

# AD ABSURDUM

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL PHILOSOPHY MAGAZINE

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*Winter 2014*





AD ABSURDUM

WINTER 2014

## Editor's Letter

## Contents

The winter exams may now be over, but the cold weather remains. The start of the second term heralds not only new courses and timetables but a new edition of Ad Absurdum, which we hope will provide you with some food for thought. Some of the Ad Absurdum team have graduated and now continue their study of philosophy at different universities, but we are pleased to welcome some new recruits to the editing team. We have a selection of articles covering a philosophical defence of veganism by Joanna Pickets, one of our editing team Lewis Savery casts a critical look at acclaimed television show Breaking Bad. Another of our editors, William Tuckwell, explores the new philosophy of the environment course We are pleased to include a response to Stella Stanford's article on race (Spring edition) by Femi Omotoyinbo showing that Ad Absurdum is reaching philosophers all over the world, Bristol alumni Richard Fell writes of his time spent at Bristol providing some insight into the constants of the student experience.. Our faculty interview features Kentaro Fujimoto who discusses his arrival at the Bristol philosophy department. Finally we explore Camus' thought in an article on the concepts of the absurd and rebellion found in his works.

In other news Ad Absurdum is now officially linked to the University of Bristol Philosophy Society (Philsoc), in order to bring undergraduate philosophy activities under one umbrella.

If any of the articles in this issue move you to respond we are always please to publish letters and response articles. As always you can join us at [bris.adabsurdum@gmail.com](mailto:bris.adabsurdum@gmail.com) if you wish to provide feedback or submit short stories, poems and articles. We would like to thank all the contributors to this issue, whether for providing articles or artwork.

This current edition and all previous content can be found online at <http://bristolphilsoc.co.uk/ad-absurdum> .

Thomas Galley, Editor

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# COLOURS *cannot* COGITATE

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*Femi Omotoyinbo* responds to Stella Stanford's article "Philosophy and Race" (Spring 2013)

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Having gone through the words of Stella Sandford (*Philosophy and Race*, Spring '13); it appears that the issue of race might have more perspectives to it than what has been given.

Due to the relativity of individuals, one cannot deny that philosophical practice – either as a mode of enquiry or in the (academic) institutional sense – is multifaceted. Every form of intellectual endeavour has within it some type of freedom. Without this freedom there would have been no expansion whatsoever in systems of human thought.

In other words, UK philosophy, in the institutional sense, has some freedom to be 'predominantly male' and 'overwhelmingly white.' This freedom is accentuated in the sense that the philosophy, as expressed here, is a contextualized philosophy. It is the philosophy of a specific culture. And there are certain aspects of that culture which could easily influence a philosophy into becoming gender biased and racial in practice.

On the aspect of being predominantly male, one could argue that UK philosophy has been influenced by religion. Most religions practised since the beginning of time have been portrayed in patriarchal lights. Christianity for example, gives a picture of man as the saviour while the woman is the sinner. And it is certain that the majority of human endeavours have danced to this tune, including philosophy itself.

Starting from the beginning of philosophy, with Thales; the art of philosophizing has been associated with men. Women like Arête of Cyrene, Diotima of Mantinea, and Hypatia of Alexandria amongst others were given no or less prominence in the history of philosophy. Perhaps, contemporary philosophy has inherited this anti-feminine trait. UK philosophy is simply a result of this occurrence.

Attempts to recue UK philosophy from continuing on the patriarchal path start with the female philosophers in the UK. Philosophical feminism should, at the present time, give less emphasis to feminine relevance in philosophical circles. Rather, female philosophers should philosophize as philosophers by default: showing their relevance via their propositions, stances and their application of philosophy to life issues. Philosophy should be appreciated as a natural art capable of being done by both genders. Feminism should not try to effeminate Philosophy: because it is a unisex adventure

Going back to the matter of race; the concept will be reiterated that UK philosophy has every freedom to be overwhelmingly white. This is so because the letters 'UK' explicitly signify 'white' in any manner of its usage. Therefore, as one cannot expect African philosophy to be overwhelmingly white, one should not expect UK philosophy to be otherwise.

The above explanation is of conclusive relevance in a micro-practice of philosophy, i.e. philosophy in communities, tribes, cultures and languages. Meanwhile, in a macro-realm the issue of race becomes applicable: because philosophy is hereby given a global appraisal, in a specific manner, by different communities, tribes, cultures and languages. When a philosophy (in the institutional sense) remains racially biased in this macro realm; the issue of race will become a malignant phenomenon demanding prompt attention. It is only in the macro-realm that Philosophy becomes a rational enquiry unencumbered by personal or political agendas; and available to practically anyone with any intellectual thirst. Any philosophical practice that remains overwhelmingly racial could, therefore, be tagged discriminatory.

In this era of globalization, philosophi-

cal practices should accept the simplest truth that the existence of any race validates its relevance to the generic motives of human living. No race has the audacity to dictate a blueprint of philosophy for others to follow. No race should allow itself to be denigrated as intellectually handicapped too.

Taking a cue from the 'game theory' of Ludwig Wittgenstein, it should be understood that philosophical practice in its varied appearances is multifaceted. For philosophy to outgrow any limit, it needs seminal contributions from the African, the Occidental and the Oriental spheres of existence. For this purpose, every race has the freedom to contribute to the philosophical parlance. From a scientific standpoint, it is important to note that there is no such thing in the glossary of neurological labels that implies that colour, language or culture are determinants of intellectual capability. That is to say that transcendental illusion has no scientific support too.

In a nutshell, race becomes relevant when philosophy is appraised on a global perspective. UK philosophy is therefore not culpable of being racial if the practice is in the micro realm. But if the philosophy (in the institutional sense) remains overwhelmingly white despite its development into the macro realm; then the issue of race sets in. It is for this reason that UK philosophy should be distinguished from philosophy in the UK.

For the sake of philosophy itself; any form of race in its structure should be avoided or positively managed. Colours cannot cogitate – the race (or gender) of an individual has nothing to do with his/her cerebral counterpoise. Race is in this manner an illogical transcendental illusion: any mature philosopher should not be caught by its spells.

# Camus *and the* Absurd

*Thomas Galley* explores some of the central themes of Camus' literary and philosophical work.

Camus was a French 20<sup>th</sup> Century author whose ideas concerning the absurd and rebellion had a major impact on intellectual life in post 1945 France. Whilst the main body of his work is composed of novels and plays, he wrote two philosophical texts: "The Myth of Sisyphus" and "The Rebel", I shall expose the notion of the absurd contained within the former and explore how Camus' understanding of the world as meaningless and of our condition as absurd does not lead to despair but pushes us to better appreciate the experiences of life and to live authentically.

For Camus the absurd comes first as a feeling and only after this sensation can we rationally apprehend it; he expressed his views mainly in novels and plays so as to portray this feeling: we see the absurdity of society in the Stranger, the lack of control we have over our lives in the Plague. He claims that the feeling of the absurd arrives spontaneously as we realise that our lives are governed by habit, that we mechanically do the same thing every day and every week. We are seized by a sense of strangeness and detect the primitive hostility of the world. Camus formalises this feeling of the absurd into a philosophical notion in "The Myth of Sisyphus".

