

## Philosophical Methodologies

Andrew Brennan and Y.S. Lo

Methodology is understood here to include methods, approaches, and styles, which are not always easy to separate. This article deals with all three, focusing on ones that have been influential in Australasia, or have developed there, through the efforts of thinkers who have either been born in Australasia, or trained or worked there for a significant period.

A combination of four methodological trends characterises much of recent Australian philosophy. First is conceptual analysis, which is a core component of the ‘Canberra plan’ championed by a leading group of ANU philosophers in the 1990s (Jackson and Pettit 1995, Jackson 1998, and for a summary see Eagle 2008 and compare Braddon-Mitchell and Nola 2009). The method involves identifying a wide range of ‘folk platitudes’ about a concept to be investigated. These are statements that typically locate the concept in question within a larger network of other concepts, and are regarded as undeniable by competent users of the concept. For example, suppose we are interested in the concept of memory. The instruction for conceptual analysis will be to locate the concept by collecting folk platitudes about it in relation to such other concepts as knowledge, truth, the past, experience, testimony, and imagination. This collection of folk platitudes may then support a certain analysis, in the form of a definition or a characterisation, of memory. A good conceptual analysis should capture the core platitudes about the concept under investigation, and it should be able to distinguish the concept from other closely related or easily confounded ones. But the analysis that best captures the folk platitudes about a concept might still not give rise to the best theory about the thing that the concept is supposed to capture, all things considered. For folk platitudes might be naïve, unjustified, or erroneous. Furthermore, a good theory needs to cohere with the wider body of knowledge we have about other things.

The technical aspect of conceptual analysis (particularly its treatment of folk concepts in a similar way to how meaning is given to theoretical terms in philosophy of science) resonates with work by Frank Ramsey and David Lewis (1970, 1972). The appeal to folk platitudes, however, is reminiscent of the Wittgensteinian ‘use theory’ of meaning and the ‘ordinary language’ school in post-war Oxford. The teachings of G.A. Paul, who was a student and follower of Wittgenstein and was marooned in Melbourne during the Second World War, along with the teachings of A. C. (Camo) Jackson (also a student of Wittgenstein), made a significant impact on students and a swathe of Melbourne-trained philosophers, several of whom rose to prominence in academic positions outside Australia.

Reflective equilibrium is a second method widely used in Australian philosophy, particularly in the area of ethics. Popularised by John Rawls (1999), ‘narrow’ reflective equilibrium is the requirement that our endorsement of a general theory must cohere with our judgments on particular cases. For example, if we endorse a moral theory of maximising overall happiness come what may, then, to be coherent, we must judge it to be morally acceptable to torture innocent people if doing so would maximise overall happiness, even if we find this particular moral judgment abhorrent. Likewise, if we decide to reject the judgment, then, to be coherent, we must also abandon or at least revise the general theory accordingly, even if we find the general theory itself appealing. According to this picture, neither the theory nor the set of particular judgments is taken to be the foundation of moral knowledge. Rather, coherence between the two is the criterion for knowledge. However, by reaching our own narrow equilibrium between the general theory we endorse and the particular judgments we make, we have not yet reached a theoretically satisfactory situation. For others may likewise be able to reach narrow equilibrium between an alternative general theory and their particular judgments. Narrow or individual equilibrium provides no means of comparing competing theories. So, ‘wide’ reflective equilibrium aims to correct this deficit by looking for comprehensive

principles that apply to the choice of theory and to the procedures for harmonising theory and data. To reach wide equilibrium, we need to find some higher-order principles with which others would also agree and which will generate a theory that is likely to be accepted by as many other people as possible, including those who hold competing theories.

The search for such wide equilibrium draws from classic methodologies in philosophy of science and epistemology, for example Hempel's (1967) hypothetico-deductive method, Goodman's (1979) approach to the problem of induction, and Quine's account of how consistency is achieved in the web of beliefs that we collectively share (Quine and Ullian 1978). All of these accounts have a holistic orientation, or involve a broad form of reflective equilibrium. For example, Quine's naturalised approach to epistemology and science sets out higher-order principles for managing competing theories within our webs of beliefs. Seen in this way, Rawls's appeal to reflective equilibrium in moral theory is an application of a method which has its roots in epistemology and philosophy of science.

