UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Philosophy at Cambridge

Newsletter of the Faculty of Philosophy

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From the Chair

Alexander Bird

Ancient, revered sage with Confucius, Fudan University, Shanghai, May 2024

Just as the last newsletter was being sent out, I was on my way to Shanghai for a visit to Fudan University. Fudan is one of Cambridge's partner universities in the Global Humanities Network, and has a large School of Philosophy where I gave a series of lectures in the philosophy of medicine, plus a department talk. I mention this because the relationship of British universities to China has been much in the news lately. One thing is certain, and that is that China cannot be ignored. And this goes for its university sector in particular. Heavy investment in its universities has seen the quality of their research rapidly reach the highest levels. Which is hardly surprising in a country that has a long tradition of valuing education (even if interrupted in the Mao era), a large population, and now the will and wealth to invest in education. My experience of Fudan was that I found the students and academics (operating in English) as engaged and as sharp as you would expect at a leading British or North American university—again not very surprising, given that a large proportion of the academic staff have British or North American PhDs. My own view, given the significance of China and, increasingly, of its universities is that we must engage with our Chinese colleagues. Yet, at the same time, we should be cautious that we are not compromised by this engagement. This is a space to be watched.

This being my last year as Chair of the Faculty of Philosophy, there are a few things that I would like to achieve before stepping down. First, I will continue our efforts to encourage philanthropic support to the Faculty, which has proved so essential to us in the recent past. We aim to raise financial support for doctoral scholarships and for new university teaching officers (UTOs—i.e. lecturers). The former are important because government funding for doctoral studies in the humanities has pretty much come to an end and because without our excellent PhD students we would be hard-pressed to deliver all the supervisions that are required. We need to expand our UTO numbers because we are so much smaller than our competitors, and because our students are interested in a broader range of philosophical topics, including interdisciplinary ones. Secondly, I will explore ways of getting colleges to provide more support for and active engagement with Philosophy. While almost all colleges wish to take undergraduates in Philosophy—which is laudable of course—many of them take just one student each year and do not have a permanent member of the University or of the college as Director of Studies. Would it be better, maybe, if fewer colleges took undergraduate philosophers, but each took more? Thirdly, Philosophy is unusual in that all supervisions are organised by the several Directors of Studies (DoSs) directly and with no participation by the Faculty, which can be difficult for inexperienced DoSs without strong Faculty connections (see previous point). Could an opt-in system of centrally organised supervisions help? I am looking at using the work of Alvin Roth, who was awarded the 2012 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics. This addressed matching problems, such as matching kidney donors and recipients across multiple hospitals. DoSs face a similar problem—they may be able to give supervisions in metaphysics but not in political philosophy. But they have a directee who wants to take a political philosophy paper, not a metaphysics paper. Currently DoSs swap supervisions pairwise. But it would be more efficient, and more helpful to less well connected DoSs, if we could organise longer chains of swaps. Implementing Roth's work on doing this efficiently is not straightforward, which is where AI will come in. Let's see what we can do.

In Conversation with Alex Bryan

Johannes Wagner

Alex, the current Isaac Newton Trust Academic Career Development Fellow, talks to Johannes about his fellowship and work at Cambridge.

What did this fellowship mean to you when you received it? It was extremely exciting. Having had previous positions which were either exclusively research positions or involved a higher teaching load, I was very glad to be able to develop both these things at the same time. I've really valued the teaching aspect, the connection with the faculty, the connection with the colleges. As a more junior person having protected time for research is absolutely crucial. I feel extremely fortunate for the opportunity to be at Cambridge for nearly three years now.

What has the fellowship enabled you to do in terms of your research? The primary project set out in my research proposal concerned the group agency of nation states. The fellowship enabled me to engage with the group agency literature in general, but also in relation to specific topics such as climate responsibility, or intergenerational responsibility of corporations. Among other things, these explorations of group agency have evolved into a project on political protest, where I am investigating the way in which protesters avoid or mitigate various moral risks involved in their action through being organised. In protest, people can decide to arrange themselves, to organise themselves in a variety of different ways. These can interestingly enable protesters to distance themselves from or be affiliated with the claims of each other, acting in some ways as collectives, in others as individuals.

I've also worked on a paper on forgetting in democracies: When and if citizens are justified in reducing the salience of certain important matters in their collective reasoning. I am also developing research on a paper exploring the justification of the use of expropriation by states to promote distributive justice, which is informed by a consideration of the nature of the agency of states.

