13

Existentialism, Quietism, and the Role of Philosophy

PHILIP PETTIT

David Hume remarks in his *Treatise of Human Nature* that while he is consumed by philosophy in his study, being often lost to questions that generate sceptical anxiety within him, he regains his composure as soon as he departs the study and takes up more practical pursuits.[1] The suggestion often read into this remark—fairly or unfairly—is that though philosophy may be a compelling and satisfying pastime, much philosophizing leaves no impact on ordinary experience or behaviour. Philosophy has no place in practice. It is a quiet and inert presence in life, not one that radiates its influence in other spheres.

This quietist vision of philosophy is consistent with many different, more specific views: with the view that it is an amusing, intellectual diversion, for example, or with the view that it is a compulsion from which we need deliverance.[2] But however it is developed at more specific levels, the vision keeps philosophy removed and insulated from practice. It makes philosophy into a self-standing, self-justifying enterprise.

Opposed to the quietist view is the sort of position that we find, for example, in the nineteenth-century, Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. Often described as the founding figure of existentialist thought, Kierkegaard said of systematic philosophers like Hegel that they are like a man who builds an enormous castle and lives beside it in a shack.[3] Here the image of the place that philosophy has or ought to have—Hegel is deemed, with scant justice, to have been a failure—is very different indeed. Philosophy, so it is suggested, ought to change people who pursue it, shaping the way they perceive and the way they act. It ought to be capable of being lived out in practice—in experiential and behavioural practice—giving a new direction or quality to the experiences and the dispositions of philosophers themselves.

I want in this essay to consider the question that divides quietism from existentialism and to defend a particular line on that question. The essay is in three main sections. In the first I set out a view of philosophy under which it grows out of reflection on the views that shape ordinary practice. In the second section I outline a theory as to how exactly practice commits us to such views. And then in the third

[1] D. Hume (1978). *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 268–9.

[2] L. Wittgenstein (1958). *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell).

[3] S. Kierkegaard (1951). *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). 'In relation to their systems most systematizers are like a man who builds an enormous castle and lives in a shack nearby; they do not live in their own enormous systematic buildings.'

section I argue on the basis of that account that, notwithstanding serious difficulties, philosophy can feed back onto the views that inform practice and recast them in various ways. I reject the existentialist vision according to which there is no limit to how far philosophy may lead us to reconstruct ourselves. But I also reject the quietist view that philosophy must leave everything as it was. Under the picture adopted, philosophy can be expected to have a threefold impact—meditative, methodological, and moral—on people's habits of experience and behaviour.

1. From Practice to Philosophy

Philosophy characterized What is it that distinguishes philosophy from other intellectual pursuits, in particular from pursuits of a scientific character? My own view is that philosophy deals with questions on which we are all already committed, whether we like it or not, and that this existing commitment, controversial as it often is, gives those questions the particular interest they have for philosophers. The domain of philosophical questioning is territory on which ordinary practice commits us to having opinions, however unarticulated and undeveloped those opinions may be; more on the nature of that commitment in the second section. And the opinions to which we find ourselves practically committed in this way are often quite problematic, whether through giving rise to paradox, having implications it is hard to live with, being difficult to reconcile with scientific views, or whatever. The drive to do philosophy, so I propose, arises from the desire to investigate those questions and to determine how far our practice-bound views can be sustained, in what ways they should be amended and revised, and whether such shifts can be implemented in ordinary practice.

Interpreted in this way, the philosophical drive is readily illustrated. It appears in the compulsion to determine whether we human beings can be free or conscious, assuming that we are creatures bound to the natural order; whether the natural order can be bound to necessities of law and causation, assuming that necessities reflect imaginings about what might have been, not observations about what is; whether values and duties have any place in a world we can explore together, assuming that the natural world can be comprehensively characterized in a wholly neutral vocabulary; and so on.

We never philosophize afresh, then, with a completely open disposition on the views we contemplate as alternatives. Whether we accept them or reject them, we always find ourselves already disposed—disposed, willy-nilly—to adopt certain of those views or families of views: for example, to adopt views that give countenance, under a certain interpretation, to the reality of freedom and consciousness, law and causation, value and duty. We always do philosophy in dialogue with positions that already have a hold on us. Philosophy, as we might put it, is an attempt to come to terms with those opinions, endorsing them if they prove worthy of reasoned endorsement and seeking to liberate ourselves from them otherwise. It is an effort to appropriate and own the views that we take on relevant questions—to expose them to the light of reason—and not to allow them to remain with us, unseen and uninvited, in the dark of unreflective opinion.

As we ask ourselves about any philosophical question, according to this picture of things, then we have to consider what our existing practices commit us to on the issue, and whether we should maintain that view or try to work our way out of it, developing it in novel ways, or replacing it with an alternative. We have to consider whether such a development or replacement is required by our reflective, argumentative lights. And we have to ask after whether it is one that we can live with in our practice: whether our habits of perception and conduct can be squared with it or amended to make room for the change that philosophical argument may seem to force upon us.

The picture sketched in these remarks suggests that in doing philosophy we will be inevitably torn between two different attractors. On the one hand we will want to embrace the ideas that come to us with our spontaneous, everyday practices, such as the ideas we naturally have about freedom and consciousness, causation and law, value and duty. But on the other hand we will want to reject any ideas that do not hold up in the light of critical reflection and reasoning. Philosophy will be conducted, then, in a field where rival forces pull against one another, holding out competing ideals: fidelity to the manifest image of how things are, on the one side; fidelity to the intellectual image of how things are on the other.[4]

Where will the intellectual as distinct from the manifest image come from? I think that this is a cultural variable and that philosophy, therefore, has represented a different challenge for different generations and societies. In every case the challenge has been formally the same: to examine and if necessary try to revise the manifest image in the light of the intellectual image. But different periods of history have put different intellectual images in play and so the challenge has been substantively different at different times. The Greeks had the problem of connecting the manifest image with the image for which dialectic or reason seemed to argue. The medievals had the problem of connecting it with the image that imposed itself in the light of revelation as well as reason. And the moderns had the problem of connecting it with the image that imposed itself in the light of science as well as reason.

In our culture the primary problem is still raised by science. As contemporary philosophers we have to face challenges presented by abstract reason—say, the difficulties posed in the traditional paradoxes—as every generation has had to do. But what we have to face most pressingly is the challenge that is presented by the scientific image of ourselves and our world. A naturalistic, more or less mechanical image of the universe is imposed on us by cumulative developments in physics, biology, and neuroscience, and this challenges us to look for where in that world there can be room for phenomena that remain as vivid as ever in the manifest image: consciousness, freedom, responsibility, goodness, virtue, and the like. While it still conforms to a pattern that has continued through many ages—so at any rate I am inclined to think—philosophy today is probably more challenging, and more difficult, than it has ever been.

[4] The conflict between the manifest and the scientific image of the world is identified as a main source of philosophical questions in W. Sellars (1997), *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).

Philosophy and science This view of philosophy would make for quite a clean contrast between philosophy and the sciences, while still recognizing the continuity between them. Philosophy will be continuous with the efforts of science, so far as it attempts to elaborate theory that has to be squared with scientific results, as just remarked. But it will stand apart from science in having as its remit the elaboration of a position that vindicates or can replace the views that come spontaneously to us in the ordinary course of life.

Consider the issues that physics investigates and think about the answers that it provides in its different bodies of theory. We ordinary thinkers may be possessed of what is sometimes called a folk physics, making unavoidable presumptions about how middle-sized objects will respond to our interventions and how they will interact with one another. But no one thinks that physicists owe a debt of loyalty to their folk selves and are duty-bound to consider how far different views may prove reconcilable with those presumptions, or even with the practice they guide. The questions physicists debate are too far removed from those presumptions and from that practice to be meaningfully subjected to any such requirement. And if some of the questions are ever connected with folk physics, as when people ask whether subatomic physics gives the lie to the ordinary presumption that some bodies are solid—solid, not full of holes—then we immediately think: this is not physics, this is philosophy.

