

CHAPTER ONE

CREATION, ENVIRONMENT AND ETHICS: SOME CARDIFF-BASED CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILOSOPHY

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I have been asked to say a little about my research contributions to Philosophy, and am attempting here to comply with that request. (References in this chapter to writings of my own correspond to the list of publications presented elsewhere in this volume. A short bibliography of works of others referred to in this chapter can be found at its end.)

Philosophy students often think of their lecturers as teachers only, rather than as researchers too. My very first students would not have been too far out to think of me in this way, as I had until then published nothing in philosophy, although I had been doing philosophy research in the previous few months at the University of Manchester. That research was continued as my doctoral dissertation, which was entirely composed when I was already in post at Cardiff, having been appointed in January 1968. It was inspired by the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer on secularisation, and concerned secularisation among philosophers from Bacon to Kant, with some amount of philosophy of religion and history and philosophy of science thrown in. The main theme was that theists can welcome secularisation (for example, critiques of religious claims, together with the practice that generates them) as opposed to secularism (a case of which would be the claim that science explains everything and thus leaves no room for religious belief). A second theme was that the critiques supplied by Hume and Kant of defences of theism from contemporary writers such as Samuel Clarke were inconclusive.

After the doctorate had been awarded in 1972, I tried for several years to find a publisher for a book that would be based on it, but succeeded only when University College Cardiff Press came into being in 1976. With them I published *God and The Secular* (1978), a slightly scaled-down

version of the doctorate; UCCP insisted that the text be shortened by one sixth. Some thirty years later I was able to publish one of the omitted sections, on secularising critiques made of each other by Leibniz on the one hand and Clarke and Newton on the other (2005, actually published 2007). *God and The Secular* received several reviews, including a strongly adverse one from M.A. Stewart, who was understandably annoyed by shoddy work on the part of the publishers, who had sent out a review copy parts of which were printed upside down. Stewart, however, had a reputation for astringent reviews, and a few years later, when I met him, he retracted his adverse remarks, although only in a private conversation. Many years later, David Lamb arranged the republication of this book in 1993 under an Ashgate imprint called Gregg Revivals.

By this time, I had published some ethics articles in prominent journals, including ‘On Being Human’ in *Inquiry* (1974), ‘Against Non-Comparabilism’ in *Philosophy* (1975), and ‘Towards a Defence of Teleology’ in *Ethics* (1975). (“Teleology” was the term then in use for consequentialism.) I had also published shorter pieces on Berkeley (1970) and on Hume (1971) in *Philosophy*, and on religious language in *Sophia* (1970, 1971, 1972) and *Religious Studies* (1973, 1977), which happened to catch the eye of a later referee, Frederick Ferré, but the ethics articles served as the initial steps towards a later and larger project in that field. The following year, a reply was published to my consequentialist account of justice in *Ethics* (1975) by one Louis Kort, and my colleague Barry Wilkins called round and encouraged me to compose a response, telling me at least what kind of thing I should say. So I took him up on this, and published a short rejoinder, ‘Racialism, Justice and Teleology’ also in *Ethics* (1977), explaining how justice and consequentialism could be reconciled.

Around this time I had two short pieces in *Analysis*, one on collective responsibility (1971), and the other on the analysis of existence on the part of my former teacher, G.E.L. Owen, who used to write about the presocratics, Plato and Aristotle. This was, for a long time, my only published contribution to Ancient Philosophy, and it was an indirect one at that. It was called ‘How Things Exist: A Difficulty’ (1973). (Michael Durrant tells me that he later came across a reply to it in someone’s doctoral thesis.) Michael Durrant also collaborated with me in a joint article, published in *Noûs*, called ‘The Irreducibility of ‘Meaning’’ (1973), which was my only foray into that field until the publication of *Creation, Evolution and Meaning* (2006). In this paper, we resisted analyses of meaning in terms of use, or more specifically of illocutionary act potential, on grounds of their circularity. Michael was very much the senior partner

in this enterprise, but showed great fortitude both in face of repeated requests for revisions from the editor of *Noûs*, Hector-Neri Castañeda, and of intrusions on his time and attention from me, one of them when he was in hospital.

