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Truth and Truthmakers

By D. M. Armstrong

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. pp. xii+158. £40, £17.99.

In recent previous work setting out his metaphysical position, and especially in his *A World of States of Affairs* (1997—hereafter 'WSA') David Armstrong has made considerable use of the 'truthmaker' approach. Now in this rather shorter book he has set out to develop quite systematically this way of exploring metaphysics, which asks, about each kind of true proposition, what it is in the world in virtue of which it is true, and considers what the answer implies for metaphysics. He first sets out the general rationale for this method, and various general principles about truthmakers and the truthmaking relation, and then applies the approach to a range of different areas: properties, universals and their instantiations; negative truths and general truths; possibility and necessity; numbers and classes; causes, laws and dispositions; and time. Without attempting to survey systematically the wide range of detailed discussions, let me ask only: from a reader's point of view, is the book of more value for its presentation of the truthmaker approach, or for what it reveals of Armstrong's latest position on a number of matters?

The previously uninformed reader will certainly learn a great deal about the truthmaker mode of metaphysical enquiry. Armstrong covers a very large amount of ground very effectively, handling in turn a succession of relatively detailed questions clearly and with the usual wealth of discussion of other writers' views and arguments which is typical of his work. One would hardly expect from Armstrong a neutral textbook-style treatment; and he does generally argue for firm conclusions—while frequently (again, characteristically) acknowledging that they may ultimately have to be abandoned in favour of presently rejected alternatives. And the whole treatment is set within the framework of his established central beliefs. Predictably, he explicitly sets out to develop a position which will be consistent with a Naturalist view of reality. Part of this Naturalism is his rejection—more emphatic than in *WSA*—of non-actual possible worlds, as anything other than a convenient *façon de parler*. His adherence to the realist view of truth—which of course underlies the truthmaker approach—is unchanged. In effect he opts to write for those who share this position; there is no systematic defence of this view of truth against, for example, redundancy theories of different flavours, or the threat posed by semantic anti-realism. Finally (though this is not made so explicit), he brings to the enterprise his belief that metaphysical enquiry of an analytical kind is not merely 'descriptive metaphysics'—conceptual analysis at the most general or categorical level—but can yield some

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insights into the fundamental structure of reality; though he does suggest that we must wait upon science to answer many of the more specific questions, e.g., about the true nature of space or time, or which predicates correspond to real universals.

The reader sympathetic to the general Armstrongian take on reality and metaphysical enquiry will find the book a pleasure; but equally, given his openness about the particular perspective he brings to bear, those less firmly attached to that perspective but able to allow for it can learn a great deal about the truthmaker approach and the ways in which it has been applied so far.

On the other front: does the book reveal any substantial new developments in Armstrong's own metaphysical position? The reader familiar with the (often rather fuller) discussions in *WSA* will in fact not find much major change, though necessity receives more attention, and causality receives a more tightly unified treatment. Apart from a characterization of the truthmaking relation (as a cross-categorical relation of necessitating, internal to its terms), the main new doctrine (p. 46f), following but modifying a position advocated by Donald Baxter, is about the nature of the instantiation relation. Where in *WSA* the account of this relation was based on a Fregean account of the unsaturatedness of universals, here the relation between a particular and a universal instantiated in it is argued (making a new use of a concept already deployed in *WSA*) to be one of partial identity—i.e., mereological overlap. Armstrong, diverging from Baxter, regards this particular identity as necessary. If Tabby the cat is hungry, then the truthmaker for 'Tabby is hungry' (assuming for the moment that Tabby and being hungry are respectively a genuine particular and genuine universal) consists in a mereological overlap between Tabby and the universal of being hungry, a necessary overlap given the respective identities of Tabby and the universal.

This shift may perhaps underlie another apparent change. Where in *WSA*, following the *Tractatus*, truthmakers for truths are consistently taken to be states of affairs, with a full and careful account of what these are, here Armstrong seems ready sometimes to admit particulars other than states of affairs as truthmakers. He also stresses that a proposition may have many truthmakers, some minimal, others more inclusive. Thus if the state of affairs Tabby's-being-hungry is the minimal truthmaker for the truth 'Tabby is hungry', its obtaining may perhaps on the new partial identity account be seen as included or embedded in the existence of Tabby herself, in the fact of this overlap between Tabby and the universal, so that Tabby is herself a non-minimal truthmaker for the proposition.

But is it plausible to characterize instantiation in terms of mereological overlap? Leave aside the implications of taking the relation to be necessary (Armstrong has a good argument for doing so, but he then (p. 47) has to re-interpret, e.g., the unactualized possibility of Tabby not being hungry as one relating not to Tabby *qua* 'thick' particular but rather to a possible but unactualized close counterpart, and not to being hungry to a slightly different universal; the former we might accept, but hardly the latter?). If,

with Armstrong, we take a universal to exist only in its instantiations, that might seem to pave the way for a view of this kind; but it seems to entail thinking of a particular object, if not as just a bundle of its properties—a view which Armstrong rejects (p. 105)—then as a mereological whole including among its parts a part of each of the genuine universals instantiated in it; and conversely also for universals. The clear category difference between the two kinds of things does seem to obstruct our attempts to get our minds round this thought; here is one suggestion as to why.

The apparently straightforward concept of a merely mereological whole is in fact a special, limiting-case concept, and needs to be handled carefully. At its heart lies the notion that for any such whole M there is a single transitive mereological part-whole relation R_m which applies uniformly within the whole: any m -part of an m -part of M is an m -part of M . And in regard to two wholes, there is a like requirement of a single shared R_m applying throughout the two before we can talk of them as overlapping mereologically. But in the case of Tabby and being hungry, the only single mereological relation R_m that could apply within the whole that is Tabby is that of physical composition (unless, unlike Armstrong, we identify Tabby with a bundle of instantiations of universals); while in contrast the only relation R_m which could hold within being hungry (unless we identify being hungry with its extension—the bundle of things in which it is instantiated—a move Armstrong also rejects, invoking the Euthyphro argument (pp. 40–41)), seems to be either that of property-composition (as, e.g., being in discomfort might be part of being hungry), or else that of a particular instantiation of a universal, i.e., a trope, to that universal. And neither of the latter is the same as the relation of physical composition (which seems to involve physical stuff of some kind). But this absence of any suitable shared relation R_m bars us from accepting that either Tabby or being hungry has as an m -part any m -part of the other, as the partial identity account requires.

