Booknotes

There is a rather striking video currently used in police training. A firearms officer is caught on video shooting an armed suspect. The officer then gives his account of what happened, and there is no suggestion that he is tying to fabricate evidence. He says that he shot the suspect once; his partner says that he fired two shots. On the video we see four shots being deliberately fired. Memory, it seems, is an unreliable witness in situations of stress (which appears to be the point of using the video).

What are the philosophical implications of a story such as this? More generally, how do we, as philosophers, cope with the undoubted fact – much emphasised, of course, by Freud – that many of our mental and cognitive states are very far from being conscious, particularly where deep feelings are involved. Marcia Cavell's **Becoming a Subject: Reflections in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis** (Oxford University Press, 2006) is a sensitive and interesting exploration of this and connected questions, which draws on psychological, psychoanalytical and literary sources as well as philosophy.

There is, as might be expected, extensive discussion of Freud himself, in which the point is made that Freud revised his view of repression towards the end of his life. In line, perhaps, with the police video and certainly in line with much experience, Freud came to believe that it was not so much that repression caused anxiety, as he had earlier held, as that anxiety (with which our lives are constantly confronted) brings about repression and other tricks and distortions of memory.

Cavell sees the self as far from being a datum, but, in opposition to Hume, not a nothing either. Rather it is a never to be completed task, a constant negotiation between me, the world and others (though in opposition to constructivists in this area, she sensibly insists that there is a real world on which both I and the others have our differing views, so that in the process of negotiation there is an ineliminable facticity). From one's own point of view authenticity will involve a move away from one's unconnected and urgent and often conflicting desires towards a more decentered view, looking towards things which are valuable outside of us, and recognised to be valuable in the realm of reason. This de-centering process will involve clearing away those hidden aspects of desire and memory

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which are obstructing perception, so that we can transcend the given and choose as our motivation emotions we can defend rationally.

According to Cavell Freud never intended to deny the authority of the first person in our mental life, for first person authority derives from the fact that we, all of us, have our own personal and idiosyncratic view of the world. Freud was rather trying to widen the validity of the first person view each of us starts with, helping us to remove distortions and falsifications there may be in our view, due to anxiety and passion and to an unadmitted past, and which may thereby mean that, in a deep sense, we may not know our own minds. But this process of illumination, this care of the soul, is not a purely intellectual process: self-discovery and self-making go together here, for the discovery may be dependent on changing one's emotional orientation. Cavell gives us a wonderful quotation from D.H.Lawrence: 'Men are only free when they are doing what the deepest self likes. And there is getting down to the deepest self. It takes some diving.' Not all may be able to dive so deep. In a fascinating comparison, Cavell discusses two literary Emmas, Emma Woodhouse who comes to realise her true feelings towards Mr Knightley (in talking to Harriet about him) and Emma Bovary, who is so emotionally impoverished that she cannot ascend to the expansive emotions of affection, curiosity, love, gratitude and awe which might liberate her, but is immured in anger, resentment, longing and unacknowledged guilt.

That is tough, and true. Less tough and (one might think) less true is Cavell's impeccably liberal (and Freudian?) non-sequitur, that understanding the point of view of one who does a truly evil deed (in the case she discusses, a vicious and casually motivated murder of a friend), and the reasons (or causes) why he or she might have been led to do it, implies that there is no absolute wrong-doing. It is hard to see how, whatever one knows of their backgrounds, what Hitler or Stalin did was not absolute wrong-doing; and there has never been any difficulty in (in one's self-centered moods) of imaginatively identifying with tyrants. The problem is not in sympathising with evil or in identifying with its proponents, particularly if they are charming or superficially attractive characters (as is Heydrich in Kenneth Branagh's portrayal of him). The problem is to retain one's sense of absolute evil even while understanding it and those who wreak it. Fortunately Cavell's sensitive exploration of self-making and self-knowledge does not seem to require that one abandons that sense.

One might also quibble about the reliance on Freud earlier in the book, when Jane Austen and Flaubert (and Lawrence) seemed to know what had to be known without benefit of psycho-analysis, but in view of the insights which Cavell's discussions of Freud elicit, that might seem ungracious (though, to the shame of the Oxford University Press and its copy-editing service, quibbles certainly are in place about Odysseus returning to Helen and about someone rather wonderfully climbing the Geiger).

One of the things which Cavell mentions quite early on is Freud's comparison of the analyst to the archaeologist, both of whom want to dig up a past which is buried and inaccessible, though, perhaps problematically, Freud believed that the analyst could completely uncover what had been lost, whereas the archaeologist was forever condemned to labour among things irretrievably broken. Archaeology does indeed raise intriguing philosophical questions, and not only of an epistemological sort.

In **Rescuing the Past: The Cultural Heritage Crusade** (Imprint Academic, 2006) an essay in what might be called applied philosophy the conservator Jonathan Tokeley makes a strong case against the politically correct nostrum that antiquities should be forever kept by the countries in whose domain they have been found.

As Tokeley was convicted of smuggling antiquities in 1997 and sent to prison for the offence, it might be thought that he is not an unbiased commentator. But he has been philosophically trained, and in addition to fascinating details about the trade in antiquities, he does lay out his arguments in detail and make a number of highly relevant distinctions, for example between those who made a given artefact and those in whose country the artefact happens now to be. His basic point is that if we are interested in preserving antiquities which are first unearthed by those working the soil (as is commonly the case), our aim is far more likely to be achieved if we allow the peasants on whose land they are found to sell them in a free market to people who genuinely care for them. The alternative appears to be to ban the trade in antiquities and to legislate so that the state in whose jurisdiction they are found can seize them, in all likelihood without adequate compensation to the original finder. Leaving aside the potential for corruption in state antiquities services and the improbability of any but a tiny fraction of what is found ever being displayed in a museum or properly written up, this, of course, sets up a perverse incentive for the peasant who finds them to destroy them; because once it is seen as

archaeologically important, his land will probably be seized by the state or an agency such as UNESCO as being a site of special scientific interest.

And let no one mention the Elgin marbles here. Had they not been transported to London by Lord Elgin they would by now have been totally ruined by the Athenian smog (as is the case with the few stones which remained *in situ*); the present day Greeks, who by descent or history are hardly closer to Pericles than we are ourselves, have no intention of replacing them on the Parthenon, which would make architectural if not environmental sense. They would simply put them in an air conditioned museum below the Acropolis; so they might just as well stay in London, where they have been cherished and preserved for two centuries, and where even now they may be contemplated in comparative tranquility (which would certainly not be the case were they in some Athenian tourist trap infested by coach parties and global tourism). All this, though, according to Tokeley, runs against the ingrained hostility of academics towards private trade and private collecting, but such hostility is mere prejudice in this context because it is likely to do far worse in practice for the preservation of ancient things than its alternative of state control of these things. If philosophy has a role in presenting robust and clear argument for unfashionable positions in political and ethical areas, Tokeley's book is certainly worthy of philosophical attention.