The argument that the human condition is absurd rests on two premises, the first of which is an aspect of humans, the second a feature of the world. Camus claims that we seek truth, certainty and meaning; this can be argued for historically as seen by the importance of religion in human development. We seek an explanation for our existence, or we want to find meaning in death: our attitude to the world is one of expectation and of seeking.

The second of Camus' observation is that the universe is devoid of any meaning: it is silent. This fact is illustrated by the famous problem of evil: innocent children suffer and die, we have a moral vision (or expectation) which tells us that the suffering of the innocent is an outrage

yet this outrage is met by silence: the world has no justification for this fact. The rise of modern science is the story of humanity's progressive separation from the external world: we used to think that the Earth was at the centre of the universe and that man was special and distinct amongst living things yet the Copernican and Darwinian scientific revolutions have removed any possibility of us occupying a favoured place in the natural order.

A situation is absurd when there is a contradiction or tension between the evidence and our expectations, for instance in a trial if all the evidence points to the defendant being guilty but the jury return the verdict that she is innocent we would say that the decision was absurd. Thus Camus concludes from his two premises that the human condition is absurd: our search for truth and meaning is met by the "unreasonable silence of the world". This tension or contradiction between our expectations and the external world is absurd.

Many people believe that the realisation of the absurdity of the human condition should lead us to despair, maybe even suicide (since it seems to indicate that there can be no meaning to human existence). However this is an erroneous conclusion to draw: our first premise was that we are searching for truth and our conclusion was that there is one truth we can be certain of: the absurd. This absurd is only reached through the confrontation between our expectations and the world, i.e. it is only possible for us if we are alive. To commit suicide then because of the absurdity of existence would be contradictory because we would be admitting that we didn't care about maintaining the only truth we could find, and caring about truth is our first premise. So despite the fact that we cannot meet our expectations we have found one certainty: the absurd. This will be the foundation of Camus' thought.

How can we maintain the absurd? We must permanently be aware of it, force

ourselves to wrestle with it and confront it head on: we accept that existence is meaningless but we stay alive and don't resign ourselves. This is the attitude which Camus terms rebellion, and this is the attitude which confers dignity to humanity; when we gladly accept the fate which has been assigned to us like Sisyphus who Camus imagines is happy as he repeatedly rolls the rock up the hill.

For Camus we should be aware of the limits of reason, that is to say that we can only understand that which is at a human level: Camus cannot accept great historical forces which determine us or a God who has plans for us. All we can understand are the things at a human level such as friendship, local struggles against oppression (as opposed to struggles in the name of some grand ideal) and bodily experiences such as the feeling of the sea on our skin. Our greatness lies in the fact that we are aware of our limits, being conscious of our absurd situation enables us to overcome our finitude. Camus argues that when we reject metaphysical and religious explanations we can focus more on what he calls the truths of the body (i.e. experience). He follows Nietzsche in wanting eternal vitality instead of eternal life.

From the meaningless world and our unmet expectations Camus manages to find a truth which we can grasp. This is a truth which we often try to ignore because it is easier to live a life which is not truly one's own, to submit to Gods and public opinion than it is to bear responsibility for ourselves. However in doing so we give up our individuality, we abandon the experiences the world offers because we get lost in thinking about ideals, whether political or religious. We must strive to permanently face this truth and gain dignity by confronting the absurdity of existence.

# Why Philosophy made me

# VEGAN

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Joanna Pickets presents a defence of veganism drawing from the arguments of several moral philosophers.

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After the Horsemeat Scandal, sensational pictures of anonymous meat being churned through industrial blenders dominated British newspapers. This scandal has made a number of people feel growing unease about a possible dark side to the consumption of animal products in the modern western world. How can philosophers deal with this unease? Does it simply arise from sentimental feelings for horses rather than cows? Or can rational, philosophical arguments concerning ethics and morality provide us with answers? Can they radically change the way in which the consumption of animal products is viewed in the western world?

I am going to argue for the latter. For me, it was philosophy, not sensationalism that made me a vegetarian and now a vegan. I'm a third year English and Philosophy student, and studying second year Ethics really got me to use reason to analyse the ethics of the food, of which I was eating on a daily basis as part of my standard 'pretty much anything goes' omnivorous diet. I found Peter Singer's utilitarian ethics and its conclusions very appealing, so I will outline them to you here. Personally, I'll probably always have a soft spot for Singer's arguments, but utilitarianism is a controversial theory of ethics that many readers will not wish to accept. So after my discussion on Singer, I will outline an argument against the consumption of factory farmed animal products which is given in one of the best philosophy articles that I have ever read, namely 'Moral Vegetarianism from a Broad Basis' by the philosopher David DeGrazia (2009). DeGrazia uses a minimal principle against unjustified suffering with superb clarity in order to give an argument against the consumption of factory farmed animal products that can be accepted by a broad range of ethical frameworks – be it utilitarianism, virtue based or deontological theories. I will

here agree with DeGrazia by strongly concluding that factory farming is morally wrong and more tentatively concluding in favour of a vegan diet. This is a summarised version of my extended essay, which was entitled 'Is it morally wrong to consume animal products?'

Firstly then, I am going to explain Singer's view on why the consumption of factory farmed animal products is wrong. Singer is a preference utilitarian, so he believes that the morally right action is that which maximises the overall preference satisfaction of those involved (2011). Preferences are interests, meaning needs, wants and desires. He argues that both humans and non-humans have preferences, often preferences such as the desire to avoid pain, reproduce, nurture one's young and continue living. Singer argues that we need to give non-humans equal consideration of interests, so of preferences, to humans in the utilitarian calculation. Denying non-humans this is to commit 'speciesism', which is an unjustifiable prejudice against a species. Critics, such as the philosopher Roger Scruton, argue that we are justified in treating non-human species differently from humans because animals do not have the same rational capacities as humans a.k.a the 'animals are stupid' argument (2000). However, Singer states that many factory farmed non-humans may have similar rational capacities to young infants and people with severe learning disabilities, so we may assume that they are likely to have similar preferences. The question is: would you be willing to subject young infants or certain severely disabled people to the same treatment that cows, pigs and chickens experience on factory farms? Singer believes that the answer is no. Singer's ideas are influenced by the famous quotation given by utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who neatly states that "The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they

*suffer*?" (1823). Singer suggests that the preferences of the animals not to suffer painful lives in factory farms is significantly larger than our preference to enjoy consuming their bodily products at a cheap price, so we are morally obliged to stop eating factory farmed animal products. This means that it is morally wrong to consume the vast majority of meat and dairy bought from supermarkets. Singer is a consequentialist, so he believes that it is morally wrong to consume these products because one is directly supporting, (financially and by encouraging other's to follow one's example), the continued strength of these industries. By removing one's support, one is contributing towards a threshold number of people needed to weaken these industries so that factory farms are closed down. This is how the consumer power of supply and demand can affect consequences.

