Thinking Through the Ages

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ABSTRACTS

Godfrey on Practical Wisdom and the Particular

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Aristotle argues in book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that right action requires that one develops practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is described as one of the intellectual virtues, a virtue that is concerned with what to do. The practically wise person knows not only what ought to be done in general, but he/she also knows what do in the particular situation. The practically wise person is able to recognize the salient moral features in the particular situation and act accordingly.

What is the relation between the knowledge of a practically wise person and a theoretical understanding of morality (gained through a work of moral theory such as *Nicomachean Ethics* itself)? The 13th century philosopher and theologian Godfrey of Fontaines, addresses this question directly and discusses the issue in detail. He argues that this kind of theorizing made by Aristotle about morality ought to be seen as a science (an Aristotelian understanding of science). He develops an account of the relationship between this science and practical wisdom drawing on different passages in the Aristotelean corpus and from the commentator tradition. Godfrey thinks that the practically wise person and moral philosopher have knowledge about actions, but under, what he calls, different modes of thought. Practical wisdom entails knowledge of universal principles but they are directed in a certain sense to the particular situation. These kind of principles are attained in particular situations to justify specific actions. In this paper, I explore Godfrey's thought in light of the contemporary discussion on generalism vs particularism. (Leibowitz, 2011) I will argue that Godfrey shares some of the central assumptions in particularism and further that Godfrey develops a novel (in relation to Aquinas' conception of natural law) conception of practical wisdom and moral science inside a broadly Aristotelian framework.

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Galen's design argument vs. Epicurean evolution in *De Usu Partium*

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Galen is well known as a critic of atomism and of all the medical systems that he recognized as influenced by materialism, such as Asclepiades of Bithynia's one. In his *De Usu Partium* he does not betray that reputation, and dedicates many pages to the rebuttal of Epicurean zoogony and its idea of evolution applied to anatomy. According to this view, particles and void are the only principles of spontaneous and casual generation of species, which gain the characterization of their anatomical structures only through adaptation to their environment.

Galen places himself within the "design argument tradition" of Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle, as clearly emerges from his idea of cosmos as outcome of divine planning.

In *De Usus Partium*, he describes the human body as a product of nature-demiurge art, which is always provident and just. In other words, according to him, the anatomical structure of human body reflects the best possible decision taken by the demiurge. Therefore, since nature does nothing in vain, the organs of human body are perfectly matched to their functions and every part of the body is conceived to be useful.

Given these premises, it is clear why Galen firmly and harshly rejects Epicurus and Asclepiades' physiology, which is based on refutation of efficient and final causes.

In my paper I will try to analyze those passages where Galen gives account of the Epicurean theory of evolution (as *De Usu* I, 74-79 K., where he refers to their theory of different levels of thickness of hand tendons, or III, 867, 14-868,11 K. where he focuses on their theory of mouth formation) and discuss their contents in comparison to Lucretius' book V of *De Rerum Natura*, where is preserved the fullest description of this fascinating aspect of Epicurean physiology.

Finding Meno: Stingrays and Self-knowledge in Plato's *Meno*

Ellisif Wasmuth (University of Cambridge)

This paper is part of a current project of investigating whether and how the topic of self-knowledge is raised and dealt with in dialogues other than the usual suspects (these being the *Apology*, *Phaedrus*, *Charmides* and to some extent the *Republic*, *Philebus* and *First Alcibiades*). Treating the *First Alcibiades* as spurious might have made scholars less attentive to how the topic of self-knowledge features in Plato's other dialogues, as well as to the role self-knowledge plays more generally in Plato's ethics, political philosophy, epistemology and metaphysics.

In this paper I will examine how the topic of self-knowledge features in Plato's *Meno*. The *Meno* lends itself particularly well to this question because it, like self-knowledge, unites the topics of knowledge and virtue and is concerned with the question of how each of these is *gained*. Thus my paper asks whether the question of how Meno can come to know himself is treated in tandem with the dialogue's more famous question concerning whether inquiry is at all possible, and whether the relationship between virtue and self-knowledge is explored alongside the relationship between knowledge, true belief and virtue.

