefs like 'Change and motion are real features of the world,' 'One does have reason to suppose that there are minds other than one's own,' and 'There are material objects' do not satisfy my second condition. (I'll sometimes refer to beliefs that do satisfy the second condition as 'controversial,' simply because 'not held by almost all human beings' is a clumsy phrase.)

When I speak of philosophical beliefs, then, I mean my remarks to apply only to positive philosophical beliefs that are not beliefs that are held by almost all human beings. So to restrict my topic is not *severely* to restrict it: a vast range of philosophical beliefs satisfy both the conditions by which I have narrowed my subject-matter.

Let us ask: has any philosopher ever had sufficient evidence for any (positive, controversial) philosophical belief in Clifford's sense of 'sufficient evidence'? This question immediately raises a prior

I am asking – whether any philosophical belief is, or ever could be, held by anyone otherwise than upon insufficient evidence.

³ I would say that the negation of a negative belief must be a positive belief, but that the negation of a positive belief will in some cases also be a positive belief. An analogy is perhaps provided by the concept of positive and negative geographical information. That the spy whose whereabouts we should like to know is not in London is a negative piece of geographical information, and that he *is* in London is a positive piece of geographical information. That he is in the Western Hemisphere is a positive piece of geographical information, but so is the information that he is *not* in the Western Hemisphere – at least given that he must be either in the Eastern or the Western Hemisphere –, for the latter piece of information narrows down our range of possible specific hypotheses as to his location precisely as effectively as its negation does. I might put my point this way: 'Theism is false' is a positive philosophical belief because both theism and its negation, atheism, are philosophical *theories* or at any rate philosophical *positions*. 'Utilitarianism is false' is not a positive philosophical belief because its negation, non-utilitarianism, so to call it, is not a philosophical theory or position. There are many philosophical theories – many ethical theories – that are incompatible with utilitarianism, but non-utilitarianism, or the disjunction of all ethical theories (indeed, of all propositions) incompatible with utilitarianism, is not one of them: it's incompatible with utilitarianism all right, but it's not an ethical theory – and not a theory of any sort.

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question: what is that sense? We may well ask, for Clifford never defines the phrase 'sufficient evidence'. Perhaps this phrase requires no definition in the cases Clifford presents as paradigms of belief upon insufficient evidence. (For example, the famous case of the ship-owner who sent his ship to sea without having her overhauled and refitted, and who, although some doubts had passed through his mind as to whether she was really fit to sail, 'succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections.')

In these cases, perhaps, we can just *see* that a certain belief was held upon insufficient evidence on *any* reasonable definition of 'insufficient evidence'. But philosophical beliefs are not much like the belief that a certain ship is seaworthy, and questions about what counts as evidence – much less, sufficient evidence – for them are more difficult to answer. We shall require some sort of understanding of 'sufficient evidence' if we are to answer the question I have posed, or even to say anything of interest about it.

We shall, in fact, need to have some sort of understanding of three things: of '(a body of) evidence,'⁴ of what it is for one to 'have' a certain body of evidence (so understood), and of what it is for a certain body of evidence that one 'has' to be 'sufficient' to support some belief that one has.

I will not attempt to give general definitions of these terms (or accounts of these concepts). That would be a task far beyond my abilities. I will, however, try to say something about what these terms or concepts come to when they are applied to philosophical beliefs.

One form that evidence takes in philosophy is *argument*. One might even suppose that, in philosophy, evidence and argument are so closely related that, with care, the two can be identified. After all, if one has a (good) argument for some philosophical conclusion, then, surely, when one presents that argument to an audience, one presents one's audience with evidence for its conclusion? And if one has evidence that supports a philosophical conclusion, could that evidence not be formulated as or presented in the form of an argument?

Whatever the answers to these rhetorical questions may be, it seems that arguments for philosophical theses are at least *one* kind of evidence for them. Whatever evidence may be, what one's evidence for a certain belief is certainly has a great deal to do with how one

⁴ In present-day English, 'evidence' is a mass-term: one cannot (now) speak of 'an evidence' or 'evidences'. And there is no corresponding count-noun. Various idiomatic phrases like 'a piece of evidence' or 'a body of evidence' perform the function of the missing count-noun.

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would answer the question, 'Why do you think that?'. More exactly, it has a great deal to do with how one would answer that question when the question is understood in what one might call its epistemic sense. (I oppose 'epistemic sense' to 'psychological or causal sense'. Taken in its epistemic sense, it anticipates an answer like, 'I was there. I saw him do it.' Taken in its psychological or causal sense, it anticipates an answer like, 'Alice has been saying that he did it, and I dislike him so much that I suppose I'm inclined to believe anything discreditable about him.')

When this question is understood in its epistemic sense, it seems to be indistinguishable from the question 'What's your evidence for that?' And a philosopher will typically respond to the question 'Why do you think that?' (where 'that' is a philosophical thesis) by presenting one or more arguments for the thesis in question. It is, in fact, not easy to see what other kind of answer to this question there could be. It seems plausible to say that in philosophy evidence is argument – or at least that to *present* evidence is present one or more arguments.

