The Holy texts of Western Philosophy

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Whatever is will have no end
although denied by foe or friend
and this I say to friend and foe
as onward to the grave we go

The candle in my little room
gives light but will not bake the host
I share my certainty with Hume
The candle with the holy ghost.

A.R.D.Fairburn.

Preface

"Holy" is of course facetious, but any closed shop collects its own folklore, not just folk-lore in the sense of subject-matter well known to all its members, but in the sense of a body of texts that express pithily and memorably some of the things that the closed shop exists in order to safeguard and express, and which is therefore specially treasured by its votaries. The purpose of this little volume is not to be yet another introductory text in philosophy: it offers little commentary, scanty history and no solutions. The idea is to convey—to people who have done no philosophy but who think they might like to try—the corpus of problems and memorabilia that have become part of the folklore of philosophy in the analytic anglo-american tradition.

Thus I have collected here those passages from the classics of our subject that have the feature: "Once heard and understood, never forgotten". However, once one has started such an anthology, one inevitably ends up collecting riddles, stories told by or about famous philosophers that make some point, and one ends up including all those items of uncertain provenance that for various good reasons have become part of the oral tradition. To use a piece of theological jargon precisely, we accumulate some *apocrypha*. Indeed, as this collection has grown, it has increasingly acquired the character of a philosophical *Arabian Nights*.

Copyright and space are the reasons for the two biggest and most obvious holes: Very little Lewis Carroll and no Borges. *Through the looking glass, and what Alice found there* in particular should have been reproduced in its

entirety[1]. From Borges both *The Library of Babel* and *The Lottery in Babylon* should be included but I cannot face either the royalties or the typing. [2]

[1] try Martin Gardener: The Annotated Alice.

[2] Both can be found in the Penguin Modern Classics Borges volume called *Labyrinths*.

Contents

1 Two Puzzles

Of course there are many puzzles in philosophy. Indeed there are even many riddles, for many problems in philosophy lend themselves to presentation as riddles. Mediæval philosophers were particularly fond of them, and we shall see some of them later. Here we will begin with two modern riddles. They have already aquired a folklore-ish character for—modern though they are (the unexpected hanging dates from around 1950 and the riddle of the boxes from about 15 years later) because it does not seem to be known who posed them (though the riddle of the boxes is often known as "Newcomb's Paradox"), and nobody seems to be entirely clear about what the right thing is to say about either of them.

1.1 The Unexpected Hanging

On monday the prisoner is found guilty and the judge says to him

> You are hereby sentenced to be hanged. You will be hanged at nine o'clock in the morning sometime in the next week but *you will not know which morning until the actual day*.

(The italicised part of the judge's announcement is different in different versions, and this might matter.) The prisoner's lawyer jumps with delight at this, and tells the prisoner

> Now he can't hang you! For consider, he obviously cannot hang you on friday [the last day of the week: hangmen have weekends off like everybody else] because if that was the plan you would still be alive on thursday after nine in the morning and you would *know* you were to be hanged on friday, and the judge has said that you won't know until the morning of the hanging. So forget about Friday. So thursday is the last possible day. But by the same argument, he cannot hang you on thursday either, and so on ...

The poor prisoner: he believes all this, and is astonished and terror-stricken when the hangman arrives at three minutes to nine on wednesday morning. What has gone wrong?

1.2 The Riddle of the Boxes

You are presented with two boxes, called A and B. Box A either contains a million dollars or nothing. Box B contains a thousand dollars. You are allowed to take both boxes, or you may, if you prefer, take only box A. Why might you prefer to take only Box A, given that *whatever* there is in box A you are certainly a thousand dollars better off taking both boxes than you are taking just box A? Well, some superior being has looked you over, and has put a million dollars in Box A if she thinks you are going to take just Box A, and has put in nothing if she thinks you are going to take both. The problem is that

the superior being is a very good judge of form, and practically always gets it right. Many, many people have done this, and practically everybody who took both boxes found the first box to be empty, so they only got a thousand dollars, and practically everybody who took just the first box got the million.

What should you do?

Nobody knows! One thing you could try is to read Martin Gardner's *Mathematical Games* column in Scientific American, for July 1973 and for March 1974. It contains a good introduction to the extensive literature on this puzzle.

2 The theory of descriptions

2.1 Scott is the Author of Waverley

This seems to be the best known piece of current philosophical folklore. "Scott is the author of Waverley" is the example used by Russell to illustrate a point about identity. If $x = y$ then everything true of x is true of y and *vice versa*. Obviously! Indeed, saying that x is something-or-other is *just the same* as saying that y is something-or-other. So, if Scott = the author of Waverley, saying that *Scott* is the author of Waverley is just the same as saying that *The author of Waverley* is the author of Waverley. This clearly isn't true, because the first allegation is informative, and the second isn't.

Identity has always been a problem for philosophers! This is in part of problem of identifying things under the correct description. There are various funny stories about this.

2.2 Cornflakes

PARENT: What would you like for breakfast?

CHILD: Pass me those bloody cornflakes

[WHACK]

PARENT: *How dare you!? Now—what do you want for breakfast?*

CHILD: *Well i certainly don't want any of those bloody cornflakes.*

2.3 Gerald Durrell's Monkey

Gerald Durrell had a pet monkey, which he had difficulty housetraining. It used to defecate on his carpet, following which he would always smack its backside and throw it out of the (ground-floor!) window. Eventually the monkey cottoned on, and thereafter whenever it defecated on the carpet it would smack itself on the backside and jump out of the window.

2.4 The King of France is Bald

Since there is (at present) no King of France, wondered Russell in 1905, what becomes of statements I make about the present King of France? If there is no King of Ruritania (say) what becomes of statements about him? Do they

become meaningless? Surely not. Of course in the case of the King of Ruritania we know what they mean: they refer to fictional events in Anthony Hope's trilogy, but that is not always available as an explanation for the meaning of expressions containing non-referring terms, for most of them (and certainly the King of France) are not fictional characters at all. But how are we to make sense of them? Russell's answer appeared in a celebrated essay "On denoting" in which he took as his illustrative example of a sentence exhibiting this problematic feature the sentence

> The King of France is bald

His answer, which was hailed by Ramsey as "a paradigm of philosophy" was to say that "The King of France is bald" is to be analysed as (that is to say it *really means*) the following

> Everything that is King of France is bald
>
> There is at most one King of France
>
> There is at least one King of France

That way, the assertion that the King of France is bald turns out to be meaningful (which had been our worry) and false (as we know it to be).