What is true of physics is obviously true also of other natural sciences like chemistry, biology, neuroscience, and the subpersonal psychology of information-processing. But what of human sciences like social psychology, sociology, and economics? Does the view sketched above allow us to say that these are indeed sciences, and not philosophy under other names?

The question is not whether theories developed within the human sciences ever engage with views that turn out to be maintained commonly among the folk; the question is whether they engage with views that are inevitably maintained by the folk, being bound up with certain regular practices. Nor is the question whether those theories ever present a challenge of some sort to views that are tied up with ordinary practice; even the theories of natural science present such a challenge, requiring us to be able to vindicate the views we hold as a matter of practice with the naturalistic vision that they project. The question, rather, is whether the human sciences have a cognitive interest that makes it legitimate for theorists to develop and test their views, as in natural science, without having to worry about how far they can live with those views as ordinary folk, squaring them with ordinary practices.

The answer to this question is surely that yes, the human sciences do lay claim to such an autonomous cognitive goal. From their very beginnings, they were designed to develop an explanatory and predictive stance on individuals and aggregates and, where relevant, to propose policies whereby various forms of social order may be rendered compatible with how it is predicted that people will behave. The platforms of explanation and prediction that are thereby established may include theses that challenge received, practice-bound presumptions, of course—and it may raise

a question about their plausibility that they do so—but they are not developed as alternatives that should replace those presumptions in guiding and shaping ordinary practice. They are not developed in the spirit of philosophical investigation.

It is true that many theorists in the human sciences, from Emile Durkheim to Claude Levi-Strauss and Michel Foucault, have often rejoiced in the revision of practical presumptions that they have taken their theories to imply, and that they sometimes seem to have embraced those theories for the very challenge and scandal they present on that front.[5] But to the extent that such theorists have taken this line, they have been generally regarded—quite rightly, from the point of view embraced here—as waxing philosophical, not scientific. Their interest has not been restricted to developing an explanatory or predictive scheme but has encompassed a desire to rethink certain practice-bound presumptions that they no longer find tenable: that is, to explore the possibility of replacing those presumptions with alternative, allegedly more satisfactory principles.

The characterization defended The view of philosophy and practice that I have been outlining reduces to three propositions: first, that our ordinary practice commits us to holding by certain, potentially controversial presumptions, such as those that bear on freedom, causation, and duty; second, that philosophy addresses those questions, seeking to examine and assess our practical presumptions; and third, that this engagement with received presumptions is what distinguishes philosophy from other disciplines: philosophy is the theory we pursue in areas where, inevitably, we find ourselves already theoretically committed. The aim of the philosopher, under this picture, is to articulate and assess, and perhaps develop and amend, received practical presumptions. The ultimate ideal is to liberate oneself from the hold of ingrained ideas and to endorse only those views that one can square with the intellectual image of the universe—say, the image deriving from science—that one finds compelling.

How to defend this characterization of philosophy? I offer a brief overview of the main areas of philosophical questioning—this, of necessity, is a fairly personal presentation—and try to show that the overview gives support to the three propositions just distinguished.

Most of the matters covered in contemporary philosophy, whether the style of philosophizing is analytical or not, can be represented as falling within one or more of five broad categories. They can be allocated to the philosophy of reason, the philosophy of nature, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of society, or the philosophy of value. A further category that might be added is the philosophy of religion but I do not consider it here.

The philosophy of reason deals with ideas and principles that govern human inquiry, argument, and theorizing and is the broadest of philosophical enterprises. It encompasses logic, methodology, epistemology, and philosophy of science and its claims are of the most general relevance. It is within the philosophy of reason that

[5] For one way in which this frequently happens see the discussion in ch 3, P. Pettit, (1993). *The Common Mind: An Essay on Psychology, Society and Politics*, paperback edition 1996, (New York: Oxford University Press).

we find an examination of concepts like those of truth, consistency, entailment; observation, induction, abduction; evidence, theory, confirmation; and so on.

This area of philosophy bears out my characterization of the discipline. We ordinary folk reason before we ever think about the philosophy of reason, and we also—crucially—give an account of why we reason as we do. We may not get as far as articulating in its most general form a principle like *modus ponens*, according to which the joint truth of a conditional and its antecedent ensures the truth of the consequent, but we will certainly be disposed to recognize and argue for instances of the principle in the course of our reasoning and of our accounting for how we reason. We are already committed to principles of this sort by our practice and the task of the philosophy of reason is to engage with such matters of practical presumption, articulating, and assessing, and no doubt developing and altering, our received views. There may be no cause for rethinking a principle like *modus ponens* but there are other principles—for example, those associated with inductive habits of reasoning—that have occasioned much heart-searching among philosophers.

The philosophy of nature is next to the philosophy of reason in the breadth of its relevance. I think of it as the area of philosophy in which we find a discussion of the notions of space, time, causation; substance, property, relation; possibility, actuality, essence; quantity, number, and other mathematical entities. These are notions that apply across the board and an understanding of what they involve and of how far they can stand up to criticism is crucial to many other philosophical enterprises.

As with the philosophy of reason, the philosophy of nature fits my characterization of philosophy in a fairly straightforward way. We all have ideas about the topics addressed, albeit in only the most inarticulate of modes. These ideas are already implicated in the ways we think about events happening at different times, for example, while assuming that substances persist through time; about some events causing later events while others merely precede them; about certain phenomena being actual, others possible, and yet others necessary or inevitable. The philosophy of nature tries to come to terms with such ideas and to put them in better shape than that which they assume in our untutored responses. In particular it tries to give them a shape—often quite a revisionary shape—that will enable them to stand up in the light of the best scientific theory. Thus the philosophy of time will often try to give an account of our ideas about time—our practically engaged ideas, not our idle speculations—that renders them compatible with the static, four-dimensional image of the universe that contemporary physics supports.

These comments should help to support the claim that the philosophy of reason and nature bears out my characterization of philosophical inquiry. But I should address an objection that is particularly likely to be raised at this point; it has more force here than in other areas. The objection is that while we may make practical presumptions that bear on issues of reason and nature, and while philosophy certainly addresses those issues too, I have done nothing to show that what makes the issues particularly engaging for philosophers is the fact that they are addressed in our practical presumptions. Wouldn't they be equally engaging, even if they had never been addressed in our folk practice and thought?

They would still have a substantive intellectual interest in that event and for many philosophers this is the only interest that legitimates them as questions worth pursuing; it is neither here nor there that they are addressed in our everyday presumptions. Nonetheless I think that there is support available for my view that the connection with everyday presumptions marks them off as questions of distinctively philosophical interest. Two observations in particular are worth making.

The first is that while the philosophy of reason has given rise to quite formal disciplines in which various logics and related systems have been elaborated, these developments are seen in many circles as belonging to mathematics or some other area, not to philosophy proper. The reason that they are seen in this way, I submit, is that they quickly go to a point at which none of our existing practices and ideas is engaged and that at that point philosophers typically cease to be particularly interested. Philosophers are essentially involved in debate with received, practice-bound opinion—opinion that they themselves hold as members of the folk—and when that debate runs out, their involvement flags.

