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Richard Sorabji, Intellectual autobiography

1930s

I was born in 1934 and my first lessons, aged 4, in 1938 were with my English grandmother, May Monkhouse, in our Oxford home. She told me of the Greeks and Romans, and put to me philosophical questions. 'What are you thinking about?', she once asked me. 'Nothing,' I replied. 'It is impossible to think of nothing', she said sternly. Next time I said, 'Something black', which seemed to me positive enough to avoid the rebuke, but close enough to 'Nothing' to preserve the truth.

She also taught me what much later I learnt to be a Stoic lesson, that after stretching out one's glass for water, one must never take it straight to one's lips. Rather one must set it first on the table, as if one had all the time in the world.

I am told that she once looked at me approvingly and said, 'He'll be a philosopher'. Whether these syllables had any influence on my childhood self I cannot say. But another episode certainly did. When I was six, my 12-year old sister Francina (now Francina Irwin) told me, 'You will die one day'. 'Don't be ridiculous', I replied, 'dying is for flies and butterflies'. I had seen these dead on our sunny windowsill in Oxford, but I did not accept the preposterous proposition that it could apply to me. 'I will show you you're wrong,' I said, 'I will ask Mummy'. I shall never forget the scene. Our mother was standing by my little plot in the garden, where a chestnut shoot sprouted from the corner, and she told me the truth in the nicest possible way, she herself believing in an after-life and picturing it like a garden. But I could never put this truth behind me, and it certainly influenced my inclination to philosophical study.

My father was Indian and had married an English girl, Mary K. Monkhouse, 30 years his junior. Elders from the Indian side, as well as the English, were set up to me as models: my Indian grandfather, whom I didn't know, but who survived murder attempts for his new-found Christian faith, my Indian Aunt Cornelia, the first woman lawyer in England or India, and my Indian Aunt Alice, who survived as a doctor and wife of a doctor among the wild tribes of the Afghan Frontier. I have fond memories of these and other Indian aunts descending from London to Oxford, in their brilliant saris during the 1940s. Being all but one of them childless, they liked to instruct my mother on how to bring up a son. Fortunately, my mother was robust.

My Father and my Aunt Cornelia had come up to Oxford University in 1890 and were both protegées of the Plato scholar, Jowett, the most influential English academic figure of his age. It was he who forced the law examiners at Oxford to reverse their refusal to examine Cornelia as a woman, by taking a vote of the Oxford Congregation. Cornelia had become Jowett's confidant, and he sent her to stay with some of the leading figures of the late Victorian age. When Tony Kenny became a remote successor of Jowett as Master of Balliol

College, I confided to him that as a child I had supposed that to be the most important job in the world. 'Only as a child, Richard?' he asked. When I was 9, Cornelia asked me up to lunch in London at Barristers Mess in Lincoln's Inn, where she then lived, and asked in a loud voice what I wanted to be when I grew up. Unfortunately, I gave the wrong answer, since I had already decided I wanted to be a teacher.

1940s

I started going to school at six. At that little school, I started my Greek activities by producing a play on the satisfying subject of Procrustes, who lopped or stretched his guests, until they fitted his bed exactly, but received his comeuppance from the hero Theseus.

In 1943, a little before my 9th birthday, I started going to the Dragon School in Oxford, driven by Mr or Mrs Bryan Brown, he being the formidable Latin Orator of Oxford University. I loved the school above all because on the last day of the Summer term, the staff would perform a fancy dress play on the river bank, which ended with them all throwing each other into the water. But the person who impressed me most of all was the brilliant Science teacher, Gerd Sommerhoff, who gave me a love of Science that has lasted all my life. In my first year, we were still being taught to recite the falsehood, ‘The atom is the smallest part of any matter’. But then Gerd Sommerhoff, a non-Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany, returned from his intern camp in Canada. The British had sent him there, along with the Communist atom-spy Fuchs, and the Nobel Laureate-to-be Hermann Bondi, who had the misfortune to be in Cambridge in 1939, when the Government decided to intern ‘aliens in coastal areas’. Cambridge, unlike Oxford, was classified as a coastal area. Sommerhoff had just left Oxford for his mother's home in the Isle of Wight, which was definitely coastal. So he spent 2 of the war years in Canada teaching Physics with Fuchs in an internee camp. Fuchs was welcomed back by the Government earlier in the war, and so was able to spy on the British atom-bomb project and later pass the secrets to the Soviet Union. But Sommerhoff was told he must stay, or there would be noone to do the teaching.

Sommerhoff, long before the days of electronic toys, made an electronic battleship which launched its life boats on the river, and an electronic organ, played by interrupting its beams at a distance. He made a revolving solar system suspended from an old violin attached to the ceiling, and a punched metal display which lit up the constellations in response to switches. Later at another school, he got the pupils to make electronic sensors to help the blind navigate, and much later I was to learn that he had written a philosophical article on the first subject I was to write about myself, purposive explanation in Biology. He also taught me an important moral lesson by announcing that the boy who came top in a test he gave could beat with his hand the boy who came bottom. It so happened that on that occasion I came top and a close friend came bottom, so I gave him a proper beating. ‘Why did you do that?’, he asked, and I was absolutely humiliated. I hope I have never again done anything merely because an admired authority said I could. Sommerhoff’s

lesson, I believe, was that what had happened under Hitler could happen anywhere. It was to the credit of my friend, David van Rest, that he remained my friend.

Another more unlikely hero was Baden Powell, not because he founded the Boy Scout Movement, but because his autobiographical *Indian Memories* included his watercolours of India, and because his account of the siege of Mafeking taught me lessons which I was to exploit in the 1980s, when Government funding to the British universities was under siege. He made his only gun out of a gatepost, and kept the besiegers at bay by poking over the parapets arrays of helmeted faces painted on biscuit tins. From the 1980s, the British universities were under siege from a cost-cutting Government, and similar techniques were needed in order to grow and flourish.

While I was still at the Dragon School, my mother ran an informal theological discussion group in the house weekly and eventually I came to attend regularly. One of the participants, Stuart Blanch, later became the Archbishop of York, though he was then in his first job as a curate; another had been a German anti-aircraft gunner in the recent Second World War, and they might well have fired at each other. The Theology came easily to me, but I also took in Stuart Blanch's skill at answering off-beat questions. 'Do you really think so?' he would reply, 'how very interesting'.

From the age of 8, the Dragon School used to spend the first part of every day, while one was fresh, on Latin, adding Greek at the age of 11. At the age of 12, I was in the second stream from top, but I was told that I could be promoted to Upper 1, if I learned the Greek irregular verbs over the Christmas holiday. My mother knew no Greek, but helped me rehearse the Greek for 'I have been known' (*egnôsmai)* by mnemonic techniques such as I was to write about later. She drew an egg, a nose and a finger pointing to it as *my* nose: *egg-nose-my*. The success with these verbs was just enough for me to gain the 13th scholarship out of 13 offered by my next school Charterhouse, and to move on there at age 13 in 1948, with my fees paid. I had been attracted to Charterhouse because it had been Baden Powell's school.

At Charterhouse, as at other such schools, we learnt a great deal of English verse by putting into Latin or Greek verse such rhymes as, 'The chief defect of Henry King was chewing little bits of string'. Failure to translate into English a particle or connective word from the beginning of a Greek sentence was treated as a total failure to translate the sentence at all. My careless translation from Latin of *noctes amaras* as 'nights of love', instead of 'bitter nights', was inscribed on the blackboard and I was not allowed to erase it for the rest of term. The worst moral offence at Charterhouse was to be caught using an English translation or 'crib', as I once was, to help one translate one's Greek or Latin. All this was a good preparation for the future.

The master for whom I mistranslated *noctes amaras*, I learnt much later, was a notable scholar of Patristics, Henry Bettenson, whose scholarly books I was to use. He was also the school Chaplain. I decided, with great regret, not to accept Confirmation in the Christian Faith, because I had doubts. I was

horrified when one of my schoolmates said he was getting confirmed only because it gave him a day off work to meditate in the Bishop's garden, and I told Bettenson. He was very angry with me and said I should never take at face value what people said about their faith. To this day, I do not know whether he was right or wrong.

1950s

Just before I left the school in 1953, there arrived a brilliant Headmaster, Brian Young (later Sir Brian) known as the Black Death because of his elegant black suits. Each week, he set us four tasks for our spare time such as, 'find (a) the funniest, and (b) the least funny joke in ancient literature'. This was the most exciting teaching I had had at the school. I was by then the top boy academically, although this was a very low standard compared with that of those I would go on to meet. I had been given a scholarship by Pembroke College, Oxford, to go there with my fees paid, an act of faith by my later Classics tutor and friend, Godfrey Bond.

I volunteered first to do my two years of compulsory military service. I chose the Navy and the course in Russian Language based at London University.[1] This meant getting to know the most interesting fellow students, as well as practising cabaret skills. We had to work hard because failure in any single one of the fortnightly exams entailed exile to the East German border. But after passing the one-year course in London, we spent much of the rest of the time conversing in Russian, in the beautiful countryside of Cornwall, with Russian emigrees, all of whom had hair-raising tales of escape from their own Soviet forces at the end of the Second World War.

Returned to Oxford in 1955, I still had a 2-year postponement before I could start Philosophy. The Latin and Greek had to be honed to a higher level. But I used the time well by courting my future wife Kate. In the term of my Classics exams, we were asked to a party every night in return for my performing cabaret with the guitar. We married in 1958, a year before I finished being an undergraduate. Godfrey Bond, a good tutor and friend, made sure that I suffered in no way from the 17th century statutes of King James the First, which forbade scholars of the College to marry. I did not even have to surrender my scholar's gown.

