

The background of the cover is a photograph of a modern building with a light-colored stone facade and large windows. The building has arched doorways at the ground level. Four people, three women and one man, are standing in the leftmost archway. They are wearing dark academic gowns over light-colored shirts. The ground is wet and reflective. The large 'OP' logo is superimposed on the upper right portion of the image.

OP

Oxford Philosophy 2026

CENTRE FOR THE HUMANITIES



UNIVERSITY OF
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Oxford Philosophy 2026

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WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR OF THE FACULTY BOARD



The Faculty is now settled in its new home in the Schwarzman Centre. It is a delight to see our students making such good use of our philosophy common room. Though our space is currently somewhat austere, with empty white walls, we are looking forward to being able to put up the portraits of Oxford philosophers and our series of Vieillard prints, illustrating Descartes’ *Discours de la Méthode* soon. We shall also be displaying the artworks of the two winners of our recent Philosophy Faculty Art competition, Nieka Van Lieshout, who is studying for the MSt in Ancient Philosophy, and one of our newest Faculty members, Mona Simion.

In April, we were very shocked and saddened to hear of the death of Dale Dorsey. Dale had recently joined us as Professor of Philosophy and the new tutorial fellow at Somerville College. In his short time at Oxford, he had already made his mark as a wonderful teacher, and as a lively and helpful contributor to both the Faculty and the College. His family are in our thoughts. He will be much missed at Oxford.

We welcome to the Faculty our other new University postholders: Raphaël Millière (Jesus), Carlotta Pavese (St Catz), Mona Simion (Exeter), and David Owens (Corpus). We are also pleased to be able to announce the election of Richard Pettigrew to the Wykeham Professorship of Logic.

This year sees the retirement of two long-standing postholders, Bill Mander (Professor of History of Modern Philosophy and a tutorial fellow at Harris Manchester since 1991) and Adrian Moore (Professor of Philosophy and a tutorial fellow at St Hugh’s since 1988). We have been very lucky to have both of them as colleagues for all these years, and we hope to continue to see much of them during their retirement.

We have hosted a number of major lectures during the year. Verity Harte (George A. Saden Professor of Philosophy and Classics at Yale University) has been visiting us for the year as George Eastman Visiting Professor, the first such professor in Philosophy since Donald Davidson visited in 1984–85. She gave her Eastman lecture on ancient approaches to understanding pleasure, entitled ‘Outside In: Theorizing Pleasure’.

Nancy Cartwright (Professor of Philosophy at the University of Durham and UC-San Diego) was the 2025–26 PPE Centenary Visiting Professor, the first such professor to be hosted by Philosophy. In November, she gave the PPE centenary lecture, entitled ‘Is Economics Queen of the Social Sciences?’

Our Gareth Evans Memorial lecture was given by Tania Lombrozo (Arthur W. Marks ’19 Professor of Psychology at Princeton University), with the title ‘Explanation: The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful’.

Finally, our new Sekyra and White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy, David Owens, gave his inaugural lecture, entitled ‘The Fragmentation of Justice and the Direction of History’. This is the first inaugural lecture we’ve had in Philosophy for very many years. We hope it will set a new tradition for incoming statutory professors.

This is my last year as Faculty Board Chair. I shall be handing over to Mark Wrathall (Professor of Philosophy and a tutorial fellow at Corpus) in the autumn. I am very happy to have found such an excellent successor.

Ursula Coope
Professor of Ancient Philosophy
Professorial Fellow, Keble College

Barbara Vetter Wins 2026 Leibniz Prize

Barbara Vetter (BPhil 2006; DPhil 2010), Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the Free University of Berlin, has been awarded a 2026 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize from the German Research Foundation for her work in modality theory. The prize is Germany’s most prestigious research award and includes €2.5 million in research funding. Up to ten Leibniz Prizes are awarded each year and Barbara was the only philosopher.



Raphaël Millière Awarded AI2050 Prize for Early Career Researchers

Raphaël Millière was awarded the 2025 AI2050 Prize for Early Career Researchers by the American Philosophical Association (APA), in recognition of outstanding philosophical scholarship relating to artificial intelligence (AI). The prize was awarded for his paper, ‘Normative Conflicts and Shallow AI Alignment’, which was published in *Philosophical Studies* (2025). In the paper, Raphaël examines challenges in aligning contemporary AI systems with human values. The APA selection committee praised the work for its combination of technical insight and normative depth.



Artur Harris Wins 2025 Fabian Dorsch Essay Prize

The 2025 Fabian Dorsch ESA Essay Prize was awarded to DPhil student Artur Harris for his essay titled: ‘Aesthetic Properties Are Not Kinds of Aesthetic Value’. The ESA Essay Prize for PhD students and early career researchers honours the memory Fabian Dorsch, a co-founder and the first secretary of the European Society for Aesthetics. The prize consists of a stipend of €500 and the winning essay is considered for publication in the journal *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics*.



Timothy Williamson Elected as a Foreign Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences

The Faculty is delighted to announce that Timothy Williamson, Wykeham Professor of Logic (Emeritus) has been elected as a Foreign Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. The Academy, which is one of the royal academies of Sweden, was founded in 1739. It takes special responsibility for promoting natural sciences and mathematics and is the body which awards the Nobel Prizes in physics and chemistry.



New Wykeham Professor of Logic: Richard Pettigrew

The Faculty is delighted to announce that Richard Pettigrew, currently Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bristol, will join us in Michaelmas Term as the new Wykeham Professor of Logic. Richard’s research covers a range of subject areas, including epistemology, decision theory, logic, and philosophy of mathematics. He is the author of *Choosing for Changing Selves* (OUP, 2020), *Epistemic Risk and the Demands of Rationality* (OUP, 2022), and *Opinion Pooling* (with Lee Elkin) (CUP, 2025). Richard’s 2025 John Locke Lectures feature later in this edition of *Oxford Philosophy*.



In Memoriam

Dale Dorsey (1976-2026)

It is with the greatest sadness that the Faculty announces the death of Dale Dorsey, Professor of Philosophy and Tutorial Fellow in Philosophy at Somerville College.

Dale joined the Faculty in September 2025 after a distinguished career at the University of Kansas, where he was Dean’s Professor of Philosophy. He had previously taught at the University of Alberta and University of California, San Diego, where he received his PhD in 2007.

Dale’s main interests concerned the relation between self-interest, morality, and practical reason. He was a prolific author, and published over 70 academic articles as well as *A Theory of Prudence* (OUP, 2021) and *The Limits of Moral Authority* (OUP, 2016). At the time of his death, Dale’s work was focussed on metaethical forms of perfectionism, along with tracing a history of the development of qualitative hedonism from Locke to Mill. He also had a new book *On Fellowship* in press with OUP, which features in the books section of this issue of *Oxford Philosophy*.

Outside his academic work, Dale was a keen amateur musician, and collector of old LPs. A devoted husband and father, he is survived by his wife Erin and their two children. Our thoughts are with them and the rest of this family.

During his short time with us, Dale had already made his presence felt through his warm personality as much as his philosophical ability. He will be deeply missed.



David Owens
Sekyra and White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy,
Corpus Christi College

David arrived at Oxford as a BPhil student in 1984 and has returned some four decades later as Sekyra and White’s Professor. In the meantime, he taught Philosophy at the University of Sheffield, the University of Reading, and King’s College London interspersed with visiting appointments, most recently at the WissenschaftsKolleg zu Berlin. He wrote his DPhil on the philosophy of mind with Jennifer Hornsby, Paul Snowdon, and Susan Hurley. After a diversion through metaphysics and epistemology, some twenty years ago he settled on moral and social philosophy as his primary focus. He has published two monographs in that area *Shaping the Normative Landscape* (OUP, 2012) and *Bound by Convention* (OUP, 2022).

David is particularly interested in the extent to which our morality is determined by social convention. Philosophers tend to think that the authority of social rules is to be grounded on pre-conventional moral principles. He sees social convention as playing a more fundamental role in our lives. For example, property rights, promises, and commands are social creations which enable individuals to shape the rights and obligations of those around them.

David intends to write a third monograph on social and political authority. Governmental officials demand our obedience as do employers, teachers, parents, team captains and orchestral conductors. What is the basis for such claims to authority? Are we obliged to obey even when their commands are misguided? Can they enforce their edicts? And who is responsible for what we do when we act in obedience to their commands?

David gave his inaugural lecture ‘The Fragmentation of Justice and the Direction of History’ in the Humanities Theatre at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities in May 2026. He was formally introduced by the University Bedel and Proctors, and we were delighted to have Luděk Sekyra, who recently endowed the Chair, in attendance.



Raphaël Millière
Associate Professor of Philosophy, Tutorial Fellow in Philosophy, Jesus
College, and Early Career Fellow in Schmidt Science’s AI2050 program

Before returning to Oxford, where he earned his DPhil, Raphaël was an Assistant Professor in the Philosophy of AI at Macquarie University and a Presidential Scholar at Columbia University. Raphaël’s research investigates foundational questions concerning the capacities and limitations of modern AI systems based on deep neural networks. In his work, he explores both first-order questions about whether these systems exhibit specific cognitive capacities, such as syntactic competence or analogical reasoning, and second-order methodological issues involved in evaluating these cognitive capacities in artificial systems.



