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1 philosophers working on metaphysics these days; he has published on metaphysics, philosophy of language and philosophy of science, specifically on the metaphysics of space-time, but has wide ranging interests in most branches of analytic philosophy. And he is always open to discuss with others their philosophical work.

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FEATURES

5 Interview with Phillip Bricker

MOISÉS & MARÍA: Phil, can you tell us how you got interested in philosophical ideas initially?

PHILLIP BRICKER: As a young teenager, I was taken with Nietzsche, in particular, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. I also remember, at one point in high school, reading much of Spinoza's *Ethics* and spending a lot of time, probably unsuccessfully, trying to figure out what was going on there. But my introduction to analytic philosophy came my first semester at UC Berkeley, where I was an undergraduate. The class was taught by a visiting professor there named Frank Cioffi. Basically it was a history of analytic philosophy course, starting with Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* and then moving on to Russell and Wittgenstein. Later in my undergraduate career, important influences came from classes taught by Ernest Adams, Barry Stroud, and Paul Feyerabend. But maybe most important was a graduate-level course on measurement theory taught by William Craig, where I got to see what it was like to be a graduate student in philosophy, and to try to do original research. For the first time, it felt like I was a real philosopher doing my own research.

M&M: What were some valuable insights that you acquired at Princeton at the time of your graduate studies?

PB : Princeton was an exciting place to be a graduate student.

GUEST EDITORIAL

Dear Reasoners, We are happy to take you to Phillip Bricker's office at UMass-Amherst to discuss some of his most interesting philosophical insights about the metaphysics of modality and the use of formal tools in philosophy, as well as to share with you a story about how some drafts that we keep in the drawer might be, after some decades, reworked and shared with the rest of the world. We hope this interview works as an inspiration for all of you.

With more than thirty-five years of academic experience, Phil is well known as one of the most prominent analytic

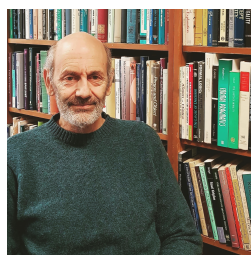


When I got there I didn't know a lot about the philosophers on the faculty. I might have heard the name David Lewis but I didn't really know much about his work. I knew only a little about Paul Benacerraf from a course I had taken where we read "What Numbers Could Not Be". And I remember reading a piece on Kripke in the New York Times Magazine centered on his work on truth; an uncle pointed it out the summer before I went to graduate school. Those were the three philosophers who ended up having the greatest influence on me at Princeton: David Lewis, Paul Benacerraf, and Saul Kripke. After I arrived at Princeton, my interests quickly moved towards philosophy of mathematics on the one hand and metaphysics on the other, especially modal metaphysics. In my second year, I made the decision ask David Lewis to supervise my dissertation. I think that was one of the best decisions of my life. He was a great teacher and mentor, generous with his time. Some people might think that because his views are so, you might say, unusual in certain ways, he might be a difficult teacher if you didn't agree with him. But it was exactly the opposite. I know of no philosopher who is better at getting inside someone else's view and being able to give suggestions from their perspective rather than from his own. So he was a great teacher and, of course, a major influence on my later work.

M&M: What was the topic of your doctoral dissertation? Are you still inclined to believe in some of the conclusions that you reached at the time?

PB : My dissertation was on possible worlds and propositions. It's titled *Worlds and Propositions: The Structure of Logical Space*. The main focus of it was to consider questions of reduction in both directions. Should you reduce worlds to propositions, as some propose or propositions to possible worlds, as Lewis does? And then I also considered different notions of proposition. If you had a narrow notion in which propositions have to be expressible in an actualistically acceptable language, then the question of reduction is one, as I saw it, of whether you thought there were alien properties in other possible worlds. In my dissertation I didn't introduce the term 'alien property' – that was later introduced by Lewis – but my dissertation was where I first gave the argument, which is in my paper "Reducing Possible Worlds to Language" and that Lewis uses against linguistic ersatzism, that because of the possibility of alien properties, a reduction of possible worlds to language fails. I also rejected at that time the reduction of propositions to possible worlds, arguing that you need both. The main reason had to do with mathematics. I thought mathematical propositions had genuine content that you couldn't capture in terms of possible worlds. I still believe that, but now I think there is hope for reduction if you include mathematical systems in reality as well as possible worlds and then understand mathematical content in terms of those systems.

