

Preface

One of the more attractive features of philosophy as a discipline is that it allows pretty much anything to count as a worthy object of investigation. It is in effect a license for poking one's nose into everyone's business! Not surprisingly therefore it tends to attract the curious (perhaps in more than one sense of the word), those who want to know the causes of many things. And more than just the causes too: their way, their significance and their future. This wide ranging explanatory and investigative ambition is admirably demonstrated in this third volume of *Rerum Causae*, a collection of philosophy papers from students at the London School of Economics. The topics of these papers range from the venerable to the contemporary, from the critical to the speculative, from logical to the sociological. All succeed in illuminating the topic they broach.

Three of the papers are on related questions in the philosophy of science. Sudhir criticises Nancy Cartwright's view that scientific laws 'lie' by offering false representations of reality, on the grounds that her conception of the role of laws is too demanding. According to Sudhir, while laws do aim to describe the functioning of different causal powers or capacities, they do not aim to provide exhaustive representations of reality in all its complexity. Huet-Vaughan clarifies and then examines a rival view of science to the causalist one, that of the economist Milton Friedman. He argues that Friedman's claim that the only true test of a theory is its predictive accuracy has to be qualified in the light of the different uses to which theories can be put. Friedman also figures in Colombo's paper on neuro-economics. According to Colombo, neurobiology is fostering a positive research programme in economics in providing the building blocks for models of economics behaviour with greatly increased predictive power – research on the Ultimatum Game provides a salient example. He defends these models against the charge that they fail to explain the phenomena that they predict, drawing on Milton Friedman's contention that the primary goal of empirical science is accurate prediction.

Two of the papers belong to normative philosophy. Drawing on cases at the European Court of Human Rights, Brenner argues that utilitarianism is both compatible with a rule-based defence of human rights and that it provides a framework within which considerations of welfare can be used to

determine the extent and depth of rights and the level of protection that they require. Austin's paper is a critical examination of Justine Lacroix's claim that compulsory voting is not only compatible with liberalism but required by the liberal value of equality of autonomy. Lacroix's argument, Austin maintains, is undermined by the inefficacy of such compulsion. No-one can be compelled to vote properly (without violating secrecy) and hence the egalitarian outcomes cannot be assured.

At the risk of classificatory fetishism, the remaining three papers, though very different, may be construed as contributions to the broad field of logic and metaphysics. Elkin and Köhler's papers respectively address the venerable problems of truth and free will. Elkin defends Tarski's semantic theory of truth against Strawson's claim that it leads to an unacceptable regimentation of the semantics of natural languages, arguing that its real value lies in providing scientists with a well-behaved regulative principle. Köhler defends Mill's compatibilist account of freedom of the will against the objection that, given determinism, what a person wants and believes is caused by factors external to her and hence so too are the choices that depend on them. For Köhler it is not the absence of external causes of our attitudes that makes us free but our ability to revise these attitudes; for instance when we discover them to be inconsistent. Finally, Jones examines the impact of social networks, such as those provided by Facebook, on the representation of the self. The question he leaves us with is where our identity lies: in our corporeal materiality or our digital hyper-reality?

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