The *Meno* contains what is probably the best known treatment of the value of Socratic self-knowledge, i.e. the kind of self-knowledge consisting in knowing that you don't know what you don't know. I will argue, however, that the dialogue's treatment of self-knowledge extends beyond this. Looking at three passages in particular (71a5-c2, 72a6-b7 and 97c6-98a9/99c11-100a7), I argue that important references to self-knowledge are scattered throughout the dialogue. Even though they are not picked up by Socrates or explored much in their own right, these references hint at the close relationship between self-knowledge and virtue.

Conscience and Moral Self-Knowledge from Kant to Hegel

Feroz Mehmood Shah (University of Oslo)

In the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant develops a distinct notion of conscience that takes the form of a second-order judgment evaluating our first-order moral judgement about what we ought to do. The activity of conscience performs the important function of safe-guarding the sincerity of our moral judgement and is therefore supposed to provide the agent with an insight into whether she acts in the basis of two basic tenets of Kantian ethics, namely that we can know what we ought to do on the basis of practical reason and that we can act on this for moral reason, that is, *because* of the moral law. As such, conscience provides an important insight into our moral deliberation by assessing it with regards to its thoroughness and morality. Kant then goes on to make the controversial claim that the verdict of conscience is unerring. In the first part of this paper, I want to show that the most prevalent interpretation of this claim rests on a premise of the transparency of the mind (Esser 2013; Ware 2009; Vujošević 2014; Timmermann 2006), but I will then go on to show that the aspect which is supposed to be transparent to us seems to be unavailable for us. I then go on to claim that the unerringness of conscience renders it unconducive to the task of safe-guarding our moral judgements. In the second part of my paper, I want to claim that both Fichte and Hegel identified this threat and to show how they represent two distinct solutions to the problem of conscience. While Fichte offers a revised version of Kant's suggestion by appealing to a form of self-knowledge, Hegel dismisses this possibility and claims that the guarantee of our moral judgements must rather be located in the ethical community. By setting the discussion of conscience up by identifying it as a guarantee of our moral judgements, I claim that Hegel's famous transition from formal to true conscience should be read as an answer to the prospects of the self-knowledge accounts of conscience.

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Kant as the first philosopher of free will

Fredrik Nilsen (University of Tromsø)

In my presentation, I argue that Kant was the first philosopher of free will in the history of philosophy. My reason for holding this thesis is that Kant was the first philosopher with a conception of the will where the will both has a legislative (*Wille*) and an executive (*Willkür*) function. As Rousseau has shown, a free will is a will that obeys self-legislated laws. The Wille (the legislative part of the will) gives its laws to Willkür (the executive part of the will), and if the Willkür obeys these laws, the will as a whole must be regarded as autonomous and free. In arguing for this, I will use the traditional discussion between Lewis White Beck and Henry Allison, but I will also comment on the modern debate on the correct understanding of the Moral Law among Kantian Scholars. These scholars divide into two camps, "the realists" and "the constructivists". Their main point of disagreement has to do with the question whether we should understand the moral law as a moral truth or as some sort of human construction. My thesis that Kant was the first philosopher of free will only holds if the constructivist account is the right one. If the realist account is true, we probably do not find an adequate conception of free will before Sartre's theory of "radical freedom".

