The Value of Ceremonies

JONATHAN WOLFF, President of The Royal Institute of Philosophy

Presidential Address

Abstract

Ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals, graduations, coronations, presidential inaugurations, and many other celebratory occasions play a central role in human life and society. But while their importance is emphasised in sociology and anthropology, as well as in Chinese, African and other philosophical traditions, ceremonies have received far less attention in Western philosophy, and when discussed are often, though not universally, dismissed as over-elaborate, or expressions of superstition. In this paper I will consider the nature and value of ceremonies, exploring both the positive and negative roles of ceremonies in human life, as well as considering how ceremonies can help us think about individual and group values.

1. Introduction

It is, to recycle a cliché, a genuine honour and privilege to take on the position of President of *The Royal Institute of Philosophy*; the most public-facing of the British national Philosophy societies.[1] From its foundation the *Institute* was determined to include the public not only as an audience, but also as participants in its activities, and I'm delighted that it continues to expand this role. My predecessors as Presidents all lived the idea that philosophy is not merely an academic discipline. All, through their publications and other activities, worked to show that philosophy as practiced in universities is just one part – though a vital part – of a much wider ecosystem.

[1] For comments, questions, and discussion on previous versions of this paper I'm especially grateful to Maria Alvarez, Bill Brewer, Elaine Collins, Avner de-Shalit, Mark Hannam, Angie Hobbes, Lucy O'Brien, Julian Ratcliffe, Jake Richards, Sarah Richmond, Ian Rumfitt, Howard Williams, and participants in the question and answer session after a version of this paper was delivered as my Presidential Address

doi:10.1017/S0031819125000014 © The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Royal Institute of Philosophy. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I've sometimes thought of myself as a member of the 'Guild of Import/Export Agents for Philosophy', and it's clear that *The Royal Institute of Philosophy* is the right trade association for me, and the Haberdashers' Hall the right location to celebrate the connection (especially as one of my grandfathers was a haberdashers' merchant, trading buttons and ribbons). I particularly wish to acknowledge and pay tribute to the outgoing President, Baroness Onora O'Neill, whose works I have read and admired since my undergraduate days. We first met when Onora was the external examiner for my MPhil thesis at UCL in 1985. She has supported me in numerous ways ever since, including, I think, writing a reference for me for my current post in Oxford.

2. Weddings, Funerals and $2 a Day

My topic, an appropriate one I hope, this evening, is 'The Value of Ceremonies'. I'm going to start in what might seem at first an unlikely place, a remarkable book called *Portfolios of the Poor* by Collins, Morduch, Rutherford, and Ruthven (2010). The authors set out to understand how it is possible for perhaps hundreds of millions of people today to live on two dollars a day PPP – purchasing power parity; that is on what you could get for two dollars a day in the United States. The authors studied poor families and communities in South Africa, Bangladesh and India. They used the innovative method of financial diaries; their research subjects recorded in full detail every financial transaction, large or tiny. The authors were particularly interested in the sophisticated informal financial instruments people used to manage their money, such as asking others to guard their savings, while at the same time taking out expensive short-term loans to increase their personal incentives to pay back. These are versions of strategies many of us will recognise in ourselves, of course.

What was so interesting to me, though, was that in stable times it turned out not to be too difficult to get by. The trouble was that prudent management was disrupted by several types of events. Unexpected medical expense was the most obvious, for these are societies with very limited access to good quality free healthcare. But more striking to me was the vast expense of funerals in South Africa and of weddings in Bangladesh and India. Given that the book was written when deaths from HIV in South Africa were running at a high rate, the problem in respect to funerals was intensified. The authors calculate that for poor families around seven months

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of income would be expected to be spent on a funeral, although wealthier family members would contribute too (Collins *et al*. 2010, p. 75). Similar sums were spent on weddings in Bangladesh and India (2010, p. 106) where 'even the poor host elaborate weddings' (2010, p. 96).

Fascinating though these sociological facts are, you might wonder why they are appearing in a philosophy paper. But perhaps the answer is obvious: ceremonies such as weddings and funerals are so important in the lives of a great many human communities that people are prepared to go to huge trouble and expense to host them. Consider again funerals in South Africa. One reason why they are so expensive is that the family holding the funeral is expected to host a large number of guests for several days. This means that a significant number of people take time out of their normal life to join in the ceremony. At the very least, and to put the point blandly, we seem to be able to conclude that ceremonies are, in some way, often connected to what human beings value. I'll develop this point in more detail shortly, to try to understand that connection and its implications, as well as its dangers. But before moving on, I want to note that two different reactions – which can be held together – are common on hearing these stories about elaborate funerals and weddings. On the one hand it can seem highly concerning that people with so little feel compelled to spend so much and make such sacrifices simply to participate in the expectations of ordinary life in their communities – going into debt that could blight their lives for years. Elaborate ceremonies intensify poverty. On the other hand, it can seem wonderful that people are prepared to make such sacrifices. Those who do this, we might think, have a deep understanding of what it is to live a human life in a human community. Maintaining and celebrating relationships, and commemorating life, family, and death are central to the human experience and override everyday material concerns. But still, we might worry, as a type of hybrid of the two positions, should they override prudent financial planning to such a degree? Do ceremonies have to be so extensive and expensive to fulfil their social purposes? However, it will be the polar opposites – concern at the excess and its consequences and admiration of the sacrifice – which will frame the following discussion.

3. The Centrality of Ceremony and the Philosophical Tradition

Ceremony and ritual, such as rites of passage, clearly loom large in human societies, and sociologists and anthropologists have often

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

treated ceremony and ritual as central to understanding a society. Remarkably, in English at least, the term 'rites of passage' is due to a book of that name by ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, not available in English until as recently as 1960. The subtitle to the original French 1909 edition has been translated as:

> Systematic study of the rites of the doorway and the threshold of hospitality, adoption, pregnancy, delivery, birth, childhood, puberty, initiation, ordination, coronation, engagement, and marriage, funeral, the seasons etc (van Gennap 2019 [1909], pp. xvi-xvii).