These projects sound highly relevant to current issues. How do you see the relation between political philosophy and contemporary political developments? At least in the work I do, I think it would be foolish to aspire to develop theories that give much conclusive, direct guidance to people engaged in politics (which of course is all of us to various extents). My work on protest, for instance, doesn't try and tell people what they should do. What it does try and do is map out some of the features of the normative landscape which haven't been fully explored. That can be useful practically, even if it doesn't directly result in practical application.

Conversely, I find that as a political philosopher, contemporary events are an extremely useful way of getting into philosophical issues. Obviously you have to then engage in various kinds of idealisation and abstraction, but if I'm interested in something in the world, that tends to mean it's a good subject for philosophical discussion. I find things puzzling when they happen; I find things intriguing or confusing or conflicting politically. Philosophy for me is a productive way of trying to work out what is causing those feelings.

A prominent theme in your research is the republican notion of freedom. Why do you think this is a relevant idea, say, within the context of modern democracies? The appeal of the republican notion of freedom is its ability to account for cases that classic non-interference accounts of freedom fail to. In a legally patriarchal society, a husband would have the power to interfere arbitrarily without any concern for his wife's interests. Republicans think that the unfreedom of the wife is not exhaustively accounted for in terms of interference. What's relevant here is the more fundamental condition of not being subject to the power to interfere, and hence the idea that freedom requires the absence of such power.

I think this is a really powerful idea and my PhD was an exploration of the economic commitments that emerge from it. Think about things like gig work, an increasingly major part of the British economy; delivery and taxi drivers, people in precarious contracts, casual labour. In all these cases, it is hard to articulate what's wrong on a non-interference account of freedom. On a republican view, we can articulate the wrong involved as a subjection to arbitrary power.

This is also valuable for understanding liberty in democracy. The republican account of freedom feeds into a republican account of justice and a republican account of democracy. Democracy, of course, is all about being subject to institutions that we have political authority and relevant kinds of control over. As well as providing a justification of democracy as such, republican freedom also provides us nice forms of critique for various institutions when they fail to meet that standard, which is obviously quite frequently.

It sounds like republican freedom reveals a deep tension in the idea of democracy: Democracy secures this kind of freedom best, but democratic institutions also threaten to compromise it. Perhaps that tension is at the heart of all accounts of democracy. When we are ruled by institutions that are not constrained by the rule of law, when we are ruled by institutions over which we don't have equal levels of relevant control, then we're dominated by those institutions and by the state. We've got this incredibly powerful political set of institutions and we need to think how it could possibly be justified. It's very plausible this justification will set some pretty exacting standards for those institutions.

That's often accepted when it comes to the idea that, in societies like ours, it's hard to imagine a legitimate state being a non-democracy. We think that these institutions have to be responsive to people's interests and preferences, each given the chance to make inputs, and for the outputs of the system to be determined by those inputs in the relevant and appropriate ways. But even in well-established democratic institutions, with very clear rules about what they can and can't do, there's always going to be people acting

out, things happening that shouldn't happen, there are going to be mistakes. Having this point of tension here is actually a useful thing to just be open about in a theory of democracy.

When we talk nowadays about the crisis of democracy, is it this inherent tension we are picking up on? I think the current crises of democracy are largely brought about by things other than the fundamental tensions. One of the bases of the crisis of democracy in the West is to develop effective economic models in the current age that provide people with a sense of security and rising living standards. Another one is a kind of communications crisis, where we can bundle together questions of polarisation, truth, the development of things like echo chambers and epistemic bubbles, and the broader questions of the epistemic value of democracy. The development of new communication technologies is something that democracy is still only beginning to grapple with, and it poses serious problems in the absence of a shared understanding of politics.

Having said that, the fundamental tension we talked about earlier remains central to both of these, because both the economic situation and the communication crisis make people feel increasingly like they don't have the right kinds of control over institutions. Some of those reasons might be well-grounded: There is evidence that current democratic systems are much more sensitive to the interests of the wealthy than the not wealthy, so there is a reasonable concern. Others might be less reasonable, leading people to conspiratorial thinking about how states are acting or to wish to use the power of the state to inflict violence on others.

Does working on political philosophy in these times lead to optimism? I'm not a natural optimist anyway (laughs). Here's one cause for optimism that comes from being a political philosopher these days: There's an enormous amount of extremely good work being done in political philosophy, work that engages with questions of political significance. Some of the things that have been identified with regards to current challenges are of great value from a diagnostic point of view for the societies we live in.

