

BOOK NOTES

Engel, Pascal, *Truth*, Chesham: Acumen Press, 2002, pp. viii + 177, £12.95.

This book appears in the Central Problems of Philosophy series, an ambitious attempt to cover the main issues of contemporary philosophy in books of modest length, which make only modest demands on the reader. *Truth* is a worthy contribution to that series.

Pascal Engel is a distinguished French philosopher who teaches at the Sorbonne. He has organized this book around the twin themes of Realism and the Minimalist theory of truth. The position that he defends is that Minimalism is true and sufficient for Realism. But he rejects deflationism, as well as all forms of relativism and scepticism. His reinflated minimal theory of truth is ‘fattened’ by its constitutive connections to knowledge, rational belief, and meaning. He defends the view that truth is a normative notion, in the sense that it has a constitutive, epistemic (as opposed to pragmatic) rôle in knowledge:

For all p , believe that p , only if, for all you know, p is true.

(This does not seem quite right—because the ‘for all you know’ locution is ambiguous between ‘unless you know that p is false’, and ‘if you know that p is true’.) But let us leave the normative issue to one side, for the general idea that truth has a normative rôle is very plausible and the general drift of Engel’s argument incontrovertible. At least, I don’t wish to controvert it.

Less happy is the handling of the views that are rejected in the early chapters: the substantive view and the deflationist view. Given Engel’s realist inclinations one would have thought that he would be comfortable with a correspondence theory of truth—or, if not, would have a compelling reason to settle for something less. But the argument given is a variant of the Frege-Gödel-Davidson ‘sling-shot argument’, and this has much less force since Stephen Neale’s ground-breaking work.

Likewise the deflationist view gets an airing: if ‘ p ’ is true has the same assertoric force as p then *true* cannot be a genuine predicate. This reader remains mystified as to how anyone could have thought this a persuasive argument for anything. The view is aired and rejected however for another reason: it leads to anti-realism. (A cavil: anti-realism is often treated as though it were coextensive with idealism. But idealists should have a correspondence theory of truth—they will merely have a differently conceived reality that the truths correspond to. Anti-realism is, in fact, a *much* wilder view than any mere idealism.)

However—like the Irish priest who advised his congregation to ‘keep to the straight and narrow path that runs *between* good and evil’—Engel’s preferred view lies somewhere between a substantive and a deflationist view. He worries that it will collapse into one or the other. In my view, perfectly correctly.

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Psillos, Stathis, *Causation and Explanation*, Chesham: Acumen, 2002, pp. xi + 324, £40 (cloth), £14.95 (paper).

This book is an introduction to the contemporary philosophical landscapes of causation, laws of nature, and explanation. Each of the three sections provides an overview of various positions and issues, sprinkled occasionally with the opinions of the author. ‘Causation’ covers in particular the accounts of Hume, Ducasse, Lewis, and Salmon-Dowe; ‘Laws’ covers the theories of Hume, Armstrong-Dretske, Woodward, and Cartwright; while ‘Explanation’ covers Hempel, Salmon, and Friedman-Kitcher. There is a nice passage at the end of the causation section where Psillos offers a ‘rough conceptual guide’ in which he briefly categorises theories of causation along three axes: generalist/singularist, intrinsic/extrinsic, and reductionist/non-reductionist. The relationships

between the topics are also discussed at places. Inevitably, there are approaches and issues which are omitted, in the case of causation, most notably probabilistic accounts of causation and the direction of causation.

If I may indulge myself, there are few comments to be made in response to Psillos's criticism of the Conserved Quantity theory. Psillos argues that the Conserved Quantity theory does not avoid recourse to counterfactuals, first on the grounds that it cannot distinguish pseudo processes from certain causal processes where both possess a zero value of the relevant conserved quantity, and second on the grounds that uninstantiated causal processes possess no conserved quantity [126–7]. To the former I would reply that it is not correct to say that a pseudo process like a shadow possesses zero momentum or charge, rather it simply lacks such properties altogether, and hence does not possess conserved quantities and hence is not causal; whereas it is correct to say that a causal process like a particle at rest possesses zero momentum (in a particular frame of reference), and hence it possesses a conserved quantity, and hence is causal. On the latter point, we should distinguish actual from possible causal processes, the former possessing conserved quantities and the latter only possibly possessing conserved quantities; i.e., it being the case that if the process were to occur it would exhibit conserved quantities.

As an introduction to the three topics, the book is admirably successful, and is particularly significant on causation where to my knowledge no other similar work exists. Psillos's writing is clear and coherent. Highly recommended, especially for undergraduate students.

Phil Dowe

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Gale, Richard M., ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Metaphysics*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002, pp. viii + 348, AU\$63.75.

