

Exploring Identity

Political and Philosophical

Anita Avramides reports on the memorial conference for her colleague Kathy Wilkes

Kathleen Vaughn Wilkes was a Fellow of St Hilda's College and Lecturer in the Faculty of Philosophy from 1973 until her untimely death in 2003. In April 2018 the College celebrated her life and work by holding a two-day conference in her honour. The event formed part of a year-long celebration of the 125th anniversary of the College. Close to one hundred people gathered from all around Britain and Europe to share memories of Kathy as both a philosopher and political activist. At the first session one of her brothers spoke of Kathy as a sister and family member, Professor Julia Annas reminisced about a shared time with Kathy as an undergraduate at St Hugh's College, Professor Helen Steward spoke of Kathy as a beloved tutor, Dr Edward Harcourt attested to her as an inspirational graduate supervisor, Dr Ralph Walker talked of her contribution

to the Faculty of Philosophy, and Dr Anita Avramides spoke of her as a colleague at St Hilda's. At the dinner that followed, the crime writer Val McDermid told of her friendship with Kathy that began when Val was an undergraduate at St Hilda's and Kathy the College Dean. Among the many books that Val has written, she has dedicated one to K.V. Wilkes. *The Skeleton Road* tells the story of an intrepid Oxford don from one of the Oxford women's colleges who travels to Croatia and gets caught up in the war for independence. While the story is fictional, it is inspired by Kathy's life and works.

Kathy's political work began, not in Croatia, but in (what was in 1979) Czechoslovakia. The story of how she came to be involved with the dissident philosophical community in Prague in 1979 has been recounted by many. In his obituary for Kathy, published in



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Publicity photograph taken by Kathy's brother, Patrick Wilkes

the *Guardian*, Bill Newton-Smith remembers that it was Kathy who first responded to an invitation from the philosophical community in Prague to conduct clandestine seminars there. Newton-Smith writes: "Harassment by the security police never daunted her, though, inevitably, the authorities eventually denied her visas. This merely galvanised her further and, with friends in the west, she created the Jan Hus Foundation, which was to become a major source of support for the dissident community." At the conference in April, Bill—along with Sir Anthony Kenny and Sir Roger Scruton—spoke of Kathy's commitment to the philosophers (and, indeed, all the people) of Prague. They recounted stories of imprisonment and of being chased to the border by the secret police. When the time came and Kathy was no longer allowed to enter Czechoslovakia, she turned



Conference at St Hilda's College April 2018

her attention to the philosophers in Dubrovnik—working at the Inter-University Centre (the IUC) to bring together academics from both the east and the west of Europe. When war broke out between Serbia and Croatia, Kathy remained in Dubrovnik. To mark her courage and assistance, she was made an honorary member of the Croatian army, and an honorary citizen of the city of Dubrovnik. After the war, she worked tirelessly for the city: raising

money, organising mine clearance and re-establishing the IUC, which had been largely destroyed by the war. For this, and her contributions to philosophy, she was awarded a doctorate honoris causa by Zagreb University. To honour her, the Croatian Ambassador, HE Igor Pogaz, attended the conference at St Hilda's in April and spoke warmly of what Kathy meant—and continues to mean—to the people of Dubrovnik.



Kathy receiving honorary citizenship of Dubrovnik in 1993



Kathy's brothers, Patrick, Andrew, and Robin Wilkes, at the unveiling of her photograph in the Oxford Philosophy Faculty

Kathy Wilkes was first and foremost an Oxford philosopher. On the second day of the conference there were sessions devoted to her philosophical work. One session concentrated on inter-disciplinary work between philosophy, psychology and neuroscience, both in Kathy's time and today. With her work in the philosophy of mind Kathy was much ahead of her day. She was one of the first philosophers to understand the importance of interdisciplinary work. Kathy's philosophical work on personal identity and the mind-body problem was informed by her knowledge of the latest empirical findings in both psychology and neuroscience. Along with colleagues at Balliol College, she ran an interdisciplinary seminar which culminated in, among other things, a volume entitled *Goals, No-Goals and Own Goals: A Debate on Goal Directed and Intentional Behaviour*. The editors of that book, Professor Denis Noble and Alan Montefiore, both spoke at the conference and recalled Kathy's contribution to the volume and those seminars. Dr Maike Glitsch

and Dr Anita Avramides spoke of the interdisciplinary work that is carried out at St Hilda's today in a workshop that they now run on a termly basis, "Brain and Mind: From Concrete to Abstract," which is open to all members of the University, to the general public and to A-level students from local schools. They acknowledged a debt to Kathy's early interest in bringing philosophy into discussion with other disciplines.

