Forms of knowledge and forms of philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Paul Hirst's work on the nature of knowledge and its significance for education is still important, in at least two respects. One is the defence he offers of a distinctively liberal education: this is widely acknowledged, but its importance in our own time deserves greater recognition. The other, which is less often noticed, is Hirst's avoidance of the widespread tendency to think of science as the model that all knowledge should attempt to emulate. This tendency, which in its extreme form is called scientism, represents less respect for science—which of course science deserves—than veneration of it. Wider discussion here of the part that the idea of knowledge plays in educational thinking today touches on recent work on virtue epistemology, the importance but complexity of the ideas of truth and reason, the curious rise of 'powerful knowledge', and recent work on the importance of philosophy in its ancient role of orienting us to reality as the home of thinking: a theme anticipated in some of the late work of Paul Hirst.

INTRODUCTION

It is interesting to read the writings of Paul Hirst, especially the earlier ones on knowledge and its supposed 'forms', with which I begin this paper, as the product of a man shaped by his time. This shows a writer who absorbed the ideas of the Vienna Circle, particularly as mediated by A.J. Ayer, who in his widely influential book *Language*, *Truth and Logic* (1936) consigned metaphysics to the realm of nonsense. It was to be eliminated: sensible argument could consist only of appeal to empirical facts or the truths of logic and mathematics. To read Hirst as the inheritor of this view of philosophy is neither to dismiss him (for failing to transcend the milieu in which he moved, as if any of us could easily do this if we tried), nor is it to turn a blind eye to the weaknesses of this school of philosophy and its adherents. Neither criticism nor praise are to the point here. It is rather that by reading him carefully through an understanding of the philosophical world he moved in we may see more clearly just what kind—what form—of philosophy he thought appropriate for what he wanted to say.

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At the heart of Hirst's extensive writings in the 1960s and 1970s is what has come to be known as his 'forms of knowledge' thesis. Before undertaking a necessarily brief critical analysis of this thesis it is important to emphasize that Hirst was inspired by the need to defend a particular conception of a distinctively liberal education. This, in Hirst's eyes, is to be understood in part by what it is not. It is not vocational education, nor 'an exclusively scientific education', nor 'a specialist education in any sense'. Nor is it a matter of responding to the learner's occurrent needs or interests: that 'progressive' bugbear which spurred a good deal of what other philosophers of education were writing in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, revisiting Hirst's writings about liberal education is not an exercise in nostalgia. It is of the first importance today, when the ideal of a liberal university education has been weakened in the UK by its government's view that the value of a university degree is expressed by the salary a graduate earns six months after completing their degree, when students' subject choices at university are inevitably affected by the need to earn enough to repay their student loans, and when websites compete to list 'rubbish degrees', which of course turns out to be a straightforward business of comparing the earnings of graduates. The idea of studying for a degree as simply interesting and rewarding in itself has been steadily elbowed into the margins of educational thinking.

Hirst's conception of liberal education was of course as an education rooted in the nature of knowledge itself. And knowledge, he maintained, presupposes underlying conceptual schemes which are widely shared as part of our human heritage. This line of argument strongly resembles Wittgenstein's well-known contention that 'If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments' (*Philosophical Investigations* §242, 1958), though Hirst made no explicit use of Wittgenstein until his later writings. If he had done so from the beginning, he might have been struck by the well-known list that exemplifies the multiplicity of language games at *Philosophical Investigations* §23, which reads in part:

Giving orders, and obeying them – Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements – Singing catches – Guessing riddles – Making a joke; telling it – Solving a problem in practical arithmetic – Translating from one language to another – Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

All of these activities embody conceptual schemes that are part of our shared human heritage, and Wittgenstein's full list makes the point about multiplicity. Hirst favoured a more restricted list, of seven or eight 'forms of knowledge', usually mathematics, the physical sciences, the human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy and moral knowledge (Hirst 1974), though there were minor variations on this from time to time. I agree with Jae-Bong Yoo (2001:

615), who states that Hirst's changes of his position in this respect at this stage of his writing is 'not especially radical'.