The second observation I cite in support of my view is that something similar—though this is a much more controversial claim—holds in the philosophy of nature. The discussion of substances and properties quickly confronts alternatives that offer different pictures of the ultimate metaphysical building blocks: these may be represented either as property-instances or tropes, for example, or as property-types or universals, so long as compensating adjustments are made on other fronts. Now there will always be an interest in adjudicating between such alternatives, from the point of view of constructing a metaphysics which fits best with natural science. But when the alternatives discussed have been taken to be equally consistent with the practical presumptions we make in respect of substances and properties and the like—and they have sometimes been taken, rightly or wrongly, in that way—then many philosophers have tended to lose interest, describing the enterprise as a form of book-keeping.[6] This tendency is intelligible in the light of my claim that questions have a distinctively philosophical interest only so far as they are taken to be questions engaged, or tied up with questions engaged, in our practice-bound presumptions.

The other main areas of philosophy, under my tendentious taxonomy, are the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of society, and the philosophy of value. The philosophy of mind engages with familiar topics like belief, desire and emotion, language and meaning, consciousness, freedom, and personhood. The philosophy of society deals with the nature of conventions, norms, and laws, the possibility of joint intention, collective rationality and group agency, and the analysis of power, authority, status, and the like. And, finally, the philosophy of value addresses the range of normative issues that arise in aesthetic, ethical, and political discussion: the meaning of beauty, goodness, and obligation, the nature and role of more substantive values in relation to those categories, and the shape that normative argument should ideally take.

[6] M. Johnston, (1993). 'Objectivity Refigured: Pragmatism with Verificationism', in *Reality, Representation and Projection*, J. Haldane and C. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

It hardly needs argument that ordinary practices of reasoning and dealing with one another are organized around ideas on these sorts of topics. The way we talk about ourselves and others, and the overtures we make in relating to others, speak volubly of the presumptions we endorse as to what minds and persons are and how they can be influenced. The way we assume that regularities can have the force of norm or law, and the way we hold fellow members of groups to certain expectations, speak of firmly entrenched presumptions about the nature of collective life. And the sorts of considerations we entertain and produce in arguing about what is desirable in this or that realm, and what is ultimately to be done, display similar presumptions on the nature of value in general and on the particular principles that ought to command our allegiance.

These three areas of philosophy serve as well as the philosophy of reason and nature to bear out the claims outlined earlier. We have received, practice-bound ideas on all of the issues addressed, or at least on questions presupposed to those issues. And it is very plausible that the reason why the issues engage us in philosophy is precisely that that is so. We are conscious as philosophers that whether we like it or not we are going to have views on those matters as an imperative of practice. And we are naturally anxious, given the challenges from the scientific image of the world, to make sure that the views we end up holding are ones we can truly own and defend.

The view of philosophy defended here, I should say, is not fully borne out by the particular demarcations that have grown up within the academy between philosophy and other disciplines. Many questions that I would regard as philosophical are investigated outside philosophy departments and many questions that I would regard as not particularly philosophical are investigated within. But this imperfect alignment is only what we should expect, given the various exogenous presssures on departmental divisions. My view claims to identify a pattern of concern that satisfies two constraints. First, it has a genuine unity in itself, and gives us an attractive way of construing philosophy. And second, it reflects the interests of institutionally identified philosophers to a more or less accurate approximation. Inevitably, then, the view taken has a revisionary aspect and it should not be judged merely by how well it describes the projects undertaken by philosophy professors and only by philosophy professors.

2. Interlude: the Nature of Practical Presumptions

Practical, not intellectual, presumptions The discussion so far has supposed that there is no difficulty about how ordinary practices can commit us as ordinary folk to endorsing certain presumptions or ideas. But this assumption needs to be addressed, both to fill out the picture of the last section and to prepare for the argument of the next. So how can folk practices commit us to beliefs on the sorts of matters mentioned? How do folk practices come to involve assumptions about what follows deductively or inductively from what, what distinguishes causation from mere temporal succession, what makes someone free or unfree, when a collection of

people constitutes a collective agent, and whether the right is always a function of the good?

This question may be variously resolved, consistently with the image of philosophy described in the first section. It is important for me to defend my particular line, however, as it is involved in the argument presented in the next section. The line is that while the ideas to which our practices commit us define something that might be described as a folk theory—a folk theory of causation, freedom, collectivity, morality, or whatever—it is not a theory that is intellectually endorsed so much as a theory that is embraced as a matter of lived know-how. It is a lived theory that gives us necessary points of orientation in the lived world: it is the *Lebenstheorie* that guides us through the *Lebenswelt*.[7]

The practices that commit us to beliefs about the general topics on which philosophy focuses are, in the first place, practices of a discursive and inferential kind.[8] They are the practices in virtue of which certain premisses—these may be given in perception or spelled out in judgment—prove capable of moving us to certain conclusions, whether the conclusions be drawn in words or in actions. The transitions that they license will sometimes be capable of formal and deductive representation but equally often they will have a non-formal or non-deductive character.

People display two sorts of beliefs in the inferences that such discursive practices lead them to make. First of all, and most obviously, they can display beliefs about what follows from what. If they instantiate and endorse relevant arguments they can show that they hold the abstract belief that *modus ponens* is a valid pattern of inference; or they can manifest the more concrete belief that certain observations provide support for the conclusion that emeralds are green but do not give any support to the rival conclusion that they are grue: that is, green if observed before a certain time, blue otherwise.[9] Cases of both these kinds, abstract or concrete, all involve procedural beliefs as to what follows from what.

But people, to move to the second case, can also display beliefs about substantive matters in their inferential practices. They do so in what they take to imply, and what they take to be implied by relevant ascriptions: say, imputations of causation, attributions of freedom, descriptions of groups as agents, or conclusions as to the rightness of an action. In being disposed to countenance certain implicators and certain implications for such ascriptions—and only certain implicators and implications—they subscribe to quite definite specifications of causation, freedom, group agency, and rightness. Thus they will subscribe to causation having a temporal direction so far as they argue from something being later in time to the conclusion that it cannot be the cause of a certain event; they will subscribe to its involving a spatio-temporally continuous process so far

[7] The word *Lebenswelt* is particularly associated with E. Husserl (1970). *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, Ill, Northwestern University Press). That work, interestingly, is concerned with what Husserl sees as the unnecessary alienation of scientific concepts from the lived ideas in which they have their roots.

[8] See R. Brandom (1994). *Making it Explicit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press); P. Pettit, (1998). 'Practical Belief and Philosophical Theory,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 76; and Pettit (2000). 'How the Folk Understand Folk Psychology,' *Protosociology* 14: 26–38.

[9] N. Goodman (1973). *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill).

as they argue from
it cannot be the cau
relationship so far
associated effects; a
so far as they invok

With any term o
tions that they cou
causation, for exan
no such dispositio
involved in the spe
answer, I suggest, i
be identified—mo
ally be expected to
sufficiently well-eq
cursive responsiven
relative to which th
are identified in th
community, say a s
involves quite deta

I said that the p
practical presumpti
kind. The reason f
the practices invol
towards the world,
mistake to miss th
defended here, ph
the cases envisage
way we respond a
going to be more
words. And besid
inclined to say; thi
in words often art
taneous responses

This last observ
highly plausible th
movements that a
corresponding end
throw things in or

[10] On conversability
Journal of Philosophy 93
Agency (New York, Ox
is invoked here, being
W. V. O. Quine—the
(La Salle: Open Court

as they argue from something being removed and disconnected to the conclusion that it cannot be the cause of the event; they will subscribe to its being a productive sort of relationship so far as they take causes to be employable as means of bringing about associated effects; and they will subscribe to its being capable of supporting explanation so far as they invoke causes to resolve questions about why the effects occurred.

