

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Sheffield
Unit of Assessment: 32 - Philosophy
Title of case study: Philosophy in the City: Inspiring the next generation
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Through our very successful schools outreach programme, Philosophy in the City, several members of staff have brought their research ideas to school students and teachers, with considerable influence both on the students themselves and on the way in which philosophy is taught and thought of within those schools. This activity has formed an important part of our civic engagement with Sheffield and its region, in enabling our research work to be understood beyond the academy, while drawing school pupils into the subject and influencing their attitude both to the issues we deal with and to higher education more generally.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Philosophy in the City has been informed by a body of research undertaken by a number of staff within the Department of Philosophy at the University of Sheffield, all of whom are highly respected as experts in their field. While the nature of the research presented must be gauged to the level of the audience concerned, this nonetheless represents a form of ‘research-led teaching’, going beyond what is offered to the school students by their teachers in class. Moreover, as a result of this expertise, our staff are in a position to offer guidance to the teachers concerning how best to relate to the content of the curriculum, and how best to present it to their pupils. The research expertise of staff is therefore what has enabled them to have the influence documented within this case study, where the relevant research is as follows:</p> <p>Chris Bennett's book <i>The Apology Ritual</i> sets out a theory of how punishment might be justified, which builds on the justification of reactions such as blame and demand for apology [R1]. In chapter three, he deals with the criticism that punishment cannot be 'deserved' because our actions, and the mental states that lead to action, are not ultimately under our control. In response, he argues that, if we look more closely at what is going on when we hold someone morally responsible (for instance, in expecting an apology), we see that blame is a response to the violation of standards that a person can reasonably be expected to meet as a self-governing member of a normatively demanding relationship. We thus understand that the conditions for moral responsibility lie more in the capacity to uphold a certain role within a set of relationships than in the ability to exercise absolute control over one's actions and character. The lecture looked at the way our aptness for certain sorts of moral assessment is a kind of social status, and hence underpinned by conditions that do not require ultimate control.</p> <p>Chris Hookway's research examines a pragmatist approach to the nature of science and knowledge. In chapter two of his recent book [R2], he discusses tensions that arise when we take seriously two important ideas. The first is that science provides us with knowledge and is aimed at obtaining <i>truth</i>. And the second is ‘fallibilism’, the idea that that any of our beliefs <i>might</i> be mistaken, or that none of our methods of inquiry are guaranteed to provide us with the truth. His lecture raised a number of questions about what the aims of scientific inquiry: and about just what it means to say that theories are <i>true</i>.</p> <p>Robert Hopkins has published on the way we experience cinema and the nature of cinematic representation [R3], and how these explain the emotional power of film [R4]. His work explores how far our experience of film involves illusion, tailoring the precise form such illusion takes both to what is independently plausible and to the task of explaining film's influence over emotion. He lectured on these issues.</p> <p>Eric Olson, lectured on personal identity. This drew on three aspects of his research [R5]: how to characterize the problem of personal identity over time (which is frequently misunderstood), his</p>

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criticisms of answers to this question based on psychological continuity (which have dominated the discussion since Locke), and his inquiries into the metaphysical possibility of life after death.

Jenny Saul's work on sex and gender argues that our ordinary notions of these concepts are deeply confused, and that these confusions have worrying ethical and political consequences. In her [R7], she explored a novel contextualist theory of terms like 'woman' and 'man', according to which these terms sometimes refer to biological concepts based on, for example, chromosomes and sometimes to social concepts based on e.g. roles in the family. The presentation she gave to The Examined Life centred around the puzzles and confusions found in our ordinary concepts, and the ethical and political significance of these puzzles.

Robert Stern based his talk around his current work on divine command theories of moral obligation, which are discussed in his recent book on this topic [R8]. In this work, he relates these theories to the problem of autonomy, and also considers how far it is possible for them to offer 'intermediate' accounts, which explain obligation but not goodness by an appeal to a divine command. He used these ideas in his lecture to offer a defence of such theories against the standard objections based on the Euthyphro dilemma, and suggested that alternatives to the divine command account are themselves problematic.

Yonatan Shemmer spoke about the value of philosophy, and the notion of 'value' itself, where this relates to his recent work concerning constructivism vs. realism about value. In his paper [R9], Shemmer explores the foundations of the norms of coherence and consistency. He argues that these norms ground all other norms and value judgments and explores possible ways of justifying these norms. In particular he assesses the idea that all justification has an instrumental form whereby a norm or value is justified by showing that being guided by it helps to promote a more fundamental norm.

3. References to the research

- R1. Christopher Bennett, *The Apology Ritual*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008
- R2. Christopher Hookway, *The Pragmatic Maxim*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012
- R3. Robert Hopkins, 'What Do We See in Film?', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66 (2008), pp. 149-59
- R4. 'Moving *Because Pictures?*', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 34 (2010), pp. 200-18
- R5. Eric Olson, *What Are We? A Study in Personal Ontology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007
- R6. Jennifer Saul, 'Philosophical Analysis and Social Kinds: Gender and Race', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 80 (2006), pp. 119-44
- R7. 'Politically Significant Terms and Philosophy of Language: Methodological Issues', in Anita Superson and Sharon Crasnow, *Out of the Shadows: Analytic Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012, 195-216.
- R8. Robert Stern, *Understanding Moral Obligation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012
- R9. Yonatan Shemmer, 'Constructing Coherence', in James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer (eds), *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 159-79

Evidence for Research Quality:

Research published in international quality journals ([R3], [R4], [R6]) or with leading book publishers ([R1], [R2], [R5], [R7], [R8], [R9]), and in some cases funded by research grants ([R1]: written during AHRC funded research leave scheme; [R6] and [R7]: presented at workshop funded by Spanish government; [R8]: Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (£95k); [R9] AHRC network grant (£26K) - so all outputs were put through a rigorous peer-review process.