As an observer and as a philosopher, there's a part of me that thinks this is a methodological question of how we go about engaging with and reading the world in a way that's best for theorising. Another, I suppose, is for all of us – how we engage in the world without becoming too overwhelmed by the dreadfulness of various things. It seems a stretch to think that there is basis for optimism from the doing of philosophy. But I think that as a political philosopher, it's important to try and retain a sense of the possible, retain an awareness of both sides of oppression and injustice. The responses to invidious social conditions are often a cause for optimism, and as such also of real philosophical interest. On the whole, it is useful to pay attention.

Circling back, is there something you really appreciate here at Cambridge? I'll start with just the incredibly encouraging environment that I found in the Philosophy Faculty. People are interested and supportive and will take time to help you. Another thing I valued is being a member of a college, and across both the colleges I'm affiliated with, I have built relationships with other members and students. There are lots of things that I appreciate, but I'll stick with those.

If you were to meet a donor behind the fellowship, what would you say to them? I would express my gratitude for being able to do the fellowship, and give a sense of how it has affected my career and research, which has been positive and significant. I would also say that these kinds of programmes, beyond my own personal experience, are valuable for the university and its research community. I would encourage them to continue looking to provide such opportunities to people.

The Isaac Newton Trust Academic Career Development Fellowship

A case of the impact of philanthropy for Philosophy at Cambridge

In 2022-23, the **Academic Career Development Fellowship** for humanities subjects was established by the Isaac Newton Trust (see here for more details). This Fellowship scheme is a unique collaboration between the Isaac Newton Trust, the University's Faculties, and one or more Colleges. With the help of two donors, the Philosophy Faculty was fortunate to be the first Faculty in our School to be awarded this Fellowship, held by Cecily Whiteley 2022-23 and Alex Bryan 2023-2025.

The Isaac Newton Trust is an independent charity founded in 1988 by Trinity College to promote learning, research, and education at the University of Cambridge. Trinity's endowment permits it not only to sustain its own activities, but also to act as a charitable foundation supporting the University. The Trust was set up to allow a significant element of this to be run independently at arm's length from the College, with Trustees from across the University. As illustrated by this Fellowship, the Trust often works by helping to leverage funding from other sources.

The Isaac Newton Trust Academic Career Development Fellowship is an initiative complementing a range of other programmes designed to support research at Cambridge. For each Fellowship awarded, the Trust provides 40% of the funding, combined with 30% each from the Faculty and College side. For our Fellowship, the Trust partnered with the Faculty of Philosophy as well as Magdalene and Newnham Colleges. This is reflected in the varied duties of the post-holder, who contributes to Faculty teaching, while also acting as Director of Studies and Supervisor at both Magdalene and Newnham. The funding from the Trust enables the Fellow to advance their research, while gaining teaching experience through their Faculty and College responsibilities, and being mentored through the Faculty.

Crucial to this Fellowship has been the support of philanthropic donations. The establishment of our Fellowship was made possible thanks to two donations, one from a Magdalene alumnus and one from a Newnham alumna. The donors were glad to support the Faculty and their Colleges in this novel way, creating a new kind of early career position that combines teaching and research with Faculty and College responsibilities. With 40% of the funds contributed by the Isaac Newton Trust, this collaboration allows smaller personal donations to be leveraged, to fund a full three- to four-year fellowship, with possibilities for future funding if partners can be found. Alumni contributions play a vital role on the College and Faculty side. The terms of donor participation are flexible, and the Isaac Newton Trust helps facilitate the needed collaboration. Such donations, in tandem with the Isaac Newton Trust's support, are testifying to the power of philanthropy to enable, sustain, and transform Philosophy at Cambridge.

Rae Langton, with inputs by **John Marenbon** (both faculty members & INT trustees)

Exploring Our Place in Nature: The BSHP Annual Conference 2025

Julia Borcherding and Angela Breitenbach

Dalia Nassar speaks at the BSHP annual conference, April 2025

The British Society for the History of Philosophy gathered in Cambridge last April for its annual conference, bringing together scholars from around the world to explore one of the most important themes in philosophical inquiry today: our relationship with other animals and the environment. The conference offered a rich tapestry of perspectives spanning from antiquity to the present day. The three-day event featured five keynote addresses, numerous panel sessions, and a special symposium, all united by the question of humanity's place within the natural world. A rich selections of talks demonstrated that this is a question with which philosophers across the globe and a range of intellectual traditions have been grappling throughout the history of philosophy. The conference was organised by a team of Cambridge-based philosophers including Julia Borcherding, Angela Breitenbach, Lea Cantor, Sophia Connell and Lia Nordmann, and generously hosted by the Faculty of Classics.