Naturalism is a third popular approach which – while by no means a universal methodological commitment – certainly characterises a great deal of Australian philosophy. There are at least two ways in which philosophy can be naturalistic. First, whatever theory we propose has to be able to stand without assuming the existence of anything supernatural or magical. Second, any puzzling or apparently non-natural property is reducible to something natural. Such a reductive form of naturalism is typified by J. J. C. Smart's (1963) defence of the view that consciousness is nothing but a brain state. Smart's 'scientific realism' involves looking for ways to identify and reduce all properties to those that can be deemed 'real' in a natural scientific sense. Likewise, for David Lewis (who was a frequent visitor to Australia and widely admired member of the Australasian Association of Philosophy) facts about values are nothing more than empirical facts about our psychological dispositions, while Michael Smith regards facts about values as nothing more than facts about the desires of fully rational agents, naturalistically understood (Smith 1994). Other examples of reductive naturalism include Brian Ellis' scientific materialism (1990).

The combination of conceptual analysis and naturalism can lead to interesting results, for example J. L. Mackie's 'error theory' of moral properties. These properties turn out on analysis to be 'queer' in that their supposed objective existence combined with their supposed 'to-be-pursuedness' seem to resist scientific explanation and are at odds with a wider naturalistic outlook on the world. So Mackie declares that the folk understanding of value properties is an error, moral concepts correspond to nothing real in the world, and therefore all moral claims are arguably false.

A final feature that characterises much contemporary Australian philosophy is a certain hard-headedness and unorthodoxy in style. The radicalism in Australian philosophy can be seen as a maverick rejection of British commonsense philosophy combined with a willingness to embrace what commonsense might regard as absurd conclusions. Smart's defence of materialism, Mackie's error theory, and Lewis' modal realism are all examples of this style. Likewise, a widespread tendency to utilitarianism in ethical theory (Smart and Williams 1973), and a willingness to embrace its radical implications for animals, euthanasia, abortion and sexual ethics in general (Singer 1976, 1993, Tooley 1972) have been distinctive in the work of a number of Australian writers. The same maverick character is also reflected in an openness among logicians in both Australia and New Zealand to explore non-classical systems, particularly in relevant and paraconsistent logic (for example, Routley, Plumwood and Brady 1982, and Priest 2008).

Many of these contemporary features can be traced back to the influence of John Anderson's scientific empiricism. Anderson taught at the University of Sydney from 1927 until 1958 when David Armstrong, his former student, succeeded him as Challis professor of philosophy. Anderson's rejection of religious or supernatural metaphysics yielded a strong form of empiricism (an early version of reductive naturalism), which was subsequently championed by Armstrong. Anderson's empiricist rejection of G. E. Moore's non-naturalistic account of goodness bore fruit in

the error theory of Mackie, also a former student, although Mackie's career took him also to New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Anderson's stolid rejection of religion and advocacy of individual freedom contributed to a cultural climate in the 1940s and 1950s from which emerged the radical social movement, the 'Sydney push'. Later developments of the movement in the 1960s saw the appearance of a range of libertarian public intellectuals and social reformers such as the feminist Germaine Greer, and sowed the seeds for critical feminist philosophies (for example, Gatens 1996, Grosz 1995, Plumwood 1993).

While Paul spread the doctrine of Wittgenstein to Melbourne in the 1940s and Anderson created an increasingly strong empiricist climate in Sydney between the 1930s and 1950s, the presence of Karl Popper at the then Canterbury College from 1937 to 1945 meant that a kind of Popperianism became well established in New Zealand and flourished up to the 1980s. New Zealand thinkers influenced by Popper's emphasis on 'falsifiability' as the criterion of empirical significance, later extended their attention to the study of what it is for a theory to be 'truthlike'. The broad debates about the scope and applicability of the notion of truth as verisimilitude was for a time the central focus of some work in New Zealand (for example, Oddie 1986). Contemporary scientific realism in New Zealand shares many features in common with Australian realism, but with a Popperian twist (Musgrave 1999). Under the influence of Australasia's first formal logician, Arthur Prior (1955), logic took a central place in both teaching and research in New Zealand, and logicians contributed to developments in classical and modal logic and their applications (Prior 1957, Hughes and Cresswell 1968). One of the important Australasian relevant logicians, Richard Routley (later Sylvan), was born in New Zealand and did his undergraduate work there.

Less inclined to adopt the maverick posture of its Australian counterpart, New Zealand philosophy can be said to be generally less radical in its conclusions. Both Australia and New Zealand have been home to a variety of other kinds of philosophical methodologies apart from the ones discussed here. Many contributions to epistemology, ethics, phenomenology, history and philosophy of science, and political and social philosophy have been made by writers from a wide variety of different methodological traditions. For reasons of space, this entry has focused on what is currently most distinctive in the methodology of contemporary Australian and New Zealand philosophy, and hence has inevitably neglected much that is philosophically interesting and distinguished in the work carried out in both countries.

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