3 Proofs of the Existence of God

Purported proofs of the existence of God are legion. In some ways this is rather surprising, given the medæval tag

> *Credo quia absurdum*

("I believe because it is absurd") but certainly one source of pressure for production of such proofs is the desire of powerful élites to justify their positions. Some cynics think that there is no more to it, and that if St. Anselm were around nowadays he would be writing copy for an advertising agency and have collected a life peerage instead of a sainthood. His argument is certain ingenious. Perhaps even disengenious, for it is difficult to believe that such an obviously clever man would not have seen the obvious riposte. Can you see it?

3.1 St. Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God

He is speaking to God (which might seem circular, but never mind)

> . . . we believe you to be something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or can it be that a thing of such nature does not exist, since 'the fool hath said in his heart: "there is no God" '? But surely, when this same fool hears what I am speaking about, namely 'something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought', he understand what he hears, and what he understands is in his mind, even if he does not understand that it actually exists. For it is one thing

> for an object to exist in the mind, and another thing to understand that an object actually exists. Thus when a painter plans beforehand what he is going to execute, he has the picture in his mind, biut he does not yet think that it exists because he has not yet executed it. [...] Even the fool, then, is forced to agree that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands it and whatever is understood exists in the mind. And surely that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind alone this same that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is that-than-which-something-greater-*can*-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists both in the mind an in reality.

The obvious riposte is that this argument can prove the existence of anything at all. People have argued over how convincing this riposte is, but it certainly leaps to mind.

3.2 Berkeley

An old and basic problem in philosophy is this: since—at least for hardnosed empiricists—the only evidence we have for the existence of things outside ourselves is evidence obtained by looking at them, we cannot (obviously!) ever have evidence that they exist unobserved. The English philosopher Berkeley expressed the premiss of this concisely as

> Esse est percipi

("To be is to be perceived".)

The trouble with this is that objects that are not perceived then cease to exist! They come back into existence as soon as anybody watches but how can we explain why they reappear in the same places and made of the same stuff as before? It certainly makes a terrible mess of physics!

Berkeley solved this problem of objects popping in and out of existence according to whether they were observed or not by postulating a God whose function (among others) is to hang around and observe things all the time so that we can be sure that they exist all the time. (See 10.1.) The following limericks (attributed to Ronald Knox) are a traditional (and quite fair) summary of his position. ("Quad" is Oxford University slang for "courtyard".)

> There was a young man who said "God
> must think it exceedingly odd
> that a thing like this tree
> Can continue to be
> when there's no-one about in the quad."

"Dear Sir, your astonishment's odd
For I'm always about in the quad
And that's why this tree
Continues to be
Since observed by, yours faithfully, GOD."

Nowadays the feeling is that a policy of ensuring that objects continue to exist unperceived by postulating a God to keep perceiving them errs by taking too seriously the idea that *esse est percipi*. It is really Occam's razor that assures us that objects continue to exist unperceived: for it just is a lot less complicated to suppose that they have an existence independent of us.

I was brought to thinking about this question earlier than most children: J.B.S. Haldane who was a neighbour of my parents' in Highgate, wrote a book called "My friend Mr Leakey" about a magician whose wallpaper had a pattern that changed spontaneously, but only when it wasn't observed.

4 Logical Positivism

Any tool that can be used can be misused: we have language and thought, and we can use them to generate nonsense, by which I mean not *falsehoods*, but things that lack meaning altogether. This is one important respect in which the languages of humans are unlike the language of bees, where every grammatical expression has a meaning. Philosophers writing about the status of nonsense will of course use little bits of it to illustrate their points, and some of these illustrations have joined the folklore:

Quadruplicity drinks procrastination

(Russell)

Colourless green ideas sleep furiously

(Chomsky)
and

This stone is thinking about Vienna

(Carnap)

The occurrence of nonsense raises the question of how we are to recognize it when we see it, so we can safely and sensibly ignore it and not, in the words of T.S.Eliot, "mock ourselves with falsehood"[3]. What sort of nonsense are we worried about? Straightforward nonsense like the above examples is not a problem for we can immediately recognise it for what it is and spurn it. What we do have to worry about is the kind of nonsense that sets us off on wild-goose-chases. Questions that have no answers are a good example of the kind of thing we would like to avoid. It seems reasonably clear that wondering how I can be sure that the colours you see are the same as the colours I see is only ever going

[3]Ash Wednesday. Of course he *should* have said "mock ourselves with *nonsense*".

to set me off on a wild goose chase. "How can we tell that everything in the world has not just doubled in size?" was for a long time the stock example of a question that is on the very edge of being this kind of nonsense, and people used to argue about it. **Verificationism** is the doctrine that a question has meaning only if can be answered, that a statement has meaning only if it can be verified or falsified. Hume held an early version of this doctrine, and he believed in addition that there are basically only two sorts of things one can say: one can talk about matters of fact, or about certain (highly restricted) abstract things like numbers. There are no other possibilities. In this spirit he wrote:

> "When we run over our libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."

Interest in the doctrine of Verificationism reached its peak with the "logical positivist" school of Vienna in the 20's and 30's of the twentieth century. They went a bit further than Hume, saying that the only things one can talk about are our immediate sense experiences ("sense data").

Although there is obviously some good common sense behind Verificationism, it has serious problems. There are subtle problems like the consideration that you have to know what (if anything) an assertion means *before* you start verifying it rather than after, but these can be haggled over, and there are more brutal and immediate ones. There is the difficulty that lies in wait to ambush anyone trying to rule certain kinds of discussion as meaningless (and it is probably obvious to the observant reader): you can end up denouncing as meaningless the discussion you are embarked on—simply apply this principle to itself! (see the discussion in section 7). Clearly if we are to verify the principle we must have some other means of finding out which things are meaningful. This is a very serious and deep-seated problem, for this kind of argument can be used against *any* version of the verification principle, and even if the Viennese version isn't correct *something* like it must be. One of the most memorable and picturesque descriptions of how to deal with this crisis is Wittgenstein[4]'s (Early Wittgenstein), at the end of a book (The *Tractatus*) in which he adopted an extreme version of verificationism.

> "My propositions are elucidatory thus: anyone who understands me will eventually recognise them to be senseless, when he has

[4]This is Early Wittgenstein. There are several Wittgensteins: as well as *Early* Wittgenstein (who wrote the somewhat portentously entitled *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* whence this extract comes, there is Late Wittgenstein (of the *Philosophical Investigations*); finally there is Paul Wittgenstein the famous one-handed pianist (for whom Ravel wrote the concerto for left hand). He was a brother of the other two, and they were all distantly related to Liszt's mistress of the same surname.