If that is what evidence is in philosophy, what is it to 'have' the evidence for the conclusion of a certain argument that is, or is contained in, or is constituted by, that argument? The answer is pretty clearly this: It is to grasp or understand the argument. Or, if grasping or understanding an argument is a matter of degree: It is *fully* to grasp or understand the argument.

There may be some question as to what, exactly, is involved in grasping an argument. I do not want to build too much into this notion. I take it that one may grasp an argument (even fully grasp an argument) without having considered at length the possible replies to and objections to the argument, without having considered its possible implications, and without having raised the question whether similar or parallel arguments might lead to absurd conclusions. (One might, for example, fully grasp Anselm's ontological argument without having considered the question whether a parallel argument might be used to prove the existence of an island a greater than which cannot be conceived.) I would suppose, too, that it is possible at the same time fully to understand an argument and to believe, mistakenly, that it has false premises – or even to be mistaken about whether the argument is logically valid. (That case is something like this case: You and I are both looking at a sheep in a field; I, for one of those reasons that epistemologists are so skilled at contriving, mistakenly believe I am looking at a mock sheep, artfully crafted of papier-mâché. And you are under no such misapprehension. You and I have the same evidence for there being a sheep in the field; if I have a false belief about my

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evidence for that thesis – even if I believe that it *isn't* evidence for that thesis –, that fact doesn't prevent its being evidence for that thesis, and evidence that I *have*.)

In light of these considerations, one may want to say that although evidence in philosophy indeed consists entirely of argument, the evidence relevant to a philosophical thesis p does not consist entirely of arguments whose conclusion is p or the denial of p . If we say that such arguments comprise the *primary* evidence relevant to p , we may designate those considerations that bear on the cogency of the arguments that comprise the primary evidence as *secondary* evidence that is relevant to p . The secondary evidence, like the primary evidence, will consist of arguments, but not arguments whose conclusion is p or its denial. The conclusions of the arguments comprising the secondary evidence will rather be propositions that concern the arguments for p or its denial: that this argument depends on an equivocation, that that one has a certain suppressed premise that needs to be considered carefully, that this one does not after all depend on an equivocation. (If there is secondary evidence for philosophical theses, there is no doubt tertiary evidence, and so, in theory, *ad infinitum*. But let us not go any further down that road, which is only a byway.)

To have the piece of evidence that is relevant to a philosophical thesis and is, or is contained in, or is constituted by, an argument is, I contend, simply to understand that argument – to understand it fully. Thus, if someone says to me, 'Why do you think that free will is incompatible with determinism?', and if, in reply, I produce a certain argument for that thesis (incompatibilism, it's called) – perhaps I write it on a blackboard – and if that argument is a complete statement of my reasons for accepting incompatibilism (no secondary evidence in this case), then you too will have the evidence for the incompatibility of free will and determinism that is my evidence for that thesis if you inspect the argument written on the blackboard and fully understand it. (And this could be the case even if, say, you believed that the argument contained a logical fallacy when in fact it didn't.)

Now, finally, what is it for a philosophical argument to be or constitute *sufficient* evidence for the philosophical thesis that is its conclusion? I am sorry to have to say that I do not know how to answer this question. Rather than try to answer it, I am going to explore one aspect of the concept of sufficient evidence (in philosophy). My exploration will take this form: I'll present an abstract, schematic case and proceed to ask a question about it. This is the case.

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McX believes that p (I mean 'that p ' to be a philosophical thesis of the sort I have said I should consider: a positive thesis not held by all human beings). McX has no evidence for this thesis beyond that contained in or constituted by the philosophical argument A (an argument whose conclusion is of course the proposition that p): if you asked him why (epistemic sense) he believed that p , he'd produce the argument A for your consideration, and that would be a complete answer to your question; this answer would leave out none of his grounds for believing that p . McX's colleague Wyman grasps the argument A (fully) and believes neither that p nor that not- p : if you asked Wyman whether p , she'd say (sincerely) something like, 'I don't know' or 'I haven't been able to decide what to think about that' in reply. Although Wyman grasps the argument A fully, she is not convinced by it and remains an agnostic in the matter of the truth or falsity of its conclusion.

And this is the question.

Suppose McX is aware of these facts about himself and Wyman. What, if anything, should he conclude from them? What, in particular, should he conclude about whether he believes that p 'upon sufficient evidence'?

Here is *one* chain of reasoning that might go through McX's mind when he considers these facts.

If my evidence for my belief that p were indeed sufficient evidence, it would lead any intelligent, rational person who reflected on it to believe that p . But Wyman has the same evidence for the proposition that p as I have. I say this because I recognize that my evidence is entirely contained in the argument A, and Wyman – I am convinced – fully grasps that argument. I know that she agrees with me on *this* point: the argument contains no logical fallacy. I am also convinced that she is an intelligent, rational person, and that she has carefully reflected on the argument. I must, therefore, conclude that my belief that p is not based on sufficient evidence.

