

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: King's College London
Unit of Assessment: 32 Philosophy
Title of case study: Morality, Humanity and Narrative – the Impact of Rai Gaita's Work
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Rai Gaita's work brings a distinctive conception of good and evil to bear on a range of central and abiding moral questions. His work has shaped and changed the understanding of core moral and political issues by the general public in Australia and in other countries, and it has influenced the attitudes of policy makers and lawyers. Some of his books are on the reading list for the Higher School Certificate in Australia and have therefore had an immediate impact on the moral sensitivities of young Australians.</p> <p>Not many contemporary moral philosophers have had such impact beyond the academic sphere. Why and how has Gaita achieved this impact? While academic philosophers tend to present their ideas in more technical form, Gaita's work crosses the boundaries between philosophical inquiry and literature. He brings philosophical issues to life by using the narrative form. For instance, his book <i>Romulus, My Father</i>, which uses biography to meditate on the human condition, has reached and influenced vast numbers of people. It was adapted into a film of the same title internationally released in 2007 and 2008. The inextricable connection between form and content in Gaita's work enables non-philosophical audiences to engage with, and respond to, his moral philosophy. In addition, his work has made a substantial contribution to the publishing and creative industries through the outstanding success of his books and related outputs.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Rai Gaita was appointed to King's in 1977. From 1999 to his retirement in 2010 he was Professor of Moral Philosophy at King's, where he is now emeritus professor. From 2000 to 2011 he was also Foundation Professor of Philosophy at the Australian Catholic University. In 2002 he was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.</p> <p>Gaita was a central member of the philosophy department at King's who attracted many graduate students (22 in the period). He published research papers in a number of international journals (<i>Philosophical Quarterly, Inquiry, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</i>) as well as several monographs. In 2011 Routledge published a festschrift: <i>'Philosophy, Ethics and a Common Humanity: Essays in Honour of Raimond Gaita'</i>, edited by Christopher Cordner.</p> <p>His first book, <i>Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception</i> (3.1) developed a conception of absolute value based on the Socratic affirmation that it is better to suffer evil than to do it. It elaborates an integrative conception of value that takes goodness to be fully revealed in the works of saintly love, characterises evil as an assault on what he calls 'the inalienably preciousness' of every human being, and offers an original account of the importance of remorse as distinct from shame. Alasdair Macintyre called it 'an outstanding contribution to moral philosophy'. <i>A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice</i> (3.3) explores the implications of this conception of good and evil for understanding the complex relations between morality, law and politics. Based on these two research monographs are two philosophical memoirs.</p> <p>The first, <i>Romulus, My Father</i> (3.2) tells the story of Gaita's father and reflects philosophically on it. It was made into a film, released in 2007-08. The second, <i>The Philosopher's Dog</i> (3.4), explores the nature of goodness and character, the role of political ideals, and our relationship with and treatment of animals.</p> <p>Both books are, to use Roger Scruton's term (<i>The Telegraph</i>, 2003), experiments in <i>narrative philosophy</i>. Gaita's use of the genre of philosophical memoir is fuelled by his philosophical investigation into the nature of philosophy. In a suggestive paper he argued that philosophy is a discursive discipline, but that the discourse is not restricted to 'the kind of thought in which form and content are separable' (3.5, 277.) Hence, in his work 'there will be no marked distinction between the narratives that must to some degree nourish inquiry and philosophical engagement with them' (Ibid.). Gaita's books implement this view: they are philosophical inquiries in which form and content are inseparable. Thus Gaita's narrative philosophy opens up philosophy for the non-academic public.</p> <p>Since 2008 Gaita has elaborated upon these themes in his collection <i>After Romulus</i> (3.6). And more recently he has explored the consequences of an inclusive understanding of humanity and</p>

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human values for multiculturalism in his book *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism* (3.7), nominated for the 2012 Inaugural Award of the International Center for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding, University of South Australia, for 'Promotion of Understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims'.

Because of their accessibility to the general public, those last four books, the film, and Gaita's numerous media contributions and public engagements (e.g. over 20 lectures internationally in the period) have been the main pathways for his philosophical work on morality and humanity to achieve its extraordinary impact beyond academic circles, as documented below.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1. *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*. 2nd Edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2004. (1st Edition London: Macmillan, 1991. Reprinted New York: St. Martins Press, 1994, 1996).

3.2. *Romulus, My Father*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998. Translated into six languages, most recently Polish, August 2013. Winner, Nettie Palmer Prize for Non-Fiction, Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, 1998. Shortlisted, Queensland Premier's Award for Contribution to Public Debate, 1999. Braille Book of the Year, 1999. National Biography Award, 1999. Nominated by *New Statesman*, London, as one of the best books of 1999 and by *The Australian Financial Review* as one of the ten best books of the decade. Published as an Audio Book in 1999 and as a CD in 2007. In 2007-08, an award-winning film based on the book, with Eric Bana and Franka Potente, was released internationally: <http://www.romulusmyfather.com.au>. The DVD was released in 2008.