Carlotta Pavese
Fulford Clarendon Professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science
and Tutorial Fellow in Philosophy, St Catherine’s College

Carlotta joins the faculty from the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell University, where she was Associate Professor of Philosophy. Previously she was Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Duke University (2014-2019), and a Bersoff Fellow at New York University (2013-2014). She received her PhD from Rutgers University in 2013. She did her undergraduate studies in Italy, at the University of Turin and at the University of Eastern Piedmont. She has broad research interests, but her areas of specialization are philosophy of mind and of cognitive science, action theory, epistemology, and philosophy of language.



Mona Simion
Professor of Philosophy and Michael Cohen Fellow in Philosophy,
Exeter College

Before coming to Oxford, Mona was Director of the Cogito Epistemology Research Centre at the University of Glasgow. She received her PhD in 2013 from the University of St Andrews. Her research is in epistemology, philosophy of language, moral and political philosophy, philosophy of gender and race, and philosophy of AI. She also does interdisciplinary research with psychology, neuroscience, computer science, social science, and medicine. Mona currently serves as the Ambassador of the European Research Council to the United Kingdom.

Adrian Moore

Adrian (A. W.) Moore is one of the most distinctive philosophical voices in contemporary philosophy. He took his undergraduate degree in Cambridge, and then came to Oxford for the BPhil and DPhil, where he was supervised by Michael Dummett. He returned to Cambridge as a junior research fellow at King’s College before taking up his tutorial fellowship at St Hugh’s College in 1988.

His books include *The Infinite* (Routledge, 1990 - with second and third revised editions in 2001 and 2019), *Points of View* (OUP, 1997), *Noble in Reason, Infinite in Faculty* (Routledge, 2003), *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (CUP, 2012), and *Gödel’s Theorem: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2022). He was co-editor of *MIND*, one of the leading philosophy journals in the world, with Lucy O’Brien from 2015 to 2025, and was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 2024.

Adrian’s work is remarkable for its depth and range. Only he could have included, in his “fat book on metaphysics”, chapters on Carnap, Quine, Lewis, Bergson, Derrida, and Deleuze. And as co-editor of *MIND*, he ensured that the journal was open to the best work regardless of area, style, or approach. There is even talk of a very short introduction to Deleuze in his retirement.

Much of Adrian’s work has been concerned, in very broad terms, with our attempts to make sense of things, including our attempts to make sense of how we make sense of things and of the limits of our sense-making. In pursuing these questions his writings have ranged widely over the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophical specialisations. Former students and colleagues are organising a retirement conference in 2027 where his distinctive voice will be celebrated.



Bill Mander

Bill Mander is the world’s authority on nineteenth century British Idealism. After undergraduate study at University College, London, Bill came to Oxford to take the BPhil in 1986. By 1990 he had completed his DPhil *The Subjective and Objective Views of Time: A Study in the Epistemology of Time*, under the supervision of Bill Newton-Smith. After a year as a junior research fellow at St Anne’s College, he moved to Harris Manchester College (then Manchester College) in 1991, where he spent the rest of his career as Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy.

Bill received the title of Professor of the History of Modern Philosophy in 2014, and he gave Faculty lectures on a wide range of figures from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, including Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel, and Schopenhauer.

In addition to his work on nineteenth century British philosophy, Bill has research interests in early modern philosophy and philosophy of religion (especially pantheism), and he is the author of numerous articles in these areas.

Author of the magisterial *British Idealism: A History* (OUP, 2011), which presented the first ever synoptic history of the movement, Bill’s other books include *The Philosophy of John Norris* (OUP, 2008), *Idealist Ethics* (OUP, 2016), *The Volitional Theory of Causation From Berkeley to the Twentieth Century* (OUP, 2023), and, most recently, *British Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century* (OUP, 2026) for the *Oxford History of Philosophy* series. He has occupied a unique place within the Faculty over the last four decades and will be sorely missed by students and colleagues alike.



‘To Love Truth for Truth’s Sake’
John Locke & Christ Church

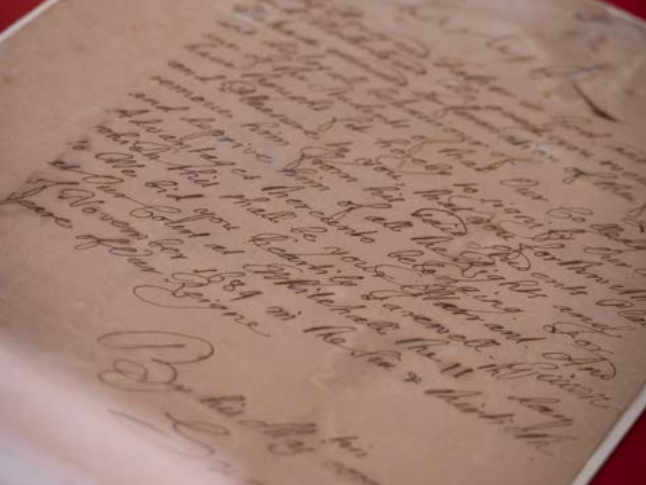
From 29 October 2025–14 January 2026, a free special exhibition was held in the Upper Library at Christ Church to celebrate the relationship between the College and John Locke (1632–1704). The title was taken from Locke’s letter to fellow philosopher Anthony Collins (1676-1729) of October 29, 1703: ‘To love truth for truth’s sake is the principal part of human perfection in this world, and the seed of all other virtues’.

Locke arrived at Christ Church in 1652 as a junior student where he was ‘looked upon as one of the most learned and ingenious young men in the college’. He took his BA in 1655/6 and, on taking his MA in 1658, he was elected a senior student. The studentship was initially awarded with the stipulation that Locke either take holy orders or a doctorate in medicine, and a requirement for renewal in 1673. Whilst Locke did undertake medical studies, in 1666 Charles II ordered Christ Church to allow him to hold his studentship permanently.

Locke resided at Christ Church, in Canterbury Quad for £10 p.a., until 1667 when he moved to the London home of the Earl of Shaftesbury. During his time at the College, Locke fulfilled various offices including acting as Censor of Moral Philosophy. And, in 1664, he completed the Latin manuscript now known as *Essays [or Questions] on the Law of Nature*.

Already in self-imposed exile in Holland, Locke was expelled by direct royal command from his studentship at Christ Church in November 1684, due to suspected involvement in the Rye House Plot of 1683—a plan to assassinate Charles II and his brother (and heir to the throne) James, Duke of York. He returned to England in February 1689 after the ‘Glorious Revolution’, and shortly after published the works for which he is best known today, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Two Treatises of Government*, and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Rather than returning to academic life, after a year in London, Locke moved to Oates in Essex in 1690, which was the home of Francis Masham and his wife, the philosopher Damaris Masham. He died at Oates in 1704.

The exhibition brought together early editions of foundational philosophical works by Locke and others in his circle to provide a picture of the political, intellectual and scientific landscapes of the time. Also on display was the Royal Order for the expulsion of Locke from Christ Church and Locke’s desk, made to his design and specifications by a London joiner, Edward Vernon, between November 1672 and May 1673. Aside from its intrinsic interest, the desk played a crucial role in the preservation of Locke’s legacy. On his death in 1704 it contained over two and half thousand letters addressed to him, one hundred and fifty draft replies, and about a thousand other loose papers. These were bequeathed to his heirs, the Earls of Lovelace, and were kept in the desk until the ‘Lovelace Collection’ was sold to the Bodleian nearly two hundred and forty years later in 1942.



Outside In

My Year as George Eastman Visiting Professor 2025-26

Verity Harte, George A. Saden Professor of Philosophy and Classics at Yale University, talks about the time she spent with us as recipient of one of Oxford's most distinguished honours.

The George Eastman Visiting Professorship is funded by the American Trust for Oxford University for a senior scholar and permanent resident of the United States to spend a year in Oxford, joining a faculty and as a professorial fellow of Balliol College. It was the most glorious opportunity and an amazing year.

Oxford boasts a terrific community of philosophers, not least in ancient Greek philosophy, and an embarrassment of other riches. In Michaelmas Term, I greatly enjoyed co-teaching The Eastman Seminar: 'Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy' to graduate students in the Faculty, with Ursula Coope. Over the course of the year I also took the opportunity to attend various philosophy talks, lectures on ancient Greek music, the Carlyle Lectures 'The Shape of Democracy' given by Jill Frank from Cornell University, and a reading group on Plotinus.

My central scholarly project was my book-in-progress, *Plato's Philebus: Constructing the Best Human Life*, for the series, *Cambridge Studies in the Dialogues of Plato*. A late dialogue, the *Philebus* has a reputation for obscurity and disorganization. Benjamin Jowett, distinguished classicist and Master of Balliol (1870-1893), complained of a 'diminution of artistic skill, a want of character, ... a laboured march...', and a degree of confusion and incompleteness in the general design'.