The Method of Collection and Division in Plato's *Phaedrus*

Hallvard Stette (Uppsala University)

In the second part of the *Phaedrus* Socrates expresses great enthusiasm for something he calls collection and division. He relates this activity or operation with his very ability to speak and think, and apparently regards it as an important, if not essential, part of dialectic, his word of choice for the proper way of doing philosophy. This high regard for collection and division has, however, perplexed commentators and scholars. As they see it, the method of collection and division is hard to square with general features of dialectic that Socrates elsewhere in the dialogue seems to commit himself too; that dialectic is a method of investigation and that it is essentially collaborative. Collection and division, on the other hand, is rather more like a method for presentation of knowledge already acquired, they argue, and additionally seems perfectly possible to accomplish in a solo performance. In light of this, they conclude hat collection and division in the end is laid aside by Socrates as something that at best can serve in an auxiliary role to dialectic, but that in any case must be kept distinct from it. Contrary to this view, I will argue in this paper that collection and division in the *Phaedrus* is presented as an integral part of dialectic, that it is a method of investigation, and that it is best performed in a questioning dialogical exchange between conversation partners. I will also demonstrate that collecting and dividing is also at play in Socrates' mythmaking, and in this way I will shed some light on the place of myths and allegories in the philosophy of Plato. I will also have something to say about *what* is being collected and divided, i.e. the object of the operation, and about the connection between collection and division and the idea of recollection in the dialogue.

Erôs, Moderation and the Encouragement of Courage in Plato's _Charmides_

Hege Dypedokk Johnsen (University of Stockholm)

The *Charmides* opens on a deadly serious note: By depicting the beginning of one of the darkest chapters in Athenian history (the 27 year long Peloponnesian war, resulting in Athens' defeat and the abolishing of its democracy), in which Socrates' and the others' courage (*andreía*) and moderation (*sôphrosunê*) were put to test. It soon changes into a lighter tune, however, as Socrates changes the topic of discussion into one he – consistently across dialogues – shows a profound interest in: Young beautiful men and the education of their souls. Charmides, whom the dialogue is named after, is a teenager (and future murderous tyrant) renowned for his good looks and temperance (*sôphrosunê*). In this dialogue, after hearing the others praise Charmides' body and soul, Socrates sets out to examine the state of Charmides' soul – is he really as sound-minded (*sôphron*) as the others claim? The *Charmides* revolves around the question of what *sôphrosunê* amounts to. My interest here is *not*, however, to scrutinize the various definitions and arguments put forward regarding the nature of *sôphrosunê*. First (i), I aim to show how the concepts *sôphrosunê, andreía* and *erôs* intertwine in the dialogue. Secondly (ii), I aim to show how these concepts denote character traits, or conditions, which this dialogue implicitly argues are necessary in order to engage in the very practice of philosophy. It has been claimed that Socrates in the *Charmides* limits *erôs* to mere sexual desire. I aim to show that Socrates does *not* limit *erôs* to sexual desire in the *Charmides*, and that the erotic content in the dialogue must be read as integral to the philosophical content; especially that which is implicitly argued through demonstration. Studies of how *erôs* intertwine with other concepts of great importance to Plato is helpful in order to get a better understanding of Plato's concept of *erôs*, and its significant role within Socratic education (as well as Plato's moral psychology). In my talk, I will point out general certain parallels between the concepts, as well as their particular touching points in the *Charmides.* I argue that the dialogue underscores how moderation, courage, and passionate desire for the truth, are important in a philosophical discussion. I conclude that the dialogue demonstrates – through Socrates' and Charmides' behavior and demeanor during their conversation in which Charmides is subjected to Socrates' erotic educational methods – how philosophical *sôphrosunê, andreía* and *erôs* must be upheld when one's opinions are challenged.

Godlikeness and the ideal of contemplation in Plato's *Theaetetus*

Jens Kristian Larsen (University of Copenhagen)

The so-called digression found in the middle of Plato's *Theaetetus* (172b8-177c5) sets forth an ideal according to which the aim of man is to become as like god as possible. Ancient Platonists identified this ideal with Plato's overall determination of the aim of man. Among modern scholars, however, it is a matter of controversy how we should understand this ideal: does it reflect a Socratic anthropology, does it rather represent Plato's, in contrast to Socrates', view of man or should we understand it as ironically mirroring the theoretical attitude of Theodorus, Socrates' interlocutor? This controversy reflects a deeper bewilderment about the function of the passage. Why does Socrates present this ideal in the middle of a dialogue devoted to the question what knowledge is? And if the passage is a digression from the overall dialogue why is it included in the dialogue at all?