I spent the academic session of 1972-3 teaching at the University of Ife in Nigeria, taking with me not only a wife and a young family but, more relevantly to research in philosophy, a document called 'Forty Related Views'. These forty theses were positions in and around ethics, such as naturalism and consequentialism, which I would have liked to write up in book form. But at that stage I had so much difficulty finding a publisher for *God and The Secular* that this project had to be deferred for several years. Instead I wrote up a by-product of my dissertation, the paper 'Clarke, Collins and Compounds', published in *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* (1977), which later made me one of their readers. There was also an article in *The Journal of Religion* on 'Science and Creation', concerning the paradoxical relations between science and that doctrine (1978). In the late seventies I had a paper on supererogation accepted by *Mind* (1979), and submitted with similar success a paper on moral relativism to *The Monist* for one of their special numbers (1979). There was also a paper on inter-generational reparations, published in the Nigerian journal *Second Order* (1979), and earlier presented to the Cardiff Philosophy Seminar.

While in Nigeria I composed a calypso about De Morgan's Law, suitable to be sung to the tune of 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise'. It runs:

Not either, so neither,
De Morgan he say,
And also vice versa;
It works either way.
Not both, so one only
At most, this he teach;
And also conversely
Just one, so not each.

The Nigerian students, at least, seemed to like this and were seen and heard singing it lustily.

By the late 1970s I had become interested in environmental philosophy, and soon wrote my first paper in that field, 'The Good of Trees', first published in *Journal of Value Inquiry* (1981), and later much anthologised. Sources of this new interest included the influence of Henry Odera Oruka, a colleague at the University of Nairobi, where I spent four

months teaching in 1975. Oruka had attended the World Congress of Philosophy at Varna, Bulgaria, at which he came across one of the earliest papers ever written in this new field, Richard Routley's 'Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?' (Routley, 1973); this whetted my appetite. Another source was my reading (on my return to Cardiff) of John Passmore's book *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (1974), to an earlier draft of which Routley had been replying. While endorsing Routley's rejection of anthropocentrism, I was attracted by Passmore's approach to Western ethical traditions vis-à-vis nature. Yet more compelling a source was being asked to teach in 1977 one term's worth of lectures towards the Cardiff course 'Philosophical Aspects of Social and World Problems' in place of Vernon Pratt, who had moved to Lancaster University in 1976. (This course had been approved on a split vote in the Faculty of Arts in 1973, while I was still in Nigeria, and marked the first stirrings of a Cardiff involvement in applied ethics.) Having to teach a field fosters both puzzlement and the adoption of stances within it. And so, before long, deferring plans for writing a work on ethics, I began composing what became *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (1983), which, as I correctly guessed, was more likely to find a publisher.

This book combined distinctive contributions to the field of environmental ethics, including a defence of a consequentialist version of biocentrism, with a discussion of population ethics owing much to Derek Parfit's (as yet unpublished) work (later published in his *Reasons and Persons* (Parfit, 1984), together with a critical survey of Passmore's account of Western religious and ethical traditions. In this connection I followed up Passmore's favoured source, Clarence Glacken's *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Glacken, 1967), and rapidly found that it supported an account far removed from that based on it by Passmore. At the same time, I was able to redeploy Passmore's classification of what he regarded as "minority traditions" such as that of stewardship, and to cite many of Glacken's sources to show that it was far from the recessive tradition of Passmore's account. At one point I planned an even ampler book, which was to have included a section on environmental politics, but my colleague Professor Thomas McPherson advised me to treat the book as complete as it then stood; and no one has ever objected to this omission. Reviewers ranged from those claiming that this was a survey book (admittedly part of the truth, for it was effectively the second overview of the field, Passmore's having been the first) to those hailing it as deserving an "environmental Oscar". It soon led to my being invited to chair a section of the Montreal World Congress of Philosophy of 1983, and in 1984 to my

being invited to join the Environmental Ethics Working Party of the Ian Ramsey Centre at Oxford University.

There were three substantial papers published separately as by-products of this book. 'Christian Attitudes to Nature' (1983) was a reply to White, who had ascribed anthropocentric and despotic attitudes towards nature to Christianity in a paper in *Science* called 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', and also to Passmore, who had rejected some of White's views and accepted others. It was published in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, and was apparently made prescribed reading in some universities. Jan Decker told me recently that reading it had saved him needing to look up the sources at the time. (Much more recently I published an essay about White in *Environmental Ethics* (2009), which delved into 'The Roots of Roots' (as one section is called). A second essay was 'Western Traditions and Environmental Ethics' (1983), and discussed historical attitudes to animals. It was published in an Australian collection, but was badly mangled by one of the editors, as emerged from the University of Queensland version. However, I managed to persuade the Open University Press, which published the British version, to include an acknowledgement of the *errata*. The third was 'Methods of Ecological Ethics' (1983) in which I defended reasoning outwards from agreed cases, an approach that most environmental philosophers condemned as "extensionism". This was published in *Metaphilosophy*. (All three essays later appeared together in my Ashgate collection *Environmental Philosophy: Principles and Prospects* (1994).) Another related talk, 'Christianity and the Ecological Crisis', related this research and the themes of *God and The Secular*, and was broadcast on Radio 3 in 1981.

