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Rationis Defensor

Essays in Honour of Colin Cheyne

 Springer

Editor

James Maclaurin
Department of Philosophy
University of Otago
364 Leith Walk
Dunedin, New Zealand

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For Colin and Liz

Foreword

“Ask a mathematician whether there are numbers bigger than 100, and he will say ‘Of course there are’. Ask a mathematician whether numbers exist, and he will wonder what you are talking about”. So Colin Cheyne once said to me, shortly after he was first bitten by the philosophy bug.

That happened to him later in life than most who are so bitten. Colin’s first career was in mathematics and as a High School teacher of mathematics, both in New Zealand and in the UK. Then, in the 1980s, he returned to the University of Otago as a part-time student of philosophy in general and of mathematical logic in particular. His talent for philosophy soon became apparent. He completed his BA and a Postgraduate Diploma in Philosophy, and embarked upon his PhD in 1990. By that time he had abandoned his career as a High School teacher to join the Philosophy Department, where he was appointed first as a Teaching Fellow and then a Lecturer.

Colin completed a stunning doctoral thesis in 1994. It formed the basis of his major publication, *Knowledge, Cause, and Abstract Objects: Causal Objections to Platonism*, which appeared in 2001. As its title suggests, it returns to the puzzle with which I began. Do numbers exist, and if they do, what kind of thing are they? Colin was skeptical about the Platonist view that numbers are abstract objects that do not exist in space or time and do not do anything. He was skeptical about this, above all, because it makes it wholly mysterious how mathematical knowledge is possible, how we can know anything about numbers so conceived. He claims that we can know of the existence of an object only if we can somehow causally interact with it, however remotely. And he argues that numbers and other abstract (a-causal and non-spatio-temporal) objects fail this test.

These anti-Platonist views were at odds with the views of Colin’s main teacher in mathematical logic, the late Pavel Tichý, who was a resolute Platonist regarding mathematical and logical objects. Tichý’s tragic death in 1994 left a gaping hole in the teaching resources of the Philosophy Department for a specialist logician. Who better to fill that gap than Colin Cheyne, who had excelled in that area? Accordingly Colin was appointed chiefly to take over Tichý’s series of high-powered mathematical logic courses. This he did for nearly 20 years. His philosophical disagreements

with Tichý did not prevent him from teaching logic the ‘Tichý way’. Nor did they prevent him from co-editing the posthumous publication of Pavel Tichý’s *Collected Papers in Logic and Philosophy*, which appeared in 2004. This work brought him into contact with Tichý’s former colleagues and disciples in the Czech Republic, and he became a regular participant in logic conferences held there.

Colin’s editorial labours on behalf of his colleagues did not end there. In 2006 he co-edited *Rationality and Reality: Conversations with Alan Musgrave*, a *Festschrift* to mark my own retirement from the Philosophy Department. The volume proved to be a little premature – or as Colin put it, “this retirement theory was refuted”.

Meanwhile, Colin’s own work blossomed. He was a demanding and rigorous teacher. Most of our most talented students passed through his hands and benefitted from his logic courses. One of the most talented of them all once complained to me that “grumpy Colin” had found mistakes in her latest logic exercise and had given her a poor mark. She later told me how grateful she was to “grumpy Colin” for teaching her the true meaning of logical and intellectual rigor. These same qualities were manifested in a steady stream of high-quality articles that Colin wrote on a variety of issues in epistemology and metaphysics. Especially important among these were his demolition of the appeal to intuition as a source of knowledge of abstract objects, and his discovery of a new paradox regarding reasonable belief.

Over the years Colin took an active interest in all the affairs of the Philosophy Department. He took a special interest in devising simple and sensible course regulations, and for years was our special Advisor of Studies on these matters. He served as a wise, understated yet very effective Head of Department from 2006 until 2008. He also became actively involved in the Australasian Association for Philosophy, as a member of its Council and General Secretary of its New Zealand Division (2004–2011). He was elected President of the New Zealand Division in 2011.

Some years ago the University decided that we should all have business cards bearing appropriate mottos. Colin chose *Rationis Defensor* as the motto for his card. This has now become the title of this volume. It is an apt title, for Colin has always been a resolute and effective defender of reason in all of his academic pursuits. The devotion to reason did not, however, extend to all aspects of his life. It did not, for example, interfere with his passionate devotion to all things Italian – Italian opera, Italian movies, Italian food, Italian weather, Italian scenery. He even on occasions extolled the virtues of Italian politics! Worse, despite (or because of?) the fact that he was born and bred in a rugby-mad nation, he developed an idiosyncratic and irrational interest in ‘Australian Rules Football’, played only in Sydney and Melbourne. For no apparent reason he became a devoted fan of a club called ‘Carlton’, and would regularly regale his colleagues at morning tea with its latest result. Reason has inevitable limitations, even for committed defenders of it such as he.

The contributions to this volume come from a wide variety of philosophical fields, indicating the breadth of Colin’s own interests and contributions. What unites them all is simple – an admiration for the man and his work.