Armstrong—rightly, I believe—accepts unrestricted mereological composition (pp. 18, 72, 119–20): we can think of Tabby and being hungry as together forming a mereological whole. But in so doing, given the absence of any shared relation R_m , we must treat each of them within that context as atomic parts of that whole, having no parts which are also part of the larger whole. (We can regard Tabby in this way because we actually conceive of her as a more-than-mereological whole, having a functional unity; and perhaps similarly for being hungry.) So it does not follow from their being parts of a mereological whole, as it might seem to, that they can have some part in common.

This is doubtless not a conclusive argument (and I am not clear whether it applies against Baxter's original more complex account). But it should be clear that only a more developed treatment could yield a plausible partial-identity analysis of instantiation while avoiding (as Armstrong is arguably right to try to do) both a bundle-of-properties account of particular objects and a reduction of universals to their extensions. As things stand,

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the Frege-inspired account of instantiation in *WSA* does seem more attractive.

Another central feature of Armstrong's truthmaker theory, this one carried over from the *WSA* account, may also be questioned (and doubtless already has been). This is the introduction of totality states of affairs as components of the truthmakers for negative truths and general truths. He is concerned to avoid admitting 'negative facts' as truthmakers for contingently true statements of the form '*a* is not *F*'; but he notes (p. 57), correctly, that merely from a collection of positive truths about *a* which does not include '*a* is *F*' we cannot conclude that *a* is not *F*: we need in addition the premise that these are all the positive truths about *a*. And he takes this to show that we need a corresponding totality state of affairs as part of the truthmaker for the true negative proposition.

Now it is true as a matter of Logic that we need this totality premise to make the inference; epistemically, also, the knowledge of totality is necessary for knowledge of the negative truth. But leave aside what *we need* for inference or for knowledge, and focus on what is needed for '*a* is not *F*' actually to be true (whether known or knowable by us to be so). Surely nothing more is needed 'out there' than the *absence from reality* of the possible state of affairs *a*'s being *F*; no totality fact is needed. And (contra the footnote on p. 55) where *a* is not *F*, is the absence of *a*'s being *F*, despite its not being something 'positive', not just as much a part of reality, of how things are, and as capable of being a truthmaker (that 'in virtue of which ...'), as the existence of *b*'s being *G* is where *b* is *G*? (Whether we opt to call such an absence a 'negative fact', or a 'negative state of affairs' matters little, provided we remain clear that it is not anything 'positive', 'present' or 'existing'.)

Again, in order to deduce the truth of a universal proposition 'All *F*s are *G*' from any (finite or infinite) conjunction of singular propositions ('*Fa* & *Ga*', '*Fb* & *Gb*', ...), we do need a totality premise ('*a*, *b*, ... are all the *F*s'); and similarly we need totality information in order to know its truth. But for it actually to be true, all that is needed is the absence from reality of any state of affairs which has the form of something being *F* but not being *G*.

Admittedly, Armstrong's totality states of affairs he treats as coming at no extra ontological cost. But he does see them—influenced, apparently, by necessary shape of inferences to negative conclusions or general propositions—as indispensable. So far as truthmaking is concerned, however, if they are just an idle wheel, why not jettison them? He is also concerned to find truthmakers are that epistemically accessible (p. 37); but absences are in no worse case in this respect than totality state of affairs.

If we hold that the make-up of reality must exactly model the requirements of Logic, including totality premises, we will certainly have to reject the *Tractatus* picture that the atomic facts are all that there are; but a really robust realism about truth should, I suggest, reject such a modelling in this case, and thereby open the way for a theory of truthmakers which is nearer to Logical Atomism. (However, a different bar to embracing a fully Logic Atomist picture may remain, that of incompatibility relations

obtaining between rival determinates of a determinable, if such relations obtain between features of particulars at the most basic level. Admitting absences as truthmakers may in fact pave the way for acceptance of a general incompatibility approach to truthmakers for negative propositions, which Armstrong is attracted to but ultimately rejects (pp. 60–63).

If there is anything sound in the two preceding criticisms, they both remind us that even those who believe that analytical metaphysics can be more than just descriptive metaphysics—can tell us about the structure of reality and not just about our categorical thought-structures—need in their enquiries constantly to keep these thought structures, their complexities and their relation to the reality thought about, in view, in order to avoid going astray or discounting possibilities that need to be considered. That said, however, Armstrong's systematic contribution in this book to the truthmaker style of metaphysical enquiry is a very major one; we may well learn more from suggestions he makes which we find unconvincing than from those of others who avoid error without providing insight. The book covers much more ground than its length would suggest, and certainly essential reading for anyone interested in the truthmaker style of philosophy.

J. R. Cameron

Before Logic

By Richard Mason

Albany NY: State University of New York Press. 2000. pp. 153. \$23.50, \$22.95.

This is an ambitious and rather unusual book. The author begins as follows:

What could come before logic? Some significant choices have to be made before logic—or a logic—can be developed. The outcomes of these choices make real differences to the directions in which logic is developed. Some problems normally thought to be within logic—logical problems—have their origin in the points and directions from which logic has developed. So logic cannot be a prior element in philosophy. Too much comes before it. More loosely, what is accepted as logical may not be taken for granted. (p. 1)

In the following six chapters, 'What can be', 'The truth in what we say', 'What must be so', 'Talking about things', 'Getting around language', and 'Logic must take care of itself [in quotes]', this idea is developed by showing how fundamental logical notions, such as logical necessity, truth, meaning and reference, involve numerous assumptions that lie outside logic, and which have a contingent, historical dimension.

