In his autobiography, Feyerabend tells us that Karl Popper opened a lecture course at the London School of Economics with the following line: ‘I am a Professor of Scientific Method—but I have a problem: there is no scientific method’. To this negation, Popper added a consolation: ‘there are some simple rules of thumb, and they are quite helpful’.¹

Paul Feyerabend started his glittering career in the philosophy of science by elaborating on the consolation. He added a few rules of thumb for scientific method, such as the principle of proliferation or the principle of tenacity, which may be regarded as corollaries of, or improvements on, Popper’s methodology. But later on, Feyerabend drew drastic conclusions from these principles and a few other assumptions. As a result, the consolation melted away whereas the negation remained, and Feyerabend came to defend an unmitigated scepticism. In 1975 he argued that ‘science is just one of the many ideologies that propel society and it should be treated as such’. Apart from the separation between state and church, he claimed, there must also be ‘a formal separation between state and science’ (p. 187). By 1980 he had so thoroughly undermined the pretensions of all experts, including philosophers, that he proclaimed a ‘democratic relativism’ and wanted to substitute citizens’ initiatives for philosophy (p. 226). By what route did he reach these far-fetched conclusions? And what (if anything) went wrong on the way?

It is an attractive feature of Volume 3 of Feyerabend’s Philosophical Papers that it allows us to trace his philosophical journey from its inception around 1960 until the culmination point of his scepticism in the 1980s. In this respect, the volume is a complement to the two earlier volumes of philosophical papers, that also covered the 1960s and 1970s.² The editor of Volume 3, John Preston, has decided not to include papers written between 1980 and Feyerabend’s death in 1994. Feyerabend documented the first half of this later period in Farewell to Reason, a collection of essays published in 1987.³ During the final years of his life, he wrote his autobiography and worked on his last philosophical book, Conquest of

A bundle. The unfinished manuscript of this book has been published in 1999, with a selection of relevant materials.\textsuperscript{4}

Volume 3 starts with a scholarly article on ‘The problem of the existence of theoretical entities’ (1960) that first appears here in an English translation. In this paper, Feyerabend demolished the traditional problem of theoretical entities by arguing that there is no valid distinction between observation-language and the language of theory, since we may describe what we observe in a highly theoretical language. On the one hand, learning a new theoretical language might enable us to perceive things that we could not notice otherwise, with or without the aid of instruments. On the other hand, ordinary language is not free from theory: its concepts embody theoretical assumptions which often stem from earlier periods in the history of mankind. Feyerabend concluded that, in contrast with what logical positivists had assumed, there is no theory-neutral set of observation statements which might be used for establishing relations of empirical superiority between theories. Theories generate their own descriptions of the empirical domain and are in that sense incommensurable.

In 1960, Feyerabend still thought that the sceptical implications of this view could be blocked by a causal theory of experience. However, this is an illusion, for if such a causal theory has a specific empirical content, it would be yet another scientific theory that generates its own descriptions of the empirical domain. Hence, if Feyerabend were right, the theory would be incommensurable with other theories instead of being a solution to the problem of incommensurability. The second chapter on ‘Knowledge without foundations’ (1961) also contains germs of Feyerabend’s later scepticism. Here, Feyerabend argues that there is no epistemic difference between on the one hand theoretical structures that we call myths and on the other hand scientific theories, because myths, such as the doctrine of witchcraft, had great observational success. Like scientific theories, they created their own interpretation of experience. But again, in this early period Feyerabend did not yet draw his later sceptical conclusions. He argued that there is an important difference of attitude between people who believe in myths, such as the Roman Catholic doctrine and Marxism, and scientists. The former adopt an attitude of complete and unhesitating acceptance (p. 61), which is ‘imposed and preserved by indoctrination, fear, prejudice, deceit’ (p. 64), whereas good scientists have an attitude of criticism concerning their theories. Like Popper, Feyerabend in 1961 associated these different attitudes with a closed and an open society, respectively, and pleaded passionately for adopting the critical attitude.

The next two chapters, first published in 1963 and 1968, contain Feyerabend’s argument for the principles of proliferation and of tenacity. In chapter 3, ‘How to be a good empiricist: a plea for tolerance in matters epistemological’, Feyerabend reproaches traditional (logical) empiricism for stimulating a dogmatic attitude in the sciences because of its methodology of confirmation. In order to be a good empiricist, we should not

attempt to confirm a specific theory as well as possible, but rather work with many alternative theories, that is, one should adopt the principle of theoretical proliferation. Since it takes time to develop alternative theories up till the point that they yield solutions to actual scientific problems, one should also adopt the principle of tenacity, which says that we stick to (promising) theories in the face of considerable difficulties. Feyerabend’s main argument for these two principles is derived from one particular example, Brownian motion. Allegedly, the Brownian particle is what Wilhelm Ostwald called a perpetual motion machine of the second kind, so that its existence would refute the phenomenological second law of thermodynamics. Now Feyerabend argues, first, that probably the relevance of Brownian motion to the second law would never have been grasped if scientists had merely attempted to ‘confront thermodynamics with the facts’. Rather, it was because scientists considered the kinetic theory, which explains Brownian motion, that they saw its relevance to the second law of thermodynamics. Secondly, without the kinetic theory, it would have been impossible to see that Brownian motion refutes the second law. Feyerabend concludes that proliferation of theories is essential to the progress of science, and that proliferation requires tenacity of those who want to elaborate alternatives to generally accepted scientific theories such as quantum mechanics.