In other words, wherever we look there are rites (Bell, 2009). Many will be too trivial to call ceremonies, but others clearly are: religious rituals, harvest festivals; and, of course, ceremonies of births, deaths, marriages; ceremonies of reaching the end of childhood; professional achievement; retirement from working life; election to parliament; and no doubt many more. Some have a formal legal standing (birth, death, marriage) some an institutional, but not legal, form (graduation ceremonies), and others are entirely non-institutional (parties for children's birthdays). As Mary Douglas demonstrates, societies typically have extensive rituals of hygiene and purity (Douglas 1966). In one of the very few philosophical papers in the analytic tradition on ceremonies John Kekes writes that virtually all known human societies share a core set of activities which they mark by means of ceremonies or something similar, in addition to other things that may vary from society to society. The core events include: 'Birth, the passage from childhood to maturity, marriage, old age and death . . . achieving conspicuous success, displaying extraordinary vice or virtue, recovering from a serious illness, the return after a long absence' (1987, p. 258). The mention of 'extraordinary vice' reminds us of the important point that ceremonies can be negative in intent, such as public executions, or, in van Gennep's example, the unfrocking of a priest (2019 [1909], p. 1).

While ritual and ceremony are frequently mentioned in Chinese philosophy (see, for example Confucius's *Analects* and other texts in Ivanhoe and Van Norden 2001; as well as Hagen and Coutinho 2018; Bell and Pei 2020; and Seligman *et al*. 2008) in African philosophy (Appiah 1992; Tangwa 2010) and no doubt in other philosophical traditions, they have been given far less attention in the main canon of Western Philosophy. Certainly, there have been discussions of ceremony, and I have learnt from several that I will discuss in the following, but it has been hard to identify an established literature or common set of textual references. One of the most

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

prominent contemporary discussions is Richard Wollheim's paper 'The Sheep and the Ceremony', which, tellingly, centres on an example taken from Confucius (Wollheim 1979). As Wollheim puts the example:

> Tzu-kung, one of the disciples, asks about the monthly ceremony at which the new moon is announced to the Ancestors. Would it not be better, he queries, if the practice of sacrificing a sheep were done away with? Confucius reproves him gently. He calls him by his familiar name. "Ssu," he says, "You care for the sheep. I care for the ceremony." (1979, p. 1)

Wollheim sensitively describes the role of ceremony and ritual in human life:

> The ceremony of announcing the new moon ... may be used to represent a whole class of actions, without which human life would be very different both from what it is and what we may presume it to have been throughout culture. ... They are felt to be obligatory, though not necessarily unconditionally so, and certainly not by all; they admit of being well done or being badly done, or at any rate of being variably done; they, like all actions, have consequences, but they are not done for, nor do they derive value from, those consequences; the value that they have is best thought of their capacity to give value or meaning to a life – to the life, that is, of the person who performs them. (1979, pp. 1-2)

I will return at the end this paper to the connection between ceremony and the meaning it can give to a life. Wollheim is interested in its meaningfulness for the participant, and I will also explore this aspect. However, anthropologists and folklorists are much more interested in the meaning of ceremonies for the broader community, and I will also consider this question.

John Kekes, too, quoted above, is also much more interested in the role of ceremonies in communities than for the individual participants. Unlike Wollheim, who regarded himself as a lifelong socialist (Budd 2005, p. 228), Kekes is known as a philosophical defender of conservatism (Kekes 1998). Kekes, expanding on Wollheim, makes a strong case for the positive value of ceremony, suggesting that ceremonies weld a community together (1987, p. 258), allowing people to share each other's fortunes (1987, p. 260) and creating a link with the past (1987, p. 259). Kekes distinguishes ceremonies of special occasions contrasted with ceremonies of ordinary life (1987, p. 263) and insightfully argues that:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> If ... a ceremony does mark a significant occasion in a life-enhancing way, it fulfils three crucially important functions. It directs the expression of natural sentiments evoked by the event, it unites a community, and it acts as a bulwark defending civilized life from barbarism. (1987, p. 261)

I will return to all these points.

4. Ceremony and Ritual

What, though, do I mean by ceremony? I have used two terms: ritual and ceremony. Sometimes I will treat them as close to interchangeable, although I understand ritual as a repeating pattern, whereas a ceremony could be one-off, although I do accept that ceremonies that fall into a pattern of behaviour often have a stronger force. Also, we tend to use the idea of ritual in perhaps a dead-metaphorical sense as a repeating pattern of behaviour unrelated to celebration. Individuals can have their own rituals; for example, in the way in which a professional tennis player prepares to serve. Here I am interested in elaborate, collective, celebrations. Hence, I will largely talk about ceremony, though many of the ceremonies I discuss could also be called rituals. Ritual, though, is a much broader notion, and virtually all the anthropological studies I shall mention take ritual, or its cognate, 'rites' as their main object, with relatively sparse reference to ceremony.

Associated phenomenon include customs and traditions, while many of the features I will identify as characteristic of ceremonies can apply to marches, processions, pilgrimages, political rallies, sports, theatrical performance, concerts, making or appreciating music or art, carnivals, and no doubt many more collective activities. I will not discuss myths, taboos, magic, and symbolic forms, although they too bear some similarities but I am already stretching the limits of a single discussion. I will outline the particular features of ceremonies, concentrating on those that will play a part in the further analysis and discussion, without supposing that I am giving a definitive analysis of the concept of a ceremony that also distinguishes it from other related forms of behaviour. The boundaries will be fuzzy, and I will make some comparisons in a following section.