With any term of this kind, people may differ in some of the implicators or implications that they countenance; some may be disposed to reason from the presence of causation, for example, to the existence of a lawlike connection, while others have no such disposition. How, then, to identify those inferential connections that are involved in the specification of the relationship ascribed by a word like 'causes'? The answer, I suggest, is that in any linguistic community the relevant connections will be identified—more or less strictly—by the connections an interlocutor will generally be expected to find compelling if he or she is taken to be conversable: that is, sufficiently well-equipped in terms of understanding, reasoning capacity, and discursive responsiveness to be worth engaging in discourse. The linguistic community relative to which the privileged connections—if you like, the a priori connections—are identified in this way may be the community at large or it may be a richer sub-community, say a sub-community of experts in which the ascription of conversability involves quite detailed expectations.[10]

I said that the practices that commit us to practical presumptions—that is, shared practical presumptions—are, in the first place, practices of a discursive and inferential kind. The reason for the qualification about this holding only in the first place is that the practices involved also have a decisive role in the way we conduct ourselves towards the world, towards other people and towards ourselves. It would be a great mistake to miss this, for it would lead us to think, quite wrongly, that in the image defended here, philosophy is exclusively focused on matters of language. In all of the cases envisaged what we are disposed to conclude and say is required to fit the way we respond at the level of conduct, and the presumptions we make are often going to be more visible in how we act than in anything we actually spell out in words. And besides, conduct is not always going to be driven by what we are inclined to say; things can also be the other way around. The arguments we spell out in words often articulate inferences that come to us in their original form as spontaneous responses at the level of sentiment and behaviour.

This last observation can be illustrated with reference to the causation case. It is highly plausible that we are equipped by our biology to see certain sequences of movements that are within our power as more or less compelling ways of achieving corresponding ends: this, in the way we drop things in order to make a noise, or we throw things in order to hit a target. Given that we conceive of causes as potential

[10] On conversability in this sense see P. Pettit and M. Smith (1996) 'Freedom in Belief and Desire,' *Journal of Philosophy* 93: 429–49; P. Pettit (2001). *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency* (New York, Oxford University Press and Cambridge: Polity). The criterion of the a priori that is invoked here, being social in origin and pliable in application, is quite close to one endorsed by W. V. O. Quine—the great critic of the traditional category—in Quine (1974) *The Roots of Reference* (La Salle: Open Court Publishers).

means for achieving their effects, then, we will often find relations of causation more vividly available to us in this natural disposition than in any more intellectual, language-bound reflection.

The point can also be borne out in the case of freedom. Whenever we think of someone as having freely done something, in particular done something that affects us, then we think ourselves justified in feeling resentful at what they did or gratified by what they did.[11] But our dispositions to feel resentment or gratitude often spring from perceptions that escape our capacity to verbalize and, though they remain subject to discursively generated revision, they are often activated in a more or less spontaneous way. This being so, we are bound to authorize the experience of resentment or gratitude as an experience—strictly, a defeasible experience—in which the fact that someone has acted freely towards us is made more or less primitively compelling.

Practical Presumptions, not Dispositions So much for the claim that the presumptions that constitute our folk theory in any area are practical, not intellectual presumptions. They are presumptions accepted as a matter of inferential and related practice, not theses spelled out in formulae, contemplated in the abstract and then reflectively endorsed. But why say that they are presumptions at all? Why treat them as varieties of belief?

The practices that we have been describing all exist as dispositions within human speakers and agents, in particular as dispositions that they regulate in the light of one another's responses. Thus the *modus ponens* practice of inference primarily exists as a disposition that people display to recognize in a case-by-case way that, certain sentences they endorse being related as conditional and antecedent, they have reason to assert the consequent of the conditional. Why should we treat this habit of inference as being anything more than that: a habit? Why should we think that it constitutes a belief or set of beliefs that the conclusion follows in this case, in that case, in that other case, and so on? And why, even more spectacularly, should we think that it constitutes a belief in the abstract principle according to which the joint truth of a conditional and its antecedent guarantees the truth of the consequent; why should we treat it as anything more than a disposition to form distinct, case-bound beliefs?

The reason we treat the habit of inference as a belief is that if we are to countenance someone as a conversable interlocutor—as someone there is a possibility of reasoning with—then we expect that if they are challenged about why they move from asserting certain premisses to asserting a deductive conclusion, they will be able to do more than shrug. They will be able to spell out the claim that the conclusion follows from the premisses, they will be able to recognize what might be evidence for and evidence against that claim, they will be sensitive to how such evidence goes in the course of inquiry and discussion, and so on. There is a striking contrast in this respect with non-inferential habits, such as the habits of putting

[11] P. Strawson (1982). 'Freedom and Resentment' in G. Watson, *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). See also P. Pettit (2001) *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency*.

words together in grammatical form. The grammatical speaker may not be able to lift intuitions as to what is grammatical into the realm of discourse but anyone we treat as conversable will have to be able to do this with intuitions as to what follows from what.

It is no objection to this observation that not every habit of inference can exist in a person's mind in the form of a premise that they explicitly endorse, as Lewis Carroll's story of Achilles and the tortoise shows.[12] Achilles reckons that he can get the tortoise to admit a conclusion, say that q, on the basis of having admitted that if p then q, and that p. The tortoise says that perhaps he will be forced to do so if he is allowed a further premiss to the effect that if it is the case that those premisses hold, then the conclusion follows. When Achilles allows him this premiss, of course, the tortoise asks for a further premiss to the effect that if it is the case that those enriched premisses hold, then the conclusion follows. And when Achilles allows him this too, he makes a similar request. An infinite regress looms and the lesson is that not every rule of inference can exist as a premiss; some rules must exist as habits of moving from premisses to conclusion that are not themselves explicitly endorsed as premisses.

But this lesson is perfectly compatible with the point just argued. The requirement I mentioned is that a conversable speaker must be capable of dealing with a challenge to any inference he or she draws, spelling out a belief as to what follows from what and being able to defend that belief. And this is quite consistent with the Carroll lesson.

So much by way of arguing that the *modus ponens* habit—and by extension any such habit of inference—must be taken to constitute a belief: a presumption maintained in practice-bound mode. But why should we describe the belief as a belief in the abstract principle or formula, not just as a belief that these premisses support that conclusion, those other premisses that other conclusion, and so on case by case? We might choose not to describe it that way, for all that the argument of this paper requires; it is enough for our purposes that the disposition to form case-bound beliefs will rationally require anyone who understands the corresponding formula to embrace the formulaic belief. But there is a long and intelligible tradition of going to the abstract characterization and I see no reason to break with this.

The idea in the tradition is that the disposition to form relevant case-bound beliefs constitutes a single case-by-case way of believing the general formula; in particular, a way of believing it that contrasts with the formulaic mode of giving one's explicit assent to that formula. Take someone who is disposed to believe of every cat that it is a cat and of every cat that, being a cat, it will have incisor teeth. This person need not be immediately disposed to assent to the universal claim that every cat has incisor teeth. But nevertheless they are traditionally said to believe that universal claim: to believe it *in sensu diviso*, as scholastics used to put it, not *in sensu composito*; to believe it in a divided but not in a unified sense.[13]

[12] L. Carroll (1895). 'What the Tortoise said to Achilles,' *Mind* 4: 278–80.

[13] The distinction, which derives from Peter of Abelard, is used in D. Lewis (1969). *Convention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).

In the same way the person who is disposed to reason in the *modus ponens* way may be said to believe the universal principle instantiated in different cases. People who are said to believe the proposition in the divided, case-by-case way will lack one ability that must be present in the unified, formulaic mode of belief: the immediate disposition to assent to the formula. But they will otherwise perform in an inferentially indiscernible manner and the disposition that they display to form relevant case-bound beliefs will give them reason to assent to that formula, should they gain an understanding of it.[14]

What I have argued in relation to *modus ponens* is going to hold, quite obviously, for other habits of inference too. The lesson is that while we ordinary folk hold by things that we may find challenging and contestable as philosophers, we hold by them in a distinctively practical, particularistic way. We embrace matters of belief in the practical ways we reason and conduct ourselves, without necessarily spelling them out—or at least without spelling them out very often—in formulae that we explictly endorse. And though the things we can be said to believe in that way are often abstract and universal in character, we typically embrace them only in a particularistic, case-by-case manner; we may never abstract from cases and formulate them as things that hold quite generally.