We now have all premises in place from which Feyerabend drew his sceptical conclusions, which are spelled out in the remaining seven chapters of Volume 3, all first published between 1970 and 1980. If proliferation and tenacity are required, we should mitigate our critical attitude with regard to attempts at constructing alternative theories, and give them the benefit of the doubt even if we ourselves do not regard them as very promising. But since Feyerabend proposed the critical attitude as the only real difference between science and myth, the demarcating line between scientific work and myth-driven practices such as religions, astrology, and witchcraft, has now been blurred. Indeed, in the future society which Feyerabend advocated, ‘scientists will not play any predominant role... they will be more than balanced by magicians, or priests, or astrologers’ (p. 190). Furthermore, if Feyerabend is correct with regard to the theory-ladenness of observation, it will not be easy to refute a theory of, say, witchcraft by an appeal to the facts. For allegedly each theory creates its own observational basis by giving a particular interpretation to experience.

This is how Feyerabend’s Popperian attempt to create methodological rules of thumb which optimally promote the growth of knowledge gave rise to a sceptical variety of multi-culturalism. He concluded that there are no neutral standards of cognitive rationality, and that the standards which the community of scientists happens to use do not have a superior status. He wrote for example: ‘science is believed to be far ahead of alternatives, but this is due to ignorance (of alternatives), arbitrary social decisions, and not to any excellence of science’ (p. 205). According to the doctrine of democratic relativism which Feyerabend advocated, each ‘citizen will use the standards of the tradition to which he belongs; Hopi standards, if he is a Hopi; fundamentalist Protestant standards if he is a Fundamentalist’, and so on (p. 220).
What went wrong? The basic flaw of Feyerabend's arguments is the fallacy of hasty generalization, which mars both his case for the theory-ladenness of observation and his plaidoyer for proliferation. Indisputably, there are clear examples of theory-laden observational reports. But does it follow that all descriptions of what we observe are theory-laden? This is the premise Feyerabend must accept when he draws the sceptical conclusion that observational reports which are neutral between competing theories are impossible. We might see the Sun and describe it as a hydrogen burning star, and this is a theory-laden description. But we might also characterize the Sun as a shining object in the sky. In doing so, no theory whatsoever is presupposed. Feyerabend advanced more specific arguments for universal theory-ladenness, and these arguments contain other fallacies. For example, he held that the concept 'table' must be a theoretical concept because (among other reasons) 'the perception of a table ... depends ... on our having properly learned to use a very complicated instrument: our eyes' (p. 22). Here, Feyerabend confused the content of a concept ('table') with the conditions of its perceptual application, and he assumed, mistakenly, that a proper theory of these conditions (optics, etc.) belongs to the intension of the concept. There simply is no good reason for thinking that all language is theory-laden.

As we saw, Feyerabend's case for proliferation is based on the example of Brownian motion. He claims that Brownian motion refutes the second law of thermodynamics and that physicists could only discover this because they had developed an alternative theory, the kinetic theory. One might doubt the physics of Feyerabend's example. For instance, is it correct to say that Brownian motion is a perpetuum mobile of the second kind which refutes the second law? But even if Feyerabend is correct in his physics, and even if the kinetic theory was indispensable for seeing that Brownian motion refutes the second law, it does not follow that proliferation of theories is always necessary in order to discover that a theory is faced with empirical anomalies. For instance, the phenomenon of black body radiation was known long before Planck derived his formula for blackbody curves in 1900 and it was seen to be incompatible with traditional physical theories such as classical thermodynamics and electromagnetic theory. In deriving his principle of proliferation, then, Feyerabend committed the fallacy of hasty generalization as well.

I conclude that we should not follow Feyerabend and become sceptics with regard to the rationality of science. Yet a sceptic may have the useful role of stimulating research by others and Feyerabend played this role with theatrical verve. Philosophical Papers Volume 3 does not contain arguments that we do not find elsewhere in his writings. Nevertheless, reading the volume is a stimulating experience which might reinforce the critical attitude in the reader.5

Herman Philipse


Two themes are approached in this book, which is based on the three Carus lectures given by Alasdair MacIntyre in the USA in 1997: (i) our dependency on each other (our vulnerability) and (ii) our potential for reasoning. It is MacIntyre's thesis that the question implied in his subtitle 'why human beings need the virtues' can best be answered by reflecting on these two factors and their relationship to each other.

As far as his account of virtue is concerned, it is refreshing to find an author who sees it as necessary to ground this in the biological facts of life. We are, MacIntyre recognizes, first and foremost animals. In this lies our vulnerability. Indeed, there is, as he points out, a cycle of vulnerability: cared for in infancy, we care for others in our prime, only to become once more vulnerable by reason of old age, disability, or illness. It is MacIntyre's view that philosophers have by and large neglected these truths. In particular, they have neglected childhood, but they have also given little attention to the other vulnerabilities of human life.