What does this actually amount to? Unfortunately, although the book is written, for the most part, in a rather self-consciously non-technical style (as the chapter titles sharply illustrate), this remains rather obscure. The

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chief problem is that it is far from clear just what alternative position (or positions) it is that Mason is attacking. After all, nobody seriously maintains that logical concepts have no history (at least, not in any relevant sense); still less that anyone can hope to understand logic without firstly understanding many other things. Analytic philosophy is easily parodied, of course, but it all too often seems, unfortunately, as if it is nothing more than such a parody that can be at stake here. Just what is it that we logicians have somehow failed to realize?

However, Mason does manage to make some important and interesting points. In particular, I was impressed by his treatment of the concept of logical necessity. This concept is evidently central to logic, but is notoriously difficult to explain. Intuitively, to say, for example (mine, not Mason's), that if Jones drinks half a pint of cyanide then he will shortly die, is to say something necessarily true, and that anyone who denies this is being thoroughly illogical. So why do logicians insist that 'Jones drank half a pint of cyanide; therefore, he will shortly die' is not a (deductively) valid argument? Just what is it that distinguishes *logical* necessity, in the technical sense, from other forms?

We might insist that logical necessity is just an elementary, primitive notion, and that there is no real difficulty in understanding what it amounts to, given a little tuition. However, it is instructive to note that we often help ourselves to a number of images here which may not be at all innocent, and which, in the past, were given a much more direct relevance. For example, we might explain, in relation to the above example, that, whereas God miraculously save Jones from death despite his ingestion of cyanide if He so wished, not even God could create a square circle, say, or arrange a situation where Socrates is a man, all men are mortal, and yet Socrates is not mortal. If our student complains that he does not believe in God, we might insist that he nevertheless should be able to see sufficiently well what we are getting at. Alternatively, we might explain that distinction by saying that we can, at least, *imagine* Jones's survival, but cannot even imagine a square circle, and so on. However, the concept of logical necessity has a history. Might not the connections between mediæval logic and mediæval theology, for example, be much closer than we might suppose? And might not the connection between logical impossibility and unimaginability, which was emphasized strongly by Hume, reflect a good deal more of Hume's overall philosophical position than is immediately obvious? And can we really be sure that there really is a unique, ahistorical concept of logical necessity that underlies these different historical conceptions? The point, which Mason makes quite convincingly in the first chapter, is that we have to move outside pure logic in order to find out, and it may well be that the answer is negative.

I found most of Mason's other arguments rather less persuasive, however. In Chapter 2, he argues against Ramsey's view that the primary sense of 'truth' concerns true propositions, and that other senses (as in 'Beauty is Truth', for example) are secondary and metaphorical. This view, which is indeed held by most logicians,

... excludes everything which makes truth intelligible and valuable. ... It is truth-as-true-propositions which can be seen as metaphor, relying on images of representation and correspondence, even where these may be repudiated explicitly, as they were by Ramsey himself. Problems in the definition of truth originate by stripping away everything that makes truth valuable so that there is nothing left to characterize it. (p. 34)

Yet it remains obscure why this should be so. If, with Ramsey, we adopt a minimalist theory of truth, where 'The proposition that p is true' is understood to say nothing more than ' p ', then exactly what more do we need? We have not explained why truth is valuable, or why we should *aim* at truth, certainly, but that may be because it is belief and assertion, not truth itself, which have the relevant normative features (as minimalists such as Horwich and myself have argued, for example). Of course, the repudiated concepts of representation and correspondence will still need to be analysed at some stage or other, but since they clearly involve more general questions about how mind and language connect with the world, we should not expect them to be answerable solely by pure logic together with an account of what is meant by 'truth'.

More generally, if Mason's problems are not answerable by pure logic as conventionally understood, it may well be because it was always a mistake to suppose that they were purely logical problems, and not because pure logic should not be understood in the conventional way. Although the concept of logical necessity really does look like a purely logical notion, the concepts of language, truth, meaning and reference do not; so we may well wonder what point it is the book is trying to make. The problem is exacerbated by the lack of rigour and clarity in many of Mason's arguments. This is largely caused, I think, by the self-consciously non-technical style mentioned above, a style which sometimes gave me the peculiar feeling that Mason was trying to write *Before Logic* in a kind of pre-logical language, or at least one which did not assume any modern logical sophistication. If so, the attempt was certainly misplaced, for we cannot coherently write about logic 'from the outside'; and a failure to use the sophisticated logical techniques actually employed by professional logicians will ensure that we cannot get properly to grips with what they are saying. Of course, we must also maintain a kind of distance if fundamental assumptions are to be laid bare, but that can still be achieved by working within the system. As it is, however, most logicians will find it hard to engage with the rather ethereal and other-worldly thoughts presented in this book, which is a shame since it contains a number of insights and original ideas that should have been developed more carefully.

Nicholas Unwin

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Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography

By Aviezer Tucker

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. pp. vii + 291. £45.00.

This is an important book: stimulating and wide-ranging, it develops a scientific approach to historical knowledge.

Distinguish value theory from epistemology, if you can. Distinguish history from historiography: the actual past itself from our representations of it, if you can. Assuming these distinctions, you may with Tucker distinguish the philosophy of *historiographic interpretation*, which attends to the evaluative characteristics of historiography, from the philosophy of *scientific historiography*, which attends to the cognitive. Distinguish if you can, as Tucker follows Leon J. Goldstein, the superstructure from the infrastructure of historiography: the presentation to a readership from the evidential base for what is said in that presentation. Concentrate on the infrastructure: the epistemology of scientific historiography attends to the relationship between historiography and its associated evidence.