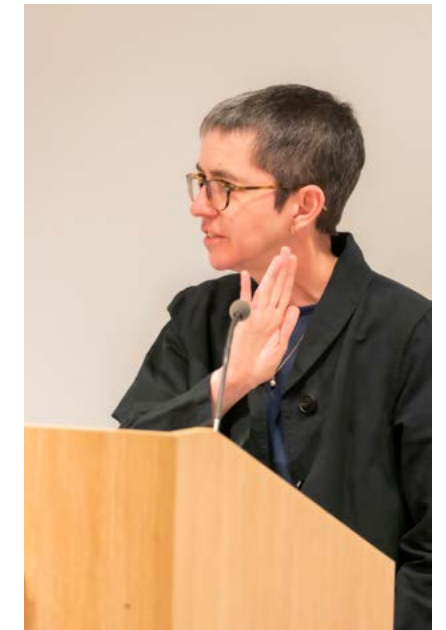
Despite its reader-friendly topic of the role of pleasure and knowledge in the best human life, its reputation has kept the dialogue the preserve of specialists. This is a pity, since the dialogue boasts a wealth of philosophical riches, including an innovative metaphysics of kinds, a sophisticated methodology for evaluating complex kinds, and a rich philosophical psychology, to name just three examples. It also contains the lengthiest treatment of pleasure of any Platonic dialogue. Part of the difficulty has been scholarly reluctance to take the dialogue at its word. It sets out a specific project and executes



it determinedly. It is striking both for the range of topics it takes to be relevant to its ethical project and the discipline with which it scrupulously attends to them only insofar as they pertain to that project.

The *Philebus*' unexpected approach to theorizing pleasure was the subject of my George Eastman Lecture in May 2026. It is, I argued, an approach that theorizes pleasure from the outside in, embedding the mind in the world and incorporating that world into the constitution of hedonic experience. For comparison, I pointed to the rich and capacious use of 'experience' to which J. M. Hinton drew attention in his 1973 book, *Experiences*. As he argued, this is the everyday use of the term and a far cry from the reduced notion he dubbed 'the special, philosophical notion of an experience', which treats mental experience as inward in such a way as to be independent of what happens external to us.

That special, philosophical notion is the one at work in Robert Nozick's famous Experience Machine thought experiment, generally taken by contemporary philosophical discussion to challenge hedonism. No similar challenge faces the outside-in theorist of pleasure. Plato, of course, was no hedonist, but neither he nor his opponent would take hedonism to be vulnerable in this way. Nor is hedonism Plato's only target. In his Academy, Plato's colleagues included both hedonists and anti-hedonists. The *Philebus* is a testament to how he confronts and steers a course between these.



The Philebus, I argued, theorizes pleasure from the outside in, embedding the mind in the world and incorporating that world into the constitution of hedonic experience.



Nietzsche *and* Truth



Stephen Mulhall, Professor of Philosophy and Tutorial Fellow in Philosophy, New College

‘What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation and decoration, and which, after they have been in use a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins’.

This passage, which comes from Nietzsche’s early but only posthumously-published essay ‘On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense’, is one of his most notorious pronouncements; and there’s no doubt that it offers an extreme provocation to any reader. For if, as he declares, all truths are illusions, then it would seem to follow that anything that any human being believes to be true is false; but that would include Nietzsche’s own influential accounts of the nature of art, morality, and metaphysics, and in particular this claim about truth itself. Such a radically sceptical or nihilistic stance about truth seems to be not just self-refuting, but so obviously self-refuting that it’s hard to credit that even a young Nietzsche would fail to see this. Or has he simply been carried away by the exuberant, even melodramatic rhythms of his own rhetoric?

Such a diagnosis forms part of a more general tendency in philosophy to regard

Nietzsche’s selection and placement of words—the poetic and rhetorical register of his prose—as essentially decorative, as pleasurable flourishes which might be altered or eliminated without any damage being done to his meaning. But what difference would it make to our sense of his achievement if we were to take the opposite tack? How might we engage with his words if we did not assume that the only way of taking what he says seriously is not to take it literally? In the rest of this article I will sketch a way of beginning to read this notorious passage that assumes Nietzsche means every word that he says, but denies that the meaningful content of his utterances can be assessed without assessing their figurative form.

Nietzsche’s answer to his question about truth begins by characterizing truth as ‘a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms’. So the category of ‘metaphor’ comes first, even if it is only first among equals. For the rest of the answer amounts to a long sequence of metaphorical characterizations of truth, and so alerts us to the fact that Nietzsche’s response to a question that might most naturally be taken metaphysically (as a question about the essential nature of truth) is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. And the same is true of his opening identification of truth with metaphor: saying that truth is a mobile army of metaphors looks much more like a metaphorical utterance than a literal assertion. So if we want to make further progress in interpreting this passage we must clarify what it is to speak metaphorically.

This is a longstanding topic in aesthetics, and of course there is no consensus about the matter. But the American philosopher Stanley Cavell has offered a helpful account from which I propose to extract three lessons. First, metaphors should be distinguished from similes. Similes (typically expressed in the form ‘A is like B’) can always be made out to be true, since there will always be some respect in which any two items resemble one another; so

Nietzsche’s answer to his question about truth begins by characterizing truth as ‘a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms’.

when they are true they are literally true. By contrast, metaphors (typically expressed in the form ‘A is B’) are always not only false but wildly or outrageously false, since they claim an identity between two items that could not be taken to be one and the same by any sane human being (eg ‘Juliet is the sun’). This is what prompts us to find another way of understanding them, of grasping them as, if true, then wildly or outrageously true. Second, as the literary critic William Empson had it, metaphors are pregnant: whereas the content of a simile can and should be capable of being fully specified (e.g., ‘Haaland is like a lion: he pursues the ball ferociously’), an apt paraphrase of a metaphor’s burgeoning meaning always has ‘and so on’ built into it. It is inherently capable of supplementation unless and until the metaphor dies (e.g., ‘Juliet is the warmth of Romeo’s world, his day begins with her, only in her nourishment can he grow, ...’). Hence, third, paraphrasing a metaphor is a kind of imaginative midwifery—a collaboration between its creator, its audience and their shared natural language. For as successive generations of critics offer new paraphrases of the meaning in a poet’s metaphor, they disclose further ranges of vitality in that poet’s way of inheriting the bent and genius of their tongue.

It’s worth noting that all three of these lessons are themselves conveyed metaphorically, as is their inter-relatedness. The figure of pregnancy delivers the figure of midwifery, and points toward the human (pro)creative process that is a primary site of human imaginative engagement—of mythical, magical, and metaphysical thinking. This is a figurative logic that is as rigorous in its own way as the interweaving structures of deductive arguments, and just as capable of transferring truth from origin to outcome. But the skills needed to keep track of truth in such figurative contexts require the same imaginative powers that produced the figure in the first place.

This approach to metaphor might be buttressed by an etymological one—something evident to anyone with Nietzsche’s kind of philological training. For where Cavell (and Empson) conceive of metaphor metaphorically, others from Aristotle to Derrida have emphasized that the term’s literal meaning is ‘to transfer’,

‘to carry over or across’, ‘to move from one place or region to another’. But if we acknowledge the word’s literal meaning, we can see that its use to characterize a distinctive linguistic operation is an exemplary instance of that operation—a transfer of meaning from its original Greek context to other Greek contexts, and thereafter to an overlapping chain of contexts in Western Europe’s understanding of its art, its language, and itself. In short, even the word ‘metaphor’ is a metaphor.

Read against this background, two aspects of Nietzsche’s initial answer to his own question stand out. First, he equates truth not specifically with metaphor, but with a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms. The figure of a mobile army links truth with warfare, whilst invoking an implied contrast between slow-moving, rigidly-organized battalions and fast-moving guerrilla-like groups flexibly responsive to circumstance and speedily adaptive to context, both collectively and individually. Second, the commas that conjoin metaphor with metonymy and anthropomorphism are designed to balance their collective similarity and their individual distinctiveness. They make it possible for Nietzsche to emphasize either their generic figurative power or their specific ways of realizing it according to purpose and circumstance, as his guerrilla campaign to render his conception of truth victorious develops. And both emphases are already at work in this opening: for the figure of a mobile army is of course an anthropomorphism as well as a metaphor; and placing metaphor as the leading element in this tripartite guerrilla band at once foregrounds the primacy of its distinctive mode of figuration and permits it to function as a metonym for the other two figurative modes that follow, and so for the figurative dimension of discourse in general.

Truth’s army is thus both the subject of Nietzsche’s investigation and his means of carrying it out. His wildly false metaphorical assertions of identity are a way of fighting on truth’s behalf, not of waging war against it; but to understand goals, strategy and tactics of his campaign, we will have to make full but disciplined use of our imaginations.

From a Point of View

Richard Pettigrew

Professor of Philosophy, University of Bristol

How should we build the point of view we take on the world; the point of view that includes our beliefs, our values, and perhaps also the attitudes we take to risk? Once it is built, how should it evolve, when and how should we gather new materials to build new points of view out of it, and how should we act in the light of the point of view we have at a given time? What normative weight do our actions have when they flow from a point of view built in a particular way? And what role do these points of view play in our moral theorising? These were the questions on which I hoped to make progress in my John Locke Lectures last summer.

The first half of the series concerned the part of our point of view through which we represent the world to ourselves. I model this component by our credences, which measure how strongly we believe the propositions we entertain. Credal epistemologists tend to take a rather indirect approach to what is arguably one of the central questions of epistemology, namely, what should I believe? They begin by saying what my credences should be like before I gather any evidence at all—my so-called priors—and then they say how I should update my credences to incorporate new evidence I receive. Credences might then be said to be warranted if they are the result of updating rationally permitted prior credences in the rationally required manner to incorporate the evidence you’ve acquired.