The question of the virtues is reached from this starting-point by asking what is required for vulnerable and interdependent creatures like us to flourish, i.e. to experience eudaimonia—the deepest kind of fulfilment, well-being or happiness. This is at least partly a matter of discovering what we need from others and what they need from us, and MacIntyre's answer is that, as reasoners, we need the intellectual virtues and, as animals, the moral virtues.

But MacIntyre begins by considering what it is that we, as human animals, have in common with other intelligent but non-language-using creatures. Animals, he recognizes, share many human needs, and although they are never destined to become reasoners, this does not mean that we cannot attribute to them intentions and reasons for action. This is especially so where the dolphin is concerned.

Implicit here is a suggestion that creatures like the dolphin naturally display some of the moral virtues—they help each other and have even been known to help members of other species, including humans. But it is the virtues in a human context that are MacIntyre's main concern. In the case of humans, he says, the virtues have a threefold function: they enable us first, to achieve and then continue in the exercise of practical reasoning; second, to care for and educate others so that they, too, can achieve and continue with practical reasoning, and third, to protect ourselves and each other against neglect, defective sympathies, stupidity, acquisitiveness, and malice.

In presenting his answer to the question embedded in his title, MacIntyre seeks to distance himself from a number of other key ethical positions. He disagrees with Hume's view that the virtues are what are generally useful or agreeable, on the ground that other people's vices may be useful or agreeable to some people, e.g. other people's greed and self-indulgence are useful and agreeable to purveyors of luxury food. Of
course, if Hume's phrase is to be understood as meaning 'useful or agreeable to their possessors', this criticism is hardly damaging to Hume's observations. MacIntyre's general point, however, is that the root of utilitarianism, its focus on utility, is ethically and logically tarnished.

MacIntyre also repudiates some characteristically Kantian claims, in particular, he rejects moral absolutes as guides to action, for he sees the virtues as taking us beyond law, even natural law. He writes: 'the precepts of the natural law ... include much more than rules. For among the precepts of the natural law are precepts which enjoin us to do whatever the virtues require of us ... at the level of practice we need no reason for some particular action over and above that it is in this situation what one or more of the virtues requires.' (p. 111)

As far as the rational choice theories so popular with governments and political theorists are concerned, MacIntyre sees an ethic based solely on the principle of rational choice as deficient in that moral requirements imposed by rational choice only apply to those who can bargain on more or less equal terms. Sympathy and empathy are required if we are to include animals, fetuses, the congenitally handicapped, and others in our moral universe. However, he rejects the dichotomy assumed in much moral reasoning: that where social relationships are concerned, we must choose between an approach which is affective and sympathetic and one based on bargaining for mutual advantage. For this, he says, is to miss the fact that these moment-of-time relationships are embedded in more complex and more longterm wholes. So morality reached by reasoning and morality based on affection and sympathy must be supplemented, he suggests, by recognizing the importance of virtues based on 'giving and receiving', in other words, mutual service and reciprocal care.

MacIntyre describes his account as that of a Thomistic Aristotelian, meaning by this that he has become aware of the extent to which Aquinas went beyond Aristotle in his reflections on the virtues, particularly in regarding as virtues characteristics quite opposed to those of Aristotle's megalopsychos. This 'magnanimous man' is an unwilling recipient of help and a self-centred giver; as MacIntyre puts it, he suffers from 'an illusion of self-sufficiency' (p. 127) and hence is unlikely to attain the combination of justice and generosity which he calls the virtue of 'just generosity.' Relationships informed by the virtue of just generosity are communal relationships that engage our affections, given that we need to be participating members of a 'deliberative community', of 'networks of givers and receivers'. This reciprocity is necessary, MacIntyre writes, since 'the achievement of one's individual good is ... inseparable from the achievement of the common good.' (p. 113) However, such relationships extend beyond these local concerns to relationships of hospitality to strangers and responsiveness to urgent need wherever it confronts the members of the community.

While MacIntyre himself rejects the communitarian label, and condemns any uncritical endorsement of the values of small local communities, Dependent Rational Animals can nevertheless be seen as a philosophi-
cally rich contribution to the search for a communitarian T hird Way. For what M acl ntyre tries to do here is to find, as in his earlier books, an ethical approach which is neither Kantian nor utilitarian, and a political approach which is neither individualistic nor welfarist and socialistic. Ethically, then, the turn is to the virtues, and politically, to the idea of mutual but voluntary and personal support—in the trite language of contemporary politics, a linking of rights and responsibilities.

These are interesting ideas, although they leave unanswered questions about the family and the nation which are touched upon only simplicity, or in passing. The family has traditionally been the locus of care in infancy, old age and disability, and the nation has provided one of the wider communal networks of mutual regard and support. But M acn tyn e describes the idea of nationhood as sinister, and he fails to stress the extent to which the care and support he is concerned to promote has most often been provided free by women. It is not clear what would replace this type of family-centred care, for he acknowledges the force of Foucault’s exposé of the link between institutionalized care and potentially exploitative inequalities of power. Instead, a fashionable regard for feminist concerns is expressed in style rather than in substance via the obtrusively heavy use of a she/he, hers/his formula which extends even to revising M arx’s famous dictum as ‘From each according to her or his ability, to each ... according to her or his needs.’ (p. 136)

There is implicit reference in the book to more familiar philosophical themes: to theories of personal identity, of perception, the fact-value distinction and the reality or otherwise of character traits, but M acl ntyre does not develop his criticism of these positions in this work.