In this paper I will argue that the passage is not a digression, but forms a natural part of the discussion of knowledge dominating the *Theaetetus*. I will further urge that Socrates here propounds views of man, of wisdom and of happiness that stand in contrast to those of Protagoras, and that the passage, when read in conjunction with Socrates' earlier defense of Protagoras (165e8-168c5), makes explicit the political and ethical side to the question concerning knowledge. I will finally argue that the ideal philosopher sketched by Socrates in the passage resembles Socrates more closely than many commentators assume and that his activity of answering *ti estin* questions is closer to Socratic dialectic than often claimed: the passage is a presentation of the heart of Socratic philosophy that takes the perspective of Socrates' interlocutor in this part if the dialogue, Theodorus, into careful consideration.

Changing One's Empirical Character: Mental Powers and Moral Cultivation in Kant

Jonas Jervell Indregard (University of Oslo)

How does one become a better person? For Kant, the answer is in one sense simple: From a practical point of view, one is always free to act morally and thereby acquire a good *intelligible* character. However, Kant also holds that from a theoretical point of view, one is a part of a causally determined world of experience and has an *empirical* character. Kant argues that the reality of freedom requires the intelligible character one freely chooses to *ground* the empirical character, what I will call *Empirical Character Grounding* (ECG).

Becoming a better person for Kant involves changing one's intelligible character from evil to good. This requires that one's empirical character is also capable of change and improvement, and hence what I call *Empirical Character Changeability* (ECC). However, the standard Kantian reading of empirical character is incompatible with ECC. For empirical character is standardly understood as a set of *causal laws* governing one's empirical behavior, and such laws cannot change.

I will argue that one's empirical character is not just a set of causal laws, but also the range of mental *powers* over which these laws hold. And while the laws cannot change, the mental powers can be weakened or strengthened. This view highlights a neglected *positive* upshot of Kant's criticism of putative cognition of the soul in his famous Paralogisms: Kant holds that unlike physical powers, which are unchanging, mental powers can diminish. Hence, one cannot show that the soul is a permanent substance, since its powers may diminish into nothing. But while this result prevents us from knowing theoretically whether we are permanent and hence immortal, it also enables ECC and hence the empirical expression of moral improvement: Moral cultivation can take place through influencing the strength of one's mental powers.

Manual Labor and "Mere Mechanicks": Bacon and the Deprecation of Craft Skills in Early Modern Science

Mark Thomas Young (University of Bergen)

This paper provides a critique of the legitimation thesis; the claim that the development of modern science involved a legitimation of craft practices in the early modern period. My goal will be to assess the credibility of this notion by focusing primarily on the work and legacy of Francis Bacon. It will be my claim that a close examination of Bacon's conception of technology does not support the central role often ascribed to him by proponents of the legitimation thesis. Instead of viewing Bacon's 'turn to practice' as a signaling a rehabilitation of the status of craft practices, I will argue that his desire to appropriate craft knowledge must be understood as a part of a general strategy for demonstrating the inferiority of the local ways of knowing upon which it was based. Furthermore, I aim to show that the failure to recognize the deprecating nature of Bacon's attitude towards technology is best explained through recourse to a pervasive tendency to view historical developments science in terms of a dichotomy between theory and practice, a framework which I will argue fails to be fine grained enough to distinguish between the kinds of technical practice Bacon advocated, and those he condemned.

Explaining Hume's Newtonianism by A Hybrid Interpretation

Matias Slavov

For the last 40 years, Hume's Newtonianism has been a debated topic in Hume scholarship. The crux of the problem can be framed by the following question: Does Hume's philosophy continue the legacy of Newton's natural philosophy, or does it deviate from it? Answering to this question has produced two lines of interpretation. I shall call them "traditional" and "critical" interpretations (1). The traditional interpretation asserts a constructive connection between Newton and Hume, whereas the critical interpretation seriously questions this.