> climbed out through them, on them, over them. He must throw away the ladder after he has climbed it[5]. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof must one remain silent."

(The German original—"Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen"— is metrically more satisfying. It can (just!) be sung to the tune of "The Red flag".) One feels like congratulating him for biting the bullet, but this doesn't actually work very well, as Frank Ramsey pointed out:

> . . . i.e., the chief proposition of philosophy is that philosophy is nonsense. And again we must then take seriously that it is nonsense, and not pretend, as Wittgenstein does, that it is important nonsense!

or, more colloquially

> What we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either[6]

The usual way of dealing with this is to adopt an attitude to Philosophy encapsulated in a phrase of Wittgenstein's: the job of philosophy is

> to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle

so that we shouldn't think of the verification principle—whatever version of it we end up with—as something that can be true or false, but merely as a machete to be used for bush-clearing where appropriate.

5 The Use-Mention Distinction

Words are to be distinguished from the things they name: the word 'butterfly' is not a butterfly. The distinction between the word and the insect is known as the "use-mention" distinction. The word 'butterfly' has nine letters and no wings; a butterfly has two wings and no letters. The last sentence *uses* the word 'butterfly' and the one before that *mentions* it. Hence the expression 'use-mention distinction'. (It is a bit more difficult to illustrate the difference between using and mentioning butterflies!) It may seem a trivial point to make but it is immensely important and surprisingly often overlooked even by people who ought to know better, particularly by mathematicians. I pick the following passage almost at random from the mathematical literature: (it actually comes from H. Davenport, *the Higher Arithmetic*):

> To divide a number a by a number b means to find, if possible, a number x such that $bx = a$. If such a number exists it is denoted by a/b . . .

The number in question is not *denoted by* a/b: it **is** a/b.

As so often the standard example is from *Alice through the looking-glass*.

[5]Not surprisingly the *ladder* metaphor has a long history. See Sextus Empiricus *Against the Logicians Bk II* Also MIND 1958 pp 80-87 esp p 80 Mauthner

[6]F.P. Ramsey died young. His complete works comprise a single, valuable and fascinating relatively small volume. This last quip is to be found on page 238 (of the first edition).

[. . .] The name of the song is called 'Haddock's eyes'".

"Oh, that's the name of the song is it", said Alice, trying to feel interested.

"No, you don't understand," the Knight said, looking a little vexed. "That's what the name is *called*. The name really is *'The aged, aged man'*."

"Then I ought to have said, 'That's what the *song* is called'?" Alice corrected herself.

"No you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The *song* is called '*Ways and means*', but that's only what it is *called*, you know!"

"Well, what *is* the song, then?" said Alice, who was by this time completely bewildered.

'I was coming to that," the Knight said. "The song really is *'A-sitting on a Gate'* and the tune's my own invention".

The situation is somewhat complicated by the dual use of single quotation marks. They are used both as a variant of ordinary double quotation marks for speech-within-speech (to improve legibility)—as in "Then I ought to have said, 'That's what the *song* is called'?"—and also to make names of words—'butterfly'. Even so, it does seem clear that the White Knight has got it wrong. If his last utterance is to be true he should leave the single quotation marks off the title, or failing that (as Martin Gardner points out in *The Annotated Alice*) burst into song. (Did Lewis Carroll get it wrong too? We shall never know!)

In the following example Ramsey uses the use-mention distinction to generate something very close to paradox: the child's last utterance is an example of what used to be called a "self-refuting" utterance: whenever this utterance is made, it is not expressing a truth.

PARENT: Say 'breakfast'.

CHILD: Can't.

PARENT: What can't you say?

CHILD: Can't say 'breakfast'.

The distinction is of wider application: clearly what is crucial is that the word 'butterfly' represents butterflies and 'breakfast' represents breakfasts. The more general distinction we must always make is that between an object and its representation. It is commonly said by western philosophers that a magical view of the universe (of the kind that we in the west think we do not have) arises from a failure to draw the use-mention distinction properly, or at least from subtler confusions of the same sort. To oversimplify, a magical view of the universe is one in which representations of objects have causal powers purely in virtue of being representations. Many cultures have (or appear to have, or had) the belief that, say, drawing a picture of a bison slain by a spear would cause the artist's tribe to slay a bison similarly the following morning. There is a malign tradition common in the ancient world (and persisting in various

forms in our own time) of killing the messenger who brings bad news. It seems reasonable to think that they are guilty of confusing use and mention (or at least object and representation) by attributing to the representation causal powers that properly belong to the object represented. Of course the world-view of believers in Magic is certainly vastly more sophisticated than that, and is in any case largely inaccessible to us, but there does seem to be *some* connection with the use-mention distinction.

There are those who say that the mistake made by believers in magic is also made by those who believe in the existence of mental entities distinct from physical entities. After all, mental things are internal representations of the external world. It should be just as silly to believe that my mental image of a cheesecake should be causally related to my eating a real cheesecake.

Rather like the paradoxes, the use-mention distinction can end up being a source of humour. A nice illustration is the joke about the compartment in the commuter train, where the passengers have travelled together so often that they have all told all the jokes they know, and have actually been reduced to numbering the jokes and reciting the numbers instead. In most versions of this story, an outsider arrives and attempts to join in the fun by announcing "*Fifty-six!*" which is met with a leaden silence and he is told "It's not the joke, it's the way you tell it". In another version he then tries "*Forty-two!*" and the train is convulsed with laughter. Apparently they hadn't heard that one before.

6 Ethics

Philosophers have spent an enormous amount of time trying to provide an explanation of what our sense of right and wrong has its roots (causal or logical) in. Thee are—on the face of it—at least two distinct questions: (i) What do these beliefs actually mean? (if anything!) and (ii) How do we come to hold them? (This second one is itself obviously—at least!—two questions, one about justification and another about causality) Mostly we are interested in the first question, and regard the second as less philosophical. There are many famous programmes in answer to (i)

6.0.1 Utilitarianism

6.1 Divine Commands

One dangerous doctrine, still widespread today, is that one can make sense of a difference between right and wrong only if one believes in God. This is a particularly malignant idea because people who adopt this position find it very difficult to avoid the conclusion that those who are not fellow-believers are not moral agents, and therefore need not be treated as such. Indeed one pope in the time of the Reformation indeed said something to this effect [ ] "You do not have to keep your word to an infidel". In any case residents of the twentieth century do not need to be told of the consequences of the belief that other people are not people. The belief that only your co-religionists are moral agents severely handicaps you for life in a pluralist society.