The Philosophy course began in 1957, and my tutor was Donald MacNabb. MacNabb was actually, though he was too modest to say so, The MacNabb, the Head of his Scottish clan. The main teaching took the form of tutorial, that is of reading aloud one's essay to an expert tutor, in the company of at most one fellow student, We wrote two essays a week, one in Ancient History and one in Philosophy. With a good tutor, it could be a transforming experience to try out one's faltering ideas on a first class and sympathetic mind.

Unfortunately, for my first 8 tutorials, MacNabb said, 'You could read Gilbert Ryle, *Concept of Mind*, a splendid book, and write on the Mind-Body

[1] The Russian course has been described by Geoffery Elliott and Harold Shukman in Secret Classrooms, London 2002

problem'. Seven times I replied, 'I read that the first week, Sir. Is there anything else you would recommend?'. But he only said, 'the books - read the books'. I later learnt that this meant, 'read the two books in Greek, Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Ethics'*, which constituted the Ancient Philosophy part of the course. But I did not understand at the time.

After the first term, I wrote as politely as I could to the Master of my College and said I had enjoyed my first term of Philosophy, but could I get another perspective by trying another tutor? The letter was forwarded to MacNabb, who wrote to me that he was sorry he was considered a fuddy-duddy (something I had never said), but I would have to put up with him. He then sent all my fellow students to other tutors, but me he kept to himself for the remaining two years. None of this could happen nowadays. There are safeguards and appeal procedures and my Oxford colleagues are among the most conscientious I know. In fact I think the danger is the opposite, that their teaching and College duties have become *too* heavy. But in those days there was only one solution.

I paid graduate students out of my own pocket to give me tutorials, read them an essay at the beginning of the week and then read the same essay later in the week to MacNabb. The graduate students were brilliant. One, Michael Woods, later became an Oxford tutor, as well as a life-long friend. He opened my eyes to what it was to read a philosophical text in Greek. MacNabb hospitably gave me my official tutorial in his home, but all he asked me was, 'What is the *Philosophical Review?*' (it was then the world's leading English-language Philosophy journal, edited at Cornell), or 'Who is Miss Anscombe?'. Elizabeth Anscombe, later to be Professor at Cambridge, was then at another Oxford College, and had just published in 1957 what seemed to me the most original set of Philosophy lectures of that period in Oxford, *Intention*, which in effect recreated a whole subject, the examination of human action and motivation.

Much later, I learnt that MacNabb had been very bright at the time of his appointment in 1936, and defeated A.J.Ayer for the job. He succeeded the great R.G. Collingwood, and both his predecessors in Pembroke, Collingwood and the Aristotelian Henry Chandler, attained to Oxford's Waynflete Chair. His display of insouciance may have been partly assumed. He had written a clear and pleasantly self-deprecating book on Hume,which I read. He also took me to the 100th anniversary meeting of the Oxford Philosophy Society, where he was pleased to hear Isaiah Berlin record that he, MacNabb, was one of the six elite Oxford philosophers who met in Berlin's rooms and developed the style of linguistic Philosophy known after the war as Oxford Philosophy. But he had not kept up with the subject. It was said that when an enthusiastic lady exclaimed, 'How wonderful it must be to be an Oxford don', he replied, 'I would rather be a master of foxhounds'.

Fortunately, final examiners were independent of tutors, and at my final undergraduate examination I was given a friendly interview by Mary Warnock representing the ethicists. That went alright, but I was asked to come back for a

second interview an hour later. I had been thinking about Philosophy, but I was sure I would be interviewed on Ancient History. So I went across the road to Magdalen College, where there was a teacher famous for getting his students through the exam, Tom Brown Stevens. I knocked on his door and said, ‘You don’t know me, but I am about to be questioned on Ancient History, and I can’t remember any’. ‘Dear boy, sit down’, he said, ‘and I will tell you exactly what to say’. Then he gave me a very large glass of rum, so that I returned to the interview with my head swimming. Meanwhile he sat down and typed out half a page of information. ‘Here you are’, he said. ‘Whatever the first question, you must reply: “As you said in your lectures, Dr Chilver, the whole question turns on the issue of manhole covers”.’ Apparently, the head examiner had written about inscriptions on manhole covers in 1st century Rome. ‘Then you have the examiners in a *trap*’, he said ‘- you can predict their second question: “What do you mean, Mr Sorabji?”, and here is the answer’. With that, he handed me a summary of the head examiner’s opinions concerning inscriptions on 1st century manhole covers. With thanks, I staggered back to the Examination Schools, only to find that it was not the ancient historians, but the logicians who wanted to see me.

The Logic written exam was always set on a Monday, Ethics on a Thursday, and one of the questions in my written paper had been, ‘if today had been a Thursday, would you be doing a Logic or an Ethics exam?’ Such unpredictable questions were a particular feature of the Logic exam, and no doubt part of the reason why success in this syllabus gave immediate entry to the highest administrative jobs. Anyone who could think clearly in these circumstances would certainly be able to withstand the siege of Lucknow. Jowett, I believe, had made Plato's *Republic* and Thucydides' *Histories* part of the Oxford syllabus for a related reason, as being the ideal preparation for administrators in India.

1960s

After my 4 years as an undergraduate, I left and became a school teacher at my old school in Oxford, the Dragon. I should have been very happy as a school teacher, and never thought that I would have an opportunity to continue with Philosophy. But I was lucky that one of my examiners was John Ackrill, and he, prompted by Michael Woods, encouraged me to return. MacNabb arranged the introduction to the all-powerful Gilbert Ryle, and to my delight I was at once allowed to return to the graduate course specially designed by Ryle for future University teachers, the B.Phil., elsewhere called the M.Phil. and introduced by many universities in many subjects.

I had the extraordinary good fortune to have as my postgraduate teachers Gwil Owen and for a time John Ackrill, the first urbane and ebullient, a continuous firework display of knowledge and references, the second a perfectly matched scholar inculcating care and exactitude, so that you knew that any loose thread would lead to your entire tapestry being unravelled. I was not as over-awed as I should have been, because I thought that this was the standard of teaching that others had been enjoying in Oxford all along.

It was on returning to study that I had the first of my chance conversations with Isaiah Berlin. 'What are you studying?', he asked. Having so far read the two prescribed texts of Plato and Aristotle, I said, 'Ancient Philosophy'. 'Ancient Philosophy, Ancient Philosophy,' he replied, and then mentioning two parties of whom I knew absolutely nothing, 'Don't you think that the Stoic theory of *Oikeiôsis* (Attachment) is the very obverse of Marx's theory of Alienation?'. I thought about that question for over 30 years. Only in 1993 did I reach the point of writing about Stoic Attachment. Even now I have not written about Marxist Alienation. But what was important about Berlin's remark was not the scholarship - I don't know what he would have said about the Stoics - but his ability to make you realise that there were important things to be thought about far beyond those of any curriculum. When I had the privilege, near the end of my career, of becoming a Fellow of the College he in effect founded, Wolfson College, Oxford, I encountered another importance, the embodiment of a humane and liberal imagination in the design of a college uniquely devised for the needs of researchers of all ages and countries.

Oxford in my undergraduate days in the mid-1950s was the home of the Philosophy of Ordinary Language, as spoken in the Senior Common Rooms of Oxford. Appeals to ordinary language were thought, not by all but by the most extreme, to dissolve metaphysical speculation. The most feared of the practitioners, the dominant member of Berlin's sixsome, was J.L.Austin. I went to Austin's lectures in the first year of my philosophical studies, and for eight lectures he pretended he was sincerely trying to understand the first sentence of a book on perception written by another member of the circle, A.J.Ayer. Berlin's own vignette on Austin describes how this tournament also went on in Berlin's rooms, and how Ayer complained, 'Austin, you are like a greyhound who doesn't want to run himself, but bites the other greyhounds, so that they can't run either'. It would take careful analysis to say in what sense Austin was an ordinary language philosopher, but what I can say is that the lectures were extremely funny. I emerged from each one with my sides aching from laughter more continuous than any I have ever experienced in the theatre. Austin's aim was to deflate theory, or at least that particular theory of perception which I later came to agree in rejecting, but curiously enough his work led him on to something more theoretical, which was in the end, in my view, to undermine many of the ordinary language techniques.

Austin himself, before his premature death, started developing a positive theory about how language worked and this was continued by Paul Grice, another Oxford philosopher, in lectures given in Harvard in the USA. I attended the first try-out of Grice's US lectures in my first year of teaching at Cornell in 1963. He showed that the appeal to ordinary language, 'We don't say that', demands further questions. If we do not say something in ordinary language, is that because it would be false, or because it would be obvious, or irrelevant, or insufficiently informative, although true? People may refrain from saying things not because they would be untrue, but because to say them would violate conversational expectations by being too obvious, or irrelevant,

or insufficiently informative. A lot of the information conveyed in conversation is conveyed not by the meaning of the words (although Grice had very interesting theories on that aspect of meaning too), but by the inferences we make about the speaker's meaning on the basis of conversational expectations. I believe that Grice's work made simple-minded appeals to what we ordinarily say or don't say impossible thereafter.

The climate was changing in other ways too against appeals to ordinary language. Anscombe had never, to my mind, practised this technique, and Strawson was writing books of a different sort. But now in the 1960s, Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke were drawing attention to the role of scientific knowledge, as well as ordinary language, in our concepts. This led to my first small act of rebellion against the Philosophy I had encountered as an undergraduate student. Aristotle, I argued in 'Aristotle and Oxford Philosophy' in 1969, was not just an ordinary language philosopher, acute as he was in his observations on ordinary language when the occasion demanded. But in his definition of lunar eclipse, for example, he inserts information not available to ordinary speakers in his time, about lunar eclipse being due to the earth's shadow. Moreover, for better or worse, Aristotle did not recognise the idea, then basic to Oxford Philosophy, of conceptual necessity as the strongest necessity, and the necessity that it was Philosophy's particular task to establish by non-empirical means.