This means that a lot of the action in this approach to epistemology lies in justifying the norms that say how my priors should be, and the norm that says how I should respond to new evidence. For instance, Probabilism says my credence in a necessary truth should be maximal and my credence in a necessary falsehood should be minimal, while my credence in a disjunction of two mutually exclusive propositions should be the sum of my credences in those propositions; the Principal Principle says roughly that my credences should match any known chances; and Conditionalization says that, upon learning a proposition, my new credence in a given proposition should be the proportion of the credence I previously assigned to the learned proposition that I also assigned to this given proposition. These three principles form the foundation of uncertain reasoning in the sciences—together, they give us versions of Bayes’ Theorem that underpin much statistical inference from the data



Purple Heron, Ranthambore National Park, India. Photography by Richard Pettigrew

we extract from the world to conclusions about what underlies that data and generates it. It is the contention of most credal epistemologists that these principles are also the central norms that govern our credences outside the sciences, and some credal epistemologists also add further norms that constrain how extreme your prior credences may be.

But how might we establish these norms? In the first two lectures, I described an axiological approach. Credences play two roles in our lives: they represent world; and, together with our values, they guide our actions. Some credences will play these roles better than others: a higher credence in a true proposition represents the world better than a lower one; a credence that leads you to make a choice that gets you more of what you want guides your actions better than one that leads you to choose something that gets you less of what

you want. We can measure how well credences play each of these roles and then ask what sorts of credences measure up and which don't. For instance, one argument for the norm of Probabilism goes like this: for any legitimate way of measuring how well credences represent the world and any set of credences that don't relate to one another as Probabilism says they should, there is an alternative set of credences that do behave as Probabilism demands and that are guaranteed to represent the world better; that is, they represent the world better, however the world is! And another is this: for many ways you might be uncertain about the decisions you might face with your credences, if they aren't as Probabilism say they should be, there will be alternatives that are guaranteed to guide your choices better, at least in expectation. And there are arguments for the Principal Principle, Conditionalization, and even further restrictions on the rational prior credences that run along similar lines.



*Credences play two roles in our lives:
they represent world; and, together
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In the second half of the lecture series, I turned from the norms that govern the doxastic component of our point of view to questions about the decisions we make from that point of view, the normative weight of those decisions, and the moral status of different points of view that a single person takes across the course of their life. The history of decision theory is a history of one dominant theory—expected utility theory—and a host of competitors, such as those that permit sensitivity to risk and those that permit sensitivity to ambiguity. While these competitors often have our intuitive judgments about what is rationally permissible in particular cases on their side, they often have structural features against which our intuitions rebel. The result is a sort of stalemate.

Building on joint work with Catrin Campbell-Moore and Jason Konek, in the fourth lecture I tried to mount an argument that could break that stalemate. Very roughly, the idea is this: A decision theory is a tool we use to get us as much of what we want as we can; when we face a choice between various options, we use this tool to select one of the options. So now suppose we're uncertain which choice we'll face. We can now ask which decision theory we should use to get us as much of what we want as we can. How do we ask this? We ask the decision theory itself. If it recommends using something other than itself, we say it's self-undermining. We can show that orthodox expected utility theory is not self-undermining, but many of its rivals are.

Some of our actions have the power to shape the normative landscape: if I promise to do something, I usually create a duty to fulfil that promise; if I consent to you doing something, I usually make it permissible for you to do it. But it seems that an action only has this normative power if the preferences on which the action is based were formed in particular ways. If they were formed under coercion or deception or under unjust pressure of some sort, the resulting actions will lack that normative power.

In the fifth lecture, I asked how our preferences must be formed if they are to have the normative power they typically have. Very often, what we do from one point of view, which we inhabit at one time in our life, affects us when, at another time, we inhabit a different point of view. And of course the later self that has that second point of view might be very badly affected by the earlier self's action. In the final lecture of the series, I tried to understand why there are ways in which we may treat other selves we will become that are not ways in which we may treat other people. Why may I place a significant burden on one of my future selves in order to benefit my current self, even though I may not place that same burden on someone else in order to benefit myself? Drawing on a style of argument that is often mounted in favour of minimal property rights, I offered an answer.



AN UNREQUITED PASSION

Award-winning author Susanna Clarke (PPE St Hilda's, 1978) reflects on her time in Oxford and how it influenced her future career.

In 1978 I went up to Oxford, to St Hilda's to read PPE. I'd done well on my entrance exam; I particularly prided myself on rather a sophisticated answer to a question on the difference between superstition and belief, only afterwards realising that I'd based it on the lyrics of Stevie Wonder's song, 'Superstition'.

The part of PPE that excited me the most was philosophy. I liked the idea of getting outside conventional ways of thinking; I imagined that the over-familiar would be peeled away to reveal something startling and new. I was also fearful that I wouldn't be equal to the task. Both conjectures turned out to be true to some extent. I now look back on philosophy as one of several

unrequited passions I experienced at Oxford. I loved it but was aware that I wasn't very good at it. In spite of this, reading philosophy gave me a feeling of intellectual winds around my shoulders, of vast spaces of thought opening up.

Unsurprisingly several of my tutors found me rather frustrating; but I had the good fortune to be taught by Dr Kathy Wilkes who belonged to St Hilda's. I was and am in awe of her. At the time we, her students, knew—though only in broad outlines—about her work on behalf of scholars behind the Iron Curtain. She told us about samizdat publications, ideas passed around in secret on precious typescripts, worn thin by going through so many hands.



Photography Duncan Elliott

With Kathy Wilkes philosophy was not only intellectual, it was also dashing, romantic, fraught with actual danger.

She told us, her students, how she would fall asleep reading Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and dream that she was still reading it—though what it said in her dream she did not impart.

Her tutorials were like herself, warm, friendly and welcoming. My ineptitude never fazed her in the slightest; she didn't seem to notice it. It was the late 70s and I remember us laughing about the difficulty of trying to do philosophy while drinking the sherry she hospitably pressed on us, the urgency of trying to say what we thought before the sherry relaxed us too much.

My final year was both the happiest and unhappiest. I studied harder and I enjoyed studying much more than before. (It's entirely possible I hit my stride too late.) At the same time, for some now-forgotten reason, I had partly withdrawn from seeing my friends and was suffering intermittently from depression. I have a vivid memory of cycling round the city late one evening when there was hardly anyone around, with a slight feeling of dissociation, as if I was about to fall off the world. The only person to notice that I wasn't doing well was Kathy Wilkes. She watched me stumble out of one of her tutorials one evening and asked if I was alright. I probably answered that I was fine; I probably thought that was the right thing to say.



Kathy Wilkes

I left with a third and for many years I felt that Oxford was something I had ‘failed’ at. Yet it had already provided signs of a way forward. In my last year a New College philosopher (whose name has sadly been expunged from my brain though I remember a friendly, cheerful face) read an essay of mine and then said, ‘You write very clearly, don’t you?’ It surprised me since I hadn’t imagined that writing clearly was something particularly worthy of comment.

In the years that followed I began writing fiction. In some ways what a novelist does is the opposite of what a philosopher does: a novelist must always think in terms of the particular rather than the abstract.

Once, long after I had left Oxford, I was seated in a café in Provence talking with a fellow PPE graduate who decided to explain economics to me. ‘It’s very straightforward,’ he said. ‘Suppose a man builds a factory.’ I supposed it. Then he

described the various things that ensue from building factories. While he was talking I began to wonder if the man who built the factory was married—and if so what his wife thought about it. I also—in perfect obedience to the instruction—imagined the factory; it was dark red and had an unsettling melancholy like a building in a de Chirico painting. I told these thoughts to the well-meaning economist. ‘That has nothing to do with economics,’ he said severely and gave me up as a bad job. Meanwhile I was beginning to think that the wife of the man really was quite unhappy about the factory and had been hoping to use the money to open a hat shop...

Writers are often asked about the themes of their work. I can only say that for me the story—and characters—come first and are always primary. I find out what I think at the end of the writing process, rather than allowing ‘what I think’ to control anything.

While there are clearly many points in the creative process when fiction writers need to think clearly and rationally, fuzzy thoughts are also useful: thoughts shaped like burrs, covered with little hooks latching on to other thoughts as they roll along. Then you can sort through the bits and pieces they’ve picked up and decide what looks promising. Or to use a different analogy, writing is a bit like lowering a bucket into the subconscious and seeing what comes up. I have always felt that the writer part of me was more intelligent than the analytic part of me, but harder to access directly.

There have been times when I felt that I’d barely salvaged anything from three years at Oxford, but then I realised that this can’t possibly be true. Once when we were debating some unlikely proposition or contortion of language, Kathy Wilkes remarked that it was the sort of thing that was only ever said in philosophy tutorials ‘where all the mad things are said.’ It is my passion for, and devotion to, saying and writing ‘all the mad things’ that has made me a writer of fantasy fiction.

And Oxford itself has haunted my writing. Scholars—usually quarrelling—abound in my fiction; so do libraries, archives, universities, and medieval architecture; and I have a passion for research and detail (which I slightly regret since I think it explains why it took eleven years to write my first novel).

Time and time again I come back to Oxford in my dreams to study once more; I imagine I’ll continue doing so for the rest of my life (although cheerfully I seem to be doing better recently). Success came to me later in life. Now it seems to me no bad thing to have glimpsed something rather beautiful and yet not to have acquired it.

