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Replies

DAVID WIGGINS

Reply to Cheryl Misak

I still remember with special pleasure the experience of reading the Peircean texts which Misak was drawing upon in her construction of the thesis which eventually became the book *Truth and the End of Inquiry: a Peircean account* 1991. At that time neither Misak nor I knew anything about the definition of truth that Rumfitt and others have now unearthed from Ramsey's (then unknown) book *On Truth*. We were well enough satisfied by a 'marks of truth' approach to the philosophy of truth. It worked well enough in conjunction with Misak's brand of pragmatism. There is still plenty to talk about there, but on this occasion I want to latch onto something else relating to the special role of abduction.

Misak writes

> A final insight of Peirce's explored and endorsed by Wiggins is that abduction provides a vindication of induction. Hume says that inference from the known to the unknown comes from habit not reason and asks how we can rationally claim to know from the fact that bread has nourished me in the past to the general conclusion that bread is nourishing.

To see what abduction must do let us take the following from Hume himself, Section 7 of *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

> Nature has kept us at a great distance from all her secrets and has afforded us only the knowledge of those powers and principles on which the influence of objects entirely depends. Our senses inform us of the colour, weight and consistence of bread, but neither sense nor reason can ever inform us of those qualities which fit [bread] for the nourishment and support of a human body.

If there are mysteries here, then Peirce's answer is indeed to appeal to abduction. But what is abduction? Peirce writes (1903, CP 5.145) 'Abduction consists in studying facts and devising a theory to

doi:10.1017/S003181912200016X © The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Royal Institute of Philosophy

https://doi.org/10.1017/S003181912200016X Published online by Cambridge University Press

explain them. Its only justification is that, if we are ever to understand things at all, in must be in that way.' Abduction itself is not any particular way. Rather the word connotes the standard to which particular non-vacuous explanations must attain. Can these explanations not reveal 'natures's secret'? Is there anything that will do better here than normal science? If there is a role here for something to be called abduction, can that be anything over and above the theory, whatever it is, which will explain both bread and nourishment? Abduction is not a mysterious *extra* way of explaining things.

Here, just for once, I am tempted to quote from William James, from his *Pragmatism*:

> When Clerk-Maxwell was a child it is written that he had a mania for having everything explained to him, and that when people put him off with vague verbal accounts of any phenomenon he would interrupt them impatiently by saying, 'Yes; but I want you to tell me the *particular go* of it'.

That surely is what Hume must have wanted. And Peirce too. And thence Maxwell's theories of light and electromagnetism. There is one other thing abduction can do. The theories it makes room for can mark out the space in which statistical inference can safely operate.

Reply to Ian Rumfitt

I want to thank Ian Rumfitt for everything that he does to explain to me in my retirement (twenty-two years so far) what is going on nowadays in philosophy. Some of these developments are more appealing than others. Mostly though I resist the temptation (such as it is) to butt in.

Having long ago discovered for myself the importance of binary articulation of some ordinary English sentences (see my '"Most" and "All"' in Platts ed., (1980) I rejoice to learn of the miscellaneous new insights that result in part from the general recognition of the unary/binary distinction. I enjoy the spectacle of Rumfitt's solving various problems of grammatical articulation I have never seen before or heard of. But his treatment of the problem of truth is more than enough to be going on with.

From Ramsey's posthumously published unfinished book 'On Truth', we have it that a belief is true iff it is a belief that p *and* p, and false if it is a belief that p, *and* not p.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S003181912200016X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Forgetting all the objections and reservations I used to register against that sort of definition and that sort of quantification, I offer just one more reservation. Surely 'true' is an evaluative term. But from the Ramseian definition one can hardly tell. All we have there in Ramsey is one special property of a belief. Is there some further way then of signalling evaluation? My thought is that over and above Ramsey's effort one can give marks of the concept of truth as follows:

(1) If *s* is true then *s* passes muster in that dimension of assessment in which *s* demands, qua *s*, to be assessed. Normally then (play apart) truth is the first dimension of assessment for beliefs, statements, utterances;
(2) If *s* is true, then *s* will under favourable circumstances command a convergence of opinion among those properly placed to judge the matter in question and the best explanation of the existence of this convergence, driven as it is by our need, will require the actual truth of *s*;

Normally, we want and need the truth. But here, with (1) and (2), I run into the difficulties Rumfitt enumerates. Rather than allow that the truth of a belief boils down to little or nothing more than the belief itself, let me attend for a moment to the fascinating examples that Rumfitt produces in illustration of his doubts about the usefulness of the idea of convergence. Some people will surely resent what Glenn Gould writes about Mozart's piano compositions. They may want to say to Rumfitt that, to judge by his recordings, Gould was not only an amazing/astonishing pianist but also an utter recluse … that, if Gould had allowed himself to engage with the moment of reconciliation that concludes *Cosi Fan Tutte* or *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, he might have understood Mozart as a composer whose work *participates* in the needs and anxieties of ordinary human beings … In his critique of the idea of convergence Rumfitt also mentions the operatic version of Melville's story *Billy Budd*. But the opera sells that story short. In the printed text of the original story that I read, the ship's surgeon, aware of Billy Budd's substantial innocence, gives private expression in his journal to the conviction that in the intense heat of warfare and their frenzied preparedness for warfare, human beings lapse into a state little short of lunacy. It would have been hard for this sort of thing to register on the opera – unless the listener was tempted, somehow, in tranquility and afterwards, to come to the very same conclusion in their own way.

One more remark. Convergence as such need not be something total or complete.

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Such is my response to Rumfitt's challenge against convergence. But I must confess that I remain less and less certain what exactly I ought to have been claiming about convergence, and uncertain again about how else to remedy the bareness of the Ramseian account of truth.

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Ian Rumfitt's (2019) comes as something of a godsend. If I had remembered what I had myself written in 1986 for Pettit and McDowell's *Subject, Thought and Content* (OUP), then I wouldn't have needed to strive so hard to find a definite answer to the question of the lifespan of Theseus' ship. (See my 2016, pp. 19–26.) Here Rumfitt restores me to sanity.

Rumfitt writes: 'By refraining from accepting the definiteness of *difference*, we can indeed make logical room for the difference between identity questions which have determinately correct answers and those which do not'. Consider now peoples or nations as Parfit conceives them and consider the effect of the slaughter of the Anglo-Saxon nobility at Hastings. Consider all the changes that William the Conqueror brought about in England. Was the English people still the same people as it had been before 1066? Rumfitt writes 'On Wiggins's original 1986 view, we should say the following. In the case where the lower-level facts – the facts about the structure of the government and the continuity of its office-holders – do not determine that the England of 1067 was the same nation as the England of 1065 (so) we should judge that the nations are not determinately the same'. Given the determinacy of identity (contrast difference) we should be prepared then to contrapose and to conclude from this that the England of 1067 was *not* the same as the England of 1065.

The reason why this argument was important for Parfit himself is that he doubted – and was happy to doubt, he wanted to doubt – that identity can be definite for *persons*. He did not want there to be a fully-fledged ontology of persons. There is no need of course to press Rumfitt himself to pass judgment on *that* particular matter. But for Parfit there was a need. For what he really wanted was for reasons of his own was an ontology of beings assembled through the workings of what came to be called quasi-memory.[1] (Rumour

[1] He resisted my comments on the definition of quasi-memory. They are collected together in my (2016) at pages 27–9, 93, 94n.

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had it that he instructed the technician who developed and printed for him to remove human beings wherever possible from the prints of his extraordinarily beautiful photographs. No persons appear on the paper cover of his first book *Reasons and Persons* (1984). This was a photo of Venice.)