This chain of reasoning, I say, might occur to McX. But if it does – and if on reflection he accepts its conclusion and proceeds to give up his belief that p – he'll be, as the history of philosophy amply demonstrates, a most unusual philosopher. What alternatives might be open to him (other than ignoring the question of what to think about the

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implications of Wyman's failure to be convinced by the argument)? There would seem to be two alternatives:

He might conclude that there's something wrong with Wyman. In becoming acquainted with the argument A, she has acquired sufficient evidence for p – and nevertheless refuses to accept p . And that implies that she is in some way defective. She's not, after all, an intelligent, rational person. Or she lacks philosophical ability or insight – at least in the degree to which he, McX, displays these qualities. He can *see* that certain propositions (certain premises of the argument) are conceptual or necessary truths, and she can't. Or she hasn't considered the disputed premises of the argument with sufficient care – despite the fact that she said she's been thinking about nothing else for a week. Or she's intellectually lazy or dishonest: she doesn't want to accept the conclusion of the argument because it would mean tearing up most of her own philosophical work and starting over or because it contradicts philosophical or religious or political beliefs to which she's strongly emotionally attached – with the consequence that she has *managed to convince herself* that propositions that are self-evident are doubtful or even false. In short, for one reason or another, Wyman is not being rational.

He might conclude that there's nothing wrong with either Wyman or himself. He might say that he and Wyman are both being perfectly rational. They've both carefully considered argument A; he's convinced by it, and that's okay; she's unconvinced by it, and that's okay. That's just how things go in philosophy.

In any real situation, both these alternatives can seem extraordinarily unappealing. Or, if we include the first alternative that I mentioned in the range of the alternatives we are considering ('I must, therefore, conclude that my belief that p is not based on sufficient evidence'), all three of these alternatives can seem extraordinarily unappealing.

We could sum up the three alternatives that confront McX this way:

There's something wrong with me. I believe that p , and my evidence is not sufficient to warrant belief that p (and that's bad).

There's something wrong with Wyman. Her evidence is sufficient to warrant belief that p , but she does not believe that p (and that's bad).

There's nothing wrong with either of us. I believe that p and Wyman does not believe that p and the evidence that each of us

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has that is relevant to the truth-value of p is identical. Therefore: either it can be all right to believe something when one's evidence is insufficient to warrant one's belief or (inclusive) it can be all right *not* to believe something when one's evidence *is* sufficient to warrant one's having that belief.

It is important to realize that the abstract story of McX and Wyman is not the mere presentation of a logical possibility. There are real situations of exactly the sort that is laid out schematically in the story. This sort of thing *happens*, and – with few if any exceptions – each of us philosophers confronts alternatives of the sort that confront McX. Asking ourselves what we make of the fact that other philosophers are not convinced by arguments we ourselves find convincing is a task we can avoid only by the ostrich method.

I will cite a concrete case of such disagreement that I have often cited, a case in which I myself figure. I believe that free will is incompatible with determinism.⁵ What evidence can I appeal to in support of this belief? The most important part of this evidence can be presented in the form of an argument, an argument I have called the Consequence Argument. To make matters as simple as possible, let us pretend for the moment that the Consequence Argument comprises *all* the evidence I have for incompatibilism. That is to say, if you asked me, 'Why do you think that free will is incompatible with determinism?', I could do no better – and no more – than to write out one or more versions of the Consequence Argument for you and try to explain to you why I thought that each of its premises was true. (I'm going to count my defenses of the premises of the Consequence Argument as parts of the argument. If that sounds incoherent to you, I'll express myself this way: the *Narrow* Consequence Argument is a certain formally valid argument with numbered premises. The conclusion of the Narrow Argument is of course the proposition that free will and determinism are incompatible. The *Wide* Consequence Argument consists of the Narrow Consequence Argument plus everything I have to say in support of the premises of the Narrow Argument. For good measure, I shall include my definitions and explanations of the philosophical terms of art that occur in the Narrow Argument in the Wide Argument.

⁵ Despite the negative form of the word 'incompatible', I regard this as a clear case of a positive philosophical belief. Any appearance to the contrary is a linguistic accident – for suppose that instead of saying ' p is incompatible with q ' we used an expression that did not have a negative form (' p denies q ', perhaps, or ' p logically excludes q ').

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When I speak of the Consequence Argument in the sequel, I mean the Wide Consequence Argument.)