I find a lot of what Singer says convincing, but there will be many readers who disagree with utilitarianism. This may be because of some classic problems posed for utilitarianism, such as Robert Nozick's idea of a utility monster who gains lots of happiness by being cruel to many other people (1974). There is not time here to deal with responses to these problems, so for non-utilitarians I will here give what I believe to be the best, broadest argument against purchasing factory farmed animal products, which is given by DeGrazia:

- P1) Non-humans have at least some moral status because they can be independently harmed.
- P2) Factory farming causes massive unnecessary harm to non-humans.
- P3) It is morally wrong to cause massive unnecessary harm.
- P4) One should not support institutions that cause massive unnecessary harm.
- C) 'All people with ready access to healthful alternatives should make every

reasonable effort not to purchase meat, eggs, or dairy products from factory farms' (DeGrazia, 2009: 159).

The first premise is justified by scientific evidence. Such evidence suggests that most animals can feel pain. If pain can be caused to an animal, then that animal can be harmed. This harm is independent of the harm caused to humans, meaning that it is not just indirectly wrong because of any harm that it may cause to humans but it is wrong in itself. Pain is morally salient, as all other things being equal to pain is generally undesirable. This is the case even if one is not a utilitarian. One can still think that animals have a lower moral status that is unequal to humans and accept P1, so long as they think the ability to feel pain means that animals have some moral status.

For the second premise, there is not time here to outline the massive amount of pain caused to animals through factory farming, but the reader may already have some idea of this and if not then they may want to research this themselves. This massive amount of pain is unnecessary because a) humans do not need animal products for a healthy diet (again, you can research this further) and b) even if one does think that animal products are needed for a healthy diet, then one can choose to eat only non-factory farmed animal products which are available, though perhaps more difficult to find, in the modern western world. If this means the animal products are slightly more expensive and so overall one eats less of them, then so be it. There are environmental and health reasons for thinking that we should all eat less animal products anyway (again, you can research this further). Consequentialists accept the third premise according to whether the harm overall maximises the best consequences. Yet non-consequentialists will also accept this, but they have a different definition of what harm is unnecessary. If the harm is necessary for the fulfilment of virtues or the moral law, then a virtue ethicist or deontologist may state that it is necessary, but this does not seem to be the case for the consumption of factory farmed animal products.

The final premise can again be accepted on consequentialist grounds, as discussed in the section on Singer. Yet DeGrazia also states that the 'duty to do

one's part in joint ventures requiring co-operation is a duty that deontologists and virtue theorists will acknowledge' (2009: 158-159). It displays a compassionate nature for one to stop eating factory farmed animal products and one has a duty to do this, just as one has a duty to recycle or to vote even if one may not be able to discern visibly the consequences of one's own individual actions.

So why do factory farmed animal products still make up the majority of animal products that we consume, as over 90% of piglets reared in the UK are factory farmed and 95% of duck meat sold in the UK's supermarkets and restaurants is factory farmed, when it seems so clear according to philosophical argument that this is morally wrong (statistics from [www.factoryfarming.org.uk](http://www.factoryfarming.org.uk))? In all of my research for my extended essay I could not find a single philosopher who attempted to defend factory farming. The dominance of factory farming could be down to a number of factors, such as its economic efficiency, the way in which the consumer is distanced from the reality of the factory farming process, the fact that the consumption of factory farmed products is so normalised in society, the nutritional necessity of animal products has been overstated and many people now buy free range eggs in a way that psychologically comforts them about the morality of their dietary habits. Yet according to the strong case put forward by DeGrazia, buying free range eggs is not enough and all of one's consumption of animal products needs to be put under moral scrutiny. One must be aware that if the animal products that one consumes do not say 'free range' or have a similar kind of certification on the packaging, then they most probably come from a factory farm. Although on one hand DeGrazia's anti-factory farming conclusion promotes a demanding and even revolutionary change in the diets of most people, on the other hand it seems to be so justified from all of the premises which he uses in his argument that any reasonable person, let alone any philosopher, should accept it.

Although I believe that DeGrazia succeeds in this argument, there seemingly reasonable arguments in favour of consuming non-factory farmed animal products. Although, they are not necessarily winning ones. Scruton states that we are morally obliged to be conscientious om-

nivores, who only eat non-factory farmed animal products, rather than vegans. This is because non-factory farmed animals that are reared well and killed painlessly have decent lives. Thus one is morally obliged to support industries which bring these animals into existence, even though their existence will also probably be ended in order to consume their products. As appealing as this argument may seem, the idea that we are morally obliged to bring beings into existence so long as they have decent lives is very problematic. If this argument is applied to humans, then we might be massively obliged to increase the size of the human population so long as those humans have decent lives even though this may massively decrease the quality of life for the average person. This, according to the philosopher Derek Parfit, is a '*Repugnant Conclusion*' (1984). Increasing and even sustaining the number of animals currently being reared for consumption of their products also has very problematic effects on the environment and the global use of resources such as grains and water, as is outlined in the UN report '*Assessing the Environmental Impacts of Consumption and Production*' (2010). For these reasons, there may be a greater obligation for those who can adopt a vegan diet to do so.

What seems natural is not always what is moral. Cultural norms do not always correlate with what is rational. The ethical and environmental problems of factory farming mean that we need to re-evaluate our diets, whether we become conscientious omnivores, vegetarians or vegans. What is clear is that the current situation is ethically unjustifiable and unsustainable. I used to be a milkoholic, cheeseoholic and salamioholic, but what I have learnt through my philosophical research has fundamentally changed not only my diet, but the way that I think about the world. I believe that it is our purpose as philosophers to seek truth. It is our purpose as moral agents to act on the truth that we find and do what is morally right. If you have found this article enlightening, then I urge you to research the matter further and act on truth.

# NEW *Philosophy of the Environment* Course... AND TRIP!

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*William Tuckwell* outlines the new philosophy of the environment course and presents the creative writing it has engendered.

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The start of this academic year saw the introduction of a new *Philosophy of the Environment* unit taught jointly by Joanna Burch-Brown and Anthony Everett. The unit aims to offer students the opportunity to study key topics within environmental philosophy including environmental ethics, green political theory, sustainability, and environmental aesthetics.

Questions that have been considered throughout the course have included: Can all of our duties in relation to the environment be traced back to duties to other people, or can other entities like non-human animals, plants, species, ecosystems, and wildernesses have independent moral standing? What do we owe to future generations and distant others when it comes to dealing with environmental hazards like climate change or nuclear power? How important is biodiversity and which forms of biodiversity matter most? Further to this, students taking the course have considered that one reason we might value nature is for the aesthetic experiences that we can have in relation to it – such as experiences of beauty, of wonder, of humility, or of the sublime. How might we characterise some of the notable aesthetic experiences that we can have in relation to nature? In what ways are our aesthetic responses to nature similar or dissimilar to our aesthetic responses to art? In what ways, if any, does aesthetic appreciation of nature depend upon background knowledge, such as understanding of natural history?