Brenda Almond

The Rediscovery of Wisdom
By David Conway
London: M acm illan Press, £ 42.50

It is a long time since I read a book so illuminating, and so disturbing. Subtitled ‘From Here to Antiquity in Quest of S ö phia’ it attempts to defend what the author describes as ‘the classical conception of philosophy.’ That conception is ‘the view that the explanation of the world and its broad form is that it is the creation of a supreme omnipotent and omniscient intelligence, more commonly referred to as G od, who created it in order to bring into existence and sustain rational beings such as ourselves who, by exercising their intellects, can become aware of the existence of G od and thereby join their Creator in the activity of contemplating G od, in which activity G od is perpetually and blissfully engaged.’

Conway contends that this Aristotelian G od, of whose existence and nature he believes that it is possible to learn by the exercise of unaided human reason, nevertheless possesses all the usual defining characteristics of omnipotence, omniscience, immateriality, and so on. But that is, he insists, a very different thing from maintaining that the teachings of any
one of the three great monotheistic systems of religion—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—includes any items of self-revelation by that Aristotelian God.

Sophia is the Greek word for the theoretical wisdom which Aristotle distinguished from practical wisdom, phronesis. The former he equated with an understanding of the ultimate explanations of things, the latter with knowing what things are worth striving for both as an individual and on behalf of the societies which one might be involved in helping to influence or to govern. It is vitally important to emphasize that, as the etymology of the name of our discipline implies, it was sophia and not phronesis which philosophy was conceived as a search after and a love of.

Although sophia was valued partly because it was believed to promote phronesis the prime reason for treasuring it was entirely different. That prime reason was that it made possible a particular kind of mental activity, which was claimed to be more desirable than any other, and which was consequently identified with the highest form of human happiness. To this form of activity Aristotle gave the name theoria. It consisted in the contemplation of ultimate explanations. This for Aristotle and his successors resulted in making God the object of such contemplation.

In a chapter entitled 'The Decline and Fall of the Classical Conception' Conway proceeds to justify his description of this conception as classical. He does this by showing how Maimonides and later Aquinas acquired it from Aristotle, how it is later to be found in Ficino and the Renaissance Platonists, and how, in the modern period, it is also found in Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza. Conway here quotes a remarkable but surely nowadays rarely remarked aside in Meditations III. In this Descartes pauses to notice a substantial agreement on the proper end for human beings between the teachings of faith and the findings of reason. Conway then goes on to show that that same classical conception of that end is also to be found in Newton, Shaftesbury, Hutchinson and even—unostentatiously—Adam Smith.

Conway attributes the progressive secularization of philosophy, and indeed of modern thought in general, not to 'the emergence of modern science per se' but to the work of three philosophers, 'David Hume, Immanuel K ant and Friedrich Nietzsche: Hume is the father of modern naturalism; K ant of modern anti-realism; and Nietzsche of currently fashionable post-modernism.' Since 'most philosophers today are convinced that, between them, Hume and Kant have decisively refuted all the traditional arguments for the existence of God' they have, if they have even become aware of the classical conception of philosophy, equally decisively rejected it.

Conway therefore next sets himself to refute their refutations, first of the cosmological argument, and then of what I would myself prefer to call the argument to rather than from design. About these refutations I want here to say only that the knowledge claim which Conway here quotes Richard Dawkins as having made is at present unwarranted.

What Dawkins asserted was that 'Natural selection, the blind, uncon-
scious, automatic process which Darwin discovered ... we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life.‘ But what the work of Dawkins himself has done so much to persuade us all that we know is how—by evolution through natural selection—one or more very primitive kinds of organism evolved into the enormous variety of species now known either still to exist or to have existed during some period in the past. But that is a very different thing from knowing ‘the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life or even of any life. For, so far as I know, no one has as yet contrived to produce any plausible conjecture as to how even the most primitive kind of organism with a disposition to reproduce and thus to expose itself to natural selection might have evolved from a mixture of the many kinds of complex molecule which are now known to be required for that construction.

Conway sees here a threefold challenge to the materialist, of which I consider two of the elements to be much more formidable than the third. The first of these two is to produce a materialistic explanation for ‘the very first emergence of living matter from non-living matter. In being alive, living matter possesses a teleological organization that is wholly absent from everything that preceded it.’ The second challenge, as Conway sees it, is to produce an equally materialist explanation for ‘the emergence, from the very earliest life-forms which were incapable of reproducing themselves, of life-forms with a capacity for reproducing themselves.’