The opening keynote by Mara van der Lugt set the tone with "The Cosmic and the Creaturely," examining the tension between cosmic perspectives and the lived reality of individual creatures. This framing proved crucial for understanding how different philosophical traditions have balanced abstract principles with concrete concern for particular beings. Subsequent keynotes expanded this inquiry across cultures and centuries: Saloni de Souza explored Garcia de Orta's critique of Eurocentric philosophy through the lens of medicine and natural knowledge; Catherine Rowett considered pigs and gully-birds in Plato to explore disgust as an ethical response; Dalia Nassar examined Madame de Staël and Karoline von Günderrode's distinctive contributions to understanding our relationship to our natural environment. The conference's closing keynote by Clare Mac Cumhaill, building on the work of the late philosopher Mary Midgley, presented an intriguing framework for conceptualising humans as part of a larger, interdependent community that includes other animals and nature.

Mary Midgley herself emerged as a central figure throughout the conference, with an entire symposium dedicated to her work and multiple panels addressing her contributions to animal ethics and environmental philosophy. Speakers explored her zoological approach to Aristotelian ethics, her use of ethology in ethical naturalism, and her distinctive method of "listening to animals." This sustained attention reflected Midgley's growing recognition as one of the twentieth century's most important voices in environmental ethics.

Overall, the many talks given at the conference offered a remarkable historical and thematic breadth. Ancient philosophy sessions ranged from Aristotle's understanding of animal nature and cosmic teleology to Stoic anthropocentrism and Lucretian arguments for animal free will. One panel creatively explored insects in Greek poetry and philosophy, including a paper defending Plato's use of the cicada as a political symbol. Medieval philosophy was represented through papers on animal agency in Thomas Bradwardine and aesthetic experience of nature in Hadewijch's mystical writings, while early modern sessions examined figures from Margaret Cavendish to Spinoza and Leibniz.

The conference gave attention both to overlooked voices of the past and to pressing challenges of the present. A symposium on modern British women philosophers highlighted Margaret Cavendish's views on natural continuity and Mary Shepherd's account of animal moral agency. Papers on Anna Kingsford, George Eliot, and nineteenth-century women philosophers demonstrated how gender has shaped philosophical engagement with nature. At the same time, discussions of Kant on the human-animal relation, Nietzsche on mastery of nature, Schopenhauer on environmental catastrophe, and deep ecology in Anne Conway all resonated with current environmental debates. A panel on twentieth and twenty-first century philosophy explored indigenous responses to animal rights theory, continental approaches to environment and memory, and the roots of deep ecology movements.

The conference also honoured the memory of the late Bob Stern, an invaluable and much missed member of the society, with a special plenary session featuring reflections on his work and a presentation on hope as a secular virtue. The session paid a fitting tribute to a leading philosopher who combined rigorous historical scholarship with important contributions to contemporary debates.

Beyond formal sessions, there were opportunities for informal exchange among the presenters and attendees through a drinks reception in Classics' Cast Gallery and a conference dinner at Millworks Restaurant.

Overall, the conference offered a powerful demonstration that the history of philosophy offers us vital resources for thinking through our relationship with the natural world. By examining how philosophers from Plato to Midgley have understood animals, environment, and human nature, presenters formulated ways forward, while reminding us that however daunting the questions we face today may be, we do not have to face them alone.

Julia Borcherding is Associate Professor in the Faculty, working on Early Modern Philosophy and Ethics.

Angela Breitenbach is Professor in the Faculty, working on Kant, Philosophy of Science, Environmental Philosophy, and Aesthetics.

Priority and Prejudice: The Epistemology of Salience and Attention

Jessie Munton

The origins of this book go back a decade, to when I was writing my PhD and became interested in theories of delusion and hallucination in schizophrenia. One prominent view traces these symptoms to dysregulation of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which leads otherwise mundane features of the environment to feel unusually salient. In trying to make sense of this altered experience of salience, the mind generates the unusual experiences or beliefs characteristic of hallucinations and delusions. The theory turns on the idea of "aberrant salience": too much salience attached to some things and too little to others. That invites the question: What makes salience aberrant? How salient *should* something be? What *ought* we to attend to?