First of all, as just mentioned, the ceremonies I'm interested in are collective and elaborately so. In this respect they contrast not only with solitary rituals, but the minor ceremonies of everyday life which

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

can be collective but on a very small scale, where people go through a type of socially expected performance (Kekes 1987; Skorupski 1976, pp. 82-3; Wittgenstein 2008). Philippa Foot's discussion of etiquette can also be included here (Foot 1972). For a particularly charming example, consider this brief passage from Kant where he ponders what we might think of as ritual forms of deception:

> Can an untruth from mere politeness (e.g., the "your obedient servant" at the end of a letter) be considered a lie? No one is deceived by it. An author asks one of his readers, "How do you like my work?" One could merely seem to give an answer, by joking about the impropriety of the question. But who has his wit always ready? The author will take the slightest hesitation in answering as an insult. May one, then, say what is expected of one? (1991 [1797], p. 227).

Sadly for us, Kant does not answer his own question, but, in contrast to his better-known rigorism about the duty of truth-telling (Kant 1994 [1797]), Kant here seems to accept that for social purposes ceremonies of untruth are perfectly acceptable, and the connection between ritual and 'the limits of sincerity' has been widely explored (Seligman *et al*. 2008). Nevertheless, small-scale ceremonies, in contrast to Kant's rituals of politeness, can have a much deeper meaning; consider Kwame Anthony Appiah's description of his father's habit of casually spilling the first few drops of a new bottle of Scotch on the carpet, for the ancestor's share (1992, p. 113). But even when of great significance for the participants, such ceremonies typically involve only a few people, perhaps only one in some cases, whereas the ceremonies I'm interested in are ways of bringing a broader community together. Compare the distinction that Michael Walzer makes between the relatively recent invention of 'vacations' in which individuals or families 'vacate' their normal place of residence and go to a resort, and much older 'public holidays' where people celebrate together in their communities. Generally religious in origin – hence 'holy days' – they are, or at least were 'provided for everyone, in the same form, at the same time, and they were enjoyed together' (Walzer 1983, p. 192). A ceremony is much more like a public holiday in this sense than like a vacation.

A second feature is that ceremonies are 'out of the ordinary', and again here they can contrast with the minor ceremonies of everyday life. They take us out of our routines into what can be called a 'liminal space', extending van Gennep's idea that the participants in rites of passages occupy a liminal role between their former and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

transformed status for the duration of the ceremony (van Gennep 2019 [1909]; see also Turner 2017 [1969]). The idea of a liminal space is that everyone involved, whether active participant or spectator, is transported somehow out of normal time and very often to a special location permanently or temporarily reserved for such events. Ordinary pressures of business and routine are suspended, and attendance at a ceremony can also have an 'excusing' function: providing a good reason to absent oneself from other expectations. Indeed, a refusal to grant time off work or school to attend a funeral of a close family member, for example, is almost a paradigm of what it is to be unfeeling.

Thirdly, ceremonies of the type I'm interested in involve what Jürgen Habermas (2023, p. 146) – summarizing Victor Turner (2017 [1969]) – calls 'social drama'. Often people wear special clothes, or use specially designed artefacts, and recite pre-determined phrases, or at least follow a code or script, often using elaborate or archaic styles of speaking that they would not use on other occasions. In this way ceremonies are often a kind of performance.

Though distinct, social drama, especially the sense of script or code, is related to a fourth feature, the formality of ceremony, emphasized by John Skorupski (1976, p. 86). There is a sense of what is 'proper', related to Wollheim's comment, quoted above, that ceremonies can be done well or badly. Skorupski adds that ceremonies are a way of putting something on the social record (1976, p. 94), and then recorded in minute books or collective memories, and often the legal record too.

Fifth, and something that returns us to the consternation around the examples of weddings and funerals, is that ceremonies go beyond what could narrowly be construed as the strictly necessary, incorporating superfluous elements that at least on the surface appear more costly, or require more time and effort than need be in order to achieve their aim narrowly conceived. In common language, ceremonies make a fuss. This element of fuss – the combination of social drama and extravagance – may explain the negative, rather puritan, attitudes to ceremonies held by some (especially, it seems, left-leaning intellectuals), beautifully put in an essay on the idea of home by Holocaust survivor Jean Améry in his book *At the Mind's Limits*:

> I am not an old general. I do not dream of national grandeur, do not find in my family album any army officers and high-ranking civil servants. Also, I have a deep aversion to riflemen's gatherings, choral celebrations, and festivals of national costumes.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> I am, in general, precisely what in Germany not all too long ago would have been called an egghead. (1980 [1966], p. 54)

I will sometimes use the terminology of 'egghead' for those who make an objection to ceremonies on the grounds of fuss and extravagance.

Sixth, if done well, rather than for the sake of mere form, ceremonies typically engage the emotions, often to a high degree. People cry at weddings as well as funerals. Émile Durkheim, albeit speaking specifically about religious rites, suggests they are 'are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of the assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states of these groups' (1995, p. 9).

Contemporary neuroscience has explored the emotional side of ceremonies in much more detail. Dimitris Xygalatas, in a recent book *Ritual*, has summarised some of this research, including his own. Noting that all known human societies have ceremonies and rituals (2022, p. 5), he begins with the obvious question: 'What drives us all to engage in these behaviours, which have tangible costs without any directly obvious benefits? And why are these activities often held to be so deeply meaningful, even as their purpose is so often obscure?' (2022, p. 4). He endorses Durkheim's position, which he summarises as 'the performance of collective ceremonies allowed people to set their everyday worries aside and be transported, albeit temporarily, to a different state,' (2022, p. 31) but digs deeper into the nature of that transformed state. Monitoring the heart rates, electro-chemical brain activity, and other vital signs of participants and spectators – including himself – he manages to measure the highly excited physical states that people experience together. He remarks, '[b]y bringing people together to enact collective ceremonies, they provide a sense of connection and unity. And by marking key moments in our lives, they give a sense of accomplishment and growth' (2022, p. 242). Although there appears to be no necessary connection between excited physical states and a sense of meaning, it does appear in these studies that the two go together and perhaps even reinforce each other. The main chapter titles provide an excellent summary of the mechanisms and effects he identifies: 'Order'; 'Glue'; 'Effervescence'; 'Superglue'; 'Sacrifice'; 'Well-being'.

