

Richard Davies: biobiographical profile

Richard Davies was born in London and read Philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge. Upon graduating, he was awarded a British Academy grant to pursue research in Philosophy (PhD 1992), and gave supervisions in almost all subjects provided for in the Tripos, as well as running university seminars in Metaphysics and Logic. In his last year in Cambridge, he was Director of Studies in Philosophy at Christ's College and at Fitzwilliam College. For several years, he was Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Birmingham. After moving to Italy, he collaborated with the Centre for Research in Metaphysics at the Catholic University of Milan and taught English at the University of Bergamo. Since 2000, he has taught History of Philosophy and Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Bergamo.

Aiming to enrich his initial formation firmly in the analytic tradition, Davies has sought to bring to bear on some classic philosophical texts questions and styles of questioning that have been at the centre of recent debates and, in turn, to use the results as food for thought about the questions that happen to be of current interest to analytic philosophers. In this optic, he aims to be faithful to the division of the examination papers for Part IA of the Philosophy Tripos: Metaphysics, Logic, Ethics and Set Texts.

In a running interrogation of Descartes' theory of knowledge, Davies has sought to bring to the fore some elements of recent virtue-theoretical insights in epistemology already latent in Cartesian writings¹, in contrast with some misleading appropriations of the initial position set out in the *Meditations*². While Descartes' (in)famous doctrine of dualism may be even more mysterious than is often thought, when it is placed against a certain background³, it is worth considering Descartes' own self-positioning against that background, as a reticent participant in the philosophical debates of his day⁴.

At the intersection of epistemology and ontology, there arise a range of questions about the standing of and about our access to a range of categories that do not seem to fit traditional dichotomies of particular and universal. While some of these questions may be answered in reference to equally traditional terminology, some caution is called for in mapping the terrains in

¹ *Descartes' Cultivation of the Intellect: A Reading of his Theory of Enquiry*, Bergamo University Press, Bergamo, 1999 (304 pp.); *Descartes: Belief, Scepticism and Virtue*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 200 (371 pp.); and 'The Modes of Descartes' First Meditation', in *Academic Scepticism in Early Modern Philosophy* ed. S. Charles and P. Junqueira Smith, Springer, Cham (CH), 2017, pp. 153-80. On the emergence of virtue theories also in ethics 'Some Quodlibets on the Virtues', *The Modern Schoolman*, LXXVI (Nov. 1998), pp. 43-60.

² 'The Demon and the Scientist', *Epistemologia*, XXVII (2004) pp. 299-318.

³ 'Mysterious Mixtures: Descartes on Mind and Body', *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 4 (2015), pp. 47-78.

⁴ 'Descartes' Letters', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 83/3 (2001), pp. 308-23; 'Cartesio e le accademie' *Mosacio francese*, ed. J. Schiavini Trezzi, Moretti & Vitali, Bergamo, 2012, pp. 169-92; and 'Making Room for the Individual in Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*' in *A Companion to World Literature*, ed. K. Segneurie, John Wiley & Sons, London, 2019, vol. IV, pp. 1503-12

question⁵. One particular area of interest here is that presented by the recent evolution of the status of the objects of intellectual property, especially what are known as documents⁶.

Davies' longstanding interests in logic run in two main directions. One is towards a synthesis of recent formal developments within the traditions running back to Aristotle's *Organon*⁷, along with clarification of some purely technical – but alarmingly basic – matters, for instance to do with conditionals and quantification⁸. In the other, there are the vexed questions of how to recognise and diagnose arguments that appear to have gone awry⁹, especially when, as may happen for instance in the philosophy of time, the availability of certain formalisms seems to close down questions that are, and perhaps should remain, controversial¹⁰. In like manner, though Hume claimed to have a decisive argument against miracles, the main text in which he makes this claim seems to crumble in our hands when we try to extract the argument¹¹.

At the intersection of ethics and political theory, the currently going theories seem to divide between those that hark back to utilitarianisms of various sorts and those that repropose versions of social contract theory. One figure who stands at the watershed between these two tendencies is Cesare Beccaria, whose *Of Crimes and Punishments* (1764) Davies translated into English for the Cambridge University Press (1995) and on which he later commented¹². Unless hedonism is true,

⁵ 'Tipi e gettoni: i limiti del nominalismo e gli oggetti della proprietà intellettuale', in *L'ontologia della proprietà intellettuale: aspetti e problemi*, ed. A. Bottani and R. Davies, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2005, pp. 70-102; 'Come fare cose con le cose: un esercizio di ontologia ingenua', in *Ontologia/Ontology*, ed. M. Benzi, *Networks*, N° 6 (2006), pp. 90-126; 'Sorte: Quando una cosa è una cosa' in *Ontologie regionali*, ed. A. Bottani and R. Davies, Mimesis, Milan, 2007, pp. 57-81; 'Carving Nature at the Joints', in *Natural and Artifactual Objects: Exercises in Analytical Ontology*, ed. R. Davies, Bloomsbury, London, 2019, pp. 1-16.

⁶ 'Intellectual Propriety', *The Monist*, vol. 93 no. 3, (2010) pp. 339-53; 'Better Wed than Read: Marriage as a Paradigm Case for the Theory for Documentality', *Rivista di Estetica*, 50 (2012), pp. 53-72; 'Why Society is Not Made of Documents', in *Metaphysics and Ontology Without Myths*, ed. F. Bacchini, S. Caputo, M. Dell'Utri, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle (UK), 2014, pp. 125-138; 'What documents cannot do', *Philosophical Readings*, VI (2014), pp. 41-52.