It is my passion for, and devotion to, saying and writing ‘all the mad things’ that has made me a writer of fantasy fiction.



Susannah Clarke’s novel *The Bishop of Durham Attempts to Surrender the City* will be published by Bloomsbury in October 2026.

A long-lost chapter in the lore of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, it is an enchanting adventure into the magic of medieval England.

Mill *at* Somerville

In Conversation with Michele Moody-Adams

In May 2025, **Michele Moody-Adams (PPE Somerville, 1978)**, Joseph Straus Professor of Political Philosophy and Legal Theory at Columbia University delivered the 2025 John Stuart Mill Lecture at Somerville College. In ‘Mill on the Complementarity of Permanence and Progress’, Moody-Adams reexamined Mill’s effect on contemporary culture by exploring his view of the relationship between tradition and progress.

Returning to Somerville also allowed Moody-Adams to confront her own progress by reuniting with two generations of her former philosophy students: **Karen Margrethe Nielsen**, now Professor of Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy, studied under Moody-Adams while completing her doctorate at Cornell University and **Karolina Nixon**, now a 2nd-year BPhil student, studied under Moody-Adams while completing her BA at Columbia University.

In the following conversation, the three Somervillians discuss what Mill has to say about the possibility of constructive political discourse, the notion of ‘civic grace’ as a Socratic virtue, and the university’s role in democratic education.

Karolina Nixon: Can you start by giving us your lecture’s key takeaways?

Michele Moody-Adams: I have found that recent criticisms of Mill’s influence on contemporary culture are rooted in problematic interpretations of Mill. These critics blamed Mill for much of what’s so bad about contemporary political and cultural discourse, when in fact, his larger vision of what it is to lead a good human life is deeply embedded in the idea that freedom of thought and discussion is central to Socratic self-examination. Mill seeks a balance between forces that prefer permanence and stability in society and the forces agitating for change and progress, and he thinks that substantive defence of each kind of political project depends upon having some kind of an adversary to argue with. So Mill wants both permanence and progress as part of a healthy polity, and he thinks it’s important for a good human life that we’re always listening to people who don’t agree with us.

Karolina Nixon: I find it serendipitous that we’re having this conversation at a time when many fear that democracies around the world are under threat. What, if any, is the benefit of studying Mill at this particular moment?

Michele Moody-Adams: Part of how we came to this moment is by accepting a politics of grievance and resentment as the defining characteristic of political life. Mill explains that we shouldn’t be thinking of ‘the other side’ as opponents, but as partners in an ongoing conversation about the good life. I’m not saying that Mill could prevent every flaw or failing of contemporary democracy, but many of these are related to not wanting to hear things that are somehow upsetting to our ordinary conventional beliefs. Mill tells us that sometimes we’ve got to be willing to trust that even the view that may be most upsetting could be the thing we most need to contemplate or consider. I think that’s a very profoundly Socratic dimension of Mill’s view.

Karen Margrethe Nielsen: Speaking of Socrates, you talk about ‘Socratic civic virtue’ in your lecture, specifically what you call ‘civic grace’. Could you say more about what you mean by that?

Michele Moody-Adams: What makes the notion of grace so important here is that it is something that we neither earn nor deserve. Rather, it involves a kind of openness to listening and allowing another to lead the life they lead. When I think of ‘civic grace’, I’m thinking of an attitude of understanding and goodwill, even towards people with whom you disagree. I think that the willingness of Socrates to keep talking, even when people are resistant or

feel they’ve been tricked, consists in a kind of grace. For Socrates may even go into these conversations confident that there’s something lacking in what the other person has to say, but he never says it that way. He tries to get the other person to realize the deficiencies of their views without saying ‘Your view is deficient’. That’s a kind of grace.

Karolina Nixon: If I may, do you think that universities play a particular role when it comes to teaching students how to engage in this type of conversation, especially as future democratic participants?

Michele Moody-Adams: Absolutely, though it’s not an easy role. Universities, as the American Association of University Professors put it, should be an ‘experiment station’: places not only for testing scientific hypotheses, but for airing, discussing, and contesting ideas that might be discomforting to hear. Universities can give people space to forcefully contest such ideas in a way that no other public forum can—without violence, or threats of violence. My fear is that we’re losing, at least in the US, that confidence in the university as an experiment station for ideas that people may not find easy to hear. I do want to acknowledge that, in principle, no one should feel afraid that they’re going to be subject to violence based on speech. But I think we’ve made people forget that sometimes even the most upsetting use of language is still a use of language until it becomes something different.

Mill explains that we shouldn’t be thinking of ‘the other side’ as opponents, but as partners in an ongoing conversation about the good life.

Karen Margrethe Nielsen: In your lecture, you spoke about ‘politically constructive expressions of writers’ indignation’ versus what you describe as a ‘politically destructive self-righteousness’. Some think this exposes a tension in Mill’s thought, specifically that the limitations associated with the harm principle conflict with his idea of open debate. Do you believe that this is correct?

Michele Moody-Adams: The last portion of my lecture addressed this tension. Mill is willing to say that even speech loses its immunity if it’s set in a context that converts it into something harmful, but his response is more dismissive than it ought to be. For example, he considers the case of a person who claims to have a right not to hear certain things, and Mill responds that if certain speech offends, just don’t listen. But occasionally, you can’t just ‘not listen’. Now what do you do about that fact? Should you try to take the Millian path and respond with speech? I think you should, rather than censoring, proscribing, etc., because I worry that situations spiral into violence when people can’t use their capacity for expression to make others aware of how harmful their expression is. 99% of the time, the best route is to target harmful speech with speech that says it is harmful and here’s why that’s wrong. I was an administrator at multiple US institutions, and I recall that students would often target harmful speech by calling for censorship. I think the better route is to respond to it, and point out that the cooperative possibilities of our life on campus depends upon being more respectful towards each other.

Karolina Nixon: Considering the current campus climate at many universities right now, especially my alma mater Columbia—which is also your current institution—what



happens when a context that is traditionally supposed to be an ‘experiment station for ideas’ becomes a context of protest that potentially has material consequences for speech?

Michele Moody-Adams: It’s complex. I won’t go into too much detail, but I think people hear much more directly violent assaults on them than they ought to hear. That doesn’t mean what they’re hearing is not offensive; I understand that the historical context in which these things are said can make the language sound much more threatening. And there are some people who do use threatening language. But when the

protest itself is not violent, and the language could be interpreted as either targeting your non-material interests or not, I think we ought to err on the side of giving it space. That view has become very hard to defend now. But I do think there are enough people realizing that the current censorship is putting a chill on speech generally. One of the last lines of my lecture was that we have to be more forgiving, even of speech that’s troubling, and more willing to speak back to it than to suppress it. Otherwise, our ability to say things that someone else might be troubled by will be limited as well. When people feel that they can’t contest ideas, then we’re all in trouble.

Going Beyond Morality *Without* Leaving It Behind

Love and Respect in Intimate Relationships

Jeremy Fix, Associate Professor of Ethics and Moral Psychology and Tutorial Fellow in Philosophy, Keble College, tells us about his recent work on the philosophy of love.

Morality and intimacy might seem like strange bedfellows. On the one hand, both draw us out of ourselves and unite us on equal terms. In intimacy, you matter to me as I do, I to you as you do. That is why your taste matters just as mine as concerns what to eat or watch. And so it is with morality. That is why your consent matters just as mine as concerns whether and how to interact. On the other hand, intimacy binds individuals differently, but morality binds everyone the same. I am intimate only with some but a moral subject to all. Intimacy discriminates and is discretionary. Morality does not and is not.

Does morality corrupt intimacy? A familiar critique of modern ethical theory, no matter its stripe, is that its exemplar is incapable of genuine friendship or romance. The alleged source of the problem is the role of the motive of duty in the moral psychology of the moral exemplar. All they do stems from, or at least is conditioned by, the motive of duty. Such motivation is meant to be incompatible with acting from direct personal concern characteristic of intimate relationships. In metaphorical

terms, whereas the person of self-interest is a bad intimate partner because they look primarily into themselves, the exemplar of modern ethical theory is meant to be a bad intimate partner because they look primarily up to the moral law. Neither looks over to you as an intimate should. As you matter for the person of self-interest only to the extent that and because you make a dent on their self-interest, so you matter for the exemplar of modern ethical theory only to the extent that and because you offer an opportunity to do their duty. So the criticism goes.

This criticism is mistaken. It has a false picture of morality and, because of it, a false picture of intimacy. ‘The motive of duty’ is a name, and what it is a motive to do depends on the function of morality. It need not be impersonal if morality includes how to treat other people as persons and direct our attention to them. Indeed, on an account of morality influenced by, among others, Kant’s ethical theory and Aristotle’s account of the virtue of justice, the function of morality is for each of us to give each other equal discretion over whether and how we interact.

*Morality is fundamentally about
establishing our independence
from each other through how we
regard and treat each other.*

Morality is fundamentally about establishing our independence from each other through how we regard and treat each other. The motive of duty is a motive to relate to each other that way. It is the motive through which we establish our independence from each other in and through our interaction with each other. As we might put it, morality is the form of interpersonal relationships.

