

HUGH MELLOR

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Emeritus Professor D.H. (Hugh) Mellor, who in 2008 celebrated his 70th birthday, originally studied chemical engineering at Pembroke College. Although he had developed an interest in philosophy at school in Manchester, Hugh did not formally study the subject until he visited the University of Minnesota as a Harkness Fellow. There he took a course on the philosophy of science taught by the great Vienna Circle empiricist Herbert Feigl. Feigl began his course by announcing that there are



three kinds of philosophy: 'the philosophy of nothing but' (needless reductionism), 'the philosophy of something more' (mysticism and spirituality) and Feigl's own preferred middle way, 'the philosophy of what's what'.

"The philosophy of what's what" might make a good subtitle for Hugh's collected papers. It nicely captures both his unpretentious, down-to-earth attitude towards the subject, and his respect for the facts revealed to us by common sense and by science. Although Hugh started off as a philosopher of science, leaving

his job at ICI to work on his PhD on probability with Mary Hesse in HPS, most of his work (and certainly his best work) has been in metaphysics.

When I wrote something for the excellent *Festschrift* edited by Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra and Hallvard Lillehammer in 2003 (*Real Metaphysics*), I commented that a dominant theme of Hugh's work is what I called his 'objectivism' about metaphysics. This is his view that the subject-matter of metaphysics is the way it is regardless of what anyone thinks about it. In the philosophy of probability, Hugh defended single-case objective chances or propensities; in the philosophy of time he defended the reality of the temporal series ordered in terms of earlier and later, and argued that the 'now' is a kind of illusion. In the philosophy of mind, Hugh argued against those like Thomas Nagel who think that the self is something outside the objective order of the world. Our metaphysics should not mix facts about the way we represent the phenomena with the phenomena themselves.

This is perhaps more of a 'philosophy of philosophy' than you would get from Hugh himself. Hugh tended to be impatient with people who speculated about the essence of philosophy, thinking this a question of as little interest as the question of the essence of science. "I'm not interested in *philosophy*" he would sometimes say "I'm interested in time, causation, probability, the mind ...". Philosophy is its own thing:

there is truth and falsehood in philosophy; the truth can be attained; and our philosophical questions are, on the whole, about exactly what they seem to be about: time, causation, probability, the mind and so on.

When I was a research student in the 1980s, Hugh was one of the dominant figures in the Cambridge scene. Tireless, tough and energetic as a graduate supervisor, he also gave inspiring undergraduate lectures and he was a formidable opponent at the Moral Sciences Club. Many visiting speakers came away from meetings with their papers in severe need of reconstruction (I know that mine did). We coined the *Philosophers' Lexicon*-style definition: *hughmellorate* (verb, transitive) = to show a visiting speaker that their paper is completely worthless. But Hugh did not do this to score points; he wanted to get to the heart of the matter, without any waffle and without affectation.

Some found Hugh just too dogmatic in those days, and even those who didn't would sometimes poke fun at him affectionately. I remember Jeremy Butterfield in a lecture describing a view about time as what Hugh believes, and adding: "He won't tell you he believes it. He'll tell you it's true. That's his way of saying he believes it". And a friend summed up Hugh's inaugural lecture, *The Warrant of Induction* in two sentences: "How do we know the future will be like the past? Because it will!".

It was odd, in a way, that Hugh should give his inaugural lecture on epistemology, which is not an area of philosophy in which he had much interest. The inaugural is a fine piece, but his greatest achievements have been in metaphysics: in particular in the philosophy of time (*Real Time* was published in 1980, and the heavily revised version *Real Time II* in 1998) and in causation, where his dense and condensed book *The Facts of Causation* (1995) argued for some very radical doctrines, for example the view that causation is not a relation. These works surely belong among the best works of metaphysics of the late twentieth century

Hugh's work in metaphysics fits squarely into a Cambridge tradition which is hard to define but easy to recognise – a tradition which in the 20th century included Bertrand Russell, F.P. Ramsey, C.D. Broad and R.B. Braithwaite. Hugh has always said how much he owed to Ramsey, but he also owed a lot to Ramsey's friend Braithwaite, who would also become a friend of Hugh's. He also claims as his other influences Hans Reichenbach, and the Australian metaphysics of J.J.C. Smart, D.M. Armstrong, Frank Jackson and David Lewis.

Hugh's substantial achievements in philosophy should not over-shadow the enormous amount he has also done for the Faculty and the University. He was the prime mover in the ambitious redesign of the Raised Faculty Building, and he also served as Pro-Vice Chancellor, managing to do at least three times as many things in a day than most academics. Since he retired, Hugh has taken a well-earned break from all this kind of thing (though not from philosophy, publishing his philosophical introduction to probability a few years ago) and has been spending more and more time on his other great passion, the theatre.

To his students, Hugh is a model of how to take philosophy seriously without being solemn about it; how to have high standards in the subject without being crippled by the enormity of the problems or the weight of the tradition; how to take account of the known facts without slavish devotion to science; and how the first and guiding aim of philosophers should be to aim to say what is true, without fuss and without obscurity. The philosophy of what's what, in other words.