In 1972, some years after I had started my teaching career, Saul Kripke published his lectures *Naming and Necessity*, in which he brought out that there are other equally strong forms of necessity. This should not have been a surprise, but a reminder of what was well known to Medieval philosophers and to Leibniz, for example. But I remember feeling a certain terror that I would have to rethink everything I had previously thought. Kripke himself did not recognise Aristotle as an ally, and explained this to me by saying that his teacher, Rogers Albritton, had put his whole class off studying Aristotle by saying that Aristotle was only for the cleverest.

I have moved ahead, in order to indicate some of the changes going on in the English-speaking philosophical scene. But it was in 1962 that I completed the B.Phil. and with Owen's support, I was again very lucky and without interview was offered a job at Cornell University. For me to obtain a visa, it had to be stated that no available US citizen could do the job, and so different were the times that it was possible to say this. The subject of Ancient Philosophy now is full of talented people, but then there were few philosophers trained in Greek in the USA. My immediate predecessor in the Cornell Philosophy Department had been Gregory Vlastos and in Classics the last Ancient Philosophy scholar had been Friedrich Solmsen, two giants, but for a considerable time there had been a gap with noone there in Ancient Philosophy.

I was told that my first two courses would be on Karl Marx and on the History of Western Philosophy for the 1800 years from Thales to Thomas Aquinas. The two works of Ancient Philosophy I had studied as an undergraduate at Oxford had taught me how to read a text, but they left me

with a feeling that I have never quite lost, that I would have to read very hard to fill in the gaps. It didn't occur to us in 1962 to go to the USA by plane. On the ship going over with our first two children, Dick and Cornelia (Tahmina was born later in the USA), I spent the entire 5 days preparing, until we slid up the river alongside the skyscrapers of New York and docked. But on arrival in Ithaca I was told, 'Did we say Marx? That was a mistake'.

The towering figures at Cornell then were Max Black and Norman Malcolm. Black and Malcolm had transformed the *Philosophical Review* from 1954 into the leading Philosophy journal in English and as a student in Oxford I had bought it back to that date. I had also read all Malcolm's writings, because he was Wittgenstein's student and first biographer. His *Memoir* records in his rock-like way the extraordinary insult which Wittgenstein inflicted on him as a student, refusing to speak to him for 5 years because of a conversational comment which Wittgenstein mysteriously took to be stupid. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* had been published with Elizabeth Anscombe's translation in 1953, and was beginning to be discussed in Oxford when I arrived there. It too offered to dissolve the big metaphysical problems, but not by any technique which could be quickly understood, and I was still very intrigued as to how it would work out. If Anscombe's interpretation of Wittgenstein was the most original, Malcolm's was the clearest, and I felt particularly privileged to be going to his Department.

Malcolm met us off the Greyhound bus at Ithaca, New York, with our snow tobaggan and many accoutrements, and took us straight to the vast supermarket in this rural town. I had totally failed to anticipate his appearance. He was wearing shorts and a sweat shirt and had silver crew-cut hair. He gave us the bed on which Wittgenstein had slept during his stay in Cornell, and when we visited him the following day, he was up a ladder painting his house. He thought of himself as a Nebraska farm boy. We became close friends and in his retirement he joined our Philosophy Department in London.

Max Black and he were opposites, Max Black cultivated and very fast in argument with high speed manoeuvres. He excelled on subjects like Zeno's paradoxes, one of my favourite topics for a long time. Malcolm by contrast was extremely slow, but when he said, 'Now wait a moment', even Max Black waited. A discussion club met once a week in Cornell's Sage School of Philosophy, as it was called. It was virtually a necessary condition of getting 'tenure', that is of getting one's job made permanent after six years, that one's contributions to these discussions should meet with approval. The last two to get tenure had been Sydney Shoemaker and Keith Donnellan, so the standard was high, and the success rate was about 50%. There were two rules about the discussions that made the task rather formidable. First, the proceedings were to last exactly two hours. Secondly, you might never change the subject currently under discussion until it had been exhausted. People could be seen who had thought of a tenure-winning point 20 minutes before the end, and who were waiting in agony to see if they could get it in without violating the 'no change of subject' rule.

Somehow I did get offered tenure after six years, in spite of the fact that I had by then published only one article and had my first book commissioned. With a historical subject, it can take a long time to read enough to be able to write. My seven and a half years at Cornell were an ideal training, in that I was among analytic philosophers from whose standards I could only learn, and who wanted to be shown the philosophical interest of anything said by the ancients. Only towards the end was I joined in the Philosophy Department by another historian of Philosophy, Norman Kretzmann, although the Classics Department after a while appointed first Philip de Lacy and then in his place Malcolm Schofield. Philip urged me to join him in translating a work of Galen, but I only came to realise its interest many years later when I wrote about emotions. My time at Cornell included a period as one of the two editors, with Norman Kretzmann, of the *Philosophical Review*, which gave one a sense of what was happening in Philosophy all over the English-speaking world.

1970s

In 1969 I was enjoying a sabbatical leave back in England when a job arose at King's College, London and I applied. I was interviewed by Peter Winch, a philosopher of formidable intellect, and General Sir John Hackett, an excellent Classical scholar and inspired Principal of the College, who was later to head a march of students demanding bigger grants, carrying a placard saying, 'More Pay For Principals'. I was told on the spot that I had the job and I began on January 1st 1970.

Peter Winch's department had only four members and a group of students very carefully selected by personal philosophical discussion. Students and staff could all know eachother and all the undergraduates were invited each year to our house. Our best teaching was probably done in two weekends of philosophical discussion at King's country retreat in the Sussex countryside. Peter Winch himself undertook all the administrative work, which had not in those days spiralled out of control, so that we were free to teach and research.

One of the most exciting circumstances of my career was that Myles Burnyeat invited me to join him in giving the London intercollegiate lectures in Ancient Philosophy. These were attended by students from all the London colleges, so that we had about a hundred. One of us would give the lecture and the other shout objections from the front row. Myles is perhaps the most electric philosopher I have known. Everything he says is exciting. There was something gladiatorial about these lectures, which was good for the strong students, though I suspect that the weaker students may have been too much spectators. It was a very great loss to me when Myles moved in 1976 first to a research leave and then to Cambridge.

Another exciting experience was compiling the 4 volumes of *Articles on Aristotle* with Malcolm Schofield, who had himself returned from Cornell to Cambridge, and Jonathan Barnes from Balliol College, Oxford, to whom Malcolm introduced me. We met in our house at Wandsworth Common, and

before lunch were quite unable to agree what should be included. But after a magic bottle of wine over lunch, agreement seemed perfectly easy.

The comparative leisure supplied by Peter Winch enabled me to finish my first book, *Aristotle on Memory.* The most interesting episode to me was my correspondence with the Russian neuropsychologist, A.R.Luria, who had just published in English a book, *The Mind of a Mnemonist,* about a patient who had exploited his pathologically overdeveloped visual imagery by performing memory stunts. Aristotle also gives some advice about recalling memorised information in Ch.2 of his *On Memory*. He was explaining the 'place' system of memorisation, which one is still taught, if one answers advertisements offering to improve one's memory. To remember 20 or more names (up to 2000 in ancient accounts) in the right order after the first hearing, one has first to prepare in one's imagination a row of 20 or more distinctive houses or other visualised places. This is the part that takes time, but it enables one to keep track of the right order. Then when one hears the names to be memorised, one quickly instals symbolic images outside each house in order. The name 'Robinson' might lead one to instal an image of a robin and baby robin at the front door of house number 1, the name 'Smith' an image of a blacksmith at the front door of house number 2, and so on. In order to recall, one revisits the places in imagination.

What had happened with Aristotle's text was that he had labelled the mental images of places to be visited with letters of the alphabet, and scribes, having no idea what he was talking about, had over the centuries jumbled the names of the places he was recommending one to visit in the process of recall. But just at the moment when I was trying to understand the text, Luria's book came out and explained that his memory man had a technique for speeding up recall of a missing name. One could skip to alternate places and take a quick look on either side, rather than visiting each place in turn. I subsequently found this advice in other mnemonist texts too. What Aristotle was recommending was that if the item sought was not at A, you should skip to C and take a quick look to either side, failing that, move on to F and do the same again. Moreover this reconstruction fitted with the readings of the best manuscripts. The skipping method could also be used with memorised sequences more rudimentary than the place system. I wrote to Luria to ask if he knew that his patient's system was an ancient one, and he replied that he had not known at all.

I also wrote about colour and vision in the 1970s. At Cornell, I had heard Edward Land, the inventor of the polaroid camera, lecture on his discovery that Newton's theory of colour is wrong. The eye responds not to absolute wavelengths of light, but to the more complicated property of reflectance, which involves the proportions among wavelengths in the available scene. Land was able to cast on the screen at Cornell a slide showing all the colours of the garden, yet he was using wavelengths only from within the yellow waveband. I was intrigued that Goethe had also rejected Newton's theory of colour, and praised Aristotle for his theory that the other hues are produced by combinations of the brightest and the darkest. This, according to Goethe, is the

theory that any painter would accept. We had a reproduction in our hallway of a painting by Bridget Riley consisting of wavy black and white stripes. Some of our guests saw brilliant colours in it. Others merely felt giddy. I wrote to ask Bridget Riley what she thought of Goethe and Arsitotle, but this time I did not get an answer.