At this point it may be illuminating to ask ourselves whether, discounting the possible effects both on believers themselves and on other people of beliefs in supposedly revealed theistic religions, there is much or even any reason why materialists should be personally concerned as to whether the Big Bang was actually caused by Aristotle’s God or whether physicists ought instead to conclude either that it was produced by an unknown and possibly unknowable physical cause or that it was itself the uncaused First Cause.

Given the suggested discountings there would seem to be no reason why ordinary, run of the mill, non-philosophical materialists should be concerned about which way the verdict goes. For none of the three alternative possible verdicts appears to carry any morals for the prudent conduct of their lives, while theoria surely is inevitably very much a minority even—spare the mark—an elitist taste.

In his fourth chapter ‘The Wisdom of the Book Revisited’ Conway examines and rejects as altogether inadequate the evidencing reasons for accepting either Judaism or Christianity as containing authentic self-revelations of the nature and will of God. In his fifth and final chapter he states two chief conclusions which he was seeking to establish in the present book: ‘The first is that the Bible contains no greater insight into the nature of reality and man’s highest good than philosophy is able to arrive at unaided by revelation. The second is that the Bible contains no less insight into the nature of reality and man’s highest good than philosophy is able to arrive at unaided by revelation.’
In his examination of revelation claims, Conway states that Jews, Christians, and Muslims are agreed on four conditions which a putative revelation must satisfy in order to be recognized as authentic. The first of these conditions is that ‘the doctrine ... in question must be in accord with everything else that is known to be true, as well as with the highest standards of morality’ (emphasis supplied).

Whether or not it is directly and unambiguously proclaimed in the New Testament there can be no doubt but that what Darwin so rightly described as the ‘abominable doctrine’ of Hell was an absolutely essential element in traditional Christian teaching. For it was the unredeemed consequences of sin which the salvation offered by the redeeming Christ was salvation from. And, of course, more than one Sura of The Koran presents God Himself as providing a direct description of tortures to be inflicted eternally. Such punishment is manifestly incompatible ‘with the highest standards of morality’. For even if we were to waive humanitarian objections to torture as a form of punishment—which I would myself do only very reluctantly, if ever—there are two other objections on the ground of justice to such punishments.

The first is that eternal punishments of whatever kind must necessarily be unjust because of their necessary disproportion to any finite charge sheet, however long its list of charges and however gross the offences with which the defendant is charged. The second objection is that, since God is ex hypothesi the creating and sustaining cause of all human beings being the individuals who make of their own freewill whatever choices they do make of their own freewill, it is God rather than those individuals who could justly be punished for them. (For relevant quotations from Aquinas, Luther, and St. Paul, see Part IV of my ‘Anti-social Determinism’ in Philosophy 1994, pp. 21–35).

I would wish that Conway had been able to include some mention of Leibniz in this connection, and in particular some mention of his Theodicy. For in that brilliant work Leibniz argues, from the in his day undisputed premise that the Universe is the creation of a perfect God, to the immensely implausible conclusion that this world must be the best of all possible worlds. It was that bold and boldly paraded inference—its outrageousness inordinately increased by such claims as that ‘The work most worthy of the wisdom of God involves ... the eternal damnation of the majority of men’ (§236)—which provoked Voltaire’s masterly satire Candide. The relevance of the Theodicy to us here and now is in the dependence of its argument upon the identification of goodness with existence or being, an identification which ultimately derives from Plato’s insistence that the Form of the Good must be at the same time and by the same token the Form of the Real.

That metaphysical identification may provoke a call to bring back the Logical Positivists. Conway’s own book is nevertheless one which ought to be in the Philosophy section of every university library.

Antony Flew
An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics
By Peter Harvey

According to a popular caricature, Buddhism is essentially a form of mysticism and nirvana a mystical state wherein all this-worldly concerns are ultimately transcended. Unfortunately, this picture encourages two interrelated misconceptions: first, that ethical conduct—as a supposedly 'this-worldly' concern—is only instrumentally important as a component of the path to nirvana; and second, that one who attains nirvana passes, as the cliché has it, beyond good and evil. Peter Harvey paints an alternative, more compelling picture of Buddhism as centrally concerned with ethics. Moreover, he counters 'otherworldly' or mystical interpretations of the religion by offering a number of illuminating applications of Buddhist ethics to contemporary 'real-world' ethical issues.

Chapter One deals with the common roots of Buddhist ethics in the twin doctrines of karma and rebirth and The Four Noble Truths. Very roughly, Buddhists see karma as a natural law that governs the transit of sentient beings between rebirths such that beings are reborn in more or less desirable rebirths according to the 'nature and quality' of their (intentional) actions. This translates into a naturalized ethic wherein good actions result in relatively auspicious rebirths as, say, humans or gods, while bad actions cause less desirable rebirths, as, say, animals or ghosts. Unlike the doctrines of karma and rebirth—which, in different forms are subscribed to in, for instance, various forms of Hinduism—the Buddha's Four Noble Truths are more distinctively Buddhist. Harvey explains that a recognition of the First Truth—that life is fundamentally unsatisfactory, marked by suffering—is seen as inspiring in one a profound sense of fellow-feeling, not just for one's fellow humans, but for all sentient beings caught up in the cycle of rebirth. After realizing that suffering is caused by craving, and that craving, and hence suffering, can be extinguished in nirvana (the Second and Third Truths respectively), one is presented in the Fourth Truth with the Eightfold Path, a set of practical guidelines on how to achieve nirvana. Practicing the path involves exercising a number of altruistic virtues such as generosity and loving kindness and abstaining from various harmful practices such as stealing, lying and killing. Chapter Two describes how these aspects of the path are expressed in the religious practice of both lay Buddhists and the Buddhist monastic community.