That practical presumptions constitute a lived theory—a *Lebenstheorie*—in this way does not mean that they are a second-best to the reflective sort of theory that we achieve when we can spell out explicit claims and show what follows from them. Spelling out a theory in explicit terms has many advantages, in particular the advantage of allowing us to examine it systematically; this is one of the things, as we shall see, that motivates the philosophical enterpise. But not every belief can be held in explicit form, as we know from the Lewis Carroll argument. And in any case there is a respect in which someone who holds a general belief in a practical, particularistic way will have a significant ability that may be lacking in the articulate believer.

Consider the principle that red things look red in presumptively normal conditions, yellow things look yellow, green things look green, and so on. Someone might believe this in the formulaic way, without actually knowing how red or yellow or green looks, and so without being able to make any use of the principle in distinguishing different colours; the person might even be colour-blind. But someone who knows the principle in the practical, particularistic way will know it through being able in suitable conditions to have colour sensations—through being disposed with any sensation of redness or greenness or whatever to register its presence in some manner—and through being disposed in those conditions, so far as the sensation is as of red, to treat it as evidence of redness, so far as it is as of green, to treat it as evidence of greeness, and so on. Holding the belief in the lived way that is tied up with practice requires the possession of a skill that may be lacking in someone who holds it in the explicitly theorized or formulaic fashion. We will return to this point in the final section.

[14] See Pettit 'Practical Belief and Philosophical Theory'.

An objection answered Under this account of the practical, particularistic way in which we hold to folk theories, it may seem that we the folk are a decidedly empiricist, even positivistic lot. We are said to conceive of causation or freedom or whatever as the phenomenon that answers to the assumptions we display in our reasoning habits as to how things connect with one another. Thus we are said to conceive of causation as that sort of relationship that runs from past to future, that does not hold at a spatio-temporal remove, that is capable of subserving a means-end connection, that makes a certain sort of explanation or prediction possible, and so on. But this means that we are said to conceive of causation operationally or functionally, in terms of what it does, and to abstain from any metaphysical speculation as to what it is in itself. And doesn't that sound suspect? Doesn't it sound as if we the folk are being cast in a suspiciously correct, positivistic posture?

The account given of folk theory emphasizes the sorts of views we cannot help but have about causation and freedom and the like, on pain of there being no possibility of reasoned exchange. But the folk may fill out those views in any area with certain more or less metaphysical commitments and those commitments may come to have a certain a priori status in their exchanges. Thus the folk may well think that while causation generally has to satisfy the sorts of connections mentioned, it consists itself in an unanalysable form of contact—a sort of 'biff' or 'oomph'—that explains why those connections generally hold and that might conceivably be realized in their absence. The commitment to the need for such an unanalysable form of contact could show up in their finding themselves unwilling to recognize certain otherwise suitable connections as instances of causation proper; it need not involve the endorsement of any metaphysical formula, though of course it might do so.

On this account the folk, were they to reject the possibility of biff-contact, might be willing to say that the predicate 'causes' should be taken to ascribe that relationship, whatever it is, that satisfies the operational or functional requirements inscribed in our practices of reasoning about causation; this is certainly the line that would fit best with their other reasoning practices. But so far as they think that there is such a thing as biff-contact—so far as they are committed to such a metaphysic—they will display a belief that the predicate should be primarily used to posit the presence of that contact, and that the functional specifications should be taken to serve a purely evidential role. The satisfaction of those specifications would be indicative of causation, under the practice imagined, providing evidence that there is the sort of biff-contact required for one thing to cause another; but it would not establish in itself that causal contact had occurred.[15]

As it is in the case of causation, so it may be elsewhere. Although the folk's views will be established on the basis of how they reason with one another, and on how far that pattern of reasoning is associated with conversability, they may still contain a metaphysical component. Just as their views on causation may postulate an empirically

[15] The account sketched here derives from an important paper by David Braddon-Mitchell which shows that this sort of thing may be true of consciousness and that if it is, then that will defuse many contemporary philosophical debates about consciousness. See D. Braddon-Mitchell (2001). 'Qualia and Analytical Condititionals', *Journal of Philosophy* 100(3): 111–35.

unexhausted form of contact between cause and effect, so their views on freedom may postulate an empirically unexhausted form of contra-causal power, their views on consciousness an empirically unexhausted form of self-transparency, and so on. The story told in this section is in no way inconsistent with ascribing such metaphysical learnings to ordinary people.

3. From Philosophy to Practice

Against existentialism By the account given in the first section, philosophy grows out of the desire to examine and reconstruct the presumptions that we are inevitably inducted into, as we saw in the second section, when we participate in the discursive and related practices that characterize human life. The question to which we now turn—the issue between existentialism and quietism—is whether this reflection on our practical presumptions is capable of making a difference in ordinary life: whether it can shift our habits of inference, so that we read some experiential data differently and are drawn into some different behavioural responses. Is philosophical reflection impotent in relation to the practice from which it springs? Or is it a sort of reflection that can feed back in that way onto ordinary practice?

Under the account given, we should naturally hope that philosophy is not practically impotent in this way. There would be something poignant and depressing about our situation were we able to examine and assess our practical presumptions, discerning various shortfalls and mistakes, but not have the capacity to do anything about putting those failures right. We would have to live in ironic, intellectual detachment from beliefs that we couldn't help but embrace in the hurly burly of the day-to-day. We must seek out any opportunity there may be, then, for allowing philosophical reflection to feed back onto ordinary practice.

The existentialist claim, as I conceive of it, is that there is no problem obstructing the path of such philosophical feedback. The proposal is that we philosophers can throw off received ideas as we find them wanting and replace them with the notions that receive our philosophical *imprimatur*. We can rebuild ourselves plank by plank, ultimately endorsing attitudes and dispositions that are completely at variance with those from which we started. We can even assume the status of a Nietzschean *Uebermensch*, spurning folk wisdom and folk inhibitions in favour of the guidance provided by our personally authorized views. We can seek with someone like Sartre, for example, to reject the self-protective, self-deceptive ideas of the folk and and to espouse the bold and bracing ideal of what is described as authentic consciousness.

It is worth reminding ourselves just how radical a transformation may be required under this image of philosophy. As Sartre interprets his findings, for example, philosophy would require us to give up on the idea that we are anything more than an impersonal sequence of brute impressions and bald decisions; to detach ourselves from all emotion, recognizing it as an attempt in bad faith to hide our free decisions from ourselves; to take the world to be the shapeless, unstructured mess which we can only experience at the cost of feeling a massive nausea; and to accept that

relations between people are inevitably a power-struggle about whose representations of the other are to prevail.[16] This is a bleak, tantalizing and wholly alien vision. If we think that philosophy could intrude it into everyday practice, then we probably believe that there are no limits to the transformative power of philosophical thinking.