The strong resemblance of Hirst's various lists of the 'forms of knowledge' (or 'experience', or 'meaning') to the curriculum of a conventional secondary school had the unfortunate effect of suggesting to some that they had found a strong justification for that curriculum. For example, the authors of a 1997 Department for Education and Science, *Curriculum 11–16: Working Papers by H.M. Inspectorate* consider that the curriculum is concerned with 'introducing pupils during the period of compulsory schooling to certain essential 'areas of experience'. Their 'check-list' of eight areas is not identical to any of Hirst's lists of 'forms of knowledge' (or experience, or meaning, which Hirst regards as identical to knowledge in this context), but the similarities are clear. It is not, in the Inspectorate's view, that each of the eight areas should be catered for by a particular school subject—the mathematical area by mathematics, say—but that virtually every school subject justifies its place on the curriculum by being concerned with all the essential eight areas. This leads to some rather strained claims. History for example substantially involves the mathematical/scientific area of knowledge:

Historical methods are depending more and more on mathematical techniques ... [C]omputers store evidence and [are] used by schools in analysing parish records ... [T]he subject matter of history is also a means of understanding the development of our scientific and technological society. This is not merely through the biographies of scientists and mathematicians ...

I quote this interpretation of Hirst to point up what he was concerned not to say, and thus the austerity of the kind of philosophy he was practising. He was always clear that he had nothing to say about the school curriculum. He was, to repeat, concerned only with the *presuppositions* of knowledge whose pursuit for its own sake is the essence of a liberal education. Those presuppositions are the existence of the various forms of knowledge (experience, meaning) that he distinguishes. What kind of an argument is this? It does not rest on empirical observation, otherwise we would be justified in asking for empirical evidence, for wondering why, say, chess or ballroom dancing do not count as forms of knowledge (etc.) and what Hirst's grounds were for the changes he made to the list of forms from time to time. The point is that the different kinds of knowledge, experience, or meaning, *whatever they are*, presuppose the possibility of the kind of knowledge that underpins a liberal education, education for its own sake.

Yet this itself is a metaphysical claim (what else could it be?), even if it is a very modest one. The argument has the appearance of being rigorously logical, but this is matter largely of style. And it is a style whose austerity was at one with the strictly circumscribed nature of its content. This can be seen in numerous passages in his writings, such as the following:

Any notion of learning which is not the learning of some particular X, is as vague as the notion of going somewhere but nowhere in particular. Equally some particular person B is necessarily learning this X. Following the logical chain, it is therefore only in a context where both what is to be learnt and who is learning it are clear, that we can begin to be clear about teaching B, X. Just as

a pupil B cannot simply learn, but must necessarily be learning X, so A cannot simply teach, he must be teaching B, and he must be teaching B, X. (Hirst 1974: 109)

The algebraic tropes seem to show that Hirst had absorbed Ayer's insistence that beyond empirical knowledge only logic and mathematics save us from the abyss of metaphysics. But here we have little more than a particular style of prose, a particular range of metaphor. If it is a 'logical chain' it does not take us very far at all, though it constitutes a devastating rejoinder to the teacher who, when asked 'What are you teaching your class today?' replies, 'I don't teach subjects, I teach children.'

Two concluding points will take my discussion into the next two sections of this paper. The first is that it seems odd to describe the intensely human activity of learning and teaching in tropes that derive from mathematics, and particularly from algebra. The reader of this part of Hirst's work may well be left with the feeling that there are more interesting things to say about knowledge, particularly in the context of education, than about what it logically presupposes. The second concluding point is that his readiness to think in terms of forms of knowledge, meaning, and experience indifferently, odd though it is in some respects (Smith 1981), is a fine safeguard against any apparent exaltation of knowledge, and particularly of empirical knowledge and the sciences, at the expense of the interpretative understanding characteristic of the arts.

