

Preface

Until relatively recently most reflective people regarded Anglo-American philosophy as an arcane academic subject of little use to ordinary people worried about how to live and how to vote. Anglophone philosophers encouraged that view by writing mainly in specialized jargon about remote issues of metaphysics, logic, and language and by treating moral and political issues as matters of emotional commitment as to which philosophers could have no special insight or make no special contribution. What was then called “continental” philosophy, because it had mainly been practiced in Germany and France, was widely supposed to be much more “relevant.” True, it was often obscure, but at least it dealt with issues that matter to people. In recent decades, however, it is the philosophy created and taught in British and American universities that has turned out to become of the greatest practical importance, and the rigor and transparency of that philosophy has proved essential to its importance.

There are many causes of that change; among these is a change in popular political culture that has made serious, careful philosophy more obviously relevant to politics. The dramas of the last few decades have confirmed that an exclusively technological, pragmatic approach to politics is irrelevant because the great issues facing mature democracies – which range from economic justice to the place of religion in politics and to the constraints of justice in fighting terrorism – cannot be properly confronted without renewed attention to contests about the best philosophical understanding of the key concepts of political morality: of justice, freedom, liberty, economic efficiency, equal respect and the rule of law. The study of these concepts is not the province of political philosophy or the philosophy of economics alone, for that study must draw on the theories of metaphysics, knowledge and truth contested by philosophers in other departments. Philosophy more than most subjects is a seamless web.

The great challenge is to bring the best philosophical argument to a wider audience so that it can play a greater role in political consciousness and argument. That is of course a daunting task, but the arrival of a new philosophical journal produced by and for undergraduate and graduate students is a particularly welcome development. It is a further advantage that this new journal is produced in the London School of Economics and Political Science, an institution whose historical concern with social and political policy is special and distinct. Welcome to *Rerum Causae*.

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