6.2 The Social Contract

The Social Contract Theorists of the eighteenth century believed that morality has meaning only in the presence of a social contract, a kind of agreement entered into by mankind at some stage (in the logical past if not in the temporal past) to set up a government and to abide by such laws as it may make. It is quite important that this fictional contract is deemed not to be contracted by separate societies individually and possibly in different ways, but by all of humanity together (otherwise there would be no morality transcending cultural differences). Of course nobody really supposes that there was ever an actual conference at which such a contract was agreed, merely that if morality has any meaning it can be expressed in terms of this metaphor.

This idea that the underlying structure of morality is very like contract law is an old and attractive theory, and clearly contains an important part of the truth. The real difficulty with this is to explain where the contract comes from or in what sense it was ever signed or agreed: after all, we clearly do not allow people to get away with a refusal to act morally simply on the grounds that they never, so to speak, signed the Social Contract! But that is another problem. If we are to take the metaphor at all seriously, we must consider that life would be like without the contract. This condition is what Hobbes calls a "state of war". This evocative expression is for him merely a technical term denoting a state of affairs where there is no contract and therefore (according to him) no conception of morality. For example, a society in a state of collapse would probably be in a state of war (or at least something hard to distinguish from it). Animals are thought by some to live in a state of war.

Savour the relish with which Hobbes assembles this coruscating litany of disasters attendant upon the failure of Earthlings to enter into the Social Contract. It is really a theatre piece, and if you do not have an audience to declaim it to, do at least read it aloud.

> "Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same also is consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, or use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short!!!"
>
> *Leviathan [...]*

This is not merely sonorous: notice how the things he itemizes are things for which stability or cooperation is required. There is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth. Arts, letters and society clearly depend on common understandings of many

matters, not least of which is the question of which behaviour is to be tolerated and which not. After that he lets his imagination run riot.

The modern phase of this "social contract theory" is found in the practice of invoking Game theory to explain the genesis of rule-governed behaviour between animals and by implication, between humans. This is popularly known as "Sociobiology".

6.3 Mill on Liberty

> . . . the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. [. . .] The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.
>
> *Mill: On Liberty*

Thus according to Mill there are no *self-regarding vices*. A self-regarding vice is one that does harm only to its perpetrator. Many of us nowadays are sufficiently under the influence of Mill to believe that there are no self-regarding vices: if it harms no-one except the person who does it how can it be a vice? Many of us, but by no means all. There are plenty of people who believe it is wrong—for example—to intoxicate oneself or to mutilate oneself *even when no other person is involved*.

Perhaps there is less real conflict here than might appear, and that there are really two concepts around even though only one word is being used. People who think, as Mill did, that there are no self-regarding vices have a view of morality as a distillation of a theory of interactions between moral agents. People who believe in the existence of self-regarding vices tend to be more interested in a concept (which they, too, call 'morality') of rules which are handed down from some prior, usually divine source, and have their roots in our natures as created beings rather than in our behaviour. Too deep to get into here.

7 The Dream of a Universal Language

> "And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech . . . . And they said to one another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and lime they had for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad across the face of the whole earth . . . And the Lord came to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language, and this they begin to do, and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered

> them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city."
>
> *Genesis II v 1-8*

Clearly we see here an aspiration for a universal language. This passage suggests both that the writers of Genesis felt the need for one and that they thought that it couldn't be had. They clearly also felt, interestingly in view of what we now know, that possession of such a language would give them immense power, ("...and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.") and would—quite literally—enable them to find God. Leibniz wrote of the need for such a universal language, a "calculus ratiocinator", and decribed how easy it would make life, in the following celebrated passage:

> "If controversies were to arise, there would be no more need of disputation between two philosophers than between two accountants. For it would suffice to take their pencils in their hands, to sit down to their slates, and to say to each other (with a friend or witness if they liked): Let us calculate."

Leibniz is of course interested in having a language that is universal not in the trivial sense that everybody speaks it (the only thing *that* would do for us is make phrase books obsolete). Indeed it is really just accident that we haven't got such a language alredy (American tourists are working on it). Even Esperanto is universal only in the sense that it is not the property of any one particular tribe. What Leibniz wanted was a language that is universal in the sense that *everything can be said in it*. One might think that any old natural language could do this, at least when used by a literate speaker. Of course we are immediately reminded that—for example—there is no English word for *Schadenfreude* and no German word for *cheek*. But this is not the point, for these imperfections can be corrected by theft from another language. The problem is much deeper than that.

Some progress has been made along the direction Leibniz envisaged: the twentieth century has seen the emergence of a number of languages that Leibniz would have recognised as steps in the right direction: one of these, the lower predicate calculus (a.k.a. *first order logic*), is nowadays commonly taught to philosophy students. (It is part of the mythology of the subject that the Logical Positivists of the Vienna school believed that schoolchildren should be taught the lower predicate calculus instead of their native languages and that then Leibniz's millenium would come to pass. According to an extreme version of the story this is what Neurath was up to when he was involved in the education ministry of the revolutionary ("Spartacist") government in Vienna in 1919. The Vienna school probably were that radical, but they were not that naïve!) Programming languages are also intended as languages which are universal for *commands* (they are intended to be able to express any command, or at least any command of a certain kind).

Actually it is clear from the quoted passage that what Leibniz was after was not just a language in which *everything could be said* but one in which, once a question was asked in it, *one would be able to compute the answer*. This is

known to computer scientists as the "halting problem' and is now known to be unsolvable.

Even if it were possible, there would seem to be difficulties in the way of anyone trying to get there, as this celebrated passage from Neurath points out:

> "Wie Schiffer sind wir, die ihr Schiff auf offener See umbauen müssen, ohne es jemals in einem Dock zerlegen und aus besten Bestandteilen neu Errichten zu können."

This observation of Neurath's aquired fame in the English-speaking world through being quoted by Quine on the fly-leaf of *Word & Object* (see section 11.2). Literally it means "We are like sailors who must rebuild their ship at sea without ever being able to dock it and there rebuild it from the best materials".

For Germans at least, it derives some of its poetic force from an allusion to the myth of the *Flying Dutchman*, who is condemned to sail the seas for ever unless he finds a woman who will love him truly.[7] But it has a message for the rest of humanity as well, for we are all of us Flying Dutchmen, the ship from which we can never escape is our world-view. The reason we can never rebuild it from scratch is that the rebuilding is itself part of the worldly activity we are trying to rebuild the picture of.