Tucker offers the following epistemological background to this relationship: it is a *consensus* of the right kind which is the sign of knowledge. Not just any agreement will count as a 'consensus', for 'communities have been agreeing on many silly beliefs' (24), and the kind of community consensus which counts for Tucker is that for which *shared knowledge* is the best explanation. Tucker adopts the 'knowledge hypothesis': that 'common knowledge' is the best explanation of the right kind of consensus on beliefs (27). 'If it be proved that common knowledge is the best explanation of a concrete consensus on beliefs, this consensus would mark a region where knowledge is likely to be present' (25). The right kind of consensus among historians is 'uniquely heterogeneous, large, and uncoerced' (39). It is heterogeneity which 'generates the strongest argument' (29) here, Tucker argues, for 'it does not matter if some do not agree to a set of beliefs, as long as the people who do, are sufficiently different from each other to reject alternative hypotheses to the knowledge hypothesis, and those who dissent are sufficiently homogeneous to support hypotheses that explain their dissent by particular biases' (34). Thus Darwinism is the right kind of consensus because of the diversity of believers, but Creationism is not, being 'composed exclusively of biblical fundamentalists, almost all of whom are American Protestants,... Their bias in favour of an anachronistic, historically insensitive interpretation of Genesis is the best explanation of their beliefs' (34). 'The philosophy of historiography is interested then in comparing the hypothesis that consensus among historians reflects shared knowledge against myriad alternative hypotheses that explain this consensus' (25).

Tucker finds the right kind of consensus among historians in the 'Rankean paradigm' (73). Leopold von Ranke claimed in 1824 that new historiography could be written on the basis of available documentation. Tucker notes Herbert Butterfield's view that the development of scientific historiography was much earlier, around 1760, and involved the

same methods as biblical and classical critical interpretation: 'The collation of manuscripts; the recovery of a purified text; the diagnosis of interpolations and corruptions; the discovery of earlier sources which the writer has used' (70). Tucker observes the overlap between Ranke's superior historiographic methods which he shared with isolated precursors and those methods already developing well in biblical criticism, classical philology and comparative linguistics (methods which were later developed for evolutionary biology as well as scientific historiography), but it was Ranke's creation of 'a community where a continuous development could take place' (70) which matters. Importing these earlier methods to scientific historiography, according to Tucker, the Rankean paradigm involved a consensus on 'cognitive values and theories' (47) and on 'beliefs since the second half of the eighteenth century' (46). The cognitive values were *critical* rather than *traditional*: tradition 'authoritative' works such as scripture, while critical cognitive values 'counsel suspicion...[they] demand the examination of evidence for the causal chain that allegedly connected past events with present evidence' (48). Ranke was extremely influential; publishing prodigiously until his death in 1886 at the age of 90, he is still seen by many as the master of the historical profession, and is seen by Tucker as the founder of a community unified by theory and method.

Tucker addresses the theoretical foundations of this new approach, which 'not all historians' (83) understand. The actual practice of historians, he concludes from his examination of the 'Rankean paradigm', characteristically involves the inference of a common cause from the information-preserving properties of effects. Historians ask, 'what is the best explanation of this set of documents...?' The centre of research is the explanation of the evidence, not whether or not a literal interpretation of the evidence corresponds with what took place' (99). They look for those properties of the evidence 'that tend to preserve information' (106). The preservation and hence transmission of information over time is essential to this. Following Goldstein, Leon Pompa and others, he holds that the evidence confirms historiographic hypotheses about what happened while the hypotheses themselves are the best explanation of the evidence. Tucker suggests that it is a consequence of his approach that there is no epistemic distinction between descriptive and explanatory historiographic propositions: historiographic explanations are the same as other historiographic hypotheses, and equally offered as the best explanation of the evidence. For Tucker, it is Bayes's theorem which is the best explanation of this historical practice, and he provides a chapter of formal and semi-formal analysis of this theorem and its detailed application to historiographic hypotheses, comparing at length historiographic methodology with Darwinian evolutionary biology. Tucker's overall epistemological thesis is thus that the Rankean paradigm involves a consensus on inference to the best explanation in terms of information transmission and that this is the scientific or cognitive core of historiography.

Given his earlier distinction between the scientific core and the non-

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scientific periphery of historiography, Tucker importantly attends also to the non-scientific and underdetermined nature of historiographic interpretation. He seeks the best explanation of the division of the profession of historiography into schools, with a view to understanding the probable limitations on the further development of historiography's scientific nature. The best explanation, he says, is in terms of dissenting historians relying on *therapeutic* values rather than *cognitive* values. Agreement on the scientific core comes from 'the identical cognitive values that they share, and a hierarchy of values that gives precedence to cognitive values over other values' (42). 'Once we understand the hierarchy that gives precedence to consensus generating cognitive values over other values that divide the historiographic community, it becomes clear that value-laden historiographic interpretation is inevitable, but hierarchically inferior to its scientific core according to cognitive values' (42). Tucker does not approve of value pluralism. Having understood knowledge largely in terms of consensus, disagreement for him is a sign of 'Imagine an ideal book of history that describes and explains everything that has ever happened,... Suppose this ideal book of history is lost,... Historiography resembles an attempt to reconstruct this ideal book of history ...' (258). Such an ideal is totalitarian: Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper famously resisted it.

There are many opportunities which historians have for disagreement, and given that disagreement is, for Tucker, a *failing*, he needs to explain it and point the way to overcoming it. He thinks that scientific prospects in areas currently underdetermined depend on prospects of expansion in the evidential base, better hypotheses, and theoretical innovation that discovers nested information in the evidence. 'The chief reason for underdetermination in historiography is paucity of evidence' (240), but it is also a matter of developing theories of wider scope. He analyses difficulties of uniqueness, among others: 'It is impossible to know whether...the reduction of unique hypotheses that are already part of scientific historiography to more elegant and simple theories of wide scope/consilience is possible or even plausible' (253) and imagines with Murray G. Murphey that the development of good comparative historiography will help. The weakness of such historiography reflects a tradition of humane scholarship which makes little use of computers or team research, and 'ingenious historiographic theoreticians, if such a breed of scholars is possible, are unlikely to emerge under current academic conditions' (250). Professional historians would find it difficult because of training, temperament and experience in the humane tradition. 'This kind of academic resistance to innovation and change is hampering scientific progress' (251). 'For now, fully scientific historiography is science fiction' (253).