Intimate relationships are interpersonal relationships if they are anything. They thus cannot conflict with the moral relationship between us without being corrupt forms of intimacy in virtue of their immorality. After all, an intimate relationship which is incompatible with the moral relationship is one in which one partner does not have equal discretion over the existence or nature of the relationship. That is subordination or domination. The formal inequality in it makes it a bad intimate relationship because makes it a bad moral relationship and so a bad interpersonal relationship.

So in intimacy, we do not leave morality behind. We do, though, go beyond morality in intimacy. So what distinguishes intimate interpersonal relationships which hold only between some individuals and vary across individuals in their content from the moral relationship which holds between all individuals and does not vary across them in its basic content? This question divides into two sub-questions, often labeled as about ‘reasons to love’ and ‘reasons of love’. The first concerns who is lovable for whom; the second concerns what distinguishes how partners relate to each other beyond morality.

The first question arises because intimate relationships are discriminatory and discretionary whereas the moral relationship is not. So what makes someone lovable for someone else? Despite many differences in the details, many current positions

claim that each person is lovable for each other person or, put otherwise, that you cannot be irrational in loving someone. Arationalists, such as Harry Frankfurt, deny that there are reasons to love. They claim that love is, at bottom, a basic desire for the welfare of the beloved, and that there are no rational constraints on basic desires. Agapists, such as Kieran Setiya and J. David Velleman, think that there are reasons for love, but they claim that the basis of these reasons is the capacity, call it ‘practical reason’, ‘humanity’, ‘character’, or what have you, which distinguishes human beings from the other known animals. As all of us possess this capacity, any of us can rationally love each other, or at least can rationally love anyone about whom we can have a singular thought which is not based solely on a rigidified definite description (don’t ask why you need that qualification).

Both views, though, are incompatible with basic facts about intimacy. First, think about how your partner might feel if you offer as your reason for love ‘no reason’ or instead cite a capacity possessed by all human beings. Intimacy is discriminatory but these responses are not. Second, think about how you might have three friends who have never met, and how A would get on with B, B would get on with C, but A and C would not get on at all. Or consider the friend who always falls for ‘the wrong person’, the one who loves someone who does not love them back or, on the flip side, the one who lacks interest in someone interested in them. Love in these cases is a mistake because of incompatibility, where that is relational property which concerns not a form of unilateral attraction of one towards the other but instead the kind of fit between people which we pick out when we talk about what people have in common, how they gel, how they get on with each other, mutual attraction, and so on, which differs between sets of individuals. Intimacy is discretionary because it is about how individuals fit together as who they are; morality is not because it is not.



My view is that the way to relate to your intimate is as someone who stands to your action as you do, at least for those actions which feature within the intimate relationship.

What about reasons of love? The challenge here is to explain how intimacy goes beyond morality while (a) maintaining the independence, and so individually, of the partners but also explaining (b) the unity between them that distinguishes an intimate relationship from a merely moral one. Put in a German register, how can an 'I' and a 'You' come together to constitute a 'We' without undermining the separateness of persons?

My view is that the way to relate to your intimate is as someone who stands to your action as you do, at least for those actions which feature within the intimate relationship. Take an example: you receive an excellent job offer which will require you and your partner to uproot your lives, moving away from friends and family, but will significantly advance your career. A view in the literature is that the way to engage with your partner is for you to make a choice to take the job, conditional on your partner's not vetoing that choice, which they may do only if they have reasons sufficiently strong to defeat the default presumption that they will accept with your choice. This is inappropriate because it is unequal. It tilts the balance towards your

choice—the default is to do what you choose. It also makes your interaction into a strange form of negotiation from an asymmetrical position—imagine springing upon your partner not just the fact that you have received this offer but also the fact that you have considered it and decided, conditionally on their not vetoing it, to accept it. They would rightly feel blindsided.

Better to deliberate with your partner, begin the discussion without having made a decision, and to come to one together. How, though, would that not erase the independence of the partners? How to keep the 'I' and 'You' separate in the 'we'? Because each partner has equal say over which options are on the table, which off, and over what they are willing to decide and do together. Is a long-distance relationship an option? Depends on whether each thinks so. If so, need it remain monogamous? Depends on whether each thinks so. Is, in fact, the termination of the relationship a possibility? Depends on whether each thinks so. The individuals are still independent because whether and, if so, in what form they remain a unity of wills is up to them. They are still in an appropriate intimate relationship because they are still willingly engaged in that relationship on terms over which they have equal discretion. And so the intimate relationship between them is okay in part because the moral relationship between them is okay.

YT

Q&A WITH
TOLA FOLA-ALADE
AKA THE RAPPER YT

(PHILOSOPHY & FRENCH, EXETER 2019)

If you hadn't done French and Philosophy, what degree would you have picked to do at Oxford and why?

Delina Gabriel, Physics and Philosophy LMH

When I first looked to apply I actually wanted to do Psychology, but I couldn't because I didn't do Maths or a science at A-Level. I was interested in psychology because I've always been fascinated with, and sought to understand, the mental. For that reason I ended up taking the Philosophy of Mind paper. I also wish I could've done Music, as the theory element would've helped me massively with production; but I am far too classically incompetent to have ever done it at Oxford.

How has studying philosophy influenced your approach to music?

Bethel Benyam, PPE Univ

Whenever I think about how studying philosophy has affected me, I find it really difficult to give direct examples and lessons learnt. Rather, I believe that philosophy is responsible for shaping my worldview and providing me with an expansive framework that includes many concepts and ideas, and the reasoning skills to better understand and analyze myself, the world, and its systems.

The way I create my own music is very intuitive and 'freestyle', but I believe that I study music as a whole, the culture, and the industry in an extremely analytical and critical way. I definitely believe that the deductive skills, aesthetic knowledge, and perhaps even moral knowledge gained from studying philosophy have influenced my music and the way I approach and navigate my career.



Would you say you had the typical university experience?

Vittorio Anah, PPE Mansfield

Overall, definitely not. But there are for sure a lot of ways in which I did. I would say my first year especially was quite typical. I was living in college and was pretty involved in college life. I played for the rugby team and was going out all of the time. At that point, I was still pretending to others and myself that music was something I just did on the side for fun. COVID suddenly hit at the end of my second term, and it was during the first lockdown that I really fully committed to music.

Second year was strange because I was still in Oxford despite the lockdown and everything was moved online. This was when my focus really shifted from academics and 'typical' uni life to music. I was frequently going to London for studio sessions and having to get the Oxford Tube in the early hours to make it back for lectures. In third year, I had my year abroad in Switzerland and then Montreal, where I worked as a line cook in a Caribbean restaurant and simultaneously got involved with the local music scene (which I know is very difficult from the typical Oxford year abroad).

Final year was perhaps the strangest out of all my uni years. My song Arc'teryx had gone viral whilst I was in Canada, so when I came back it was the first time at uni I had some buzz. I was doing music fully and was being recognised as such whilst at the same time trying to keep up with all my academic requirements to graduate. During this period was when I was really travelling up and down the country to do shows, magazine shoots, studio sessions, music videos etc. whilst trying to keep up with all the studies that come in term time. This ultimately led to me getting the nickname Hannah Montana, which clearly acknowledged the double life I found myself living.

How do other people from the music scene react when they find out you went to Oxford?

Niklas Welch, D Phil Worcester

It's often met with a surprise 'Aha'. Many people find it impressive. Honestly though, I rarely mention it. It's of course something that I'm proud of, but I don't like to bring it up or make a big deal about it. It's just another cool fact.

As a Nigerian who studied French at school, I initially hoped to incorporate it into my university education but could not as I chose to pursue PPE. What drew you to French with Philosophy as opposed to French on its own other joint honours?

David Babarinde, PPE Wadham

I mostly wanted to study Philosophy, but seeing as Oxford doesn't offer it as a sole option, I had to choose another subject. I chose French as opposed to any of the other joint honours because I was doing well in it at A-Level. I studied *L'Étranger* by Camus and *Candide* by Voltaire which I both enjoyed a lot and which showed how the two subjects go hand in hand (French philosophers, of course have contributed majorly to philosophical tradition). I knew that knowing a language, its literature, and its culture is a valuable life skill and I was also very interested in studying abroad. The Francophone world is diverse, spanning continents, giving one access to an extremely rich range of music, art, and culture.

How did you balance cultivating a large online following with managing your studies?

Ben Blunt, B Phil Hertford

To be entirely honest, I don't think my following was that large whilst I was studying. At least relative to now. I think I only had around 6000 followers or so at the time I left Oxford. I spend so much of my time on the internet naturally, and so a lot of releasing music and being active on social media was something I had always done and enjoyed. I was always doing music stuff and that was probably my priority. I did far from the best job at staying on top with studies, but I managed to do just about enough to survive through the terms and then by God's grace, I was able to clutch up come finals time.

I BELIEVE THAT PHILOSOPHY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SHAPING MY WORLDVIEW AND PROVIDING ME WITH AN EXPANSIVE FRAMEWORK THAT INCLUDES MANY CONCEPTS, IDEAS, AND THE REASONING SKILLS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND ANALYZE MYSELF, THE WORLD, AND ITS SYSTEMS.

Do you think the understanding of language you developed during your degree has impacted your lyrics and music?