As part of the course students were treated to a trip to the Bristol botanical gardens and the 'Goats in the Gully' project in the Avon Gorge. The motivation for such a trip is the thought that the most fruitful way to do environmental philosophy is not solely in the lecture halls, the library and seminar rooms but by going out into the environment and getting

amongst it!

Bristol botanical gardens is a 1.77 hectare garden and is home to 4500 plant species that provides a unique teaching, research and conservation resource. The gardens are complete with glasshouses that represent a unique opportunity to cultivate plants from warmer climates and create a unique visitor experience.

The 'Goats in the Gully' project consists of the introduction of a herd of goats into the Avon Gorge as part of a plan to save rare wild flowers. When sheep grazing in the area ceased at the beginning of the last century, the area became overgrown and woodland quickly established. The job of the goats is to control scrubby regrowth in the Gorge, helping to restore grass and flowers to one of the UK's most important botanical sites.

While the trip may have been initially met by some with scepticism, once students were encouraged to write about their experiences the trip proved to have substantial philosophical payoffs and contributed to helping answer some of the questions considered throughout the course. What follows is a mini anthology of some thoroughly enjoyable accounts of students' experiences on the trip.

### **Carly Redhead's Story**

We saw five white goats, later joined by another, calmly chewing grass on the cliffside. Surrounding these goats were hundreds of trees, thousands of plants and hundreds of thousands of blades of grass. There was evidence of tired trees having been standing there for hundreds of years, plants for years but varied, and insects that would last far less than a year, probably weeks as winter is approaching. The colours that stood out most as I took a panoramic view of the site were red berries on a tree top high up, and a few wild berries lower down on what looked like a raspberry bush. A piece of fallen

bark was next to me, holding insects in their homes beneath, gripped by moss all over it and leafy plants growing around it. A micro ecosystem within a macro ecosystem. I looked up to see one of the goats eating from the tree, noticing only then it's horns necessary for defence. However, the only threatening entities about seem to be thorns on the plants. The goats coat was white and clean, standing proud at the top of the hill in sunlight for warmth. The goats must provide for themselves, finding a clean source of water and enough minerals in the ecosystem to sustain this healthy appearance. A few birds circled above with occasional squawks. A spider had made a line of a web and was navigating its way from one home to another, leaving a trail to be able to return. A greenfly flew past my face.

### **Lara Brown's Story**

My chosen plant had dangling trails of flowers almost floating out far from the base and leaves which grew modestly upwards. The long thin stems however reached out far and unravelled their flowers which suddenly cascade down the full length. Each individual flower somewhat resembles a daffodil but there are so many it was hard to view them as individuals since they didn't seem to compete but flourish together, almost but not quite connecting. Two miniature ants passed each other on the long stem which on a closer reveals many ants, absolutely tiny crawling all over the plant's flowers and inside their bright yellow middle...stamen. I cannot find where they go when heading away, they just vanish into the plant which carries on seemingly unaffected by such busy life and carries an air of stillness in itself. As I move or if I blow gently the trails of flowers elegantly sways for a long time not resisting in any way and

carries a fresh lemony fragrance.

Out in goats' gully it was a typical autumn situation of browning plants and leaves beginning to rot and mush with the damp which is everywhere. I noticed no fungus here though until later a couple of mushrooms growing under a log. I'm sure they may have provoked disgust in some who might see them, not particularly attractive, multiplying spores in the damp muggy air of the rotting log, yet they are a fascinating part of environments and I always look forward to seeing fungi growing in woods as they thrive when other things die. I also noticed a deciduous tree thin of its leaves wrapped in a coniferous tree or vine of some sort. It looks almost strangled by a parasitic evergreen plant but they may also grow together harmoniously. There are many other details, some stunning patterns on the wood where the bark of the logs had worn off that I just felt like painting and of course the goats, or rather the humorous stare of a herd of human beings as they set eyes on the goats as if exotic alien species! Yet the environment as a whole felt harmonious in that it would carry on the same even if we never looked at it and appreciated it. I think my eyes and appreciation are superfluous to any value that environment has in itself.

#### **Katrina Kilkenny's Story**

In the greenhouse of the Botanical Gardens, the plant that caught my eye was the *Columnea Magnifica*, which hung from the ceiling in a large pot. The plant itself had five long stems that dropped over the pot, almost reaching down to the floor. Besides from the remarkable length of the plant, the fuzzy texture of the stems and the small, closely packed leaves that grew all the way down, was particularly interesting. I assumed that the hundreds of tiny hairs formed some sort of protective layer for the plant, perhaps also collecting water droplets, or keeping moisture inside the plant. On the underside of each leaf was an intricate network of pink veins, which became a darker purple furthest away from the root. At the very tip I noticed two tiny, fuzzy, pink flowers just starting to open. They seemed like the plant's final goal, having grown so long, reaching so far away from the root to finally offer up these beautiful little buds. The tips of the plant curved upwards as if trying to let the buds see the

sunlight so they could properly flower. There were areas in the middle of each stem where the leaves looked paler, as if they had caught a disease. They were speckled with green, yellow and pink blotches, with the diseased-look emphasized by the perfectly round hole in one leaf, left by some hungry insect. Perhaps this was because the middle of the plant was lacking in sunlight, having been sacrificed for the flowering at the tips. What I saw when observing this plant was an intelligent life, not intelligent in the rational human way, but certainly showing a definite strive for self-preservation.

#### **Alex Benedyck's Story**

The plant's leaves are smooth on the inside but the contours are somewhat surprisingly pointed and sharp. The texture of the leaves are uniform throughout the plant, regardless of direction. It is also clear, presumably due to light conditions, that parts of the plant were able to grow quicker than others. The top of the plant is particularly pointed outwards and straight, whereas the leaves in the middle and bottom are far more jagged and low-lying. Whilst I cannot see the root, I imagine it is quite stable to have kept the plant in a reasonably straight condition despite the recent heavy winds and torrential rain that has swept across the South-West. The hue is a light green, although as you move further down the plant it darkens, but only slightly and probably unnoticeably to the non-meticulous eye. The plant smells typically of others I've encountered – an almost impossible to describe smell of 'green wildlife' imbued within me since a very young age due to being surrounded by plants at home.

I can see many different members of the biotic community. The smallest insects are probably ladybirds, occupying unpredictable spaces along plants and trees. One particularly remarkable sight from the surrounding areas are the trees opposite me, looking robust and powerful but yet kind and generous as they sway slowly to the tune of the wind. The history of these trees is something that fascinates me – whilst it is near impossible to imagine the space ahead without them, how long they've been around remains a hidden secret without scientific analysis. But perhaps it should remain a secret.