There is a final chapter in which Tucker discusses the realist interpretation of historiography on his approach. He suggests (255-6) a distinction between realism; 'determined constructionism' which involves the determined interpretation of evidence according to professional norms; 'underdetermined constructionism' where there are no independent

criteria to choose between inconsistent results (he does not notice the possibility of incommensurable alternatives, and illegitimately imports here a requirement of consistency with its problematic relationship with realism); and ‘skeptical constructionism’ where all propositions are equally indeterminate and indistinguishable from fiction. ‘The historiographic practices examined in this book do not neatly fit any of these positions’, Tucker says (256). Apart from the difficulties involved in analysing historiographic practices, the lack of fit appeared to me to be because Tucker’s last chapter is not reliable on these matters. His overall position here is that historians are realists, and ‘the best explanation is that [historians] possess knowledge of the past’ (257). He seems to be treating realist and antirealist analyses as if they offered *best explanations* of historical knowledge. Tucker says that ‘historiography is as open to realist interpretation as any established science that posits unobservable entities’ (257), but, whether we are realist or antirealist in our approach, we surely have to be able to make some better sense of the idea that, while historiographical descriptions might be true, the past is *dead and gone* while electrons and the like are still with us.

It is ‘inference to the best explanation’ which is central to Tucker’s approach, and provides much of the approach’s value. Inference to the best explanation is a powerful idea, and Tucker is right to restructure an agenda for the philosophy of history in terms of it and he has done us a worthy service in his own attempt. Nevertheless, the idea is the source of a number of difficulties. There are three uses of ‘inference to the best explanation’ in Tucker’s theory which he does not distinguish. First is the claim that this is what historians actually do: historians ask of their evidence, ‘what is the best explanation of this?’, and they infer historical ‘facts’ accordingly. Something like this is an extremely plausible analysis of the relationship between historiography and evidence, and indeed it goes well beyond historiography: as Pompa pointed out with reference to it, ‘historical reasoning is continuous with our everyday reasoning about matters of fact’ (Leon Pompa, ‘Truth and Fact in History’, in *Substance and Form in History*, eds. L. Pompa and W. H. Dray, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, 171–86 at 182). As noted, this is not a new thesis in the philosophy of history and it is particularly familiar in the philosophy of science, although Tucker’s analysis of it in terms of a semi-formal application of Bayes’s theorem to the confirmation of historiographic hypotheses is a helpful presentation for a different readership.

The method of ‘inference to the best explanation’ presupposes a stipulative distinction that we can make more explicit: that an historiographic proposition *explains* the relevant evidence, while the evidence—in virtue of that explanation—*justifies* or confirms the historiographic proposition. Yet this view about the opposition between the direction of explanation and the direction of justification will be problematic for some historian readers, however easily it may fit with the views of those familiar with Bayesian approaches in the philosophy of science, and however naturally it may fit with the usual understanding of ‘inference to the best

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explanation'. It is a commonplace thought that to understand is to forgive, a thought which is easily translated into the view that to explain is to justify. It is an elementary problem in moral philosophy to worry about how far this thought is true, and morally plausible to hold that, for example, understanding is insufficient for forgiveness. Yet, whatever the complexities here, we do not in our everyday conversation speak as if the direction of understanding were *opposed* to the direction of forgiveness, or that the direction of explanation were *opposed* to the direction of justification. Yet this seems to be what is involved in inferring to the best explanation.

Yet we may recommend this first thesis. It remains problematic, however, whether "best explanation" should be understood, as Tucker does, in terms of the transmission of information. For Tucker, it is an essential part of some historical proposition being the best explanation of present evidence that there is transmission of information, a causal chain, connecting the two. 'Historians are interested only in particular types of causal chains, the ones that preserve information' (94). Thus to justify the historical proposition is to demonstrate the causal chain of information transmission which connects the proposition to the present evidence for which it is the best explanation. In information transfer, information is *preserved*, Tucker tells us (as if the originator writing the document and the historian reading it did not each presuppose some theory of meaning or sense of practical reasoning which they might not share). The transfer of information is seamless: we imagine the unbroken continuity of an object through time. Yet the image of a causal chain, by contrast, is in some sense discrete or 'digital'. It consists of sets of atomistically conceived historical events with causal or explanatory connections between them. Given that information 'transfer' is not *transfer* at all but a seamless continuity in the existence of a document and its meaning, to crystallize that continuity of information existence into discrete events with explanatory relations between them which are directed towards present evidence is to muddle if not falsify what is happening. Is that what historians do? Ordinarily, historical knowledge and explanation involve the presupposition and the presentation of discrete events. Historiography may *presuppose* the use of evidence which is the outcome of the seamless transmission of information from the past event which best explains it. But it just does not seem plausible to *identify* best explanation with information transfer. The preservation of objects and the preservation of information need to be understood as distinct. Much more analysis is required here.

The difficulties arising here do not affect the first thesis of 'information to the best explanation' itself, for that admits of many auxiliary theories about what counts as 'best explanation'. For the first thesis, the core idea is that historians infer some sentence about the past as the best explanation of presently available evidence. There is some explanatory, perhaps causal, link from the past event, as described in the inferred sentence, to the present evidence. In this way the evidence justifies the past assertion. We might well agree with this, and even believe that it is necessary to the con-

struction of historical knowledge, while also believing against Tucker that inferring sentences in this way is a trivial—in particular, an *epistemically* trivial—feature of what historians do. Historical knowledge is one of the areas of our understanding which suggests that ensuring sentence-truth is a long way short of the whole cognitive story. No-one embarking on a philosophy course in a search for truth will be satisfied with the suggestion that grass is green, and no-one embarking on a history course in a search for truth will be satisfied with the date of the Battle of Hastings. *Which* truths is a crucial question; the *selection* and *ordering* of truths is a crucial part of the answer; some (admittedly, not all) narrative theories see these issues as epistemologically central.