I had enough leisure in the 1970s to write my second book, *Necessity, Cause and Blame* (1980). The ideas of the first two chapters I tried out in lectures with Myles Burnyeat. It was often thought that Aristotle did not discuss the worrying deterministic threat that everything we are going to do is already fixed and inevitable in advance because of antecedent causes. On this view, whatever happens in the future has prior causes, and those causes have prior causes, and the chain of causes stretches back before you were born. Since the past is irrevocable, it was already fixed before you were born what you are going to do tomorrow. I sought to attack this argumentation at two points. One was the inference from 'caused' to 'necessitated'. The other was the idea that whatever happens has a cause. I attacked both ideas on the basis of Aristotle's view that a cause is a certain type of *explanatory* factor. He challenges the claim that whatever happens has a cause, so I thought, in a chapter whose meaning had been considered 'baffling', *Metaphysics* 6.3. Coincidences, he replied, do not have causes, because they have no *explanation*. Admittedly, to supply an example, if a little girl asks, 'why does is it raining on my *birthday*?', there may be a perfectly good explanation of why it is raining today, and a perfectly good explanation (what her parents were doing 9 months before her birth) of why it is her birthday today. But these do not add up to an explanation of what she asked. It would be an answer to her question if it were true to say, 'the rain is a punishment for being naughty', but of course we do not believe that that is true. The only honest answer is, 'there is no explanation. - it is just a coincidence'. Aristotle infers, 'no explanation - no cause'.

Later, these ideas about coincidence were used in an interesting way by David Owens, in his book *Causes and Coincidences*, Cambridge 1992,to attack certain reductionist theories of explanation in economics. It is not true, Owens argued, that explanation of inflation as due to increasing the money supply can be reduced to an explanation of all the activities which constitute inflation by reference to all the activities which constitute an increase in money supply. If one so treated the activities involved in inflation separately in this way, they would constitute one giant coincidence and have no explanation at all.

One has no idea whether one's work is good or bad, except from the reaction of other people, whose knowledge of one's own mind is better than one's own. Tony (A.A.) Long telephoned me one day, and said, 'Congratulations on the review'. I had no idea what he was talking about, but it turned out that Elizabeth Anscombe had reviewed the 1980 book in the *Times Literary Supplement.* We were just setting out for dinner in Hampstead, and I stopped off at Euston Station to get a copy. Thanks to her review, the 1980s were entirely different for me, and by 1981, I was a professor.

1980s

In 1980, I was 45 and I decided it would be a pity for the rest of my career to remain a specialist only on Aristotle. Despite the notorious remark of Cornford, Lawrence Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Cambridge in the 1930s, that we would gladly sacrifice all 700 lost rolls of the Stoic Chrysippus in return for one lost roll of the early Presocratic Heraclitus, it seemed to me that the story of Philosophy was a continuing one with very interesting sequels, particularly so on the subject of my next book, which was about the nature of time. I had come to favour studying the story as a continuing history, rather than skipping from one famous name to the next. Some of my colleagues had already been opening up the study of Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics, and I later found that there had been a parallel expansion in other branches of the Classics, with Ancient History and literature being widely studied right through to the sixth or seventh century AD. The alternative method, on which we had all been brought up, was to skip from Aristotle over 1500 years to Thomas Aquinas, or nearly 2000 years to Descartes. But it is hard, if one skips, to understand the later people. How could Thomas Aquinas, for example, think that Aristotle was compatible with Christianity? Only because he read Aristotle through Neoplatonist lenses. The Neoplatonists had to answer Christian charges that the pagan philosophers disagreed with each other, and for this purpose they made Aristotle's God, like Plato's, a Creator, and his human intellect, like Plato's, immortal. It was this anti-Christian harmonisation of Aristotle with Plato that by an irony enabled Thomas in the 13th century to present Aristotle as suitable for Christians.

In 1981, Peter Winch put me forward for a personal London University Chair at King's College. I gave my inaugural on the arguments of Philoponus in the sixth century AD on behalf of the Christian belief in God’s Creation of the universe. The pagan Greek philosophers accepted Aristotle’s account of infinity as an ever expandable finitude. Aristotle denied that you could finish going right through a more than finite series. But unless the universe had a beginning, as the Christians claimed, so Philoponus pointed out, it would by now long since have finished going right through an infinite number of years. And the number of days would be 365 times infinity, which the pagan philosophers all considered absurd. In 1983 I held a conference at the Institute of Classical Studies in London on how Philoponus had sought to replace Aristotelian Science with a science adapted to Christianity, devising ideas sometimes considered revolutionary and often wrongly credited to the later Middle Ages.

In King’s, I held a seminar with a well-known, but maverick pupil of Einstein, David Bohm. He was about to publish his book, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, and in the first half of term, he expounded his ideas. Clive Kilmister, one of our professors of mathematics acted as Chair because of his wonderful ability to explain the mathematical and humanist sides to eachother. In the second half of term, we looked at some of the Neoplatonists’ ideas of space and time. Bohm kept clapping his hand to his brow and exclaiming,

‘This is what I have just published in the *Journal of Physics*’. It may not have been exactly what he had published, but the attraction was that the Neoplatonists considered the world of space and time to be wholly dependent on a higher world that was indivisible and unextended.

Continuing my layman’s exchanges with scientists, I published a trilogy of books in the 1980s on ancient Philosophy of Physics, on such subjects as cause, necessity, time, space, matter and motion. I was able to consult on modern Physics first Arthur Fine, who had been my colleague at Cornell, and then Michael Redhead, when he came to King’s and later took over the chair in Philosophy and History of Science.

Another valuable encounter for me in the early 1980s was with Fritz Zimmermann, a leading scholar of Islamic philosophy. It is standardly recognised that from the 9th century AD Islamic Philosophy was a response to ancient Greek Philosophy, which is not in any way to deny its towering brilliance. But I read an article of the 1930s by a German scholar, Pretzl, claiming that before the 9th century there was an indigenous Philosophy in Arabic, which, in the author’s view, was too irrationalistic to be influenced by the Greeks. On looking at a translation of the star specimen of this supposedly indigenous Philosophy, I got a considerable surprise. The translator was not sure whether the text was about atoms or ants. But it seemed to me that the text was replying sentence by sentence and line by line to some late Greek arguments concerning atomic discontinuities in space, time and motion. Discontinuous motion would be like the cinematographic motion on a movie screen, with objects disappearing from one spot and reappearing further on, without having been in between. Fritz Zimmermann, for the first of many times, made for me a careful paraphrase of the Arabic, and confirmed that it was indeed responding to the ancient Greek.

I learnt further in the 1980s, because a scholar of Neoplatonism, A.C.Lloyd, started coming to the seminars I was running on late Greek Philosophy at the Institute of Classical Studies in London, and for several years, thanks to the fast Intercity trains, he regularly brought with him up to three other members of his department at Liverpool. He knew far more than me or any of the rest of us about Neoplatonism, and since he took the view that anything he knew surely we must know, I constantly had to ask him to stop and explain the brief allusions which poured out from him. Whenever he did stop and explain by reference to his copious exercise books, it was of very great benefit for us all.

In December 1982, I became one of a stream of visitors to a group that met secretly in Prague,[2] to study Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, a work innocent of political implications, but banned by the ignorant Communist authorities. We met in people's houses and could not speak aloud each other's names, as the walls were bugged. The participants had been sacked from their academic jobs for wishing to study this subject, and given other jobs as window cleaners and

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[2] These and other acadmic visits to Prague have been described by Jessica Douglas Hume in *Once Upon Another Time,* Sutton Press.

so on. Hence they could only read at night from inadequate and outdated texts. I had to memorise a list, not to be entrusted to writing, of books they wanted sent from England, something I had earlier done in 1965 for the dissident Julius Tomin, who was not yet at that earlier time well known. It was touching how long they had tried to prepare for our two meetings. We had to leave each house in small groups at midnight, so as not to attract attention, and after walking me back to my hotel, they went on talking with me in the snow outside, since to come in might have betrayed the affiliation of the person who booked me in. Only one of them was allowed to use a university library, and then only to read books recognised as belonging to Ancient Philosophy. A book on Ancient Astronomy was forbidden to him. When he was later allowed to visit the Institute of Classical Studies in London, he committed suicide rather than return to Prague.

The most dramatic event of the 1980s in Britain was the installation of a Prime Minister famous for saying, ‘There is no such thing as Society’. Margaret Thatcher very much disliked the spending of public money. One result, early in the 1980s was the closure, through want of funds, of five colleges in London University. One of the five, Bedford College, which had a brilliant Philosophy Department, had originally been a woman’s college, the first in Britain, and the subject of a gentle lampoon about women taking over the world in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Princess Ida*. They occupied an extremely beautiful site in Regent’s Park in the middle of London. The survivors were sent out to join another college, variously estimated by different parties to the dispute, as 25 or 30 miles away, and within 5 years lost even the mention of their name. Whatever the distance, it would have prevented our continuing to include Bedford College in the combined intercollegiate lectures, which were part of the source of our strength.

I spent much of the year of 1983, as Acting Head of the King’s Philosophy Department, debating whether, because of the same funding crisis, our own department should be reduced from five members to three, which would in effect be abolition, since three was below the official estimate of viable size, or increased to eleven by the acquisition of the Bedford Department. I offered the Principal of King’s, then Air Chief Marshall Lord Cameron, a bottle of champagne, if he got the Bedford Department. He said it would have to be the best champagne. The harder task was undertaken on the Bedford side by Mark Sainsbury, resisting first abolition, and then removal to a variously estimated distance. The initial discussions in King’s had to decide which Humanities departments would shrink to meet the funding cuts, and they were surprisingly good-natured discussions despite some protests. When they were over, the next step was comparatively easy, since everyone in King’s agreed concerning Bedford College. Thanks to the help of an outside adjudicator, Ronald Dworkin, I had eventually to buy the champagne, and the King’s Department has now grown to 17 permanent members, or 27 with postdoctoral research fellows included.