EPISTEMOLOGY

It would be good to be able to say that Hirst's work on the Forms of Knowledge inspired new interest in epistemology among philosophers of education. Certainly, there were many critical responses in journal articles during the 1970s and 1980s, plus a full-length book by Allen Brent, Philosophical Foundations for the Curriculum (1978). Interest continues, with a recent paper by Geoffrey Hinchliffe (2018) in which he fruitfully compares and contrasts Hirst's work on knowledge and the 'space of reasons' with that of McDowell (1994). For the most part, though, philosophers of education have until recently seemed content to leave epistemology to philosophers who specialize in that field, or to pursue epistemological questions under other headings, such as the nature of educational research. Paul Hirst's and Patricia White's four-volume collection, Philosophy of *Education: Major Themes in the Analytic Tradition* (1988) does not devote a section explicitly to epistemological issues at all; Randall Curren's *Philosophy of Education*: An Anthology (2007) contains a short section—four out of the sixty contributions in the book—to 'Inquiry, Understanding and Constructivism', although in both collections epistemological questions are discussed under other headings, such as 'Critical Thinking and Reasoning' (Curren) and 'Education and the Development of Mind' (Hirst and White). When I was invited by Routledge to edit a successor collection to Hirst and White's I thought I detected signs of revived interest in epistemology and found no shortage of interesting new work, and the Epistemology section of Volume I consisted of sixteen articles. It was helpful, too, that my collection was titled Philosophy of Education II: Major Themes in

Education (2015), thus signalling no exclusive commitment to any particular brand of philosophy—analytic, continental, or otherwise.

If epistemology came in recent years to seem less important to education than some of the other areas of philosophy, perhaps that was also because its own star was beginning to shine less brightly. It was usual to define epistemology in avowedly narrow terms as 'the study of knowledge and justified belief' (thus the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy): a sense had begun to grow that the field had become dominated by a limited set of questions. Foremost among these are what is called the Gettier problem (or problems), named after the American philosopher Edmund Gettier. Gettier challenges the adequacy of the idea that knowledge is true, justified belief by inventing cases where a person's belief is true, well- founded, but clearly not knowledge. For example, a man glances into his kitchen to see if his dog is there, catches a glimpse of what seems to be a dog of the right size and colour, and accordingly thinks his dog is indeed in the kitchen. But what his glance in fact took in was a similar animal that his wife came across, apparently lost, while walking the family dog: at this moment she is in fact phoning the owners, whose number is on a tag attached to the dog's collar. At the same time the man's own dog was, and perhaps still is, in the kitchen, but not visible from where he stood when he looked in. His belief that his dog was in the kitchen was true, and it was justified: we might say it was not surprising that he mistook the dog he saw for his own. Yet it hardly seems to qualify as knowledge. It doesn't seem right at all to say that this man knew his dog was in the kitchen.

There is an extensive literature dedicated to attempts to solve such problems. This seemed vital to those who took a foundational view of knowledge. On that view knowledge is like a building: we develop knowledge by erecting more complex and sophisticated kinds of it on the foundations of basic certainties which are themselves true and justifiable, and thus constitute a cohesive structure of knowledge. Candidates for basic certainties include incontrovertible sense-data or Descartes' conclusion that, whatever the contents of his thoughts, he himself must exist as an entity capable of thinking them. But if we cannot give a satisfactory account of the nature of knowledge then not even the foundations can be put in place. Along these lines we can call 'foundational' (or at least 'fundamental') the various efforts by philosophers of education (not least of course Paul Hirst) to distinguish different forms of knowledge as the basis of the curriculum. The persistence of Gettier problems is just one reason why such efforts are now generally regarded as unconvincing, and why epistemology in its classical form did not seem to have much that was fruitful to contribute to philosophy of education.