Such a belief in philosophy's transformative power is not restricted to card-carrying existentialists. Many contemporary philosophers in the analytical tradition think that the philosophical examination of practical presumptions should lead us, so far as we endorse the findings of science, to think that we embrace falsehood when we evaluate actions as right or wrong,[17] when we treat people as having done things freely,[18] when we countenance beliefs and desires as determinants of action,[19] and when we say that time passes.[20] If these philosophers go on to say that we should simply replace our existing false beliefs with what we take to be scientifically warranted truths, reworking our ordinary practices around this new wisdom, then they are just as radical as any self-described existentialists.[21]

I do not think that the existentialist image of philosophy's transformative potential can really stand up. It suggests that there are no limits in the extent to which philosophy may be able to transform ordinary practice and this, in my view, is just facile optimism. The optimism is iconoclastic and enticing but it comes ultimately, so I shall try to argue, from an inadequate understanding of the relationship between belief and practice.

The suggestion that philosophy can transform practice in quite radical ways only makes sense if the practical presumptions that philosophy examines are the determinant of practice, discursive and otherwise, and not the other way around. The beliefs we entertain will have to be the unmoved movers of our practice-bound dispositions to reason this way or that, where the reasoning involved may be purely discursive or may also appear at the level of sentiment and behaviour. In particular, this will have to be so with those more or less general beliefs or ideas that philosophy tries to explicate, examine and—at least in the existentialist image—replace. Such beliefs must be the independent variable and the reasoning practices associated with them the dependent; the direction of determination must run from beliefs to practices.

This picture has a natural appeal. It gives expression to the idea that the beliefs and ideas endorsed by intellect are at the control centre of human response and that what happens at that centre determines everything which takes place on the peripheries of practice. And that idea has been dominant for a very long time in philosophical thinking, constituting what has sometimes been described as a 'logocentric'

[16] J. P. Sartre (1957). *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux); Sartre (1958). *Being and Nothingness* (London: Methuen); Sartre (1962). *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (London: Methuen).

[17] J. L. Mackie (1977). *Ethics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

[18] P. Van Inwagen (1983). *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

[19] P. Churchland (1979). *Scientific Realism and The Plasticity of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[20] J. J. C. Smart (1963). *Philosophy and Scientific Realism* (London: Routledge).

[21] A good example of someone who takes this view is Paul Churchland, op.cit.

vision: a vision focused on the role of word or *logos* rather than on the role of custom or deed, *ethos* or *praxis*.[22]

But this logocentric picture is at odds with the account given in the last section of how it is that we the folk hold by our practical presumptions. For we saw in the course of explicating such presumptions that if we can be said to believe something like the principle of *modus ponens*, or commonplaces such as those that govern causation, then that is so only because we are disposed to reason appropriately and to justify our reasoning in discourse with others. The mode of existence enjoyed by such general beliefs is not independent of our reasoning habits and practices. The general beliefs exist in us only so far as those habits and practices command our allegiance. They exist in us only so far as we are spontaneously disposed to reason appropriately—at least in presumptively favourable conditions—and are equally disposed to maintain those dispositions under discursive interrogation. Those dispositions are the base on which the possession of the general beliefs supervenes.

If anything of this kind is true—and something of the kind is surely compelling—then we cannot think of the general beliefs in question as attitudes that exist independently from discursive practices, shaping how those practices go. And so we cannot think of them as attitudes that may readily shift under philosophical examination, leading to an automatic adjustment—however long the adjustment may take to stabilize—in the person's discursive practices and in associated responses at the level of sentiment and behaviour. We could only have thought of them in that way if they had been formulaically embraced beliefs, not beliefs maintained in the case-by-case manner of practical presumptions.

Were formulaically embraced beliefs at the origin of our practice-bound responses then they would have constituted a centre of control which philosophy might have infiltrated and transformed. But the centre at which our discursive and related practices are controlled does not lend itself to easy philosophical take-over. That centre exists, paradoxically, at the peripheries where we find this or that particular transition of thought compelling and display it in what we say, in what we feel, or in what we do. It is distributed in the myriad points at which we find ourselves compelled to draw this or that conclusion and find ourselves able to defend the conclusion drawn under the pressure of discursive exchange with ourselves and others. Thus the conviction that causation is from past to future or that there is no causation at a distance manifests itself, not in the mesmerizing spell of an abstract formula, but in the magnetic force with which we find ourselves drawn to conclude that now this event, now that, can or cannot have been the cause of something under investigation.

The lesson is that if we go along with the argument of the last section, then we must reject any easy existentialist optimism about the capacity of philosophy to undo and reform our received, practice-bound ideas. We must recognize that those ideas come

[22] My preferred account of the relationship between belief and practice may be described as 'ethocentric', in a word I have used in related contexts; see, e.g., *The Common Mind*. Ironically, this understanding of the relationship has many affinities with the point of view maintained by Martin Heidegger in his allegedly existentialist work. See M. Heidegger (1963). *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row).

with the inertia of
they may leave in

Against quietism
unhappy prospect
sophically unable t
ing between two p
with lived experie
the perspectives o
I think not.

Under the acco
practical assumpti
and the rationaliz
some assumptions
coherent with doc
eral lessons of nat
us to draw lessons
since it is only wh
they lead. And any
or amending some
surprising. The les
terms, as respectiv

The meditative le
tions that are capa
people a different
inevitable and indis
ance to the experie

Think of how w
and feel resentmen
concepts that we g
of the meaning of
the responsibility o
any philosophical t
be seriously embra
support them and
conceptions—and t

My own preferen
tion which is reas
austere naturalistic
realm, and the regu

[23] P. Pettit (1993). 'A D
freedom see *The Commo*
Agency (Cambridge: Poli

with the inertia of habits ingrained in us by our biology and our background and that they may leave in place only restricted possibilities for revision and replacement.

Against quietism But does the lesson argue for quietism, then, leaving us with the unhappy prospect of having to believe in practice what we may find ourselves philosophically unable to endorse? Does it suggest that we may have to live our lives switching between two perspectives, one practical, the other philosophical—one associated with lived experience and behaviour, the other with theoretical reflection—where the perspectives offer visions of different and incompatible worlds? I hope not; and I think not.

Under the account of philosophy presented earlier, it involves the articulation of practical assumptions, whether in the area of reason, nature, mind, society, or value, and the rationalization of those assumptions—this will typically involve giving up some assumptions, and amending others—so that they are internally coherent and coherent with doctrines that are taken to be independently compelling: say, the general lessons of natural science. But any articulation of such assumptions will allow us to draw lessons from them that were not previously capable of being identified, since it is only when we articulate our beliefs that we can begin to examine where they lead. And any revisionary articulation—any articulation that involves rejecting or amending some received ideas—is bound to have lessons that will be particularly surprising. The lessons to be taught by philosophy I describe, for want of better terms, as respectively meditative, methodological, and moral.

The meditative lessons The meditative lessons I have in mind are those implications that are capable of being absorbed reflectively by people. Such lessons will give people a different take on habits of perception and response that are more or less inevitable and indispensable in human life, leading them to assign a different significance to the experience and behaviour in question.

Think of how we see and read the expressions of others, interpret their actions, and feel resentment or gratification at what they do to us. Think in particular of the concepts that we generate to make sense of these performances, as we introduce talk of the meaning of a glance, the intention or motive behind a piece of behaviour, or the responsibility of the agent for how they treated us. It is extremely unlikely that any philosophical theory which represented these conceptions as groundless could be seriously embraced. But there are many different theories that might be used to support them and, depending on which is embraced, philosophy will give the conceptions—and the performances they inform—a very different significance.

My own preference, for example, supports a construal of the conceptions in question which is reasonably faithful to our intuitions but remains valid within an austere naturalistic picture: a picture under which the entities in the subatomic realm, and the regularities that govern them, fix every other aspect of the world.[23]

[23] P. Pettit (1993). 'A Definition of Physicalism,' *Analysis* 53: 213–23. For my views on intentionality and freedom see *The Common Mind*; and Pettit (2001). *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency* (Cambridge: Polity).