It was in 1985 that I began, with funding from the USA, the research project for translating into English the Philosophy of 200-600 AD, the crucial period of transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. That Philosophy to a large extent was conducted in the form of Commentary on earlier Philosophy. Part of my reason for deciding to go ahead was the same funding crisis. The number of philosophers in Britain was reduced by 25% during the 1980s. From all over London, people were asking me if I could take over the teaching in Ancient Philosophy that they could no longer maintain. One side effect of taking on the project was that, since it could not be run without research assistants, there would at least be jobs for exceptionally able young researchers, and a real presence in the subject. This, of course, was not the reason for conceiving the project in the first place, but it was a consideration in deciding whether to undertake the enormous labour that it involved.

The project came about in an unexpected way. As a young lecturer at Cornell in the 1960s, I had said to my medievalist colleague, Norman Kretzmann, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could translate the ancient commentators on Aristotle?' I made this remark in ignorance, because at the time I knew only the period down to Aristotle, and I was merely thinking of the light that would be thrown on Aristotle, not on the commentators in their own right. Twenty years later, Norman Kretzmann was on the translation panel of the National Endowment for the Humanities in the USA, and at the end of the year's round of awarding grants, the panel asked itself, 'What translation project out of the whole of history would we like to see done most?' Remembering our conversation, and conscious of the light that would be shed on Medieval Philosophy, Norman Kretzmann said, 'translating the ancient commentators on Aristotle'. It happened that the entire panel agreed, and they initially looked for an American to devise such a project, but, not finding one who was willing, they wrote to me.

My initial answer was 'no'. I explained that I would never have time to do anything else, and I wanted to write books of my own. Then I wrote another letter to 50 colleagues, to confirm my impression that the idea was not practical. To my surprise, I got 49 letters back, saying that it would be a wonderful thing to do. Ten of the respondents revealed that they were doing translations of their own for private use, but thought nobody would be interested. Fifteen further people volunteered, although I hadn't asked them, to become translators. I was close to being committed. But I still said that I must be free to do other research as well, and I could not undertake the project without research assistants. It was necessary to make an application to the National Endowment for the Humanities. But in consultation, the Endowment said that I could certainly apply for research assistants to work with me in King's College, London. I also proposed that there should be trainees, so that people could learn about the subject. But the Endowment's Translation Section was not authorised to fund educational programmes. What they said to me was, 'Your assistants will be the ones to learn about the subject, and they will spread it across the world'. And this is in fact what came about.

The application still had to be made, and the constraints of the Endowment are formidable. They send applications to 50 referees of their own choice and to 8 chosen by the applicant, who, however, are not allowed to have any involvement in the project. The application required is over 100 pages in length.

I think it is a mark of the idealism in the USA that when they did eventually award the grant, there was no requirement that the London assistants should be American. They wanted to support what they considered to be the most valuable projects. This kind of idealism is completely at variance with the misconception that was then being promoted by the UK authorities as an ideal to be copied, that Americans think about nothing but return on investment, and not spending a dime more than necessary. As it happened, Americans tended to be the ones selected as assistants, but this was purely on the basis of merit, not because of any requirement.

There was a requirement, however, that the official applicant should be an American resident or citizen. The Endowment had itself ascertained that the American Philosophical Association wanted for the first time to sponsor a major project, and so the official applicant was the secretary of the Association. But in another demonstration of idealism, the secretary, not himself a Greek scholar, was left free to choose whomever he thought best to carry out the donkey work, which was myself.

Just before I was to hear the outcome of the application, I got an urgent message from the Endowment. An obstacle had arisen. The best known scholar in the field of Ancient Philosophy, Harold Cherniss, had opposed the project. The reason was that another outstanding scholar, his own best ever pupil, had applied for funds to reedit the Greek of the largest among the ancient commentaries that I proposed to translate. The commentary in question occupied 2 of the 24 volumes of commentary edited by Diels at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries. The point was that Diels' text, contained misprints and other more serious inaccuracies, and Cherniss' view was that no translation should be funded, until the Greek text had been reedited by reference to the medieval manuscripts, although even the one text could well take 20 years to correct. I had never met Cherniss, but I immediately took the train to Princeton and visited him at the Institute of Advanced Study. It seemed to me that there was an opportunity here. I proposed to him that I should write to the Endowment to say that it was essential that both projects should be funded, on condition that they exchanged information with eachother, because then each could enhance the other. Cherniss was convinced, and withdrew his objection, and both projects were funded.

To illustrate some of the difficulties of the translation, I should explain that some of the relevant texts have been lost in Greek, and survive only in medieval translations. One has passed through lost Syriac and Arabic on its way to the surviving Hebrew. Another survives only in the medieval Latin translation of Thomas Aquinas' collaborator, William of Moerbeke. We had a translation of this last text, Philoponus *On Aristotle on the Intellect*, done for

our series by William Charlton, and we followed the standard procedure by which other specialist scholars help me check the final draft. Charlton had done a very good job of making some sense of Latin that was often unintelligible, despite having been reedited twice by scholars earlier in the century. One of our checkers, Fernand Bossier, was a specialist on the practices and handwriting of William of Moerbeke. Bossier telephoned me from Antwerp in some agitation. ‘You can’t publish the translation as it is’, he said. ‘I must come and see you’. So Bossier came to my kitchen in London and gave me a tutorial on the mysteries of retrotranslation. Just to provide an example, there was a sentence which was nonsensical because in the middle of the sentence were the words ‘if not’. They weren’t even grammatical. The Latin was *si non*. This didn’t make any sense at all. But Bossier said to me, ‘Please think what would have been the original Greek before William of Moerbeke translated into Latin. What’s the Greek for “if not” ’? So I said ‘The Greek is *ei mê*' He said ‘Right you are: the Greek was *ei mê* and the Latin translator rendered it into Latin as “if not”, *si non*. But *ei mê* can’t have been what the Greek original said. What the original said must have been a very similar word, *Eidê*', the Platonic Forms.’ It made perfect sense. Bossier then produced 163 further emendations of the text. This was very hard on Charlton, who had other projects to get on with. But the two scholars were persuaded to stay together for a further 12 months’ work.The result was that the public got what was in effect a new original text, and also a translation that was intelligible from beginning to end.

The project has facilitated and benefited from new discoveries and identifications of texts. Two scholars, one of them, I believe, when still a PhD student, have been able to reassign wrongly identified Arabic translations to the right Greek commentator. Two other Parisian PhD students have discovered substantial chunks of previously lost commentary, one chunk in Arabic translation, one in the original Greek, by one of the most important of the commentators, Alexander. English translations of both are being published in the series.

Eventually funding from the USA dried up. There are always swings of the pendulum, and a new US Congress halved the Endowment’s funds, with the result that the entire Translation Section, with 90 people, had to be disbanded at 2 months’ notice. Fortunately, by then the series was well established, and generous support was forthcoming in England and Europe. There were by then 120 collaborators in 14 countries, and we now by 2003 have completed well over 50 volumes of translation, 2 of explanatory books and a 3-volume Sourcebook.

Towards the end of the US funding, my then assistant, Sylvia Berryman, got a call from the USA asking if I would sign that I would be happy to go to prison, if the accounts were wrong. Quite rightly, she replied that I would be very happy to go to prison, if there was the slightest thing wrong. We had always had to account for every cent. It turned out that our final grant had gone over a certain limit at which certain extra accounting questions needed to be

answered. We had not been briefed on the questions, but fortunately, after considerable enquiries, we were able to answer them all to the completre satisfaction of the accountants.

A relevant side effect of my interest in later Greek philosophy was that we were invited by the archaeologists, Jean and Janine Balty, to the beautiful site at Apamea in Syria, where one of the most important Neoplatonist philosophers, Iamblichus, had had his school around 300 AD. The site was marked by a set of mosaics, one of which showed Socrates teaching his companions, and since the figure of Socrates was labelled in Greek, there could be no doubt about the identification. A second mosaic, convincingly interpreted by Janine Balty as representing the Liberal Arts in relation to Philosophy, had been moved from the site in the 1930s and we were to see it later. But there was something strange about the third mosaic. It showed a lady taking her clothes off. Assuming this was the Philosophy School, Janine had put forward the hypothesis that the lady was taking off the robe of the body, to reveal the soul. But it did not look like her soul that she was revealing. I doubt if I persuaded Janine of my alternative, but as I looked at the mosaic, I noticed that one of the figures was labelled in Greek 'Persuasion' (Peitho) and another 'Judgement' (Krisis). The disrobing lady was marked 'Cassiopeia' and beside her was picked out the Sea God, Poseidon. Now it was the custom in Rhetoric Schools in Antiquity to train students by making them take a story from Mythology and argue that the verdict should have gone the other way. In an earlier version of the story, Poseidon had disqualified Cassiopeia in the Beauty contest, angry that his sea nymphs had been challenged. But here in the mosaic, Poseidon was standing happily beside Cassiopeia while she was being crowned Beauty Queen. And all this was brought about by Persuasion, and confirmed by the verdict of Judgement. The message was, 'Come to the Rhetoric Department, and we shall teach you how to reverse the verdict'. The Philosophy Department mosaic with Socrates was in the smaller room next door, and this corresponded to the fact that Rhetoric was the popular course for getting on in the world. Only a smaller number of students would go on to do Philosophy.

The mosaics had been installed by the Emperor Julian some 40 years after Iamblichus' death, when the Philosophy School had been dispersed under Christian pressure. Iamblichus was Julian's hero, and he made a short-lived attempt to restore pagan religion in the Empire. Even this could now be better understood, I thought. Julian would not have been installing mosaics in a dead museum, but in a living university. What he would have been saying was, 'Re-start the Philosophy classes'. And since we know that often lecturers could teach both Rhetoric and Philosophy, the staff could well have been already there to do it.