This emotional heightening achieved by ceremonies has also been the focus of some important earlier philosophical contributions. Hume in his essay on 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' (1987 [1744, 1777]) links ceremony to superstitious religion, which he bitterly

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

opposes, preferring Religious Enthusiasm which, he thinks, eventually burns itself out into something closer to calm reason, which he admires in sects such as the Quakers.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, however, sees the political potential in the emotional fervour of ceremonies, and in his late constitutional writings on Poland writes:

> How then is it possible to move the hearts of men, and to make them love the fatherland and its laws? Dare I say it? Through children's games; through institutions which seem idle and frivolous to superficial men, but which form cherished habits and invincible attachments. If I seem extravagant on this point, I am at least whole-hearted; for I admit that my folly appears to me under the guise of perfect reason. (n.d. [1772], p. 6)

Rousseau gives the example of bullfighting, which he claims 'has contributed no little to the maintenance of a certain vigour within the Spanish nation' (n.d. [1772], p. 16). Accordingly, Rousseau recommended introducing new civil ceremonies to bind together communities, noting, '[i]t is hard to believe to what an extent the heart of the people follows its eyes, and how much it is impressed by majestic ceremonial' (n.d. [1772], p. 17). Nevertheless, there is a hint of an earlier scepticism about ceremonies found in Spinoza, which I will discuss shortly, when Rousseau observes that Moses overburdened his people with peculiar rites and ceremonies (n.d. [1772], p. 8). You can, therefore, go too far, he thinks.

Xygalatas, who is especially interested in extreme rituals such as firewalking, and Rousseau, both focus on the general function of ritual, and, it seems are less interested in their precise contents, especially as often the meaning or rationale of the ceremonies and rituals Xygalatas discusses have been lost, while Rousseau encourages those building new constitutions to make up new ones for the sake of the psychological effects of the ceremonies themselves.

This observation, however, brings us to a seventh feature of ceremonies: the external meaning of ceremonies, by which I mean what they mark or celebrate, though in deference to Xygalatas we should concede that not all ceremonies have to have an external meaning, or, perhaps, while historically they may have had, the meanings can be lost, but the ceremonies continue. Many social scientists, however, are especially interested in this idea, which is well expressed by anthropologist Monica Wilson:

> Rituals reveal values at their deepest level ... men express in ritual what moves them most and since the form of expression

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> is conventionalized and obligatory it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies. (1954, p. 240)

Notice that the idea is not so much that the ritual is of value – although it is very likely to be – but rather the ritual reveals the values of the group. (Wilson herself distinguishes ritual, which she takes to be believed to be efficacious, from ceremony which she says can be mere play-acting, but I'm less convinced that there is a systematic distinction of this type – *cf*. Seligman *et al*. 2008.) Rituals and ceremonies can have a type of epistemological function of revealing values. I will return to this important point in much more detail shortly.

Eighth, and finally, I'm tempted to add a further feature mentioned by one commentator, albeit again about rituals: 'Rituals never fail to provoke commentaries on what kind of action they are or on what they may achieve' (Severi 2008, p. 79). Strictly, of course, this is simply false, as many ceremonies and rituals are absorbed into regular life and are no more reflected on than anything else, but the observation still contains an insight in that there is rarely a settled understanding of the nature and purpose of ceremonies, and once reflection starts in can lead into a number of diverse, conflicting accounts.

5 Comparisons with Other Collective Activities

Having laid out these conditions, it is apparent that, as mentioned above, many other human activities that would not instantly be identified as ceremonies bear many similarities. Take, for example, sport, as well as concerts, theatre, and carnival. They are elaborately collective, involve social drama – special clothes, codes, and scripts, often in a special location – and, if done well, take us into a liminal space where time passes in a different way, and they engage the emotions including the type of collective rhythm typical of ceremonies. As Nietzsche characteristically puts it:

> In the theatre one becomes mob, herd, woman, Pharisee, voting animal, patron, idiot—Wagnerite: there even the most personal conscience succumbs to the levelling charm of the great multitude, there the neighbour rules, there one *becomes* neighbour. (Nietzsche 1896, p. 69)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

And of course, theatre, in particular, can have an external meaning, such as reflection on the human condition, moral dilemmas, political scandals, and so on.

Iris Murdoch points out that the contemplation of art or nature can also take one to a place where time disappears (Murdoch 2001 [1970], p. 72). To pick up on another feature I've associated with ceremonies, take also sport. In a now famous discussion of Wittgenstein's claim that the concept 'game' cannot be defined, leading to the idea of 'family resemblance concepts', Bernard Suits, in contrast, suggested that a definition is available: a game is the intentional overcoming of unnecessary obstacles (Suits 2014). This idea of the unnecessary is resonant of the what I have called the 'fuss' of ceremonies.

Sport and theatre, and even more obviously carnival and religious worship, come very close to the account of ceremonies I have given here. Should we, then, consider them to be forms of ceremonies too, or look for a further point of distinction? For my own purposes – looking at sources of group identity and solidarity – there is reason to have an inclusive account, especially when external shared values can be detected, although I accept that there could be other analytic reasons for wanting to draw the boundaries more tightly.

Should we go even further? Concentrating now on the idea of a liminal space and taking people out of the routine, it is often observed that intense love has a similar role. It creates a space in which, for certain moments nothing else matters or exists (Luhmann 1986).

Kierkegaard remarks, '[p]eople are always crying that a depressive should try to fall in love, because if he does, he will forget about everything else' (2009, p. 7). Yet while love may help us understand one aspect of ceremonies, albeit in a particularly intense form, its personal nature means it lacks the communal experience I'm taking as central. Yet, of course, our starting point was the marriage ceremony, in which the love of two people, or at least their union, is collectively celebrated.