David Lewis knew all about the Consequence Argument. In fact, he wrote a characteristically wonderful paper about it called 'Are We Free to Break the Laws?'.⁶ (This paper is the best defense of compatibilism that there is. It may well be the best paper about free will that there is.) He and I studied each other's arguments about the compatibility of free will and determinism carefully. We discussed the issues connected with this question carefully and at great length throughout the 1980s. I am therefore, I think, in a position to make this judgment: Lewis fully grasped the Consequence Argument. And he was not convinced by it. (He in fact accepted the denial of its conclusion. I'll presently incorporate this fact into my discussion. But let us pretend for the moment that Lewis simply failed to be convinced by the Consequence Argument; that he considered it carefully and was thereafter an agnostic about its conclusion.) If, therefore, I have no evidence for my belief that free will and determinism are incompatible but the evidence that is contained in or is constituted by the Consequence Argument, Lewis had all the evidence I had for the proposition that free will and determinism are incompatible, and yet did not accept this proposition. What should I conclude from this?

I should, of course, like to believe that I do not, in Clifford's phrase, accept this proposition upon insufficient evidence. But if the evidence I have for this proposition is sufficient evidence, why did Lewis, who had the same evidence, not also accept it? If it is epistemically wrong or irrational to accept a proposition upon insufficient evidence, is it not likewise wrong or irrational *not* to accept a proposition upon *sufficient* evidence? If I have sufficient evidence to support my belief that, say, the earth is more than 6,000 years old, and if I present a Young Earth Creationist with this evidence – if I 'present' this evidence to him in a way that has the consequence that he 'has' this evidence in the same sense as that in which *I* have it – is he not irrational if he does not come to share my belief? As I have said, I do not know how to give an account of sufficient evidence in philosophy (or in any other area of inquiry), but it is certainly plausible to suppose that whatever 'having sufficient evidence' (in any area, philosophy, geology, what have you), may be, it should bear the following relation to rationality: if one has

⁶ *Philosophical Papers, Vol. II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 291–98. The paper first appeared in *Theoria* 47 (1981), 113–21.

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sufficient evidence for a proposition and does *not* accept that proposition, one is irrational. Or will someone say that one might have sufficient evidence for a proposition one does not accept and not be irrational owing to the fact that one has not carefully considered the implications of that evidence? Well, I don't mind if someone says that. If someone is inclined to, I'll simply add to my statement a clause to accommodate that person's scruple: if one has sufficient evidence for a proposition *and has carefully reflected on the implications of that evidence for the truth of that proposition* and does not accept that proposition, one is irrational. That will not affect the problem with which Lewis's failure to be convinced by the Consequence Argument confronts me, for Lewis had certainly carefully reflected on the implications of the Consequence Argument for the truth of the proposition that free will and determinism are incompatible.

So. How shall I respond to this problem? Shall I say that there's something wrong with *me*? Shall I say, that is, that I do not have sufficient evidence for my belief that free will and determinism are incompatible? Or shall I say that there was something wrong with *Lewis*? Shall I say that, although he *should* have accepted the thesis that free will and determinism were incompatible as a result of considering the Consequence Argument (since that argument constitutes sufficient evidence for its conclusion), for some reason or other he didn't accept it? Or shall I say that there was nothing wrong with either of us? – that it is epistemically permissible for me to be convinced by a certain philosophical argument *and* it was epistemically permissible for him not to be convinced by that same argument? (Remember, we are not supposing that he understood the published piece of text that contained the argument differently from the way I did. No, it was the same argument, platonically speaking, that was in my mind and in his.) That is, shall I say that either the Consequence Argument does not constitute sufficient evidence for incompatibilism and it's all right for me to accept compatibilism on the basis of that argument alone, or that it *does* constitute sufficient evidence for incompatibilism, but it was all right for Lewis not to accept incompatibilism when he was in possession of that evidence?

All these alternatives, as I have said, are remarkably unappealing. I still think that the Consequence Argument shows that free will and determinism are incompatible. I find I can't help thinking that. But why doesn't Lewis see that if it's true? Was Lewis stupid? Lacking in philosophical ability? Intellectually dishonest? I certainly can't believe any of those things. Look, it's *David Lewis* we're talking about here. I can remember a talented young philosopher saying to me in the 1970s, following his first encounter with Lewis, 'Lewis is

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so smart it's *scary!*'; and that has been more or less the response of all philosophers who have measured themselves against that formidable mind. Nor could anyone suggest with a straight face that Lewis was lacking in philosophical ability – not unless *all* human beings are lacking in philosophical ability. And he was scrupulously honest: he may have believed one or two odd things, but he did *believe* them, and believed them because he thought that they were straight-forward objective truths.

Suppose, then, I say that there's nothing wrong with either my being convinced by the Consequence Argument or Lewis's failure to be convinced by it. Suppose I tell myself that that's just how things go in philosophy. There are arguments that some philosophers find convincing and others don't, and it's *okay* to regard the philosophical arguments that one finds convincing as having established their conclusions if one has considered them carefully and responsibly. And it's *okay* for some other philosopher not to find those same arguments convincing provided he or she has also considered them carefully and responsibly. In a word, Lewis and I were both rational – or at least may well have been.