⁷ *Gli oggetti della logica*, Mimesis, Milan, 2009 (609 pp.).

⁸ 'Lowe on conditionals', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 45, N° 181 (1995), pp. 477-86; 'Where is 'There is' in '∃'?', *History and Philosophy of Logic*, 2020, 41, 4 (online).

⁹ *Le fonti dell'argomentazione*, Audino Editore, Roma, 2021 (236 pp.), which draws in parts on parts of 'Collocare le fallacie', in *Dibattito, didattica, fallacie e altri campi dell'argomentazione* ed. A. Cattani and M. De Conti, Loffredo, Naples, 2012, pp. 71-88; 'Can We Have a Theory of Fallacies?', *Rivista italiana di filosofia del linguaggio*, 6 (2012), pp. 25-40; 'Eristic dialectic: The fencing master's judgment', *Eris*, I, (2015), pp. 20-33; and 'In Defence of a Fallacy' *Studia Semiotyczne*, 2020, XXXIV, 2, pp. 25-42, and a part is developed in 'Locke and ad', *Argumentation*, 2023 (online doi/10.1007/s10503-023-09594-w).

¹⁰ 'The Phenomenology of Time and the Retreat of Reason' *Humana.mente*, 8 (2009), pp. 131-55; 'Lost in *Lost's* Times' in *The Ultimate Lost and Philosophy* ed. W. Irwin and S. Kaye, Wiley-Blackwell, Boston (Mass.), 2010, pp. 9-31.

¹¹ 'Credibilità relativa', afterword to D. Hume and J. Douglas, *Disputa sui miracoli*, Medusa, Milan, 2005, pp. 89-124; "'Impact" and "Overrule": Two models of belief-assessment in Hume's essay "Of Miracles"', *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*, CVI, 1 (2014), pp. 95-130.

¹² 'L'attualità di Cesare Beccaria', in *Un fortunato libriccino: L'attualità di Cesare Beccaria*, ed. R. Davies and P. Tincani, L'Ornitorinco, Milan, 2014, pp. 9-22; 'Newtoncini tra lumi e tenebre: Beccaria e Facchinei', in *Un fortunato libriccino: L'attualità di Cesare Beccaria*, ed. R. Davies and P. Tincani, L'Ornitorinco, Milan, 2014, pp. 79-127; and 'Limiting the Death Penalty: Beccaria's Polemical Styles', *Philosophical Inquiry*, II (2014), pp. 87-106.

utilitarianism cannot be; but very few philosophers have wanted to identify pleasure and the good; one exception is Eudoxus of Cnidus, who, if Plato and Aristotle are to be believed, provided some surprisingly strong arguments in favour of just that identification¹³. While social contract theories come in two main flavours, the Hobbesian and the Lockean, according to how one conceives of the starting circumstances from which the supposed contract emerges¹⁴, the thought experiment of Rawls' original position may be decisive in providing criteria of the justice or otherwise of certain social arrangements, including but not limited to the question of the role of women¹⁵.

While recognising but deprecating the appeal of styles of philosophising athwart the analytic tradition¹⁶, Davies cannot but concede not only that there is no plausible candidate for what Descartes called a 'method' in the subject, but also that there is no obvious order in which to confront the challenges that the traditional questions pose¹⁷.

¹³ 'La ricezione delle argomentazioni etiche di Eudossio di Cnido tra l'Accademia e il Liceo', in *Seconda Navigazione* ed. R. Radice and G. Tiengo, Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 2015, pp. 157-99; 'The Measure of Pleasure: A note on the Protagoras', *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 2017, III, 3, pp. 301-15; *The Hedonism of Eudoxus of Cnidus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2023.

¹⁴ 'Trust and the Past in *Lost's* State of Nature', in *Lost and Philosophy*, ed. S. Kaye, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 2008, pp. 177-90 (reprinted in *Introducing Philosophy Through Popular Culture* ed. W. Irwin and D.K. Johnson, Wiley-Blackwell, (Mass.), 2010, pp. 249-59; in *The Ultimate Lost and Philosophy* ed. W. Irwin and S. Kaye, Wiley-Blackwell, (Mass.), 2010, pp. 145-63; also in *Introducing Philosophy through Popular Culture* (2a ed.) ed. W. Irwin and D.K. Johnson, John Wiley and Sons, Hoboken, NY, 2022, pp. 273-83).

¹⁵ 'Ragionare con persone', in *Scienze della persona: perché?*, ed. G. Bertagna, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2006, pp. 133-43; 'How to point a philosophical armchair', *Discipline filosofiche*, XXV, 1 (2015), pp. 173-90; 'Donne filosofe? Un ragionamento dirottato' in *Filosofe Maestre Imperatrici*, ed. M. Bonelli, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 2020, pp. 3-15.

¹⁶ 'Teorie, prassi e critiche', *Quaderni del dipartimento di linguistica e letterature comparate dell'Università di Bergamo*, 10, (1994) pp. 185-211; *Nietzsche disintossicato*, Ornitorinco, Milan, 2018 (pp. 204).

¹⁷ 'L'ora di filosofare', afterword to Italian edition of Martha Nussbaum, *La terapia del desiderio (The Therapy of Desire)*, Vita e Pensiero, 1998 pp. 617-61; 'Should Philosophy Books Be Treated as Fiction?' *Knowledge Organization*, 36 (2009), pp. 121-9; 'I nodi da sciogliere: un sondaggio di alcune criticità dell'analisi filosofica' in *Analisi: Annuario della Società Italiana di Filosofia Analitica*, ed. R. Davies, Mimesis, Milan, 2011, pp. 13-43.