6 Ceremonies and Western Philosophy

I have suggested that the importance of ceremonies is much more apparent in Chinese and African, and no doubt other traditions, than in Western Philosophy and to a Western reader reverence for ritual is one of the most striking features of Chinese philosophy. Rituals are taken as central to life, and are a constant reference point with

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their value widely acknowledged. Rituals link to the sacred, and to a sense of respect for tradition, the past, and one's forbears, although they are not above criticism and there is also some discussion about whether sometimes they are too elaborate, too costly, or otherwise objectionable.

Comparing Chinese to Greek philosophy is interesting in this respect. In Book 1 of Plato's *Republic* the elderly Cephalus is depicted as 'garlanded' as he has been sacrificing in court, and makes the excuse that he has to return to court to supervise the sacrifices to avoid a demanding inquisition by Socrates. Plato's *Symposium* – an extended discussion of love – takes place at a feast, and there is discussion about which drinking ritual the participants should adopt before the serious conversation. Yet, as far as I can tell, for Plato festivals tend to take place off-stage, or as a backdrop to action, rather than being an object of philosophical interest.

For Aristotle they barely appear. Pythagoreans were reputed to have held to various rituals, but this is normally identified with the religious and mystical aspects of their practice, with the philosophical and mathematical contributions purified from such contamination, in a similar way in which Newton's physics was isolated from his mystical writings.

Spinoza, on the other hand, takes ceremonies head-on, devoting part of a chapter of his *Theological-Political Treatise*, published in 1670 (2007 [1670]) to the topic 'On the Reason Why Ceremonies Were Instituted'. This book is rarely read now, but claimed by the book's contemporary editor Jonathan Israel to be 'one of the most profoundly influential philosophical texts in the history of western thought' (Spinoza 2007 [1670], p. viii), primarily for having the courage to raise the question of the authorship of the Old Testament. Spinoza's agenda is to argue that ceremonies are not part of divine law or universal law, but exist for political and not religious reasons. His argument is that they vary in time and place, and hence can be linked to arbitrary authority. Several times he repeats that ceremonies do nothing to advance human happiness, which for Spinoza is connected to universal law.

Such scepticism diminishes the search for the meaning of ceremonies, but that project is taken much more seriously in the highly influential discussion in Wittgenstein's (2008) *Notes on Sir James Frazer*, extracted from much longer notes and compiled by others. Here Wittgenstein considers Frazer's account of ceremony and ritual in *The Golden Bough* (1988 [1911-15]), in which Frazer successively attempts to explain, reduce or unmask a dizzying profusion of rituals and ceremonies. Frazer, it seems, wants

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to *see through* ceremonies, explaining them as a type of ineffective primitive science. Wittgenstein takes strong exception to Frazer's reductionism and insists we should *see them as they are*. Wittgenstein notes '[Frazer's] explanations of primitive practices are much cruder than the meaning of these practices themselves' (2008, p. 44). (Wittgenstein's follower Peter Winch, 1990, p. 23, would later make a similar comment on Durkheim). In general, the debate concerns whether priority should be given to the perspective of the participant, who may have one view of the purpose of a particular ceremony, or the theorist who is likely to have a completely different view, possibly driven by a general theory of ritual and ceremony.

Indeed, Wittgenstein goes as far as to say '[o]ne could almost say that man is a ceremonial animal. This is probably partly false, partly nonsensical, but there is also some truth to it' (2008, p. 42). Some commentators have seen in these notes an initial sketch of the direction that Wittgenstein's later work will go, particularly in relation to the concept of 'form of life', though I will leave that to others. However, if we emphasise the continuity between ceremony, ritual, and ordinary life – Wittgenstein gives the example of hitting a tree or the ground with his cane when angry (2008, p. 54) – then their collective and social drama diminishes, and we reduce or even lose entirely the sense of transportation out of the ordinary. This is not to criticise Wittgenstein, but just to say that he is interested in a different range of ceremonies, and a different feature of them, than I am.

But with the exception of Rousseau and Wittgenstein – two philosophers who are often exceptions to any generalisation – the overwhelming response to ceremonies in the Western tradition prior to the 1970s or so is to ignore them entirely, or to diminish them, in the style of Jean Améry's 'egghead'. Consider, for example, Simone Weil's (1952) *The Need for Roots*. Weil lists fourteen 'Needs of the Human Soul', including some very surprising ones, such as Risk, Punishment, and Hierarchy, but ritual and ceremony are not among them. In *The Sovereignty of the Good*, in looking for a morality much more focused on inner states than was usual at the time, Iris Murdoch states that she considered using the example of religious ritual, but instead chose her famous illustration of a mother-in-law changing her evaluation of her daughter-in-law (Murdoch 2001 [1970], pp. 21-24).

Why have philosophers in the Western tradition given so little attention to ritual and ceremony? Of course, anything I say here must be speculative, but one thing to notice is the extraordinary

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

personal lives of the great philosophers in the Western tradition. It has often been pointed out that prior to the 20th century almost none of the philosophers that we still read today had what we might think of as an ordinary family life. Very few married or were responsible for the upbringing and education of children. What is less often observed is that many didn't even have a normal family life as children, being sent from home early to study or live with wealthier relatives. Hence, as a very broad generalisation, relatively few of the great philosophers were at the centre of ceremonies, in the sense of organising weddings, funerals, christenings, or other rites of passage, as part of their lives, other than to contemplate the arrangements for their own deaths – although several lived in aristocratic circles in which elaborate ceremonies, organised by others, would have been common.

A separate, though, quite possibly related, argument, concerns the nature of philosophy in at least a significant part of the Western tradition, which is brought out well by a comment on Voltaire by French novelist and biographer André Maurois:

> Voltaire's great weakness as a historian is that, being an intellectualist philosopher, he doesn't understand the sentiments and mystical cravings of other men. He does not perceive that underneath the multiplicity of sects and rites there is always the common ground of a need for rites. (n.d., pp. 59-60)

Durkheim as we noted, suggested that the point of religious rites was to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states, while Raymond Aron observes that 'there is a great philosophical tradition according to which authentic liberty is the mastery of reason or will over the passions' (2023, p. 44).