By the end of the 1980s there were a lot of graduate students studying Greek Philosophy in King's. At the peak, there were 20 students and others in other colleges, with up to five seminars in the subject each week. I also took my own PhD students in a group, asking them to hear eachother's dissertation drafts.

That way, they got continuous feedback from their fellow students, additional to anything they got from me, and also formed a community of their own. As I asked them to draft a chapter per term, they also got a sense of pacing, and in many cases were able to publish discrete portions before completing their PhD.

One of the most exciting and formative experiences of my life was a 10-week tour arranged for me in 1989 by the Indian Council for Philosophical Research, an extremely imaginative body supporting Philosophy very effectively in a country much poorer than Britain. Invited to lecture in India, I said that we would like to see more than one campus, up to half a dozen. Having heard nothing, I telephoned on the eve of departure and learnt that they had arranged for 30 lectures on 20 campuses in a great circle around India. I shall here mention only one of my stops, which was at Kottayam in Kerala. The Vice-Chancellor there, Ananta Murti, was a well known novelist one of whose novels had also been made into a movie. He had arranged for me to talk about Time to an invited interdisciplinary group. The conversation, which clearly touched people's lives, included a moving confession of his beliefs from a doubting Jesuit priest newly risen from what he had expected to be his last illness. The following day, I joined the Vice-Chancellor, running through the streets of Kerala at the head of a column of running academics, to inaugurate his programme to make Kottayam 100% literate in 100 days. The language was an ancient literary language, Malayalam, and the level of literacy was already high. But he had arranged that every person in the city over six years of age who could not read should choose a University lecturer, or relative, or friend, to teach them to read in a hundred days. He did not know what the response would be, but the local citizens had certainly turned out and were lining the streets, as we ran past, sheltering from the noonday sun under black umbrellas. When we ran into the Town Hall, everyone from all over the state was there, the ministers, the Chief of Police the priests, the Bishop. Everyone was backing the project. And indeed I later heard that the target had been met, though whether the project continued when Ananta Murti returned to his native Tamil Nadu I do not know.

This experience convinced me that universities could do far more for the public than British universities had thought of doing. It was no wonder that the public did not rise up to defend them, when funding was cut, if they were not doing things for the public. The head of King's was then a philosopher, Stewart Sutherland, and he had had the excellent idea of creating a centre to bring together the philosophers who at that time were scattered among different departments in the College. The idea was further developed by Christopher Peacocke, then Head of our department. When I agreed to be the first Director, it seemed to me that we could exploit the fact that the philosophers in other departments had special expertise in matters of public interest, Medical Law and Ethics, Military Defence and Religion, in order to interest the general public. While bringing in the best philosophers to talk on their special subjects, we also asked them to address questions of public interest, and we advertised to the public in a well sited plate glass window by a

bus stop in the Strand. We also invited non-philosophers to speak to philosophers, which they found a very novel experience. Among the subjects addressed, we had two of the country's leading and most controversial architects, Sir Denys Lasdun and Quinlan Terry. We invited two people who had been advising the Labour Party in opposite directions, without realising it, on whether Britain should have a Bill of Human Rights. And we had a conference in 1991-2 on Morality in Warfare from Cicero to Saddam, which I located partly at the Institute of Classical Studies.

1990s

In 1990, I was summoned by the then Principal of King's for an unexpected interview. I assumed that he was going to ask me if I would help meet the continuing financial crisis by offering to take early retirement. This was a widespread response to the funding shortage, and I wondered why I had been so stupid as not to foresee that it could happen to me. To my surprise, the Principal asked me something completely different. Would I consider standing for the post of Director of the Institute of Classical Studies, which belonged not to any one college, but to the University as a whole, and was a national resource? It had not occurred to me that I could be considered. Quite recently, Ancient Philosophy had been a fringe subject in Classics. The centre of the subject was Philology and Literature. I was also unsure if I would know enough about the Classics, since I had not studied it since I finished being an undergraduate in 1959. But I was overlooking certain factors. First, Classics had changed. Greek and Latin language were no longer being taught at many schools. Students first encountered the Classics in translation, and read them not for the linguistic discipline, but because of the intrinsic interest. They learnt the languages after arrival at University. The seminar in Ancient History, also once a fringe subject, was now the best attended one at the Institute, and the Ancient Philosophy seminar was not all that far behind. As for my own lack of knowledge, the Directorship provided the most wonderful crash course at the frontiers of research, because the Director had to introduce many of the world leaders who came to speak in different branches of the subject.

As it turned out, I was offered the job, and it provided a crash course not only in the Classics, but also in administration, partly because the agency for Government funding sent a letter to all the Humanities Research Institutes which, like ours, provided a research facility without taking student fees, and asked why the Government should continue funding us. On the administration side, I had to learn faster than at any time since my childhood.

The Classical Institute's funding comes from the Government and depends on its being a national, and indeed international, resource, not a local one. It was founded in 1954, thanks to the vision of Tom Webster, who had the brilliant idea of pooling resources with the two independent bodies, the Hellenic and Roman Societies whose classical libraries were very well established, having been founded at the turn of the century, but who now

needed to find new premises. The custom-built Institute was designed to accommodate them.

The first seminar and the first publication of the Institute were the work of Michel Ventris. Ventris' great discovery had been announced at the time of the Queen's coronation the previous year, along with Edmund Hilary's climbing of Everest, as one of two great British achievements of 1953. Ventris was an architect by profession, but he studied the unknown script, Linear B, excavated from sites of the Mycenaean period in the second millennium BC. Against initial opposition, he established that it was a script of ancient Greek. He took as his collaborator John Chadwick, a classical scholar who had worked at Bletchley on deciphering the secret German codes during the Second World War. The Mycenaean seminar was the Institute's first. Although Ventris was killed tragically in a motor cycle accident as a young man, Chadwick was still taking part in the Mycenaean seminar, when I came to the Institute.

By that time, the Institute was running two seminars a night on almost every branch of the Classics. Its combined Library was about to be acknowledged by the Government as the UK's leading research library in Classics. The publication list was already very long. Other Classical organisations had come to place their Headquarters in the building. And all these activities were held together by a Common Room, where research students would come to meet many of the leading classical scholars of the world over a period of 2 or 3 years' study.

My predecessor as Director, John Barron, had had the excellent idea of pooling the Humanities Research Institutes of London University into a School of Advanced Study. There were other institutes with remarkable histories. Closest to ours in subject matter was the Warburg Institute for the study of the history of the Classical Tradition in Europe. Their predecessors had escaped to London from Hitler's Germany with their entire library intact on 7 trucks, I believe, a library 40% of whose books were not even owned by the national British Library. The formation of the new School led to more interdisciplinary seminars and discussion, and we collaborated also in addressing the threat to funding.

I took advice from the Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies, which was too large an Institute to form part of our group, but which had experienced an earlier threat to its Government funding. The Director had asked for a review before funding was cut, and some no-nonsense businessmen were sent in to make a report. This produced an unexpected result. They reported that the Institute was grossly underfunded. I transmitted the Director's advice to the Directors of The School of Advanced Study, and we too asked for an inspection and drew up our own performance criteria, providing statistical tables, showing just how much the institutes achieved at a national, not a local, level. After three years of discussion, we received letters saying that Government funding would continue on the original basis.

A side result of our many discussions in the School was that the Directors agreed to provide funding for a baby Philosophy Institute, not yet allowed to

call itself an Institute, alongside the other institutes. The idea had first been put to me by John Barron, in his period of Directorship, but was not at that time welcomed by the philosophers. The idea had now been independently revived by Mark Sainsbury. The philosophers were very keen and the Directors in the School made the aspiration financially possible.

The Classical Institute itself had to negotiate each year with its partners, the private Hellenic and Roman Societies, about how much each party would contribute to the library. As an amatuer in finance, I was at a definite disadvantage, because the Treasurer of the Roman Society was Graham Kentfield, the man who signed the UK's banknotes. I was at a further disadvantage because the Institute turned out on my arrival to have overspent its budget, for reasons which it was hard to analyse, until several years later a very extensive costing operation was carried out. Severe economies and the Librarian's inspired fund-raising were not enough and I had to ask our partners to help us correct our deficit as a favour. Although they very generously did so, this naturally caused some resentment, so long as the underlying causes remained unclear. In the end, Graham Kentfield graciously agreed to join my own committee of financial advisers, so that we, as well as our Roman partners, had the benefit of his advice.

The Institute's Common Room had a balcony overlooking a beautiful London Square and it was much loved by everybody. But the Library was running out of space. In addition, I sometimes had to turn down an excellent seminar, because we could only accommodate two per night. We were fortunate to have as our Publications officer Richard Simpson, a scholar-architect, who discovered exactly what the participants in the building would want, if a new and larger space could be found. There had been some false alarms about moves, but when an ideal possibility arose, Richard Simpson's plans had enabled the Institute to seize it. In my last year, the Institute was invited to bid for nearly double the space at no increase of rent in a prominent position at the heart of the University's Senate House. Sad as we were to lose the charm of our custom-built building, the decision of all parties to seize the opportunity was absolutely unanimous.

Not everything was administrative. The post enabled me to continue running or co-organising the Ancient Philosophy seminars at the Institute as before, even though I no longer had time to attend all the other Ancient Philosophy seminars. One of the most rewarding occasions was the visit of an American war hero, Admiral Jim Stockdale. Stockdale had been shot down over Vietnam, and had endured 8 years of captivity, 4 years of solitary confinement and 19 occasions of physical torture, he said, by following the precepts of the ancient Stoic philosopher Epictetus. He had recently stood as candidate for the Vice-Presidency of the USA. He did not at that time know any Greek, but I invited him over so that we could learn how Stoicism worked out in practice, and I think I got more feel for this than I ever could from the texts alone. At the first meeting in the Institute, we had present scholars of Epictetus and a practitioner of modern Cognitive Therapy, which is close in certain ways to

ancient Stoic practice. At a more public meeting in King's, I said to Sibyl Stockdale, his wife, 'I presume you found no help in a Philosophy which says that it does not eventually matter whether your husband returns,' and she agreed. But when I read their book, *In Love and War*, I realised that the situation was different. In fact, she was often practising Stoic techniques without realising it, while when the Admiral returned as a hero, he sometimes felt impatient with the peacetime culture in cases where Stoicism could have been a calming influence. I came to see that Stoicism offers tranquillity in prosperity as well as in adversity.