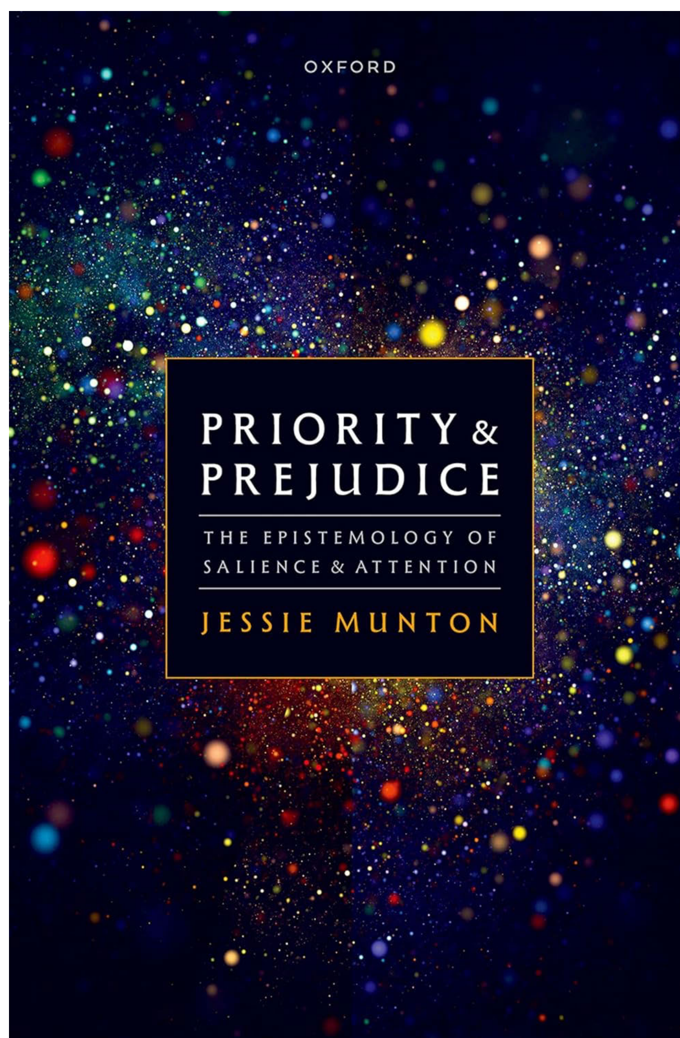
Around the same time, I noticed that certain forms of prejudice didn't seem to be primarily rooted in false beliefs, but in the quantity of attention someone paid to certain facts, or features of an individual or situation. Could these forms of prejudice similarly be understood as forms of aberrant salience? And then there is the perennial question: why doesn't everyone agree with me? Sometimes we disagree about the facts. But sometimes we disagree instead in virtue of differences in which of those facts we attend to or prioritise in our reasoning. That makes such disagreements hard to resolve. I was back at the same question: what *ought* we attend to in any given situation?

Attention and salience are central to our cognitive lives. Many aspects of reasoning, our personality traits and even emotions are partially constituted by what we are disposed to pay attention to. Grief, or love, for instance, involve characteristic patterns of attention; certain forms of anxiety and rumination are characterised by the inability to stop attending to particular thoughts. Abductive reasoning relies on the selection of evidence and hypotheses in ways that are shaped by attention. These phenomena have very significant consequences for activities which sit squarely within the terrain of epistemology: what evidence we gather, what beliefs we form on its basis, and what further inferences we draw. We need ways of evaluating our attentional dispositions in epistemic terms, not merely psychological ones.

This book offers a framework that lets us do that. I first develop a way of modelling an individual's attentional dispositions in terms of a "salience structure", a network that describes the relative accessibility of information to the subject. A salience structure lets us capture how our attentional landscape is contoured by a range of causes—our physical and social environment as well as our own interests, needs, and past history. I then turn to the question of how these structures can be assessed from a distinctively epistemic perspective. The second half of the book applies this framework to four domains: inquiry, ignorance, prejudice, and the organisation of information by search engines.

Stepping back, the book represents a shift away from what is sometimes called the "doxastic paradigm" in philosophy of mind and epistemology—the long-standing focus on propositional belief states as the primary targets of epistemic evaluation. That focus is too narrow. We also need to evaluate what evidence we possess, which possibilities we treat as live, which patterns we notice, and which bits of information never rise to the level of attention at all. As part of that, the book aims to give us tools to evaluate what I think of as "negative epistemic space": not only the beliefs we form, but the ones we never form; not only the knowledge we possess, but the knowledge or evidence we fail to acquire or maintain; the systematic lacuna that shape our cognitive lives.

Jessie Munton is Associate Professor in the Faculty, working on Philosophy of Mind, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Psychology.



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The account I develop is also strongly externalist. I argue that an individual's cognitive attitudes depend partly on what is salient to them, and what is salient to them depends on their social and physical environment as much as on anything "internal." Attention is importantly determined by cues, incentives, and objects outside the individual's head.

Finally, a recurring theme is that our systems for salience and attention serve many masters—they facilitate practical and moral goals as well as epistemic ones—and so the quality of our epistemic agency depends heavily on the incentive structures of our environment. Juster societies free their members up to be better epistemic agents, by reducing the practical costs to them of having an epistemically optimal salience structure.