#### **Josh Maguire's Story**

In the botanical gardens I fixed my attention on a pitcher plant or monkey cup (genus: *nepenthes*), a carnivorous plant. The cup hangs from a long tendril which impressively holds the elegant structure of the cup which resembles a vase. The light penetrates through the wall of the cup, displaying the evenly spaced veins flowing from the bulbous belly to the narrower neck of the cup. The lip of this cup is shadowed by the leafy lid. The surrounding plant has many of these cups, some with their lids open and others with their lids closed, some with water inside and others without. It is a beautiful plant with an efficient trapping mechanism for insects. The lip of the neck is a deep maroon reddish colour, which clearly stands out from the pale green of the rest of the cup, which helps to attract the prey.

#### **Faraz Aghaei's Story**

While I have been writing this, the vine in my garden has continued to grow, finding its way up the fence, intertwining and hooking itself on, climbing onto the top of my neighbour's tree to find the optimum amount of sunlight. Korsgaard's account in 'Fellow Creates: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals', claims that my vine does have a functional good but it does do not take an active enough role in its maintenance and continuation to say that it has a final good. She suggests only animals have an active pursuit of their maintenance, self-constitution, self-creation and protection. I like to think otherwise! My vine has an active pursuit of its maintenance, it actively seeks to grow both downwards and upwards. My vine has an active pursuit of self creation, it creates a beautiful bloom of purple flowers during spring and summer that lead to the spread of its pollen. My vine even has an active pursuit of its protection; it wraps itself around the fence, clinging on for dear life and braving the elements. The reasons, given by Korsgaard, for putting a limit on the extension of kantian ethics to plants and fauna seem unjustified. The challenge lies in finding this justification within kantian terms.

# Richard Fell

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*Richard Fell* provides some thoughts on his time studying philosophy at Bristol in the late 1960's

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*Richard Fell CVO studied at Bristol University from 1967-1970, graduating with a 2.1 BSc in Politics and Philosophy. He was also Chairman of Debates and on the Students Union Council from 1969-1970. After Bristol, he obtained an MA from the University of London before joining the British Diplomatic Service in which he served for 35 years ending up as British High Commissioner to New Zealand and Samoa and Governor of the Pitcairn Islands. Since then, he has been involved in charitable work, occasional work for government and is the Book Reviews Editor for Asian Affairs, the Journal of The Royal Society for Asian Affairs which was founded as the Central Asian Society in 1901 (see [www.rsaa.org.uk](http://www.rsaa.org.uk))*

I began at Bristol on a Combined BA Hons course - Economics, History, Philosophy and Politics - which you could do in those days while working out, I suppose, what was of most interest to you. I quickly decided that the History subjects on offer were rather repetitive of what I had already done at school. Some aspects of the Economics course particularly those relating to the operation of financial institutions like banks and the labour markets were of interest though macro flow charts left me rather cold. So I changed to a Joint BSc degree in Philosophy and Politics at the end of my first year, though this did not affect the length of my degree.

Turning to the studies themselves, I enjoyed tackling the philosophers on offer. We had some excellent lecturers and some leading world experts. I recall, for example, Professor Stephan Korner, a man with a most interesting personal history and a leading expert on Kant and the philosophy of mathematics. However, my natural inclination was always more

towards empiricists such as Hobbes and Locke and political philosophers such as Rousseau, Bentham, Sartre, and even Marx and Engels, rather than Kant, Leibnitz, Wittgenstein and the logical positivists. This probably reflected my parallel interest in matters political, but then I was also never convinced that you could reduce philosophy to a purely scientific/mathematical, or indeed linguistic, construct. I do recall struggling with Wittgenstein's Blue and Brown Books one vacation; my father who was much more mathematically and scientifically inclined than me did provide some reassurance when he told me that he had attended a lecture given by Wittgenstein at Cambridge University and had found it hard to follow.

In those days we had a mixture of one to one tutorials, group tutorials and lectures. The one to one tutorials could be a bit of a challenge after an evening spent on debates or student politics or merely having a good night out! However our teachers were fairly understanding and tolerant provided you turned up and also submitted written work on time.

Of course, there was no internet then. Nor indeed laptops, mobile phones and the rest. You actually had to turn up at the libraries, read the books, make notes and write your essays. That meant too that libraries were social places in that you could usually find some friend there with whom to disappear for coffee or a sandwich when Leibnitz et al. became too much. I don't recall that there was a Philosophy Society or philosophy magazine as such in those days though there might have been.

Much of my spare time, particularly in my final year, was taken up with organising debates and the vagaries of student

politics. Bristol at that period was never as politically active as, for example, the Sorbonne and the LSE; radical student politics did finally reach Bristol though it did not engage everyone by any means. The sit-in at the Senate House in 1968 has perhaps been given greater weight in the history of Bristol than in fact it deserves!

That meant too that the Students Union Building on Queen's Road was for some of us a social focal point as well as a political one. Debates took place there on wider social and international issues. But then so did rock concerts and interpersonal socialising. When I last visited the building, it was a semi-derelict shadow of its former self. I am glad to see that the University plans to spend substantial sums to renovate it. Its 1960s 'brutalist' architecture may not appeal to everyone, but I do think that the student community needs the option of an appealing, active central meeting place whatever their academic discipline.

Was Philosophy at Bristol worth studying? Of course. Learning how Western thinking on morals, social issues and politics has developed has to be worth knowing. Also it instils an interest in other philosophical histories and cultures such as in Asia which reveals common underlying principles and concepts and provides a basis for understanding and communication. The personal abilities too to be able to sustain a logical argument based on facts and to ask intelligent questions have to be of value in what you do in later life. Having said that, I did not devote enough time in my final year to deciding what to do after Bristol. I am sure that today's students are much more 'logical' in that regard.



# Philosophy Society



## PhilSoc News

The philosophy Society is happy to announce we've formally united with Ad Absurdum! We anticipate a fruitful future through this natural joining of the two entities.

The PhilSoc has had a busy term of events, including the massive Parenting Party, bar crawl, pizza and pub social, and a talk by Armin Shulz from LSE. Still forthcoming this term we have our Christmas Meal (12<sup>th</sup> Dec, 6.30pm, Rack's, tickets available on our UBU page) and launching the Philosophy Library before the Department's Christmas Party. Next term expect many more talks, debates and social events.

If you'd like to be a member of the society, you can sign-up online (for one year or for life!), which will give you various perks, discounts and emails from us. It also supports the community of philosophers and philosophical debate we exist to facilitate by allowing us to put on bigger, better events, and bring in speakers from further afield.

If you would like to get involved or have any suggestions, either post on the Facebook group or email [president@bristolphilsoc.co.uk](mailto:president@bristolphilsoc.co.uk).