Chapter Three examines the various developments in Buddhist ethics associated with the rise of the Māhāyāna or Great Vehicle schools from c.150 BCE. Māhāyāna distinguishes itself from other traditions (which it pejoratively terms Hinayāna or Lesser Vehicle schools) on the basis of its ideal of a worldly compassionate being, the Bodhisattva, one on the path to perfect Buddhahood. Harvey explains that although this distinction is often based on an unfair caricature of Hinayāna as advocating an essentially selfish concern with one's personal enlightenment, it is nevertheless clear that Māhāyāna places a greater emphasis on ethics than other tradi-
tions. Particular emphasis is placed on the virtue of compassion, the Bodhisattva being conceived as one who has developed an acute sensitivity to the feelings of others. This compassion is the result of 'seeing the world aright', as Schopenhauer put it. One who realizes the radically holistic nature of reality—the fact that all things lack self-existence—is said to find no grounds to distinguish between his suffering and the suffering of others. In this sense, ethics is based on 'seeing the world aright', as Schopenhauer put it. To facilitate this insight, Māññaka advocates that one should not crave the good karmic fruits of one's actions in the hope of thereby achieving a desirable rebirth or nirvana for oneself but that one should selflessly dedicate the karmic fruits of one's virtuous actions to all sentient beings. But if the Māññaka emphasis on compassion marks an elevation of the importance of ethics, it also results in greater flexibility regarding ethical principles. For in certain exceptional circumstances, it is maintained that spiritually advanced Bodhisattvas will be impelled to commit ostensibly evil actions—such as lying, stealing or even killing—in the interests of compassion. It is this idea which has sometimes been taken to justify antinomianism, the idea that the Bodhisattva exists, in some sense, beyond good and evil.

Chapters Four through Ten examine the following problems in applied ethics: 'Attitude to and Treatment of the Natural World'; 'Economic Ethics'; 'War and Peace'; 'Suicide and Euthanasia'; 'Abortion and Contraception'; 'Sexual Equality'; and 'Homosexuality and Other Forms of "Queerness"'. These chapters constitute the book's greatest strength and there is much here worthy of discussion.

As its title suggests, Chapter Four focuses on environmental ethics, one of the few areas of applied ethics that has made significant use of Buddhist ideas. Harvey includes some interesting discussions of Buddhist attitudes to animals and to plants (including sections examining Buddhist approaches to specific issues such as vegetarianism, pest control and animal experimentation). It seems that a commitment to the welfare of all sentient beings conjoined with a flexible conception of sentience means that moral concern for animals (and sometimes even for plants) can be easily justified within a Buddhist context. The question of the plausibility of a Buddhist environmentalism is, however, a different one. Harvey notes that one problem here is that it is not obvious how traditional Buddhist ideas can be used to justify the preservation of species as a concern over and above that of protecting individual sentient beings: 'classical Buddhist ethics would not, without being extended, see killing the last rhinoceros as worse than killing one when they were plentiful, or killing a cow, say' (p. 183). A 'classical' Buddhist environmental ethic would presumably also resist the practice of culling extremely populous animals when their numbers threaten the well-being of the ecosystem as a whole (a position implied by Harvey's discussion of abortion on p. 326). Deep ecologists should note that, on this point, a classical Buddhist ethic would be at odds with those 'holistic' environmental ethics, such as Aldo Leopold's land ethic, which posit the well-being of the 'natural community', however conceived, as the ultimate good.
In examining Buddhist perspectives on economic ethics, Chapter Five includes some interesting reflections on Max Weber’s thesis on Protestantism and the rise of capitalism applied to Buddhism, as well as an illuminating comparison of Buddhist thought and right- and left-wing political ideals. Although, considering their central commitment to destroying craving, Buddhists are generally critical of consumerism, some Buddhists find much to admire in capitalism, not least the head of the Japanese firm TDK, who declares that his company’s ethos is founded on Buddhist principles (p. 236). Moreover, if Buddhist writers such as the Thai monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu sometimes adopt socialist standpoints in order to criticize the excesses of capitalism, they are often equally critical of the extreme political left (which is not surprising given the treatment of Buddhism by communist regimes in Cambodia and China, for instance). This chapter moves on to discuss the question of an alternative ‘Buddhist economics’ along the lines of that presented in E. F. Schumacher’s influential Small is Beautiful, (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973), including a case study of the socio-economic basis of the inspirational Sarvodaya Shramadana movement in Sri Lanka.