This idea of the mastery of reason over the passions is, no doubt, most explicit in Kantian moral philosophy, but the same attitude – that emotions need to be 'mastered' and are a distraction to clear thought – was widely held. And to the degree that ceremonies and rituals involve 'exciting' the emotions (although in fairness Durkheim talks of 'mental states' more broadly) then they will be the object of deep suspicion. Now, it is true that the philosophical tradition contains an important counterweight to Kant, running through Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith, that bases morality on sentiment rather than reason, but as Hirschmann points out these thinkers found it important to distinguish between 'calm' passions which can be channelled for productive purposes and 'inflamed' passions which are a danger to society (Hirschmann

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1977). Indeed, Rousseau may have known that in promoting ceremonies that inflame the passions he was playing with fire.

7 The Value and Danger of Ceremonies

Although there isn't a clean distinction here, I've discussed two types of relation between ceremony and value. On one approach, ceremonies and rituals have a type of force because of the nature of the event they are. They excite emotions, take people out of ordinary life, and cement the group together. This is independent of what it is that they celebrate. On the other approach, outlined by Monica Wilson, ceremonies are, or at least can be, a way of both revealing and reinforcing the particular values of the group.

We get a much more powerful result if we put the two – general force and particular content – together, and here I'm inspired by some comments of Jürgen Habermas, although I will use them in a different way. Habermas, both a philosopher and a sociologist of course, is especially interested in examples of such things as oaths, appointments, marriages, transfers of property, and the conclusion of contracts (2023, p. 134). Using the language of J.L. Austin, Habermas points out the combination of what he calls the 'minimal propositional content with an overwhelming illocutionary power' (2023, p. 135). The institutional framework means that just a few words – 'I do' for example – can have very significant consequences if said on the right occasion. There's something about the frameworks, which he acutely says 'trigger stereotypical feelings and evaluative attitudes and create social bonds' (2023, p. 134), that invests the content of ritual or ceremony with special force, and in the cases he mentions with legal, as well as social, consequences.

What interests me is that once we distinguish the force of ceremonies in general – they trigger stereotypical feelings – from their specific contents, we see that the two can merge to give particular emphasis and significance to those contents. Death takes on a greater significance in the context of a funeral and a partnership between two people in the context of a wedding. Ceremonies introduce significance, bonding and loyalty irrespective of content, while at the same time giving further force and support to that content.

Here, we can return to Kekes's observation that ceremonies act 'as a bulwark defending civilized life from barbarism' (1987, p. 261). What I take him to mean is that ceremonies have a sociological function of reminding us of and reinforcing what the group has traditionally regarded as genuine values that can easily be weakened

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

under challenge or neglect. In times of stress – economic crisis, war, poverty, disease – we can turn inward, and society can fragment. Ceremonies have the capacity to pull us back to what has traditionally been important and collectively valued. This is the appeal of ceremonies to conservatives, and one reason why progressives are so often so suspicious. Ceremonies have the socially solidifying function of taking away space for the criticism or revaluation of values, and assume that opposition is 'barbarism'. Progressives never want to stop the conversation, for now may be time to be liberated from previous values and practices. Yet there is also a point on which all can converge. There are things of genuine value which at moments of pressure on time and resources can come under threat of neglect. In this sense ceremonies are a vital reminder of what is so important that other aspects of life should stop, or at least pause, for them.

An even graver danger, though, is when the force of ceremony is used to support values or defend a message that would not stand up to calm rational scrutiny. One recent example concerning ceremonies is the (now mostly failed) attempt to reserve formal weddings to a man and a woman, giving one type of life-relationship a privilege – not only a legal privilege but also an emotional privilege – over others. But the issue is particularly acute in political speeches and rallies in which the neuro-physical effects of ceremony can cynically be hijacked to give a type of halo effect to a message and a surrounding set of values. It's possible that the effect can be so powerful as to put the content almost beyond question, and give controversial values a force, and even unquestioned loyalty, they are not entitled to. Although arguably not ceremonies in a natural sense of that term, political rallies can bear many of the same characteristics. Countering such smuggled in and distorted values is a difficult matter and requires sustained work by politicians, academics, journalists, and other actors. Stand-up comedians, for example, can be particularly effective in unmasking coded messages and reaching wider audiences than many academic analysts.

Of course, there is no reason why the content of the celebrated values needs to be traditional or regressive. Indeed, revolutionary speech and symbols are just as susceptible to this type of ceremonial artificial validation as racist or reactionary speech and symbols. Those who object to the use of ceremonial-type practices to propagate political messages will do so on the grounds that they give false validation to values, and object to such distortion, whatever its goals, and even if one actually supports those goals: these are the rationalists or 'eggheads'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Note that this argument from the distorting potential of ceremonies is distinct from the objection that ceremonies are over-extravagant. Imagine two reasons for opposing elaborate weddings. One, more common, is that they are a waste of money, time and energy that would be better saved or spent in other ways; the second, probably less common, is that they overplay the significance of the affective bond and of intimate, long-term, exclusive personal relationships. Both objections are possible and may often go together, but they are logically distinct and have a very different character.

8 Ceremonies and Social Philosophy

Ceremonies, as an intense part of life, have been remarkably resistant to the admittedly rather sparse philosophical critique they have received. When used well, they combine and intensify (at least) two sources of value – the form of the ceremony, and its content – and can help to show and preserve a society's values, and bring people together, even if ceremonies and related phenomena can be, and are, misused. Yet the arguments of the last section highlighting the danger of ceremonies to give undeserved support to questionable (though in fact unquestioned) values might seem to be in contradiction to the earlier arguments that, in a way, celebrated the value of ceremonies. Now ceremonies reappear in a much more sinister form. Should we conclude that the task of moral or political philosopher is to argue for the abolition of ceremonies on a combination of the grounds that they are wasteful of resources, and that they hijack the emotions to over-value the values they celebrate?