That I adopt this picture is not going to change greatly the way in which I carry on in the application of the concepts in question, but it is bound to have an impact on me; or at least it is bound to have an impact if I am a philosopher who internalizes his own views properly. One negative impact it will have is to discipline me in a habit of thought that banishes all suggestion of a non-materialistic machinery at work in the generation of human behaviour: it will inhibit any tendency to draw Cartesian conclusions. And one positive impact it should have is to school me into a sense of continued awe that I, a construct in messy chemical material, should be able to make interpersonal contact with other such constructs and to establish community with them.

I speak of the sort of lesson forthcoming here as meditative in character. The reason for that choice of epithet is that it is a sort of lesson that is easily lost to view in the professional pursuit of philosophy. Letting the lesson resonate and echo in one's everyday awareness requires a discipline of the soul as much as a discipline of the mind and it is not something that is easily taught in the classroom or cultivated in the office. It is not something indeed that fits comfortably with the image of the professional that philosophers are more or less forced to assume. It smacks of religion rather than scholarship or science.

Yet if philosophical reflection is not allowed to have a meditative impact, then it really is vulnerable to Kierkegaard's jibe against systematic thought. The professional philosopher who works from nine to five on his or her views of mind-reading, action-explanation, or freedom and then leaves that work entirely to the confines of the office is pursuing philosophy in a space that is one dimension short of what it might have been. The interest of philosophy is associated in considerable part with the challenge it poses to let the results of philosophical reflection reverberate in one's day-to-day experience and life. If professional philosophy loses touch with that dimension, then it is in danger of degenerating into a routine scholasticism or of being absorbed into other disciplines like the history of ideas or the sociology of thought. Not only that indeed. If professional philosophy loses touch with that dimension, then it will miss out on an important source of confirmation and disconfirmation for philosophical views: the view that cannot be absorbed in any way within ordinary experience and conduct must for that very reason come under serious question.

I illustrated the meditative challenge with the naturalistic sorts of views that I happen to hold about mind but it applies with all sorts of views, non-naturalistic as well as naturalistic, and it applies of course to views on the whole range of topics covered in philosophy.

Philosophical views on almost any topic can be categorized as non-naturalistic or naturalistic and, in the latter event, as hard naturalistic or soft naturalistic. The non-naturalist will argue that our practical presumptions on the subject in question are inconsistent with science but should still be embraced. The hard naturalist will agree that they are inconsistent but maintain that they therefore have to be rejected. And the soft naturalist will hold that they can be reconciled, though perhaps only after quite imaginative recasting, with scientific claims. The views I used to illustrate

the meditative lesson are soft naturalistic in character. But non-naturalists would also have meditatively challenging views—views of a spiritualistic character—to savour and absorb in their everyday practice. And hard naturalists would face the rather different meditative task of finding a way of living with practices that they believe to be grounded in false beliefs. One way of doing this would be to try to think of them as practices pursued or pursuable in the fashion of make-believe games. Another would be to try to see them as habits of reaction that are more or less autonomic in character and only mistakenly treated as modes of believing anything.

The meditative challenge to philosophy not only arises, regardless of whether one is a non-naturalist, a hard naturalist, or a soft naturalist. It also arises in every area of philosophical thought: those involving reason, nature, society, and value, as well as the area of mind. Consider the view of inductive reasoning under which it works with categories of projection that come to us naturally but that have no rationally discernible basis. Or think of the theory of time under which our experience as of time passing is essentially illusory. Or think of the position which represents certain groups as having all the properties for which we naturally look in an agent or person. Or think of the various views that claim to identify the purpose, cognitive or non-cognitive, of evaluation. No matter where one looks across the range of philosophical reflection, one finds views emerging that are going to pose a meditative challenge for any serious mind.

But the influence that philosophy is going to have on practice is not limited to the meditative impact, central though this is. There are at least two other distinguishable domains in which philosophical reflection is likely to change how people might otherwise perceive and behave. I describe these respectively as the methodological and the moral. The meditative lessons of philosophy derive from the particular casting that philosophy gives to views we already hold, albeit in purely practical mode. The methodological and moral lessons come from a different source. They derive from the fact that our practical presumptions, when they are articulated according to the account given in this or that philosophy, often prove to have implications which are new to common sense. The methodological lessons are implications that bear on how the world may be expected empirically to be, the moral on how it should be evaluated.

The methodological lessons Consider the famous attempt by Galileo to persuade people that objects fall to earth at the same rate, regardless of their weight.[24] It works by inviting people to think a thought experiment through and to agree that what will happen, according to their own beliefs about different aspects of the experiment, shows that bodies of different weights will fall to the earth at the same rate. You are invited to imagine two solid bodies, indiscernible in shape or weight, falling to earth, and to agree that they should fall at the same rate. Then you are invited to imagine them falling with a thread connecting them and to agree that

[24] This use of the Galilean model is different from that in F. Jackson (1998). *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 78.

they will still fall at the same rate. Finally you are invited to imagine that the connecting thread is rigid like an iron bar and to agree that they will continue to fall at the same rate. And then it is pointed out that the two bodies connected in that rigid way are equivalent to a single body of double the weight, so that you have just agreed that such a body will have the same rate of fall as either of the bodies on its own. Thus your own beliefs about the elements in the scenario envisaged—the claims to which you are invited to agree—are shown to imply, perhaps contrary to your existing view on the matter, that bodies of different weights can fall at the same rate to earth.

This thought experiment turns on the fact that our views on different matters, once articulated, can prove to have surprising implications. And that lesson holds as much of the practical presumptions articulated in philosophy, as it does of the particular, empirical intuitions that Galileo was working with. Unsurprisingly, then, one very common style of argument in philosophy attempts to derive such potentially surprising implications and to paint in the picture of the world that they convey.

It is in this vein that I read many of the most influential—though not necessarily compelling—contributions of philosophy in the last hundred years or so. Here, roughly stated, are some prominent examples.

- Lewis Carroll's demonstration that under our presumptions about reasoning, as revealed in interpersonal exchange, no argument will be supported by its premisses alone; there will always have to be a rule of inference that is presupposed in the background.[25]
- Wittgenstein's argument that properly and coherently articulated, our practical presumptions about what following a rule involves, in particular a rule of thought or judgement, entail that a private language is impossible: no one could use an informative, private language to name and keep track of sensations that others could not in principle access.[26]
- Quine's argument that the presumptions we hold in respect of interpreting and translating words, at least when they are spelled out as they ought to be, entail that two equally good manuals of translation could offer inconsistent construals of a sentence in the target language.[27]
- Sellars's argument that everything we are committed to in ascribing mental states to ourselves and others is consistent with our having learned to use mental concepts in the way in which we apparently learn to use terms that are theoretically introduced.[28]
- Strawson's argument that the presumptions involved in sustaining reactive emotions like resentment and gratification entail an ascription of freedom to the subject on whom they are targetted and that disbelieving in someone's freedom is as difficult as the suspension of those reactions.[29]

[25] L. Carroll (1895). 'What the Tortoise said to Achilles,' *Mind* 4: 278–80.
[26] L. Wittgenstein (1958). *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell).
[27] W. V. O. Quine (1970). *Word & Object* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).
[28] W. Sellars (1997). *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
[29] P. Strawson (1982).'Freedom and Resentment', in G. Watson, *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

- John Perry's a
  necessary to m
  with an indexi

Just as Galileo's
have often been a
that are designed
invited to imagin
story—who tries
what the premiss
person who tries
else could in pri
she finds it possib
ing to make one
at a stage where
but not a properly
reactive emotions
personal and free
unfamiliar compl
on the map is *here*