In this article, I shall argue that the correct interpretation of Hume's Newtonianism is a hybrid. To provide this argument, I shall first argue that Hume is sympathetic to many prominently Newtonian themes in natural philosophy, such as causal interpretation of laws of nature, experimentalism, critique of hypotheses, inductive proof, and critique of Leibnizian principles of sufficient reason and intelligibility. Second, I shall argue that in many cases, Hume is not a Newtonian philosopher: his conceptions regarding space and time, vacuum, reality of forces, specifics about causation, and the status of mechanism differ markedly from Newton's related conceptions.

My aim is to show that instead of choosing one of these interpretations at the expense of the other, a hybrid view is the best way to explain Hume's Newtonianism. The traditional interpretation tradition is right in that Hume's philosophical project respects the experimentalist methodology of Newtonian natural philosophy and partially continues its legacy. However, some parts of Hume's philosophy are at odds with Newton's philosophy, as indicated by the critical tradition. In this sense, Hume is not a Newtonian in many cases, but relies more on to his science of man. Thus a hybrid interpretation should be preferred.

(1) The traditional line of interpretation includes Nicholas Capaldi (1975), James Force (1987), Stephen Buckle (2004, 2011), Peter Millican (2007), Graciela De Pierris (2001, 2006, 2012), Matias Slavov (2013) Charlotte Randall Brown (2012),and William Edward Morris (2012, 2014). The critical interpretation tradition can be seen to include Larry Laudan (1981), Peter Jones (1984), Eric Schliesser (2007, 2009), YoramHazoni (2009), Steffen Ducheyne (2009), Michael Barfoot (2010), and Miren Boehm (2012).

The nature and shortcomings of Spartan virtue

Pål Rykkja Gilbert (University of Oslo)

In book 8, chapter 3 of the *Eudemian Ethics* a peculiar distinction is drawn between being 'good' (*agathos*) and being 'fine-and-good' (*kalos k'agathos*). The latter is a common expression of praise in ordinary Greek language, but Aristotle's subtle distinction between the two is difficult to grasp. He provides the example of the Spartans, who are characterised by 'a kind of civic disposition' (*hexis tis politikē*), and who believe that one should acquire virtue for the sake of 'external' goods, but not for its own sake. In the end Aristotle appears to ascribe virtue to the Spartan – he is 'good' – but not fine-and-goodness, which is also called 'complete virtue' (*aretē teleios*). But virtue being a disposition to act (and react) in a certain way, how will these two dispositions differ? Interestingly, the notion of civic virtue also pops up in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.8, an account of a disposition which is very close to courage proper, but not completely (*politikē andreia*).

What is Spartan virtue? Will the Spartan's external behavior be 'the same' as that of the truly virtuous, but his motivation different? Does he 'feel' differently towards what he does? Will his values be 'the same', but his justification for them – were he pushed to produce one – different? I believe an investigation of Aristotle's view of Spartan virtue can throw light also on what it means that the truly virtuous choose virtue and the fine 'for their own sake'. I will discuss the issue (primarily) on the basis of the mentioned passages, in addition to the account of the Spartan constitution in *Pol.* 2.9.

Aristotle on Sight and the Transparent: the Blind Spot Argument

Reier Helle (Yale University)

The transparent, τὸ διαφανσές, plays an important role in Aristotle's theory of vision. The transparent is a nature, which inheres in every body to some extent or other, but which cannot exist independently of these bodies. The transparent is meant to explain how the medium of sight and the eye can receive the color of an external object. It is controversial what this change, receiving color, consists in. Literalists think it involves ordinary alterations, material change, whereas spiritualists think it does not, but instead is a mere Cambridge change. I argue that receiving color cannot involve ordinary alteration, fleshing out and extending an argument suggested by Myles Burnyeat and John Magee, which I call the Blind Spot argument. It proceeds as follows: Aristotle distinguishes changes that preserve power from those that exclude power. Ordinary alterations, such as becoming cold, exclude power. This means that if I become cold for instance, I cannot exercise my ability to be cold, since I am then actually cold and the exercise of that power depends on being actually hot. Receiving color, by contrast, preserves power. When the eye receives red, its ability to receive color is not constrained; it is rather actualized, and may still be exercised. According to Aristotle's theory of color, material composition determines color. Therefore, changing the material composition of an object may lead to a change of color. Thus, if receiving color involves material change, receiving color may lead to a change of color. But that would mean that receiving color may fail to preserve the ability to receive color. For the ability to receive color depends on colorlessness, transparency. So, the medium or the eye changing color causes a blind-spot, where a shade of color may not be received. However, it is impossible that a preservative change fail to preserve. Consequently, receiving color cannot involve ordinary alteration.