It is now time to take account of a fact that I have been ignoring. I have conceded parenthetically that Lewis did not merely refrain from accepting incompatibilism: he accepted its denial, compatibilism. And he did not accept compatibilism simply because he had examined that thesis and discovered within himself a conviction that it was true. He accepted compatibilism on the basis of certain arguments – arguments whose essential point is as old as Hobbes's debate with John Bramhall, Bishop of Derry, about liberty and necessity. It is necessary to add that these old arguments were not the only ones that played a role in his assent to compatibilism. An argument of *his*, an argument for the conclusion that the Consequence Argument turns on an equivocation also played a role in his assent (this is a case of what I have called secondary evidence). And, having brought that argument into our discussion, I can no longer maintain the pretense that the Consequence Argument constitutes the entirety of the evidence I have that is relevant to the question of the compatibility of free will and determinism. I have some secondary evidence of my own; if nothing else, *my* argument for the conclusion that *Lewis's* argument fails to show that the Consequence Argument turns on an equivocation, is a part of the evidence I have that is relevant to that question.

There were, therefore, other arguments than the Consequence Argument 'in play' in Lewis's and my decade-long discussion of the free-will problem. But, however many arguments were involved

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in our debate, we both knew about them all and both fully grasped every one of them. Our situation was therefore more nearly symmetrical than I have been making it out to be. I believe that I fully understood all the arguments that constituted Lewis's evidence (primary and secondary) for the proposition that free will and determinism are compatible, and that I therefore 'had' the evidence on which his belief that free will and determinism are compatible was grounded. And, of course, I was not convinced by those arguments. There was, therefore, a certain body of evidence – it comprised the Consequence Argument and all the other arguments that figured in our debate – such that Lewis and I both had this evidence and such that, on the basis of this one body of evidence, I accepted a certain proposition and he accepted its denial.

The position that, in this set of circumstances it was all right for me to accept incompatibilism *and* all right for Lewis to accept compatibilism is not one that it is easy to be entirely comfortable with. (Let's describe the position this way: it was rational for me to accept incompatibilism and rational for Lewis to accept compatibilism.) If I contend that both Lewis and I were rational, I hear Clifford's ghost whispering an indignant protest. Something along these lines (Clifford has evidently acquired, *post mortem*, a few turns of phrase not current in the nineteenth century).

If you and Lewis are both rational in accepting contradictory propositions on the basis of identical evidence, then *you* accept one of these propositions – incompatibilism – on the basis of evidence that does not direct you toward incompatibilism and away from compatibilism. (For if it did, it would have directed *him* away from compatibilism, and it would not have been rational for him to be a compatibilist.) But of all the forces in the human psyche that direct us toward and away from assent to propositions, only rational attention to relevant evidence *tracks the truth*. Both experience and reason confirm this. And if you assent to a proposition on the basis of some inner push, some 'will to believe,' if I may coin a phrase, that does not track the truth, then your propositional assent is not being guided by the nature of the things those propositions are *about*. If you could decide what to believe by tossing a coin, if that would actually be effective, then, in the matter of the likelihood of your beliefs being true, you might as well do it that way.

I am unwilling to listen to these whispers. And I find it difficult to answer them. (No doubt these two facts are connected. I am unwilling to listen to the whispers of Clifford's ghost – if I listen to them, it

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is only because I force myself to – *because* I find them so difficult to answer.)

Could it be that the difficulty I find myself in is based on some false assumption, an assumption hidden somewhere in the various lines of reasoning I have presented? That's certainly an attractive thought. But what might this assumption be – or these assumptions, if there's more than one? Here's a candidate that in some moods I can find appealing: the assumption that all evidence for a philosophical proposition can be presented in the form of an argument. Evidence that can be presented in the form of an argument is essentially public. Any argument can be written down on a blackboard, and – so I have supposed – anyone who studies what's written on the blackboard and understands it thereby 'has' the evidence comprised in the argument. Suppose, however, that there's such a thing as interior, incommunicable evidence for certain propositions: evidence that can somehow be present to one's mind, although one is unable to articulate it, unable to put it into words, unable to present in the form of an argument.

Whether or not there is evidence of this sort for philosophical propositions, there are plausible examples of it in other areas. I sometimes know that my wife is angry when no one else does, for example, and I can't explain to anyone (even to myself) how I know this – I can't give what Plato would call an 'account' of what underlies my conviction that she is angry. It seems to me to be plausible to say that in such cases my belief that my wife is angry is grounded in certain evidence, evidence that I cannot put into words. After all, although I usually turn out to have been right about her being angry, if someone asks me, 'How did you know she was angry?', I can give no answer. Mathematics provides a very different kind of example of this phenomenon. Mathematicians are often intuitively certain that some mathematical proposition is true, although they are unable to prove it. (Gödel, I understand, was convinced that the power of the continuum was \aleph_2 , but was unable to give any statement of the ground of this conviction.) Since they often later do discover proofs of these propositions, it seems likely that, prior to their discovery of the proofs, they had some sort of evidence that those propositions were true. Now maybe the evidence they had is exactly the evidence that they would later present in the form of a proof (on those occasions on which they did later produce a proof) although for some considerable period they were unable to articulate it. It is not essential to the suggestion that I am canvassing that 'inarticulable' evidence be *essentially* or *in principle* inarticulable. The suggestion requires only that a person have at a certain time

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evidence that he is not *then* able to articulate. Might it not be that the following two theses are both true?