Freedom and Equality: Essays on Liberalism and Feminism

Clare Chambers

Almost every year since 2006 I have given a series of lectures on feminism to students at the University of Cambridge. Many readers of this newsletter will have attended them. In the first lecture I ask students to raise their hands if they would call themselves a feminist. In the early years of lecturing, only about half of the students would raise their hands. Nowadays, virtually everyone does. One year, a woman who did raise her hand was sat next to a man who didn't. She gasped, her eyes wide in shock, and turned to him aghast. "Why not?!" she asked, in a voice loud enough for the room to hear. "It just means equality!"

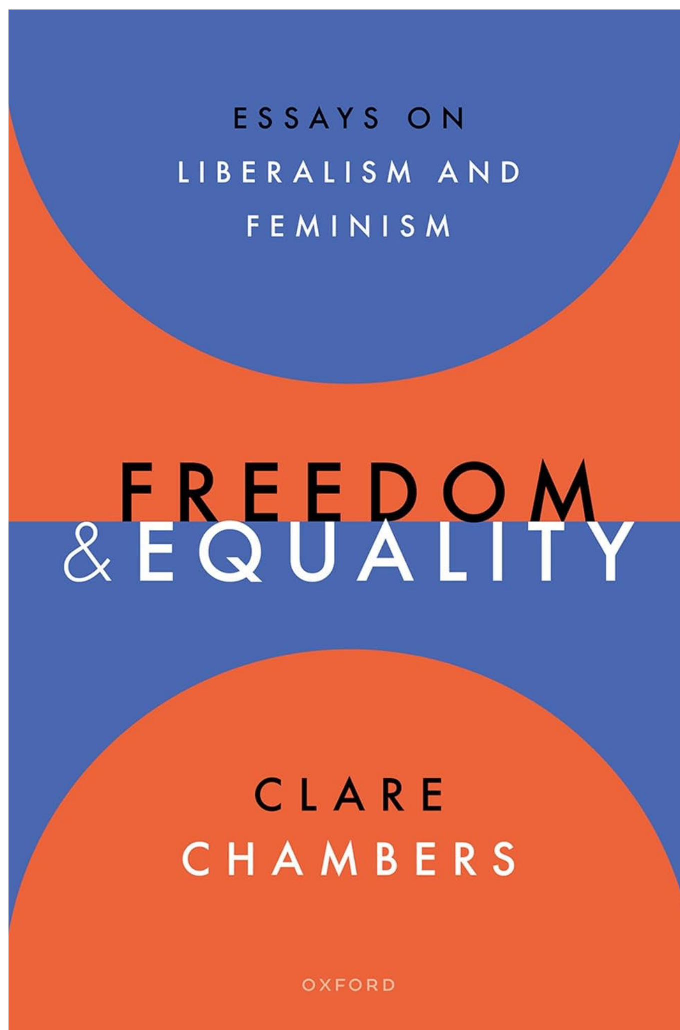
This anecdote opens my most recent book *Freedom & Equality: Essays on Liberalism and Feminism*. The book contains thirteen essays exploring what feminism and liberalism are, how they interact, and how they deal with current controversies including women's sport, marriage, the state recognition of gender, multiculturalism and religious freedom, cosmetic surgery, genital cutting, abortion, and the gendered division of childcare.

Overall, *Freedom & Equality* investigates the contours of feminist liberalism: a philosophical approach that is appealing but elusive. My aim is to show that feminist liberalism is both possible and necessary. It is possible because the two doctrines of feminism and liberalism are compatible, their fundamental values aligned. At its heart, as Malala Yousafzai puts it, "Feminism is just another word for equality". It is also about freedom or women's liberation, as the radical feminist "women's libbers" of the second wave put it. But feminism is necessary because liberalism has shown that it is simply not up to the task of securing gender equality and women's liberation alone. As Julie Bindel points out, feminism is "a deeply uncomfortable politics" because it means rejecting the need for men's approval – and that means that feminism is not, and should not be, easy to accommodate. It is not "just" about anything. Feminism, as Andrea Dworkin points out, may not always be fun.

Freedom & Equality considers the specific intersection between feminism and liberalism. I defend feminist liberalism. Its hallmark is a liberalism that prioritises equality and individual autonomy, while offering a rigorous critique of using individuals' choices as the measure of justice. Liberalism *simpliciter* prioritises individual choice, a strategy that has played a crucial role in the liberal defence of freedom against authoritarianism and conformity. However, as feminism shows, relying on individual choice is insufficient to render an outcome just, because people often choose things that harm or disadvantage themselves. Often, these changes are made in response to social norms, including unjust, unequal, or harmful norms. It follows that relying on individual choice as a measure of justice actually leaves unjust social structures intact. Any defender of autonomy and equality must be prepared to criticise individuals' choices while prioritising individual choosers.