For me, perhaps, the most fundamental question of metaphysics has to do with this question whether what I now call the realm of representation, which includes propositions and properties and all the ways in which we represent reality, whether that realm can be reduced to the ontology, what I call the reality of things, which for me includes the actual world but also all the possible worlds and the mathematical systems.



M&M: Given that your work usually involves formal tools could you share your views on the value of formal tools in philosophy, especially in metaphysics and philosophy of science?

PB : I think that formal tools are important in philosophy. It is not so much that we need them to express our philosophical views, which I think can largely be done in English. There is sometimes an overuse of formalism in how we express what we want to say. But formal tools are extremely important for getting clear on how concepts and theories relate to one another. In my dissertation there is a lot about Boolean algebras. If you are talking about propositions, you need to get clear on how they relate to one another; you need to get clear what the structure is. That structure comes from mathematics. And once you get clear on that, some questions open up that you might not have seen without the mathematics: Are propositions a complete Boolean algebra? Are they freely generated? Are they an atomic Boolean algebra? Once you know the mathematics, you see what the questions are and you can think of how to give arguments for and against. Giving a formal presentation allows one to get clear on the general structure of the theory and its commitments.

M&M: Your work has largely contributed to the modal realist research program in metaphysics. Could you talk about your views on modal realism?

PB : 'Modal realism' is a term which Lewis introduced and then regretted shortly after because it suggests that, if you're a modal realist, you're a realist about modality, which is not what it is at all; you are a realist about possible worlds. But the term got ensconced in our usage and I haven't shied away from it. Even so, there are different ways you might use the term. Some philosophers use it to refer to Lewis's very specific views about possible worlds including his views about actuality, his views about recombination, and so on. I prefer to use it more generally. In this more general sense I can call myself a modal realist. In this sense it means belief in the existence of concrete possible worlds, for some notion of concrete that you have to make precise. On this Lewis and I agree, but we disagree on a lot of the other aspects of Lewis's modal realism.

Lewis called philosophers' initial reaction to modal realism, the "incredulous stare". When they first heard the modal realist say "I believe in talking donkeys and flying pigs, they just aren't around here but they are somewhere else in reality", they think that sounds somewhat crazy. I divide that reaction into two parts, one I agree with and the other I don't. Some philosophers don't like the view because of its bloated ontology, because the modal realist believes in all sorts of things we don't have good reason to believe in. I disagree with that. The philosophers who make this objection support it by appeal to some Occam razor's type principle: you should believe in less rather than more. But I don't think Occam's razor has any force in metaphysics. I think we have good reason to accept a plenitude of possible worlds and of mathematical systems, and I don't think Occam's razor gives us reason to reject that. If the complaint is bloated ontology, I don't accept it.

What about the other side? I think a lot of people think what is crazy is to think that these flying pigs are just as real as the pigs in this world. I agree that that is crazy. I divide reality into two very different parts, one is the part that we are causally related to, roughly, the physical universe that we are part of; and the other is the realm of what we are able to think about. When we think about flying pigs, there are flying pigs that are objects of our thoughts; but there is no reason to think these objects of

our thought exist in the physical universe. So that gives us good reason to hold that what we are thinking about involves objects in other possible worlds. But what we think about is ontologically not on a par with the kinds of things we bump into in this world. I have a two category ontology where on the one hand there are the actual things – which I also argue, may go beyond what we can causally interact with because of the possibility of island universes – and there are the things that we have access to through our thoughts and our representations. In that way I disagree substantially with Lewis's version of modal realism and his account of actuality as a purely indexical notion.

M&M: You have developed a systematic view on metaphysics of modality which is put together in your forthcoming book *Modal Matters*, what are the main discussions of the book?