Tucker distinguishes the scientific core of historiography from mere historical ‘interpretation’: ‘there are many different interpretations of events like the French Revolution. Reading more than a single interpretation...suffices to distinguish interpretations from the core of scientific knowledge that diverse historians share’ (12). In doing this he deliberately excludes, although with no direct argument, the cognitive relevance of much recent work on the role of narrative in the theory of historiography: ‘since this book pays little attention to the superstructure of historiography, it pays even less attention to the debate whether it has the structure of a narrative or not’ (7). Tucker, like the Carl G. Hempel of 1942, sees such matters as merely part of a rhetorical superstructure. Contrast this with an opposed view which has been much discussed by philosophers of history in recent years, that of Hayden White, as modified by Hans Kellner, that a limited range of narrative structures of historical knowledge have the status and function of Kantian categories. Some narrative structure may just be the best explanation of the evidence. It seems that only an *a priori* commitment to a certain kind of atomistic logicism enables Tucker to exclude narrative, and thus so much recent philosophy of history, so readily. In doing this, Tucker adopts an approach to the question whether historiography can be scientific which has a range of old and familiar implications reflecting the fault lines of a debate which goes back long before the discussion of Hempel and indeed long before Bury and Trevelyan.

A second and quite distinct use of ‘inference to the best explanation’ in Tucker’s theory is this thesis: that the best explanation of what historians do is that historians ask of their evidence ‘what is the best explanation of this?’ One might, after all, come to a different conclusion. Suppose we were to do so: for example, suppose we were to conclude that the best explanation of what historians do is that they seek, not the best explanation of the evidence, but to engage in Collingwood-type re-enactments. Are we thereby contradicting ourselves by failing to engage in a Collingwood-type re-enactment in reaching this conclusion? Certainly not, if only because we do not need to assume that seeking the best explanation for what historians do is itself an *historical* exercise. We might well think that it is a *philosophical* exercise—a form of ‘rational reconstruction’, perhaps—instead. But Tucker, in using ‘inference to the best explanation’

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in the historical way that he purports to do in undertaking his study of Ranke, is presupposing that this is how the relevant philosophical exercise ought to be undertaken. In other words, this second use of ‘inference to the best explanation’ in Tucker’s theory is a thesis about *philosophy* and not merely a thesis about history: when philosophers seek to analyse historical knowledge or practice they ought to ask ‘what is the best explanation of this?’ Readers will no doubt have their own views about the nature of philosophical analysis or understanding.

A third and again distinct thesis also arises. Tucker identifies the ‘Rankean paradigm’—still ongoing, presumably—as the relevant consensus about historiography. Tucker’s recovery of this paradigm is—or ought to be, on his own approach—an exercise in scientific historiography. As such, the existence of the Rankean consensus has to be, for Tucker to be consistent with his own approach to historiography, the best explanation of the evidence available now. As part of this, the claim that Ranke through the relevant consensus had *knowledge* is another alleged historical fact which has to be part of the best explanation of present evidence; after all, by adopting the ‘knowledge hypothesis’ Tucker has already held that knowledge is the best explanation of the Rankean consensus, and the knowledge hypothesis is thus confirmed by that consensus.

Just what is the link between knowledge and consensus? Says Tucker, we ‘cannot define knowledge in terms of consensus on beliefs’, for that would make the argument ‘vacuous’ (25). Indeed. Tucker, supposedly acting as an historian in identifying the historical existence of both Rankean knowledge and consensus, purports to infer the Rankean *consensus* by inferring it in the recommended way as the best explanation of present evidence, and he infers the Rankean *knowledge* as the best explanation of the consensus. Consensus can be explained by competing hypotheses; ‘from an epistemic perspective, the most interesting such hypothesis would suggest that shared knowledge is the best explanation of a consensus on beliefs’ (24). An opaque endnote is appended to this: ‘Note that this explanation is not necessarily a causal explanation. Some philosophers may object to considering an aspect of the cause as its effect. Shared knowledge implies analytically shared beliefs, since all knowledge is composed of beliefs. Shared beliefs, however, do not imply common knowledge, so this explanation does not beg the question’ (279). So the connection between knowledge and consensus is not a matter of definition and is not (or is not necessarily) causal; so what is it? Something very odd is happening here. It is not a causal information-preserving route from some past fact of knowledge to some later fact of consensus which drives Tucker’s approach here, but a *philosophical* thesis which provides the ‘best explanation’.

Suppose we follow the track of Tucker’s causal or explanatory chain here, this supposed transmission of information. ‘A particularly interesting hypothesis from an epistemic perspective is the *knowledge hypothesis* that holds that given background conditions, a consensus on beliefs reflects common knowledge’ (27). So in the Ranke example, knowledge is the best explanation of the consensus. Now it may be, as Tucker says, that this

hypothesis ‘does not have to prove its absolute truth, only its comparative advantage over its existing competitors’ (28), but it is nevertheless a philosophical hypothesis which is perhaps best understood as an expression of *cognitive value*. ‘An identical set of cognitive values and theories both defines the community of historians, and *must be assumed in the current inquiry into the historical emergence of this community of historians*’ (46, my stress). Tucker does not succeed in avoiding the circularity here. The having of knowledge is not some historical event additional to consensus on belief, and certainly not one involving the transmission of information over a time gap between knowledge and consensus.