Kotzee (2013: 157) has gone so far as to say that 'a chill' has come over the relationship between the philosophy of education and analytic epistemology. He suggests some possible reasons for that, the particular widespread rejection of the idea that there is any universally recognized body of knowledge that children should acquire, as well as scepticism towards conceptions of education in which the transmission of knowledge is its chief function. Certainly, there has in recent years grown a sense that epistemology has different and more interesting questions to ask. For

example, instead of wondering what it is about knowledge that makes it knowledge, philosophers have increasingly asked why knowledge is valuable at all. They have become less interested in knowledge as cognitive content and more interested in knowers: in people and their cognitive capacities. Attention has turned to the role knowledge plays in communities and thus to *social* epistemology; to the field of virtue epistemology and the value of such qualities as concern for truth, openmindedness, 'intellectual character virtues' such as 'curiosity, open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual courage, intellectual rigour, and intellectual honesty' (Baehr 2013: 248–9). and to currently unfashionable virtues such as intellectual modesty. These are issues of obvious professional (and of course more broadly theoretical) concern to philosophers of education, and ones to which they stand to make a major contribution. In addition to this it has come to seem less obvious that propositional knowledge, or knowledge *that*, should be thought of as the paradigm of knowledge, and there has been an explosion of work on knowledge how, on skills and capacities, and on practical judgement and practical reason and, to a lesser extent, to understanding and interpretation. With the map of epistemology thus redrawn, questions about, for instance, the nature of learning, mental powers, intelligence, and memory, can be seen as central to philosophy-or as important places on the map—and not simply as explorations of its side roads. It would not be going too far to say that epistemology has recovered much of its warm relationship with philosophy of education even while it is increasingly unrecognizable to philosophers who specialized in it fifty years ago.

This explosion of interest in virtue epistemology however brings its own problems. Some of the commonly instanced epistemic virtues, such as 'love of truth', simply do not make sense. It is necessary to tread carefully here, and to reassure the reader that I have nothing but exasperation with the idea that we are moving into a 'post truth' era. But what can the phrase 'love of truth' mean? Perhaps we are irritated by a politician's claim that nobody cares more for the UK's National Health Service than he does: what he says simply is not true, we protest. But this is more like disgust at being lied to, at the attempted deceit. 'Love of truth' points to some more general commitment, but what could that commitment be? It is true that a red car has just passed my window, followed by two black ones, but this is a truth that does not move me at all. I certainly do not love it in some general way, divorced from any context that would make my attachment to this truth comprehensible: and then it would be the context and not simply its truth that made it lovable. Presumably someone who loved truth would be concerned to maximize the number of truths at their fingertips. They might do this by naming the flowers in their garden ('I call this tulip Josephine, this one Peter, this one Charlotte ...'), but such a person has got the importance of truth seriously wrong. Boys of around the age of 12 often pride themselves on knowing, say, the names of the grounds of all the clubs of the English Football League, or the batting averages of prominent cricketers from 1950 to the present, but we expect them to grow out of it. None of this is to denigrate the idea of truth. Either it is true or it is not that Lee Harvey Oswald's bullets were the only ones that hit President Kennedy; either it is true or it is not that the Soviets and not the Nazis committed the Katyn massacre in Poland in 1940. Talk of truth here signifies that there is in principle something solid to be found beyond propaganda, claim, and counterclaim. But it is not 'truth' as some abstract idea that we are committed to or can be said to love: it is the truth about who committed this particular assassination or that particular massacre because these are things that matter, while others do not.

'Love of truth', like 'intellectual rigour', may thus look more like a vice than a virtue. Montmarquet (1993: 22) observes that desire for truth is entirely compatible with intellectual dogmatism or fanaticism: so much more, we might say, is *love* of truth. Such desire or love may involve impatience with those areas of enquiry that lead less to *truth*, conceived in a scientific (or pseudo-scientific) way, than to interpretations that are more or less adequate or persuasive. There is no 'truth' in an insightful reading of a novel, or an impressive new interpretation of the causes of the First World War, that is comparable to the truths of mathematics or physics. But this does not mean that the good historian or literary critic does not love truth, nor that they love it too little. The criteria of good work in their field are simply different. Aristotle has an important insight into this which virtue epistemologists might take to heart. He reminds us that rigour, or 'precision' as his translator below has it, is relative to the issue under consideration:

It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b11–27, trans. Ross 1969)