Apart from the fact that if we declare a war on ceremonies we will be sure to lose, I want to conclude by suggesting three reasons for taking ceremonies seriously in moral and political philosophy.

First of all, I want to draw a comparison with a move in contemporary political philosophy, based on a distinction between what is typically called ideal and non-ideal theory, although I prefer the term 'real world' to non-ideal. Ideal theory sets out ideal theories of justice, as a type of template to judge the world. Real world theory starts from actual problems in the world: perceived injustices and inequalities, and considers how to use philosophical tools and techniques to help mitigate those difficulties. There is much to discuss here, but the critical point is that real world philosophy needs to start with an assessment of how things are. In the present context, this means beginning from the recognition that ceremonies are central to human life. Even if we would like to wish them away,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

we can't. And hence it is important that they are understood, and their value as well as their dangers are appreciated. Otherwise, we risk retreating into utopian thought. As Richard Wollheim put the point: '[t]here is a well-worn phrase, "You must take him as you find him." I would adapt the phrase and say to moral philosophy, "You should take morality as you find it."' (1979, p. 37). Wollheim uses this idea in the course of arguing that morality is a broader phenomenon than typically understood by moral philosophers. I agree with this though not necessarily as Wollheim understands it. Here, I appropriate his phrase for purposes of developing real world moral philosophy. Ceremonies are with us, and are a valued part of life for most human beings, all around the world.

Second, and following on from the first point about the pervasiveness of ceremonies, there is a possibility that philosophical reflection upon ceremonies can help us develop better philosophical accounts of a meaningful life, and this was Wollheim's own reason for reflecting on ceremony. Departing from Wollheim's own analysis I'd like to make the connection in the context of one currently influential approach to understanding what makes a life meaningful, which has been developed by American philosopher Susan Wolf. Wolf argues that there are two components to a meaningful life. She summarises her approach as suggesting that meaning arises: 'where subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness' (1997, p. 211). Wolf does not, though, offer an account of objective value, illustrating her position with various examples of what she believes to have, and not to have, objective value. Yet resting the account of the objectively attractive on individual judgement threatens to obscure the distinction between 'subjective attraction' and 'objective attractiveness' and thereby reduce the account to something closer to an existentialist view of finding meaning in individual choice. While ceremony doesn't show objective value in the fullest sense, it does show what is deeply valued within a community; a type of inter-subjective value. Hence it is possible that ceremonies can provide a guide to some forms of value that transcend individual judgement, and hence can feature in a Wolfian 'dual component' theory of a meaningful life for an individual.

Finally, I come to a third reason, which I should now say is my main motivation for extended reflection on ceremonies, and that is in connection with thinking about nationalism. In the aftermath of World War 2 many political philosophers shared a judgement well expressed by philosopher Brian Barry that nationalism is 'inimical to civilised values' (1991, p. 157). Yet more recent trends in politics have seen a revival of nationalism across the globe. Some

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

philosophers have welcomed this, and even in the 1990s, attempted to develop theories of 'liberal nationalism' which they have returned to more recently in the light of events such as Brexit, Trump's presidency, and the rise of illiberal nationalism (see for example Miller 2016; Tamir 2018).

For my part, I view the revival of nationalism with quiet alarm, and although it may be possible to distil what is valuable in nationalism from what is troubling (Wolff 2024), what nationalism has in its favour is its ability to tap into the need many people seem to have to identify with a group that is smaller than humankind as a whole (Cohen 1983, p. 235). Bearing in mind, however, that national identity is only one of many identities we have (*cf*. Wolff 2015, 2017), I would like to consider the possibility that ceremony can identify and allow us to celebrate other forms of group identity that have positive value, and less negative potential than nationalism. Now, this may seem a fool's project. National solidarity is a value much promoted by ceremonies, and we saw, for example, that Rousseau was well aware of the value of ceremony in building a national identity. But we can, in a way, take Rousseau's hint that ceremonies build solidarity without reserving them for the building of national solidarity.

Ceremonies, I have argued, are a type of epistemology of value – they can help us identify at least what is found valuable in a society. I suggest that they can also be an epistemology and locus of group identity and value. One of those groups, as noted, will be the nation and another the family, which is celebrated by means of the ceremonies I began with: weddings and funerals. But at the same time there are many other sources of group identity, connected with friendship, neighbourhood, region, religion, ethnicity, culture, work, recreation, and numerous other sub- and cross-national formations.

Consider, for example, a much-quoted remark from Alasdair MacIntyre:

> I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession, I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations (2007, p. 225).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This passage is often taken to be a summary of MacIntyre's communitarianism, but it is of interest that MacIntyre here implies that each person is potentially a member of many communities based on differing aspects of their identity, and there is no reason to think that he has identified all possibilities. Each of these can offer the solidarity of a group, and although the idea of a nation is present, it is one among many.

It may be said, though, that if we are capable of listing such groups directly, without first going through the mediation of ceremonies, as MacIntyre has done, we are not in need of ceremonies as an epistemology. This is a fair point, but I would make two replies. First, I have not claimed that ceremonies are a unique epistemology for discovering group values; they can be one of many, but sometimes may alert us to a group identity that is less often brought to attention: membership in an academic community, for example. Second, ceremonies are not merely an epistemology, but have many other aspects. As noted above, the ceremonies I'm interested in are collective, take us into a liminal space, involve social drama, have a formality, go beyond utilitarian necessity, and strongly engage the emotions of participants and spectators. In addition to revealing values, they can celebrate and reinforce them. In this way they can still have a role to play in strengthening group identities. Furthermore, they provide a type of protection against fragility, reminding us of what is important when we are under other forms of pressure. This is the idea of ceremonies as a 'bulwark' in Kekes's phrase. Whether or not we want to add the idea of a bulwark 'defending civilized life from barbarism' is another matter, but the ideas of defending lasting values against temporary threats and pressures is of much wider appeal.