Doxa* in Plato's *Republic

Vivil Valvik Haraldsen (University of Oslo)

In Book 5 of Plato's *Republic* Socrates draws the famous distinction between two powers, *epistêmê*, standardly translated knowledge, and *doxa*, most often translated opinion or belief, explicated with reference to a distinction between what they are concerned with, namely, in the case of *epistêmê*, what really and truly is, and, in the case of *doxa*, what is in between what really and truly is and what is not, and partakes of both in the realm of becoming. This distinction is most commonly read in connection with the similies of the Sun, Line, and Cave in Books 6 and 7, where *doxa* is said to relate to the realm of becoming and of the sensible. If the distinction is also sought connected with the account of the tripartite soul, it is accordingly most often understood as a distinction relating solely to the capacities of reason, distinguishing its different powers.

But *doxa* is also discussed in the *Republic* in ways that do not naturally suggest that it is a power, but rather the opinion that may be the result of the power of opining. In some passages *doxa* further appears to be attributed not only to reason, but also to the other elements of the soul as well as simply to the soul. Finally, Socrates states throughout the central books that he can only offer his *doxa* on the matters they are discussing since he does not have knowledge of them; here *doxa* again cannot mean power.

This paper will discuss how we can understand the notion of *doxa* in the passages in which Socrates uses it in a sense that fits badly with the more technical account in the central books. It will be argued that *doxa* is here used in a less technical sense where the focus is not on what it is directed at but on the fact that it can be true or false, a sense that nevertheless plays an important role in the elucidation of the role of reason and of the notion of justice in the soul. To recognize this variation in the meaning of *doxa*, rather than regarding it as a problematic discrepancy that one should attempt to resolve by forging a unified use corresponding to its characterization in the central books, is thus necessary to avoid overlooking an important aspect of the dialogue's argument in defence of justice.

The *Hippias Minor*: An exercise in fiction

Zacharias Andreadakis (University of Michigan)

Plato's *Hippias Minor* presents us with what appears to be a most contradictory argument. In his encounter with the sophist and expert mathematician Hippias, Socrates argues, strikingly and at quite some length, that calculated lying is in fact morally superior to accidental truthfulness. This paradoxical line of reasoning is best summarized and exemplified in Socrates' conclusion that "the one who errs and does shameful and unjust acts voluntarily if there is such a person, is none other than the good person" (376b5–6). It will be the aim of this paper to make sense of this seemingly absurd argument and thus propose a different angle from which to read Platonic philosophy.

My line of argument goes against the commonsense understanding of ψεῦδος in the *Hippias Minor* by maintaining that the Greek word should be understood in the context of this dialogue as fictional falsehood—and not as lying in a narrow moral sense. Support for this assumption will be drawn from a close reading of other instances of ψεῦδος in the *Hippias Minor* and from a survey of Plato's dialogues in general (especially, *Laws* 730c4–6) together with Lucian's pervasive yet subtle commentary of the dialogue in his *Lover of Lies* (*Φιλοψευδής ἢ Ἀπιστῶν*, c. 160 CE). By making sense of Socrates' conclusion in this dialogue, I aspire to provide new ammunition for understanding the nuanced division between lying and fictionalizing in Platonic philosophy, as well as its intricate exegetical consequences.