SCIENTISM

Because Paul Hirst's approach to philosophy was so strongly influenced by the logical positivism that dominated British philosophy in the wake of A.J. Ayer, and because as I have noted above, his writing style made much use of its tropes, it would have been natural for his vision of education to foreground science at the expense of other areas of the curriculum. However, if we look in his writings for evidence of scientism, that is excessive respect, even veneration, for science, we find little or none. Far from that, he is concerned to emphasize that literature and the fine arts, as he calls painting and music (and no doubt he would have included film and sculpture) constitute 'a unique form of knowledge', securely in place alongside mathematics, history and science itself. (In his private life Hirst was a great lover of Wagner's music.) Yet in perhaps his most significant paper on literature and the fine arts he is concerned simply to justify the idea that these 'constitute an area in which we have *knowledge* of a unique form' (my emphasis), even while he concedes that 'This may be the least interesting, indeed the least important or valuable, aspect of the arts.' Of course, the emphasis on knowledge is necessary for his argument that 'the achievement of understanding involves the mastery of a whole range of complex language games, each game having its own particular function' (Hirst 1974: 81, originally a 1966 conference paper). We note here that Hirst finds it more natural to write of 'understanding' rather than of 'knowledge'. It is puzzling that he does

not, so to speak, listen to himself here and, following the instinct that seems to have prevented him from writing of 'knowledge', explore the well-known distinction between *verstehen* and *Erklärung*, the former including apprehension and interpretation, while the latter, often rendered as 'explanation' points towards the kind of knowledge that we think of as 'scientific', being etymologically connected with the historical Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and its valorizing of what we can see clearly before our eyes. This, I suspect, may be fatal to his entire 'forms of knowledge' thesis, in ways that I do not have space to explore here (see Smith 1981, though there are parts of this paper that do not now seem to me entirely sound).

There is a further oddity in Hirst's paper on 'Literature and fine arts as a unique form of knowledge' (Hirst 1973). After listing Picasso's 'Guernica', Middlemarch, 'Fidelio' or a Haydn symphony as examples of statements 'expressing a truth we can properly be said to know', there is no mention, let alone exploration or discussion, of any work of literature or of the 'fine arts' at all, in twelve pages of text. Here it does seem to me that Hirst is the victim of his preference for the abstract over the concrete, and that if he had turned his mind to a wider range of the arts—especially to abstract (paradoxically) sculpture such as the work of Barbara Hepworth, some of Wordsworth's short 'Lucy' poems, or Beethoven's late string quartets—the awkwardness of supposing that they express truths 'we can properly be said to know' would have impressed itself on him. Here I may seem precisely to offer an example of what we can be said to know about various forms of art, and thus to demolish my own argument. But this reductive kind of criticism is precisely an example of scientistic thinking, where all poetry and novels critiquing the legacy of the Enlightenment are examples of the same genus just as all tubes of hydrochloric acid contain the same chemical, that Wordsworth and his contemporaries were challenging.

Scientism has become so entrenched in our culture that it is unsurprising to find that it has colonized education. For example, E.D. Hirsch, in Validity in *Interpretation* (1967) and elsewhere, claims that the study of literature only opens the way to subjectivism and a free-for-all if there are different interpretations none of which can be said to be definitely right or wrong. Reading novels, plays, and poetry must proceed on the basis of a single and compelling criterion that guarantees and constitutes a correct reading if a text is to have a place in education. In the first part of his PESGB Impact booklet 'Powerful knowledge', cultural literacy and the study of literature in schools, Robert Eaglestone discusses Hirsch's solution: it is the author's intention that provides the 'correct methodology' (quoted in Eaglestone 2021: 21) and leads to real knowledge rather than the flabby imposters (understanding, interpretation, making sense) that have been haunting literary education. Eaglestone shows that for Hirsch there is only one kind of true knowledge, and that is the scientific kind. It is not the broad sense in which we can say we know Ahmed but not Amanda, or ask someone how well they know Paris, but 'the kind of knowledge which characterizes the natural sciences' (p. 12), when we talk of knowing the Periodic Table of the elements or knowing that light from the constellation of Andromeda take two and a half million years to reach Earth. 'Cultural literacy' in Hirsch's account demonstrates 'the mission-creep of scientific ideas from their right realm of understanding nature into a wider world' (Eaglestone 2021, 12): this is precisely *scientism*. Eaglestone's response is to demonstrate that there are in fact '*different kinds* of knowledge, as the very existence of different subjects implies' (his emphasis).