Freedom & Equality engages some of the most controversial questions of contemporary gender politics. I argue that the injustice of the gendered division of labour cannot be solved by pushing mothers into paid employment; instead, women's caring

Clare Chambers is Professor of Political Philosophy in the Faculty, working on Political Philosophy, Feminist Philosophy, Social Philosophy, and Bioethics.



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and domestic work must be valued by everyone including the state. I also set out the case for abolishing state-recognised marriage and replacing it with piecemeal regulation of personal relationships. In another part of the book I argue that there are limits on what the liberal neutralist state can do and that these are sometimes surprising. For example, the state should *not* recognise gender, as opposed to sex, at all, because doing so would conflict with reasonable conceptions of the good and does not promote justice. But the liberal neutralist state *should* prohibit clinically-unnecessary circumcision, even though all liberal states currently allow it. Moreover, states such as the UK should abandon their current practice of sharply distinguishing between what the law calls Female Genital Mutilation and cosmetic labiaplasty. And I argue that even a liberal state cannot avoid taking a position on the deeply controversial question of the moral status of the foetus.

Moving on, I map the concept of equality of opportunity and show how the most egalitarian versions of it cannot be both philosophically defensible and practicable. I show that equality of opportunity is compatible with women's sport, but that three alternative justifications for it – fair competition, anti-sexism, and identity – have starkly contrasting implications for trans inclusion. Finally I consider the ways in which feminism can – and must – be judgmental.

Freedom & Equality is a book which has something to engage – and, quite possible, enrage – anyone. But even those who are enraged will, I hope, agree that these are questions which deserve an appreciation of nuance and proper consideration of objections. This is politics, but it needs philosophy.

People

Faculty and Staff News

Welcome:

Mat Simpson, Teaching Associate

Johannes Wagner, Assistant Professor (temporary cover)

Welcome also to:

David Collins, Junior Research Fellow, Churchill College, Cambridge

Rose Ryan Flinn, Junior Research Fellow, Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge

Lea Bourguignon, Junior Research Fellow, Trinity College, Cambridge

Honours, Awards & Promotions

Congratulations to:

Sophia Dandelet, awarded a Mind Association Research Fellowship for 2024-25

Julia Borcherding, awarded a Mind Association Research Fellowship for 2025-26

Departures

Farewell and congratulations to:

Sophia Dandelet, who is taking up a position as Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Paula Keller, who has been appointed Assistant Professor in Social and Political Philosophy at Utrecht University

Colette Olive, who has taken up a Teaching Fellowship in Philosophy at the University of Leeds

Christopher Masterman, now a Research Fellow at the University of St Andrews

Farbod Akhlaghi, who has been appointed as Assistant Professor in Moral Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin

The Faculty also welcomes **Hannah MacGregor** as Postgraduate Administrator and temporarily **Alex Calder**, taking over from **Janette Dutton**. We bid farewell to **Ellen Hammersley** in the Faculty Office.

Your comments and contributions are always welcome. Please send them to **Johannes Wagner**, Editor, at: Faculty of Philosophy, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA. Email: jmjw4@cam.ac.uk

In Memoriam

Jonathan Lear

The Faculty of Philosophy is saddened to hear of the death, on 22nd of September, of Jonathan Lear.

Jonathan first studied History at Yale and came to Cambridge as an affiliated student where he took another BA in Philosophy in 1973. He came back to the Faculty from 1979 – 85 as a lecturer and was also then a Fellow and Director of Studies at Clare. In later years he returned regularly to Cambridge to visit friends and colleagues. From 1996 his professional life was based in Chicago, where he was a major figure in the Committee on Social Thought and was also Director of the Neubauer Collegium.

He had a remarkably wide range of interests, engaging deeply with Aristotle, Plato, Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard and Freud, and reflecting on logic, meaning, understanding, the unconscious, mourning, death and love. To his powerful and influential writing on all of these people and topics he brought deep scholarship, acute insight and human warmth.

He will be greatly missed by many people.