PB : The book includes pretty much all of my major work on modality, published and unpublished, except for my doctoral dissertation. It provided a good way for me to go back and work on some unpublished work that I had always wanted to publish, and get it ready for publication. The book has eighteen essays in total; five of them have not been previously published, including a comprehensive introduction where I try to tie together many of my views about reality as a whole.

Much of the unpublished work contained in the book is on modal plenitude. In 1991, I published a paper called "Plenitude of Possible Structures", and even that paper was only part of a larger manuscript which I include in the book. But I also had other work that remained unpublished, including "Principles of Plenitude", "All Worlds in One: Reassessing the Forrest-Armstrong Argument" and a paper from the 80's called "On Living Forever". There is also a paper called "Realism without Parochialism" which is about plenitude in a more general sense, in metaphysics and philosophy of mathematics, not just about modal plenitude. All of the unpublished work is on plenitude, in one form or another, some of which goes back to my dissertation, because I had already been thinking about these issues at the time.

M&M: Why did you not publish this before?

PB : I wish I had a good answer to that. One of my biggest regrets is that I had a contract to publish my dissertation and I never followed through on that. I think in all these cases there were things about the work I was not completely happy with and I would tell myself "I will rewrite it", "I will just fix it", and then new things would come out, and I would say "now I have to take this and this into account". In the end, I just moved to new projects. So, I have no good excuse for not publishing that work. I am glad that Oxford is giving me the opportunity to do something that I should have done many years ago.

M&M: Many thanks for sharing with us a bit of what grounds your philosophical views. We will be looking forward to the book!

NEWS

Calls for Papers

IDEALIZATION, REPRESENTATION, EXPLANATION ACROSS THE SCIENCES: special issue of *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*, deadline 15 January.

TRUTH AND FALSITY: special issue of *Kairos*, deadline 28 February.

Science Policy

One of the most important ways of knowledge spreading in science is through journal publications, that are in turn often evaluated based on citations. Citation metrics are used both to measure researchers' success and to determine the ranking of scientific journals. However, there are numerous problems and questions whether such metrics accurately represent the quality of a publication. For instance, citation patterns are field-dependent (Perović and Sikimić, *How Theories of Induction Can Streamline Measurements of Scientific Performance*, JGPS, 2019), journal editors and reviewers can be biased, results that are later abandoned can still be highly cited, etc.



Still, we find the peer review system to be important because we want a system that will get as close as possible to the ideal of equal chances for publishing scientific results, determining their importance, and in a later stance make it possible to get research funding. This system is envisioned as meritocratic instead of being based on the traditional prestige of certain academic institutions. The idea is that everyone with interesting research results can submit an article to an academic journal, get published and cited. We are still far from this ideal. Discrimination based on the scientific subfield or approach, gender, affiliation, age, etc., still happens. Thus, we need to think about what can be done to equalize the chances of researchers to publish their results in a visible manner. The visibility of a paper is relevant not only for its citations but more importantly for its incorporation in the scientific discourse.

Thus, I would like to raise your attention to certain factors that prevent equal opportunity and treatment when it comes to academic publishing. This is far from an exhaustive list of problems that should be addressed, but I hope it will motivate you to think further about these issues.

The first important topic in this debate is open access of scientific articles. Journals that have full open access free of charge promote the accessibility of science in the best way. However, there are other policies such as paying for accessing an article, paying for open access, or for submitting to open access journals. The prices for such submissions are substantial for some researchers, e.g., the ones working in poorer countries. Thus, we end up with something like an open access paradox: researchers pay a fee so that other researchers for whom paying for an article is an obstacle, can read the results and expand on the research. However, it will most likely be very difficult for less funded researchers to publish their own study in the same costly journal.

Likewise, paying for open access in journals that have a mixed policy will increase your visibility, but it will remain an impossible option for many others. However, in a system in which submissions are free, at least everyone can equally participate. Tiered pricing could be an intermediate solution, but it is still not ideal.

The second big topic when it comes to academic publishing is the blind review process. It has been discussed which