A further problem for Tucker: if, at the end of the relevant chain, the best explanation of present evidence is, ultimately and completely, not necessarily causal but indeed a philosophical hypothesis, then we can dispense with historians altogether. (Malebranche, precursor of Henry Ford, would have approved; he ‘declared that there was more truth in a single principle of metaphysics than in all historical books’ (Gooch, 12).) It gets worse. If the best explanation of present evidence is the knowledge hypothesis, then this philosophical hypothesis is justified by the fact that it explains as it does. While not many historians will be found who will agree with the thought that historical knowledge is explained by philosophical hypotheses, there also won’t be many philosophers who will agree with the thought that philosophical hypotheses can be justified by present evidence. Plainly all this needs unpacking: a holist outcome which makes philosophy continuous with history, much as for Quine philosophy is continuous with science, may be a proper outcome here. But Tucker has eschewed that: noting that Murphey thought that there was a whole explanatory structure which best explains the evidence, he opts against this for ‘atomic explanations’ (187).

The philosophical thesis about knowledge which purports to identify and explain the Rankean consensus is thus fraught with difficulties. Moreover, it illegitimately replaces with a philosophical thesis what is properly an historical issue. Ranke’s approach is presented by Tucker as stimulating a consensus amounting to a Kuhnian paradigm, but there is too much philosophical theorising in reaching that conclusion. Tucker’s claim about the Rankean paradigm, if historically correct, must itself be the best explanation of the evidence available now, but his claim is not plausible; a ‘consensus’ amounting to a paradigm isn’t the best explanation of what was happening in the historical profession in the nineteenth century in Germany (the subject’s centre for most of that century). I cannot here write the *narrative* which would show the inappropriateness of Tucker’s ascription of a paradigmatic ‘consensus’ to the historians in question, and in disbelieving that Tucker’s is the best explanation I am relying on G. P. Gooch’s *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, 2nd edn., 1952) and Charles E. McClelland’s *The German Historians and England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

In 1806 Ranke ‘saw the flying Germans, closely followed by the

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victorious French, pass through his native village' (Gooch, 72), and appears to have backed off engaging with the political present. His famous wish merely to show how things actually were was seen by the historian Heinrich Leo as a 'timid avoidance of personal views' (Gooch, 98). What more centrally characterized the foundations of historical science, according to Gooch (13), was not some version of information-preserving inference to the best explanation analysable in Bayesian terms but 'the liberty of thought and expression, the insight into different ages, and the judicial temper'. While there is no doubt that Ranke's critical approach to sources became increasingly influential through his many pupils, Ranke's own passionless detachment was rarely followed and historiography as a discipline in Germany, while notable for its political motivation both before and after Ranke, was increasingly feverish as it developed the self-understanding of German nationalism (McClelland, 63–4). If there was a developing consensus among historians in Germany (consensus in England came later), there was more consensus on this than on focusing on 'the dust of archives' (Gooch, 101). The 'rise of German nationalism' is sometimes given as a one-line answer to the cause of the Great War; it was itself a response to the Napoleonic wars. We may disagree about the connection between Auerstädt in 1806 and Auschwitz in 1940 but we had best not consign the moral and political judgments which are inevitably involved in the historical understanding here to mere 'superstructure', nor think that cognitive values are not *values*.

It seems clear to me that different cognitively sound histories can be written about the development of the Rankean approach to history. There may not be a *best* explanation. Tucker brings philosophical assumptions to his history which lead him to seek features of a Kuhnian paradigm; I—and I claim no merit for the approach—have sought here something more political. Truth—whatever philosophical sense we make of that—is best seen as the answer to a question. Collingwood saw it that way. We each put history to the question in our own ways, and there is no *one right question to ask*. Consistently with this I affirm the importance of Tucker's book. His is a question worth asking.

Jonathan Gorman

Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self

By Susan Brison

Princeton University Press. 2002. \$29.25

In *Aftermath* Susan Brison describes her recovery from a sexual attempted murder. Because she is a philosopher, it is as a philosopher that she seeks to recover, so her account includes her struggles with our discipline along the way. The book was written over a long period, and includes changes of opinion about identity and recovery, and changes in the foci of Brison's concern. In Chapter 1, which is angry and univocal,

Brison describes the assault on her as a hate crime, and describes her recovery as a restoration of a coherent, unified self through the construction of a heard, autonomous narrative of her trauma. As she discovers, far from confirming that all knowledge is good, the knowledge confronted in the true narrative of a trauma may ‘fill you with incapacitating terror and then uncontrolled rage’ (p. 20). Nevertheless, it must be faced because recovery is impossible without it, and because it makes you stronger.

In Chapter 2, Brison tackles the view that ‘the personal’ has no place in philosophy. Her reasons, of course, are both personal and philosophical (Brison does not dwell on the personal reasons in *Aftermath*, but is open about them in conversation). During her recovery, she was told that her work on sexual violence was not philosophical enough to count for tenure. This added insult to her injury, and it shames our profession that it could be done in the name of philosophy. We share a duty to ensure that it cannot be done again. Brison’s need to make philosophical sense of what had happened to her was absolute, “a matter of life and death”, as she put it to me, and it was the clear moral duty of philosophers around her to respect and support this work she had to do. It is a tribute to Brison and those who helped her, that she did not sink into despair and leave philosophy, or dissipate her energies in public anger and blame. Instead, she uses philosophy to expose the philosophical mistakes underlying the view used to harass her, and makes a positive philosophical case for philosophical engagement with the personal.

The first mistake in denying that the personal can be proper topics of philosophy, Brison argues, is inconsistency: if war and abortion are proper topics, how can murder, assault and rape fail to be? The second mistake is imagining that an ‘impersonal, acontextual’ stance for philosophy is even possible, let alone ideal. Scratch any piece of ‘pure’ philosophy, and you will find the very specific preoccupations of a particular man at a particular time and place. Brison goes on to make a positive case for philosophical attention to personal experience. First-personal narratives of experience are needed to ‘expose previously hidden biases in subject matter and method’; to ‘facilitate empathy with those different from ourselves’, and to ‘lay on the table our own biases’ (p. 26). There are specific dangers, but the way to deal with them is not by flight to the impersonal. Rather, it is by their more careful, self-reflective and critical use. The first danger is that the narrator may claim excessive authority to speak for a group, as when Brison might be tempted to speak for all victims of attempted sexual murder. The second, is that first-personal experiences may be treated as foundational, beyond doubt and critique, as Descartes’ meditations have been used. The third and fourth dangers are specific to victimhood. Victim narratives may trigger counter-narratives, as when claims of feminists shape counter-narratives about the suffering of men. And narratives of victimhood may perpetuate negative stereotypes about the victim’s group, as when the story of a rape perpetuates the idea that women are to-be-violated.