7.1 Can Everything be Said?

Related to the idea of a universal language is the question of whether there is anything unsayable, or indescribable, or inconceivable. In the following celebrated passage Berkeley argued that they *couldn't* be anything inconceivable because everything exists in the mind. As was customary for many generations, this argument was cast in the form of a dialogue—in this case between Philonous and Hylas. Philonous is Berkeley's mouthpiece, Hylas the stooge.

> *Hylas*: What more easy than to conceive of a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever. I do at present time conceive them existing after this manner.
>
> *Philonous*: How say you, Hylas, can you see a thing that is at the same time unseen?
>
> *Hylas*: No, that were a contradiction.
>
> *Philonous*: Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of *conceiving* a thing which is *unconceived*?
>
> *Hylas*: It is
>
> *Philonous*: This tree or house therefore, which you think of, is conceived by you?
>
> *Hylas*: How should it be otherwise?
>
> *Philonous*: And what is conceived is surely in the mind?
>
> *Hylas*: Without question, that which is conceived exists in the mind.

[7] There is an opera by Wagner based on the same tale.

Philonous How then came you to say, you conceived a house or a tree existing independent and out of all mind whatever?

Hylas That was I own an oversight ...

The best modern analysis of this argument is due to Graham Priest, who links it with the paradoxes: specifically the paradox of Berry (concerning the smallest indescribable number) which we will see below. See Priest's article in the Prior *festschrift*.

7.2 Dr. Johnson's Foot

Having gone this far, it is but a short step for mankind to conclude that things exist *only* in the mind. This was too much for Dr. Johnson. As Boswell reports:

> After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the nonexistence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true it is impossible to refute it. I shall never forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it "I refute it THUS!"

8 The Paradoxes

In a universal language we can discuss anything. If a language includes itself among the subject matter it can discuss we get a paradox, as the Ancient Greeks knew. The paradox arises as follows. There is nothing to prevent us formulating a sentence in English

> What I am now saying is false

which is false if it is true, and if false, must be true. This is traditionally attributed to Epimenides the Cretan, but this is not the only ancient source for the puzzle. St. Paul obviously knew it as an old puzzle when he wrote to Titus:

> One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said "The cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies".
>
> *Epistle to Titus i 12*

It is not known whether St. Paul wrote this tongue-in-cheek!

The Greeks had other stories like this: in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* there is the story of the lawyer Corax and his student Tisias. They agree that Tisias will pay Corax for his lessons when he wins his first case. Tisias then does not practice law, so Corax sues him for his fee. Tisias says: "Either I win this, in which case, by the judgement of the court, I do not have to pay Corax, or I lose. If I lose, then by our agreement I do not have to pay him, for I pay him only when I win my first case." Corax argues: "Either I win, in which case Tisias

must pay me by the judgement of the court, or he wins, in which case he must pay me according to our agreement".

People usually say how silly these stories are, and refuse to discuss them. Of course, when we are not seeking to avail ourselves of the semantic tricks the paradox makes available—that is to say when we are ordinary users of the language—it is entirely proper for us to avoid these parts of the language, and in any case, *qua* ordinary users, we are unlikely to need them. But *qua* philosophers we cannot pretend that these features are not there, and we have to take their dangers seriously. They are a disaster waiting to happen. Russell (the modern treatment of the paradoxes probably owes more to Russell than to anyone else), in his autobiography, after describing the paradoxes, wrote:

> It seemed unworthy of a grown man to spend his time on such trivialities, but what was I to do? There was something wrong, since such contradictions were unavoidable on ordinary premisses. ... Every morning I would sit down before a blank sheet of paper. Throughout the day, with a brief interval for lunch, I would stare at the blank sheet. Often when evening came it was still empty.

The self-reference that gives rise to the paradoxes does not always make a mere mess: sometimes profound things emerge from it. In at least one version of the paradox of the Liar[8], the Cretan does not say "What I am now saying is false", but "*Everything* I say is false". What follows? Well, if it is true, then because it is one of the things he has said it would have to be false. So it's false. So *not* everything that he has said is false. So he must have said something that's true! But what can this something be? It wasn't what he has just said, so *he must have said something else as well.* This sounds fair enough: after all, most of us do. But suppose a Cretan appears spontaneously, utters "Everything I say is false" and disappears *without saying anything else.* (According to modern quantum theory this is not impossible, merely very unlikely!) What are we to say about this?

Unfortunately we have to conclude that this doesn't really prove anything at all. After all, the machinery we used was quite capable of proving a self-contradiction as well, so it is thoroughly suspect. Other examples of things that appear to be non-trivial and non-paradoxical arising from this can be found in Laraudogia (MIND 1990) L.J.Cohen (JSL vol 22 (1957) pp 225-232)

Self-reference is not always used to establish paradoxical conclusions. It is frequently used as a vehicle for comedy. See for example Russell's story about the Solipsist in section 9.2. In the United States there is a genre of joke called "Tom Swift jokes" whose common theme is self-reference. A delightful dramatic use of self-reference is to be found in the closing scenes of *The Wizard of Oz* where the voice of the glowering figure on the stage (both of them of course merely special effects driven by the Wizard from his keyboard hidden behind a curtain) booms (as the dog Toto sniffs behind the curtain)

> "**Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain**".

[8] A.N.Prior: *Papers in Logic and Ethics* Duckworth 198?

(Interestingly this little detail appears in the film but not in the book). There is a story of a question in a Philosophy examination

Is this a question?

to which (the story is told of many people, for example) A.J.Ayer is supposed to have supplied the one-line essay

Only if this is an answer.

There is no reason to suppose that any version of this story is true: it's just an urban myth.

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

"But who will guard the guardians?" asks a character in one of Juvenal's satires. Although this is usually taken to be a question along the lines of "Who will police the police?", the guardians being referred to are in fact minders retained by male Roman aristocrats to ensure the sexual fidelity of their womenfolk ... but the underlying logic of the situation remains the same!

We will not here go into detail of what the twentieth century has had to say about this matter, but it is evident that a language that can get us into this sort of trouble is not acceptable—even if it can say everything, it cannot say it reliably and cannot be trusted. Russell did not stare at his blank sheets of paper in vain, however. He was one of the first people to work in a modern mathematically rigorous tradition that enabled us to seek (and eventually provide) a taut analysis of this problem. He eventually decided that the way to avoid paradox was to see Language as being the result of agglomerating an entire hierarchy of languages, where each language can express assertions only about languages strictly lower in the hierarchy than itself, so that no language can contain a paradoxical sentence like that uttered by the Cretan.