- (a) I have sufficient evidence for my belief that free will and determinism are incompatible; some of this evidence is contained in the Consequence Argument, but other parts of it are either in principle interior and inarticulable or else evidence that could in principle be presented in some public form, but which, for some reason, I am at present unable to put into that form.
- (b) Lewis did not have this interior evidence that I have. I thus have more evidence that bears on the thesis that free will and determinism are incompatible than he had. His failure to accept incompatibilism was a rational response to the body of evidence he had, and mine is a rational response to the (more extensive) body of evidence that I have.

It is important to realize that thesis (b) does not imply that I am smarter than Lewis or a better philosopher. The idea is rather this. Owing to some neural accident, I have a kind of insight into the, oh, I don't know, entailment relations among various of the propositions that figure in the compatibilism/incompatibilism debate that was denied to Lewis. I *see*, perhaps, that a certain proposition *p* entails the proposition *q* (although I'm unable to formulate this insight verbally) and he was unable to see that *p* entailed *q*. And this insight really is due to a neural *quirk* (to borrow a phrase Rorty used for a different purpose). It's not that my cognitive faculties function better than Lewis's. His were as reliable as mine – no doubt more so. But his were not identical with mine, and some accidental feature of my cognitive architecture has enabled me to see an entailment that he was unable to see. (If it's open to me to say this, it would, of course, have been open to Lewis to say the same thing *mutatis mutandis*, to have contended that *he* had a body of interior, inarticulable evidence that *I* lacked and that his total evidence *vis-à-vis* the question of the compatibility of free will and determinism was more extensive than mine. It is imaginable, in fact, that we might both say this – 'this,' of course, being in each case appropriately tailored to the convictions of the speaker –, and might each regard the other as mistaken, perhaps excusably mistaken, perhaps not. Each might suppose that the other had mistaken a merely subjective conviction that some entailment held for *seeing* that that entailment held.)

I have raised the question whether (a) and (b) might not both be true. This question suggests a further question. According to (a), I have sufficient evidence to warrant my belief that free will and determinism are incompatible. According to (b), Lewis had less evidence

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that was relevant to the question of the compatibility of free will and determinism than I and his belief that free will and determinism were compatible was rational, given the evidence that was available to him. But (b) says neither that Lewis's evidence was sufficient to warrant his belief that free will and determinism were compatible nor that it was not. The 'further question,' of course, is: Was his evidence sufficient to warrant his belief or was it not? I should like to think that it was. I find it uncomfortable to suppose that my evidence was sufficient and Lewis's was insufficient, even if in this case his believing something upon insufficient evidence was somehow excusable. But if I suppose that it was, I face this difficulty: My evidence is, if we interpret this statement very literally, not sufficient to warrant a belief in the compatibility of free will and determinism – not at least if the same body of evidence cannot be sufficient to warrant both a certain belief and its negation (since it is sufficient to warrant my belief that free will and determinism are incompatible). But Lewis's evidence was a *proper part* of my evidence. If Lewis's evidence was sufficient, it would follow that a certain body of evidence was not sufficient to warrant a certain belief, but a proper part of that evidence was sufficient to warrant that same belief. And that seems counterintuitive. It is not clear, however, that this thesis, counterintuitive though it may be, is false. Suppose, for example, that Superman and Lois Lane are looking at a field and that Lois is having visual experiences of the kind that any normal human being who was looking at a field in which there was a single sheep would have. Lois believes that there is a sheep in the field before her, and it would seem that she has sufficient evidence for this belief if any human beings ever have sufficient evidence for any of their beliefs. Superman, more than human, has the evidence that Lois has and more besides: the evidence provided by his X-ray vision, which faculty reveals to him that what appears to the mere human eye to be a sheep is one of those epistemologists' mock-ups of a sheep. It seems therefore that he has sufficient evidence for a certain proposition and that Lois has sufficient evidence for its denial and that her evidence is a proper part of his. Perhaps Lewis's belief and his evidence, on the one hand, and my belief and my evidence, on the other, are related in the same way: my evidence consists of his evidence (the evidence provided by certain philosophical arguments) together with further evidence, interior incommunicable evidence, that is mine alone; nevertheless, despite the fact that his evidence is only a proper part of mine, my evidence is sufficient to support my belief that free will and determinism are incompatible and his evidence was sufficient to support his belief that free will and determinism were compatible.