Other papers of the 1980s concerned very different themes. I wrote on the analogical nature of theological predicates in 'Religious Symbols and the Voyage of Analogy' (1980), which somewhat over-used the theme of Scylla and Charybdis, but was still published in the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. My interest in this topic was kindled by my former colleague Humphrey Palmer's book *Analogy* (1973). Some years later I published a second (and more readable) essay in this field in the *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* (1996). Several papers about Leibniz appeared in *Studia Leibnitiana* (1980), reflecting themes from my dissertation, which were differently echoed in articles and reviews about religious language that appeared in *New Blackfriars* (1980, 1983, 1984); I don't know whether any other Quakers have ever written for that journal. There were also some papers on ethics, such as 'Optimific, Right but not Obligatory' (1982), published in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 'Work and the Human Essence' (1984), which appeared in the first

number of *Journal for Applied Ethics*, and another joint paper with Michael Durrant, critical of the communitarianism of D.Z. Phillips and H.O. Mounce, which appeared in *Philosophical Papers* (1981). (Most of the credit for this paper belongs to Michael, who supplied most of the ideas; my role was to make their presentation more reader-friendly.) Another applied philosophy paper was 'Development: Some Areas of Consensus' (1986), which the editor of *Journal of Social Philosophy* declared, in accepting it, "almost the ideal paper" for that journal. In this period I was also able to resuscitate and revise some research on the impacts of secularisation on the history of witchcraft, that I had done at Manchester before coming to Cardiff, which was now published in the journal *Annals of Science* (1985).

A light year of teaching now gave me the opportunity to write up 'Forty Related Views' as a book which Croom Helm agreed to publish as *A Theory of Value and Obligation* (1987), covering value-theory, normative ethics and meta-ethics. It was probably a mistake to cover all these areas together, but that had long been the whole idea. There were quite a number of reviews, some of them quite favourable, but tending to say that, since nothing I or anyone else could say would persuade non-consequentialists to become consequentialists, its main interest consisted in the modifications to ethical theory that environmental ethics seemed to require. There was also a scathing review from Frederick Feldman, and an extended and largely favourable one from David O. Brink in *The Philosophical Review* (1991). These and the other reviews were among the factors that impelled me to rewrite the book, which re-appeared from Rodopi of Amsterdam and Atlanta as *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics* (1995). That book received fewer reviews, but responses eventually included some largely favourable coverage from Alan Carter, effectively itself a review, presented in a review of a later book of mine in *Mind* (2001).

Meanwhile I had been rather distracted from philosophical research for parts of the 1980s because of the struggle to reform the structures of University College Cardiff, and limit the powers of the then Principal, C.W.L. Bevan. From 1984 I was also spending one day a month with the Environmental Ethics Working Party of the Ian Ramsey Centre at Oxford. Eventually I became the joint editor of its report, *Values, Conflict and the Environment* (1989 and 1996). That report advocated a method for environmental decision-making called "Comprehensive Weighing", an environmentally enhanced version of cost-benefit analysis, which I agreed to support as a compromise, although I spent some of the next few years presenting papers explaining my reservations and objections (1995). As

for the report, it was published (1989) by the Cardiff Centre for Applied Ethics (together with the Ian Ramsey Centre, which was at that time out of funds); the report was republished a few years afterwards (1996) by a more established publisher, Avebury (the present Ashgate). Another result of my participation in this enterprise was that in the dark days of the late 1980s, when the future of the Cardiff Philosophy unit was in the balance, Lord Bullock, the co-chair of the Oxford Working Party and former Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, wrote to the Cardiff Principal, Aubrey Trotman-Dickenson in our support.

In the early nineties, some of the participants in the Working Party arranged a conference at the University of Kent at Canterbury in which we applied this method to an actual planning decision (about road-building in Dorset), coming up with the conclusion that a different decision from the one reached by the Inspector would have been better, as also would have been doing nothing at all. The report continued to be discussed occasionally, but otherwise fell into oblivion. Meanwhile the view shared by Alan Holland and John O'Neill that cost-benefit analysis was incapable of being reformed prevailed, at least among philosophers.