None of this affects Rumfitt. But I do have something else to say about the argument that Parfit offers for the non-identity of pre-conquest and post-conquest Britain. In as much as this is an argument about individuation, it needs to be decided (I say) what it is exactly that we are talking about. Is this a country, a population, a people or a nation? (These words don't mean the same.) Claims about identity through time can *only* be decided by reference to some thing-kind which brings with it a principle of continuity for x adequate to ensure that any y that counts as the same as x will have all its properties and relations in common with x. Strictly speaking, such individuations must depends upon what nations *are*. Any proper answer will determine a particular principle of activity. Such a principle will trace, track and pick out the objects that share in that nature. See my (2016, chapter 1).

What were nations/populations/countries hostages for? Well, persons I say. Yes, but, as we have seen, persons do not belong in Parfit's preferred ontology. For, in some cases, the 'we' who can *survive* are not really persons, it seems. The survival Parfit envisages dispenses altogether with identity. Do we understand this? In *Needs, Values, Truth* (1987) Essay IX 'The Concern to Survive', I describe perfectly ordinary cases of hopes and fears where I showed that this claim makes nonsense of all sorts of ordinary hopes and expectations. It is hard moreover to understand the content of ordinary experience without reference to 'I'. Can there be a whole clone of subjects of experience with each of whom one can identify oneself? Indeed Q-memory itself is hard to envisage or characterize in ordinary experience without substantial access to the idea of oneself.

Reply to Adam Etinson

I am not sure whether, apart from the exchange which he describes as happening in New College Library, I ever properly met Adam Etinson. (I retired in 1999/2000.) But having read his contribution, I rather like him. His mention of 10 Merton St happily reminds me moreover of the time when in philosophy we had a library of our own (with the possibility of extension aloft), a simple admin of our own, and (true to the spirit of philosophy) a garden of our own –

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all on one of the most beautiful streets in Europe. So much for nostalgia. Moreover there were no prescribed sub-faculty reading lists.

Etinson writes as follows: 'Wiggins defends the possibility of objective truth in moral judgment and thus denies "error theory". But Wiggins is himself a moral subjectivist. In his *Ethics: Twelve Lectures*, as elsewhere in his work, he develops a largely Humean understanding of the nature and status of morality'.

Why does Etinson write 'but' here? Something troubles him about the consistency or coherence of my standpoint. Can one not be a subjectivist of any sort *and* an objectivist? Can one really admire all sorts of things in Mackie's work, yet refuse to embrace his 'error theory'? Let me see if, pace Etinson, I can both coherently and plausibly combine all of these claims.

We begin with something Plato says in *Republic*, Book Eight, 352d. 'Our discussion is about no trifling matter but on the right way to conduct our lives.' Let us allow the Platonic question to organize our discussion of the substance of morality. Our findings must be fit to be agreed among *us* – not just you or me, not just English people or (say) Americans but thinking/feeling persons in general. It is a question for *human subjects*, moreover. But the answer, if it is good enough, wise enough, will be *objective*. It is Plato's sort of question, surely, that structures or organizes John Mackie's rejection of utilitarianism and consequentialism, his discussion of the prisoners' dilemma, and so on.[2]

So 'subjective', I say, will stand in no settled or particular relation to 'objective'. See also 'A sensible subjectivism', which became Chapter V of my *Needs, Values, Truth* in its third (1983) edition. See especially pp. 190–200.

Over and over again what moral philosophy hunts for is an objective answer to the question whether this or that is beneficial or pernicious. For human subjects, is such and such dangerous or harmless? It is difficult to boil all this down into a finite set of axioms or a

[2] Aeons earlier than Mackie, Hume or any other thinker we know of, consider the perception of the murderous futility of vendetta and the ancient remedy, which was the determination of a blood-price, the payment of which can halt the whole supposed necessity for revenge. Some even find a depiction of the court that determines a blood price in one of the scenes depicted on the shield of Achilles. See Homer *Iliad*, Book 18, lines 497–509. On vendetta, see also my *Ethics: 12 lectures on the philosophy of morality*, pp. 341 ff. (Harvard and Penguin, 2006) on Montaigne and the moral virtues of the cannibals, evident as these virtues become in what was pointed out by those who accepted the invitation to visit Europe. That which shocked them shocks us too.