9 Philosophy of Mind

9.1 Weakness of the Will

We have desires, and they cause us to act. Sometimes we have conflicting desires, and then the strongest desire wins, and we act on that one. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it? But this theory does not properly explain situations where one can desire to do something and yet not do it. It seems that as well as desires, we need to postulate a thing called the *will* which drives the actions caused by the desires. Otherwise there would not be problems like

Video Meliora proboque, deteriora sequor

("I see the better and I try to do it: I do the worse") says Ovid's Medea as she prepares to murder her children.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

There is an apocryphal story dating from the early days of computer translation of natural language, according to which a computer translated this sentence into Russian and back, obtaining the result:

> "The vodka is good and the meat is tender".

The problem of weakness of the will is such an old one there is even a classical greek name for it: *acrasia*.

9.2 Cogito

Cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am) encapsulates in slogan form Descartes' (No, he's not Greek, he's not pronounced $\Delta\epsilon\sigma\kappa\alpha\rho\tau\epsilon\sigma$, he's French!) attack on the problem philosophers call *scepticism*. You start on the slippery path to scepticism by noticing that sometimes you form mistaken impressions of what goes on in the outside world. Then you notice that one of the funny things about being mistaken, unlike being drunk, say, is that you cannot know that you are it at the time. So perhaps we might be mistaken all the time—about everything! All the world's a dream. AArgh!

This is clearly an unacceptable conclusion. One way of avoiding it would be to exihibit something that we are absolutely certain of, and try to reconstruct some certainty from that. Descartes' dictum is merely one attempt. His line is this: if I am even able to worry about this problem, then I must at least be here! If I think, I must exist!

> ...I noticed that whilst I wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the 'I' who thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth '*I think, therefore I am*' was so certain and so assured that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy for which I was seeking.

Discourse on Method, IV.

Arresting though this remark is, it is not a great deal of help. Knowing that I exist is not much use if my worry is that most—if not all—of my perception of the external world may be delusion or hallucination. There is an extreme version of this worry, which is a doctrine called *Solipsism*. If I am a solipsist, then I believe that the only thing in the universe is my mental life: the external world is not *partly* illusory, it is *entirely* illusory. This doctrine is somewhat extreme, but it is sometimes used to set up exercises for students, the aim being for them to show what is wrong with it.

Nobody believes it, or practically nobody. Bertrand Russell used to tell a story about once giving a public lecture in which he defended Solipsism. At the end of the talk he was approached by a member of the audience who congratulated him on the clarity of his exposition, and expressed delight at meeting another solipsist, for "I had always thought I was the only one".

Descartes wrote on Solipsism too:

> I shall then suppose, not that God who is supremely good and the fountain of truth, but some evil genius not less powerful than deceitful, has employed his whole energies in deceiving me; I shall

> consider that the heavans, the earth, colours, figures, sound and all other external things are naught but the illusion and dream of which this genius has availed himself in order to lay traps for my credulity; I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing myself to possess all these things; I shall remain obstinately attached to this idea, and if by this means it is not in my power to arrive at the knowledge of any truth i may at least do what is within my power (i.e., suspend my judgement) and with firm purpose avoid giving credence to any false thing, or being imposed upon by this arch deceiver, however powerful and deceptive he may be. But this task is a laborious one, and insensibly a certain lassitude leads me into the course of my ordinary life. And just as a captive who in sleep enjoys an imaginary liberty, when he begins to suspect that his liberty is but a dream, fears to awaken, and conspires with those agreeable illusions that the deception may be prolonged, so insensibly of my own accord I fall back into my former opinions, and I dread awakening from this slumber, lest the laborious wakefulness which would follow the tranquillity of this repose should have to be spent not in daylight, but in the excessive darkness of the difficulties which have just been discussed.
>
> *The First Meditation*

The modern version of this puzzle is the brain-in-a-vat. There is a brain, properly perfused with blood, and maintained in a vat at the right temperature. (There is a *very* nasty story by Roald Dahl about this, called *William and Mary*.) Its sensory nerves are connected to modules that generate the right stimuli, and the effector nerves are connected to detectors that give the right feedback so that when the brain thinks it has moved its left foot, it gets back sensory information as if this had happened. It's a bit like being inside a super-sophisticated flight-simulator. The point of this puzzle is that in these circumstances the brain is just as convinced it is living in the real outside world as you or I are, it just happens to be *wrong*. As with Descartes' Evil Genius, the point of this story is to make radical scepticism seem more plausible than it otherwise might.

9.3 Behaviourism

Behaviourists are (or were) people who think that all there is to minds is behaviour. This has gave rise to the joke about the two behaviourists meeting in the street:

> *First Behaviourist* Hello
>
> *Second Behaviourist* Hello
>
> *First Behaviourist* How am I?
>
> *First Behaviourist* You're fine, how am I?

10 Induction

How do I know the sun will rise tomorrow? How do I know the freezing point of water will continue to be 0 deg Celsius as it has been in the past? Inferring from the fact that things have been this way in the past, to the conclusion that they will be this way in the future is called **Induction**, and the problem of justifying it is called the **Problem of Induction** or sometimes the problem of **Uniformity of nature**. (if nature is uniform that explains why induction works!)[9]. The problem of induction is different from the problem of *scepticism* ("How do I know that the outside world is the way I think it is?") of section 9.2 for that is a more radical doubt. This time I know that the world is the way I think it is: I just wonder if it is going to last. Sometimes it doesn't:

> The man who has fed the chicken every day throughout its life at last wrings its neck instead, showing that more refined views as to the uniformity of nature would have been useful to the chicken.
>
> *Russell: The problems of Philosophy*

But there is another problem: even if we could be sure that things would stay the same, just what do we mean by *the same*? Goodman has the following puzzle:

> Suppose that all emeralds examined before a certain time t are green. At time t, then, our observations support the hypothesis that all emeralds are green; and this is in accord with our definition of confirmation. [...]
>
> Now let me introduce another predicate less familiar than "green". It is the predicate "grue" and it applies to all things examined before time t just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are blue. Then at time t we have, for each evidence statement that an emerald is green, a parallel evidence statement that that emerald is grue. Then, according to our definition, the prediction that all emeralds subsequently examined will be green and the assertion that all emeralds subsequently examined will be grue are alike confirmed by evidence statements describing the same observations. But if an emerald subsequently examined is grue, it is blue and hence not green.
>
> *Fact, Fiction and Forecast pp 73-4*

The answer to Goodman's puzzle would appear to be completely obvious. The properties "grue" and "bleen" make essential reference to *dates* in a way that "blue" and "green" don't. But Goodman is ready for this one: he points out that if we take "grue" and "bleen" as primitive (undefined) and define "green" and "blue" in terms of them, then it is green and blue that seem to involve dates! It is sufficiently complicated to be interesting.