The discussion of abortion in Chapter Eight is potentially provocative. In Harvey’s view, it is extremely difficult to justify abortion as a necessary evil on Buddhist principles. The opposition here is founded on the idea that a human rebirth is not just a chance encounter between a sperm and an egg but a ‘rare and precious opportunity’ for spiritual progress, which should be cherished, not wasted (p. 314). In particular, argues Harvey, Buddhist principles inveigh against ‘pro-choice’ standpoints: ‘a foetus is not just “a part” of a pregnant woman, but another living being ... whose life must be properly considered, not just swept aside by a “right to choose”’ (p. 325). Nonetheless, Harvey notes that Buddhists do not generally advocate making abortion illegal, while pointing out that this reticence to deal in legislation is somewhat undermined by an analysis of classical Buddhist texts on the function of law.

Philosophers should take note that Harvey is a professor of Buddhist studies, not of philosophy, and as one might therefore expect, this book is largely free of the technical ethical debates one finds in academic philosophy journals. References to philosophers—both contemporary and historical—are rather thin on the ground: his discussions of personal identity include no references to Derek Parfit, for instance; his chapters of euthanasia and abortion contain no references to Peter Singer. Readers who would prefer more connections between Buddhist ideas and western ethics are directed to Damien Keown’s excellent study, The Nature of Buddhist Ethics (London: Macmillan, 1992).

Moreover, non-Buddhist readers should take note that this book does not include criticisms of core Buddhist ideas such as karma and rebirth. Although this is not surprising, I imagine that many non-Buddhist readers will find it difficult to accept the various arguments presented in this book that rest on accepting the idea of rebirth. Consider, for instance, the following argument from Harvey’s chapter on abortion: ‘Against a view
that says it is “unfair” to allow a child into the world under certain circumstances, Buddhism would say: it will be born in some shape or form anyway, soon, according to its karma. So it is better to do the best one can for it in the circumstances it is already heading for’ (p. 324). Certainly, this and the many other arguments in this book that hinge on accepting the idea of rebirth will be hard to accept, not just for many non-Buddhist philosophers, but also for the many western Buddhists such as Stephen Batchelor (author of Buddhism without Beliefs (London: Bloomsbury, 1998)) who, rightly or wrongly, downplay the importance of the idea of rebirth, or even dismiss it altogether as a mere relic of early Hindu cosmology.

However, these are concerns with one dimension of Buddhist ethics; they are not criticisms of Harvey’s masterful elucidation of the topic. On the contrary, I would recommend this book, not just to students of Buddhism, but to all thinkers keen to understand the place of ethics in the good life.

Simon P. James

Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap
By Peter Byrne
Macmillan Press, 2000, pp. xiii + 175, £40.00

In Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap Peter Byrne is concerned to argue against any ethical theory that claims that there must be some fact (such as, autonomy, rationality, self-consciousness, or intelligence) about human beings that gives them a special moral status. For it is Byrne’s argument that such accounts necessarily entail that where that fact is lacking (say, in the case of the cognitively disabled) then the same degree of moral worth cannot be accorded. In Chapter 1 Byrne claims that philosophers like Singer, Kuhse, Frey, and Glover all argue for a sliding scale of value—the degree of the agent’s autonomy determining where on the scale the agent belongs. The result of their view is that babies and the severely cognitively disabled would be accorded less moral worth than any other human being. This is a conclusion that Byrne claims that many including himself would ‘find abhorrent and totally unacceptable.’ (p. 11)

In Chapter 6 Byrne raises a similar worry against theological accounts of human worth that claim that human beings are to be accorded a special moral status in virtue of being appropriate objects of divine love. Byrne’s worry with such accounts is that they also end up pointing to some fact (autonomy, self-consciousness, and so on) about human beings that make them appropriate objects of divine love. Once again, Byrne argues, the cognitively disabled would fail to meet the necessary criteria.

In Chapter 3 Byrne argues that the only way we can hold on to the thought that the cognitively disabled are to be accorded the same moral status as any other human being is by rejecting the thought that there must be some extra fact justifying that moral status. Instead we are urged to accept Byrne’s claim that the cognitively disabled have moral worth simply in virtue of being ‘fellow human beings’. In Chapter 3 Byrne talks
about fellow human beings as those that are of the same species as ourselves, or those who we stand in relationship to, or those to whom we give a name, not a number (pp. 66–67). However, Byrne is also committed of course to the view that his notion of ‘fellow human being’ (and its equivalents) is not to be explicated by reference to any particular fact about the human being. Consequently, it remains unclear as to what Byrne is trying to get from the fact that the other is a fellow human being that he cannot get from the fact that the other is simply a human being.

In Chapter 4 Byrne applies his argument to the areas of euthanasia and abortion. In the case of euthanasia Byrne argues that there can be no relevant difference between killing a cognitively disabled person and killing any other human being. However, Byrne is also concerned to point out that this does not mean that we may have no reason to end the life of someone who is cognitively disabled. In those cases where it would be beneficent to end the life then ending that life is justified. But Byrne claims that this would be perfectly consistent with the view that the cognitively disabled have the same moral status as any other human being because to end the life in these cases is to act out of respect for the human being (pp. 85–87).

In the case of abortion Byrne argues that whether or not a foetus places the same moral demands upon us as other human beings depends on whether the foetus can be classified as a human being. Byrne argues that if we accept a developmental view of the foetus or a view which holds that a foetus only achieves the status of a human being after it is born then we may judge that aborting that foetus is not the moral equivalent to killing a human being (pp. 93–97).