3.3. *A Common Humanity; Thinking about Love & Truth & Justice*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999. Reprinted three times. London and New York: Routledge, August 2000, reprinted 2001. Nominated by *The Economist* as one of the best books of 2000.

3.4. *The Philosopher's Dog*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2002. Shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award, 2003, and *The Age* Book of the Year, 2003. Nominated by the *Kansas City Star* as one of the ten best books of 2005.

3.5. 'Narrative, Identity and Moral Philosophy'. *Philosophical Papers* 32 (2003), 261-77.

3.6. *After Romulus*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2011. Shortlisted for an NSW Premier Award. Nominated in *The Australian* as one of the best books of 2011.

3.7. *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2011.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Professor Rai Gaita is one of Australia's foremost public intellectuals. The connection between his philosophical research and his more general-public works was captured in the citation for the award of the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa from the University of Antwerp, 2009: 'for his exceptional contribution to contemporary moral philosophy and for his singular contribution to the role of the intellectual in today's academic world'. In 2011, Flinders University organised a conference in his honour; speakers included writers, filmmakers, lawyers, social workers, political and literary theorists and poets. In recognition of the cultural importance of his work, the National Library of Australia has asked for Gaita's papers for their collection, and the Australian National Portrait Gallery commissioned his portrait in 2012. (There is also a street graffiti portrait of Gaita in Melbourne). His work has influenced public attitudes towards justice (to humans and animals), multiculturalism, war and reconciliation, collective responsibility, racism, genocide and crimes against humanity, and also the general public's understanding of the experiences of immigrants in Australia. The following are examples of these impacts on different groups of beneficiaries.

The General Public. Described by Nobel Laureate J.M. Coetzee as 'one of those miraculous books ... that have an unpredictable life of their own', Gaita's book *Romulus, My Father* has sold more than 100,000 copies in English and is one 'of Australia's best loved books' (*The Australian*, 19.8.2011). The film adaption reached even more people: it was seen by approximately 10% of Australians (i.e., over 2m) on its release, and it continues to be viewed throughout the world in cinemas –now primarily at festivals and in art houses, on television and on DVD (the latter has sold about 30,000 copies). Both book and film have made people re-examine how they live their lives and have inspired them to re-evaluate their choices. These are just two examples among many of testimonies by email correspondence since 2008:

'I just saw the film *Romulus, My Father* with a friend, and we both enjoyed it tremendously. I feel

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honoured to be writing you... You are an inspiration. Your work is certain to get people talking ... and ultimately will help many people overcome burdens in their own lives.'

'In seeing the movie and reading your book several times I sense the sadness, despair, sympathy, love, hope and heartbreak of young Rai. The things that you wrote about your mother were very personal and must have been difficult to open to public scrutiny (...) Here I am, a person who was born forty years and half a world away from Christina who thanks to her son and his love and sympathy for her I recognised and admitted to myself what I've been suffering for so long. And for this I thank you Professor Gaita.'

The book has a significant profile in the Australian Education System and is currently on the reading list for the Higher School Certificate in New South Wales and Victoria. The text is required to help children reflect on the cultural diversity of their community and to encourage affirming perspectives. To date it has been selected for assessment by over 10,000 children in Victoria. The use of the book in schools has ensured 'that the ethical and philosophical questions posed by Professor Gaita's story are considered by a broad cross section of our community, not just those undertaking a formal study of philosophy' (Vice-Chancellor, University of Melbourne. Letter, March, 2013).

Since 2009, Gaita has spoken every year to large groups of schoolchildren (up to 700) for whom *Romulus* is a set text. The Director of Information Access gives a telling description of the impact of these talks on children:

'Having last left off reading the years of Raimond as a child, they experience standing before them now someone who not only survived the experiences but who offers philosophical pathways to integrate challenging human experience' (Email correspondence, 2013).

The film *Romulus, My Father* was the most successful of all Australian releases in 2007, earning ca. \$2.6 million and won the 2007 Australian Film Institute (AFI) award. Since then, it has not only reached the general public, but it also influenced Australia's cultural and creative landscape. In the words of its producer: 'The cinema, DVD, and television release of *ROMULUS* reached an estimated audience of 2.5 million Australians... The film also had a huge global reach, premiering at the prestigious Toronto International Film Festival and selling in many territories throughout the world.... There is a significant cultural impact and importance in telling Australian stories like this on the global scale achieved by *ROMULUS, MY FATHER*.... We worked with the Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) to develop a study guide and support screenings in schools. [...] The film and associated props and screenplays [have formed an important part of Australia's cultural heritage and] are held in the collection of the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra. ... [The] wonderful book *ROMULUS, MY FATHER* brought together a group of filmmakers to create a film that has had a huge reach, ... prompting many and varied discussions and articles about its themes and the important ideas it explores.' (Email correspondence 2013).