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'theory'. It is an outlook rather. Yet the result – I say – can yield up a mass of good answers to a whole crowd of rather detailed good questions all falling within the ambit of Plato's question.

But can good answers to Plato's question count as *true*? Mackie (I can readily imagine) would say 'no'. It is certain that the things we end up saying will be utterly unlike the exact topographical answers that a map-maker would give to questions about the geography of some place or a geologist might give to what lies beneath. But why must we model our answers to Plato's question upon answers to questions of geography or geology? And why must our efforts to answer Plato's question, or our devotion to the pleasure, happiness or contentment of human beings, yield only an ontology of what John Mackie calls make-believe?

Reply to John O'Neill

I am profoundly grateful to John O'Neill for his sympathetic and entirely accurate account of my views about sustainability, needs and the proper constraints upon economic reasoning. However hard I tried, I could not improve on it or even match it. I thank him too for the fascinating account he gives of Otto Neurath's contributions to social and economic thinking.

Reply to Jeff Seidman

Seidman demonstrates an enviable knowledge of a mass of literature ecological, economistic and philosophical. I have learned much from him. By way of reply, I shall offer two thoughts arising from his own reflections.

The first thought is to clarify my account of the life and outlook of the Latin peoples, the peoples of Italy whom the Romans came over the centuries to dominate. That outlook as Mommsen describes it was benignly animistic, consistent both with gratitude and with precautionary restraint. One of the several connotations of the Latin word *religio* was a scrupulosity allowing at once for the celebration of good fortune when it came and a moderation in its way *analogous* to the cautious scientifically informed fearfulness for the future of the earth. We cannot go back to those times but can we not learn from them?

The second thought is prompted by the anxiety that Seidman is occasioned by the fate of the swallow (for instance) a bird rarer and rarer

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in the Cambridgeshire that Robin Page frequented and cultivated. How are we to think about such losses? How much do these losses matter and why?

I offer two answers to that question, neither of them original with me. The first answer is to the effect that we need to think of the earth as *home*, the only home we shall ever have. See Scruton (2012). The second answer, offered in the very same spirit but a different idiom, may be found in Wangari Matthai's (2007, pp. 275–76).

> My mother was certainly not an environmentalist in the way we would understand the concept today, but she knew the beauty of nature when she saw it and how it made her feel. My mother told me a story of when she was a young woman. She used to walk through the forest from Neri to Naivasha on the western side of the Aberdare range [in Kenya]. As she walked she crossed numerous tributaries of the Gura River which I could hear from our house in Ihithe when I was a child. The Gura and all the other tributaries, known collectively as Magura, flowed down the Aberdares and my mother told me they were teeming with trout. Kikuyus didn't eat fish at that time so there was no fishing. But she and her friends would rest by the streams, watch the trout, and marvel at how beautiful they were.
>
> My mother is gone, as are many of those rivers and with them the trout and a way of life that knew and honoured the abundance of the natural world. Now, because of the devastation of the hillsides [by logging or conversion to cash crops], instead of rivers there are only little streams and the Gura River no longer roars. Its waters don't pass over the stones so much as seep into the riverbed, and even when I stand next to it, the river says nothing … its roar has slowly been silenced.

Maathai went on, in adulthood, to expose the corruptions which had devastated these places and many others. In the end she secured international funds for the planting of trees that would, so far as possible, restore the soil, the atmosphere and the ecology of the places devastated by the efforts of the colonial powers and their successors. In the end a million trees were planted – a partial restoration, a promising start upon the remaking of something that those who share in it may find it easier to rejoice in as their home.

I want to thank the editors of *Philosophy* for this wonderful and wholly unexpected opportunity to engage with the philosophers who have kindly contributed to this venture.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S003181912200016X Published online by Cambridge University Press

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