In another session, Dr Karen Nielsen (Somerville College, Oxford), Professor Joseph Moyal (Prague) and Professor Ricardo Viale (Milan) spoke about Kathy's legacy in both ancient Greek philosophy and philosophy of mind. Kathy's interests in philosophy ranged wide: she studied Greats as an undergraduate and did her PhD under the supervision of Tom Nagel and Richard Rorty at Princeton. Many of us, as we read back over Kathy's work—her books *Real People* and *Physicalism*, and the volume of papers she edited with Bill Newton-Smith, *Modelling the Mind*, as well as her many journal articles—were astonished at how

well they have stood the test of time.

The conference was brought to an end with a concert of piano music by the Botrill Piano Duo, who played music associated with both Prague and Croatia. A photograph of Kathy now hangs in the corridor outside the Ryle Room in the Philosophy Faculty. She is a woman whose intellect and whose passion touched the lives of generations of students and ordinary citizens. Bill Newton-Smith summed things up perfectly when he wrote, again in her obituary in the *Guardian*: "Some have sought to understand the world; others have sought to change it. Kathy's goal was to understand the world, but by insisting on the right of others to join with her in seeking to understand it, she did change the world as well."

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Photography by Keiko Ikeuchi

Applied Philosophy

Dan Zahavi explains how his current research uses insights from phenomenology to enrich work in psychiatry, psychology, and, in particular, nursing.

Phenomenology, the tradition I was trained in and have worked on since the early nineties, is not only a distinct philosophical approach, it is also a tradition that is firmly situated within a certain Kantian or post-Kantian framework. With Kant, the pre-critical search for the fundamental building blocks of reality was transformed into a transcendental philosophical reflection on what conditions something must satisfy in order to count as real. Although phenomenology differs in many ways from traditional Kantian transcendental philosophy—Husserl, for instance, argued that it is necessary to expand Kant's concept of the transcendental and include the humanities and the manifold of human sociality and culture in the transcendental analysis—phenomenology arguably still holds on to the reflective move that is the defining feature of transcendental thought. Its main aim is not to contribute to or augment the scope of our empirical knowledge, but rather to step back and investigate the nature of, and the conditions for, this knowledge.

If this is so, one might reasonably wonder whether phenomenology can inform empirical work? The answer to that question is straightforward. From the outset, phenomenology was seen by many as offering a refreshingly new way to conduct philosophy, one that connected with everyday experience in a way not normally seen, and for more than a century phenomenology has informed the debate in a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology,

and anthropology. Within the last few decades, phenomenology has also started to influence cognitive science and has become a significant trend within qualitative research. Max van Manen's book *Researching Lived Experience* from 1990 has, for instance, been cited more than 18,000 times.

In my own work, I have combined a scholarly engagement with Husserl's phenomenology with a systematic interest in issues also discussed in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. I have written extensively on topics such as consciousness, self-consciousness, selfhood, social cognition, empathy and shame. During the last few years, I have also started to explore how writings on collective intentionality, affective sharing and communal experience by phenomenologists such as Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Edmund Husserl, Gerda Walther, Martin Heidegger, Aron Gurwitsch, and Alfred Schutz might intersect with and impact theoretical considerations in the social sciences.

My current work in Oxford examines how ideas from phenomenological philosophy have been and can be used in psychiatry, psychology, and, in particular, nursing. The influence in some of these areas can be traced back to the early beginnings of phenomenology. In 1912, the psychiatrist (and philosopher) Karl Jaspers published a short article where he suggested that psychiatry could learn from Husserlian phenomenology. This was followed up in Jaspers'