Policymakers. Gaita's work on human rights and international justice has had international reach and a profound effect on the understanding of nationalism and international politics. These examples, selected among others, serve to illustrate the claim:

- Gaita was invited to speak at a major international policy event sponsored by the Austrian foreign ministry, 'Trilogue. Global Visions: are we Speaking a Common Language?' in Salzburg 2008. Participants included the Rt. Hon. Kim Campbell (former Prime Minister of Canada), Peter Sutherland (chairman of BP) and Michael Fleischhacker (chief editor of *Die Presse*). His letter of invitation recognised the impact of his work on debates about nationalism and international politics.
- In November 2010, Gaita was invited to discuss the morality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with three eminent military figures: Colonel Richard Kemp, Major General Yaakov Amidror and Major General Jim Molan. Organized by NSW Jewish National Fund, it attracted over 900 guests, including influential members of the Australian Jewish community. His contribution caused a significant stir, prompting a debate with the head of the NSWJNF, reported in the local press.
- In 2012 the International Melbourne Writers Festival invited him to discuss the prospects for peace in the Middle East with Martyn Indyk, former US Ambassador to Israel under President Clinton and presently President Obama's envoy to negotiations between Israel and Palestine.
- Gaita's work is often used by public figures and policymakers, for example in former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams' book *Faith in the Public Square* (2012, p. 17), to deepen their

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understanding of contemporary issues, as attested by the Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University: 'Professor Gaita is a public intellectual of considerable standing. He has demonstrated an ability to engage the higher education sector and the broader community in considered mediation, constantly challenging ideas and proposing new thought. (...) In 2011 and 2012 Professor Gaita organized the Wednesday lectures series here at Melbourne University. They are a highly popular part of our calendar of events and are well attended by students, staff and the general public. (...) the lectures are much anticipated by colleagues for their thought-provoking discussion and ideas.' (Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University, The 'Wednesday lecture series' are open to the public and regularly draw audiences of c.200-300 people. Email correspondence, 2013).

In 2008 Gaita was invited to speak to senior leaders and new graduates at the Australian Government's Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Its secretary, Andrew Metcalfe AO, described the expected impact of that talk as helping 'to develop and strengthen the leadership group's appreciation of its central role in promoting good governance throughout the organization'.

The Legal Profession. Gaita regularly gives seminars and lectures to both academic and practicing lawyers. In 2010 he spoke to the Victorian Association of Magistrates on the subject of 'Morality, Moralizing and the Law'. The c.200 audience included senior members of the Victorian legal establishment. Gaita's absolute conception of human value has influenced the thinking of lawyers, especially on justice and human rights. For example, Julian Burnside, one of Australia's most prominent human rights lawyers, writes: 'Rai Gaita's work had a powerful impact on me. My involvement in human rights work was increasing significantly, and his book [3.3] helped shape my response to a number of human rights problems. The... book was profoundly important in helping me think about social justice and human rights' (email correspondence, 2013).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Melbourne: Text Publishing, for book sales figures in English: <http://textpublishing.com.au>.

5.2 Romulus My Father (feature film): <http://www.romulusmyfather.com.au>. (See also: <http://www.news.com.au/quality-over-quantity/story-e6frfmwr-111115095141>.) Arenamedia Pty Ltd for figures concerning film and DVD sales.

5.3 Education: http://hsc.csu.edu.au/english/area_of_study/area_intro/3634/aos_intro.htm.
<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/exams/english/english-samp-w.pdf>.

Letter from Victoria's Curriculum and Assessment Authority CEO (statement uploaded).

5.4 Papers and portraits: Email correspondence with the National Library of Australia.

http://www.portrait.gov.au/site/collection_info.php?irn=52&acno=2012.37.

<http://www.cdh-art.com/gaita.html>.

5.5 Individual Users/Factual Statements: from the Director of Information Access, a prominent Human Rights lawyer, a Producer/Director/Writer at Arenamedia, the Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University. Also the VCAA CEO (see 5.3).

5.6 Full list of Gaita's Public media and other public engagements in the period. (Available from HEI. Some at: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/stories/2009/07/21/2631960.htm> (audience c.500);

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/is-god-necessary-for-morality/3264902> (audience c.700; and 200 turned away);

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/features/inbedwithphillip/episodes/133-raimond-gaita/>;

<http://wheelercentre.com/projects/faith-and-culture-the-politics-of-belief> (audience: c.600);

abc.net Q&A, 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqQuTvwrij0>;

Report of NSWJNF 2010 event: www.iwire.com.au/news/military-men-a-philosopher-and-the-morality-of-war/12782.

5.7 Conference on Gaita's work and Reviews of his books, attesting to their public reach:

- http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/firth/firth-conferences/a-sense-for-humanity-the-ethical-thought-of-raimond-gaita/a-sense-for-humanity-the-ethical-thought-of-raimond-gaita_home.cfm;

http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/faculties_institutes_and_centres/theology_and_philosophy/schools/philosophy/about_our_staff/professor_raimond_gaita/professor_raimond_gaita_-_books.