An editor, charged with assembling a collection of essays under the heading *Guide to Metaphysics*, has at least two strategies available to her. She could offer a collection of introductory essays on a selection of core topics. Alternatively, she could collate some samples of higher-level research in some ongoing debates. I think a minimal expectation is that a guide to metaphysics ought to adopt just one strategy. Otherwise, no individual reader will be entirely happy with the collection. Those new to philosophy will find some essays that they don't understand, and those with some background in philosophy will find introductory essays that, for them, are redundant. The essays in Gale's collection do not collectively exemplify just one strategy. That being the case, it's hard to say who this book is aimed at, or who would benefit most from reading it.

Gale states that his intention is to expose students of metaphysics to paradigm cases of it, so that they can learn by example, which suggests the second of the two strategies I mentioned above. This aim is achieved in seven of the sixteen essays, which offer an original contribution to an existing debate. These are: Gale on time, Puntel on ontological category, van Inwagen on persistence, Sprigge on idealism, Rescher on realism and idealism, Butchvarov on realism and nonrealism, and Pruss on modality. Six of the remaining nine essays offer surveys of their respective topics, although some make an original contribution in addition to this. However, they don't all fall into the same category, as they apparently have different target audiences. Three are aimed at complete newcomers to metaphysics (Salmon on causation, Bennett on events, and Aune on universals), and three require a degree of familiarity with philosophical concepts and terminology (Rosen and Dorr on composition, Whiting on personal identity, and Lycan on possibilities). Finally, the remaining three essays are broadly historical in approach (Sklar on Newton's dynamics, Haldane on Thomism, and Brandom on Sellars).

In terms of coverage of the subject matter, there are no glaring omissions. Substance and freewill receive no attention, but they are, arguably, no more central to metaphysics than any of the topics covered. The fact that three essays were devoted to the realism/anti-realism debate (broadly speaking) struck me as disproportionate, especially as each of them advocates some kind of anti-realism, albeit to varying degrees.

Highlights of the book for me were Salmon on causation, Rosen and Dorr on composition as a fiction, and Lycan on possibilities. Salmon's essay is an excellent introduction to the problem of providing a metaphysically adequate account of causation, including an examination and critique of Mackie's INUS conditions, and a development and defence of Salmon's own process causation. It is very accessible, even when discussing difficult scientific concepts. Rosen and Dorr provide a good introduction to the dispute concerning composite entities. They survey some of the available positions, and focus on the methodological problem of how to resolve the dispute. They ultimately defend a position according to which the thesis that composition is universal is a fiction that we all engage in. Lycan's

essay is a useful survey of the range of existing accounts of the metaphysics of possibilities. It schematically introduces the variety of accounts, their typical motivation, issues on which they differ from each other, their implications, and some problems they each face. It is brilliantly written; classic Lycan.

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Clark, Mary E., *In Search Of Human Nature*, New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 576, US\$115 (cloth), US\$31.95 (paper).

According to Mary E. Clark, our 'Human Nature' is but a collection of fundamental and evolved desires or propensities. Two of the most important of these propensities are our need for community and autonomy. However, these desires are thwarted, since our western way of life is at odds with this fundamental 'human nature'. Clark claims as evidence all the current ills of the developed world: family violence, rampant consumerism, anger in the workplace, and so forth.

Evolutionary psychologists might explain this conflict by saying we have Pleistocene brains, and these are unsuited for modern life. Clark agrees with this in part, we do have Pleistocene brains and a human nature unsuited for our current life. However Clark does not agree with evolutionary psychology's picture of human nature.

The problem with the evolutionary psychologist's picture of human nature, says Clark, is that it is generated by an overly reductionist model of science, a 'Billiard Ball Model' of the world. Clark argues the 'Billiard Ball Model' provides a model of human nature that is incorrect. This style of thinking generates the wrong expectations of human behaviour: it portrays *Homo sapiens* as aggressive and competitive biological actors. Social, economic, and political ideas based on this false model frustrate our true natures. Clark thinks that if we can build a better conception of ourselves, a conception not generated by the billiard ball model of the world, then the social sciences can be reformed in such a way that they are more in tune with our 'human nature' and ourselves.

The alternative is an evolved model of ourselves that is the result of Clark's 'Indra's Net Thinking', a label for a holistic approach to science. This 'Indra's Net Thinking' is supposed to generate a picture of human nature with less disjunction between our Pleistocene brains and our social world.

On Clark's view, our Pleistocene minds are social, co-operative, and less prone to violence than 'billiard ball' thinking would lead us to believe. We are not competitive biological actors; we are social and co-operative ones. As such, not competition but sociality and co-operation have played a large part in our evolutionary past.

Clark supports her claims by retelling the story of human evolution. However, because Clark is concerned with scientific bias, evidential requirements for claims about the past take a back seat to ideological ones. Given two alternative postulates about the past, Clark chooses the one that is most amenable to her picture of human nature, rather than one that has more empirical support. The result is an elaborate 'just so' story that builds to her pre-determined conclusion. Thus, ideas long discounted by workers in the field are resurrected if they suit Clark's agenda. It's a patchwork approach that fails to confront anything unpalatable about human nature, and is uncontaminated by the need for evidence.

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