In Chapters 2 and 5 Byrne is primarily interested in both defining and defending the notion of “mental handicap” as a legitimate category against those who argue that the term denotes no fact about the individual and is merely used as a label of oppression. In Chapter 2 Byrne defines ‘mental handicap’ as relating to cognitive disability. The notion of ‘cognitive disability’ is described in terms of ‘a loss of, or deficiency in, [cognitive] function typical of the species ...’ (p. 26). Interestingly, Byrne then prefers to use the term ‘cognitive disability’ in place of ‘mental handicap’ throughout the book. Other than bringing into focus the form of affliction affecting certain human beings the term ‘cognitive disability’ does admittedly seem a less derogatory term than that of ‘mental handicap’. It is then unclear why Byrne preferred to use the term ‘mental handicap’ in the title of his book. Perhaps part of Byrne’s justification is his argument in Chapter 5 that we should challenge those who attach negative attitudes to terms like ‘mental handicap’. It is then unclear why Byrne preferred to use the term ‘mental handicap’ in the title of his book. Perhaps part of Byrne’s justification is his argument in Chapter 5 that we should challenge those who attach negative attitudes to terms like ‘mental handicap’ (pp. 119–120). But even if Byrne’s argument is valid the point of his argument is clearly not going to be appreciated by those who are already put off reading the book because of the title. In Chapter 5 Byrne argues against those who claim that terms like ‘mental handicap’ or ‘cognitive disability’ are only used as labels of oppression and never denote any actual affliction. Byrne argues convincingly, I think, that although these terms can be and have been abused they do in many cases pick out real afflictions suffered by the individual. Moreover, to ignore this
fact would be to ignore the various moral demands that those with cognitive disability place upon us (p. 120).

In Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap Byrne reminds us of the fact that there is an important sense that no matter how impaired a human being is there is something deeply disturbing about any moral conception that would deny that human being the same moral status that we accord to all other human beings. It seems to me then that the strength of Byrne's book is that it challenges any philosophical account that contradicts those moral insights or intuitions that we take as basic or foundational to our ethical thinking. Hence, a moral conception that contradicts the claim that the cognitively disabled are to be accorded the same moral status as any other human being strikes most of us as a sufficient reason to reject that moral conception rather than change our thinking about the cognitively disabled.

The worry, however, is that it is not at all clear what we are to derive from the above consideration. Are we to derive the conclusion that there is no fact about human beings (including the cognitively disabled) that gives them a special moral status over and above the fact that they are human beings? Or are we to say that whatever that fact must be it cannot consist in those things that philosophers such as Kuhse and Singer talk about? The worry is that if one accepts that human beings have a special moral status then the question arises: in virtue of what do human beings have a special moral status? This is not simply a worry about speciesism, however. The worry is not simply how can we justify treating non-human beings in ways that we cannot justify treating human beings (although it raises that worry as well). For even if man was the only species in existence the question of why man is accorded a special moral status can still be asked. Unless we can answer this question then it really does remain unclear to me as to how we are to answer those who fail to accord value to human life (or those who fail to accord a different moral status to human beings than to other animals). For we cannot argue against such a person if we have no argument to offer.

This worry is brought into focus in Chapter 3 of Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap where Byrne considers but ultimately rejects the thought that the sharing of rational nature is the reason why human beings are to be accorded a special moral status. On this view the cognitively disabled (amongst others) are still beings who share in rational nature however impaired that nature might in fact be. However, it is not at all clear that Byrne is able to say why the sharing of rational nature is not the reason why human beings have a special moral status. Byrne argues that the principle of rational nature is hardly likely to be more cogent a justification for not murdering another person than the fact that the other is a fellow human being (p. 66). But the fact that the other shares in rational nature is surely very likely to tell us much more than the fact that the other is a fellow human being. For it purports to tell us why a human being makes certain moral demands of us (demands not made by animals, trees, or mountains, for example). Of course we might want to explore further
how sharing in rational nature is the relevant feature. For example, we
might want to explore further why the fact that human beings share in
rational nature is a reason to treat them as ends and not means. But at least
we potentially have the beginnings here of an explanation for why human
beings are deserving of certain types of respect, an explanation that can-
not be given simply by saying that the other is a fellow human being.

Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap is motivated by a
genuine concern for those with cognitive disability. Byrne’s arguments
against those who fail to recognize ‘cognitive disability’ as denoting any
real affliction of the person, or, against those who claim that the cogni-
tively disabled are of less moral value than any other human being are
lucid, powerful and thought provoking. Moreover, Byrne’s humanism is an
attempt to show why the cognitively disabled are deserving of the same
degree of respect as any one else. But it does seem to me that it is not suff-
cient to simply point out that others (including the cognitively disabled)
are to be accorded special moral worth in virtue of being human beings.
For we still need to know in virtue of what human beings make this
demand of us that other things (animals, trees or mountains) do not.
Simply saying that the other is a fellow human being fails to give us that
information.

Demian Whiting