4. Details of the impact

The outreach programme run by the Philosophy Department and its students has played a crucial role as a medium for communicating our research. 'Philosophy in the City' (PinC), which was founded in 2006 as a schools outreach programme, now has links with eight local schools and other institutions involving young people, such as afterschool clubs and the Roundabout homeless shelter. A significant part of this activity is student-led, where seminars and discussion groups are run by our undergraduate and graduate students, based on the sort of research-led teaching they have received themselves within the Department. PinC has been very successful, serving as a model for programmes developed by other departments at Sheffield (such as 'History in the City'), while also receiving external recognition (for example, in 2007 it came runner up in the THES award for Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community).

From early June 2008, academics in the Department gave lectures at the annual PinC conference called 'Philosophize!' in which the schools came into the University for a day of activities. More recently, teachers involved in the programme suggested greater staff involvement and asked us to provide lectures in schools, in addition to the seminars run by our students. This process began in 2011, with individual staff visiting particular schools. We have now intensified this activity with a series of school visit days, an educational programme which we have called 'The Examined Life'. For these events, a variety of schools bring pupils into the University for the day. The series has involved over 320 local Y10 students, from six schools. The main focus of the day is the staff lecture, which is then backed up by seminars led by our students. Hopkins and Bennett both gave lectures at Silverdale school and Stern and Saul spoke at Outwood academy, while Olson, Stern, Hookway, Saul and Shemmer have each given lectures to audiences from a variety of local schools in the 'Examined Life' series.

There is clear evidence that both forms of activity have been successful. Reports from both teachers and students regarding the individual staff visits were extremely positive. Commenting on the lectures by Hopkins and Bennett at Silverdale, the teacher concerned remarked '*Both of the lectures were brilliant. Chris Bennett's lecture, and the preliminary and follow-up sessions had a profound impact on the way that my students thought about punishment. The idea that punishment was something that someone might have a right to had never occurred to them previously. Rob Hopkins' insights into the emotive aspects of the paradox of fiction were equally novel and thought-provoking*' [S1].

The 'Examined Life' days have also been highly successful. The Head of Philosophy/RE at Meadowhead School commented on '*A fantastic day that delved deeper into the issues raised as it evolved through the seminars. Students were able to develop their beliefs and challenge others to do the same. A thoroughly enjoyable introduction to higher education*' [S2]. Feedback from the whole body of pupils also showed positive engagement with the events, with enjoyment rated at 6/10 overall, 23% of the respondents rating the experience as 8/10 or above and 28% expressing an interest in studying Philosophy at degree level [S3]. Figures from Silverdale school alone were even more impressive: 73% said they 'thought differently about the issues' after the Examined Life days, while 60% said they were now more likely to go to university, with 80% saying they would now choose Sheffield as the place to study for their degree [S4]. Comments include: '*Re-evaluated my thoughts on society and morals...influenced me to question the origins of my morality more than ever before*'; '*I now understand my concept of morals better*', '*it makes me think about impacts of actions more*', '*made you think deeper about the things you wouldn't normally*', '*it made me look at other aspects of Philosophy*', '*gave me a chance to voice and discuss my opinions*' [S3].

The success of these activities has led to local schools changing their curriculum provision in line with the research areas of the department. For example Silverdale school's entire KS4 RE and SMSC provision for Y10 students is delivered through 'The Examined Life' series. Work from Silverdale school shows a profound engagement with the research topics. For example, a number

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of student essays now offer animalism as a sensible approach to take on questions of personal identity, through exposure to Prof Olson's work [S1].

In addition to the direct impact of our teaching on the school pupils, we have also used our research expertise to engage with the teachers themselves. On 24th June 2013 we organized a conference for A-level school teachers working in philosophy, which was attended by 29 teachers and covered 22 schools from across the country. This event enabled us to broaden the teachers' understanding of the curriculum, and ways in which it might be made of more interest to their pupils, by offering 'state of the art' accounts of current research, based upon our expertise. The conference was a great success, with 71% of attendees rating the subject knowledge refreshment aspect as Excellent. 93% felt the conference would have a lasting impact (41% at a significant level) upon their teaching. Comments included: *'interesting new areas I wouldn't have previously covered or would have done differently'*; *'extra "string to bow" as a CPD/INSET course'*; *'the content/presentation of lectures gave me a lot of good ideas for teaching similar areas of the curriculum'*. All attendees expressed an interest in attending similar events in the future and all are keen to work with us to develop the format and other school and college events [S5].

Taken overall, therefore, this case study shows how we have delivered impact at the level of civil society, cultural life, education, public discourse and public service, in the following respects:

- informing the intellectual lives of school children, while leading them to think about and question various aspects of their ethical and social lives, and their heritage
- providing access to advanced philosophical ideas in an accessible way
- helping provide ideas and intellectual skills to enable school children to participate in discussions on philosophical issues
- enabling schools to deliver education in these areas more effectively, and assisting in the career development of teachers

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. Head of Philosophy, Silverdale School, Sheffield
- S2. Head of Philosophy/RE, Meadowhead School, Sheffield
- S3. Information collated from questionnaire returns after Examined Life days, from all attendees
- S4. Information collated from questionnaire returns after Examined Life days, from pupils at Silverdale School (sample from one form group, which had 22 of the 128 Silverdale pupils in it who had taken part in the Examined Life days)
- S5. Information collated from questionnaire returns from teachers' conference