[9] If you have been taught about mathematical induction and its variants, you may find this a bit confusing. This terminology is a hangover from the days when *in*duction was inference from the particular to the general, and *de*duction was inference from the general to the particular. The meanings of the words have changed now

10.1 Occam's Razor

Entia non sunt multiplicanda præter neccessitatem

This remark is attributed to William of Ockham. It means "Entities should not be multiplied beyond need" that is, never postulate anything you do not need to postulate. This of course is "Occam's Razor". It seems that he never said it, but he did say various things like it, such as

Frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora

"It is vain to do with many that which can be done with few" (which seems to have been a common saying at the time) and

Pluritas non est ponenda sine necessitate

Quodlibeta VQi

(multitudes are not to be postulated unneccessarily) In general this is sound advice, at least as far as good science is concerned. It can give rise to political difficulties. Laplace, on showing his cosmology to Napoleon, was asked "Where does God fit into all this?" He replied "I have no need of that hypothesis" and he was given to understand that this was not at all the right thing to say. Actually, Laplace was not being a contumaceous atheist: the point of his remark is that Newton thought that God was needed to prevent the Solar System from collapsing under gravity, and Laplace had shown that this was not the case, and the system would continue to run quite happily without divine intervention.

There are other circumstances in which Occam's razor can lead you (scientifically) astray. This can happen, for example, if you are missing important bits of data. This is nicely illustrated by the following story, told by Gwen Raverat of her father, George Darwin (son of Charles Darwin):

> "In very early days I was much confused because his beard and the tobacco he smoked seemed to be of exactly the same colour and texture. Did he perhaps smoke his own moustache? His hair was made of a rather darker kind of tobacco."
>
> Gwen Raverat, *Period Piece, A Cambridge Childhood*, Faber

In general, we recognize Occam's Razor as a good policy. A theory that postulates less is easier to check and easier to use. Since the whole point of having theories about things is to enable us to get on with our lives, it's a good idea to *Keep It Simple*. This was probably what Monty Python had in mind when the Australian philosophers insisted that the new arrival should be called 'Bruce' like everyone else.

10.2 Honest toil

There is a famous remark of Russell's on postulation which belongs here. First we must have some background.

There was a problem that used to bother the mediævals, and they presented it—as they so often did—in the form of a riddle. Consider Socrates. There are

things that are too heavy for him to lift, since, poor chap, he is only mortal, as the legendary syllogism tells us:

> All men are mortal
>
> Socrates is a man

Therefore

> Socrates is mortal

The riddle concerns the cut-off point above which weights are too heavy for Socrates to lift. To set it up we have to make the assumption that quantity is infinitely divisible. This is presumably not true, since matter is atomic, but that is only one of our problems, since in any case Socrates' strength varies from time to time. None of this really matters, since the puzzle is only a metaphorical way of raising problems about the real line. So let us suppose for the sake of argument that Socrates' strength does not vary, and that quantity is infinitely divisible.

The question then is: is there a heaviest weight that Socrates can lift, or a lightest weight that he can't? There clearly cannot be both, since by infinite divisiblity of quantity there would have to be a quantity half-way between the two, giving us a contradiction.

It is actually not at all obvious that there has to be *either*. Suppose weights can only come in rational numbers (ratios of whole numbers) and that Socrates can lift a weight of x kilograms as long as x^2 is less than 200. Then there is neither a lightest weight that he cannot lift nor a heaviest that he can, since there simply do not exist two natural numbers x and y such that $(\frac{x}{y})^2 = 200$ (and the Ancient Greeks knew this). If we discard the assumption that weights have to be ratios of whole numbers, then—with the help of a theorem known as the *Least Upper Bound Theorem*—we can show that there must in fact be either a greatest weight that he can lift or a least weight that he can't (but it still doesn't tell us which!). At the time Russell was writing his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* the status of the Least Upper Bound Theorem was contentious, and the suggestion was in the air that the Least Upper Bound Theorem should just be *postulated*. This moved him to write:

> The method of "postulating" what we want has many advantages; they are the same as the advantages of theft over honest toil. Let us leave them to others and procede with our honest toil.

10.3 Buridan's Ass

Jean Buridan was a Schoolman and this is another mediæval puzzle. It concerns an ass that was placed equidistant between two equally attractive bales of hay. It starved to death!

This is a problem about rationality. It is not entirely clear what it is to be rational (even though Aristotle defined Man to be the "rational animal"!) but among the various halfway-sensible notions around is the economists' notion of rationality, according to which you are rational if you are trying to maximise

the quantity of something (presumably desirable). Economists dream of perfect markets peopled by perfectly rational agents who always try to maximise gross income and minimise gross expenditure. Crude though this is, this is certainly *one part* of our concept of rationality, and it is a part that can be sensibly applied to animals. The rational way to build a nest must be, other things being equal, the cheapest in terms of time and energy. Thus to return to Buridan's ass, being rational must involve (since you eat hay for a living) going for the bigger of any two bales of hay on offer. If they are the same size, this rule of thumb doesn't tell you what to do. It plainly isn't rational to take neither, so you have to make a random choice, toss a coin or something. A more developed kind of rationality must be able to give answers to more questions. Although this does not offend common sense, it does nevertheless, at first blush, seem strange to conclude that to be rational you must sometimes behave randomly—toss a coin or something.

11 Unclassified

11.1 The Value of a Variable

> "To be is to be the value of a variable"

This aphorism comes from W.V. Quine, one of the most influential twentieth-century philosophers working in the Anglo-saxon tradition. He is addressing one of the classical recurrent problems in philosophy: what is there? And this doesn't mean silly empirical questions like "Are there animals more than three meters high?", but rather questions about whole classes of object: are there ghosts, or are they just figments of our imagination? Do electrons exist, or are they just theoretical constructs we use to make the world more intelligible? Is there any more to existence than that anyway? Is there any real difference between asking about the existence of ghosts and the existence of animals more than three meters high? And if there is a difference, which of them does the question "Does God exist?" more closely resemble? (!) Quine's dictum is not an answer to this question, but to a toy version of it. He says that we cannot really know what the world consists of, but that we can at least discover, by listening closely to peoples' *discourse*, what they *think* the world consists of. If a language contains variables that take widgets as values, then, according to a speaker of that language, the world contains widgets. That doesn't sound very useful as it stands, but remember that this can be used in contexts where the word "variable" has a very precise meaning, and that the dictum is correspondingly more informative.