When Stockdale parachuted out of his plane, the parachute was fired on, and he fell heavily and broke his leg. The torturers exploited the pain he felt, but this gave him something in common with Epictetus, who had had his leg broken when a slave. Stockdale found that under torture everyone broke down and gave more information than their name and number. But information was not what the captors wanted. Upon giving out extra information, the captives felt so ashamed that they could not face their fellow men. The shame gave the captors what they really wanted, because then the prisoners were ready to go on television to denounce American policy. Stockdale told his men Epictetus' precept that you have to distinguish what is in your power from what is not. It is not in your power to confine yourself under torture to giving name and number. But something else is in your power - to disobey your captors in trivial matters and court renewed torture. Some of the men agreed to do this. They were tortured again and blurted out too much again, but this time it didn't matter because they had regained their pride, and not one of those men could be persuaded to go on television. The captors were powerless, just as Epictetus describes the tyrant who can put Epictetus' leg, but not himself, in chains.

Mrs Stockdale meanwhile had an experience that was terrible in a different way. The U.S.A had not officially declared war and therefore would not admit that there were any prisoners. Correspondingly, the Vietnamese were not obliged to treat the prisoners according to the rules of war, so she only heard from him by chance and very irregularly. After five years of waiting, she set up an office on behalf of prisoners' wives a mile from the White House in Washington and within a month had forced President Nixon to admit that there were prisoners and start negotiating. I published an account by Admiral Stockdale in the first number I edited of the *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*.

The most exciting other seminar in Ancient Philosophy was organised by Richard Janko. In the late 18th century, excavation uncovered a philosopher's library that had been buried under volcanic lava in the eruption of Vesuvius of 79 AD, described by Pliny the Elder. The library contained the main works of the philosopher, Epicurus, previously lost, as well as the works of an Epicurean philosopher, Philodemus, from 200 years after Epicurus, around 100 BC. The works describe the practices, values and beliefs of the School 200 years on, and report some of the contrary views of their rivals, the Stoics. The only problem was that the papyrus rolls were so badly charred that they were

very difficult to unroll, or to read when unrolled. One technique for unrolling them is to soak an even number of layers, because papyrus is woven across and across in double strands. If you soak an odd number of layers, you pull the page to pieces. In the last few years, machines for computer enhancement, one of them from the Unites States Space Agency, NASA, have been brought to bear on unrolled pages. On the screen one sees a blackened sheet turned into a perfectly legible Greek script before one's eyes at the press of buttons. What cannot yet be done is to read the texts without unrolling. But the philosophical content of those scripts which can be read is very interesting indeed, and new editions are now appearing continuously. Moreover there is more of the library to be excavated when there are no longer buildings on top of it, and it is perfectly possible that lost works of Aristotle, for example, or of the classical tragedians could be found.

In the 19th century, the easiest rolls were opened, sliced like apples until legible layers were reached, and copyists then copied the script very carefully. The slicing cut through the middle of pages, and a scholar in Paris, Delattre, had recently discovered that some of the copied half pages had been stored in the wrong order, so that scholars were trying to make sense of misassembled half pages. Janko invited Delattre to visit his seminar at the Classical Institute from Paris, now only a three and a half hour journey away thanks to the Channel tunnel, and give us his latest new readings. The seminar was in the first place for the papyrologists, but when the new readings were explained, it was the philosophers' turn to say what that meant for the philosophical thrust of the text. 'So the argument is against the Platonists, not the Stoics'.

Janko was one of three leading scholars of the Herculanean papyri who had come to Britain from the USA at this time, bringing research grants to pursue this exciting line of discovery. The small size of Britain makes it easy for scholars to keep in close personal touch over this kind of work, and this asset has attracted scholars to come here, at least if they can stand the current culture of accountancy assessments whose hilarities I have touched on.

During the 1990s, I turned from writing books on ancient scientific ideas to writing books on Mind and Ethics. I had avoided teaching Ethics, so long as our children were at home, forcing me to rethink my ethical views once a fortnight, but now they had left home. The switch to Mind and Ethics did not involve abandoning Science altogether. In order to write about animal minds and human morals, I had discussions with animal researchers and watched animals being trained. To write about emotions, I had discussions with brain specialists, and to start work on the concept of Self, I had to look into infant Psychology. In addition, philosophical topics interconnect, and in my earlier books on time and on determinism, I had discussed the implications for mortality and for responsibility. But the main direction of the new books was different, and the ethical subjects proved to be directly relevant to life. I modified my eating habits considerably, although not totally, after writing about animals. This was not because the History of Philosophy had revealed neglected good arguments against killing animals, although that kind of

discovery is common enough. Rather, I was appalled at the badness of the arguments that killing animals was perfectly alright. History had revealed the lack of sound support for an inherited attitude.

Another conclusion I came to was that the question of how to treat animals was best decided on a case by case basis, in the manner of the recently despised casuists. Some have approached the subject on the basis of the idea that there is only one thing that matters, which can be formulated in a rule. But I believe there are so many different things that matter, which all need weighing, that a rule picking out only one thing, or only a few, will lead to counter-intuitive results.

In my next book, I studied emotions, and this was extremely useful when directing an Institute in times of threatening financial hazard and alarming change, even though in the end the Institute was very well treated. I might have substituted Seneca on emotion for Jowett's Plato and Thucydides as the best preparation for administrators. My stoical grandmother had not prepared me to attend sufficiently closely to negative emotions. She had often enough had to ‘pull herself together’, as the one married woman looking after the men who were clearing a very inhospitable bit of the New Zealand bush in the 1880s, and her uncomplaining letters home reveal the hardship. Nonetheless, I came to feel that I would have been more emotionally helpful as a father, if I had been able to reverse the order, running an Institute through threatening times in my twenties and having children in my fifties. One sign of my increasing appreciation of the emotions was that with our three children I recorded with fascination their conceptual development, but with our grandchildren I have been recording their emotional development and their sense of self and other.

The emotions led naturally to the book currently under way about the self, a subject so relevant to fear of death and to selfihness. Here the Indian tradition, thanks to debates with the Buddhists, went beyond the Greek, and I shall be obliged to take cognisance of it. The experience is quite unlike that of looking at Islamic Philosophy, which is all part of one tradition with the West. In the case of Indian Philosophy, apart from Buddhism, I have never had the feeling with a Western philosopher and an Indian that one must have read the other, as is normal in studying Islamic Philosophy. At most I have thought, 'Great minds think alike'.

After five years at the Institute, in 1996, one of the British Academy's two Research Chairs fell vacant, with two and a half years remaining. When I applied and was offered it, this gave me an opportunity to undertake something I could never otherwise have done, namely to prepare a Sourcebook in three volumes to explain and illustrate the Philosophy of the Commentators of 200-600 AD. The first draft was got ready with the help of a team of assistants just in time for a week-long conference at the Classical Institute in June 1997 for young scholars from Europe, Canada and the U.S.A. Five of those who helped expound the different topics were research assistants past and present in the Commentators project as a photograph records. Others had taken part over the years in the seminars at the Institute. Two of those present were shortly to get

European chairs, while still in their thirties. After revision in the light of comments, the Sourcebook was ready to send to press in 2002, and I felt for the first time that I had an overall picture of the Commentators on whom I had been working since 1985.

21st Century

On retirement from King's in 2000, I found myself with tasks in five places. The most unexpected development was receiving a 3-year appointment to a 400-year old professorship, the Gresham Chair of Rhetoric in the City of London. The quaint appointment of a philosopher to this Chair of Rhetoric was unprecedented. Thomas Gresham, author of the law that bad money drives out good, had founded the Royal Exchange in London, and from part of the rents he had seven chairs posthumously established in 1597. He is said to have restored the fortunes of King Henry VIII by his dealings on the Antwerp Stock Exchange. In the 17th century, Gresham College was the place where the Royal Society was planned and initially housed in the time of Christopher Wren's Professorship and Robert Hooke's Curatorship at Gresham. The Gresham chairs nowadays call on the holders to formulate lectures for a broad, though acute, audience, and this led me to consider subjects of wider public interest than I might otherwise have dared to talk about. Something rather similar happened with a second 3-year invitation to mount activities on subjects of wide interest in Classics at New York University for a few weeks each year, with the added bonus of an apartment in Washington Square in Manhattan.

My lectures in New York University were given within view of the tragic and moving site where thousands of innocent people were massacred by terrorists on September 11th 2001. The streets were still full of the smell of smoke when I gave my lectures there in October 2001. A minor side effect of the September 11th massacre was that I was prevented a few days later from addressing an Institute in Iran set up to promote 'Dialogue Among Civilisations', at a time when such dialogue was much needed.