This response carries echoes of Paul Hirst, and it is entirely convincing. Yet the wild implausibility of Hirsch's chosen criterion needs to be made manifest. Quite a lot of the authors we read are dead and have left no clue as to their 'intention'. Some texts are anonymous or have no known single author (the *Iliad*, which we call Homer's, is the fruit of a long tradition of wandering reciters of old legends in Ancient Greece). Some authors are notoriously unreliable guides to the meaning of their own work. D.H. Lawrence is often instanced. And in famously declaring 'I am not one man, I am many, I am most' (Lyon 2006), Lawrence points up the absurdity of Hirsch's criterion. He can hardly be the best guide to his intention, when there is no one 'he' to be found. And he—to relish the paradox—according to Hirsch's argument, should know.

I will be brief here with Eaglestone's equally trenchant dismissal of the idea of 'powerful knowledge', which is the brainchild of Michael Young (e.g. 2014). It, too, takes scientific knowledge as the model for the teaching of all school subjects and for how teachers themselves are taught. Eaglestone writes:

Students in the sciences are taught the criteria and tools to make *calculations*. These criteria equations or complex scientific methods correctly applied produce correct answers. No one doubts that speed equals distance divided by time. 'Powerful knowledge' wishes the same for the humanities. (Eaglestone 2021: 17)

Accordingly, a focus on 'powerful knowledge' deliberately redirects attention away from students and learning as a process, because it was the focus on learners and the skills they need to acquire that supposedly ruined education in the UK for several generations of children.

The educational consequences of scientism here are disastrous. They take us back to a world where a student's engagement with, say, Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* will only bring her 'powerful knowledge' if she can answer questions like 'How many sheep had Gabriel Oak?' (Charles Dickens's description in *Hard Times* of the humiliation of Sissy Jupe in Mr Gradgrind's school for being unable to define a horse comes irresistibly to mind.) The consequences today include school students being told that Thomas Hardy often uses the metaphor of a farmer's duty to his animals for his capacity for taking care of the people to whom he owes responsibility. The students highlight examples of this in their texts. The process is so efficient and productive of good examination grades that many never bother to read the novel at all.

As is no doubt obvious, both Hirsch and Young are driven by the search for objectivity, and thus by the perceived need for standardization. Only when we have that, of course, can we have reliable comparison not just between children but between schools and school systems. The shadow of PISA (International Programme for Student Assessment) and the demand for ever more fine-grained data loom over this. Here much could be said, too, about the way scientism lies behind current trends in educational research, which is marked by the growing tendency to imitate scientific and medical research, and in particular the randomized controlled trials (RCTs) which are often thought of as their 'gold standard'. This results in, as well as being partly caused by, the ready assumption that proper educational research is essentially or even exclusively empirical in nature: that the researcher goes out (into 'the real world', of course, as if that was a guarantee of quality) to collect data, which is then measured and quantified: a process which is revealingly called 'analysis', suggesting a process of breaking down phenomena into self-evident atoms in some way or other.

There is no space here to illustrate this in more detail, and in any case I have written about this extensively elsewhere (e.g. Smith and Smeyers 2014). But it is worth reflecting on the fact that scientism is now not content with shaping the content of education—what we might call knowledge in the broadest sense—in schools: in dominating research it is extending its sway to our sense of what is to count as the generation of knowledge itself. Only the human soul is left unquantified, and this omission it appears is shortly to be rectified. James Vincent writes of how the entirely sensible attempt to arrive at standard forms of measurement for the production of milk, the storing of corn, and so on—apparently there were 250,000 variant uses in use in eighteenth-century France—led to the obsession with measurement with which we are familiar today.