Professor Jane Heal

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The Magic Kingdom and the Meaning of Life
A Philosopher Visits Disney World
Adam Kadlac

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The Republic of Innovation
A New Political Economy of Freedom

Animal Studies and Philosophy
Rebekah Humphreys

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A Year Organising the Moral Sciences Club

Andrew Ma, Lia Nordmann, Maya Tucker, and Marlene Valek

Owen Griffiths at the Moral Sciences Club, January 2025

Organising the Moral Sciences Club's programme starts early in a Secretary's tenure. Almost as soon as the annual photo is snapped, the AGM concluded, and the final meeting brought to a close, the incoming Secretaries start collecting the Faculty's views on who should be invited to speak in the next academic year. Despite existing as an independent student society, the Club depends on the financial and executive support it receives from the Faculty. As such, the Secretaries take seriously the task of creating a programme of speakers that reflects the Faculty's broad interests. Once a shortlist has been finalised, invites are sent out, and the tricky scheduling process begins.

We are fortunate in Cambridge that academics are typically willing to visit us and present their latest research. The 2024/25 academic year was no different. Across the 20 meetings, we heard presentations on a range of topics, from logical constants to hypocrisy, by way of Plato's tripartite soul and consistent estimators. The Club's constitution requires that minutes are kept for all these meetings, a task also assigned to the Secretaries.

Notable amongst the speakers was Professor Crispin Wright (Stirling) who returned to present on epistemic justification and in doing so cemented his position as the (modern) Club's most prolific speaker – at least, as far as we can tell from the records available to us. We also welcomed several international philosophers, including Professor Alice Crary (The New School) and Professor Hanne Appelqvist (Helsinki), both of whom presented on aspects of Wittgenstein's work.

Several talks were given by academics within the University. Dr Frisbee Sheffield (Classics) spoke on Socrates and the power of dialogue, and Dr Michael Diamond-Hunter (History and Philosophy of Science) presented an ameliorative approach to the metaphysics of race. Alongside this, the Club continued its tradition of inviting former Secretaries to present a paper; an exciting if somewhat nerve-wracking "reward" for the hard work of organising the Club's meetings.

The Secretaries' final task is to prepare a poem to be read out in the first meeting of the next academic year. In the Republic, Plato describes "an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry"; if this is true, the annual poem represents an uneasy détente between the two sides, an opportunity to summarise a year's worth of philosophy through rhyme and humour. Our poem is included on the next page, readers can decide for themselves whether we were successful…

This year was also Professor Rae Langton's last as the Club's President, ending ten years in the role. To mark her significant contribution over the last decade, Professor Langton was elected to life membership at the AGM. Stepping into the position is Professor Alexander Bird, with Dr Sarah Fine taking over from Dr Sophia Dandelet as Vice-President. Dr Neil Dewar remains in post as the Club's Senior Treasurer.

We wish all involved in the Club's ongoing success the best of luck for the coming year; particularly the new secretaries, Eirini Vryza and Tatiana Sitnikova!

A PHILOSOPHER LOOKS AT
Clothes
KATE MORAN

"BUY LESS. CHOOSE WELL. MAKE IT LAST."
Vivienne Westwood

Friendship
The Religious Life
Science
Digital Communication
Architecture
Human Beings
Sport
Work

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Moral Sciences Club

Year 2024/25

Sat under the stern gaze of Sidgwick
The four secretaries did pick
A number of talks
On various thoughts
None of which were that quick.

For Sheffield and Daniela Dover
Big crowds of students came over
Discussion was raucous
Because of B caucus
But we were glad of this friendly takeover.

Parry, Marques, Chadha, Sinclair
Discussed all that was moral and fair.
There weren't any more,
Though some members swore
That ethics had too big a share.

Robert, Rodriguez and Cole
Worried about ads, cake, and the soul.
Jäntgen and Sherling
Did much unfurling
Of diagnoses and decisions on the whole.

We had tried three years in a row
to get Professor Kukla on the show.
We were all very cheery
for Quill's speech act theory
which we learnt was spatialised – woah.

On some days, the people on zoom
Could not hear what was said in the room
So those online
were not all fine
"Use the microphone!", they would fume.

With thanks to Neil and Rae,
there was a fancy biscuit buffet.
We too did our best
to attract more guests
– but did they stay for the Q&A?

Appleqvist and Alice Crary
both knew to be exceedingly wary.
Would they cross a line
presenting their Wittgenstein
in this place full of pokers and sherry?

And we heard many clever suggestions
on some hard scientific questions.
Griffiths, Fletcher, and Leech
made their meeting each
a serious metaphysics-session.

At last we want to apologise,
For as you may have realised
Your names didn't rhyme
We ran out of time
Wright, Whiteley, and Diamond-Hunter

* * *

Andrew, Lia, Maya, and **Marlene** are PhD students in the Faculty.

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