11.2 Radical Translation

The problem of trying to learn a novel and totally strange tongue ("radical translation") and reconstructing the world view of its speakers is one that anthropologists in principle have to do all the time. Indeed one day, when the Extraterrestrials come, it will be presented to us in a more acute form than

usual, for then we might not even have a common brain architecture to suggest that our minds work in the same way and that we divide up experience into objects in the same way[10]

11.3 Wooldridge on the *sphex* Wasp

The following, although not a piece of philosophical writing, has impressed itself indelibly on the memory of all philosophers who read it. Philosophers are naturally concerned with the nature of intelligence, and it is always salutory for those who are interested in a commodity to bear in mind how easy it is to make fakes!

> When the time comes for egg-laying, the wasp *sphex* builds a burrow for the purpose and seeks out a cricket which she stings in such a way as to paralyse but not kill it. She drags the cricket into the burrow, lays her eggs alongside, closes the burrow, then flies away, never to return. In due course the eggs hatch, and the wasp grubs feed off the paralysed cricket, which has not decayed, having been kept in the wasp equivalent of deep freeze. To the human mind, such an elaborately organized and seemingly purposeful routine conveys a convincing flavour of logic and thoughtfulness—until more details are examined. For example, the wasp's routine is to bring the paralysed cricket to the burrow, leave it on the threshold, go inside to see that all is well, emerge, and then drag the cricket in. If, while the wasp is inside making her preliminary inspection, the cricket is moved a few inches away, the wasp on emerging from the burrow, will bring the cricket back to the threshold, but not inside, and will then repeat the preparatory procedure of entering the burrow to see that everything is all right. If again the cricket is removed a few inches while the wasp is inside, once again the wasp will move the cricket up to the threshold and reenter the burrow for a final check. The wasp never thinks of pulling the cricket straight in. On one occasion, this procedure was repeated forty times, always with the same result.

D.Wooldridge: The Machinery of the Brain. (McGraw Hill 1963 p 82)

11.4 Locke on Personal Identity

> . . . yet the soul alone, in the change of bodies, would scarce, to anyone but him who makes the soul the man, be enough to make the same *man*. For should the soul of a Prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the Prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler as soon as deserted by his own soul, everyone sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the

[10] n.b. "might"! There could perhaps be deep reasons why any creature whose behaviour and mental life is sufficiently sophisticated must have brain architecture like ours. Some people feel that discovering such reasons is one of the tasks of philosophy: nobody knows any!

> prince's actions; but who would say it was the same man? The body too goes to the making of the man and would, I guess, to everybody, determine the man in this case, wherein the soul, with all its princely thoughts about it, would not make another man: but he would be the same cobbler to everyone besides himself ...

11.5 Plato's Cave

Plato had a theory of what we call in English *forms*. For example something is red if it partakes of the platonic *form* of redness.[11] Unnecessary but probably harmless you may think. Plato thought that the forms (redness) were more real than the ordinary everyday objects that partook of them (cricket balls, Mackintosh apples) and took their nature from them. Hence the following memorable metaphor:

> Picture men in an underground cave dwelling, with a long entrance reaching up towards the light along the whole width of the cave; in this they lie from their childhood, their legs and necks in chains, so that they stay where they are, and look only in front of them, as the chain prevents their turning their heads round. Some way off, and higher up, a fire is burning behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners is a road on higher ground. Imagine a wall built along this road, like the screen which showmen have in front of the audience, over which they show the puppets. [...] Then picture also men carrying along this wall all kinds of articles which overtop it, statues of men and other creatures in stone and wood and other materials; naturally some of the carriers are speaking, others are silent. [...] They are like ourselves, for in the first place do you think that such men would have seen anything of themselves or of each other except the shadows thrown by the fire on the wall of the cave opposite them? How could they if all their life they had been forced to keep their heads motionless? What would they have seen of the things carried along the wall? Would it not be the same? Surely! Then if they were able to talk to one another, do you not think they would suppose what they saw to be the real things? Necessarily! Then what if there were in their prison an echo from the opposite wall? When any of those passing by spoke, do you imagine that they could help thinking that the voice came from the shadow passing before them?
>
> [...] Let us suppose one of them released, and forced suddenly to stand up and turn his head, and walk and look towards the light. Let us suppose also that all these actions gave him pain, and that he waas too dazed to see all the objects whose shadows he had been watching before. What do you think he would say if he were told by someone that before he had been seeing mere foolish phantoms,

[11] The use of the word 'platonic' to mean 'chaste' as in "platonic love" is a misuse deriving from this usage.

> while now he was nearer to being, and was turned to what in a higher degree is, and was looking more directly at it? If each of the several figures passing by were pointed out to him, and he were asked to say what each was, do you not think that he would be perplexed, and would imagine that the things he had seen before were truer than those now pointed out to him?

11.6 Tortoises

William James told the story of a persistent questioner at a public lecture he gave, who was a flat-earther, and wouldn't shut up. He tried her with the obvious question "What does the Earth rest on?" and was told: the back of a giant tortoise. He then, naturally enough, asked what the tortoise rested on, but the flat-earther had heard that one before and replied:

> It's tortoises all the way down!

I think the moral of this tale is that you should never get embroiled in arguments with flat-earthers. (Creationists are the modern equivalent) They have had this argument before—probably often—and you (have better things to do) have not.

11.7 Diogenes

said to Alexander the Great

> I am the wisest man in this city because I know that I know nothing.

11.8 Einstein

> "Raffiniert ist der Herrgott, boshaft ist er aber nicht."

Einstein is supposed to have said this on being shown a particularly nasty set of field equations. It is usually (but not really correctly) translated as "The Lord is subtle, but He is not malicious." Perhaps a philosopher, (at least one who isn't a poet) would rather say "The truth may be difficult to find, but it will never be ugly".

Hilbert's Hotel.

12 envoi

Immanuel Kant was a real pissant
he was very rarely stable;
Heidegger Heidegger was a boozy beggar
he would think you under the table
David Hume could out-consume
Schopenhauer and Hegel
and Wittgenstein was a beery swine
who was just as sloshed as Schlegel

There's nothing Nietzsche
couldn't teach yer
'bout the raising of a wrist
Socrates himself was permanently pissed

John Stuart Mill of his own free will
on half a pint of shandy was particularly ill
Plato they say, could stick it away
half a crate of whisky every day
Aristotle Aristotle was a bugger for the bottle
Hobbes was fond of his dram
and René Descartes was a drunken fart
"I drink therefore i am"

Yes Socrates himself is particularly missed
A lovely little thinker but a bugger when he's pissed

Monty Python