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On reflection, however, the idea that I have evidence, incommunicable evidence, that Lewis lacked, tempting though it is, is hard to believe. At any rate, it's hard to believe that it applies in all cases in which I disagree with other philosophers about some philosophical proposition or other. After all, I accept *lots* of philosophical propositions that are denied by many able, well-trained philosophers. Am I to suppose that in every case in which I believe something many other philosophers deny (that is, in every case in which I accept some controversial philosophical thesis), I'm right and they're wrong, and that, in every such case, my evidence is superior to theirs – owing to the fact that in every such case my evidence incorporates interior, incommunicable evidence that is somehow inaccessible to those other philosophers? If I do suppose that, I must ask myself, is the neural quirk that gives me access to this evidence the same neural quirk in each case or a different one? If it's the same one, what I am postulating looks more like a case of 'my superior cognitive architecture' than a case of 'accidental feature of my cognitive architecture.' If it's a different one in each case – well, that's quite a coincidence, isn't it? All these little evidence-friendly neural quirks come together to give the right results in just one philosopher (no other philosopher agrees with me about very much), and that philosopher happens to be me.

It seems more plausible to reject the idea of interior, incommunicable evidence and to concede (to revert to the case of David Lewis and myself) that I have and Lewis had the *same* evidence in the matter of the problem of free will. But if this is so, then either at least one of us has believed something upon insufficient evidence, or else I accept incompatibilism upon sufficient evidence and Lewis accepted compatibilism upon sufficient evidence and the evidence that the two of us had that bears on the compatibility of free will and determinism is the *same* evidence.

I will not try to say which of these disjuncts is right. I will instead conclude with some remarks about what a philosopher who believes either is committed to.

Suppose a philosopher accepts the first disjunct. (I'll call this philosopher 'you'.) You believe that at least one of the two of us, Lewis and me, accepted a certain philosophical position upon insufficient evidence. Then you must conclude that you and any philosopher who disagrees with you about the truth-value of some philosophical thesis are in the same position: one of you, at least, accepts a certain thesis upon insufficient evidence. Unless you are willing to say that *you* accept the thesis in question upon insufficient evidence (presumably you are not), you must conclude

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that you accept the thesis upon sufficient evidence and that your colleague accepts its denial upon insufficient evidence. And, surely, you will agree that there are *many* such theses – many positive, controversial philosophical theses that you accept and other philosophers deny? Let me ask you this: Do you really find it plausible to suppose that *in all or most such cases*, one of the two of you accepts a thesis upon sufficient evidence and the other upon insufficient evidence and that *you* are the one with the sufficient evidence? (The alternative is to suppose that you accept a high proportion of the philosophical theses you accept upon insufficient evidence.) We might, indeed, direct this point at Clifford himself – for the simple reason that he is one of us, a philosopher. One very good example of a philosophical thesis that Clifford accepts is, of course, the thesis we have been discussing: ethical evidentialism. Ethical evidentialism is a positive, controversial philosophical thesis. (William James rejected it, and other philosophers – Roderick Chisholm⁷ and myself, for example – have expressed doubts about it.) Clifford has, of course, presented arguments for ethical evidentialism – rather good arguments, as philosophical arguments go. But is he really in a position to contend that these arguments constitute sufficient evidence for ethical evidentialism – given that other competent philosophers fully grasp these arguments (have the evidence he has) and do not embrace ethical evidentialism?

Now the second disjunct: that Lewis and I accept contradictory propositions on the same evidence, and that this evidence is in both cases sufficient. I want to make just this point: *Clifford* cannot accept this disjunct. I concede that the second disjunct is not logically inconsistent with Clifford's thesis, with ethical evidentialism. Consider, for example, one of those religious beliefs that were the intended 'target' of ethical evidentialism. The following three propositions are certainly logically consistent:

It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence

Professor Dawkins believes that there is no God; the total body of evidence that he has that is relevant to the existence or non-existence of God is E; E is sufficient evidence for his belief that there is no God.

⁷ See *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957), 9. and 99–100.

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Archbishop Williams believes that there is a God; the total body of evidence that he has that is relevant to the existence or non-existence of God is E; E is sufficient evidence for his belief that there is a God.

But if the second disjunct is consistent with ethical evidentialism, it is nevertheless inconsistent with an essential premise of the *argument* by which Clifford claims to establish ethical evidentialism.