In the early nineties, Barry Wilkins and I jointly edited for Routledge *International Development and the Third World: Studies in the Philosophy of Development* (1992), each contributing an essay. Mine was 'Development and Environmentalism' (1992 and 1994), which argued that developmentalists (that is, supporters of social and economic development) should support environmentalism, the cause of environmentalists, and also vice versa. This essay won high praise from Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler in one of their survey books (Botzler and Armstrong, 1998, 93). Then, in 1993, Andrew Belsey and I organised in Cardiff the Annual Conference of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, on the theme 'Philosophy and the Natural Environment', and the next year edited the conference proceedings under the same title. My own paper was entitled 'Rehabilitating Nature and Making Nature Habitable' (1994). Andrew and I wrote the Introduction. However, I was distracted from composing articles through serving a stint as Chair of the Philosophy Board of Studies, from 1991 to 1994, until I was granted a year's study leave in compensation. It was in that year that *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics* (1995) was prepared.

Across the nineties, a steady flow of invitations came my way to present papers, some in Kenya, some in Malaysia, one in Austria, one in the then Czechoslovakia, and several in Scandinavia. (The invitations to Kenya were from Henry Odera Orika, now a Professor, and a prolific organiser of conferences until his untimely death in the later part of 1995;

his 1991 Conference was a World Conference of Philosophy, sponsored by FISP, though lacking the status of a World Congress.) There was also a trip in 1994 to present a paper at the American Philosophical Association (Pacific Division) at Los Angeles, which somehow generated invitations to present other papers at Corvallis in Oregon and at Fort Collins and Boulder in Colorado. Most of the invitations were in the field of environmental philosophy, but I continued to give papers in other fields too, such as the history of philosophy (1993, 2004) (a field in which I served on the Committee of the relevant British Society) and the ethics of genetic engineering (1995, 1998). But there were still opportunities to give talks about most of the range of topics in environmental philosophy, from historical and religious themes, via aesthetic ones, to issues of population policy, sustainable development and the compatibility of environmentalism with democracy. There is no space to cover them all here.

In 1998, after taking part in Nigel Dower's Aberdeen-based global citizenship project, I was awarded a semester of study leave to write a book for his series on Global Ethics for Edinburgh University Press, which emerged as *The Ethics of the Global Environment* (1999). Most of the issues just mentioned were discussed, together with some thought experiments about human extinction, and an updated account of the stewardship approach; this latter I was also asked to present at a colloquium of the John Ray Initiative, held at Windsor Castle (of which I contributed to the proceedings volume (2006)). The book on the global environment was reviewed for *Mind* by Alan Carter (2001), who (as mentioned above) obligingly reviewed *Value, Obligation and Meta-Ethics* at the same time, as conveying its theoretical basis. Carter regarded this theoretical approach as being as good as any, but regarded all such approaches as defective on pluralist grounds. I published a reply in *Utilitas* (2003), to which Carter responded there at length; I was then allowed the last word (2005), albeit a fairly short one. (There is a further unpublished contribution of mine to this debate; but the Paris conference where it was presented has not yet managed to publish the proceedings.)

Discovering that John White had published in a 1997 book a reply to my earlier paper 'Work and the Human Essence', I now published a rejoinder in the first number of *Reason in Practice* (which now carries the title *Philosophy of Management*) (2001). This allowed me to resuscitate a long-standing argument from essential human capacities, which he had misconstrued. This paper was apparently regarded by one of the editorial board as the corner-stone of their first number. But since then, this argument seems to have returned to oblivion.

In 2000, together with Johan Hattingh of Stellenbosch University, I managed to secure funding from the Association of Commonwealth Universities for a project on sustainable development, with reference to South Africa. There followed two visits in 2001 and 2002, one to the Northern Province, and the other to Stellenbosch, to which I was returning, having earlier held a Research Fellowship of the National Research Council, which had sponsored lectures at Stellenbosch, Cape Town and Pretoria. This time my wife Leela became an officially funded member of the research team. Johan also visited Cardiff more than once. The upshot was two papers on sustainable development, one published in *International Journal of Human Rights* (2002) and the other in *Third World Quarterly* (2004). The second of these papers was jointly authored by Johan, myself and Manamela Matshabaphala, an academic at Witwatersrand who had participated in the project. A related (overlapping and therefore unpublished) paper was presented at Addis Ababa in 2005, where Leela and I were visiting the University at the invitation of my former doctoral student, Workineh Kelbessa.