Ifeoluwa Oyedeji, PPE Hertford

Like with the similar question about philosophy, it definitely has. But it's hard to give pinpoint examples. I must have benefitted from having studied things such as rhyme, meter, metaphors, and similes from poetry and literature. Even knowing about phonetic things like plosive and fricative sounds, for example, and then knowing how to implement that to string words together in cool ways that sound good. Knowing French has also allowed me to make connections and collaborate with French-speaking artists in places like Paris and Montreal, both of which I spend a lot of time in. In general, it has given me a better appreciation for, and better allowed me to engage with global music.

What's the main thing you miss about Oxford?

Jon Metcalf, B Phil Mansfield

The main thing I think I miss about Oxford is my friends. Living in College or in Cowley with like everybody you know a few streets away from you at max. I also miss the thought provoking conversations, the variety of intelligent people from different backgrounds that you would interact with on a day to day basis, the diversity of ideas, and being intellectually challenged and stretched.

If you could collaborate on a song with any philosopher, who would you choose and why?

Lucy Corkin, PPE Mansfield

This is hard. I think I'd have to say Dostoevsky. I listened to the *Crime and Punishment* audiobook, and I'm now listening to *The Brothers Karamazov*. When I listen to Dostoevsky novels I can visualise the scenes intricately because of his descriptive detail, imagery, and narrative. Because of that I imagine that if he made music he might have good bars and descriptive lyrics that produces vivid imagery and paints scenes. Also, maybe Kierkegaard, because he also wrote poems. His writing was very witty and contains a lot of metaphors. He could make an interesting rapper.

Just Philosophy

A TRIBUTE TO JEFF MCMAHAN

ELAD UZAN

A conference in honour of a philosopher is an unusual kind of tribute. Its form is not agreement but argument. In June 2025, moral, political, and legal philosophers gathered at Corpus Christi College to argue about questions and problems Jeff McMahan has done much to reshape. The occasion was his retirement from the Sekyra and White's Professorship of Moral Philosophy.

Jeff McMahan is one of the most influential moral philosophers of the past half century. His work has shaped contemporary debates on topics such as war, self- and other-defense, abortion, euthanasia, population ethics, personal identity, and the moral status of animals. In June 2025, for two days, speakers and commentators qualified, endorsed, and also resisted McMahan's arguments and conclusions. That did not place them outside his influence; it only showed how deeply his work has altered the terms in which those debates are now argued.

As I opened the conference and looked out at the audience, it was striking how many of those present had been helped by Jeff: students, former students, colleagues, and others who had found him ready, at some crucial moment, to read, advise, support, or otherwise intervene. Larry Temkin's special address later gave voice to much of that gratitude. There were the academic stories familiar to anyone who knows Jeff—about a paper read with extraordinary care and rigour, or comments so penetrating that they transformed the work itself. Jeff is one of those exceptionally rare philosophers whose comments almost invariably improve the work to which they are addressed. But people also shared other stories, less professional but perhaps more revealing, about acts of support that had nothing to do with career and everything to do with character. Those stories did not stand apart from his philosophy. They helped explain the person who wrote it.

The same cast of mind was evident in the papers themselves. Victor Tadros addressed a problem that ran through much of the conference. Moral philosophers often move too quickly between three questions: what is good, what we ought to value, and what we ought to do. Tadros argued that what is good does not by itself settle what we ought to value, and if valuing does not simply amount to recognizing or promoting the good, then the relation between moral theory and practical judgement becomes less straightforward than many theories assume.

Helen Frowe defended the view that deterrent measures are subject to the same proportionality constraints as other forms of defense. This resists a familiar tendency to treat deterrence as morally less exacting, particularly when it is directed at culpable wrongdoers who have been warned in advance. Frowe examined two objections: first, that there are no upper limits on the harm one may threaten to deter wrongdoing; second, that many ordinary deterrent practices must be ruled out as excessive. Her claim was that both objections can be answered. Deterrence does not create an exemption from proportionality.

Thomas Hurka returned to a question central to Jeff's work on war: what can count as a just cause? Jeff once distinguished between independent and conditional just causes. Resisting aggression could





justify war on its own; disarming an aggressor or deterring future aggression could not, unless some independently justifying cause was already present. Jeff later rejected that distinction, but Hurka argued for restoring it. If some aims can shape the proportionality of a war without being able to justify it in the first place, then moral reasoning about war still needs more distinctions than a simple contrast between liable and non-labile targets allows.

A different set of papers turned from war to another focus of Jeff's work: the value of life, the badness of death, and the claims of those who do not yet exist, or who may or may not exist. Frances Kamm took up the Non-Identity Problem through the problem of climate change. If our present choices affect not only how future people will live but which future people will exist, it becomes difficult to say that they are harmed by our inaction, since those very individuals may owe their existence to the same policy that causes them to suffer. She also argued, contrary to Jeff, that it can be reasonable not to bring into existence the only person we could create, even if that person's life would be worth living, if doing so would involve violating that person's rights.

Shelly Kagan spoke to a deceptively simple question: when comparing two possible futures, does it matter whether the same people exist in both? If one future is better for a particular person because that very person would exist in both and do better in one, the comparison seems straightforward. But what if the two futures contain different people, even though the total or average level of well-being is the same? Once this distinction is taken seriously, Kagan argued, it can be



developed in several different ways. The issue matters because it bears on whether morality is fundamentally person-affecting or whether it must also compare states of affairs more impersonally.

M. A. Roberts took up one of Jeff's more far-reaching claims: that human extinction might be the worst practically possible outcome. This claim seems to depend on a symmetry. If there is a moral reason not to bring into existence a person whose life would be intrinsically bad, perhaps there is a corresponding moral reason to bring into existence a person whose life would be intrinsically good. The claim bears on how one understands the moral significance of future generations. If the symmetry fails, then the case for treating extinction as the worst outcome becomes less secure, along with some hopes of moving from judgements about particular acts of creation to conclusions about populations as a whole.

Michael Otsuka defended the claim that when a person's life is worth living, it is not merely good for that person to exist; it is better for her to exist than never to have existed at all. However, such a view seems to generate impossible obligations toward the countless merely possible people who will never be born. Otsuka's response was to defend an asymmetry: one may say that existence is better for an actual person without inferring that non-existence wrongs those who never come to be. This view preserves the thought that life can be a benefit while resisting the conclusion that morality requires limitless creation. It also shows how difficult it is to reason coherently about value once the question is not how a life goes, but whether there is a life at all.

The final pair of talks shifted attention from first-order moral questions to the conditions in which such questions can be argued about at all. Peter Singer defended a distinction that now seems both familiar and contested: the distinction between speech that causes offence and speech that incites hatred. The point is not to deny that speech can do harm, but to resist the thought that offence as such is enough to justify restriction. Given the range of beliefs and identities that people may find offensive, that standard would be untenable. Singer's position was that there may be legitimate grounds for restricting speech that genuinely incites hatred, but not for suppressing views merely because they are unwelcome or unsettling.

Francesca Minerva brought the matter closer to the profession itself. Speaking about the *Journal of Controversial Ideas*, which she co-founded with Jeff and Peter Singer in 2018, she described an academic culture increasingly inclined to meet some views not with rebuttal but with petitions, demands for retraction, and efforts to prevent publication or speech. The journal was conceived as an attempt to keep open a forum in which controversial arguments could still be answered by argument. That aim, Minerva suggested, was also very much Jeff's own: he often defended the hearing of views he regarded as mistaken, and the fair treatment of people whose conclusions he firmly opposed.

A concert on Saturday evening provided not a break from the conference but a change of medium, and a fitting tribute to Jeff, a long-standing lover of classical music. Violinist Yuqi Liang, a Philosophy



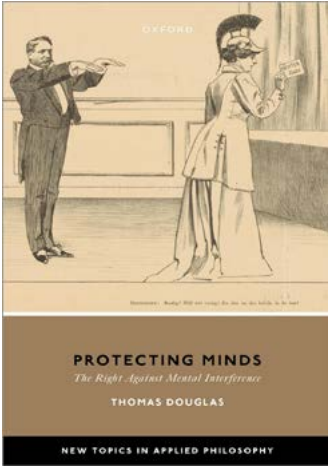
DPhil student, and pianist Aidan Strong, a Mathematics DPhil student, began with Dvořák's *Sonatina in G major*, played with warmth and restraint, before turning to Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*, whose larger scale and combative energy made it an apt companion to two days of philosophical disagreement. What was most impressive was not the technical accomplishment, though there was plenty of that, but the character of the musical exchange. The opening of the *Kreutzer* was unsentimental; the transition into the presto had force without loss of control; and in the variations and finale alike the two musicians gave the sense of listening as hard as they played. After two days of papers on harm and disagreement, Beethoven's sonata sounded less like an interlude than something which the conference had displayed in philosophical form: that serious philosophy depends on attunement rather than noise. That, too, many of us have learned from Jeff.

Elad Uzan is a philosopher based at the University of Oxford. He worked under the supervision of Jeff McMahan as a junior research Fellow in Philosophy at Corpus Christi College from 2022 to 2024.