Why does Clifford think that it is wrong to believe things upon insufficient evidence? The central nerve of Clifford's reason for supposing this is contained in some words I put into his mouth a moment ago: Of all the forces in the human psyche that direct us toward and away from assent to propositions, only rational attention to relevant evidence *tracks the truth*. Believing things *only* upon sufficient evidence is, therefore, the only device we have for minimizing the extent of our false beliefs, or at least the only such device that has any prospect of providing us with a useful set of true beliefs. (One could, of course, very effectively minimize the extent of one's false beliefs by believing nothing.) If we form our beliefs on any other basis – if we allow them to be formed by some factor that does not track the truth –, we are, in effect, believing things at random. If I form my beliefs on some basis other than rational attention to evidence, no doubt there will be a causal explanation of some sort for what I believe, but the truth of falsity of those beliefs will not figure in that explanation. Since there are a lot more ways to be wrong than there are to be right, beliefs formed by a method that does not track the truth will, to a high probability, be false. (Recall the 'electric monk' in one of the Dirk Gently books, who, owing to a malfunction in his electrical innards, had begun to believe things at random, and who, at one point in the narrative had spent the morning believing that forty-seven per cent of all tables were hermaphrodites. The example illustrates nicely the high probability of a randomly chosen proposition's being false.) A person who believes things upon insufficient evidence, therefore, is not taking care to minimize the extent of his false beliefs. And any moral person *will* take care to minimize the extent of his false beliefs. This is the moral course of action because a person with false beliefs is *ipso facto* dangerous: a driver on British roads who believes that in Britain one drives on the right-hand side of the road is dangerous indeed – as is a ship-owner who believes that his ship is seaworthy when she is not. Any moral person, obviously, will want to minimize the danger he presents to himself and others, and an essential part of realizing that end is to believe only those things for which one has sufficient evidence.

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This argument, I contend, is the core of Clifford's defense of ethical evidentialism. There is more to his defense than this core argument, of course. Suppose, for example, that someone had asked Clifford the following rather obvious question: 'Can you really suppose that a philosopher who has false beliefs about the reality of universals or the proper analysis of causation is *ipso facto* dangerous?'. One part of Clifford's defense of ethical evidentialism is, in effect, an answer to this question (and it is a thoughtful and interesting answer). But for my present purposes, I need consider only the core argument. It is evident that anyone who accepts this argument cannot suppose that a certain body of evidence can be sufficient to support both a belief that p and a belief that not- p . For, if that were the case – and particularly if it were a common occurrence –, rational attention to evidence would not track the truth. If you believe that in Britain one drives on the left and if I believe that in Britain one drives on the right, and if the evidence that you and I have that is relevant to the question which side of the road one drives on in Britain is the same, and if this evidence is sufficient in both our cases, then rational attention to evidence does not track the truth – and making sure that one has sufficient evidence for one's beliefs therefore provides no assurance that one is not a dangerous repository of false belief. In the present case, I am a dangerous driver and you, no doubt, are not – but your basing your belief concerning the side of the road to drive on upon sufficient evidence is not what prevents you from being a dangerous driver, for I did the same thing and everyone had better steer clear of me – literally – when I'm behind the wheel. If, therefore, one accepts the second of the disjuncts on offer, one can accept ethical evidentialism, if at all, only on some basis other than the argument by which Clifford defends it.

Can the philosopher who accepts ethical evidentialism say anything in defense of his or her accepting any positive and controversial philosophical thesis? (And remember: ethical evidentialism is itself a positive and controversial philosophical thesis.) I cannot see any very plausible avenues for the ethical evidentialist to explore. I conclude that philosophers should find ethical evidentialism an unattractive thesis – as I do. But what are philosophers to say in response to Clifford's argument for ethical evidentialism? It certainly does seem clear that, for just the reason Clifford cites, *many* propositions are such that a moral person will accept them only upon sufficient evidence. Might a philosopher contend that that this stricture does not hold for all propositions, and that philosophical propositions are among those for which it does not hold? Supposing that Aristotle

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was right to think that universals exist only *in rebus* (they might ask), did Plato's belief that universals exist *ante res* make him a dangerous man? Might this philosopher not appeal to the authority of Hume in the matter of errors in philosophy: While errors in religion (and, presumably, in politics and medicine and many other areas, including the Highway Code) are dangerous, '... errors in philosophy are only ridiculous.'? There is much that might be said in response to the thesis that false philosophical beliefs are harmless. Two of the things that might be said, and they're the only ones I will say, are that history demonstrates that wrong ideas in philosophy have done a lot of harm, and that Plato's political beliefs did not exist in isolation from his metaphysical beliefs.

If it is conceded that it is wrong to accept philosophical propositions – positive, controversial ones – otherwise than upon sufficient evidence, and if it is conceded that the same evidence cannot be sufficient for contradictory propositions, and if it is conceded that interior, incommunicable evidence plays no significant role in philosophy, there seem to be only two choices open to a philosopher who is unwilling to embrace immorality. (I will remark that I have encountered only one philosopher who has made the first of these choices and only one who has made the second.) First, the philosopher might insist that he *does* have sufficient evidence for his philosophical beliefs and that those philosophers who disagree with him on any substantive philosophical point do *not* have sufficient evidence for their beliefs; those other philosophers are irrational or lacking in philosophical ability or unintelligent or uninformed or intellectually dishonest or exhibit some other such cognitive or epistemic defect. I can only say that I regard any philosopher who embraces that option as a comic figure. Secondly, the philosopher might choose to accept *no* philosophical theses (other than negative theses and uncontroversial ones) – not even the thesis that accepting no philosophical theses is the only morally permissible course of action for a philosopher. This philosopher I regard not as a comic but as an heroic figure. I have nothing to say about such heroism other than that few of us other philosophers are likely to imitate it. I certainly am not.