During 2002, with the help of another semester of study leave, I composed a textbook for Polity Press of Cambridge called *Environmental Ethics* (2003). At the suggestion of Patricia Clark I included a glossary, portions of which have often been quoted back at me by student essayists since the book was published. This book includes a further defence of biocentric consequentialism, and applications of it to, for example, global warming. Soon afterwards, I began presenting papers on that topic, one of them at San Diego, which was recently published in a special number of *Journal of Social Philosophy*. It is entitled 'Mediated Responsibilities, Global Warming and the Scope of Ethics' (2009), and stresses the enlarged scope of human impacts that, because of technology, ethics needs to consider nowadays, as not in the past.

Several other papers on global warming have followed, partly because of my participation in a UNESCO Working Party on environmental ethics (2006), and also in preparing the *White Paper on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change*, authored largely by Donald Brown of Pennsylvania State University (2006). This seems to have generated an invitation to address an international conference of Fondazione Lanza in October 2008 at Padua, another to address the Toda Foundation conference at Honolulu the next month (to which I contributed electronically), and another to address a conference in March 2009 at the National Leonardo Da Vinci Museum at Milan. A further such paper was presented at the World Congress of Philosophy at Seoul (Korea) in August 2008. (The relevant papers are all forthcoming.)

In 2004, I read an editorial by Alan Holland in *Environmental Values* which came across as a challenge to myself, and composed a reply that was published (2005) in the same journal. Since the challenge concerned the poetry of John Clare, the reply used passages of poetry in an attempt to illustrate that not all talk of value is to be regarded as a projection of human sentiments. I am grateful to Christopher Norris for some of the ideas, particularly a relevant passage from Gray's *Elegy*.

In 2005, I was awarded research leave by Cardiff University and by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (one semester from each) for a book on creation and Darwinism. One of the referees was Frederick Ferré, one of few philosophers able to remember my much earlier writings on philosophy of religion. After planning the structure during a holiday in 2004 to visit a nephew and his family in Vietnam, I managed to compose *Creation, Evolution and Meaning* (2006) by the end of 2005. The front cover design is a photograph that I once took of the Eden Project in Cornwall. The book was published in December 2006, and has so far received several favourable reviews, plus a less favourable one in *The Times Higher*, to which I managed to publish a brief reply by way of a letter to the editor. In this work, philosophy of religion is combined with philosophy of biology and environmental philosophy. The opening chapters result from reflection on the work of Alexander Miller and Christopher Norris on realism and anti-realism, as well as some longstanding interests in verificationism and in falsification. Clarification of belief in creation (and of how to distinguish it from creationism) and arguments for the existence of God are present, as is a discussion of the varieties of Darwinism, its relation to varieties of teleological argument, and its relation to the problem of evil. Later parts discuss Daniel Dennett's account of how the story of evolution culminates in language and then, supposedly, in science, adding how a stewardship approach coheres with the account of creation given earlier. One indirect effect has been an invitation from Christopher Southgate to write reviews for *Reviews in Science and Theology*. I hope to develop further some of the themes about evolution and psychology in a project funded by the Oxford University Ian Ramsey Centre for the year 2009-10.

Once this book was out of the way, I was able to turn to a contract with Ashgate to edit a collection of readings on environmental ethics. My main role was to write the introduction, which occupied much of the summer of 2007; the book (much the longest that I have published) appeared under the title *The Ethics of the Environment* (2008), and has not yet been reviewed, as far as I am aware.

Having embarked on teaching ancient philosophy in a module delivered three times to MA students, I presented a related paper last year to the Cardiff Branch of the Royal Institute of Philosophy. This arose also from the undergraduate module ‘Philosophy and Poetry’, jointly taught in recent years by Christopher Norris and myself, and was called ‘Philosophy on Poetry, Philosophy in Poetry’ (forthcoming). It concerns whether Plato would have (or could consistently have) banned philosophical poetry, such as the poetry of Lucretius, from his Republic. It is being published in a proceedings volume of the Society for Value Inquiry sessions held at the Seoul (Korea) World Congress, where I also presented it last August.

Currently I have a contract to write a textbook on ethics, with a deadline of June 2011, and am all too likely to pick the brains of colleagues in the coming two years while I am attempting to write it. No other books are planned, but several conference presentations are envisaged. Having now covered my books and a fair sprinkling of my other writings, I will close, with many thanks to colleagues past and present whose ideas and encouragement have made these writings possible, or (in some cases) who have joined in writing them.

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