Preface

Colin Cheyne is a consummate analytic philosopher; curious, enthusiastic, precise, and forthright. He is widely published in epistemology, philosophical logic and philosophy of mathematics but, in truth, Colin is a philosophical omnivore with great breadth of interest and great breadth of enthusiasm. In departmental seminars, Colin always has a view. He usually speaks last and he often asks the crucial question that half the people in the room were struggling to formulate. Omnivory is a hard thing to celebrate in a world that is ever more specialised—yet, celebrate it we should. This volume brings together a diverse group of philosophers, many close friends of Colin and of the Otago department, some of whom were among Colin's excellent students. All have been eager contributors to a volume that straddles epistemology, science, metaphysics and logic, the areas of philosophy with which Colin has a particular affinity. But above all this book recognises and celebrates Colin's abiding interest, not just in solving philosophical problems, but in sorting out how we should reason about philosophical problems.

That question is asked many times and in many different ways in *Rationis Defensor*: How do we judge our success in the pursuit of knowledge? (Alan Musgrave's *Getting over Gettier*, Gregory Dawes's *Justified Believing* and Pavel Materna's *Mathematical and Empirical Concepts*); How do we assess our moral obligations? (Tim Mulgan's *The Future of Utilitarianism* and Andrew Moore's *The Buck-Passing Stops Here*); How should philosophers characterise propositions (Heather Dyke's *Propositions: Truth vs. Existence* and Bjørn Jespersen's *Post-Fregean Thoughts on Propositional Unity*), modality (Josh Parsons's *Against Advanced Modalizing* and Charles Pigden and Rebecca Entwisle's *Spread Worlds, Plenitude and Modal Realism*) or logical inference? (Martin Frické's *Best-Path Theorem Proving*); Where should philosophers look for evidence? (Gregory Currie's *Literature and Truthfulness*, Juan Gomez's *The Progress of Scotland and the Experimental Method* and Alberto Vanzo's *Kant on Experiment*); What sort of propositions can form part of philosophical inference? (Jc Beall's *A Neglected Reply to Prior's Dilemma* and Hannah Clark-Younger's *Is Imperative Inference Impossible?*); What can philosophy tell us about what there is? (Emily Gill's *Defending Quine on Ontological Commitment*, James Maclaurin's *Universal*

Darwinism: Its Scope and Limits, Kirsten Walsh's *Did Newton Feign the Corpuscular Hypothesis?* and Vladimír Svoboda's *The Scandal of Semantic Platonism*).

Colin Cheyne is truly a defender of reason. He has devoted his philosophical career to understanding how philosophy works and to applying philosophical reasoning to problems that matter. He has also spent uncountably many hours helping colleagues and students in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago. We are lucky to have had such a good and constant friend who will now be bristling at my sloppy use of "uncountably many" in the preceding sentence.

University of Otago

James Maclaurin

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My first thanks of course goes to Colin who inspired this volume. How happy to be in charge of a project in which all the contributors leap at the chance to be involved and produce wonderful essays well before the publisher's deadline. 'Colin Cheyne' truly is a powerful phrase. Special thanks goes to Jc Beall for his help with the logic chapters and to those who I consulted on the structure of the book, particularly Heather Dyke and Alan Musgrave. Thanks also to Alan for writing a foreword that is accurate, illuminating and fun. Thanks to all at Springer and particularly to Lucy Fleet who has been a pleasure to work with.

My greatest debt is owed to my diligent and uncomplaining editorial assistant, Kirsten Walsh (who is also the author of chapter 12) for making this project much easier than it might have been and for all the care she took over a manuscript with more than its fair share of typographical challenges. As always, my thanks to my remarkable colleagues and to our department's generous and inspiring students who make philosophy fun.

Finally, my special thanks to Kristen Gillespie and George Maclaurin for all their help and good humour, for picking me up when I'm down and for putting up with another year of having a philosopher for a husband and father.

University of Otago

James Maclaurin

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Contributors

Jc Beall is Professor of Philosophy jointly in the Departments of Philosophy at University of Connecticut (US) and at the University of Otago (NZ).

Hannah Clark-Younger is a PhD student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Gregory Currie is Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Nottingham (UK).

Gregory W. Dawes is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Otago (NZ).

Heather Dyke is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Rebecca E.B. Entwisle was a graduate student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ) and at Princeton (US).

Martin Frické is an Associate Professor in the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona (US).

Emily Gill is a PhD student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Juan Gomez is a PhD student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Bjørn Jespersen is a Post-doctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Values and Technology at the Delft University of Technology (NL).

James Maclaurin is Head of Department and an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Pavel Materna is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Masaryk University (CZ).

Andrew Moore is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Tim Mulgan is Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of St. Andrews (UK).

Alan Musgrave is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Josh Parsons is a lecturer at Corpus Christi, Oxford (UK).

Charles R. Pigden is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Vladimír Svoboda is a researcher at the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (CZ).

Alberto Vanzo is a Post-doctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).

Kirsten Walsh is a PhD student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago (NZ).