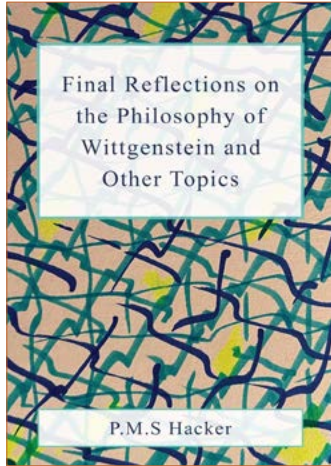
On Fellowship
OUP
Dale Dorsey

Relationships with others are a fundamental human good. Few would regard a life without friendship or love relations as a life well-lived, and philosophers have not shied away from considering these and similar relations. However, while these are important aspects of the good life, focus on them misses a wide range of human interactions. We hang out with casual acquaintances, chat with strangers, and enjoy the company of others while watching films. None of these relationships need constitute friendship, but without them life would be significantly worsened. In this book, Dale Dorsey considers the value of this ‘fellowship’. Drawing on sources from the history of moral philosophy and contemporary psychology, he argues that fellowship is not only intrinsically valuable, but an essential feature of the good life. Moreover, Dorsey claims that the value of fellowship helps us explain and understand a range of human virtues. Fellowship is far from a lesser form of friendship. Rather, it is one of the most significant goods in human life.



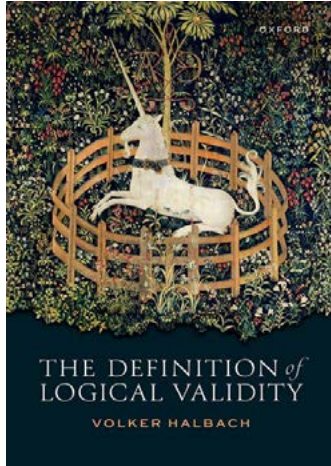
Protecting Minds: The Right Against Mental Interference
OUP
Thomas Douglass

It is widely accepted that we possess a right against interference with our body. In this book, Thomas Douglas offers two arguments for the view that we possess a right against interference with our mind. The first appeals to intuitions regarding cases where one individual influences the mind of another in a seemingly wrongful way, and argues that we can best account for this wrongfulness by invoking a right against mental interference. In the second, Douglass claims that our ownership of ourselves implies ownership of our minds, which in turn implies a right against interference with our minds. Douglass then turns to defining the scope of this right. The most obvious infringements of this right are ‘nonconsensual neurointerventions’—interventions that alter a person’s mental states by altering their brain states without consent. But Douglass argues that some psychological forms of influence can infringe it too, e.g., subliminal imagery and conditioning-based interventions, such as loot boxes in computer games.



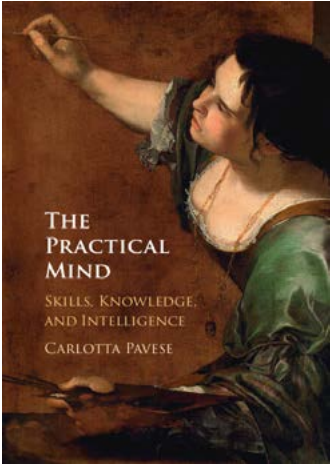
Final Reflections on Wittgenstein and Other Topics
Anthem
PMS Hacker

This book of essays brings together Peter Hacker’s most recent reflections on Wittgenstein’s philosophy as well as some earlier essays that seem worth preserving for historical reasons, as they involve information about personal relationships otherwise not easily retrievable by future chroniclers. It is the concluding complement of the Hacker’s previous two volumes of essays: *Wittgenstein: Connections and Controversies* (OUP, 2001) and *Wittgenstein: Comparisons and Context* (OUP, 2013), which together form a trilogy of collected papers that represent his decades-long endeavor to understand and give an adequate description and defense of the thought of the first philosopher of his age.



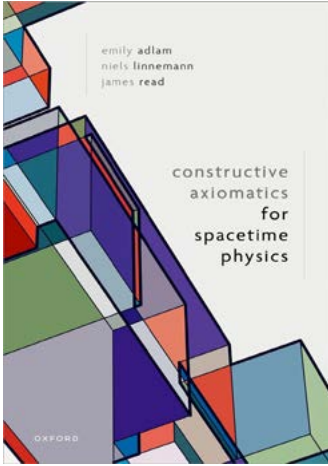
The Definition of Logical Validity
OUP
Volker Halbach

On the semantic definition, an argument is logically valid if, and only if, the conclusion is true under all interpretations under which all premisses are also true. This is only a general pattern, and Volker Halbach presents a specific way of spelling out this definition. In contrast to the predominant approaches, truth is taken to be a primitive notion and not reduced away by a mathematical definition. An interpretation of a sentence is obtained by replacing non-logical terms uniformly with arbitrary other terms of the same grammatical kind. Halbach then shows how the resulting definition combines two advantages: first, it is universal, applying not only to a restricted language, but to the entire language in which it is stated. Secondly, it admits the intended interpretation, i.e., the interpretation of sentences at face value without any re-interpretation. Thus, logical consequence is trivial preserving truth. The usual model-theoretic definition lacks this property, which is fundamental to logical consequence and warrants its usefulness in philosophy.



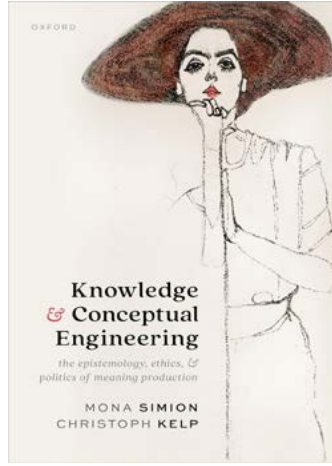
The Practical Mind: Skill, Knowledge, and Intelligence
CUP
Carlotta Pavese

Our breathtaking intelligence is embodied in our skills. Think of Olympic gymnastics, and the amount of strength and control required to perform even a simple beam routine; think of a carpenter skillfully carving the wood, where complicated techniques come across as sheer easiness of the bodily movements; of a pianist performing a sonata, balancing technical virtuosity with elegance. Throughout our lifetimes, we acquire and refine a vast number of skills, and the improvement and refinement of skills are not bound to the human lifespan alone either: somehow, they also cross generations. Skills both foster cultural evolution and are refined by it—for example, in the way cultural evolution perfects tools and building techniques. What makes skills possible? And how can skills explain our successes? This book is the first systematic philosophical discussion of skills: of their nature, and of their relation to knowledge and reasoning.



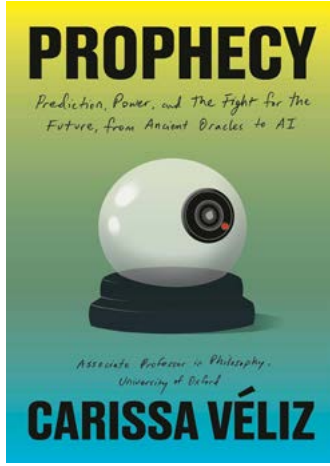
Constructive Axiomatics for Spacetime Physics
OUP
Emily Adlam, Niels Linnemann, and James Read

‘Constructive axiomatics’, promulgated by Hans Reichenbach in 1924, seeks to build up the architecture of our best theories of physics from basic axioms with supposed immediate and indubitable empirical content. Hermann Weyl proposed a ‘causal-inertial’ approach to the constructive axiomatization of Einstein’s general relativity. However, this came to fruition only in 1972, in the work of Ehlers, Pirani, and Schild (EPS). This book is a celebration of the constructive axiomatic methodology. It achieves four main tasks. First, it provides a thoroughgoing presentation of the EPS axiomatization, allowing an appreciation of the extent to which a causal-inertial approach might succeed and what the approach offers. Second, it synthesizes and assesses the vast literature on constructive axiomatics. Third, it generalizes the approach to apply to quantum spacetimes. And fourth, it applies it to the context of non-relativistic spacetime physics. All in all, the book demonstrates that constructive axiomatics is live-and-kicking.



Knowledge and Conceptual Engineering: The Epistemology, Ethics, and Politics of Meaning Production
OUP
Mona Simion and Christoph Kelp

Suppose you could change people’s way of thinking about the world at its very roots, by changing the very concepts by means of which they think. Suppose, further, that this would make the world a better place; that would be quite something. Conceptual engineering is concerned with this remarkable kind of feat. This book is a comprehensive and systematic study of the nature and normativity of conceptual engineering. It deals with all the central questions in the field: concerning the very possibility of conceptual engineering, its success conditions, the epistemic and moral permissibility of conceptual engineering, the nature of conceptual ignorance and conceptual understanding, duties to engage in conceptual engineering, as well as with political aspects of conceptual engineering, such as engineering social kind concepts, the nature of hermeneutical injustice, and conceptual disinformation.



Prophecy: Prediction, Power, and the Fight for the Future, from Ancient Oracles to AI
Doubleday
Carissa Véliz

Today computer scientists play the same role as the oracles of the ancient world and the astrologers of the Middle Ages. And when we cede ground to their predictions, we lose control of our own lives. In this book, Carissa Véliz explains how putting too much stock in such predictions makes us vulnerable to charlatans, con artists, dubious technology, and self-deception. Examining a wide range of subjects, both personal and societal, including medicine, climate, technology, society, and others, Véliz uncovers a number of insights: predictions about humans tend to be self-fulfilling; more data does not guarantee better outcomes; AI is more likely to increase risk than decrease it; and a free and robust society requires not more prediction, but better preparation. Véliz argues in this incisive and bracingly original book that the main promise of prediction is not knowledge of the future, but rather power over others. Prophecy is an invitation to defy those orders and live life on our own terms.



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