What, then, are the types of groups that can be celebrated and reinforced by means of ceremony? The most obvious are religious, and of course many ceremonies have a strong religious aspect. Again, we need to start by taking the world as we find it, in which even those who do not profess religious faith often pay lip service to religion at important moments in life by using forms of ceremony either conducted in a religious context, or at least following the form laid down by traditional religion. What I take from these cases, however, is that religions are typically trans-national in form, and while nations often claim a religious affiliation, it is rarer for a religion to feel it is bound to a particular nation, even when it has that nation in its name (as some forms of Christian Orthodoxy do). Hence there is a sense in which religion transcends nation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I also should point out that, certainly in nations of any size, regional affiliations often come much more naturally than national identities, which often have to be constructed. Many countries have a strong internal divide and rivalry between different states, or provinces, or the North and the South, or equivalent, with different climates, cuisines, and styles of life. Of course, such sub-national identities can have a bad side as well as a good, insofar as they define themselves against an 'other', but here my point is simply that sub-national identities, alongside trans-national identities, provide another alternative to national identity.

Less well-developed, in terms of ceremonial celebration, are civic non-national groups, and at least some of these are on the decline. What I have in mind here are such things as trade union fares, colliery bands, society prize ceremonies, football teams, local interest societies, perhaps even exercise classes, and other ways in which people come together to celebrate their solidarity within their collective. Again, eggheads show their disdain for such things, but the problem is that in doing so they are leaving the field open to sinister interests.

Clearly there is much more to be said here, but developing the connection between ceremony and group value in detail is a task for another occasion. In the meantime, I want very briefly to return to the first of these three reasons for taking ceremonies seriously: real-world philosophy. People reading this paper may or may not find ceremonies appealing – and I have to repeat my confession that personally I'm often, if not always, with the eggheads – but if we ignore ceremonies we ignore a central component of human life, society, and culture. That would be a strange thing to do for people who call themselves philosophers. And even stranger when they come together under the banner of something called *The Royal Institute of Philosophy*.

Bibliography

Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980).

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Raymond Aron, *Liberty and Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023).

Brian Barry, 'Self-Government Revisited' in his *Essays in Political Theory Vol. 2: Democracy and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 156-186.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
Daniel A. Bell and Wang Pei, *Just Hierarchy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).
Malcolm Budd, 'Richard Arthur Wollheim', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 130 (2005), pp. 227-246.
G.A. Cohen, 'Reconsidering Historical Materialism', *Nomos* 26 (1983), pp. 227-251.
Daryl Collins, Jonathan Morduch, Stuart Rutherford, and Orlanda Ruthven, *Portfolios of the Poor* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).
Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966).
Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. by Karen E. Fields (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1995).
Philippa Foot, 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives', *The Philosophical Review*, 81:3 (1972), pp. 305-316.
Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1911-15]).
Jürgen Habermas, *Also A History of Philosophy, Vol 1* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023).
Kurtis Hagen and Steve Coutinho, translated with commentary *Philosophers of the Warring States: A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2018).
Albert O. Hirschmann, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).
David Hume 'On Superstition and Enthusiasm' in his *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* ed. by Eugene Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987).
Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001).
Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [1797]).
Immanuel Kant, 'On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns' in his *Ethical Philosophy*, trans. by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994 [1797]).
Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
John Kekes, 'The Moral Importance of Ceremonies', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 21:4 (1987), pp. 251-268.
John Kekes *A Case for Conservatism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).
Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd edn. (London: Duckworth, 2007).
André Maurois, *Voltaire* trans. by Hamish Miles (London: Daily Express Publications, n.d. [1935/6?])

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

David Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1970]).
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzche Contra Wagner* in his *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* Vol. 11 (London: H. Henry and Co., 1896).
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (Bombay, India: Grapevine, n.d. [1772]).
Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Pruett, and Bennet Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
Carlo Severi, 'On Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*', in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Mythology in Our Language: Remarks on Frazer's* Golden Bough ed Giovanni da Col and Stephan Palmié (Chicago, IL: Hau Books, 2008), pp. 75-83.
John Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* ed Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1670]).
Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, 3rd edn. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2014).
Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).
Godfrey B. Tangwa, *Elements of an African Bioethics in a Western Frame* (Bamenda and Buea, Cameroon: Langaa RPCIG, 2010).
Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (London: Routledge, 2017 [1969]).
Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, ed David I. Kertzer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019 [1909]).
Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (London: Martin Robertson, 1983).
Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952).
Monica Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Ritual and Symbolism', *American Anthropologist*, 56:2 (1954), pp. 228-241.
Peter Winch, *The Idea of A Social Science* 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1990).
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Mythology in Our Language: Remarks on Frazer's* Golden Bough, ed. by Giovanni da Col and Stephan Palmié (Chicago, IL: Hau Books, 2008).
Susan Wolf, 'Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 14 (1997), pp. 207-225.
Jonathan Wolff, 'Forms of Differential Social Inclusion', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 34:1 (2017), pp. 164-185.
Jonathan Wolff, 'Social Equality, Relative Poverty and Marginalised Groups" in *The Equal Society* ed. by George Hull (London: Lexington, 2015) pp. 3-23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jonathan Wolff, 'Nationalisms: Purification, Privilege, Pride, and Protection', *Studia Philosophica Estonia*, 17 (2024), pp. 96-106.
Richard Wollheim, 'The Sheep and the Ceremony', *The Leslie Stevens Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
Dimitris Xgyalatas, *Ritual* (London: Profile Books, 2022).

Professor JONATHAN WOLFF *was elected President of The Royal Institute of Philosophy in October 2023, succeeding Onora O'Neill, Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve* CH*, in the role. He delivered his inaugural Presidential Address on 9th May 2024 at Haberdasher's Hall, London.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819125000014 Published online by Cambridge University Press