Brison may underestimate the fourth danger. When I first heard of

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Brison, in a full-page article in *The Guardian* headlined as the violent rape of a young woman philosopher, her story seemed to me just to add to the pile of salacious stories of sexual violence that dominate the media, feeding a male appetite for stories of harm to women—the more ‘pure’ the women, the more extreme the degradation, the more fully reported and satisfying the story. (A middle-class philosopher makes an only slightly less exciting victim than a virginal nun.) Brison focuses on resisting stereotyping of the victim as helpless, ‘by rejecting the dichotomy between victimization and agency, avoiding sensationalist accounts, and refraining from appearing on talk shows in which sleaze is valued over truth’ (p. 35). If negative stereotyping as helpless were the only worry, this might be enough. But how are negative stereotyping as deserving, and as exciting, to be prevented? Many victims are deterred from the healing narration of their suffering for those reasons, rather than from fear of being seen as helpless. A narrative which integrates suffering into ongoing life is the only way to heal trauma. Silence is no more use than inarticulate grief and rage, and even less use than flight to the impersonal. One way to meet the danger might be to make victim-narratives much more common. If we fill the public domain with them, how will any illicit thrill remain? In the face of the sheer diversity of victims, harms and perpetrators, how will the cruel notion that some groups of victims deserve their suffering be maintained? The persistence of negative stereotypes of women is a sad tribute to the persistence and ingenuity of patriarchy. But more telling, not less, may be the only way to drive negative stereotypes into the dust where they belong. Brison’s own narratives can be seen as first steps in the right direction.

In Chapter 3 Brison returns to the theme of self and recovery, exploring the connection between narrative, speech and subjectivity, and emphasizing the social aspects of the being, harming and restoration of the self. In Chapter 4 she discusses the problems faced by trauma victims in telling what has happened to them—the need for action, and the pervasive, impossible double bind that victims face: if you are composed enough to be able to tell about your trauma competently, then you can’t be that traumatised, and you probably bear some responsibility and guilt, so you will not be taken as a victim. But on the other hand, if you are so damaged by your trauma that you cannot tell about it competently, then you will not be taken seriously as a victim either. Brison here raises the possibility that passivity—allowing that one is helpless, ill, in pieces and needing to be acted on—may be a precondition for the recovery of the capacity for effective agency (p. 83).

By Chapter 5, Brison’s conceptualization of her trauma has broadened, and she considers the range of narratives available to capture it. She *is* now safe enough to notice how earlier on she felt bound to pick and hold on to just one narrative for purposes of getting her assailant convicted, and another one for purposes of presenting the trauma as a philosophical problem about gender-hate-crime and self-hood. She notices how the different narratives of the experience fit into culturally available ‘scripts’: rape, attempted murder, sexual murder as entertainment. She worries that her

narratives might feed what she calls the ‘pre-memories’ of rape of all women in our culture, and add to the burden of ‘post-memories’ of historic wrongs that we all carry. She worries, but in the end decides that the obligation to tell is overriding. Failure to tell is dangerous; others need to know what happened, and need to be recruited to the fundamental ethical work of ensuring that ‘never again’. In Chapter 6, Brison’s commitment to a single narrative of trauma, and the idea of healing as recovering a linear, orderly history and a capacity to go on in the same way is further loosened, as she adds more reasons why telling is essential. A failure to tell—however raggedly and provisionally—makes it impossible for the self to recover—instead, it is doomed to be forever ‘clenched’—holding on to the trauma, remembering it over and over again, until it finds a space where safe, heard telling is possible (p. 106–7; p. 115).

The question which leads us to, and through, *Aftermath* is, roughly, ‘how does one carry on living after a horror like that?’, but in the final chapter and afterword the question dissolves into a simpler, more general one, ‘how does one carry on?’. For in the end, the book includes not just the terrible assault on Brison, but the suicide of her brother, the barely-reported murder of two black PhD students at Dartmouth, and the murder just as *Aftermath* was completed, of Brison’s mentor—someone who had given her hope to continue her career. We are forced, in the face of these sparsely narrated further shocks, to face the fact that there is never just one trauma. Rather, trauma is all around us, all the time. In extremis all our narratives of self give out, ‘meaning flows away like blood’ (p. 122), and all that is left is human, animal life with its push and pull of despair and hope. The idea of recovery as recovery of control is one that Brison now rejects, arguing that what is needed in the face of uncontrollable terrors of such magnitude is not control, but its opposite—letting go, accepting, feeling your way. The later pages of the book offer a vision of hope as a will ‘to believe that there ... might be such a thing as irreversible repair’ (p. 116).

Although Brison renounces the idea of a fixed point of clarity in recovery, or a single right stance in relation to evil, when she contemplates telling her son about her trauma, her ethical vision becomes more definite. How provisional is that definiteness, I wonder? Might it rather be foundational? As she gathers herself to introduce her son to the horrors of the world, of which her trauma is only one, Brison articulates what might just be a unique moral imperative: help your children be safe. She seeks a telling for her son which will enhance ‘not the superhuman ability to avoid life-threatening disasters, but, rather, resilience, the capacity to carry on alive in the present, unbound by dread or regret ... the will to say, whatever comes, *Let’s see what happens next.*’ (p. 117). The place where *Aftermath* leads us is a very human place, and Brison’s eloquence as she speaks from it is shaming. Why have so few philosophers dared to speak of suffering and recovery, when these are unalterable facts of the human condition, as brute as the facts of agency, penalty and reward to which we so much more eagerly attend?

Soran Reader