Details of events, dates, and speakers are updated frequently on our website & Facebook pages. To keep up-to-date and find out more, check us out online:

**Website:** [bristolphilsoc.co.uk](http://bristolphilsoc.co.uk)

**Facebook Group:** [facebook.com/groups/uob.philsoc](https://facebook.com/groups/uob.philsoc)

**'Like' Page:** [facebook.com/BristolPhilosophySociety](https://facebook.com/BristolPhilosophySociety)

## Forthcoming PhilSoc Events

- ◆ **Reasoning Fishbowl debate** on the 6th February at 7pm, in the queens building room 7.1.
- ◆ **Book Sale** on the 14th February from 4pm in Cotham House
- ◆ **Talk on the self**, also on the 14th February in Cotham house at 6pm, with speaker Guy Longworth
- ◆ **Film and Discussion Night** on the 20th February at 6pm

## Discussion Groups

- ◆ Monday (8pm): Moral/Political philosophy- Highbury Vaults
- ◆ Tuesday (8pm): Philosophy of mind- Highbury Vaults
- ◆ Tuesday (6pm): Anarchism Discussion Group - Multi-faith Chaplaincy
- ◆ Tuesday (5pm): Nietzsche (Twilight of the Idols) Reading Group - Highbury Vaults

## *In Conversation with...*

# Kentaro Fujimoto

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In a discussion ranging from logic to the Rocky films, Ad Absurdum talks to new arrival *Dr. Kentaro Fujimoto* about his various interests and his experience of philosophy departments around the world.

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As with any university, each year sees our faculties rearranged: some lecturers go, and some arrive. One new addition to the philosophy department this year is Dr. Kentaro Fujimoto, who specializes in the fields of logic and mathematics. Although Dr. Fujimoto already began lecturing in mathematics during the latter half of last year, it was only in September that he began to assume his role in the philosophy faculty. The Japanese logician is a world travelled philosopher, holding degrees from illustrious institutions such as Tokyo University and Stanford, and can boast a doctorate from Oxford University – where he also held a fellowship at Wolfson College. His 2010 paper, *Classes and Set Theory* was a finalist in the Kurt Gödel Fellowship Prize 2010. We met up with Kentaro to discuss his journey from a little town in Tokyo to the big leagues of professional philosophy.

**First of all Kentaro, thank you for taking the time to talk to us. How are you finding life in Bristol so far?**

KF: Well, it's perhaps the biggest city I've ever lived in abroad, although it has a very similar atmosphere to the high

school I attended. We're near the sea, so it feels very open and fresh. I like that. Other cities I've lived in such as Palo Alto are like a giant university campus, with loads of expensive shops and such. The fact that Bristol is a port city very much appeals to me. Overall, I've settled in well and am enjoying my work so far.

**You mentioned how much Bristol reminds you of home, and we'd like to know more about that. Where did you grow up, and what was life like early on?**

KF: I grew up in Ninomiya, a very small suburb of Tokyo. The people there are very traditional Japanese; they very much kept onto their culture even after the war. This isn't the case in the main parts of Tokyo, where people don't quarrel over who you hang out with for example. However, my family gave me a liberal upbringing – my mother was a freelance writer, while my father was a professor at Tokyo University. He taught something along the lines of philosophy.

**So did you grow up with philosophy from an early age? We'd imagine literature in all forms was very important considering your parents' backgrounds. Can**

**you remember a profound moment when you first became engrossed in philosophy?**

KF: Actually, I got into philosophy during my teens. I didn't go to high school often for personal reasons and I had a lot of time to kill. I began to read the works of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze – I was attracted by the whole postmodernist movement, as well as about others like Althusser. After I got into university though I lost interest in philosophy.

**What was the reason?**

KF: Well, I took on other projects. I tried to set up a company with some friends, and we made progress with some investors. I was very much driven to do something related to business, I didn't read any philosophy since I arrived! Instead I read books about business and how to get rich.

**So as well as trying to conquer the world of business, what did you study at Tokyo?**

KF: Well, university is very different in Tokyo. A lot of Japanese universities

adopt the western style currently, but Tokyo remains a traditional Japanese university. We take the first two years doing a liberal arts course, where we can study everything. Then we spend a year specializing in a subject, where I chose philosophy. My get-rich scheme was during my liberal arts years, but then I picked up my interest again after I left the business, which also came at a time when I realized business wasn't an environment I could be in. I began to ask myself how I should live, and went to find the answers in philosophy. Then I discovered philosophy never gives answers, it just creates more problems! The discipline though satisfied many of my needs, so I stuck with it.

**Is the curriculum different at Tokyo in regards to the content? Is there a heavy emphasis on eastern philosophy, or is it still dominated by western thought?**

KF: In Japan, the word 'philosophy' means western philosophy. It's a very lateral term. We have a completely different department for occidental philosophy, comprised of Japanese and Chinese thought. I did study Buddhism and Chinese philosophy though, but there's not really an edifice of Japanese philosophy. Most of the East-Asian countries are influenced by China, that's where Japan inherited Buddhism. During the Sakoku period we ceased interacting with other countries, and began to develop our own ideas, but we never had a unique philosophy per se.

**Of what you studied, is there any philosophy you learnt in Japan that you feel would be helpful or interesting to students?**

KF: Well, Chinese philosophy is different from Western philosophy because much of its emphasis is on the implementation of ideas. Something like trying to get promoted, or how to become happy. For philosophers like Plato, happiness is a very abstract thing, whereas in Chinese philosophy it is more social. It's about being part of a society and how to function within it. Also, Japanese philosophy as a profession is focused very much on the interpretation of imported philosophy. It's very important to us to understand what philosophers are saying, a philological focus. It's a study of litera-

ture, rather than the concepts. We're more concerned with text than the ideas and the arguments that follow. That creates a different environment of study. In the west, students seem to strive for originality and to write their own papers, whereas in Japan they strive more to gain a rich understanding of the text.

**Following this, you went on to do two master degrees. One in Tokyo, where you studied an interdisciplinary course and gained a MSc. Then the year after you went to Stanford for your philosophy masters. What made you go over to the States?**

KF: No academic reason pushed me, I just wanted to go abroad and experience somewhere. The US is a somewhat close country to Japan as they have a heavy influence on our culture, and I gained a scholarship from the American government. So that was it.

**What was the transition to the US like?**

KF: It was a massive culture shock. Many people gave me the wrong advice, they told me I'd automatically be able to speak English going to an English speaking country. I didn't make any effort, and it just didn't work. I should have spent time learning English. I knew some already since I'd studied it in high school, but it was a struggle.

**What did you study at Stanford?**

KF: My main focus was logic, and my supervisor was Solomen Feferman, who I think is one of the best logicians in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I was originally interested in mathematics because I read the about the *Poincare Conjecture*, and as a fourth year in Tokyo I organized some student seminars with friends about mathematical logic. I knew that logic had much to do with philosophy and I studied it in my spare time while at Tokyo, but there wasn't any formal course on logic while I was a student there. It was in Stanford where I seriously got into logic though. Feferman was an essential part of that. I also have to give thanks to Grigori Mints, a professor who had a very substantial impact on my career.