It's in school that we are first exposed to the harsh lessons of quantification—where we are sorted by grade and rank and number, and told that these are the measures by which our future success will be gauged.

Once we leave school and begin work, these tests reappear in the form of KPIs (key performance indicators) and OKRs (objective and key results). In my own early career as a journalist, the value of my work was judged primarily by a pair of statistics: the number of articles I wrote and the online page views they attracted. My peers and I were taught to value quantity over quality ...

... The underlying principle—that any human endeavour can be reduced to a set of statistics—has become one of the dominant paradigms of the 21st century. (Vincent 2022)

We should not be surprised when Vincent tells us that there is a 'Quantified Self movement' whose members hope to achieve 'self-knowledge through numbers', as represented, for example, by wearable fitness and sleep trackers, leading ultimately to an obsession with minor changes of diet and their putative connection with enhanced well-being.

METAPHYSICS

Metaphysics, for so long consigned to the realm of nonsense by philosophers trained in the tradition of logical positivism, had, I suggested above, a vestigial presence in Hirst's writings on the Forms of Knowledge. It is now returning with fuller and unapologetic force. Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman's recently published philosophical biography of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysical Animals: How Four Women Brought*

Philosophy Back to Life includes the following, in 'Afterwards'. The four philosophers tried to see for themselves 'what is of serious importance in human life', a task made all the more important by the horrors of war in which they met and worked.

For all four friends, what mattered most was to bring philosophy back to life. Back to the context of the messy, everyday reality of human life lived with others. Back to the deep connection that ancient philosophers saw between Human Life, Goodness and Form. Back to the fact that we are living creatures, animals, whose nature shapes our ways of going on. (MacCumhail and Wiseman 2022: 295)

We use language, ask questions, draw pictures, and these, our creations, change the world we live in and through this they change us. Ethical questions are not just questions about the language of morality, important as these are. Where Kant had thought it was our capacity for reason that formed the groundwork for morality; the four philos-ophers thought there was indeed a kind of groundwork that showed us the basis for moral thought and action, but it was the teeming, rough, contingent, often self-contradictory variety of our lives. This is our nature, which 'shapes our ways of going on'. It is always there. This is what is meant by saying that we are 'metaphysical animals'.

It is a familiar point that in his later writings Hirst moved away from his earlier insistence that rational autonomy is the ultimate aim of education and indeed of human life in general. He was now prepared to concede that a good life is one 'ordered by the demands of practical reason, not those of theoretical reason' where our human nature as creatures with shared social, cultural, physical, and other needs is fully acknowledged and cared for. To live thus is to enjoy a rational life, but not the austere rationality as conceived in his early work where it served principally to justify the transcendental deduction by which anyone who asked why rational autonomy should be so highly valued could be told that simply by asking that question, they demonstrated their commitment to reason. Beyond that, reason worked chiefly to order 'all other human concerns into a coherent and consistent whole' (Hirst 1993: 185).

In *Philosophy and the Metaphysical Achievements of Reason,* Ryan McInerney argues that the later Hirst has moved from the repudiation of metaphysics, a position he inherited from the Vienna Circle, as mediated through A.J. Ayer and others, to a substantial if tacit embrace of metaphysics. McInerney writes that philosophy orients us explicitly to:

reality at large, the home of thinking beings: it does that, however, from the historical standpoint of language, the medium of thought; and its sayings, which continue to speak through us again and anew, are only ever on the verge of being thought. This orientation, meanwhile, is the original, monumental achievement of education everywhere. Education effects a metaphysical transformation by introducing us to language, the repository of mind, and the fount of reason. (McInerney 2021: 3)

Thus McInerney, like Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley, and Iris Murdoch takes us 'back to the fact that we are living creatures, animals, whose nature shapes our ways of going on'. A new (but of course very old) agenda for philosophy of education seems to be taking shape. In the context of this *Festschrift* it is wonderful to note the part that Paul Hirst played as he wrestled with the various roles and forms of philosophy and helped prepare the way for a return to metaphysics.

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