Within a year, there had been an unhappy response to the massacre, with the US administration proposing, and the British Prime Minister agreeing, against the wishes of his country, to an invasion of Iraq, a country which had nothing to do with this horrible crime. When in October 2002 in New York I put on a conference on the concept of Just War, I found that mine was only one of four such discussions of just war planned in New York within that week, so worried were the New Yorkers by their own government's reactions. I organised a further conference on the subject at Wolfson College, Oxford in 2003, with speakers including not only academics, but also some leading figures in British public life. It is some comfort to know that Philosophy in all the traditions involved in the current conflicts, Christian, Islamic, Jewish and Indian, have devoted centuries of careful thought to justice in war. I have been particularly impressed by the 16th century Spanish discussions on the rights of the American Indians vis-à-vis the Conquistadors. The main subjects that have recurred, regime change, preemptive killing, rescuing victims of human

sacrifice in another's country, were already carefully discussed then. Of course, the theoretical background was different with its appeals to the laws of nature and of nations. But the considerations of simple justice appealed to are hard to deny, even when detached from their original backing, and it was very interesting that a majority of the British public clearly preferred them to their Prime Minister's moral beliefs. Suddenly philosophical considerations, as well as factual ones, had become central to public discussion in the UK.

In October 2002, back in Oxford, Wolfson College was kind enough to make me a Fellow for life. Wolfson is the college founded by Isaiah Berlin. I had been a fellow since my oldest friend, Jon Stallworthy, proposed me in 1966 and a good many post-doctoral scholars and some PhD students were now applying to work with me either at Wolfson or at the Institute of Classical Studies. Wolfson had something in common with the Institute of Classical Studies in having been specially designed for people involved in research, and having a large proportion of students and visitors from overseas. Just as the Institute Common Room was a place for research students and senior scholars to meet, so Isaiah Berlin's Wolfson had rejected, as inappropriate to the research stage, the tradition of separating students from senior scholars at table or in the Common Room. In multiple ways, it had recognised the different stage of life represented by research, for example providing a nursery school and safe play areas for those who had children, and by welcoming partners at all meals and children at some.

Retirement enabled me not only to give more seminars in Oxford University, but also to undertake some annual teaching in a fourth place, Austin, Texas, whose Ancient Philosophy programme, built up by Alexander Mourelatos, had sent me seven outstanding research assistants and students since 1985, when the Commentators project began, and promptly allowed me to bring over an eighth.

The fifth place in which I continued work was London University, because the Commentators project continued in King's College and the Institute of Classical Studies. I was particularly lucky in my successor in King's, Peter Adamson, because he brought to King's the combination of Islamic and Greek Philosophy teaching which I had always hoped to establish. With two other scholars, Han Baltussen and Martin Stone, he planned a programme to extend the translation of commentary works into the period of the Islamic and Latin-speaking Middle Ages. These three scholars organised a conference in London in 2002, the first of three international conferences to be held in different European cities, to bring together study of the commentary traditions in all these periods. At almost the same time, an Australian team organised by Harold Tarrant, held a conference in New South Wales, to celebrate an expansion of translation work into the Ancient Commentaries on Plato. The London conference established a new landmark, since for the first time, I believe, it had as many papers about the commentators writing in Arabic or Latin as about those writing in Greek, thus bringing the three traditions, and a

huge time period, together. Ancient Greek Philosophy lasted well over a thousand years to 600AD. The conference added on another thousand years.

There was a certain symbolism in our acquiring in retirement a little apartment on Folly Bridge Island in Oxford on the site where supposedly Roger Bacon had promulgated Aristotelian Philosophy and Islamic Science in the 13th century. It was part of an artistic community created on the island by Orde Levinson and was above the Art Gallery and next to the art studios he had built. With a little work for family members in the Gallery and the studios, life took on extra dimensions.

Another pleasure was having more time to travel, sometimes visiting former students. The University of Mexico, UNAM, in Mexico City has two very well appointed Research Institutes in Philosophy and Classics side by side in its beautiful grounds, in addition to its teaching faculty in both subjects, Three of the permanent researchers had earlier, as PhD students, been with me in King's College, London, with imaginative and generous long-term student grants provided by Mexico. Now they were all established researchers, and one of them, Ricardo Salles, organised the international conference in Mexico, which provided the original core of papers for this book. I should like to thank both him and the colleagues who so generously came to the conference, or subsequently contributed their work to the volume.

History of philosophy

I have already mentioned some of the lessons I believe I have learnt about *Philosophy*: the ramifications which make study of the physical universe and of the mind relevant to each other, and to how to live. But what have I learnt about the *History* of Philosophy, since I started in 1980 to read it as a continuous and continuing story, instead of skipping from one famous name to the next? I have already mentioned my first lesson, that intermediate philosophers may be needed for understanding later ones. In addition, I had learnt how ideas can be *transmuted*. One striking example was the transmutation of a Stoic theory of how to avoid agitation into a Christian theory of how to avoid temptation. Another was the harmonisation of Plato and Aristotle, which, in the Neoplatonists, produced a new Philosophy that was identical with that of neither.

But I also got a sense of how ideas can be *revived* in very different contexts. Berkeley's Idealism was designed to solve a problem of knowledge - if we know only the ideas in our own minds, how can we know about tables and chairs outside our minds? Answer: tables and chairs are bundles of ideas in the mind, sometimes of ourselves and always of God. This, I came to realise, is a revival of the 4th century theory of St Gregory of Nyssa. Material objects, he said, are bundles of God's ideas. But his reason was to do with a quite different problem concerning causation. If cause must be like effect, how can an immaterial God have created a material world? Answer: the world is not material in the way you think. Material things are bundles of God's ideas. Same theory: different reasons. Of course, Berkeley may have known of Gregory, and he does give Gregory's reason as a supplementary one.

One more example of revival, this time not based on reading the earlier sources, is provided by the work of Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*. Though presented from an atheistic point of view, with examples not from Theology but from science fiction, I am not the only one who has noticed that his ideas about the survival of the self in unfamiliar situations parallel the ancient Christian discussions of resurrection. The idea of transplanting at least half of the brain relates to the orthodox Christian belief that your original matter will be reused in your resurrected body. The fiction of electronically beaming someone to another planet, and constituting a new body there, relates to Origen's unorthodox proposal that in the resurrection each individual will get a new body with photographically similar structure. There is even, in another context, an anticipation of Parfit's further question, whether the surviving transplantee could be made to perish, if the other half of the brain were successfully transplanted into someone else. For there could hardly be *two* survivors and yet how could the survival of the first transplantee depend on an operation performed on the second? I believe the same question, with the example of a surgical operation, was raised in connexion with what I would call the Shrinking Argument levelled in the 3rd century BC by Chrysippus, the Stoic, against the Growing Argument. How can a surgical amputation performed on a man with a foot, Dion, be supposed to affect the survival of a different footless person, Theon? I am inclined to wonder if there are any ideas that could not be revived in a new context.

Parfit writes in the tradition of John Locke, who is often called the Father of modern theories of personal identity. But Locke too, I think, was returning to Antiquity, in his case from Christian theories of personal identity to the pagan theories of Epicureans and Stoics.

The possibility of reviving ideas is part of what gives point to philosophers studying the History of Philosophy. It liberates us from the circle of ideas which happen to be most recent and expands the philosophical imagination. The opposite utility has also been illustrated, that History can make us question the soundness of some of our inherited presuppositions, as with the supposed harmlessness of killing animals.

This idea of History as *liberating* contrasts with the view that we are trapped in our circle of ideas and the ancients in theirs. On this view, ideas are so tied to the context of a given time that we can easily say they could not have been thought of before that date, or could not be taken seriously after it. There are also ideas so entrenched that we can foresee that our own circle will not give them up. Again, history, on this view, merely shows us why we have inevitably come to adopt certain views, and discard others.

Of course, if we revive an idea, we may need to detach it from its original background, as ideas about when it would be just to go to war, may get detached from their background in natural law. But detachability is not only an interesting historical phenomenon. It is also what helps to make ancient ideas directly applicable to modern philosophy, or, as in the example of justice in war, to life. As historian, one must be keenly aware of the original background,

or one will miss significant differences. As philosopher, one may consider how far the background can be detached.

I do not wish to deny that there are limits to the repetition of ideas. A particularly interesting one which I have mentioned is that I have found at most likeness, never exact similarity, in the case of non-Buddhist Indian Philosophy, perhaps partly because it was until recently the guarded preserve of Brahmins who felt the West could teach them about Technology, but not about Philosophy.

To return to the ramifications of Philosophy, they are so extensive, and the cultures which have studied them so varied, that Gregory of Nyssa's charming idea is surely right: there is room for the understanding to make perpetual progress and one need never grow tired.

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An autobiography, including an intellectual autobiography, is selective. The idea was formulated originally in Plato's *First Alcibiades* that one sees oneself better through the eyes of others. But of course different people give very different accounts. Daniel Dennett, indeed, has cited the very different life stories that people can write about the same person to show that the idea of a self is merely a convenient fiction. But the fact of different stories does not in fact tell us whether all the stories are false, or all true. My colleague in King's, Jim Hopkins, revealed that he had thought of me through the 1970s principally as a lover of medieval churches, because I took our students to visit medieval churches on our philosophical weekends in the country. But in the 1980s he saw me galvanised by Prime Minister Thatcher's attack on university budgets, and he felt that that redoutable lady had given me a new self. My schooldays friend, the poet Jon Stallworthy, had seen me first and foremost as Indian. He wrote a poem expressing the thought that he had stolen my birthright by going to the Indian Subcontinent before I did. For his memoirs, *Singing School,* London 1998, he asked for a photograph of my 9-year old self dressed as attendant to one of the Three Wise Men, and wearing a turban. I featured in that book not as I have been asked to describe myself here as scholar or philosopher, but as player of the guitar that his Father gave me for my 21st birthday and singer of songs, some of them written by Jon. Jon had introduced me to Kate and one thing he said in his memoirs I could not bring myself to correct when he asked me for corrections to the manuscript. By the standards of historical chronology, he had reversed the order of two events, but I think he was following the higher standard of poetic truth, when he said that in 1958 I married Kate and went off to live in a place called 'Paradise Square'.