**Was there anything specific you found in logic that you didn't find in mathematics, or was it just a very natural transition?**

KF: Modern logic itself is heavily rooted in mathematics. We use mathematical tools to investigate logic, but the motives behind doing so are very philosophical. It is about how we reason; things like the status of the a priori or analytical analysis. But mathematical logic is also the principle engine for logical positivism. There's a very deep and essential connection between the two disciplines. I currently hold positions in both mathematics and philosophy departments, but it would be hard for a geometer to be in my position. This intrinsic link is where my interest in logic started to blossom, and it came very naturally.

**Was Stanford a big step with regards to what you were studying?**

KF: Very much so. A big difference. As I mentioned, the way philosophy is taught in Japan is very different, and over their university is mainly a place to help you get a job. Students prefer to get experiences, whereas western university is more rigorous with regards to its subject, so I found that I was studying a lot more.

**After Stanford, you travelled to Oxford to obtain your doctorate in philosophy. How did that come about?**

KF: Well originally, after Stanford I wanted to go back to Tokyo, but I changed my mind because of the difference in philosophy between Japan and the west, so I thought that it would be a great challenge for me to pursue philosophy over here. So I now had a bigger goal. I considered other universities like Berkeley and Stanford, both leaders in the field of logic. But I wanted to get more world experience and change countries, so Oxford was able to give me that.

**Did your two years in Stanford make the transition easier again, or did you get a second dose of culture shock?**

KF: Yes, the jump from US to UK was a lot easier than when I left Japan, but I still had trouble with English. I couldn't understand anything anybody was saying because of their accents! Obviously Stanford couldn't prepare enough for that.

When I first arrived I spent ages arguing with the porter of the dorms about my room key, because I couldn't pronounce the 'A' and 'T' differently. I was saying 'A13' and he said 'T13!' Apart from that though, the transition was easy, yes. I really liked the city as well. It felt like a movie full of lovely buildings and old English gentlemen.

**Who was your adviser and what was your academic focus while at Oxford?**

KF: My doctorate advisor was Dr. Volker Halbach, and my main focus was the theory of truth, which intrigued me greatly. You see, it is known the truth predicate has an expressive power in a language, as well as a deductive power sometimes. But truth is contradictory because of the liar paradox. The paradox, one may think, is just a pathological example and we shouldn't really care, but it's a very important example in mathematical logic to things like Gödel's incompleteness theorem; perhaps the most famous theory in 20<sup>th</sup> century logic. So truth is contradictory, but we use it every day. This begs the question, how can we use something that is contradictory? I was very intent on investigating that. Since our naïve conception of truth is very contradictory, we have to restrict it. We need to ask what a guiding principle is, and how can we proceed since the natural conception of truth leads us to contradictions. There are actually many paths to take, each of which characterises truth in regards to how we should use it. Here the philosophical problem arises, which one is the best? The truth predicate is very important to mathematical logic as it gives us a stronger theory, but depending on our conception of truth it gives the predicate different strengths. In many cases they are related to some number theory or set theory. That also allows us to investigate the relationship between them and truth.

**What are your plans for Bristol, Kentaro? Will you be continuing your investigations of truth theory, or is there a new plan for you?**

KF: Firstly, I'm very interested in bridging two branches of mathematical logic: proof theory and set theory. My background is in proof theory, and we also have Phillip Welch, a set theorist in the

mathematics department, so it gives me a great opportunity to work on this. I'm very keen on this synthesis. I'm searching to apply the techniques of proof theory to set theory in a practical manner, or to create some problems in set theory from the view point of proof theory. I'm still very interested in truth theory, so I now want to use it to investigate the general philosophy of mathematics. Things like where mathematical knowledge comes from. We can't find any mathematical objects in the natural world, it's not something like a chair, but we somehow communicate about mathematical objects like numbers and graphs. We know that '1+1=2', and we think this knowledge is more absolute and reliable than ordinary knowledge like the fact that I'm Japanese. This is very strange - we're so sure of the intangible. I'm actually a naturalist, so I want to give a better naturalist explanation of this problem in such a way that it can be connected to the real mathematics as well. Now I'm in both departments, I also want to raise mathematical problems motivated by philosophy. Usually, philosophical logicians want to apply logic to philosophical problems, but the other direction is also important.

**To close, we'd also like to ask you some very general questions, so the readers get to know more about you as well as your work. Firstly, what are your hobbies apart from unravelling the secrets of mathematics?**

KF: Well, since I came to Bristol I don't have any time to do my hobbies. Every day is very busy, but when I do find time I usually relax and rest. Just sitting in a chair doing nothing. Sometimes watching YouTube or a Japanese drama. Maybe I should watch English drama to improve my speaking skills, but the internet makes it easy for me to find Japanese ones. When I was in Oxford I also used to play piano, but I don't have one now.

**What type of music do you enjoy listening to, or even playing for that matter?**

KF: I mainly play classical stuff like Beethoven, Chopin, those are my favourite. I listen to any kind of music. I don't like rock though. Instrumental, electric and soundtracks I also enjoy listening to. BT is one of my favourite artists.

**Any favourite films?**

KF: Easy! My favourite film is Rocky!

**The question that has plagued philosophers since the dawn of time then: could you grade them?**

KF: Oh, very difficult question indeed. As a pro wrestling fan, 4 is first. 4 3 1 2. As a philosopher though, 1 2 3 4. I don't count 5. 6 is also difficult to rank, it's better than 5, and I enjoy that Antonio Tarver is in it. I can't understand any of the complicated movies here, but punching somebody is pretty simple.

**You mentioned that you read a lot during your childhood. What is some of your favourite literature?**

KF: Since I left Japan, I haven't read much - mostly philosophy and logic papers it seems. But my favourite novelists back home were Jiro Asada and Haruki Murakami, I like Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* a lot.

**Do you enjoy travelling?**

KF: I loved to when I was young, but am less energetic now. I backpacked through south east Asia, and saw places like Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. That was a fantastic experience.

**Finally, do you have a message for the students of Bristol University?**

KF: When I first started mathematics, I felt that my world changed. It's very difficult to get used to doing logic. Unless you're a genius, you could never master thinking mathematical. We all have to struggle with it, but the rewards you attain from it are incomparable. When you can do it, it just rewires the way you think, how you question things, and helps you approach any problem in a very interesting way. Whether or not logic will give you a benefit in terms of your career is debatable, but it gives a fantastic experience nonetheless. That's what happened to me. Thinking with logic is a revolution. If I could, I would recommend everybody to it study it seriously.

# I THINK *therefore* I AM

## THE DANGER

*Lewis James Savery* explores the political and moral philosophy of *Breaking Bad*: contains spoilers!

August was a time of dread and angst for many of us. A-level results were looming over University hopefuls; we watched Egypt swallow itself into a military police state; Cameron made claims about launching a full-fledged war with Syria – but most importantly, it was the season finale of *Breaking Bad*. Few shows enjoyed the cult status *Breaking Bad* attained, and its vast viewership in the UK was especially commendable for a show that never aired on British television. *Breaking Bad* became a critical success, hailed as one of the greatest television dramas in history.