Philosophy clai
templating such s
bears in a distinct
and it is for that r
the tales rehearse
hard-wired into a
Cartesian theatre
museum of mean
ouristic language
short step to hav
emerged; that if
ate, by our lights,
given conditions
that any story of
involving in the m

The methodol
ported by the arg
cognitive science
able to teach will
sophical work in
argument that pe
assume would no

[30] J. Perry (1979). 'T
[31] D. Dennett (1984)

- John Perry's argument that under our practical presumptions as to what is necessary to make it rational to perform an action, the agent must have beliefs with an indexical content involving concepts like 'I' or 'now' or 'here'.[30]

Just as Galileo's deduction was driven by a thought experiment, so these arguments have often been associated with experiments—better perhaps, intuition-pumps[31]—that are designed to make vivid the possibility or impossibility alleged. We are invited to imagine the frustration of the individual—Achilles in Carroll's famous story—who tries to move by argument an interlocutor who will endorse only what the premisses say, and nothing that is merely presupposed; the plight of the person who tries to keep a diary on sensations occurring within them that no one else could in principle access; the problems of the radical translator as he or she finds it possible to translate a sentence in inconsistent ways and can find nothing to make one translation right, the other wrong; the position of human beings at a stage where they can give a behaviouristic account of one another's responses but not a properly mental one; the challenge for the person who wants to suspend reactive emotions in dealing with someone and yet continue to see them as a personal and free subject; and the predicament of someone who is lost in an unfamiliar complex and enjoys access to a map but has no way of telling where on the map is *here*.

Philosophy claims to teach us something potentially surprising by means of contemplating such scenarios, as Galileo claimed to do so by his. And what it teaches us bears in a distinctive way on practice. In particular, it bears on the practice of science and it is for that reason that I speak of methodological lessons. Thus the lessons of the tales rehearsed are, roughly: that we must expect some rules of inference to be hard-wired into any cognitive system; that there is no point in looking for a so-called Cartesian theatre of the mind; that neither is there any point in looking for a museum of meaning in the head; that if we can explain the evolution of a behaviouristic language for describing one another's responses, then it is going to be a short step to having an explanation of how the language of mind might have emerged; that if we can give an account of conditions that would make it appropriate, by our lights, to feel resentment and gratification at a subject, then we will have given conditions under which it is in order to ascribe freedom to that person; and that any story of cognitive architecture must make room for beliefs that are context-involving in the manner of beliefs with indexical content.

The methodological lessons illustrated—they may not be the only lessons supported by the arguments in question—all bear on the challenges and prospects for cognitive science and neuroscience. But not every lesson that philosophy may prove able to teach will be confined to this area. There is room for the same sort of philosophical work in relation to the social sciences. Thus Donald Davidson offers an argument that people who were as alien to us as certain anthropological theories assume would not be recognizable—by our received practices and views—as other

[30] J. Perry (1979). 'The Essential Indexical,' *Nous* 13: 3–21.

[31] D. Dennett (1984). *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).

minds.[32] And in a similar vein many philosophical accounts of our presumptions about the nature of people and of how they operate argue that it would be impossible to engage interpersonally with any subjects who conformed to the role in which much sociological theory casts them; in that sense they would not count as people.[33] This sort of argument persuaded Max Weber to impose on social science the *Verstehen* constraint of always having to represent human beings in such a way that we could imagine making interpersonal sense of them.[34]

Why should there be room for active exploration of this methodological kind in relation to the human sciences, psychological and social, but not, so it seems, in relation to the natural? There is some room for such work in relation to the natural sciences, as when philosophers put forward schemes under which quantum phenomena are interpreted so as to fit with received ideas about causation, or the theory of natural selection is interpreted so as not to undermine intuitive ideas about altruistic motivation. But it is certainly true that the human sciences offer more fertile ground for such investigations. The reason, I suggest, is that the shared presumptions about mind, persons, and society that are embedded in our ordinary practices are much richer and harder to remove than the presumptions we make about nature, so that the implications they prove to have are bound to carry greater methodological weight.

The moral lessons The derivation of the moral lessons implied by our practical presumptions is the sort of thing pursued in normative ethics and normative political theory. These disciplines take as given the presumptions of moral reasoning—as already articulated and perhaps amended—and tries to deploy them in the development of views on a range of particular, often quite practical issues. The presumptions that are typically deployed in this sort of argument will bear on how far normative judgement is universalizable, abstracting from particularities of person or context; how far it is driven by reference to paradigm cases, and the judgements they support, how far by reference to principles; and how far issues of what it is right to do or right to institutionalize turn on questions of what is for the best overall: say, what is likely to promote overall welfare.[35] These presumptions are variously recognized and variously assessed by philosophers, of course, and what status they are given is often a function of how satisfactory they prove in the lessons they teach; the same indeed is true of the presumptions from which methodological lessons are derived.[36]

[32] D. Davidson (1984). *Inquiries into Truth & Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

[33] Pettit, *The Common Mind* is devoted in good part to showing what social science research programs are feasible by reference to this and to related constraints.

[34] M. Weber (1949). *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Free Press).

[35] On some of those issues see P. Pettit (1997). 'A Consequentialist Perspective on Ethic', in M. Baron, M. Slote, and P. Pettit, *Three Methods of Ethics: A Debate* (Oxford, Blackwell); and Pettit (2001). 'Embracing Objectivity in Ethics', in B. Leiter *Objectivity in Law and Morals*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 234–86.

[36] See J. Rawls (1971). *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) on the method of reflective equilibrium.

Many of the issues addressed in normative ethics will be questions to which people's answers come fairly quickly, being matters of well-established opinion, if not practical presumption. But many of the issues will be novel and will give the enterprise a surprising and engaging cast. Is abortion on a par with homicide? Is the failure to save the lives of those exposed to starvation equivalent to taking their lives? Is it legitimate to damage embryos in order to further medical research? As society changes and technologies develop, there are a host of ethical issues of this kind that need to be resolved. Thus there will always be occasion for developing received presumptions about matters of morality—as these are articulated in this or that philosophy—and applying them in the resolution of such issues.

But apart from teaching moral lessons that bear on relatively new ethical issues, there is also room for philosophy to play a similar role of this kind in developing views on how society should be best ordered. Unsurprisingly, our practical presumptions do not bear directly on matters as concrete—and in human history as recent—as how best to arrange the affairs of people in relation to one another, in relation to law, and in relation to government. At most those presumptions give us a base for the specification of presumptively relevant values such as those of equality and justice and freedom. Thus philosophy can also assume an engaging moral role in elaborating different ways of understanding such ideals, and different ways of weighting them against one another. And this, of course, is precisely what normative political theory attempts. It tries to derive from a baseline of common, practical presumptions lessons that bear on what sort of state and society we should be seeking.[37]

Conclusion

Although we have to reject the intellectualist picture under which ordinary practice is guided by independently maintained beliefs, and can be adjusted to any revision in those beliefs, still we can see lots of opportunity for the philosophical articulation and examination of received ideas to influence practice. Philosophy has meditative, methodological, and moral lessons to teach and these impact, by any criterion, on ordinary practice. They reshape the perceptions and dispositions that pre-exist the philosophical enterprise and, without amounting to the sort of thing envisaged in existentialism, they certainly give the lie to the quietist picture that seemed to loom as the only alternative. Philosophy is not something, then, for the armchair alone. It teaches lessons that philosophers ought to be able to bring home from the office, and take out of the study.[38]

[37] The elaboration of such ideas may often involve looking at past practices of reasoning and seeing possibilities of thought that may have been eclipsed at later points. For an argument that a past tradition of politics and thought points us to a conception of liberty—freedom as non-domination—that is unjustly neglected in contemporary political thinking, see Pettit, (1997). *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

[38] My thanks to Brian Leiter and Victoria McGeer for their comments on my argument.