For those who narrowly avoided being baptised in the Kool-Aid, *Breaking Bad* saw the odyssey of Walter White, an average high school chemistry teacher struck with the fatal news of lung cancer. The fallout of this sees Walt secure a working partnership with ex-student turned meth dealer Jesse Pinkman, as a means to procure enough capital for his family to survive after his demise. Walt eventually becomes consumed by the business, and morphs into a ruthless kingpin under the alias 'Heisenberg'. On the surface, this doesn't seem like the stuff of TV sainthood. However, what kept many of us needing a defibrillator by our side every time we watched was that the show relied heavily upon its sadistic blend of unbearable suspense and intense emotional attachment. How was this done? Bar the phenomenal performances of every cast member, you have to give a lot of credit to the innovative, meticulous writing of Vince Gilligan.

Gilligan's mantra for the series was 'I want to believe there's a heaven, but I can't not believe there's a hell', and so we see one of *Breaking Bad*'s explicit central themes is morality. Cranston received a letter from Anthony Hopkins commending him on his performance, but Gilligan could probably have got Mill to dedicate his foreword to him. In early episodes, Walt writes a list of the pros and cons of killing a petty drug dealer, which one could see as slight allusion to utilitarianism. Though clearly a consequentialist, it would be a stretch to call Walt a utilitarian. He enters a business that destroys and corrodes the lives of thousands, all for the sake of three: his unemployed wife; his disabled son, and his new-

born daughter. The greater good was not reserved for society, but only for his loved ones. Not only does this beg the question 'can the ends justify the means', but one could also make a claim that it calls into question our idea of what it is to be a good father. The role was once that of the provider, and in many cases still is, but what if he can't provide? One could see the venture into crime as a noble act, a necessary evil for good, but as the series progresses, Walt caves into to a nihilist world view, where actions are performed not for their inherent moral obligation, but rather simply based upon a calculation of risk and reward. One could see this as Gilligan writing in support of deontology. Chaos and despair are directly proportional to egoism in this story, and Walt's myriad of woes always stem from his decisions. His choice to let Jane die leaves her father in a perpetual state of grief, and then while at work he makes a fatal error that causes the death of 167 people. The death of innocents and Jessie's collapse into addiction following his beloved's demise plagues Walt throughout the series, and in the episode 'Fly', we see Walt nearly confess to Jessie in a state of excessive fatigue, but holds back for fear of the repercussions likely to ensue. Our actions carry consequences, and a lot of time, these consequences go further than we think they will.

Gilligan's affection for the concepts of heaven and hell show his affinity with justice. The series slips in and out of the dark criminal underworld, and on the outside the notorious meth kingpin is pursued by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Hank Schrader is the DEA's hero in the story, and represents a more black and white framework of morality - you break the law, you're wrong. Hank eventually gets his man, but only to reveal to him what he knew from the start – Heisenberg is his brother-in-law Walter White. The revelation does not stunt Hank's resolve, but he is impeded by an underwhelming lack of direct evidence. The virtues of family fail to keep Hank's professional values at bay, and in an instant Hank's perception of Walt flips from a humble laymen to that of a venomous castigator. The final tragedy of the story resides in the fact that Hank does not come

out on top. Instead, evil prevails as neo-Nazi thugs slay Hank to save Walt from arrest. Hank, the only character throughout the show who stays true to his values and does not falter, fails in his goal of toppling the meth empire.

Is this therefore a contradictory message that morality hinders us, that those who escape its binds are at an advantage? Perhaps, but this conclusion only comes about because of the ineptitude of the law. Walter's main rival in the series four and five Gus Fring also plays the citizen facade, using his fried chicken business to covertly nourish his meth trade. Gus is esteemed by the DEA for his regular donations and polite mannerisms, and only when Gus is murdered do they uncover his secret life. The rich use their wealth and social status to escape the persecution of the law, as do those who use crooked lawyers like Saul Goodman, and so it is only when they are stripped of these mechanisms that the law can truly serve its duty.

Art has always been a medium to project philosophical ideas. What has made *Breaking Bad* special was that it wasn't just an epic tale of greed and passion, but it attacked the viewer morally and ideologically. It made us call into question who we were rooting for. Most felt intense sympathy for Jessie because the fatal world of chance delivered him nothing but sorrow. Some felt Hank's intense commitment to the law made him our knight. Despite all of this, a lot of us stuck with Walt because no matter what atrocity he committed, we knew he was doing it for his family. But in the end, did we truly support Walt as he metamorphosed and embraced his darkness, and if we did, what does that say about us? The only way we can answer this question is by examining what beliefs we are committed to, and in the process, perhaps realize that our values may not be as strong as we think.

*For a more in-depth and comprehensive philosophical study of the series, Prof. David Koepsell's book 'Breaking Bad and Philosophy' is thoroughly recommended and available on Amazon.co.uk*

# Paradoxes

Hilbert's Hotel Hilbert's Hotel is a (hypothetical) hotel with an infinite number of rooms, each one of which is occupied. The hotel gives rise to a paradox: the hotel is full, and yet it has vacancies. That the hotel is full is obvious. It has an infinite number of rooms, and an infinite of guests; every room is occupied. That the hotel has vacancies is a little more difficult to demonstrate. Suppose that a new visitor arrives; can he be accommodated? At first it seems that he cannot, but then the hotel clerk has an idea: He moves the guest in Room 1 to Room 2, and the guest in Room 2 to Room 3, and so on. Every guest is moved to the next room along. For every guest, in every room, there is another room into which they can be moved. This leaves Room 1 vacant for the new visitor. Although the hotel is full, then, the new guest can be accommodated in Room 1. It is not only one new guest that can be accommodated; in fact, Hilbert's Hotel has an infinite number of vacancies. By moving every guest to the room the number of which is double the number of their current room, all of the odd numbered rooms can be vacated for new guests. There are, of course, an infinite number of odd numbered rooms, and so an infinite number of new guests can be accommodated.

Find more paradoxes at [www.logicalparadoxes.info](http://www.logicalparadoxes.info)

This edition of Ad Absurdum was made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship of **O2 Think Big**.

To contact the team or submit your own work for future issues, email us as [bris.adabsurdum@gmail.com](mailto:bris.adabsurdum@gmail.com)



# Events

**British Undergraduate Philosophy Society's Annual Conference:**

5th-6th of April, Sheffield University

Paper presentations from undergraduates and keynote speaker Professor Duncan Pritchard FRSE

Tickets £15 - includes free lunch and coffee/tea

For more information, go to <http://www.bups.org/forthcoming-conference/>

# Contributors

**Femi Omotoyinbo** ("Colours cannot Cogitate) is a 2010 graduate of Philosophy from the Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo State, Nigeria.

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**William Tuckwell** ("New Philosophy of the Environment Course, and trip") is a third year Philosophy and Politics Student

**Richard Fell** ("Where are they now: Bristol's Alumni) studied at Bristol University from 1967-1970, graduating with a 2.1 BSc in Politics and Philosophy.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL PHILOSOPHY MAGAZINE

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*Winter 2014*



think  
**big**  
with O<sub>2</sub>

